PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

An exploration of the impact of actor training, based on the practices of Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux, on the creativity, health and wellbeing of older people

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of older people participating in drama workshops, based on the physical theatre actor training practices of Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux. It examines older people’s perceptions of the impacts of their drama experiences on their creativity, health and wellbeing. The study addresses a lack of research on the creative and cultural value of older people’s theatre-making. The findings also make a significant contribution to the limited research on the impact of drama on older people’s health and wellbeing.

Four groups of older people (42 participants) in North East England participated in physical theatre, drama workshops, over one year. The workshops were designed to give participants a practical introduction to key elements of Gaulier and Pagneux’s work: Le Jeu (play), complicité (collaboration and rapport) and disponibilité (openness). These tenets underpin an approach to theatre-making that Pagneux describes as ‘lifeful’. Participants’ responses were collected through questionnaires, focus groups and journals. The data were analysed within a heuristic and hermeneutic phenomenological framework.

Key themes identified from the data were grouped under the headings: The Physical Self; The Mental, Psychological and Emotional Self; The Individual and the Group. The findings indicate that participants particularly enjoyed the collaborative and improvisatory nature of the workshops, learning and developing new theatre-making skills. They found the work to be integrating and holistic, encouraging them to take risks and step out of their comfort zones through creative movement and play. Several participants described the workshops as enabling them to express parts of themselves that, as older people, might often be hidden from public view. This was a freeing and liberating experience. Additionally, many participants also reported improved posture, balance and range of movement, as well as enhanced mood, confidence and cognitive stimulation.

This research contributes original knowledge as to how physical, playful and improvisatory approaches to theatre-making, based on Le Jeu, complicité and disponibilité, can support older people to stay active, engaged and ‘lifeful’, regardless of any physical or mental limitations they might experience. These approaches build older people’s skills in creative expression which can also engender experiences of empowerment and agency, thereby challenging individual and societal perceptions of ageism.
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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by Northumbria University Ethics Committee on 11.07.18.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 79,192

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Date: 14.2.2022
The Author

Sarah Kemp has a degree in Spanish and Latin American Studies, a PGCE in Spanish and French and an M.Ed. in Drama in Education. Following a short period as a language teacher, Sarah then worked as an advisory drama teacher for Newcastle City Council. In 1989, she went to study with Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier in Paris and subsequently co-founded Théâtre Sans Frontières, where she is joint Artistic Director. Sarah has either directed or performed in most of the company’s productions, including the award-winning production Lipsynch, a collaboration with Ex Machina and Canadian director Robert Lepage, which toured worldwide from 2008 to 2012.
Prologue

‘I want to tap into the part of myself that is BIG…and not just be a “nice elderly” woman!’

(Workshop participant – Mary, aged 72)

The title of this thesis, Pushing the Boundaries, came from participants in one of the drama workshops that I ran as part of this research. In the first workshop session, I asked participants to write down individually, on shared large sheets of paper, one or two words, or phrases, that they felt described what the terms ‘health, wellbeing and creativity’ meant to them. Participants then worked in small groups and taking one sheet per group, made a selection of the words that they agreed were the most significant to them. The groups used their bodies to express these words physically in a visual tableau. ‘Pushing the boundaries’ was the phrase chosen by one of the groups under the heading of ‘creativity’ and is expressed visually by participants, in the photograph, Figure 1. below.

![Figure 1. 'Pushing the boundaries' tableau](image)

This phrase has come to encompass many of the experiences described by participants in response to the workshop sessions that were part of the research process. Findings from the study indicate that the workshops ‘pushed boundaries’ for participants in a variety of ways, physically, mentally and creatively. Whilst this was sometimes challenging for people, for many it was also a positive, enjoyable and rewarding experience. The workshops generated new ways for people to experience, understand and use their bodies, communicating creatively with others and ‘tapping into’ parts of themselves that they felt they did not often have an opportunity to express.
Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the aims of the study and defines key terminology used in the research. I then describe my background, how my experiences of actor training with Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux and running my own theatre company, led me to setting up a drama group for older people and, ultimately, to the focus of the study. Finally, I set out the thesis structure and a brief description of the content of each chapter.

1.1 Study aims

The aims of this study are to:

- Explore the perceptions of older people regarding their experiences of physical theatre actor training, based on the theatre practices of Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux and the impact these experiences have on their creativity, health and wellbeing in the context of ageing
- Explore whether and how emerging insights can inform better understanding of how creative practices such as physical theatre can contribute to an improvement in older people’s health and wellbeing.

The thesis addresses specific gaps identified in current research on drama and theatre-making with older people. It particularly examines the cultural and creative experiences of their participation in physical theatre practices, in relation to their perceptions of the impacts on their creativity, health and wellbeing. The study uses hermeneutic phenomenological and heuristic frameworks to gather and analyse participants’ experiences of participating in a series of drama workshops based on the practices of Gaulier and Pagneux, that were designed and led by me.

1.2 Definitions of key terminology

This is a hybrid research project that spans the fields of drama, theatre, health and wellbeing. It is therefore helpful to define some of the key terminology that is used throughout the study as these are fluid terms that may be used differently in different contexts, by specialists and non-specialists. Key terms used are: older people; physical theatre; drama workshops; creativity; health and wellbeing.

Older People

There is no firm agreement amongst academics on when we become ‘older people’. Ageing is a process that starts from the moment we are conceived and continues until
we die. Several theoretical models have been put forward to define the ageing process and at what point we become ‘older’. These include: Erikson’s (1997) psychosocial development through the lifespan; Weiss and Bass’ (2002) ‘four ages’ lifespan and Cohen’s (2005) four phases of older age: midlife; liberation; summing up and the encore. Within these different models, older age is described as beginning anywhere between 40 to 65 years. The UK, Government’s Department of Health National Service Framework for Older People (2001, p. 3) outlines three different groups of older people: ‘Entering old age’, ‘Transitional phase’ and ‘Frail Older People’. The Framework describes ‘Entering old age’ as a social construction that sometimes includes people from the age of 50. There are arguments that the definition of an older person should not solely be based on a number. Gerontologist, Barbara Edlund (2016, p. 4), contends that ‘functional ability is a better indicator of aging than chronological age’. Indeed, whilst many older people might lead long, independent and healthy lives, there are other people who live with disabilities and frailty when they are relatively younger. However, whilst chronological age is not necessarily a useful indicator of a person’s ageing, with regard to their state of health or wellbeing, it is, nevertheless, ‘one of the most frequently used markers to define senior citizens’ (Fung and Lehmberr, 2016, p. 10). For this study, I am taking 50 as the lowest age for participants in my fieldwork drama groups and therefore the starting point for my definition of older people. At the same time, the oldest participant involved in drama workshops was 94, which means that the cohort of ‘older people’ for this research spans 44 years, so there are potentially several generations involved. I describe and discuss the fieldwork participants in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Whilst using a chronological age marker to define the age range of the participants in this research, I also hold in mind that each older person involved is a different individual. Older people are not a homogenous group of, ‘the elderly’, as often described in the media and there is no typical older person (Bowling and Dieppe, 2005; World Health Organisation, 2002). Dillaway and Byrnes (2009, p. 707) contend that ‘aging, at base, is a contextual process, dependent on the past and present conditions of individuals’ lives’. This means that several factors may affect how participants perceive and respond to the work, including: past life experiences; functional and cognitive abilities; prior social and cultural experiences; class, gender and race (Phillips et al., 2010; Walker, 2017). Consequently, whilst there may be some similarities in participants’ responses to the drama and theatre workshops, at the same time, each older person’s experience will be unique to them.
Physical Theatre

This thesis uses the term ‘physical theatre’ to describe a set of practical approaches to performance making and actor training. ‘Physical theatre’ is also often used as a generic descriptor of a particular kind of performance style that might be considered to emphasise the visual aspects of a production. This study, however, is not concerned with presenting a performance to an audience but rather the processes involved in developing acting skills through physical theatre practices. In their book on physical theatres, Murray and Keefe (2016) discuss and critically reflect upon the history and contexts of how the term physical theatre has come into popular use, particularly in the UK, North America and Australia since the 1980s. The authors examine a range of physical theatre practices, many of which originated with practitioners from mainland Europe. Broadly speaking physical theatre methodologies seek to redress a perceived imbalance in theatre practices, that foreground the spoken word and text over the use of the actor’s body and gesture in making meaning. This does not mean that the body then becomes more important than the word, or that the body and word are in opposition, but rather that the body explicitly plays a significant role in the theatre-making process and can often be the starting point for creation. Indeed, actor and writer, Rick Kemp (2012), argues that theatre-making is an embodied art form and that actor training should pay equal attention to developing non-verbal communication skills, as well as linguistic skills. Kemp contends that this is because about half of meaning in personal interactions involves communication without words, through gesture, posture and physicality. (I discuss the concept of theatre-making as an embodied art form in more detail in 3.3i).

It is important to note that whilst the term physical theatre implies a focus on the significance of the body in theatre-making, this thesis is not a sociological study of the ageing body. However, in relation to a sociological theory of embodiment in ageing, the research acknowledges Twigg’s (2006, p. 41) view that, ‘social gerontology has tended to avoid the subject of the body as part of its attempt to support good practice and positive images of ageing’ and that the neglect of how ageing bodies are experienced and perceived in society is now a vital area of enquiry. The focus of this research is on how older people use and experience their bodies creatively through developing and employing physical theatre practices, so, whilst a sociological examination of embodiment theory in ageing is not within the scope of the research, the study does respond in part to Twigg’s call. As Tulle (2015, pp. 126-127) says, ‘we have bodies but we also are bodies’ and ‘body matters are at the heart of ageing as experience’. In this thesis the performer’s experience of their aging body is seen and explored through physical theatre practice.
Within this context, the creative methodologies for this research are based on the actor training practices of Pagneux and Gaulier. Their practices are usually considered to be ‘associated with the physical training of actors’ (Murray and Keefe, 2016, p. 13), although Pagneux and Gaulier, themselves, do not describe their work as ‘physical theatre’. Nonetheless, their practices encompass the embodied and integrated use of gesture, movement, voice and word in making theatre. Pagneux and Gaulier’s work is also rooted in play and playfulness, openness and rapport, or collaboration, between performers, which can also be described using the French terms, *Le Jeu, disponibilité* and *complicité*. I examine these terms and Pagneux and Gaulier’s methodologies in greater detail in Chapter 3.

**Drama workshops**

The terms ‘theatre’ and ‘drama’ are generally fluid, and understanding is subjective, both individually and culturally. I used the term ‘drama’ with participants in this research, to signal to them the overall practical and participatory nature of the workshops that I was running. The participant information sheet (appendix 2) explained in more detail the physical approach to theatre-making that they would experience in the workshops. I also gave participants a brief explanation of my background and approach to drama and theatre-making in the first workshop sessions that they attended.

For the purpose of this thesis, I use the term ‘drama’ to encompass the various practical theatre-making activities that I used with participants in the workshops. The structure and content of the workshops was developed based on the physical theatre actor training practices of Pagneux and Gaulier, as outlined above, combined with my knowledge and experience gained from 40 years of work as a theatre-maker and teacher. The workshop methodologies were also informed by my study and work with drama educator Dorothy Heathcote whose practices I describe in more detail in Chapter 3. Consequently, the drama workshops sometimes had a greater focus on developing specific theatre-making, acting and performance skills and at other times they focussed more on self-expression through gesture, voice and role play, without necessarily involving performance. The emphasis of each workshop varied according to the needs and interests of individual groups and group members, as I discuss in Chapter 4.
Creativity

There are many definitions of creativity, but most describe it as a process that involves the generation of new and original ideas and/or the making of a creative product. Arts Council England defines creativity as, ‘the process by which, either individually or with others, we make something new: a work of art, or a reimagining of an existing work (2021). In his book on creativity, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2013, p. 28), says that ‘creativity is an act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain into a new one’. Similarly, Participatory and Community Arts specialist, François Matarasso (2012), posits that when an artist creates something new, they change reality, even if only very slightly. Creativity is also viewed as encompassing curiosity, divergent thinking, problem solving and imagination. For this study, I take participants’ descriptions of their creativity to include their experiences of having new ideas, thinking differently and using their imagination to make something that is new and original to them.

Health and Wellbeing

The World Health Organisation’s (WHO) definition of health is ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’ (WHO, 2021). While this is useful in that it recognises the multi-dimensional nature of health, the definition has been criticised because this view of health is unrealistic. Godlee (2011) argues that few people have ‘complete’ physical and mental health at all times, as set out by WHO, yet nevertheless they subjectively report that their wellbeing is good. This suggests there is a difference between the concepts of health and wellbeing. The idea that wellbeing is subjective indicates that it is associated with emotional and psychological perspectives of the individual, concerning themselves and their relationships with the world, rather than the objective physical state of being ‘healthy’ or ‘unhealthy’. Wellbeing is also associated with happiness and life satisfaction which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2. Acknowledging the differences between health and wellbeing, for the purposes of this study, I use the term ‘health’ in relation to participants’ physical experiences of doing drama and the effect they feel it has on their body, including, but not limited to, posture, mobility, balance and pain, and in the case of participants with dementia or cognitive impairment, on their cognition. I use the term ‘wellbeing’ in relation to participants’ experiences of doing drama on their psychological and emotional state, encompassing also their mood and mental alertness.
1.3 My background

In this section, I set the context for the practical drama work that I undertook with participants in this research study. I describe my introduction to physical theatre and the methodologies of Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux. I explain how I studied and then incorporated physical theatre practices into my work as an artist and teacher. The knowledge gained from my own experiences then informed the approaches I used in adapting and using Gaulier and Pagneux’s practices with the participants involved in this research.

In 1983, a then unknown, newly formed theatre company, comprising four young performers recently out of drama school, came to my local arts centre. They were performing a piece of theatre, devised by themselves, entitled *Put It On Your Head*. I was intrigued by the poster and the description of the show:

>A flight of fantasy about the English seaside and the social agonies of Englishness on the beach. *Put It On Your Head* tells the adventures of four characters who fail to comprehend the changes which overtake them, using a physical and comic style which stems from the traditions of circus, continental theatre and silent movies. (Complicité Productions, 2021)

I knew nothing of what ‘continental theatre’, or a ‘physical’ style meant. I was curious about the company’s name, Théâtre de Complicité (later changed to Complicité), which was rather unusual, in French and using a word I had not come across before, ‘complicité’. There was no set, the actors were all dressed in black and the lighting was basic. The production, however, was like nothing I had ever seen before. Through their bodies, their physical interactions with one another and their vocal skills alone, the company conjured up the real, as well as the fantastical and playful, world of an English seaside, with characters and situations that were both larger than life and yet totally believable. It was truly ‘a flight of fantasy’; I had never laughed so much in a performance before and at the same time it was a poetic and poignant experience, with images that have stayed with me to this day.

The performers were recent graduates from the Ecole International de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris and *Put It On Your Head* was my introduction to a very different way of making theatre. The following year, in my role as an Advisory Teacher of Drama, for Newcastle Education Authority, I invited Complicité to bring their new production, *A Minute Too Late*, to perform and run workshops in local schools. I grew to know the company and its performers over the following years. In 1989, Complicité returned once again to Newcastle, now with an international reputation, performing the award-winning *The Visit*. On this occasion, actor Marcello Magni, whom I had seen in
the original Complicité show, encouraged me to go and study with Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier. Pagneux and Gaulier were teachers from the Jacques Lecoq School who had recently left and set up their own school, also in Paris. So, in Autumn 1989, inspired by the joy, fun and skill of Complicité’s work, I gave up my job and went to Paris to train in physical theatre.

**Paris**

I arrived in Paris not really knowing what to expect. I wanted to learn new physical theatre-making skills but I did not realise how much, within this approach to training, I needed to ‘unlearn’ first. I thought that theatre was primarily about learning and speaking text and I had forgotten how ‘to play’ and be ‘in the moment’ which are key elements of this training. Initially, I enrolled in Pagneux’s 12-week, introductory movement course and two of Gaulier’s workshops, *Le Jeu* and Neutral Mask, exploring play and openness. However, the workshops took me on such an inspiring, stimulating and challenging journey that I decided to stay and complete the rest of that academic year with Gaulier and Pagneux.

Pagneux’s workshops were about gaining a deep awareness of how the different parts of the body connect and interact, in a fluid and playful manner. Pagneux introduced me to the work of Moshe Feldenkrais, whose exercises she integrated into her practice and who I discuss further in Chapter 3.4ii. Through the Feldenkrais exercises I gained greater awareness of how I habitually held my head and my shoulders and I discovered how lengthening the back of my neck might enable me to stand taller, walk more lightly and move with greater fluidity. Over the three months with Pagneux, I journeyed along a sometimes bumpy but always inspiring and playful path to gain a greater sense of balance and rhythm, developing deeper physical awareness of my whole body in space and its interaction with others.

Gaulier’s work very much complemented that of Pagneux’s, with a particular focus on play and also ‘letting go’ of preconceived notions of what makes ‘good’ theatre, in order to discover something more alive and engaging. Murray and Keefe (2016, p. 186) describe Gaulier’s teaching as one that is ‘direct, fearless’ and has ‘ruthless candour’. It is ‘made bearable to the recipient usually only by virtue of its wit and hilarity’. Gaulier constantly probes students with the aim of bringing out the innocent, vulnerable and playful nature of the child within that he believes is the basis for making entertaining and vibrant theatre. Theatre Director, John Wright, describes his experience of attending a Gaulier workshop during a summer school at Middlesex Polytechnic:
His incisive comments are like subjecting yourself to open-heart surgery without anaesthetic, and the only thing that makes it bearable is Gaulier’s wicked sense of humour. ‘You treated your partner like a lavatory brush,’ he said to me, ‘a Viennese lavatory brush!’ The class laughed at this, and looked pityingly at me standing in the centre of the acting space. (Wright, 1990)

My own experience was not dissimilar, Gaulier teased me for sounding like a stereotypical ‘school teacher’ and taking myself too seriously and I had several tearful evenings early on, wondering if I should give it all up. However, with the support and camaraderie of the other students and a determination to complete the courses, I continued. The year became an enlightening and liberating journey on a road to learning how to ‘let go’ and allowing myself to be ‘stupid’, in other words, to play ‘in the moment’ and learn to fail, without self-judgment. There was much laughter and the making of deep friendships that have continued to this day.

**Continued training with Gaulier and Pagneux**

Following the year in Paris, I did a one-week course with Pagneux, in Edinburgh. Out of this course emerged the idea for Théâtre Sans Frontières (TSF), the theatre company that I then co-founded in 1991 with three other ex-Gaulier and Pagneux students. TSF’s aims are to create vibrant, physical and multilingual theatre productions. Since the company’s inception it has created over 50 shows and drama projects for audiences of all ages, touring to theatres, arts centres and school venues. TSF works with actors and artists from across the globe and uses Gaulier’s and Pagneux’s methods and practices to inspire and inform the making of productions.

Alongside working with TSF, I have continued to develop my knowledge and understanding of Gaulier and Pagneux’s practices. In 1994 I did a three-week course with Gaulier on Melodrama and attended a one-month pedagogical course with Pagneux. I became part of an international group of theatre-makers who met once a year in Barcelona to work with Pagneux, to deepen our understanding and experience of the work, sharing skills and expertise. This group also included Complicité co-founders, Marcello Magni and Annabel Arden. In 2012, I participated in the filming of one of these week-long workshops, for a film entitled *Inside Outside* (Golden, 2012). Pagneux has never written about her work, so the aim of the film was to capture the essence of her teaching before she retired completely, aged 87, in 2013. Since then, I have also attended one final weekend workshop with Pagneux and a small group of ex-students, in Grenoble, in 2019. A particular focus of this workshop was on exploring and sharing ideas for how Pagneux’s practice could be used with and might be useful to, older people. Pagneux herself, having recently moved into residential care, was
particularly interested in how her ‘lifeful’ approach to theatre-making might support older people to stay active and engaged in the world.

1.4 Work with older people

Through the course of working with Pagneux, I came to know Dutch theatre maker Loes Hegger. Hegger spoke to me enthusiastically about two productions she had created with older people in Holland in 2013 and 2015. Up until then, I had only run workshops for youth theatre groups, A-level drama students and younger adults through the Workers’ Education Association (WEA). I became interested in exploring what Gaulier and Pagneux’s approaches to theatre-making could offer to older people, who might have had a more traditional experience of drama in the past, or, possibly, no previous drama experience. I was also aware of my own ageing, having turned 60 and having had a hip replacement. I recognised a desire to continue to create and stay physically active. Inspired by Hegger’s work, I ran my first drama workshops specifically for older adults in 2016, in collaboration with my local arts centre. The workshops focussed on developing participants’ physical theatre and improvisation skills. At the same time, some of the people in the group also commented on benefits that they felt they had gained from the work, that went beyond learning new creative skills. A number of individuals remarked, often in passing, on how the work had helped them reach the floor more easily and how they felt they had less pain in their back, or in their knees. In 2017, the opportunity then arose for me to explore, in depth, the potential benefits of older people engaging in physical theatre practices, through undertaking this PhD research at Northumbria University.

1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis explores and examines the theoretical, operational and narrative activities involved, during my PhD investigation. The thesis structure and content are described below.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the study. I present the study aims and define key terminology used in the research. I then describe my background and the context for me taking up this research.

In Chapter 2, I set the theoretical landscape for the study. I discuss the current literature on theories of ageing, the arts and ageing and drama and ageing. I discuss the gaps in literature on theatre practice with older people, specifically identifying the lack of reference to older people’s experiences of the cultural value of drama and its
relationship to their experiences of ageing in the context of creativity, health and wellbeing.

Chapter 3 describes the methodologies and theoretical frameworks used in the research for the study. I discuss the use of hermeneutic phenomenology and heuristics to collect and analyse participants’ data. The chapter also introduces the background, methodologies and practices of Gaulier and Pagneux. I then explain how I adapted their work for the participants in the fieldwork groups.

Chapter 4 explains the methods used for the recruitment of participants and for the planning and teaching of the four groups involved in the drama workshops. I explain the methods used for collecting and analysing data from participants. I discuss ethical practices within the research fieldwork and data analysis, particularly in relation to my interconnected roles as teacher, artist and researcher.

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I report on the findings from the data analysis. Using a thematic process, I analyse and interpret the data. Each chapter reports on a different theme in depth, whilst also recognising the interconnectedness of the themes and the overall holistic nature of the drama work. The three overarching themes concern participants’ experiences of the work on: their physical self; their mental, psychological and emotional self; their relationship as an individual to the rest of the group.

In Chapter 8, I discuss the findings in relation to the study aims of researching the perceptions of the impacts of participants’ drama experiences on their creativity, health and wellbeing. I discuss the findings within the broader context of research on the participatory arts, drama and ageing.

In Chapter 9, I explain my conclusions, my original contribution to knowledge, the limitations of the study, together with my recommendations for future physical theatre practice with older people and further research, and also the legacy of the study.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This research study concerns the introduction of physical theatre practices, based on the work of Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux, to four groups of older people aged 55-94, who attended a series of drama workshops, in North East England, in 2018/19. The study explores participants’ perceptions on the impacts of their drama experiences on their creativity, health and wellbeing, within the context of ageing. It is therefore a hybrid investigation, that encompasses overlapping academic bodies of knowledge, including, ageing; participatory arts in relation to health and wellbeing and drama practices with older people. In this literature review I outline and examine each of three different, yet interconnecting, areas of knowledge and research, and discuss the inter-relationships between one area of knowledge and another. The specific practices of Gaulier and Pagneux are discussed in Chapter 3, on methodologies.

In the literature review, I start by discussing theories and concepts of ageing, as well as ageing better strategies and policies, wellbeing in older age and issues around ageism. I then review literature on ageing and the arts, giving an overview of the impacts of arts activities on older people’s health and wellbeing. From this, I look specifically at the history, experiences and impacts of older people engaging in drama and theatre-making. This is based primarily on research that has taken place in the UK, USA and Australia. I also examine some of the challenges of measuring the affective, as well as the effective, impacts of people’s participatory arts and theatre-making experiences. From this literature review, I identify gaps in research on the cultural, creative and aesthetic value of participatory drama with older people and how physical theatre practices, in particular, may affect older people’s experiences of their creativity, health and wellbeing.

2.1i Literature search strategy

I used a literature review approach, as defined by Grant and Booth (2009), to achieve an overview of literatures relevant to the areas of my research. In their typology of reviews, Grant and Booth define a literature review as a review of published literature that might or might not have been peer reviewed: it involves a process for identifying materials for inclusion, which might or might not involve a formal literature search, a method of synthesis, or an appraisal of the quality or contribution of the selected literature. As a background for small empirical research studies, this approach is appropriate, as it provides a summary of previous work, a context and basis for discussion for the proposed study and supports identification of gaps in current
research (ibid.). It is less appropriate for studies that include systematic review and meta-analysis methods, as it lacks the scope, validity appraisal, and systematic synthesis methods necessary for those types of studies (ibid.). The literature review approach that I used enabled me to identify and examine the range and nature of current literature and research, in, ageing; health and wellbeing; the arts, participatory drama and theatre-making. This was in order to, firstly, locate the study within the contexts of these three fields and, secondly, map out the broad intersections between the fields (Arksey and O’Malley, 2005; Munn et al., 2018). Through this process I identified the contexts of the study and gaps in the research on drama and ageing, with a view to supporting the processes of planning my own research study.

The review brings together different bodies of literature: academic, policymaking and theatre practice, in relation to the research question as set out above. This is an iterative process to ensure that all relevant literature has been covered. Relevant arts and health research databases were accessed via Northumbria University’s ‘LibrarySearch’. The search strategy used a combination of key terms that were associated with, or related to, the aims and the context of the study including: ‘older people’, ‘ageing’, ‘health’, ‘wellbeing’, ‘participatory’, ‘arts’, ‘creativity, ‘drama’ and ‘theatre’ and their synonyms. I also conducted searches of government policy sites, charitable organisation sites, and ageing and wellbeing online forums and blogs, to identify relevant grey literature. In addition, I examined literature suggested to me by colleagues and contacts working in the fields of my research, in both ageing and theatre practice. The review was continually kept up to date with new research and policy documents that were published during the research period. The results of the search included a number of ‘false hits’, which were sifted out. Only items that were specifically related to the aims or context of the study were selected for inclusion in the literature review. It is important to note that the search identified mainly qualitative studies. This might reflect the fact that I was specifically searching for literature that explores perceptions and lived experiences, which usually involves qualitative methodologies and methods.

The selected literature was reviewed and grouped into initial discussion categories, achieved via a mapping process. During this process, it became apparent that the context of the study and related contemporary discussions were broadly about:

- who older people are, the ageing process, and where older people and the ageing process are situated within society, including discussion of theories of ageing, ageism and how ageism operates in society
- definitions of wellbeing and how wellbeing relates to older people
• the relationship between ageing and the participatory arts
• the cultural and creative value of the participatory arts, including drama, for older people
• older people's engagement in drama

As the synthesis process progressed, these contexts and topics of discussion were developed and refined into themes. Figure 2. illustrates the main themes that emerged from the final synthesis of all the selected literature. A discussion of these themes is presented in the following sections of the chapter.

Figure 2. Literature Review search terms

2.2 Theories of ageing

Psychosocial theories of ageing fall under three main headings: functionalism, conflict perspective and symbolic interactionism. These theories examine, analyse and theorise about the relationship between older people and society, including how older people negotiate and manage the ageing process and ‘expectations’ of ageing within society. Other theories, notably ‘successful ageing’ and ‘active ageing’ acknowledge and focus on personal experiences of ageing. In this study, participants are older
people situated within the context of UK society who come together in groups, with individual perspectives and experiences, to engage in a creative and collaborative activity. I therefore first consider some of the key theoretical concepts of ageing, under the headings outlined above, in order to facilitate contextualisation of their experiences.

2.2i Functionalism

Functionalism is a term used to define and explain older people’s roles in relation to how they contribute to the overall functioning of society. ‘Disengagement theory’ (Cumming and Henry, 1961) was one of the first functionalist theories. ‘Disengagement theory’ considered it normal for older people to withdraw from society as they aged and retired from work. Within this theory, people’s lives were described as consisting of three distinct phases: learning, working and resting, with resting being viewed as being a positive period of life in older age. Resting allowed older people to be released from the pressures of work, enabling younger people to take their places, a situation that was viewed as favourable for both older individuals and society (Cox, 1993).

Subsequently, this ‘resting’ phase came to be considered as a period of dependency, decline and loss, leading to older people’s social, economic and political exclusion (Walker, 2008; Boudiny, 2013; Zaidi and Howse, 2017).

Alongside ‘disengagement theory’, psychologist Robert Havighurst (1957) conceptualised ‘activity theory’, proposing that older people could remain independent and active in society if they continued to maintain their same activities and involvement in life for as long as they could. Havighurst then went on to develop ‘continuity theory’ arguing that as people age, they are likely to keep the same habits, personalities and lifestyle as they had previously. Working with sociologists, Havighurst conducted several studies on ageing and life satisfaction amongst older people. One of these was, *The Kansas City Study of Adult Life* (1968), in which he analysed data from interviews with 59 people aged 70-79, from a range of backgrounds, to explore whether there was a personality dimension to their experiences of life satisfaction. Havighurst concluded that personality seemed to be key to understanding patterns of ageing and predicting relationships between levels of activity and life satisfaction. Havighurst’s ‘continuity theory’ therefore indicated that an individual’s personality and lifestyle might shape any new role they take on in older age (Phillips *et al.*, 2010). At the same time, applied theatre academic, Sheila McCormick, writing about creative ageing, posits that ‘continuity theory’ also suggests that in older age ‘one does not cease to grow or develop just as one does not transform into an unknown other simply through the passage of time’ (McCormick, 2017, p. 32). In the context of this research, ‘continuity theory’ supports the likelihood that the older people who choose to
participate in the drama workshops will probably have some prior interest in developing their creativity, even if they might not have done any drama before.

2.2ii Conflict Perspectives

‘Conflict perspective theories’ consider that different social groups are in competition for wealth, power and resources. In relation to ageing this can lead to concern over the costs of funding support, such as pensions and social care. Within this approach, ‘social exchange theory’, proposed by Dowd (1975), considered that as older people’s resources (economic, physical and social) decline, so the costs to support their needs, for example pensions, health and long term care, rise and become greater than the benefits that they bring to society. Consequently, older people may be considered to become a burden on society and balance can only be found through increasing older people’s resources (Phillips et al., 2010). This, in turn, suggests that older people are in conflict with other generations. Alongside ‘social exchange theory’, ‘age stratification theory’ and ‘cohort theory’ (Riley, 1971) seek to identify how individuals age within different age groups and different historical periods. Within societies, behavioural age norms, including norms about roles and appropriate behaviour and activities, dictate what members of age cohorts may reasonably feel they can do. These norms are specific to each age strata, developing from culturally based ideas about how people should “act their age”. These theories, whilst acting as lenses with which to look at ageing on a macro level, have been criticised for failing to take into account people’s individual lived experience of ageing and how they might understand that experience. Nevertheless, they are important contexts for this study, where physical theatre activities were explored in the context of older age cohorts, i.e., cohorts not often associated with physical theatre.

2.2iii Symbolic Interactionism

Theories within the symbolic interactionist perspective focus on how society is created through the day-to-day interaction of individuals, as well as the way people perceive themselves and others. One ‘symbolic interactionist theory’ is Rose’s (1962) ‘subculture of ageing theory’, which focuses on the shared community created by older people when they are excluded, voluntarily or involuntarily, from participating in other groups, due to age. This theory suggests that older people will disengage from society and develop new patterns of interaction with their older peers. Older people might find a strong sense of community with their new group. Society encourages older adult subcultures in the creation of centres, associations, activity groups (such as the groups in this study) and housing, that focus on catering for older people. Subcultures
reinforce self-concept and social identity and can facilitate a political and more powerful voice for older people. Critics of ageing subcultures suggest these can lead to people primarily defining or labelling themselves as ‘old’, ignoring or playing down other cultural aspects of their lives, i.e., involvement in groups that focus on preferred activities. Subcultures might also lead to stereotyping because intergenerational engagement may be lacking.

Swedish sociologist, Lars Tornstam, developed a ‘symbolic interactionist theory’ called ‘gerotranscendence’ (2005): the idea that as people age, they transcend the limited views of life they held when they were younger. Tornstam believes that throughout the ageing process, older people feel more peaceful and connected to the natural world. The theory purports that older people develop heightened self-understanding, self-confrontation, creativity and spirituality, which supports them to negotiate the social world.

Within symbolic interactionism, Baltes and Baltes (1990) developed the ‘selective optimisation with compensation theory’ (SOC). SOC considers that personal development throughout the life course and subsequent mastery of the challenges associated with everyday life, are based on the components of selection, optimisation, and compensation. According to this theory, energy diminishes as people age and they use creativity to select personal goals to optimise the effort they put into activities, in this way compensating for the loss of a wider range of goals and activities. Overall, symbolic interactionism models suggest that older people take an active and creative approach in their ageing process, set goals that are attainable and meaningful and continue to grow. Again, this is a useful context for a study of the impact of a chosen activity on older people’s creativity, health and wellbeing.

2.2iv Successful and Active Ageing

As this study considers health and wellbeing of older people, it is essential to acknowledge ‘successful ageing’ and ‘active ageing’ as concepts contributing to the study’s context.

Successful ageing

‘Successful ageing’ was a concept that emerged in the 1980s and 90s and which challenged views that older age is a time of decline and loss. It also acknowledged different people’s ageing experiences. Fisher explains that the term ‘successful ageing’ could encompass any, or all, of the following aspects: ‘adaptation, self-acceptance,
productivity and activity, optimizing life expectancy, independence or autonomy, positive relations with others, having a purpose in life, and personal growth' (Fisher, 1992, p. 201). From further research involving interviews with older people, Fisher posits that older people do not offer a clear preference for any one aspect over another and experiences of ageing differ from person to person. He concludes that ‘successful agers continue to grow and learn as they use their past experience to cope with the present and set goals for the future’ (Fisher, 1995, p. 240).

Rowe and Kahn (1987) describe ‘successful ageing’ as avoiding disease and disability whilst maintaining physical and cognitive function and continuing to engage in social and productive activities. However, there are several critics of this definition as it implies that those who do live with physical, cognitive and/or social difficulties are unable to age successfully. Baltes and Carstensen (1996), argue that ‘success’ is frequently measured by economic accomplishments whereas it should encompass all kinds of personal goals using a flexible variety of norms and criteria that also take into account cultural contexts. Similarly, Dillaway and Byrnes (2009) contend that because of ‘successful ageing’s’ political and biomedical origins, one cannot assume that it is inclusive of all older people’s perspectives and contexts. Bowling and Dieppe (2005) are critical of what they see as a tendency for ‘successful ageing’ to be viewed through a narrow lens of health and disease, arguing that a disease-free state is not realistic for most people. They contend that discussion around ‘successful ageing’ should include personal growth, happiness and contentment, noting that it is possible to be happy even in ill health. Indeed, Timonem says that when older people’s own perspectives are factored into ‘successful ageing’ models, then ‘optimism, effective coping styles and social and community involvement are more important to ageing successfully than traditional measures of health and wellness’ (Timonem, 2016, p. 23). This concurs with Dillaway and Byrnes argument that ‘success’ in ageing should be viewed as a process rather than an outcome and should not become ‘a game which can be won or lost on the basis of whether individuals are diagnosed as successful or not’ (2009, p. 706).

Timonem (2016) raises several other arguments against the use of the term ‘successful ageing’. She considers that it places too much emphasis on individual responsibility and decontextualises significant factors such as gender, class, ethnicity and locality. Consequently, ‘successful ageing’ may well be the prerogative of only those who live economically and socially comfortable lives and society does not recognise a need to provide for those who ‘fail’ at ageing. She also suggests that the term ‘successful’ plays into the hands of commerce that wants to sell ‘anti-ageing’ products on the basis that no one wants to be seen as having failed at ageing.
Timonem concludes that ‘successful ageing leads us to the elite preserve of strong, stable, capable people – the ones we don’t really need to worry about when developing policy’ (ibid. p. 32).

**Active ageing**

Following on from the debates around the usefulness of the term ‘successful ageing’, the concept of ‘active ageing’ (sometimes referred to as ‘healthy ageing’ or ‘productive ageing’) was developed during the first part of the 21st century. ‘Active ageing’ arose from European and global discourses that began to involve older people themselves in the political discussion and placed greater emphasis on their activity and participation in ageing debates (Walker, 2008). In 2002 the World Health Organisation (WHO) described ‘active ageing’ as ‘the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security to enhance quality of life as people age’ (WHO, 2002, p. 12). In the same year, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (United Nations, 2002) added personal development, self-fulfilment and wellbeing across the life course to the WHO’s original principles. As a result of this endorsement and promotion by the WHO and the UN, the concept of ‘active ageing’ has subsequently become a guiding principle for ageing policies across many countries (Mestheneos and Withnall, 2016).

A positive consequence of ‘active ageing’ policies has been a huge expansion in education programmes for older people (Mestheneos and Withnall, 2016). However, very often, these programmes have focused on narrow economic frameworks, re-training and up-skilling individuals for a longer working life, rather than offering opportunities for personal development and supporting wellbeing (Boudiny, 2013). Boudiny also contends that ‘active ageing’ policies have tended to focus primarily on promoting a healthy, active lifestyle and consequently some older people who are more frail or dependent may feel excluded. She argues for a more multidimensional view of ‘active ageing’ and policies that centre on promoting older people’s participation in and engagement with life in general, regardless of any physical limitations they may have. This is particularly important considering that the UK’s National Health Service (NHS) Long Term Plan (2019, p.16) indicates that more than 13% of the population over the age of 65 is living in poor health and that this figure is even higher in other parts of Europe. Equally, Walker (2017) makes the case for an ‘active ageing’ strategy that focuses on the whole life course and includes mental as well as physical activity. Alongside this, Zaidi and Howse (2017) argue for a ‘healthy ageing strategy’ that pays greater attention to the range and variety of people’s experiences in later life, noting that whilst the process of ageing usually results in the progressive degeneration of cells, this is not necessarily a linear process or directly connected to chronological age.
'Active' and 'healthy' ageing concepts set out to define the ageing process in a more positive light than earlier ageing theories. They have been used to guide and develop policies based on older people’s rights rather than their deficits, recognise their potentials and support equality of opportunity for all (Zaidi and Howse, 2017). These are policies that set out to recognise, amongst other things, the importance of older people’s social and political participation in society and a better understanding of the health, economic and societal inequalities that shape experiences of ageing. Several policies and strategies also encourage programmes that aim to maintain older people’s independence and give greater support to those who are more frail. Some key recent strategies include: UK’s Centre for Ageing Better (2018) Transforming Later Lives; UK NHS’ (2019) Long Term Plan and the WHO’s (2020) Decade of Healthy Ageing.

The Transforming Later Lives strategy aims to achieve ‘a society in which everyone enjoys later life’ through prioritising four key goals, healthy ageing, fulfilling work, safe and accessible housing, and connected communities. The strategy focuses particularly on 50-70 year olds where it considers that the strongest impact can be made.

The UK NHS Long Term Plan (2019, p. 17) emphasises the importance of targeted and personalised support for older people’s physical and mental needs in order to maintain independence for longer. For example, the plan identifies programmes for building strength and balance that can reduce the likelihood of falls and therefore admissions to hospital and cost to the health service. The plan (ibid. p.33) also sets out to slow older people’s frailty by improving social and community support.

On a global level, the WHO (2020) proposes a Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030. This proposal builds on its 2002 ‘active ageing’ policy framework and its 2017 report on 10 Priorities Towards a Decade of Healthy Ageing. One of the aims outlined in the WHO’s Decade of Healthy Ageing: Plan of Action (2020) is that older people should be able to:

Continue to develop personally and professionally, to be included and to participate and contribute to their communities while retaining their autonomy, dignity, health and well-being. (WHO, 2020, p. 10)

These examples, given above, indicate how, overall, recent ageing policies and strategies have sought to support and encourage older people’s continued independence and participation in society. They place greater emphasis on promoting holistic and individualised approaches to ageing better or ageing well as a process, rather than focussing on whether ageing outcomes are ‘successful’ or not.
2.3 Wellbeing

The policies and strategies outlined above support a holistic approach to ageing better, or ageing well, recognising that supporting older people’s wellbeing is as important as encouraging healthy or active living. This study examines participants’ experiences of drama with regard to both their physical health and their mental, emotional and psychological wellbeing. In this part of the literature review, I therefore examine the phenomenon of wellbeing in more detail. Ryff (1989) identified six dimensions of psychological wellbeing. These are: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, purpose in life, autonomy, personal growth and environmental mastery. Wellbeing is therefore a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Additionally, Diener and Suh (1997) distinguish between objective and subjective wellbeing. Objective wellbeing is based on a person’s material and social circumstances, often judged by policy makers or academics, whereas subjective wellbeing is based on an individual’s self-assessment of their wellbeing. Diener and Suh (ibid. p. 204) explain that subjective wellbeing is not just about a ‘state of simply being merry’. They contend that the principal elements of subjective wellbeing are ‘a sense of satisfaction with one’s life and positive affective experiences’ (ibid.) which are most likely to be experienced through developing individual goals within the context of personal values. This study looks particularly at subjective wellbeing as it focuses on older people’s individual responses to doing drama in the context of their experiences of ageing.

In the following sections I discuss in more detail some of the commonly cited aspects of older people’s subjective wellbeing. These are happiness, personal growth, and social connectedness.

Happiness

Happiness, indicating positive mood and pleasure, is often considered to be a key indicator of wellbeing (Park et al., 2009) and is frequently linked to positive wellbeing and healthy ageing. The World Happiness Report (De Neve et al., 2013) produced by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the Global Happiness Council states that ‘happier individuals tend to live longer and have lower risk of mortality, even after controlling for relevant factors’ (De Neve et al., 2013, p. 56).

Happiness can be described as either hedonic or eudemonic (Bowling, 2005). Hedonic happiness is considered to require little effort and refers to the type of pleasant feelings that a person may feel on receiving something they want. Ryan and Deci (2001, p. 144) contend that for hedonic psychologists, wellbeing is ‘subjective happiness and
concerns the experience of pleasure versus displeasure’. In contrast, eudaimonic happiness is aligned to life satisfaction and having meaning in life, which Scollen and King (2004) describe as developing one’s potential and having purpose in living. They contend that eudaimonic activities also encompass, expression of self, personal growth and mastery.

The Orientations to Happiness (OTH) framework developed by Peterson et al. (2005) seeks to refine and further deepen understandings of happiness and its connection to wellbeing and life satisfaction. Peterson et al. (2005) propose that people seek wellbeing through three behavioural orientations: Pleasure, meaning, and engagement. ‘Engagement’ is therefore a third element added to hedonic and eudaimonic happiness. Peterson et al.’s definition of ‘engagement’ is based on Csikszentmihalyi’s (2002) writings on flow, the psychological state that occurs when an individual is fully engaged in an activity. Peterson et al. (2005, p.27) describe flow as, ‘time passes quickly. Attention is focused on the activity. The sense of self is lost. The aftermath of the flow experience is invigorating’. From their research, Peterson et al. conclude that each of the three behavioural orientations; pleasure, meaning and engagement, can be associated with supporting life satisfaction. They also posit that the orientations are distinguishable from one another, that they can be pursued at the same time and that they are not incompatible.

Hardeep et al. (2020) have used the OTH framework in research with older people on happiness and wellbeing. They used the framework, in combination with a phenomenological approach, to investigate the lived experiences of 16 older people involved in lifelong learning programmes. Their intention was to examine the interrelatedness of different pathways to happiness and what they call ‘whole-person wellness’. They found that the OTH framework was a useful tool for examining the intersections between these three aspects of happiness: pleasure, meaning and engagement, concluding that the wellness of the whole person lies at the intersection of all three. In relation to this study, it may therefore be useful to consider how any descriptions participants might give of experiences of pleasure, meaning and engagement in the drama work, intersect with any experiences they perceive of improvements in their subjective wellbeing.

**Purpose in life and personal growth**

Purpose in life and personal growth are two factors that are considered to support improved wellbeing and healthy ageing in later life. They are identified by Ryff (1989) within her six dimensions for psychological wellbeing as outlined at the start of this
section. Indeed, in relation to health, Ryff et al. (2004), in a study of older women, found that those who experienced greater purpose in life or personal growth appeared to show better neuroendocrine regulation and lower inflammatory markers. By contrast, an earlier survey by Ryff (1989) of 321 people of different ages, found higher levels of depression (not within a clinical range) amongst older people who had a lower sense of purpose in life or personal growth. Indeed, Van Mil and Hopkins (2015), for the What Works Centre for Wellbeing (a UK independent body for wellbeing, policy and practice), identified that what many active retired people want, in particular, are things to do, respect and sense of purpose. This is substantiated in Thompson et al.’s. (2017) study on the experiences of older, retired people working with student nurses in standardised patient simulations. As well as being able to offer authentic content to the simulations which was useful to the students, the older people themselves noted that their wellbeing particularly benefitted from having a sense of purpose and being valued.

In relation to personal growth, psychologist, Carol Dwerk (2012), argues that that people with a ‘growth mindset’ live with an attitude that their life is not carved in stone and so they continue to develop and change across their life course. In the context of SOC theory, as described in 2.2iii, Fries (2012) describes older age as a period of both gains and losses, when people may experience letting go of some things, such as work and family commitments but also have the opportunity for personal growth in other areas, such as taking on new activities and new learning.

Purpose in life and personal growth are also considered to be closely aligned to having control over one’s life which, in turn, is associated with positive social effects (Rodin 1980; 1986). This includes older people being less likely to stereotype themselves negatively and feeling happier. Purpose, personal growth and control can also support a person’s positive sense of self which may be in a state of flux due to no longer working, children leaving home and/or unexpected health issues which might lead to dependency. Without a sense of purpose or value in society, people can feel they are a ‘burden’, which damages self-esteem and identity, and can contribute to depression and other mental health issues (Carstensen et al., 2019).

Social connectedness and positive relations with others

Social connectedness and positive relations with others are other significant components of wellbeing and happiness in later life, as identified by Van Mil and Hopkins (2015) and echoing Rowe and Kahn’s (1987) description of ‘successful ageing’ discussed earlier (2.2iv). This is supported by other research: Bowling (2005)
found that what older people considered to be the building blocks for a good quality of life included, amongst the highest requirements, good social relationships (81%) and social roles and activities (61%); Litwin’s study (2011) on depression and older adults aged 65 and over, conducted through computer assisted interviews and questionnaires, concluded that gregarious social networks were associated with fewer symptoms of depression; Riby’s (2016) research found that both giving and receiving social support impacted positively on health, quality of life and psychological wellbeing. In the context of this study, the drama workshops could be seen to offer possibilities of bringing people together in a shared, creative environment where they could connect with others and build new relationships.

Promoting wellbeing

In relation to encouraging people to engage in activities that might support or improve their wellbeing, Aked et al. (2008) produced a report for The New Economic Foundation that identified five key factors for the generation of feelings of wellbeing, known as The Five Ways to Wellbeing. These are a set of actions to help people incorporate wellbeing into their everyday lives and have been taken up by the NHS (2021) in its mental health, self-help guides. The Five Ways to Wellbeing are articulated as: connect with others; be physically active; learn new skills; give to others and pay attention to the present moment. In relation to this study, the drama workshops with older people might have the potential to support all five actions. They will offer participants opportunities to come together and engage in physical and collaborative activities that enable them to learn and share new skills.

2.4 Ageism

Ageing theories, policies and strategies, as outlined in 2.2 and 2.3, set out to understand, promote and support older people’s health and wellbeing and their rights to enjoy later life. However, Swift et al. (2017) argue that if these policies and strategies wish to support ageing well, they must also address issues concerning ageism; that is, how to reduce negative attitudes towards older age, both societal and internalised, which might play a significant role in preventing the fulfilment of these objectives. Ageism is therefore another important factor to consider in a study about how older people perceive physical theatre in the context of ageing.

Societal ageism

The term ageism was first used by Butler (1969, p. 243) who defined it as ‘a deep seated uneasiness on the part of the young and middle-aged—a personal revulsion to
and distaste for growing old, disease, disability; and fear of powerlessness, “uselessness,” and death. More recently, Ayalon and Tesch-Römer (2018, p. 3) have defined ageism as ‘the complex, often negative construction of old age, which takes place at the individual and societal levels’. Ageism is described by Burnes et al. (2019, p.1) as comprising three components, ‘stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination toward people on the basis of age’. Together, these may lead to the devaluing or stigmatisation of individuals and even pose a risk to their health and wellbeing as they get older (Wurm et al., 2017). Negative stereotyping of older people is not new and indeed dates back many centuries as can be seen, for example, in Shakespeare’s ‘ages of man’ speech, in As You Like It. Here, older age is painted as one of physical decline leading to mental decline and ultimately helplessness, ‘sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything’ (Shakespeare, 2004, 2.7: 166). This description of older age as one of decline, is taken up by Gullette (2004) in her book Aged by Culture. Gullette contends that whilst, what she calls, the ‘master narrative’ of one’s life, might appear to be about progress, through childhood and into early adulthood, overall, it promotes an ideology of ageing as one of ‘decline’. Gullette (2004, p. 130) argues that this ‘master narrative’ means that ‘even if we also make progress, we are supposed to internalize decline as our private age identity’. The ‘master narrative’ of ‘decline’ therefore shapes and promotes, both societal and internalised, negative attitudes and behaviour towards older age and older people.

**Internalised ageism**

The negative stereotyping of older people can start in childhood and lead to internalised ageism in older age (Isaacs and Bearison 1986; De Pallo et al., 1995). Scholl and Sabat (2008, p. 105) explain that ‘children adopt stereotypes about older people, which are then reinforced throughout adulthood, often without the person’s knowledge. The stereotypes then become self-stereotypes when a person reaches old age’. Indeed, The Royal Society for Public Health’s (RSPH) report into attitudes towards ageing contends that, ‘faced with overwhelming negative attitudes about ageing in day-to-day life, it is perhaps no surprise that older people themselves can come to hold ageist attitudes about other older people, and indeed themselves’ (RSPH, 2018, p. 8). Similarly, the Centre for Ageing Better’s report (2020, p. 36) on negative attitudes to ageing concludes that, ‘internalised ageism – in which older people are essentially ageist towards themselves – can be just as damaging as ageism by others’. Internalised ageism contributes to the self-fulfilling nature of age stereotypes or, in other words, stereotypes that were once applied to ‘other’ people now become applied to the self.
The impacts of ageism

Several reports indicate that ageism prevails in many areas of society and, as a consequence, may have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of older people. Ageism can lead to discrimination against older people in terms of allocation of health resources (Lloyd-Sherlock et al., 2016) or older people being excluded from meaningful roles and relationships (Burnes et al., 2019). Examples of reports include: The Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project final report, executive summary, published by the UK Government Office for Science, which identified the need to ‘address the massive under-utilisation of the mental capital of older adults, and how to reverse the continued negative stereotyping of older age (Foresight, 2008, p.11); AGE Platform Europe’s report, based on a survey of 150 member organisations on structural ageism across Europe, that highlighted ageism in many areas of society, including finance, civic participation and employment. With specific regard to healthcare, the report notes that older people often experience exclusion from discussions about their health needs and that there is ‘a particular prevalence of unequal access to healthcare services, such as surgical treatments and medical rehabilitation’ (AGE Platform Europe, 2016, p. 6); Officer et al.’s report, in their bulletin for the WHO, that contends that public discourse around ageing continues to depict ‘older people as burdens on public spending and economic growth’ and that ‘negative attitudes and assumptions about older people are serious barriers to developing good public policy on ageing and health (Officer et al. 2016, p. 710).

The reports, outlined above, indicate some of the negative impacts of societal ageism and negative stereotyping of older people. Equally, internalised ageism can act to limit older people’s behaviour and self-esteem which might also negatively affect their health and wellbeing. Swift et al. (2017) argue that negative stereotypes can influence how people feel they can behave, and consequently older people might start to reduce, or restrict, what they do. A campaign report on ageism for the World Health Organisation notes that frequently older people ‘feel shame about getting older and limit what they think they can do instead of taking pride in the accomplishment of ageing’ (Officer and Fuente-Núñez, 2018, p. 295). Similarly, the Centre for Ageing Better (2021, p. 3) contends that internalised ageism, in particular, can lead people ‘to limit their own behaviour and opportunities, describing themselves in negative ways such as ‘past it’ or ‘over the hill’. Internalised ageism is also considered by some researchers to impact on an older person’s life expectancy. Levy et al. (2002 p. 261) contend that ‘older individuals’ internalized age stereotypes contribute to the formation of their self-perceptions of ageing, which, in turn, can have a physiological outcome’. Levy’s 2002 study found that individuals with positive self-perceptions of ageing ‘lived
7.5 years longer than those with less positive self-perceptions of aging’ (ibid.). Conversely, other studies have found that older people with negative self-perceptions are less likely to seek health care or engage in physical activity (Sarkisian et al., 2002; Wurm et al., 2010) and they might have a reduced motivation to carry on living (Marques et al., 2014).

Ageism and agency

Ageism can also cause older people to feel excluded from society, that their voices are ignored, and they have little power or agency. Matarasso (2012, p. 21) considers ageism to be ‘masked by benevolent condescension’ and that ‘passive injustice towards the old, for instance in the form of exclusion and neglect, is also widespread’. Similarly, Abrams et al. (2011, p. 8) contend that ‘this type of [benevolent] discrimination may make it more difficult for older people to feel empowered and be taken seriously’. Indeed, this has been seen recently in attitudes towards older people in much of the government and media debate around the COVID-19 pandemic. People aged 70 and over, have frequently been framed as one homogenised group, ‘the elderly’, with a perceived need to be protected due to chronological age rather than actual health status. The British Society of Gerontology (BSG) made a statement to this effect at the start of the pandemic, saying, ‘it is wrong and overly simplistic to regard people who are aged 70 and above as being vulnerable, a burden, or presenting risks to other people. Many people in this age group are fit, well, and playing an active role in society’ (BSG, 2020). In a public lecture on ageism and COVID-19, Professor Thomas Scharf contends that the labelling of all older people in the same way, reinforces ‘negative stereotypes of old age as being marked by vulnerability, frailty, ill health, disability’ (Scharf, 2020, 8:54). A similar view is echoed by the Centre for Ageing Better whose 2020 report found that ‘COVID-19 has served to reinforce the idea of older people as frail and vulnerable’ (2020, p. 6). Meanwhile, The United Nations General Secretary, António Guterres (2020), has advocated for governments and communities to respect the rights and dignity of older people and not to treat them as ‘invisible or powerless’ during the pandemic.

In response to the perceived negative effects of ageism and a narrative of ageing as one of vulnerability, powerlessness and decline, Gullette (2004, p. 135) argues that ‘there is a way out if one recognises that decline is an ideology, learns more about its techniques, and invents resistances’. In the next part of this literature review I therefore examine how participation in the arts and particularly drama, might support older people to resist ageism, find new creative ways for self-expression and generate an
alternative narrative of ageing that supports and promotes older people’s visibility and agency in society.

2.5 Ageing and older people’s participation in the arts

In this section I examine research on ageing and the participation of older people in the arts in general. I discuss how involvement in the arts can make a positive contribution towards supporting aspects of the ageing well and ageing better agendas, maintaining or improving older people’s health and wellbeing. I look at how arts participation might intersect with the three pathways to happiness, identified through the OTH framework (pleasure, meaning and engagement) and also support older people to incorporate The Five Ways to Wellbeing (2.3) into their lives. This section also looks at how participation in the arts can contribute to resistance to ageism.

2.5i Participatory arts, health and wellbeing

I start with an overview of some of the recent research studies, reports and reviews on the impacts of participatory arts, health and wellbeing projects with older people. Whilst there is also evidence that engagement in other cultural activities, such as museums, can support health and wellbeing (Thomson and Chaterjee, 2014), this literature review focuses primarily on research where older people participate as artists, making art themselves, including dance, drama and music, rather than interacting with art made by others, as this aligns best with this study’s aims.

The late Gene Cohen, psychiatrist and founding director of the George Washington Center for Aging, Health and Humanities in the USA, conducted many key studies into mental health and ageing. For example, the 2001 Creativity and Aging Study was a multisite longitudinal research project that involved over 300 participants aged 65-100. Half the participants took part in intensive weekly arts programmes with professional artists for approximately nine months a year, over two years. The control group participated in various community activities but not arts activities. Cohen (2006) found that the intervention group, in relation to the comparison group, had significantly fewer doctors’ visits, bought fewer over-the-counter medications, reported a decrease in falls and a decrease in loneliness. Cohen therefore concluded that participatory arts programmes can help to maintain independence and reduce some of the risk factors leading to the need for long-term care. He also contended that arts engagement appeared to support improved wellbeing by offering people opportunities to experience control or mastery, generating experiences of satisfaction and empowerment.
In the UK, The Baring Commission’s, *Ageing Artfully* report (Cutler, 2009) mapped participatory arts projects with older people across the country. The report focuses on 120 short case studies of professional arts organisations working with older people. Regarding health and wellbeing benefits, the report cites: strengthening joints and muscles through dance and movement; improvements in breathing through singing and playing instruments, as well as enhanced self-esteem, self-confidence, socialisation and morale.

Stuckey and Nobel (2010) reviewed research into the arts, healing and public health across the USA and Europe. They focused on four main participatory arts areas: visual art therapy, music, movement based creative expression and expressive writing, with most interventions taking place in hospitals. Whilst acknowledging that limitations on the research meant that sweeping generalisations could not be made, Stuckey and Nobel conclude that, nonetheless, the studies they reviewed appeared to show that creative engagement can decrease anxiety, stress and negative moods.

A number of research projects have looked specifically at participatory music-making with older people in the UK. Creech et al.’s (2014) book *Active Ageing with Music* brings together stories and case studies of how participatory music-making can support improvements in cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing in older age, including reductions in loneliness and isolation. Similarly, What Works Wellbeing’s review (2016) of research on singing and older adults, found that singing can improve quality of life and also reduce loneliness, isolation and depression. Additionally, Skingley et al.’s research project (2018) showed how singing improved respiratory symptoms and wellbeing with 60 people aged 50-89 in South London, who had chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

At a governmental level, the 2017 report from UK All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) inquiry report on Arts, Health and Wellbeing consolidated much of the research on ageing and the arts, arguing that arts engagement should be central in health, wellbeing and ageing agendas. It cites projects similar to those described earlier, including, singing, visual arts and drama projects that have been set up to combat social isolation, as well as dancing programmes to combat falls. The report also describes the benefits of Arts-on-Prescription projects, delivered through the Social Prescribing Network. It notes that in areas where Social Prescribing is in operation there has been a reduction in GP visits and that arts activities have played a vital role in both the recovery and maintenance of health, as well as, helping people with physical and psychological pain. These findings are echoed in the Centre for
Cultural Value’s review of 13 Arts-on-Prescription studies (Dowlen, 2020). The review found that all the studies ‘showed positive wellbeing outcomes, with participants reporting feeling more confident, less socially isolated and having better self-esteem’ (Dowlen, 2020, p. 4).

Following on from the APPG report, Age UK’s 2017 Index of Wellbeing in Later Life found that maintaining meaningful engagement with the world was one of the most important elements that made a difference in older people’s sense of wellbeing and that cultural and creative participation played a key part in this. Their report on the Index findings states that:

> Creative and cultural participation was the single factor that contributed the most out of all 40 of the factors we found to significantly contribute to wellbeing. (Age UK, 2018, p. 3)

The report concluded that because creative and cultural participation is clearly important to older people, there is a need for improved access and opportunities for participation. It identified a number of barriers to participation, including, location, transport, income and poor physical or mental health. They argue, amongst other things, that poor health should not hinder participation and for stronger partnership working between arts organisations, community groups and national and local leadership.

Overall, the studies and reports cited above, indicate that participation in the arts can maintain and improve older people’s health and wellbeing in many ways. Arts participation intersects with the OHF framework and supports the Five Ways to Wellbeing strategy by offering opportunities for pleasurable, meaningful and engaging activities that support social interaction, staying active and learning new skills. In some circumstances, participation in arts activities can also help to improve specific aspects of physical (balance and breathing), or mental health issues (reduction of depression or anxiety).

### 2.5ii Participatory arts and ageism

Alongside the health and wellbeing benefits outlined above, participation in the arts can also be a vehicle to counteract both internal and societal ageism, as described in 2.4, by creating opportunities for older people’s self-expression, enhancing self-confidence and promoting greater visibility. Cohen (2006) and Matarasso (2012) each contend that the ability to create art does not diminish with age. Indeed, McCormick argues, ‘one can be an emerging artist whatever one’s age; it is simply about harnessing creativity...
and supporting it to develop’ (2017, p. 232). Additionally, Matarasso contends that making art can help people to retain individuality and autonomy, enabling them to tell their own stories and experience a continued sense of agency in the world. This is indicated in Creech et al.’s studies on music with older people which suggested that making music offers opportunities for self-expression and creativity which can enhance self-confidence and empowerment. Creech et al. (2014, p.76) explain that developing older people’s musical self-concept enables them to experiment with as their ‘possible musical selves’. Underpinned by SOC theory (see 2.4), they argue that whilst some aspects of an individual’s life may change and be lost as they age, this, in turn, leaves space for the development of new, forgotten or unknown selves to emerge. Creech et al. contend that engagement in music supports older people to redefine their identity and posit that ‘these possible musical selves have been found to be related to a sustained sense of autonomy and control in individual lives’ (ibid. p. 79).

However, whilst some research on arts and ageing, such as that of Creech et al. above, does examine the impact of arts participation on the person’s creative self and their sense of agency and control, Reynolds et al. (2016) contend that often research agendas are driven more by the problems rather than the possibilities of an ageing population. These agendas can then serve to perpetuate negative views of older people’s creative potential. To some extent this is reflected in the findings from Cutler’s Ageing Artfully report (2009) which found that across the UK, there was a lot more arts activity happening with younger rather than older people and that the media either tended to ignore, or be more negative towards, older people making art.

Some of the apparent deficit in both the quantity and profile of older people’s arts work has begun to be addressed since Cutler’s report was published. This has been through a variety of local and national initiatives, including:

- The Age of Creativity network which was launched in 2012 and collates and promotes arts research and practice with older people across the UK. The network runs a nationwide festival each year to celebrate and promote existing opportunities for older people to take part in creative activities, alongside new events organised specifically for the festival
- Since 20014, the New Vic Theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme has collaborated with researchers from Keele University to run a yearly Live Age Festival. The festival showcases and promotes the work of older local people to wider audiences
In 2018, Arts Council England and The Baring Foundation launched their *Celebrating Age* Programme. Funding has enabled 32 organisations to create and deliver new projects specifically to increase older people’s participation and leadership in the arts. The programme encourages older people to actively take part in arts activities, act as arts ambassadors in partnership with their local venues and offers opportunities for older people to develop skills as workshop leaders or facilitators.

Together, these new projects and initiatives seek to raise the visibility and engagement of older people as artists and individuals, thereby helping to combat both internalised and societal views of older age as a period of decline and dependency.

### 2.6 Drama and theatre-making with older people

The previous section examines some of the intersections between ageing, health and wellbeing across the broad field of arts participation. I now look more specifically at drama and theatre-making within an ageing context. There is substantial research on the work of older professional theatre-makers (Basting, 1998; Lipscomb *et al.* 2010; 2013; Matarasso 2012; Mangan 2013; Watton 2019), however, because this research study focusses specifically on drama and theatre-making with non-professionals, this is the area of theatre practice discussed in this review.

Theatre-making with non-professionals is often described as participatory, or community, theatre or drama. Whilst participatory drama projects with older people may often take place in arts centres or theatres, they also happen in non-traditional theatre spaces, such as, community venues, day centres, care homes, or even site-specific places such as shopping centres. Projects may involve older people performing for the public or invited audiences, or they may focus more on workshops, where participants primarily share work with one another. The fieldwork for this research study does not involve showing work to any outside audience. Nevertheless, because the research workshops involve developing performance skills and several participants were interested in performing either to one another, or eventually to an audience outside of the workshops, this part of the review examines a range of older people’s drama and theatre projects, both with and without audiences.

#### 2.6i An overview of participatory drama practice with older people

In 2017, Bernard and Rickett published a review of 77 research projects on the benefits of older people’s participation in drama and theatre. The review covered older people
as both practitioners and audiences, examining health and wellbeing benefits, as well as, exploring the cultural value of older people’s drama participation. Bernard and Rickett found that the great majority of the research on drama and ageing had taken place in the USA and UK, along with two studies from Australia. Also in 2017, McCormick published her book Creative Ageing, exploring the benefits of participatory drama with older people. Again, the research studies described in the book were primarily from the USA and UK, with one chapter concerning a project in Australia. From Bernard and Rickett’s and McCormick’s work, along with my own research, I have identified a number of research projects, that together, give an overview of the kinds of participatory drama and theatre work that has taken place with older people in the USA, UK and Australia since the mid 1970s, when participatory drama research first began. In order to situate my study in the wider field of participatory drama practice with older people, I now describe some of this work, along with its perceived health and wellbeing benefits. I begin by discussing examples from the USA and Australia, and then discuss UK practice, which will give a national context for my study.

The USA and Australia

In the USA, research projects examining the range of possible benefits of drama activities with older people, and particularly an improvisational approach to drama, can be traced back to the middle of the 1970s. For example, Barbara Davis (1987), in her review of what she describes as ‘creative’ or ‘improvisational’ drama projects with older people, cites The Brookdale Drama Project in New York (1976) as an improvisational drama project where participants reported improved poise, confidence and communication skills, as well as being able to explore their own creative potential. Davis also cites a range of other personal, social and creative benefits, identified by researchers including herself, on other improvisational drama projects with older people. These include, improved self-esteem, playfulness, fun, self-expression and also combatting ageism.

Specifically in relation to combatting ageism, The Jewish Association for Services for the Aged (JASA), Theatre Ensemble, (New York 1984-1991), was a drama group that was set up with the aim of raising issues concerning ageism in the health services. The group created theatre productions based on older people’s experiences of care and treatment by the medical services, with the intention of empowering the non-professional older actors and audiences (often medical staff and students) to engage in conversations around these issues. The productions were performed frequently across the USA, despite medical staff sometimes reporting that at times they felt overly criticised by the older performers (Pflanzer, 1992).
Since these projects, described above, numerous participatory drama programmes and groups with older people have developed across the USA, with some of these projects focussing specifically on using improvisation with project participants. For example, Anne Basting’s (2001; 2009; 2013) TimeSlips programme which began in 1998 and later The Penelope Project (Basting et al., 2016), are based on improvisational storytelling and theatre-making workshops with people living with dementia. In these projects, participants’ creativity is encouraged through imagination and play, rather than memorised text, enabling all participants to participate and engage, regardless of their cognitive abilities. Basting (2013, p.1) writes about how when she first began using improvisation with people with memory loss, she discovered that the ‘shift toward the imagination had sudden and profound impact. My small group went from very little talking or eye contact to laughing, singing, and communicating in any and every way we had’. Consequently, Basting felt that improvisation enabled the participants to find new ways of expressing themselves and connecting with one another in a non-judgemental environment. Improvisation and play were also central to a drama project run by Ruth Yamamoto (2020) with a group of older women in a Mid Atlantic Community Center. Participants in the project described the drama improvisation workshops that they attended as ‘serious play’, where they had fun learning new skills and could simultaneously forget about day-to-day concerns. Participants also described the improvisatory and spontaneous nature of the work as stimulating their brains whilst simultaneously not experiencing the stress of having to remember text. In Australia, play and improvisation also underpin the clown theatre work of Clark Crystal and Anna Yen, with older people living with dementia. Crystal and Yen’s practices, which have developed from their actor training with Gaulier and Pagneux, offer opportunities for participants to ‘own the play, to lead the improvisation and to be given an active role in creativity’ (Balfour et al., 2017, p. 123).

The UK

I discuss drama practices with older people in the UK under three headings that encompass some of the different types of work that takes place. These are: amateur theatre, Reminiscence Theatre, and participatory drama and theatre-making. Although this study focusses primarily on the latter practices, it is useful to give a brief overview of amateur theatre and Reminiscence Theatre as well, as this will give an understanding of the wider context of this study.
**Amateur Theatre**

Amateur theatre groups have long been embedded in communities across all parts of the UK, in both city and rural settings. They tend to run independently and are not usually linked to professional arts organisations or theatres. Whilst not being specifically aimed at older people, they often attract retired older people as volunteers, performers, directors and audiences (Organ 2016; Nicholson 2018). Organ notes that although amateur theatre offers opportunities for people of all ages to learn new skills and be active in their communities, it tends to put on more mainstream plays and may therefore ‘limit its capacity to challenge stereotypical representations of old age, especially for women’ (2016, p. 23). Mangan also contends that amateur theatre groups are ‘seldom the home of the most cutting edge or experimental theatre’ (2010, p. 159). However, Nicholson (2018) disagrees, arguing that amateur groups do also put on plays that they find challenging, often new writing that has come from places such as the Royal Court Theatre, London. Overall, however, most amateur theatre work usually involves performing texts written by known playwrights. It is less common for amateur theatre groups to use improvisation and experimentation to create their own devised productions. At the same time, Nicholson also argues that whilst amateur theatre might be perceived as being artistically conservative and at times exclusive, it can also nurture a sense of building communities.

In relation to the context for this study, it seems probable that those participants who come to the drama workshops, and have any previous drama experience aside from school, are likely to have been members of an amateur theatre group. Their experiences may then affect their views and understandings of theatre-making and of participating in the drama workshops for this study.

**Reminiscence Theatre**

Outside of the amateur theatre sector, up until the 1980s, much drama for older people in the UK focused on those in residential care and on passive entertainment rather than active, participatory, engagement. However, from the 1980s onwards, arts organisations and artists began to develop new ways of working with older people that positioned them in more active and collaborative roles in the creative process (McAvinchey, 2013). Reminiscence Theatre, pioneered by Pam Schweitzer who founded Age Exchange Theatre in 1983, was one of the first examples of drama practice bridging the gap between entertainment and participation. Reminiscence Theatre involves a process of collecting and sharing older people’s memories, then turning them into a theatre production. Productions were initially performed by younger actors to groups of older people in non-theatre settings, including day centres and care
homes, promoting shared ownership of the stories being told and connecting older people with their own past and those of others. As Reminiscence Theatre continued to develop, Schweitzer (2007) encouraged older people to perform their own stories. She describes the rehearsal process as being physically and mentally stimulating for participants and noticed improvements in performers' communication, memory skills and confidence. Critics of Reminiscence Theatre take the view that it can become too nostalgic and focused on the past, which in itself could be distressing for some older people. This can lead to alienation from the present and prevent examination of the here and now, or possibly inhibit engaging in fantastical or imagined futures (McAvinchey, 2013; Mangan, 2013). Reminiscence Theatre is very different from the drama practices used in this study. However, because the research may involve some older people with memory loss it will be useful to be aware of any potential distress that could be caused by placing too much emphasis on remembering.

**Participatory drama and theatre-making**

Participatory drama and theatre-making groups for older people have grown rapidly in the 21st century. Organ's 2016 report on older people's drama, identified 25 theatre companies working with older people and describes 14 in detailed case studies. Some of the best known, include: Entelechy Arts, The Performance Ensemble, Spare Tyre, Magic Me, Fallen Angels, Ages and Stages and the Elders Company at the Royal Exchange Manchester. However, Organ acknowledges that there are likely to be many more groups than these 25 and from my research, there are now a myriad of such projects and groups across the country. These groups are often attached to arts centres, regional theatres and community organisations and seek to target people living in more deprived areas who may not have had much previous access or involvement in drama activities, for example, Arts Council England’s *Celebrating Age* programme, as described in 2.5ii. Many of the groups aim to increase participation and create opportunities for older people to actively develop their drama skills, whilst also supporting their health and wellbeing. For example, Sextou and Smith’s study on the health and wellbeing benefits of drama with older people engaged in the Fallen Angels drama group found that participants reported ‘improvement in mood through social interaction, growth of relationships and a sense of belonging to a community’ (Sextou and Smith, 2017, p. 287). They contend that all of these experiences indicate that involvement in drama can help to combat loneliness and improve wellbeing, particularly for people who live alone.

Many participatory or community drama groups focus on making theatre that is based on celebrating a particular place or group of peoples (Mangan, 2010). The Ages and
Under Lyme, for example, started by examining the place of the theatre in people’s lives, through researching documentaries and other local archive material. This led to the creation of a new documentary performance piece, Our Age, Our Stage, created by some of the older people involved in the project. A particular aim of the project was to examine the emotional, affective and social impacts of older people’s drama participation. The researchers found that it had engendered a sense of belonging, which thereby generated security in which individuals felt that they could take risks, learn new skills and build confidence (Bernard et al., 2015).

One of the aims of The Performance Ensemble in Leeds is to bridge the space between professional and non-professional older performers, as in the group’s 2018 production of Anniversary at Leeds Playhouse, which was a mix of performance, contemporary dance, music and personal stories to explore and celebrate what it means to be an older person. The aims of other older people’s drama groups include, exploring and addressing current issues around ageing, taking theatre to new places and challenging ageist attitudes. For example, Entelechy Arts’ production of Bed (Slater, 2019) has travelled to shopping centres and streets worldwide to raise issues concerning older people’s visibility in social life.

The drama projects and productions, described above, are all very different and at the same time all offer opportunities for participants to learn new theatre-making skills, express themselves creatively and raise the visibility of older people within wider society. They are similar to this research project in that they encourage older people to work together collaboratively, often through improvisation and experimentation. However, many of the projects also differ, in that they often have an equal, if not primary, focus on exploring a specific issue or story that will then form the basis of a new piece of theatre for public audiences. In doing this, as much emphasis is placed on creating and presenting the production as on developing personal drama skills. In contrast, the aims of the drama workshops for this research were specifically to explore and develop older people’s physical theatre acting skills, in collaboration with other group members; any sharing that took places was only within the group. There was no intention to perform publicly, although these skills could certainly be used in the creation of theatre productions and indeed, some participants may wish to do this in the future. Therefore, whilst there is overlap between this study and the work of other UK participatory drama and theatre groups, there are also differences. The fieldwork practices used in this research are more aligned to aspects of the actor training workshops of drama students, which I discuss in the next chapter, and to Yamamoto’s
(2020) improvisation workshops with older people in the USA, as discussed earlier. At the same time, owing to the collaborative and exploratory nature of most participatory drama projects, based often on devising new work rather than staging existing texts, it is possible that there could also be some similarities in any benefits experienced by the older people involved in this study. In the next section, I therefore give a summary of some of the benefits that have been identified with older people involved in participatory drama projects.

**2.6ii Summary of some of the benefits of participatory drama practices with older people**

Many of the benefits that have been identified for older people participating in drama are discussed in Bernard and Rickett’s (2017) review of literature on the cultural value of older people’s theatre-making. This review was undertaken as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s (AHRC) Cultural Value Project during 2013-15. In relation to health, Bernard and Rickett noted that drama has been seen to particularly improve recall and problem solving (Noice *et al.*, 1999; 2004; Noice and Noice 2006; 2008; Stuckey and Nobel, 2010) and also to lead to a decrease in depression (Bohlmeijer *et al.*, 2005). Regarding wellbeing, Bernard and Rickett (2017, p. e22) summarise the key wellbeing benefits of drama as ‘decreased anxiety, decreased loneliness, increased self-confidence and self-esteem, and increased sense of value and purpose’. Looking beyond pure health and wellbeing benefits, Bernard and Rickett found that projects where older people participated in devised theatre work, in particular, they reported experiencing enjoyment, challenge, use of their imaginations and consequently increased self-worth and transformed perception of self.

Devised work in drama is usually based on collaboration, exploration and improvisation. This collaborative approach encourages communication and team building between people, which in turn supports individuals to explore their own self-expression, take risks and gain self-confidence. Johnston (2005, p. 37) explains that when ‘teamwork is put first participants discover a new and stronger individuality for themselves’. Indeed, in their report, *Understanding the value of arts & culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project*, Crossick and Kaszynska (2016, p. 109) state that the greatest benefit of the Ages and Stages drama project, discussed above, was, ‘taking older people out of their comfort zones, with fun and enjoyment being in creative tension with fear and risk’. Drama, based on exploration and improvisation, can therefore be both fun and enjoyable, whilst at the same time encouraging older people to take risks and explore their creativity in new and different ways. In this way the benefits can be considered as potentially encompassing more than improved physical
health or emotional and psychological wellbeing. Through collaborative exploration and experimentation, drama may also enhance an older person’s sense of their creative and cultural self.

2.7 The cultural and creative value of arts participation

As discussed previously, many of the benefits that are described as resulting from older people’s participation in the arts fall within a health and wellbeing agenda, including improved psychological wellbeing, reduced dependency on medicines, improved physical fitness and less dependency on social care. This could be viewed as an instrumentalised use of the arts to achieve social, health or political goals. However, as Matarasso argues in his book on older artists, ‘ageing is not a disease’, even if it may sometimes be accompanied by disease. He contends that whilst the arts can be life enhancing, they should not be seen as a remedy for solving all social ills:

> Arts practice has immense value to human wellbeing, but that value cannot be controlled or directed. Art can only be experienced by individual people who will make of it what they choose. (Matarasso, 2012, p. 16)

Equally, Cohen et al. (2006, p. 728) contend that arts programmes ‘foster sustained involvement because of their beauty and productivity’ and that ‘many people seek involvement for the natural appeal of the art; secondary positive health benefits are an added bonus’.

This study aims to not only explore and examine the health and wellbeing aspects of older people’s engagement in physical theatre-making but also the cultural and creative value of their experiences. If, as Cohen et al. attest, participants engage in arts practices primarily because of the art rather than any potential health and wellbeing benefits, it is important to interrogate why people may be attracted to doing drama, how they describe their creative experiences and what these experiences mean to them, their cultural value.

Matarasso (2012, p. 70) describes the appeal of making art as the creation of something new. He says it is to ‘act in the world’, to be ‘a subject, not only an object’. Matarasso contends that when someone creates something that did not previously exist, she ‘makes an event that changes reality, however slightly, and gains agency in her own existence’ (ibid.). The process of making art can therefore be an empowering experience, conveying a sense of agency and enabling the artist, as Creech et al. discovered in their research on older people making music, to experience a new ‘possible self’ (2014 p. 76). However, whilst some of the projects and research
described in the previous sections do include participants’ experiences of artistic self-expression (Davis 1987; Basting 2001; 2009; 2013; Creech et al. 2014), they are in the minority. Much arts, health and wellbeing research focuses primarily on health and wellbeing outcomes. One possible reason for this is that these types of outcomes are perceived to be easier to measure. For example, it is more straightforward to monitor reductions in blood pressure or a person having fewer falls. Also, the funding for many projects, for example Arts-on-Prescription and Social Prescribing programmes, is likely to come from health rather than arts budgets.

When funding comes from health budgets, many funders may want to see clear health and wellbeing outcomes in order to justify the cost. However, writing about the work of Entelechy Arts, as discussed in 2.6i, Danny Ruta, Director of Public Health in Lewisham views the benefits of the organisation’s work as being much greater than purely biomedical:

It is coming from a completely different model, which is about passion for art. It’s holistic; completely holistic. It’s not really about health or learning, it’s about enriching the quality of a person’s life. (Ruta, 2017, p. 3)

Nevertheless, the holistic enrichment of an individual person’s quality of life, through their experience of the arts, is often placed in a secondary role to other social, economic or health outcomes and measuring the creative and cultural benefits of an arts intervention can be viewed as challenging. Crossick and Kaszynska, in their report, Understanding the value of arts & culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project, conclude that:

What emerges from the Cultural Value Project is the imperative to reposition first-hand, individual experience of arts and culture at the heart of enquiry into cultural value. Far too often the way people experience culture takes second place to its impact on phenomena such as the economy, cities or health. (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016, p. 7)

Likewise, Dowlen’s report for the Centre for Cultural Value on the evaluation processes of 13, Arts-on-Prescription programmes that she examined, found that much greater focus was placed on evaluating health outcomes over the making of art. Dowlen (2020, p. 9) argues that the lack of inquiry into the nature of the arts and cultural programmes themselves meant that it was, ‘difficult to determine the specific value of arts and culture over other group-based activities’.

Dowlen’s contentions are similar to those of Bernard and Rickett in their review of literature on the cultural value of older people’s theatre-making, as discussed in 2.6ii. From their findings, they concluded that, in general, there is a lack of research into the
aesthetic value and quality of older people’s drama. Their initial searches for research that specifically explored the cultural value of theatre-making for older people did not produce anything. From this they concluded that the term ‘cultural value’ had not been explicitly used in drama research studies with older people, and that older people had not been asked to reflect on their drama experiences from this perspective. Consequently, Rickett and Bernard argue for a more nuanced and holistic approach to research on older people’s drama participation, saying that:

Rather than separating intrinsic and instrumental value, research is needed to explore how the intrinsic and affective elements of people’s drama experiences may also have instrumental effects on their lives. (Rickett and Bernard, 2016, p. 45)

This argument supports the contention of applied theatre academic, James Thompson, that drama research should seek to understand the affective as well as the effective meanings of the drama experience for individuals. He explains affect as:

The bodily sensation that is sustained and provoked particularly by aesthetic experiences. It is the force that emerges from attention to pleasure, astonishment, joy, and beauty. (Thompson, 2009, p. 135)

Equally, applied theatre academic, Gareth White, contends that those who advocate for participatory art but then only view it in terms of definable and measurable outcomes do not recognise the value of the art in its own right:

What an aesthetics of participation must show is how the practices of participation and the experiences of participation should be valued as art works, accepting that some of these practices and experiences will involve working on people’s emotional states and interpersonal dynamics. (White, 2015, p. 46)

In order to address some of these issues, McCormick (2017), in her book, Creative Ageing, has attempted to capture a rich variety of examples of theatre-making with older people in different parts of the world, looking at benefits beyond measurable, health or economic outcomes. The projects described, privilege the relationships between the artist and individual over age and/or health diagnosis. In seeking to recognise the affective, as well as effective, impacts of participatory drama, McCormick contends that artists should be trusted to understand and recognise moments of affective value, even if they are not always easy to document. She writes that drama with older adults is ‘heavily invested in affect over effect, and embodied responses occur when moments of connection are privileged over other outcomes’ (McCormick, 2017, p. 54). Alongside this, Parkinson, in the same book, argues that creative ageing research and evaluation should take into account the ambiguities and uncertainties that lie within making art, that are often contradictory to the language of medicine and
health care. Parkinson posits the need for the arts to find their own language in order to understand cultural value and ‘enable deeper understanding of the subjective realities and diverse lived experiences of others’ (Parkinson, 2017, p. 162).

In the context, therefore, of wishing to understand the creative and cultural value of older people’s participation in drama, this study sets out to examine and describe the diverse and nuanced affective, as well as effective, impacts of the experiences of the older people involved in the drama workshops. I discuss the methodologies and methods used to do this in the next two chapters.

### 2.8 Summary

Early theories of ageing focused on deficit models that framed older people as withdrawing from society on retirement and consequently often being viewed as becoming dependent on others and a social burden. More recent theories have sort to re-frame older adults as individuals who, with support and opportunity, have the possibility to continue to grow, develop and stay engaged in society, despite any potential ill health or frailty. Policies and strategies for ageing well or ageing better seek to encourage older people’s social participation whilst recognising that there can be barriers, including, socio-economic, gender, ethnicity and class, as well as internal and societal ageism. The arts are viewed as a way of supporting older people to stay involved and engaged, promoting social connectedness and offering meaningful opportunities to grow. Arts experiences can generate feelings of wellbeing and happiness, as well as developing greater self-confidence and self-esteem. Drama, in particular, is a collaborative art form that brings people together in a collective creative endeavour, whilst also encouraging individual self-expression. The arts can also support NHS strategies such as engagement in The Five Ways to Wellbeing. In some circumstances the arts can also help to maintain or even improve health issues such as balance and breathing and reduce stress and anxiety. The arts enable older people to stay creative as they age and sometimes discover lost, forgotten or new selves. In this way they may help to combat ageism and negative images of ageing and engender personal agency and empowerment.

However, there are challenges in measuring the impacts of arts activities and there can be tension between the differing needs and interests of health professionals and artists to capture both the instrumental and intrinsic, effective and affective impacts of an arts experience. The literature reviewed indicates that older people are rarely asked to describe the cultural or creative value to them of an arts experience. This means that
there is little understanding of how or why a particular arts activity may affect a person’s experiences of creative ageing.

With regard to drama specifically, there are a number of specific gaps in research and knowledge about older people’s experiences of participation in drama and theatre-making. Some of the existing literature describes older people putting on scripted plays or making devised work which often has social or political aims. However, there is little information on the methodologies of any drama workshops that older people have attended, or any detail regarding the processes involved in developing older people’s drama and theatre-making skills. There is little research on older people’s experiences of being involved in a physical and improvisational approach to acting and theatre-making. Bernard and Rickett’s 2017 review of older people’s theatre-making refers to participants having been involved in ‘drama workshops’ without any detail regarding content or skills taught. Equally, Bernard and Rickett, alongside others, including Dowlen (2020) at the Centre for Cultural Value, have identified that older people are rarely asked about the cultural and creative value of their drama experiences.

This research study aims to gain a more holistic understanding of older people’s experiences and perceptions of the impacts of physical theatre practices on their creativity, health and wellbeing. The study specifically examines older people’s experiences of theatre-making, based on the physical theatre actor training methodologies of Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux. It addresses some of the gaps in knowledge about older people’s drama and theatre-making experiences in relation to their perceived cultural and creative value. It does not seek to measure impact but rather understand impact as the value that older people place on physical theatre in their lives. In these ways it makes an original contribution to knowledge concerning the participants’ perceived impacts of these drama and theatre-making practices on their creativity, health and wellbeing within the context of ageing.

In the following chapter I discuss the theoretical and methodological frameworks underpin this research study. I also examine and discuss Pagneux and Gaulier’s physical theatre methodologies and practice, which I use in the study’s workshop sessions with older people.
Chapter 3 Theoretical Frameworks and Methodologies

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discuss theories of ageing and how older people’s involvement in participatory arts, and drama in particular, might contribute to their creativity, health, wellbeing within an ageing context. I identify specific gaps in the current research on ageing, participatory arts, drama and theatre-making. These are:

- Older people are rarely asked to describe or reflect on their arts experience from a creative or cultural perspective
- There has been little research that examines the arts experience itself and therefore, why or how, any specific arts intervention, in this case physical theatre, might positively affect individuals’ experiences of creativity, health and wellbeing.

In order to answer these questions, I ran a series of drama workshops with four groups of volunteer older people between Autumn 2018 and Autumn 2019. The intentions of the workshops were to introduce participants to a variety of physical theatre practices based on the actor training work of Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux. The work had a specific focus on developing participants’ experiences of Le Jeu (play), disponibilité (openness) and complicité (rapport), which I discuss in more detail in section 4 of this chapter. The workshops enabled me to collect data from participants in order to address the gaps in research outlined above and fulfil the aims of this PhD study, namely:

- To explore the perceptions of older people regarding their experiences of physical theatre and the impact these experiences have on their creativity, health and wellbeing in the context of ageing
- To explore whether and how emerging insights can inform better understanding of how creative practices such as physical theatre can contribute to an improvement in older people’s health and wellbeing.

The first part of this chapter explains the theoretical frameworks and the hermeneutic and heuristic methodologies that I employed in the research study to effectively collect, analyse and interpret participants’ data. The second part of the chapter discusses the specific theatre-making practices and methodologies of Gaulier and Pagneux and explains how I adapted these to use with the fieldwork groups. The fieldwork practice was embedded in my own knowledge and experience of physical theatre actor training,
combined with 40 years of professional work as a teacher, theatre director and performer.

3.2 Theoretical frameworks

One of the objectives of this research study was to capture older people’s lived experiences of the physical and creative processes of making theatre from their own perspectives. As I was carrying out the research with 42 older people from different backgrounds and with a multitude of experiences, I required a research approach would acknowledge each individual’s perception of truth and reality. Consequently, I decided to work within an interpretive paradigm because it takes the view that there are multiple perceptions of reality, that accord with individual beliefs and perspectives, including those of the researcher. These varying perceptions of experience need to be interpreted in order to find similarities and differences and discover underlying meanings.

An interpretive theoretical stance requires a methodology that enables the exploration, interpretation and understanding of participants’ varying perceptions of their theatre-making experiences. There are many interpretative methodologies, including, phenomenology, heuristics, case study research and ethnography. When selecting my approach, I was aware that the methodology chosen would need to support an investigation of physical theatre and at the same time, facilitate the collection, analysis and interpretation of the experiences of the individual participants engaging in its practice. After investigating a range of qualitative methodologies, I identified aspects of hermeneutic phenomenology and heuristics as being the most appropriate to guide the study. I therefore developed a framework that combined these two methodologies. In the next section, I discuss how this framework was developed.

3.3 Developing a methodological framework

3.3i Phenomenology and embodied theatre

My first need was to find a framework that would serve to explore participants’ experiences and perceptions of physical theatre-making as an embodied, creative activity. I chose phenomenology because, although it has many different strands, it is particularly concerned with the individual’s physical, lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Phenomenology dismisses the Cartesian Dualism of Descartes, that makes a clear distinction between the mind and the body and considers the mind to be of greater importance (Sorell, 2000). Instead, phenomenology favours the view that the person is in the world as a physical being and through the
experience of their body, being and moving, they can describe, interpret and understand their actions and the nature of their relationship with the world and the objects around them (Husserl, 1969; Merleau-Ponty, 1976).

Existentialist biographer, Sarah Bakewell, explains that phenomenologists believe that our experience of the world comes first and foremost, ‘through our sensitive, moving, perceptive bodies’ (Bakewell, 2016, p. 231). She elaborates further, ‘perception is bound up with our own movements around the world: we touch and grasp and interact with things in order to understand them’ (ibid. p. 232). In this way, phenomenologists consider that the individual makes meaning through embodied experiences that connect them to their environment. This process can be viewed as a continuous, dynamic, inter-relationship between the self and the world around it (Allen-Collinson, 2009). In other words, as this inter-relationship develops, so the individual begins to make sense of the world and understand their place within it. Consequently, phenomenology considers that the body and mind are co-dependent and are each of equal value.

Physical theatre practice resonates with phenomenology in that it is often described as an embodied activity, involving the use of the actor’s body and as well as their mind to express and convey meaning. Johnston (2007, pp. 16 and 18), argues that acting is ‘not a detached theorisation about the world’, it is ‘the physical embodied presentation of ideas’. Kemp (2012) describes theatre as being made up of three key elements: story, space and time. He contends that these elements, ‘meet in, are defined by, and expressed through the actor’s body’. Kemp (ibid. p. xvi) also posits that the mind itself is ‘inherently embodied’ because ‘physical experience shapes conceptual thought, and thought operates through many of the same neuronal pathways as physical action’. He therefore argues that acting and theatre-making are embodied activities where ‘the actor’s bodymind experiences, formulates and communicates meaning’. Similarly, Zarrilli (2004, p. 661) employs the terms ‘body-in-mind and mind-in-body’ to describe the symbiotic relationship between mind and body that he considers to be manifested in all embodied practices, including theatre-making.

Physical and embodied theatre-making is also a holistic practice that integrates, rather than separates, mind and body. It therefore lends itself well to being examined through a phenomenological lens that shares a similar understanding of making meaning in the world through physical perception and lived experience. Phenomenology, because it acknowledges the significance of the body-mind connection, is also a useful framework to support the collection, analysis and interpretation of participants’ experiences of
doing drama. Indeed, Zarrilli (2007, p. 641), contends that phenomenology is one of the most appropriate methodologies to use when discussing experiences of physical theatre-making, precisely because this type of theatre ‘foregrounds the ‘lived’ embodied experience of the practitioner as central to its project’, rather than the performance itself. In this way, phenomenology suits the nature of the drama workshops which are about participants’ experiences of creative exploration and self-expression through physical theatre, rather than the presentation of a play or production.

3.3ii Descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutics

There are different strands of phenomenology, so in this section I discuss how I selected hermeneutic phenomenology to further inform the methodological approach to interpreting participants’ drama experiences. Phenomenology focuses on the individual’s experience as understood from their own personal perspective and informed by influences from the world in which they live (Tuohy et al. 2013). It is therefore a useful framework for not only examining practice but also for giving voice to and interpreting the experiences of participants engaged in physical theatre activities. A phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis for this research study can facilitate a rich description and holistic examination of what the drama experiences meant to participants on many different levels. However, Allen-Collinson (2009, pp. 280-1) describes phenomenology as ‘complex, mutable, multi-stranded and contested’, with elements that overlap and are intertwined. Therefore, for this research, I make a broad distinction between the two main strands, descriptive phenomenology, which was not appropriate for the research, and hermeneutic phenomenology, which I did use.

Descriptive phenomenology, as developed by Husserl (1969), examines phenomena in various forms until the common aspect, or ‘essence’ is exposed. Descriptive phenomenologists propose that every phenomenon has an ‘essence’, or, a ‘pure state’, i.e., a characteristic that is recognised by all perceptions or experiences of that phenomenon. Describing the essence is achieved by ‘bracketing’ everything except the participants’ accounts of their lived experience of the phenomenon itself. This is done by disregarding the context and setting aside, as much as possible, any bias or prejudice on the part of the researcher (Finlay, 2008). Consequently, the researcher’s intent is to remain detached from the phenomenon being investigated and the aim of the data analysis process is to transform subjective data into a single account of the participant’s perceived reality (Douglas and Moustakas, 1985). Allen-Collinson describes the ultimate purpose of descriptive phenomenology as:
To ‘go back to the things themselves’ and to describe experience by suspending as far as possible prior knowledge, assumptions, attitudes and interpretations of the phenomenon in order to arrive at its essential core characteristics and meanings. (Allen-Collinson, 2009, p. 285)

My research does not intend to examine the phenomenon of physical theatre in ‘its essence’ or search for an ‘essential core’. The theatre practices used with participants in the drama workshops are concerned with active communication and interaction between people. That is, between the participants themselves, in their roles as actors and audience, and also between the participants and myself (I discuss my position within the study in detail in the section ‘Heuristic Inquiry’, 3.3iii). The aim of this research was to collect and interpret the perceptions and experiences of participants, so as to better understand what impact these artistic experiences might have on their everyday lives and their creative engagement with the ageing process. For these reasons, hermeneutic phenomenology was the most appropriate framework for collecting and analysing data.

Hermeneutic phenomenology stems from the work of Heidegger who expounded the concept of ‘being-in-the-world’. Heidegger (1962, pp. 191-192) argued that ‘whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception’. It is not possible, therefore, to be a disinterested observer and divorce the object of inquiry from its surroundings and its history. For this study, I knew that in my roles as artist, teacher and researcher, I would bring my knowledge of theatre-making, as well as my, a priori, socio, cultural and life experiences, to my subjective interpretations of this study. Equally, the workshop participants would bring their own life knowledge and expectations, and these would affect how they described their drama experiences. I therefore needed to make transparent, but not ignore, my potential assumptions and biases, and also acknowledge the contexts in which participants were living. As the researcher, I would be making the final interpretations of participants’ perceptions of the impacts of the workshops; however, these interpretations would most likely result from a ‘fusion’ of both my and the participants’ understandings of our experiences, as I explain further in the next section.

**Fusion of Horizons**

One of Heidegger's students, Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004, p.305), developed a concept that he called a ‘fusion of horizons’. Gadamer proposed that our prejudices, rather than being a hinderance to understanding, could become a focus of questioning. He contended that the process of understanding is that of a dialogue between our self-
understanding, through self-questioning and our understanding of the object being examined. Gadamer posited the concept of ‘horizons’. These ‘horizons’ are the limits of our current perception, or understanding, of the world in which we live. Gadamer (2004, p. 238) argued that ‘horizons’ are not fixed, ‘a horizon is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further’. He further explained that ‘to acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand - not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion’ (ibid. p. 304). In this way, ‘horizons’ provide perspective and context concerning the phenomena being investigated. Through a dialogical, questioning process, Gadamer considered that we can expand our ‘horizons’ and are able to perceive and understand more than had been possible at the outset of the inquiry.

In terms of applying Gadamer’s concepts to my research study, the phenomena being investigated are the perceptions of a group of older peoples’ experiences of their participation in physical theatre. The perceptions of the participants are what Gadamer calls ‘the text’. When trying to understand the ‘text’, Gadamer posits that:

We do not try to transpose ourselves into the author's mind but, if one wants to use this terminology, we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views. But this simply means that we try to understand how what he is saying could be right. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 292)

In relation to this research and my interpretation of participants’ experiences, this means that I did not try and become the participants but that I set out to fully acknowledge their perspectives and the reality of what was true and ‘right’ to them. Thus, Gadamer describes the dialogical process that takes place between one’s own perceptions and those of the participants, as a ‘fusion of horizons’. As I critically questioned and reflected upon our varied experiences and perspectives present during the research period, so my ‘horizons’ of understanding had the potential to expand. Vessey (2009, p. 540) explains this process as, ‘our horizons are broadened; we have a new perspective on our old views, and maybe new views as well’. Through a ‘fusion of horizons’, my original understanding and experiences of physical theatre practice and my cultural resonances ie. my own data, interacted with that of the participants and led me to new and deeper understandings.

**A fusion of disciplines**

Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ also offered a useful framework for examining the relationship between my prior experience and knowledge of physical theatre and my new research on health, wellbeing and ageing. Gadamer’s work has previously informed academic writing in both these areas of inquiry. Examples of this can be seen
in the research of applied theatre academic, Helen Nicholson, and nursing academic, Juliana Thompson. In Thompson’s study of the role and status of nursing home nurses, she contends that Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ was a useful concept to underpin her view that her own nursing home experiences ‘might facilitate understanding of the complexities and paradoxes of work situations and experiences’ for other nursing home staff (Thompson, 2015, p. 54). In relation to drama practice, Nicholson (2009, p. 324) posits that Gadamer’s ‘suggestion that new ideas and knowledges are generated through discussion and interaction with others’ is a key principle, informing drama practice and research. Both academics therefore consider that Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ enables a rich and deep engagement with the subject matter that can lead to new perspectives and understandings within their individual fields of expertise. At the same time, Nicholson also proposes that:

Academically, the idea that new interpretations arise when different perspectives meet and contrasting ideas are juxtaposed suggests that inter-disciplinary conversations can encourage scholars to extend their horizons of understanding beyond the histories and traditions with which they are familiar. (Nicholson, 2009, p. 324)

Following Nicholson’s proposition, I would contend that in this research study, a ‘fusion of horizons’, might also occur when bringing together the two fields of inquiry in which I was working, i.e., theatre practice with which I was already familiar, and ageing and health research which was new to me. The interaction, or ‘conversations’, between these two areas of study might throw new light on both fields separately, and more significantly, together. In this way, it might be possible to better understand how the embodied and exploratory nature of physical theatre might influence an older person’s perceptions of their creativity, health and wellbeing and vice versa.

3.3iii Heuristic Inquiry

A hermeneutic phenomenological framework, combined with Gadamer’s concept of ‘fusion of horizons’ was a useful vehicle to fuse together participants’ perceptions of physical theatre practice with those of my own as an artist and researcher, in order to reach new understandings. To support and enrich this approach further I also drew on elements of heuristic inquiry, as developed by Clark Moustakas. This is a framework of inquiry that places the researcher at the heart of the process so that they engage in deeper self-reflection and analysis. Moustakas (1990, p. 9) explains that the word heuristic means to discover or find. He first began to explore and develop a system of heuristic research through the publication of his book Loneliness in 1961, and he describes heuristics as a way of knowing or being informed. It begins with an internal search on the part of the researcher in order to discover the ‘nature and meaning’ of an
experience for themself and then, through a further process and methods of investigation and analysis, the researcher explores the nature of other people’s experiences (ibid. p. 43). In this way, heuristic inquiry supports and complements the hermeneutic framework outlined above. Heuristics not only acknowledges the researcher’s prior experiences but seeks to fully integrate the researcher into the research process. It thereby recognises and, indeed, emphasises the interconnectedness and relationship between the researcher and the participants (Douglas and Moustakas, 1985).

The aims of this study are to explore older people’s responses to their experiences of attending a series of drama workshops led by me. At the same time, I recognise that I am also an older person and older artist, so I share, to some extent, certain similarities with the workshop participants. Consequently, I was conscious that the work might give me new insights into my own creative ageing experiences. Heuristic inquiry supports processes of self-reflection because rather than viewing the researcher’s knowledge and personal context as a potential problem that could get in the way of any rigorous analysis, it starts and ends with the researcher’s own experience. In this case, my experience was that of working as an artist and teacher for over 40 years, coupled with that of also being an older person who, like my participants, was also engaging with what the ageing process means to our bodies, minds and relationships with the world around us. On a personal level, as I age, I wish to keep my body alive and mobile, to stay connected to others and continue the development of my artistic practice and my understanding of theatre as an art form. This research therefore gave me a unique opportunity to explore how physical theatre might inform my own experiences of the ageing process, as well as the experiences of the participants.

Thus, on one level, I was also a participant, myself, in the research. My own experiences were not hidden from view but formed an integral part of the journey. Within the drama workshops, I took part in many of the activities, games and exercises alongside and with the participants. However, at the same time, I had different perspectives on the workshops from participants. I have professional training in physical theatre and a history of professional directing and performance that informs my understandings of theatre-making. As the person who planned and ran the workshops, I had the power to decide what activities we undertook and how the sessions were conducted. I also had an ethical responsibility towards each individual, to ensure that they were safe throughout the workshops. I was therefore both an insider and an outsider within the research process. Critics of heuristic research argue that if the researcher is too much on the inside, then it is not possible to examine the
work objectively. Burgess (1984, p. 23) wrote that ‘being a stranger, an outsider in the social setting, gives the researcher scope to stand back and abstract material from the research experience’. However, Hockey’s view (1993) is that an insider, researching peers, can establish greater rapport and communication than an outsider, leading to possibly more honest responses from participants. Hellawell (2006) considers that there are in fact advantages and disadvantages in both insider and outsider positions. He posits that most researchers actually move along what he calls an ‘insider-outsider continuum’ during the research process. Hellawell proposes that the researcher should use reflexivity to enable them to acknowledge and reflect critically upon where they stand at any moment on their research journey. In relation to this study, I was sometimes more involved with the work as an older artist and teacher, and at other times more as researcher. Reflexivity therefore enabled me to acknowledge both insider and outsider perspectives. I discuss the practicalities of this further in Chapter 4.9. Overall, the heuristic processes of personal engagement with the subject matter and repeated cycles of reflection and interrogation of the data enabled me to view the entirety of the research inquiry from multiple perspectives. Moustakas (1990, p. 9) says that in heuristic research, ‘the self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge’. Consequently, at the same time as knowledge about the phenomenon is extended, so also is the self-knowledge of the researcher deepened.

In conclusion, in developing a theoretical framework for this research, I considered that Gadamer’s hermeneutic phenomenology and Moustakas’ heuristic inquiry approaches would be useful lenses through which to explore and analyse the embodied nature of physical theatre and its application to the lived experiences of the participants in the drama workshops. They enabled and facilitated multiple perspectives to be acknowledged and examined and at the same time, rather than excluding myself from the process, I could place myself, as an older artist, within the inquiry. I also considered that because hermeneutics and the concept of ‘fusion of horizons’ can be applied to research in the fields of both theatre practice and ageing, that they would support me in exploring the intersections between these two areas of study. I would thereby gain a deeper and richer understanding of both.

As I have outlined above, hermeneutic phenomenology was a useful framework for examining the physical and embodied theatre practice undertaken with participants for this research. The specific nature of the fieldwork practice was based on my knowledge and experience of teaching and directing drama and theatre in the UK and
abroad. Much of my work is based on the physical theatre practices of Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier, with whom I trained in Paris. In the next section of this chapter, I therefore describe and examine their practices in more detail. I then discuss how I developed appropriate methodologies to introduce physical theatre to the participants taking part in the workshops for this research.

3.4 Physical theatre methodologies

Physical theatre is an embodied activity that engages equally the body and the mind (Zarrilli, 2004; Kemp, 2012; Murray, 2013). My physical theatre practice is based primarily on my training with Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier, as outlined in Chapter 1.3, alongside experiences from working with other physical theatre colleagues, many of whom have also trained with Pagneux and Gaulier. Pagneux and Gaulier, as I explained in Chapter 1.2, do not themselves describe their work as 'physical theatre', however their practices are considered to be 'associated with the physical training of actors' (Murry and Keefe, 2016, p. 13). Both teachers studied themselves with theatre pedagogue, Jacques Lecoq, before becoming senior teachers at Lecoq's school in Paris. I therefore start this section with a short introduction to Lecoq's work, in order to better understand some of the origins of Pagneux and Gaulier's embodied practices.

3.4i Jacques Lecoq

Jacques Lecoq was part of a loose grouping of 20th century European theatre pedagogues who believed that the use of the actor’s body, as much as the spoken word, was vital to convey meaning in theatre (Murray, 2003). Lecoq set up a theatre school in Paris in 1956. His pedagogy was primarily concerned with giving students the tools and skills with which to make theatre. His focus was therefore less on product than on developing students’ curiosity in the world around them, through the physical exploration of rhythms within nature and the pushing and pulling of objects in space. Lecoq encouraged students to discover how these elemental impulses can impact on how an actor moves, responds and creates with her or his body. Lecoq (1997, p. 20) explains that ‘every living structure emerges from movement that has its own rhythm. This organic process can be found at work in every improvisation’. In this way, Lecoq’s theatre training methodology reflects, to some extent, themes of phenomenologists such as Husserl (1969) and Merleau-Ponty (1976), who contended that the individual discovers and comes to understand the world through their physical interaction with everything around them.
At the heart of Lecoq’s teaching are three key tenets, *Le Jeu* (play or playfulness), *disponibilité* (openness or readiness) and *complicité* (the rapport between actors, or actors and the audience). Lecoq considered these three interconnected principles or states to be ‘critical in the realisation of a vibrant and immediate’ theatre (Murray and Keefe, 2016, p. 181). *Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité* are also central to the practices of Pagneux and Gaulier. Consequently, they underpin my own work and the physical theatre practices that I introduced to participants in my research field study groups. I therefore now examine these three principles in more detail.

**Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité**

Murray and Evans (2020, p. 516) describe *Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité* as ‘happy, libidinous, sensual and inseparable bed-fellows’. Each principle has its own meaning and place in theatre-making and at the same time they are interconnected and intertwined, complementing and supporting one another. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding, I examine each in turn. To do this I share some extracts from a playful dialogue performed by Murray (SM) and Evans (ME) at a panel event on ‘The Influence of Lecoq on UK Theatre’, hosted by the National Theatre, London, in 2018.

**Play (Le Jeu)**

ME:   Play – The pleasure of insouciance.
SM:   Play – The frisson of uncertain outcomes.
ME:   Play – The fearful delight in not knowing where you are heading.
SM:   Play – The risk of throwing away the route map.
(Murray and Evans, 2020, p. 517)

Play or *Le Jeu* is therefore about pleasure, lightness and also the joy of engaging in unplanned opportunities. It is about improvisation, taking risks, stepping into the unknown without being sure of the results. Lecoq (2000, p. 98) says ‘my method aims to promote the emergence of a theatre where the actor is playful’. Lecoq considers that there can be no creativity without play (Murray and Keefe, 2016).

**Disponibilité**

SM: The *disponible* actor is open and receptive to the human and material environment with which they engage on stage.

ME: The *disponible* actor never says ‘no’ to challenges.
SM: The *disponible* actor is always in the moment and aware of the theatrical possibilities of the moment.

ME: *Disponibilité* – underpins all collaboration and group dynamics

SM: *Disponibilité* – deeply embodied, cognitive, psychological and emotional.

(Murray and Evans, 2020, p. 517)

The actor who is *disponible* can therefore be described as one whose body and mind are ready and available to respond to whatever comes to them. *Disponibilité* refers both to a body that is flexible and without tension, as well as a state of being or mind in which the individual is open and accepting of whatever comes to them (Murray, 2003). The actor is therefore playing in the moment, without judgement of themselves or those they are working with.

**Complicité**

ME: *Complicité* – generates a shared understanding between performers.

SM: *Complicité* – the condition we desire to create between performers and their audience.

ME: *Complicité* – when present we all understand the rules of the game, the spirit of play, *Le Jeu*.

(Murray and Evans, 2020, p. 517)

*Complicité* is the rapport between actors and also between actors and their audience. It is generated through playing and creating together, from the deep listening and response of one actor to another. Complicité is the basis of ensemble work, where a group of actors work closely together as a team, in a spirit of playful cooperation. Yen and Battersby (2015, p. 251) describe *complicité* as, ‘playing as an ensemble, staying connected with the environment through an awareness of yourself. The environment may be other actors, the space or the audience’. *Complicité* is therefore also present between actors and audience when the performers share their work fully, communicating their collective imagining with the audience, rather than keeping it privately for themselves.

As can be seen, *Le Jeu, disponibilité* and *complicité* are separate elements in physical theatre practice and are also interconnected and interdependent. It would be unusual for one to be present without the other. To play together the actors need to be open and ready, through playing together they can build a strong rapport with one another.
In the next sections I introduce Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier and examine how *Le Jeu*, *disponibilité* and *complicité* are embedded in their practices, and consequently in the work that I did with participants. I also introduce and discuss the work of Moshe Feldenkrais, as his work on the body forms an integral part of Pagneux’s teaching.

### 3.4ii Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier

Pagneux and Gaulier were two of the senior teachers working at Lecoq’s school at the time that the founders of Complicité (the theatre company cited in Chapter 1) attended. Pagneux and Gaulier left Lecoq’s school in 1980 to set up their own school, also in Paris. Gaulier then moved to London for a number of years before returning to teach in Paris. Pagneux retired from full time teaching in 1991 and focused on running master classes and pedagogical courses around the world. In 2007 she began running annual workshops in Barcelona with an invited group of students, including myself. These workshops continued until 2013 when Pagneux retired from teaching completely. In Autumn 2019, at the age of 92, Pagneux ran a final weekend workshop in Grenoble with a small group of ex-students, to explore the legacy of her work.

### Introducing Monika Pagneux

Monika Pagneux was born in Germany. She trained first as a circus performer, then as a dancer with choreographer Mary Wigman and then joined the Ecole Jacques Lecoq in 1961, where she subsequently taught from 1963-1980. During this time, Pagneux also worked with movement specialist Moshe Feldenkrais and British theatre director Peter Brook, with whom she collaborated on several productions. Ex-Pagneux student and theatre academic, Carmina Salvatierra (2006, p. 331), writes that Pagneux said, ‘she learnt about a sense of space from Wigman; movement from Lecoq; acting from Brook and how to better organise the body from Feldenkrais,’ [my translation from Spanish]. These four seminal teachers/directors have therefore strongly influenced Pagneux’s pedagogy, although she has equally been described as ‘a disciple to no one. Her approach is eclectic’ (Wright, 1994, p. 11).

Pagneux uses a range of approaches to develop the ‘physically articulate and responsive performer’ (Murray and Keefe, 2016, p. 182). She is particularly known for introducing the ideas of Moshe Feldenkrais and the Feldenkrais Method to theatre practitioners across the world (Callery, 2001). Pagneux integrates Feldenkrais’ work into her teaching, in order to awaken the actor’s awareness of their body and develop their physical *disponibilité* in preparation for play. Several of the physical exercises that
I used with participants in the drama workshops were based on those of Feldenkrais, so I now explain his history and practice in a little more detail.

**Moshe Feldenkrais**

Feldenkrais (1904-1984) was a scientist and judo expert who injured himself in a soccer accident. Having refused an operation that had a 50/50 chance of fixing his injury, Feldenkrais decided to investigate how his knee worked in order to try and use it ‘correctly’. He realised that he was moving his body without understanding what he was doing and that this was probably the case for many people. ‘I then saw that most people don’t know what they are doing; they just don’t know that they don’t know’ (Feldenkrais and Morris, 1966, p. 115). Feldenkrais began to think about the physical habits that people form over their lifetime and concluded that people needed to unlearn an acquired habit in order to then change and use their body more effectively, that is, with greater economy and less effort. Starting from first observing his own body’s habits and obstacles, Feldenkrais developed a method of working with others that turned exercise into self-observation, ‘enabling people to learn different ways of doing things’ (Callery, 2001, p. 39). The emphasis of Feldenkrais’ method is on individuals learning experientially about their own body. Through doing this they be able to find ‘new, more efficient, more confident, more comfortable and healthier ways of movement through tapping into the vast potential of the central nervous system’ (Knaster, 1996, p. 232).

Although Feldenkrais worked mostly with people in a medical field, he was also interested in theatre practice, believing that his method could support actors to expand their range of possible movements. Equally, he considered that his method could develop the performer’s spatial awareness and thereby enable them to listen and respond with greater sensitivity to other actors.

**Pagneux’s methodology**

Pagneux worked with Feldenkrais on several occasions and consequently sought to integrate his method into her own actor training methodology to develop, in particular, the performer’s physical disponibilité in preparation to play. Pagneux’s work seeks to develop greater body awareness, improve flexibility and mobility and prompt the unlearning of habits that might hinder openness, imagination and play. Her aim is for all elements and aspects of the actor’s theatre-making to be ‘lifeful’, that is, vital and engaged. Murray and Keefe (2016, p.183) describe this as a state of ‘alive lightness of presence’ which is gained as a result of heightening one’s attention through a process of ‘deep listening, looking, feeling, sensing, knowing…letting go and being fully
engaged’. Developing ‘lifefulness’ starts with ‘waking up’ the body, which actor, Kathryn Hunter (2012, 30:12), describes as ‘waking up a sensitivity really, to yourself and to others. It is through the body comes the spirit, but you can’t have an alive spirit in a dead body’.

The following photographs show Pagneux working with professional performers, including myself, in 2012. The images convey some of the key aspects of Pagneux’s work, waking up the body through the spine and developing greater flexibility, exploring movement and gesture through space and also complicité and playfulness within the group. These are all aspects of her practice that I introduced to participants in the workshop sessions.

![Figure 3. Pagneux uses Feldenkrais exercises to wake up the spine](image)

Pagneux integrates Feldenkrais’ ideas into her teaching through the use of specific physical exercises that ask individuals to engage in a focused observation of their own body. They thereby deepen their awareness and understanding of how each muscle connects and interacts with another. Salvatierra explains:

> Starting with very precise, technical movement exercises, Pagneux enables each person to pay attention to their own body, to notice it, observe it and feel how it moves in order that they can reach their own understandings. Always without forcing or pain…the first exercises are about waking up the spine, feeling the body’s axes. The most frequent questions are: What are the differences between before and after doing the movement? What has changed?’ (Salvatierra, 2006, p. 336) [my translation from Spanish]
By asking these questions of their body, the individual gradually refines their awareness of how their body functions. They have the possibility of being able to let go of habits that might impede or block the body’s potential movement and explore alternative pathways to movement that is lighter, more dynamic and open. Change can then take place. Murray and Keefe (2016, p.183) describe how, ‘a slight realigning or opening of the vertebrae in the lower back may have consequences for posture, breathing, flexibility, walking, other forms of mobility, and – very significantly – shifts in self-image’. These are first steps in preparing an actor’s disponibilité or readiness to perform and also potentially changing their awareness of themselves in relation to the world around them. At all times, Pagneux stresses that the exercises she uses should be fluid and alive and never become mechanical. Theatre and movement director, Judith Pippen (1999, quoted in Sandercoe, 2001, p. 69), writes about a class she attended with Pagneux in Australia, saying that Pagneux would remind students that, ‘each movement should have a fresh quality. Keep the spine ‘lifeful’.

Figure 4. Pagneux shows how alignment of the spine supports standing taller and improved posture

Yen (2000, quoted in Sandercoe, 2001, pp. 61-62) explains that Pagneux’s use of Feldenkrais in her practice ‘creates more options for oneself beyond the habitual, creating more flexibility in one’s thinking and response to the world’. In relation specifically to performance, actor, Yoshi Oida (1992, p. 15), explains that as an actor you are then able to ‘add details and habits to your body as part of the character you are portraying. But these are the character’s personal habits, not the actor’s’. In other words, Pagneux’s teaching enables students to explore, discover and employ a wider
range of possibilities for gesture, movement and voice, which can be applied both to everyday life and also to performance work.

![Figure 5. Gesture and movement through space](image)

Yen also posits that whilst challenging one’s habitual movement may initially feel uncomfortable and risky, it can also be a liberating experience. Yen (2000, quoted in Sandercoe, 2001, pp. 61-62) argues that when a person feels more comfortable in their body, in a supportive environment, they then have the ‘possibility of taking risks and making new discoveries’. Therefore, although Pagneux’s methodology focuses primarily on the body, it is one that also has resonances in the mind. Pagneux’s methodology, like that of the phenomenologists, considers the body and mind as being very much interconnected, as an integrated whole. Edinborough (2016) describes Pagneux’s practice as one of ‘waking up’ rather than ‘warming up’, as would be more commonly thought of as being part of the actors’ physical preparation. He says:

> Rather than thinking about increasing blood flow, flexibility and stamina, Pagneux’s term places emphasis on attention and awareness. Instead of oiling the cogs of a machine, Pagneux entreats us to open our eyes, take a breath and see what’s going on. (Edinborough, 2016)

Pagneux (2012, 17:30), herself, describes the process of her work as one that is ‘the wake up of each part of the body in relation with the brain’, thereby engendering a state that she calls ‘lifeful’. Yen and Battersby (2015, p. 251) explain Pagneux’s use of the word ‘lifeful’, as meaning a state of being that comes about through awakening ‘sensitivity, imagination, play, through the body and beyond the body’. In this ‘lifeful’
state, the whole of the performer is ready and fully engaged in an attentive, vital, playful and creative process.

Pagneux is also very clear that the purpose of the physical work is to prepare the actor to play. She says, ‘I take an exercise and I take it into play. It is play that takes one to life and within that I find the rules for theatre, for play’ (Pagneux, quoted in Salvatierra, 2006, p. 335) [my translation from French]. This is therefore a critical difference between attending a Feldenkrais class that might concern itself with doing specific exercises in order to improve an issue with mobility, or deal with an injury, and attending a drama workshop that integrates Feldenkrais practice into the actor training process. As, theatre academic and director, Ellie Nixon (2019, p. 104), explains, ‘Pagneux takes the Feldenkrais work a step further’, leading the performer into action, play and creation with others. Nixon (ibid.) continues, ‘when her students playfully explore lessons such as ‘freeing the upper back’, ‘moving from your centre’, ‘twisting and turning’ or ‘grounding’, these activities extend seamlessly into improvisational work’. Similarly, Yen and Battersby (2015, p. 251) describe how Pagneux ‘turns the exploration of movement into a game, into play, into a creative process’. Pagneux’s practice is therefore ultimately about preparation for play, freeing the actor’s body and imagination to create collaboratively with others. Thus, Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité are embedded within Pagneux’s ‘lifeful’ methodology and were central to the work that I did with the participants for this research study.

Figure 6. Playful complicité
Introducing Philippe Gaulier

In this section I outline the work of Philippe Gaulier, the other physical theatre teacher I trained with and whose practice informed much of the work I did with the fieldwork groups. Gaulier was born in occupied Paris in 1943. Murray (2010, p. 220) says that ‘for anyone who has encountered Gaulier as teacher, colleague or friend, it is clear that the anarchic spirit and disposition of 1968 continue to embody and inform his practice’. Gaulier trained at the Ecole Jacques Lecoq before taking up a teaching post there and then leaving in 1980 to run his own school, as described above.

Gaulier’s methodology

Gaulier is best known and most written about as a teacher of clown. Lecoq (2002, p. 156) describes the clown as ‘the person who flops, who messes up his turn…through his failure he reveals his profoundly human nature, which moves us and makes us laugh’. Students come from around the world to take just this one workshop with Gaulier, which is the final course in the school year. Purcell Gates (2011, p. 238) describes Gaulier’s teaching of clown as being ‘structured around the idea of failure’ so that the student experiences and finds vulnerability and pleasure in being ridiculous. I would contend that those students who only study clown miss out on experiencing and therefore understanding the fundamentals of Gaulier’s practice, in particular, Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité as described in Chapter 3.4i. Le Jeu is the first course of Gaulier’s teaching year and the school website explains that Le Jeu is taught first because ‘it is the source of everything; of the pleasure and desire to be an actor’ (Ecole Philippe Gaulier, 2021). Le Jeu aims to develop students’ playfulness and openness in creating theatre with their fellow classmates. Murray (2010, p. 224) describes the Le Jeu course as one that ‘will underpin and permeate everything that follows. Le Jeu offers students the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the vocabulary or scaffolding of acting’

In examining Gaulier’s use of Le Jeu, theatre academic and practitioner Kendrick (2011) relates it to Roger Caillois’ (2001) play theory. Kendrick makes the distinction between paidic (pleasurable play) and ludus (rule-bound, complex play). Kendrick considers that both are present in, and I would argue essential to, Gaulier’s work. Gaulier creates games that have rules. Some of these rules are more complex than others and some ask to be, or accidentally are, broken. In Gaulier’s practice, whether one wins or loses the game, or makes mistakes, it does not matter, what is important is the pleasure of playing. Kendrick (2011, p. 78) explains that a student may be praised for winning a game of tag but equally ‘the important point is that pleasure occurs at the moment of losing, in getting the game wrong, the moment the rule is accidentally
flouted, the pleasurable experience is ignited’. Kendrick (ibid. p. 84) argues that Gaulier’s actor training ‘produces a paidic aesthetic as all his strategic ludic techniques are designed to create this pleasurable, paidic play’. In other words, rules are there to make the game function and at the same time to be disrupted or broken, it is the pleasure of playing that is most important. Murray (2010, p. 229) concludes that, ‘for Gaulier, lightness, pleasure and play are mutually interdependent qualities and dispositions’. Indeed, Gaulier himself says, ‘theatre equals the pleasure of the game plus a play’ (Gaulier, 2007, p. 193). Experiencing the pleasure of playing with one’s companions is therefore a fundamental tactic that Gaulier’s uses to keep theatre-making light and engaging for both actor and audience.

Whilst Gaulier uses Le Jeu - games and playful improvisations - to engender an experience of pleasure and lightness in the performer, he also uses games to develop the actor’s understanding of complicité and disponibilité. To play the games one needs to be ready, attentive, present and alert (disponible) and one must develop an awareness of, and rapport with, the other players (complicité). Le Jeu is therefore Gaulier’s starting point for theatre-making, it is multi-layered and has many purposes. Play should be fun, it can make rules and break rules, it takes place in the moment and involves connecting with other people.

**Connecting Lecoq, Pagneux and Gaulier**

Each of Lecoq, Pagneux and Gaulier’s approaches to theatre-making, described above, is distinctive and at the same time they encompass certain similarities. All three teachers take the body as the starting point for playful exploration of the world around them and as the basis for making theatre with others. Murray (2010, p. 235) says that whilst all three teachers reject particular training methods, they share a ‘belief that theatre is, first and last, a practice in collaboration, of comradeship and of ensemble’. I would posit that all three also share a vocabulary that reflects the similar foundations of their practices. This vocabulary encompasses Le Jeu, complicité and disponibilité. Though their approaches may be different, they have a common goal, to make embodied work that is playful, open and emphasises the rapport and communication between people.

Pagneux and Gaulier’s practices do not aim to engage in the psychology of the performer and their work is not concerned with improving a performer’s personal wellbeing. For example, Murray (2010, p. 234) says, ‘Pagneux’s immensely detailed attention to the individual bodies of her students and her quest for disponibilité is neither for therapeutic reasons, nor to make her students feel happier’. However,
because of the intimate connection between mind and body, they can often also have an effect on the person’s state of mind. There was an occasion when I was studying with Pagneux, in Paris, that a fellow student ended up in tears after doing a particular exercise. This was not because the exercise was difficult but because the act of doing it unlocked something deep within her. Pagneux said at the time that we hold our emotions in our sternum and if we start to physically loosen up that part of our anatomy, as this particular exercise did, it is not surprising that it would also affect our emotional being. At the same time, Gaulier’s focus on games and play frequently generated a lot of laughter amongst students. So, whilst he might use a game to teach a specific drama point, playing the game might also enhance a student’s mood and sense of belonging within the group. Pagneux and Gaulier’s work therefore affects both the body and mind of the performer, the individual explores the world and their relationship to it, in new and different ways, through play, gesture and movement, in collaboration with others. Therefore, in relation to this study, Pagneux and Gaulier’s embodied practices resonate with the phenomenological and heuristic frameworks that I described previously and that I used to collect, analyse and interpret data for this research.

3.5 Applying Pagneux and Gaulier’s practices to my research fieldwork methodology

Having described Pagneux and Gaulier’s practices, including their relationship to the pedagogy of Lecoq and Pagneux’s integration of Feldenkrais exercises into her work, I now discuss how I approached applying their work to my own drama sessions with participants for this study. In doing this I was aware that there would be challenges in selecting and introducing the aspects of their work that I felt would best suit the four different fieldwork groups. This was particularly because the groups comprised a wide range of people aged 55-94 with different physical and cognitive abilities, as well as prior experiences and expectations of doing drama. All of these factors would be likely to affect how they would receive and respond to the work.

3.5i The challenges of physical theatre training

I identified a number of challenges in adapting Gaulier and Pagneux’s teaching practices to the fieldwork groups. In the first instance, the work can often be physically and emotionally challenging. Most theatre training, including that of Pagneux and Gaulier, takes place in drama schools or universities. It often involves several hours of intense, physical, vocal and mental training a day. Courses are primarily aimed at younger people who have recently left school or university and who want to develop a
professional career in the theatre. Indeed, Gaulier’s website (Ecole Philippe Gaulier, 2021) specifically says that the courses are for people who are, or wish to be, professional actors and when I attended his courses in Paris, the oldest person was 35, with the average age around 27. Gaulier and Pagneux’s courses can be physically demanding. Much of Pagneux’s Feldenkrais work is done either lying on the floor or moving between standing and lying. Her initial movement course takes place daily, over a three-month period, and it is often only over time that students gain deeper understanding of the effects of the work. Indeed, theatre teacher and Feldenkrais practitioner, Dianne Hancock (2015), observed in her own drama students, that they only really appreciated the benefits of the Feldenkrais work in their theatre practice, in their second year of training. Equally, Gaulier’s practice often involves a lot of fast-paced physical action, running and jumping around the room.

Gaulier and Pagneux’s work can also be emotionally challenging for participants. They both have reputations for being highly critical and/or demanding in their teaching, particularly when they feel that students are being what they might describe as hard or heavy in their acting, as opposed to light, fluid, playful and open, as I described earlier. Gaulier is known for teaching through a process of rejection, often called via negativa. This means that rather than teaching by example, showing or illustrating an exercise, he prefers to work with students through negation, i.e., telling them to stop and sit down when he is not happy with what they are doing (Murray and Keefe, 2016). My own experiences of rejection, that I described in Chapter 1, are echoed by many other actors and academics who have worked with Gaulier (Purcell-Gates, 2008; Kendrick, 2011; Murray, 2013; Amsden, 2017). Gaulier’s clown course in particular, which I described earlier, is predicated on students experiencing failure. Whilst Gaulier’s strategies might at first appear contradictory to the generation of experiences of pleasure through play, his aim is to push the student to find new possibilities for creating theatre: possibilities that are more spontaneous, open, playful and alive and less based on previous habits or preconceived ideas. Murray and Keefe (2016, p.186) contend that it is ‘only by virtue of its wit and hilarity’ that ‘the ruthless candour’ of Gaulier’s teaching can be made bearable for participants. Wright (1990) concludes that ‘the ideal way to meet Gaulier is to be experienced enough to know you can work well in front of an audience, yet to have enough humility to be able to approach the work as if you had never done it before’. This implies that working with Gaulier requires both being able to let go of prior ways of theatre-making, whilst at the same time sustaining a certain level of resilience and confidence in one’s own ability.
From my personal experience and that of colleagues, Pagneux can also be very demanding of students. Her quest for ‘lifefulness’ (Chapter 3.4ii) in every moment means that she might ask students to repeat an exercise over and over, in order to find the most engaging way of doing it. An example of this was in a workshop where we spent an hour exploring the deceptively simple task of carrying a chair onto the stage and sitting down in front of the ‘audience’ (Pagneux and other students). Pagneux would ask us to consider first how we walk into the space; our relationship with the audience and the other performers; then, how the chair is placed and finally how the performer sits on it. These were not theoretical questions but ones of practice, Pagneux would demand of the performer to try and test, try and test, again and again. Each time she would be seeking the moment when the performer became wholly engaged in the action, ready, vital, attentive, in open communication with their fellow performers and with the audience – ‘lifeful’.

In relation therefore, to the drama workshops that I was running as part of this research, I was aware that some of the physically and emotionally demanding aspects of Pagneux and Gaulier’s work might not be appropriate for the participants. The workshop groups comprised older people coming as volunteers to participate in a creative, recreational pursuit. I wanted the sessions to be inclusive and for participants to have a pleasurable, stimulating and rewarding time. My intention was that participants should begin to experience and use their bodies in new playful and creative ways, whilst recognising that some people might have mobility constraints, and many would probably not be as physically fit and flexible as they had been when they were younger. Equally, the workshops would take place over a relatively short period of time, so I recognised that some participants might not fully experience the possible benefits of the Feldenkrais work. I did not want physical or mental health to be a barrier to participation in, or enjoyment of, the drama workshops. Overall, I wanted participants to be able to experience the fun and pleasure of engaging in physical theatre without the fear of failure or rejection. My intention was to arouse participants’ curiosity and creativity in ways of making theatre that might be different from their previous understanding or experiences of drama, and in so doing, to gently push their physical and mental boundaries.

3.5ii Putting the work into practice

My approach, therefore, in adapting Gaulier and Pagneux’s practices to the workshop groups, was to create a series of drama sessions that would emphasise fun and at the same time generate opportunities for participants to experience and develop Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité. I did not intend to introduce these terms explicitly to
participants unless they asked me because the workshops were about practice rather than theory, however, my methodological approach sought to embed these three principles within all the work we did.

Most sessions generally followed a similar structure. This involved: gentle Feldenkrais exercises to ‘wake up’ the body; games and exercises to engender Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité; improvisations where participants could collaborate together in pairs, small groups or as a whole group. The aims were to offer opportunities for participants to gain greater awareness of their bodies, engage in creative and playful interactions with each other and learn new theatre-making skills. I was aware that, because of participants’ differing functional and cognitive abilities, it would be necessary at times to adapt the work to suit the needs of each group and possibly particular individuals. In planning the work, I made decisions based partly on my own experiences of working with Gaulier and Pagneux and also on the knowledge gained from having run a participatory drama group with older people for the previous three years, as described in Chapter 1. This had given me some valuable insights into which activities, games and exercises might be of greatest benefit and interest to these new groups of participants (a sample session plan is outlined in Chapter 4).

With regard to using Feldenkrais and other physical exercises with the groups, Pagneux’s ‘wake up’ methodology is not about developing a particular movement technique or improving fitness levels. Indeed, Murray and Keefe (2016, p. 182) attest that ‘Pagneux is not interested in physical virtuosity for its own sake, but has an extraordinary ability to awaken performers’ bodies of any shape or size’. Similarly, theatre director and ex-Pagneux student, Annabel Arden (2001, p. 2), says, ‘no actor needs the perfect body; they need their body to be available to them, working at maximum potential with the minimum effort’. The aim of the Feldenkrais exercises, therefore, was to begin to develop participants’ greater awareness of their own bodies and support their flexibility, balance, posture and range of movement. Whilst the time spent on the exercises was not as much as would be spent in a specific Feldenkrais Method class, nonetheless participants were able to do some gentle stretching and use different muscles from those they might use in everyday life. I adapted several of the exercises so that they could be done sitting down where necessary. I combined the Feldenkrais exercises with other activities of Pagneux’s which focused on playful, physical and vocal interactions, developing ‘lifefulness’ as described in 3.4ii. In these ways I considered that it would be possible for all participants to experience the work at some level, regardless of their state of health and mobility.
It was also important to build positive group dynamics and generate trust between participants, thereby developing *complicité* in the group and creating a strong ensemble from the varied individuals involved. If the group did not work well together then members could not play and create, and vice versa. This involved recognising that each person is different and at the same time, understanding that the aim of the work would be to balance individual and group needs, in order to achieve what Johnston (2005, p. 38) calls ‘an embodiment of complementarity’. My intention was that in building *complicité* within each of the groups, individuals would feel able to explore their creative potential, their ‘possible selves’ and take risks in a safe and supportive environment. Johnston (*ibid.* p. 37) argues that ‘the paradox is, if teamwork is put first, participants discover a new, stronger individuality for themselves’. I aimed to develop *complicité* by selecting games and exercises of Gaulier and Pagneux’s that would encourage people to play together, listening and responding to one another in a spirit of camaraderie and collaboration. Through these games the group members would also experience *Le Jeu*, the pleasure of playing and creating with one another. Play or *Le Jeu* would encourage experiences of spontaneity, being in the moment and creative flow. From games and exercises we would move on to creating short improvisations playing with rhythm, sound, dramatic tension, character. I would encourage a ‘yes and’ approach to play and improvisation. This principle comes originally from theatre educator and pioneer of improvisation games, Viola Spolin (1973), and was then developed by Johnstone (1981) and Johnston (2005). Saying ‘yes and’ (rather than ‘yes but’) means that the performer accepts rather than rejects a fellow performer’s offer, thereby enabling a game or improvisation to continue and develop further. The approach is valuable in encouraging participants not to engage in self-judgment or criticism of themselves or others. Mistakes might happen but they would not matter, they would be embraced as part of a playful, supportive and open process.

Overall, my methodology for the workshops involved developing playful and pleasurable opportunities for participants to gain embodied experiences of *Le Jeu*, *disponibilité* and *complicité*, as described above. The workshop methodology was developed to suit participants of all ages and all physical and cognitive abilities, enabling them to learn new skills and explore their creative selves in collaboration with others. The work primarily focussed on specific aspects of Pagneux and Gaulier’s physical theatre practices, however my teaching methodology was also influenced by my experiences of studying and working with drama in education specialist, Dorothy Heathcote, as described in Chapter 1.3. Heathcote’s practice therefore also influenced my approach to running the workshop sessions. In the next section, I give a short outline of some key aspects of Heathcote’s work.
Dorothy Heathcote

Heathcote’s teaching has been written about extensively by many academics (Wagner 1979; Bolton 2003; Heston, 2013), as well as by Heathcote herself (1990). Heathcote’s approach to drama teaching has a primary focus on process rather than performance. She uses drama, particularly with children, to enable the group to enter a world of ‘as if’ and engage with the action from new and original perspectives. Using what she calls ‘Mantle of the Expert’ and ‘teacher-in-role techniques’, Heathcote encourages students to take responsibility for decision-making and the direction of the drama and their learning. In this situation, the students work collaboratively to solve a fictional problem, as if it were real. For example, they might take on the role of architects who have been commissioned to design a suitable space craft to take animals to another planet. In doing the students have to work together to analyse the habits and needs of the animals concerned and then take on the responsibility of ensuring their security and safety ‘on the journey’. The children become the ‘experts’ and the teacher usually takes on the role of the ‘client’ requiring the children’s services. The teacher guides the students from within the drama and her fictional status shifts according to their needs. Although Heathcote’s process-led practice might seem to be very different from Gaulier and Pagneux’s actor and performance orientated methodologies, all three practitioners share an approach to drama and theatre-making, that foregrounds exploration, curiosity and improvisation. They create work that responds to the moment, focussing on discovery rather than outcomes. I would also argue that Heathcote’s work is embedded in the embodied nature of theatre-making, encompassing use of space, movement, voice and imagination. I learnt from Heathcote the value of creating moments of heightened theatrical significance through employing a simple, yet precise, gesture or word. White (2015) argues that even if Heathcote was not interested in the quality of children’s acting, her practice was underpinned by a deep understanding of the art form:

It is an aesthetic experience stimulated by the artistic skill of the facilitating teacher-in-role, who manipulates her own role-play, but also the relationships she has with the students and their involvement in the dramatic action. (White, 2015, p. 47)

My experience of working with Heathcote has also given me valuable insights into working with groups of people who have widely differing skills and abilities. From working with Heathcote on various projects over several years, I saw how she gave time and space to children and adults, whatever their age or background. She had the ability to bring together a group of children with differing interests and desires into a dramatic context, in which everyone would agree to participate and collaborate. Developing group cohesion, in other words complicité, was at the core of her work. She
always listened to and valued what individuals had to say and strove to find ways of incorporating their ideas into the work, however unusual they might be, whilst keeping them focused on the task in hand. Although, I am not specifically examining her work as part of this research, I did use her ‘teacher-in-role’ work with one of the groups. Overall, there is no doubt that her influence on my teaching practice over many years informed, both consciously and unconsciously, my inclusive approach to the fieldwork with participants.

3.5iii The potential benefits of participatory drama with older people

I did not want to pre-empt what the participants might say about their experiences of engaging in the drama workshops that I ran. At the same time, in adapting Gaulier and Pagneux’s practices and combining them with my own teaching methodologies, I did hold in mind some of the potential benefits that the work might bring to participants. These were based on my own experiences, as a student, artist and teacher, and also on research studies concerning play and improvisation, and also the use of Feldenkrais work with older people. For example, I thought that a specific focus on spontaneous play and pleasure through Le Jeu might engender positive experiences of mood, as well enhance participants’ creativity. Lieberman (1977) contends that playful activities generate creativity and imagination and Chang et al. (2016) conclude from a study of 167 members of the Red Hat Society (an international playgroup for women) that playful activities can be beneficial for physical and mental health. Le Jeu might also be a vehicle to free people from self-judgement or expectation and thereby combat ageism, both internal and societal. Yamoto’s (2020) improvisation group described feeling that the playful nature of the sessions allowed them to ‘be silly’ together, in a way that is not possible in everyday life. Guitard et al.’s (2005) research on understanding playfulness in adults found that having a playful attitude to life enables adults, amongst other things, to distance themselves from conventions that might limit behaviour. I also considered that collaborative improvisations, built on foundations of complicité and disponibilité, would give participants opportunities to explore a range of self-expression and discover other ‘possible selves’, similar to Creech et al.’s (2014) older people making music. Additionally, studies on Feldenkrais with older people have been shown to improve physical awareness, balance and mobility (Connors et al. 2011; Webb et al. 2013; Broome et al. 2015). Even though the workshop participants would engage in the Feldenkrais practice for shorter periods than the people in the aforementioned studies, from previous experience I considered that even a relatively short amount of time spent on physical exercises could be beneficial, at least to some.
White (2015, p. 83) says that ‘there is art in participation that invites people to experience themselves differently, reflexively and self-consciously’. My contention was, that by participating in physical theatre, through Le Jeu, complicité and disponibilité, participants might experience different aspects of themselves, enhance their creativity and at the same time support their wellbeing and health. The sessions also aimed to enable participants to connect with other people, have fun, be physically active and learn new skills. In this way they would support the aims of the Five Ways to Wellbeing, as well as offer experiences within the Orientations to Happiness Framework (pleasure, meaning, and engagement) as described in Chapter 2.

My methodologies for the workshops therefore intended to support participants to have creative and ‘lifeful’ experiences as they continued on their life-course journeys. At the same time, I was also conscious of the continued need for reflexivity on my part, to ensure that any prior thoughts or expectations I might have concerning potential benefits of the work, would not lead to biased interpretations of participants’ responses to their drama experiences. I discuss the need for reflexivity further in Chapter 4.9.

### 3.6 Summary

The aims of this research are to analyse and interpret the experiences of older people engaging in physical theatre-making, based on the actor training practices of Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux, and in relation to participants’ creativity, health and wellbeing. Theatre-making is an embodied and holistic art form as explained in 3.3i. It is ‘a performative art that engages and integrates voice, body and imagination’ (Bernard et al. 2015, p. 1141). Therefore, a hermeneutic phenomenological and heuristics framework assisted me in realising the aims of the study. In particular, Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ approach to interpreting data enabled me to explore different people’s, including my own, perspectives on their lived experiences of the work. This ‘fusion of horizons’ approach, also supported the bringing together of different academic disciplines; ageing, health, wellbeing and theatre-making, to reach new understandings.

In this chapter, I have also outlined and explained Gaulier and Pagneux’s teaching practices, including Pagneux’s use of Feldenkrais exercises, and I have discussed which aspects of their work I intended introducing to the groups of volunteer older people involved in the workshops. I have described how I decided to focus on developing participants’ experiences of what I consider to be the foundations of Pagneux and Gaulier’s work, Le Jeu, complicité and disponibilité, in order to expand their theatre-making skills and encourage their creative learning. I also recognised that
it was important that the workshops should be fun and enjoyable, alongside being a research process for the thesis. My teaching methodology aimed to be inclusive and was developed from my extensive experience as a theatre-maker, as well as my work with drama in education specialist, Dorothy Heathcote. The workshops involved: introducing participants to some gentle Feldenkrais exercises to develop greater physical awareness, balance and mobility; games to engender playfulness, openness and teambuilding; improvisation to encourage self-expression and creative exploration. Through Le Jeu, complicité and disponibilité, I sought to generate a supportive and inclusive group dynamic, that would encourage the individual to engage the whole of their being in a collaborative, creative and ‘lifeful’ process.

In the next chapter I discuss my research methods, including, recruitment and make-up of the fieldwork groups, power dynamics, ethics, data collection, data analysis and reflexivity. I also discuss the research design and describe the creative intervention in more detail.
Chapter 4 Research Methods

4.1 Introduction

In this research study I explore the experiences and perceptions of older people taking part in physical theatre actor training and the impact of these experiences on their creativity, health and wellbeing. In order to undertake this research, I ran a series of practical drama workshops with four groups of volunteer, older people, in Northern England, between October 2018 and November 2019. The workshops took place in a market town arts centre, a rural private house, an urban community advice and activity centre and a day centre for older adults.

The focus of the workshops was to introduce participants to the theatre-making practices of Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux, through exercises, games and improvisations that would engender experiences of Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité, as discussed in the previous chapter. During the workshops I collected data from the participants for the study.

In this chapter, I explain the methods used to undertake the study. I start by briefly describing the study design, discussing the ethical issues associated with the study and the ethics approval process. I then describe the methods used to recruit participants for the four workshop groups and the make-up of the groups. Next, I describe the creative intervention. Finally, I explain the data collection and analysis methods, as well as researcher and participant power dynamics, researcher reflexivity, credibility and rigour.

4.2 Study design

This study was an exploration of the experiences of older people participating in physical theatre. The research study was shaped and informed by the phenomenological and heuristic frameworks described in Chapter 3. To achieve this aim, I collected and analysed data from the workshops' participants that focussed on what the drama and theatre-making experiences meant for them, particularly in relation to their creativity, health and wellbeing.

4.3 Ethics

The research study received ethical approval from Northumbria University on 11.07.18 (appendix 1). The ethics application included an outline of the general aims and objectives of the research and the plans for running drama workshops with four
different groups of older people in Northern England over a one-year period. A copy of the ethics approval letter, together with a risk assessment, copies of participant information forms, participant consent and permissions forms, data collection tools and schedules can be found in the appendices as indicated below.

4.3i Participant information

All participants received a research study information sheet (appendix 2). This gave the context and aims of the research. It explained that the intentions of the workshops were for participants to be able to explore and develop their creative theatre-making skills based on the work of theatre practitioners Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux. The study information sheet explained that I would ask participants for feedback on their experiences of the workshops, particularly in relation to their creativity, health and wellbeing. It also gave a brief description of what participants would do in the workshops, including participation in games, gentle movement and improvisation.

At the start of each new session of workshops I explained the research and encouraged participants to ask questions. All participants had my email address should they wish to contact me privately. Participants in three of the groups also had a contact number for the organisation hosting the group that they attended, should they have other questions that they did not specifically wish to raise with me. The fourth group met in a friend’s private house, so they had the friend’s contact number.

4.3ii Risk assessments and health information

Northumbria University reviewed and approved a risk assessment form that covered both my working as a single researcher and also procedures to be taken should there be any physical injury or emotional distress on the part of participants (appendix 3).

Participants were given a health information sheet (appendix 4) with a brief description of the physical aspects of the workshops, giving advice on what to wear and bring with them. It explained that they should stop the physical work if at any time they were in discomfort or pain. I also reiterated this advice at the start of each session. I suggested that participants would be welcome to contribute through observation, should they wish to sit out of any exercise.

The health information sheet also recommended that participants tell me in private and in confidence if they had any particular health issues they wished me to know. Additionally, I asked participants to fill in a questionnaire in the first workshop that gave
them the option to tell me about their current state of health and wellbeing if they wished.

4.3iii Consent and permissions

All participants received consent forms (appendix 5). These explained that participants’ comments would be used anonymously unless they requested otherwise and that they could withdraw from the workshops at any time. Permission to use photographs and video, for research purposes only, was also requested on a separate photograph and video release form (appendix 6).

Data collection included:

- Participants: filling in questionnaires and journals; writing comments on post-it notes in sessions; contributing to informal discussions inside and outside sessions and recorded focus group sessions

- Photographs and video that I took in sessions; my field notes which included planning, evaluation and observation of sessions.

All participant data were anonymised within the study and each person was given a pseudonym. However, there was a possibility that participants could be recognised from photographs and videos used in the presentation of the study findings. Participants were made aware of this and their consent to use this data was obtained, as outlined above. Hard copy data were securely stored in a locked cabinet that only I had access to. Digital data were transferred to Northumbria University onedrive. I discuss specific data collection methods in more detail in 4.7.

An ethics amendment, that was given approval on 19.5.2021 (appendix 7), also enabled me to use photographs of participants in a theatre workshop that I had attended with Monika Pagneux in Barcelona in 2012.

4.3iv Vulnerable adults

One of the four groups I worked with was based at a day centre for older adults. This group included a number of people who were ‘vulnerable adults’, as defined by the UK Government Care Act, 2014 (NHS England, 2017). They included people living with dementia and having learning difficulties. It was ethically important to include these
vulnerable groups in research to find out how their valuable perspectives might inform, help construct and improve the services they use (Murphy et al., 2015).

In order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of this group a number of safeguards were put in place: Day Centre staff ensured that all potential participants had capacity to consent to participation in the study; I obtained Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) approval; Day Centre staff supported potential participants by reading through information and consent forms with participants to ensure informed consent. For those older people that wished to participate but had written communication challenges, Day Centre staff supported them to complete consent procedures. Participants and staff at the Day Centre (with consent of participants) also gave me verbal information on specific participants regarding health conditions such as dementia diagnoses and experience of stroke, that might impact on an individual’s ability to participate in certain activities. Several participants had mobility issues and staff assisted in bringing these participants to the sessions. Frequently, though not always, a member of staff stayed in the session to assist with any particular needs that participants might have.

4.4 Sampling, recruitment and make-up of the fieldwork groups

4.4i Sampling processes

I used purposeful (or purposive) sampling as the primary method to select participants who would assist me in fulfilling my research aims. This meant finding people who would be best able to provide the most relevant information on the phenomenon being investigated in order that any eventual findings might seem credible (Willig, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Patton (2002) describes several different types of purposeful sampling. For this research study, I particularly used criterion-based sampling and sought to achieve some diversity of samples by approaching a variety of organisations involved with older people in differing locations. I used volunteer, snowball and convenience sampling as processes of recruitment.

Criterion-based sampling

In criterion-based sampling, participants fulfil specific criteria in order to be included in the research study. This enables the researcher to gain rich and in-depth information that can in turn generate detailed exploration and understanding of the specific phenomenon (Patton, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2014; Robinson, 2014). The criteria I used for selecting participants for this particular study were: they should be older people; have an interest in attending and participating in the drama workshops and be willing to give me feedback on their experiences. With regard to defining older people, I decided
to take 50 years old as the lowest age for recruitment to the workshops, as explained in Chapter 1.2. I did not set a maximum age limit.

Diversity of sample

At the same time as having certain key criteria for inclusion, as described above, I was interested in involving a cross-section of older people who might reflect greater diversity than those who had previously attended the drama group at my local arts centre in a market town, as described in Chapter 1. This group primarily comprised retired professional people in their 60s and 70s. To this end, I contacted three other groups of older people: a day centre that offered activities to people with differing functional and cognitive abilities; an urban community advice and activity centre for over 50-year-olds and an independent painting group based in a rural area. I recognised that too much homogeneity could limit the range of perspectives captured (Robinson, 2014). Therefore, I considered that it would be valuable to have people of different backgrounds, ages and with a variety of functional and cognitive abilities in order to explore a broad and rich range of experiences and perceptions. I discuss the diversity of the groups in greater detail in section 4.4v.

Parameters on group sizes

Whilst agreeing with Patton (2002) that the quality of potential responses to the research question is more important than the quantity of participants involved, for pragmatic reasons, I did set minimum and maximum parameters to the group sizes. These were a minimum of four people and a maximum of 15. I considered that smaller than four would make it difficult to run group-focussed activities and research the collaborative nature of drama. I also felt that in a group larger than 15, it might be harder to manage group dynamics and attend to the needs of individuals, whilst also conducting the research. I wanted to be able to remember each person as well as possible, in relation to the data collection and analysis.

4.4ii Recruitment processes and advertising

Volunteer sampling

I used volunteer sampling methods to recruit participants for the workshops. Advertising for volunteers for the workshops took place through a variety of media and networking channels. These included: Arts Centre brochure, website and direct mailing; Community Centre brochure, direct mailing and phone calls by the centre to people they thought might like to be involved; direct mailing from me to personal contacts who then passed on to others who they thought might be interested; personal
invitation from staff at the Day Centre to clients present on the day of the workshop. The advertising stated that no previous knowledge or experience of drama was required. It explained that the workshops were free and formed part of my PhD research. Potential participants could email me, or the centre concerned, for further information, prior to attending the first workshop (see appendix 8 for examples of advertising).

I also ran taster sessions with the groups from the Day Centre and the community advice centre. I met with the rural painting group to discuss the research and workshop plans.

**Snowball and convenience sampling**

The workshops were also promoted through word of mouth, from one participant to another (snowball sampling) and through personal contacts that I had (convenience sampling). That is, via: my existing arts networks; personal contacts with people working with older people, and friends and acquaintances who fulfilled the criteria and had expressed an interest in the research and participating in the workshop sessions. Whilst these two sampling methods may be regarded as weak due to risk of sampling bias, at the same time they are useful in circumstances where it might be challenging to recruit from hard to reach groups and/or for specific interventions as in this study (Valero et al., 2016).

**4.4iii Summary of the groups**

The following is a summary of the four groups that were formed following the recruitment processes outlined above:

- 42 older people participated in the workshops across four groups
- The four groups included: a market town arts centre drama group; an urban community centre group; a rural independent painting group; members of a day centre based on the edge of the city
- The smallest group size was 4 and the largest 16 (slightly larger than I had originally intended but I did not want to turn one person away)
- The minimum number of sessions with any one group was seven and the maximum 25
- Some people participated for the whole year and others for one term of workshops. All participants attended a minimum of three workshop sessions with the majority attending six or more.
### 4.4iv Summary of the individual participants

Table 1. below summarises the 42 individual participants across the four groups. The table gives each participant’s pseudonym, age, gender, country of origin (if not the UK), any known health issues and any known prior arts experience. With the exception of age, which I asked participants to give me if they were happy to do so, the rest of the information came either from participants telling me directly, or from comments made in questionnaires and journals. In the case of the participants from the Day Centre, the participants or staff gave me specific health/disability information on some individuals (with the consent of individuals).

**Table 1: Summary of the individual participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Known current state of health</th>
<th>Known previous arts experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts Centre 25 sessions</td>
<td>1 Alice</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Amateur visual artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 4 terms</td>
<td>2 Hilary</td>
<td>80-85</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Issues with balance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Matilda</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional visual artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Annie</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Has depression</td>
<td>Amateur Egyptian dancer and member of historic re-enactment groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Rachel</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Arthritis affects movement</td>
<td>Joined the Arts Centre group in 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Janice</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Issues with back pain</td>
<td>Sings in community choirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 Josie</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional poet (We have done various drama and text projects together in the past)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 Catherine</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Interested in improving balance</td>
<td>Keen theatre goer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 Alex</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 Isla</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Amateur jive dancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 Debbie</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>In remission from cancer treatment and has a lot of arthritis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 Olivia</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Has Fibromyalgia</td>
<td>Some amateur drama in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Occupation/Activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Professional musician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Professional musician and Bowen Technique practitioner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Attends creative writing group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Stacey</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Has a lot of back pain, waiting for operation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Centre 13 sessions over 2 terms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>F (Argentina)</td>
<td>Uses a stick for walking outside Has done some work as an ‘extra’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Maite</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>F (Spain)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Interested in stand-up comedy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Retired Drama teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Studied visual art and creative writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>F (Ireland)</td>
<td>Had a fall in Spring 2019, so some issues with shoulder pain during the second lot of sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Retired primary school teacher with responsibility for music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>F (Columbia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural 7 sessions over one term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Gemma</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Some walking issues</td>
<td>Amateur painter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Amateur painter. Caller for ceilidh bands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Amateur painter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Donald</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Has Parkinson’s disease and visual impairment. Uses a stick for walking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amateur painter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Day Centre 12 sessions over 2 terms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>75-80</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Uses walking aids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Hazel</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Uses walking aids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Living with dementia. Uses a walking stick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Wheelchair user</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>65-70</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Wheelchair user. Had a stroke part way through first term of sessions. Returned later</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Clive</td>
<td>60-65</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Has learning disability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lives with dementia. Uses a stick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some amateur drama in the past</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Experiencing some memory loss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some amateur ceramics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>75-80</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Uses walking aids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Violet</td>
<td>75-80</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Uses walking aids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4v Diversity of participants in the groups

In this section I expand on the make-up of the groups shown in the table above, with regard to: age and gender, socio-cultural background, prior drama or arts experience, health, mobility and cognitive ability.

Age and gender

I had set 50 as the lowest age for recruitment to the workshops with no maximum age. The groups recruited covered an age range from 55 to 94. There were two younger people who also participated in the arts centre workshops, but as they did not fulfil the criteria for the research study their data is not included in this study.

With regard to gender, I did not specify gender within my criteria, however, amongst the total number of participants, there were 5 men and 37 women. Three of the five men attended the Day Centre, so staff had direct contact with them and could encourage them to join in. One man was part of the already established painting group. This means that from the general advertising only one man signed up.

Socio-cultural background

The research study did not set out to look specifically at socio-cultural difference between participants, however I was interested in having participants from a variety of backgrounds and I did not wish to exclude anyone who might want to be involved. To this end, I set up groups in different geographical and socio-cultural locations that I thought might bring a range of participants. The four groups were located in: a rural private house, a market town arts centre, an edge of city day centre and an urban community venue.

The Rural and Arts Centre groups were located in areas where people tended to be wealthier and/or had professional backgrounds. The Day Centre, situated on the outskirts of the city, included people from a cross section of backgrounds, who were either referred by the local authority or NHS services, or who came as private individuals. The urban Community Centre works in a socially and economically deprived community, however, the drama workshops attracted people from across the city and did not therefore necessarily represent the local demographic. The centre itself said that whilst the area comprised a large ethnic mix, the majority of non-white people living there were younger and so they did not have contact with them. This group was the only one to include four immigrant participants. Their countries of origin were Ireland, Spain, Argentina and Columbia.
Prior drama and other arts experience

The advertising for participants stated that no prior drama experience was necessary, and this was the case for most participants. However, several participants had been, or were, involved in a variety of other arts activities, as shown in column 6 of Table 1. There were also a number of professional visual artists and musicians.

- In the Arts Centre group, there were five freelance professional artists (two visual artists, one poet and two musicians). One participant had attended previous drama workshops with me. There were also people who were involved in amateur dance, creative writing, community choirs and painting/art groups.

- In the urban Community group, one participant had some recent professional theatre experience primarily as a musician, one person was a trained school drama teacher, one had been to another drama group and one did occasional work as an ‘extra’.

- Within the Rural group, everyone was involved in painting and they met once a week together to do this. Additionally, one person was an occasional caller in a ceilidh band.

- Within the Day Centre group, one of the men had done a lot of ceramics at the centre, I was not aware of any other current arts activity within this group.

Health and mobility

The known healthy and mobility of the participants in the workshops is shown in column 5 of Table 1. Participants’ health ranged from those with no obvious problems to those recovering from cancer or a stroke, some people had arthritis and joint pain, one person was living with Parkinson’s disease and one with Fibromyalgia. In the case of the Day Centre, participants or staff informed me of specific health issues concerning particular individuals, where they felt it might be relevant to the work.

Regarding the mobility of participants, this varied hugely from one group to another and also within each group and consequently impacted on how I ran the workshops. There were participants who did dance, Pilates and/or yoga on a regular basis and therefore had good mobility, flexibility and understanding of their bodies. There were other participants in wheelchairs, using mobility aids, or with chronic back problems or arthritis, for whom physical work was more challenging. I knew that I would have to
adapt what I did with participants according to their needs and abilities. I, myself, have a replacement hip. This does not prevent me from doing most things, however, I am aware that I had a lot of pain and restricted movement before I had the replacement and that on occasions there are still things I cannot do as easily as I used to. This was a good reminder for me to be constantly aware of participants' own physical abilities and limitations. Therefore, whilst encouraging participants to explore movements that may be different or new for them, I knew that I would have to be sensitive to how their body felt at the time.

**Cognitive abilities**

At the Day Centre two participants were living with dementia and one person with learning difficulties. There were also participants in this group who told me that they felt they were experiencing some memory loss. Whilst I was not qualified to assess participants' cognitive abilities, I was aware that, in terms of planning and running the workshop sessions, any cognitive impairments might impact on participants’ abilities to engage in language-based activities that required memory or, sometimes, a range of vocabulary. I therefore needed to adapt the work to try and include all abilities. At the same time, some participants’ cognitive impairments also impacted on the data collection methods and amount and content of data that I was able to collect. I discuss this further in the data collection section, 4.7.

**4.5 Physical working environment**

Whilst needing to adapt the work according to participants’ physical and cognitive needs, as described above, I also had to adapt the work in relation to the physical environment in which the groups met. The embodied and physical nature of theatre-making means that there is often a focus on moving in and through space and also on using the space for group play. The quality of the physical environment affects how the performers move, speak, interact and create with one another. The best space for most physical theatre work is a large, warm, empty room, with good lighting, sound proofed, well-ventilated and with a clean, wooden or carpeted floor. The floor is important as much of the work is about the participant developing a sense of connection, through their body, between the floor and the ceiling. This means that ideally participants would work in socks or bare feet so that they could have a greater contact with the floor. A wooden or carpeted floor means that it is possible to use the floor for particular Feldenkrais exercises and/or to explore different physical levels theatrically. It is also helpful to have a big enough space for people to move around easily without bumping into one another, or furniture, where they can experiment with moving at different
tempos and/or using different voice levels and also, ideally, are able to work in smaller groups without one group impeding another.

The spaces that I had to use with the groups were very varied, they included:

- Arts Centre group – most, but not all the time, a light, fairly spacious room with carpet and some furniture that could be moved to one end
- Rural group – an old farmhouse living room with a stone flagged floor, with rugs, furniture and clothes drying
- Community Centre group – (Term 1.) A large, cold, church hall with a concrete floor. (Term 2) Warmer church hall with carpet
- Day Centre group - a small bar area with lots of tables and armchairs, very little space to move around, particularly as there were also wheelchairs and mobility aids. Occasionally we had to move to the main hall, curtained off from other activities but with a lot of sound coming from outside (radio and voices) and sometimes people walking through.

As can be seen, many of the spaces that I worked in with groups were not ideal for physical theatre. This meant that I often had to adapt what I did with participants according to the limitations and possibilities of the space. There were sometimes fewer opportunities than I would have liked for activities that involved moving around large open spaces. Also, because sometimes the spaces were cold, it was necessary to change planned activities to ensure participants stayed warm.

4.6 The creative intervention

4.6i Session structure

The aim of the research study was to introduce participants to some of the physical theatre practices of Pagneux and Gaulier, developing their experiences of Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité in a fun and supportive manner. The approach towards each group differed at times, according to the needs, abilities and interests of the individuals, and also the limitations of the spaces we were in, as outlined above. I explained to participants at the start of the workshop sessions that the work we were doing was largely based on my training with Pagneux and Gaulier in Paris, however, I did not go into detail or use specific terminology with participants, unless they asked. This was because the focus of the workshops was on practice rather than theory.
I followed a similar session structure with each group and then adapted as necessary to suit participants’ particular needs and interests, as I discuss in the next section. Each session usually began with either a Feldenkrais exercise or a game. I explained that the purpose of the Feldenkrais exercises was to gently waken up our bodies and stretch muscles that we might not usually use in everyday life (an example is given in the table below). I explained that the games were to have fun together and also to build group cohesion, focus and collaboration (complicité). An example of a simple exercise that I did with all groups was that of throwing a ball from one person to another, standing or sitting in a circle. Each participant said their name first and then the name of the person they were throwing to. This was a useful physical exercise that helped participants to learn one another’s names and at the same time encouraged and developed mind-body coordination, vocalisation, a shared group sense of rhythm and eye contact between people.

The games and exercises were used to develop experiences of Le Jeu, complicité and disponibilité and explore specific elements of drama and theatre-making, including, physical and spatial awareness, gesture, rhythm, sound, voice, status and character. I encouraged participants to engage spontaneously and playfully with one another, in a supportive and non-judgemental manner. The games and exercises built on one another and also led into improvisations, either in small groups or as a whole group, with an emphasis on exploration and creative expression. I would remind participants that there was no right or wrong in any activity, that the aim was to ‘say yes’ to one another (as described in 3.5ii) and enjoy creating together. The interventions and particularly the improvisations differed to some extent with each group, according to the abilities and interests of the individuals, as well as what it was possible for me to do within the limitations of the space where we met and the amount of time that we had. The sessions in the Day Centre were much shorter than those with other groups.

Table 2. below, gives a sample session plan that I used with three of the groups, explaining each activity and its purpose. The Rural group did not do this particular session as it took place in the second term but they had done some of the activities described. The plan describes a complete session with the Day Centre group and a half session with the Community and Arts Centre groups, who had longer session times. Each activity built on the previous one and I varied the degree of complexity or challenge according to the particular group and its physical and cognitive needs and abilities, as well as other factors that I discuss in the next session.
Table 2. Sample session plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>To build <em>complicité</em>, <em>Le Jeu</em> and <em>disponibilité</em> through – eye contact, rhythm, being in the moment, awareness of others and being part of the whole group. To be both challenging and fun.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Clapping exercises  | Standing/sitting in a circle, each person claps one after the other, making eye contact with the next person and trying to keep a steady rhythm in the whole group.  
Same exercise but clap together with the person next to them, who then claps together with the person next to them, aiming for the claps to be at the same time and to keep a steady rhythm around the circle.  
Same two exercises but with alternate people clapping - first one after the other, then together. | To gently ‘awaken’ muscles and realise how each is connected to the other in the body.  
To be more aware of how a spiral can open the shoulder to feel looser and give a longer stretch in the arm.  
To notice how a gentle exercise can engage the whole body, support balance, improve posture and develop *disponibilité*.                                                                                                     |
| 2. Feldenkrais exercise| Stand on two feet, ideally without shoes and feel contact with floor (sit if standing is not possible).  
Put both hands out in front and check how hands come together and how shoulders feel.  
Put one hand out in front, with palm to floor. Keeping palm parallel to floor, bend elbow to take arm behind the body on a straight line, eyes follow. Repeat a few times. Rest.  
Bring hand forward again and this time spiral hand so the palm faces ceiling, notice longer stretch. Take arm behind as before. Repeat and rest.  
As before, this time bringing ear to shoulder, if possible. Notice how knee bends with the movement and hips, lower back, ribs and are engaged. Repeat and rest.  
Continue with movement and for those standing, notice if there is a moment when the opposite heel starts to spontaneously lift off the floor, leading to a small balance on the other foot with opposite hand and leg lifting behind.  
Rest and come back to starting position. Bring both hands out in front again and check if one arm is/feels, longer, lighter, more ‘awake’. How does the shoulder feel - lower, more open? Feel weight on both feet and notice any difference in contact with the floor. Stand briefly on one foot and the other, does one feel more secure than the other?  
Repeat exercise on the other side, noticing similarities and differences. |
### Table 2 (continued)

| 3. Breathing and articulation exercises | Lift arm over head and hold ribs below with opposite arm, breathe deeply into the ribs to open up.  
Interlock hands and move around body whilst breathing deeply.  
Yawn loudly and massage jaw to wake up muscles.  
Experiment with pitch on an ‘aah’ sound – take hand above head and then bring to floor, whilst pitch goes from low to high (ie opposite of arms).  
Articulate by repeating different consonants, quickly, loudly and quietly. | To connect the voice to the body, first through deep breathing and then through sounds, wake up the vocal chords and expand volume, exploring range of pitch and clearer articulation. |
| 4. Improvisation | Taking the Feldenkrais exercise, participants work in small groups to create an improvised ‘machine’ based on elements of the movement exercise that they select. They add in sounds and play with tempo, pitch and space to create a short scene. The groups share their scenes with one another. | To collaborate together, creating a group improvisation, exploring how constraints or limitations on movement can lead to greater use of the imagination when one has to do something differently.  
To experiment creatively with movements and sounds that are different from the everyday.  
To share with others and notice how a simple exercise can be transformed into a variety of scenes that can be playful and entertaining.  
To put Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité into practice. |

#### 4.6ii Reflection and adaptation

When planning the drama sessions, such as the one outlined above, I took into account participants’ physical and cognitive needs and interests, plus knowledge of the space and time available. However, I often might have to adapt the planned work to a changing situation on the session day itself. For example, sometimes there would be fewer participants than I expected, sometimes we had to move rooms, sometimes the space was cold and the group needed to move around more to stay warm. All these
factors affected which exercises we might do or how we might do them. On a creative level, propositions might also arise through improvisations that participants wanted to explore further, so work might sometimes go in a new and unplanned direction. In her book on drama facilitation, Sheila Preston (2016, p. 155) discusses the need to adapt work to suit the social dynamics of the group. She contends that it is important to have a process that is both ‘organized and flexible’ and can take into account such things as participants’ energy levels, motivation and attention span. The group’s social dynamics might vary from week to week and also within sessions, thereby affecting how the work might need to change at any given moment. Similarly, applied theatre practitioner, Kay Hepplewhite (2016, 177) describes how the facilitator needs to be ‘tuned in to group and individual needs, aspirations and issues’, so as to be able to respond to moods and atmosphere, whilst also maintaining awareness of the long-term goals of the work. In order to achieve this, I had to continuously reflect on and respond to what was happening in the workshops, as both artist and teacher. It was necessary to observe, capture and adapt to individual and group reactions, as they arose. This is what Schöen calls ‘reflection-in-action’ (1983). Rolfe explains that reflective practitioners:

Reflect on-the-spot, in the here-and-now, and the products of their reflections are immediately put into practice in a continuous and spontaneous interplay between thinking and doing, in which ideas are formulated, tested and revised. (Rolfe, 2014, p. 1180)

The need to reflect-in-action or on-the-spot is demanding and full of possibilities for error or misjudgement. In order to give my best to participants, I needed to trust in my knowledge and experience of years of teaching and making theatre. Hepplewhite (2016, p. 169) describes these as ‘acquired skills which had grown over time’. She explains that experienced practitioners use informed planning that is then:

Coupled with an ability to read the room and listen to participants, think on their feet, adjust to the needs of individuals in the moment and change the structures that they had initially proposed. (Hepplewhite, 2016, p. 169)

Consequently, throughout the sessions I aimed to stay attentive and alert to the participants and adapt or change an activity in the moment, if required. These changes in plans were noted in my researcher journal, as discussed in section 4.7 on data collection.

4.6iii Creative topics

In addition to the exercises and games that were adapted to suit the needs of each group as outlined above, I also introduced different creative topics or specific aspects of theatre-making to the sessions. These were often based on interests, or
suggestions, from participants and were then used as the basis for developing a variety of improvisations. They were informed either by such things as an artifact (a photograph or text) brought by a participant, or by a request from participants to explore a specific area of theatre-making such as character building, in order to further develop their performance skills. Table 3. below, shows some of the specific content that I worked on with each group.

Table 3. *Topics used with workshop groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts Centre group</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Exploring and performing poetry through embodied action, gesture and voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing characters through physicality, rhythm, and status</td>
<td>Exercises leading to small group improvisations set in a variety of scenarios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploration of theatre genres</td>
<td>Improvised text expressed in different styles, changing tone, pace, rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Centre group</td>
<td>Explorations of women’s lives in the city, in early 20th century</td>
<td>Improvisations based on stories from a pamphlet found in the church hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Stories and improvisations based on objects that brought the group members joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural group</td>
<td>College Rowing Team</td>
<td>Improvisations, role plays and hot-seating of characters based on a college photograph of one of the group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Centre group</td>
<td>A new baby in the family</td>
<td>Improvisations based on the theme of family which came from first sheets participants had written about health, wellbeing and creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional and original stories</td>
<td>Collaborative storytelling with sounds and actions based on well known and then invented stories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst, as can be seen above, each group’s improvisations were different, the underlying principles of *Le Jeu, disponibilité* and *complicité* continued to run throughout the work. The central aims of having fun with other group members and learning new creative skills were also fundamental to all the work we did. In the next section I
describe how I collected data from the participants about their experiences of their workshop experiences.

4.7 Data collection

4.7i Overview of data collection methods

I used a variety of methods to collect data from participants on their experiences of the drama workshops in relation to their creativity, health and wellbeing. These included their experiences both during the workshops as well as afterwards in their everyday lives. Using a phenomenological and heuristic framework as outlined in chapter 3, my foremost intention was that participants’ actual words and expressions would be central to the data collection (Moustakas, 1990; Allen-Collinson, 2009; Ivey, 2013). I therefore sought ways in which participants could describe or demonstrate their experience in their own words or expressions, bearing in mind their individual contexts as well as the nature of theatre-making as an embodied experience.

Throughout the data collection process, I saw each participant as a unique being, inhabiting their own place and on their own journey, albeit in collaboration with other participants. I had set out to recruit participant volunteers from a range of backgrounds in order to be able to look for commonality amongst a diversity of experiences. I therefore knew that what participants would report and how they would express themselves would depend to a large extent on where they were starting from: their previous experiences of drama (either acting or as an audience member); their knowledge of their own bodies and their abilities to articulate the workshop experiences.

I knew that there would be a number of challenges in asking participants to report on and describe their workshop experiences and any benefits they might feel they had gained. From my own experience, I knew that it can often be difficult to fully engage in an action and at the same time describe what is happening, words cannot always successfully express embodied experiences. In discussing the use of phenomenology to examine the learning processes of drama students, theatre academic Kathleen Perkins (2016, p. 71) contends that the embodied knowing of the actor ‘involves consciously noting, however fleetingly, the sensations of one’s body in motion’. She explains that the experience takes place at a specific point in time and space, and ‘sometimes one can retain the sensation of the moment, but mostly describing it, is an after the fact reflection’. Reporting the experience, therefore, happens after the event and is also dependent on the person’s memory and their understanding of what they
In relation to the drama workshops, I was asking participants to remember and report on both the drama workshop experience itself and also any benefits or problems they might notice as a result of the experience. I was aware that in describing their experiences, some participants might be extremely fluent and detailed in their descriptions and others might struggle to say or write more than a few words. It was therefore likely that I would receive more feedback and data from some participants than others. Equally, I considered that some people might prefer to respond individually, whilst others might enjoy group discussion. Consequently, in asking participants to give feedback on their experiences, I sought to use a variety of data collection methods that might suit and accommodate different people's preferences and needs. The data collection methods, therefore, included opportunities for participants to write both a lot and a little, to respond verbally and visually, privately and in a group. They included: individual questionnaires; post-it notes shared with the group; individual journals; short stories; informal conversation and focus groups; photos and video.

As I was using Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ and Moustakas’ heuristics to inform the methodological approaches to this research, as discussed in chapter 3, it was important that I also recorded my own experiences as the researcher and workshop leader. These would also form part of the data collection and analysis. To this end, I kept researcher notes that documented my observations of sessions and participants, and my own experiences of running the workshops. These researcher notes also assisted me in remembering and reflecting on what had happened in the sessions, as well as planning for the following sessions.

Throughout the data collection process, I was aware of the need to generate an atmosphere of trust and understanding so that participants would feel that they could speak with confidence, that they would be heard and respected. I wanted to encourage participants to tell me what they felt honestly and to understand that that there was not a right or wrong answer. Equally, I did not want to over-direct their views, make them feel burdened, or under pressure, to reveal anything they did not wish to say. Whilst I can never be certain that participants told me exactly what they felt about the workshops, I considered that by giving them a range of different ways to recount their experiences, in a supportive environment, that there would be a process that would suit everyone.

Table 4. below, gives an overview of the data collection methods used with each group. Beneath the table I explain each method in more detail.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Data collected</th>
<th>Collection date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts Centre</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>Start and end of each period of workshops and after week 3 of second period of workshops</td>
<td>Filled in by all participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-it notes shared with group</td>
<td>Week 4 of first period of workshops</td>
<td>Filled in by 5 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>End of 1st and 2nd periods of workshops</td>
<td>1st focus group attended by 4/7 people. 2nd focus group attended by 11/16 people (3 arriving part way through)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>Given out at start of workshop period and collected at end</td>
<td>Filled in by 6 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five sentence stories</td>
<td>A year after last workshops</td>
<td>Written by 8 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>At opportune moments throughout workshops</td>
<td>Some photos posed i.e. tableaux, most photos spontaneous to capture an exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>At opportune moments throughout workshops</td>
<td>Some improvisations filmed. Some spontaneous video to capture an exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Centre</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>Start and end of each period of workshops</td>
<td>Start questionnaires filled in by all participants. End questionnaires filled in by all participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five sentence stories</td>
<td>A year after final workshops</td>
<td>Written by 3 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>At opportune moments throughout workshops</td>
<td>Some photos posed i.e. tableaux, most photos spontaneous to capture an exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>At opportune moments throughout workshops</td>
<td>Some improvisations filmed. Some spontaneous video to capture an exercise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Rural

| Questionnaires | Filled in at start of the workshop. End questionnaire emailed to group organiser | Filled in by all participants. One person with Parkinson's was unable to fill in the questionnaire himself, so he and I did it together. No one filled in the end questionnaire. I reminded the organiser but did not receive anything |

| Post-it notes shared with group | Week 4 of workshops | Filled in by everyone. As with the questionnaire, I scribed for the person with Parkinson's |

| Focus group | End of workshop period | 3 out of 4 participants present |

| Photos | At opportune moments throughout workshops | Some photos posed i.e. tableaux, most photos spontaneous to capture an exercise |

### Day Centre

| Questionnaires | Filled in on 2nd session of 1st period of workshops | Filled in by all 5 participants who attended that session, with assistance from either myself or staff. Participants who joined later did not fill in. No further questionnaires were given |

| Informal discussion | End of weeks 3 & 5 of 1st period of workshops and end of weeks 1 and 6 in 2nd period | All participants present participated but not everyone was at each session |

| Photos | At opportune moments throughout workshops | Some photos posed i.e. tableaux, most photos spontaneous to capture an exercise |

| Video | At opportune moments throughout workshops | Some improvisations filmed. Some spontaneous video to capture an exercise |
4.7ii Data collection methods

Questionnaires

I used different questionnaires throughout the data collection process. The aim was to collect thoughts and responses from individuals in a private manner at different points during the workshop periods. Participants could give me personal information and feedback in a confidential manner (examples of questionnaires are in appendix 9).

The initial questionnaire that I used when participants first joined the workshops asked for their name and age, if they were willing to tell me. It then asked them to tell me briefly about their expectations with regard to joining the drama workshops and how they were feeling in relation to their creativity, health and wellbeing. This assisted me with positioning participants’ starting experience and also supported the planning of workshop content.

The aims of the research were to examine, interpret and understand participants’ experiences of the workshops in relation to their creativity, health and wellbeing. Therefore, the questionnaires at the end of the first two workshop periods asked participants to reflect particularly on how they felt that the workshops might have impacted these three areas. I also wanted to understand how they viewed theatre as an art form, so additional questions asked what drama/theatre skills they felt they had developed and how they thought theatre-making differed from other art forms and/or any other physical activity they did. As well as providing data for me to be able to analyse on their experiences of the workshops, the questionnaires also helped me to plan what to do next. I was able to understand what participants enjoyed most, what they found the most challenging, if there were any particular drama skills they wished to develop or topics they wished to explore. In the context of my teaching methodology, as outlined in Chapter 3, this meant that I could then adapt the work to suit the needs and interests of particular groups, whilst continuing to develop their experiences of *Le Jeu, complicité* and *disponibilité*.

At the end of two periods of workshops, many people in the Arts Centre group were keen to continue so I ran two further series of workshops and three new people joined the final workshop. By this time, I had become more familiar with Moustakas’ heuristic methods and sought to find other ways of collecting data through asking questions that were more open and more closely aligned to a heuristic framework. The aim being to try and collect ‘full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person’ (Moustakas 1990 p. 39). I therefore did not ask
participants specific questions but asked them to describe their experience of the workshops, what this experience meant to them and their reflections on how they felt during and after the workshops. I did still ask them to comment on any impact or change they experienced in their health, wellbeing and creativity. One of the consequences of these further workshops is that I do have more data for this group than the other three groups. I discuss the implications of this in 4.7.

**Post-it notes**

I used post-it notes with two groups, the Rural group and the Arts Centre group. This was to see if it would be a useful and attractive way to collect data midway through the period of workshops for people who might not want to write a lot on a questionnaire. Participants wrote short sentences about their experiences on post-it notes which were then shared anonymously on large sheets of paper under the headings of Creativity, Health and Wellbeing. It worked well with the Rural group which was very small and the individuals were interested in reading and then discussing each other’s observations. The Arts Centre group engaged less with this data collection method and I only had a few responses, so I decided not try it with other groups which were larger and where time constraints meant that we focused more on the practical work during the session times.

**Individual journals**

In order to gain more in-depth perspectives from participants on their experiences, I offered each person a notebook to fill in at home, so that they could write down their reflections, as in a journal, on a week-to-week basis. I recognised that this would demand more commitment from participants than questionnaires at the beginning and end of a series of workshop sessions and that not everyone might want or be able to do this. The participants in the Rural and Day Centre groups chose not to take the notebooks. Many participants in the Community Centre and Arts Centre groups did take them and ultimately six people from the Arts Centre group filled them in and returned them to me.

The journals were unstructured and gave participants opportunities to write what and how they wished. They could describe both their workshop experiences and also how they felt in between workshops in greater depth. Willig (2013) explains that journals are useful because they mean that participants can write in real time whilst the workshop is still fresh in their memory, rather than retrospectively at the end when their circumstances might have changed and/or they might have forgotten details. As with the questionnaires, participants could tell me personal things that they might prefer not
to share with the whole group. The six journals that I received gave me rich and nuanced perspectives on these participants’ particular experiences of the workshops, as I discuss further in the next chapter.

**Short stories**

Story-telling is also used as a data collection method within phenomenological and heuristic research in order to gain different perspectives on an experience. I had not planned to use it initially with participants as I did not wish to over burden them with more writing. However, the year following the last workshops I was involved in some unrelated drama work with Dutch colleague, Loes Hegger (introduced in Chapter 1). Hegger used a creative process of asking people to write short stories in five sentences in order to distil the essence of an experience they had had previously. As this aligned well with aims of phenomenology and heuristics to understand the core, or ‘spirit’ of an experience, I decided that it would be interesting to experiment with this approach with some of the participants. It would be a way of asking them to reflect, several months later, on what they considered to have been the key elements and impacts of their drama workshop experience. I contacted the participants for whom I had email addresses and asked for volunteers to participate in this new data collection experiment. A total of 11 people responded. The five sentence stories started with the age they were when they joined the drama workshops, followed by four sentences beginning: I felt…I experienced… I learnt… I discovered… Their stories offered a succinct reflection of their memory and feelings about the experience.

**Focus groups and informal discussion**

I ran two focus groups with the Arts Centre group and one with the Rural group. I also had some short informal discussions with the Day Centre group during the session time. As time was limited it was not possible to do a longer focus group with this group. It was also not possible with the Community Centre group because the time constraints of the room booking meant that there was no additional time for discussion with participants outside of the workshop sessions, which I did not want to shorten.

Although focus groups are not commonly used in phenomenological and heuristic research, I considered that they could be interesting and useful because of the collaborative nature of the work and the interactive experiences of participants in the workshops. Focus groups enable participants to share their own personal views and experiences and at the same time listen to, make comments on and ask questions about other people’s perspectives. Therefore, the data collected results from the interaction and dialogue between all the participants involved (Sparkes and Smith,
This enables the researcher to find out what might be of particular significance to individuals and to the group collectively and also how they might make sense of the phenomenon together (Bryman, 2001). Thorne (2016) contends that focus groups that specifically bring together participants who have previously responded through individual interviews, or in my case individual questionnaires, can be very valuable in assisting the researcher in refining their understanding of the shared phenomenon. I would argue that all these aspects of focus groups supported my application of Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ approach to the study, as discussed in Chapter 3. By listening, questioning and participating in a shared conversation, both the participants and I were able to gain multiple perspectives on how each person had experienced the work. Together, these different perspectives could lead us to expand our collective horizons of understanding.

The focus groups took place at the end of each period of workshops, either before or after the session. Participants came voluntarily, with no pressure to attend. By running the focus groups at the end, rather than the beginning of the workshop periods, the Arts Centre group were already comfortable working and talking together. The Rural group already knew one another well and were used to sharing thoughts and feelings. I reminded everyone that the discussion was confidential and that any comments used would be anonymised. The focus groups were semi-structured conversations that I recorded and later transcribed for analysis. I started by asking participants what they had enjoyed most about the workshops. I then asked what they had found most challenging and what benefits, if any, they felt they had experienced from their participation. In the second focus group with the Arts Centre participants, I asked the people who had attended both terms of workshops to say if they felt there had been any difference. Overall, I aimed to ask open-ended questions so as not to overly direct the conversation and I encouraged participants to take turns in speaking. Very often participants responded to one another’s comments, and this took the conversation into different directions not necessarily guided by me. There was much lively and collective dialogue in each of the focus group sessions.

Visual data

In addition to creating a variety of ways for participants to give me verbal feedback on their experiences, I also used photos and video to capture key elements of the physical, embodied and playful nature of the work we did. Sparkes and Smith (2014, p.105) describe visual methods as offering ‘a different way of ‘knowing’ the world, which goes beyond knowledge constructed and communicated through written and spoken word alone’. The collection of visual data was sometimes opportunistic, when I
was able to pick up my iPad to photograph or record a moment in time, or sometimes
planned, when I agreed with participants to record a piece of work, a tableau or an
improvisation. I took photos to capture the non-verbal aspects of the workshop
experiences, focusing on participants’ use of body language: gesture, facial expression
and physical and creative interactions between group participants. I took video to
record participants’ movement through space and their collaborative improvisations.
Whilst doing this, I was aware that video, in particular, could possibly change
participants’ behaviour and held this in mind throughout the process. Overall, the visual
data served to assist me with recall and review of sessions, to view participants’
engagement from a different perspective and to document the work, illustrating specific
exercises or activities.

Researcher notes

Alongside collecting data from participants, as discussed in the previous sections, I
also kept my own journal in which I wrote field notes. These notes included: the
workshop session plans; reflections on how I felt the sessions had gone; things that I
had done differently from planned and why; what I planned to do next; observations on
participants’ verbal or physical responses to the work and participant comments from
within sessions. The notes therefore served a variety of purposes: they were an
essential part of the practical week-to-week planning of the workshops and also
enabled me to recall and reflect on what had happened several months after the
workshops had finished. They were also useful to aid my reflexivity as a researcher
which I discuss in detail in section 4.9.

The notes were also the primary form of data collection from the Day Centre group. I
had no written data from individual participants in this group because several people
had difficulties with writing and reading for either cognitive or functional reasons. The
sessions were too short to be able to assist people with filling in questionnaires, except
for the initial starting questionnaire and consent forms, and staff did not have time to
help participants with form filling outside of sessions. The researcher notes therefore
became an essential method of collecting data from this group. I was able to write
down participants’ comments made during sessions and in informal discussions, as
well as my observations of how individuals had responded physically or emotionally to
different activities. It was also useful to be able to capture participants’ responses at
the time, rather than asking them to reflect some time after event, as several people
experienced some memory loss.
The final reason for keeping field notes was because heuristic research, as outlined in Chapter 3, places the researcher at the centre of the inquiry. It was therefore important that I recorded and reflected upon my own experiences and feelings throughout the workshops process. The notes were key to situating myself within the study process and reflecting on how the work was affecting me as much as the participants. In this way, I was able to chart how my experiences and understanding developed though the workshop periods.

4.8 Data analysis

4.8i The approach to data analysis

The aims of the data analysis for this study were to generate understandings of what the experiences of the drama workshops meant to participants, in relation to their creativity, health and wellbeing, within the context of ageing. In Chapter 3.3i, I explore theatre-making as an embodied activity that integrates mind and body. Kemp (2012, p. xix) describes acting as ‘a holistic bundle of simultaneous activities’, it may therefore initially appear contradictory to try and separate participants’ experiences of the different aspects of the work. However, as Kemp (ibid.) continues, ‘separation of these activities is necessary for any in-depth study, but is inevitably artificial and suggests an apparent prioritization of elements’. In order for me to fully understand participants' experiences and find key themes it was important to analyse different aspects of the activities, whilst not giving greater significance to one experience over another. The separation was made in accordance with how participants described their drama experiences, which they themselves often separated into physical and mental experiences. At the same time, I also sought to maintain an awareness of the overall holistic and integrated nature of work.

I was also aware, as discussed in 4.7i, that the process of translating an embodied, physical and emotional experience into written or spoken words is in itself a difficult task. Each of the 42 participants’ different articulation and cognitive skills, prior knowledge and self-confidence, would affect the ways in which they might describe or interpret a mood, a feeling or an observation, arising from the creative intervention. However, despite these differences of expression, the intention was to find key themes in the data. Alongside this, and in keeping with the hermeneutic and heuristic frameworks for this study, I also reflected on my own experiences of the workshops. The aim was not to try and reach one ‘right’ interpretation of the data but rather, by investigating the phenomenon from multiple perspectives including my own, that it would be possible to reach a ‘fusion of horizons’. In this way it might be possible to
reach shared meanings. These meanings could lead to a better understanding of the affective nature of the creative experience, combined with greater knowledge of any possible health and wellbeing benefits for participants and possibly for other older people.

4.8ii Data analysis process

I used a combination of thematic and heuristic processes to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data. Thematic analysis is considered to be a ‘flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78). I followed Braun and Clarke’s six-step guide to thematic analysis which is a recursive process involving moving backwards and forward, as required, over time, between the different steps. They describe the process as ‘searching across the data set in order to ‘find repeated patterns of meaning’ (ibid. p. 86). Their thematic analysis process also intersected well with Moustakas’ (1990) eight-step heuristic guide for analysis of data. Both processes emphasise the need for the researcher to first immerse themselves in the data, to become intimately familiar with all its complexities. The researcher then makes notes and/or codes the data in detail. The codes are grouped together, looking for patterns or themes. This leads to making meanings and understanding, as well as returning to the raw data to check validity. In relation to this study, I searched for participants’ experiences of the drama work in relation to the perceived benefits to their creativity, health and wellbeing. Then, having searched under these headings, I began to look for patterns and themes between different participants’ experiences.

As part of the analysis process, I also followed Moustakas’ heuristic process of creating in-depth depictions of the individuals involved. As the total sample size was 42, practically, due to time constraints, it was not possible to do this for each individual, so I selected the five participants for whom I had the greatest amount of data. These were people who had filled in journals as well as questionnaires and also participated in focus groups. Whilst they were all from the Arts Centre group, they did reflect diversity in that they included: a spectrum of ages - 55, 60, 61, 74 and 84; people who had done some drama before and those who had done none; two who lived with severe physical pain and one with depression; two people were physically very flexible and mobile and three less so; two people lived on their own and three with a partner. I wrote five depictions or portraits of these individuals by examining what they said in detail to get a deeper and richer perspective on their experience. Having created portraits of these five people, I then looked at the similarities and differences of their experiences and finally compared and synthesised these with the whole data set.
Again, following Moustakas’ heuristic guide, I also sought to explore possibilities for a creative synthesis from the data, in order to understand it from other perspectives. These creative ways of looking at and presenting the data included:

- Writing an imagined conversation between a participant and a voice specialist using their real words
- Combining various participants’ comments into an ‘I like, I enjoy, I think, I love’ poem
- Asking participants for whom I had email addresses to write about their experience in a five-sentence story, as described in 4.7ii, whilst simultaneously writing my own versions about them following the same format. In this way I could compare and contrast both my and their perspectives on their drama journey. I also wrote a five-sentence story for myself, reflecting on my experience throughout the workshop period.

The timetable for the data analysis process covered a 15 month period (see appendix 10). It started following the end of the second term of workshops in late Spring 2019 and continued till August 2020. It was often an iterative and messy process, involving large and small sheets of paper, post-it notes, coloured pens, thoughts jotted down in books, scraps of paper, on the computer, at different times of day and night. These were then organised into codes, groups, maps and charts in different formats. The aim was to become deeply familiar with the material from varying perspectives and then test out ways of grouping themes together in order to make sense and meaning of both the individual and collective experiences of the participants. There were also conversations with colleagues, friends and some of the participants. Each new examination of the data aimed to add to, refine and develop the coding, the themes and the analysis.

4.8iii Data analysis step by step

This section gives further detail on the data analysis process step by step, using Braun and Clarke’s headings for each step. The process was informed by Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis process and Moustakas’ heuristic inquiry guidance, as outlined above. It is important to note that steps 1-4 were recursive as new data were generated over the year-long time scale of the workshops. It was always necessary to revisit the original data to search for new patterns and meaning.

Step 1: Familiarisation
Familiarisation involved reading and re-reading the participants’ data. This included questionnaires, transcripts of focus group conversations, journals and post-it notes, together with my own researcher notes, in order to become deeply familiar with the data. The aim was to begin to actively search for meanings and patterns, with particular regard to participants’ experiences of their creativity, health and wellbeing and any benefits and challenges they reported in each of these areas.

**Step 2: Generating codes**

This step involved reading the data again in more depth and highlighting or coding aspects of the data that related specifically to experiences of creativity, health and wellbeing. Initial codes arose from participants’ perceptions and feelings about these experiences. For example: fun and laughter; getting to know one another; creative expression; creative confidence; spontaneity and liberation.

**Step 3: Searching for themes**

Once the coding was finished, the codes were then grouped into sub-themes. For example: fun and laughter and getting to know one another were brought together under the sub-theme of ‘Play’. Creative expression; creative confidence; spontaneity and liberation were grouped under the sub-theme of ‘Explore, Experiment and Express’.

**Step 4: Reviewing the themes**

This stage involved re-reading the data and reviewing the sub-themes to date, to make sure that they were accurate and representative. Sub-themes were discussed with members of the supervision team and other current and retired academics, as well as some of the participants. This process supported trustworthiness of the data analysis which is discussed in more detail in section 4.9.

**Step 5: Defining and naming themes**

Step 5 involved the final synthesis of sub-themes into themes and the defining and naming of three overarching themes. These were: The Physical Self; The Mental, Psychological and Emotional Self; The Individual and the Group. For example, the sub-theme of ‘Play’ came under the theme of ‘The Individual and the Group’, the sub-theme ‘Explore, Experiment, Express’ was placed under ‘Mental, Psychological and Emotional Self’. Figure 7, below shows how codes, sub-themes and themes developed.
Figure 7. Mind map of codes, sub-themes and themes
Step 6: Producing the report

Chapters 5–9 of this thesis are what Braun and Clarke (2006, p.93) call the ‘write-up of the report’ on the study. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the study findings, using the theme, sub-theme and code headings as a framework for the presentation. Chapter 8 discusses the findings within the context of current literature, policy and practice, and discusses how the findings answer the research aims of the study. Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by: reflecting first on my own experience as an artist, researcher and older person taking on this research work; discussing the contribution this study makes to original knowledge; examining the limitations of the study; outlining recommendations for future research and practice. Finally, I discuss the legacy of the work.

4.9 Rigour and credibility

I used three key criteria to ensure rigour and credibility with regard to the study methods. These were: Epistemological Integrity; Systematic and Messy Analysis; Reflexivity and Member checking.

Epistemological Integrity

Thorne says that:

For the findings to be credible, the research process must reveal a research question that is consistent with the stated epistemological standpoint and an interpretation of data sources and interpretive strategies that follows logically from that question. (Thorne, 2016, p. 233)

In order to maintain epistemological integrity throughout the research study, I continuously referred back to my original research question and aims, exploring the experiences of older people participating in physical theatre actor training workshops, based on the practices of Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier, and the impact of these workshop experiences on their creativity, health and wellbeing. As these were embodied and lived experiences, the workshop design and running, data collection and interpretation were all consistent within a phenomenological and heuristic framework. The research process then led towards gaining multiple perspectives on the experience and ultimately a ‘fusion of horizons’ between my own and the participants’ understandings.
Systematic and Messy Analysis

The data analysis process was based on a step-by-step approach, informed by Braun and Clarke, and Moustakas, foregrounding participants’ own words and descriptions of their experiences. Whilst this was on the one hand a systematic process it was also often messy, involving a repeated to-ing and fro-ing between the data and experimenting with different ways of coding, analysis and interpretation. This was to make sure that on the one hand I did not ignore anything that might be useful, whilst at the same time enabling me to explore a range of creative approaches to viewing the data that might lead to alternative or unexpected interpretations. An approach such as this, that is both is systematic and messy, can involve what Hughes et al. (2011, p. 207) describe as, ‘a series of crossovers and confluences between discursive research practices and creative practices’. This is consistent with placing creative theatre-making at the heart of the research. Creative practices and experiences can be complex, not easy to encapsulate and can be inconsistently described, therefore, a synthesis of both systematic and creative analysis methods served well to explore the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives.

Reflexivity and member checking

Throughout the research and writing of this thesis I have oscillated between the roles of artist, teacher and researcher. At different points during the process one or other of these roles has taken on greater authority, often all three have been inextricably intertwined and sometimes in tension with one another. I have fluctuated between being both an insider and an outsider during the research process, as described in 3.3iii. I was particularly conscious that this could affect the power dynamics between myself and participants. I was the artistic expert with all the a priori knowledge and experience that I brought to that position, and also the academic researcher, designing and running the study. I planned the workshop programme in terms of structure and content, ran and participated in the workshops and collected the data that I would later analyse and interpret. These multi-layered, insider/outsider roles and responsibilities would therefore impact on the relationships between me and the participants, during and after the workshop sessions.

The advantages of being an insider researcher were that I had significant knowledge of the subject area and was also an older person, artist and teacher. All these experiences would inform the workshop process, the questions to be asked of participants and how their responses might be interpreted. A disadvantage was that what participants might choose to say in the data collection process might be influenced by my relationship with them as the workshop leader. Whilst I could
emphasise that the research was about their experience and that there was no right or wrong answer, it was still possible that their responses would be affected by factors such as: how well they felt they knew or liked me; how much they wanted to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear and how confident or honest they wanted to be about their thoughts and feelings. Whilst this could be seen as problematic, at the same time, a complete outsider researcher, who might ask different questions and get different responses, would not, however, have the same depth of experience or insights concerning the subject area, in order to analyse and make sense of participants’ experiences.

Both Hellawell (2006) and Sparkes and Smith (2014) argue that, in the first instance, the key to solving the insider/outside conundrum is to view it as a continuum that goes from a position of complete outsider observer to one of complete participant observer. Hellawell contends that the researcher should then try and work out where they are on the continuum, whilst Sparkes and Smith posit that the researcher role may shift to and fro along the continuum. In terms of my own position on the continuum, I consider that I was closer to the end of complete participant observer (insider). At the same time, whilst I participated in many of the workshop activities it was not on the level as the other participants and at times, I frequently deliberately stepped out of an activity in order to observe from the outside, even though I still had insider knowledge of the phenomenon. Hellawell (2006 p. 492) contends that locating oneself on this continuum, even if one’s position later moves, is a valuable step in guiding the researcher towards what he calls the ‘secret garden of reflexivity’.

Reflexivity is an essential part of acknowledging the researcher’s thinking, bias and their impact on what is being studied, regardless of where they position themself on the insider/outsider continuum (Richards and Morse, 2013). In their guide to reflexivity, Ramani et al. (2018) propose that the researcher should report on how their beliefs and assumptions may have influenced the research process. The researcher should also endeavour to include in their research, diverse cases and a diversity of participant perspectives. Practicing reflexivity requires the development and incorporation of a critical self-consciousness throughout the study process. In order to do this, I wrote researcher journal notes throughout the workshop period, reflecting on the sessions and my observations of how people had responded. I used these notes to critically review what I felt had gone well and why, as well as what I and/or others had found challenging and how I would plan the next steps.
I was aware that my own prior knowledge, life experiences and experiences of theatre-making, would affect how I selected, discussed, interpreted and made meaning from the participants’ data. It was also always possible that I could misunderstand or misinterpret a participant’s words (Denscombe, 1998). Reflexivity, therefore, also meant stopping at each point in the data analysis process, to reconsider and reflect on the decisions I was making, to make transparent my own bias, acknowledging how my own experiences and contexts could influence the inquiry outcomes and how my own perspectives might have shaped the research (Etherington, 2004; Willig 2013). I sought to foreground participants’ own voices, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that my selection and editing of words would be influenced by my own subjective perspectives on the work, my own values and beliefs (Fine, 1992; Creswell, 2013). I therefore critically reflected at each stage of the analysis process, noting how I was reaching decisions and the influences on what I thought and felt as I interpreted participants’ experiences.

Ramani et al. (2018) also propose that the researcher should ensure data triangulation to justify the findings. To this end, I discussed the data analysis processes, findings and interpretations with my supervision team, as well as with other current and retired academics who had experience of thematic analysis, in order to gain alternative perspectives on my interpretations. In relation to checking credibility of data interpretation with participants, I member checked with two participants through informal discussion. I also sent a draft of the findings chapters to a number of the participants who volunteered to read them and tell me if they felt that the findings concurred with and reflected accurately their experiences.

4.10 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the design of the research study and the methods used for the recruitment of fieldwork groups. I have described the make-up of the groups in detail and the ethical practices undertaken when working with them. I have outlined the creative intervention and how it was adapted to suit different groups. I have also explained the data collection and analysis methods and how I sought to deal with researcher bias and ensure credibility of interpretation. In the next three chapters I describe my findings from the research.
Chapter 5 Findings – The Physical Self

5.1 Introduction

In the following three chapters I examine my findings from the data analysis. Following the data analysis process described in Chapter 4, the findings are grouped under three themes, as shown in figure 7 in the previous chapter. These are: The Physical Self; The Mental, Psychological and Emotional Self; The Individual and the Group. The themes reflect the overarching ways in which participants described their experiences of the work. In general, they commented separately on their physical and mental experiences, whilst also often describing the work as being holistic, integrating mind and body. I therefore first examine the different physical and mental experiences and then discuss participants' holistic experiences in more detail at the end of Chapter 6. Due to the overall holistic nature of the work, the finding chapters and themes are intertwined and interrelated. This means that the same data may appear in different chapters, viewed from slightly different perspectives. There are sub-themes within each chapter and these, like the overarching themes, are very much linked together. As I draw data together under different sub-themes and themes, I seek to highlight patterns, find commonality and also identify negative cases amongst participants' experiences, that I will discuss further in Chapter 8. At all times, I aim to represent participants' experiences accurately and respectfully, as I draw out meanings and interpretations from their words in relation to the aims of this research study, to explore their perceptions of their drama experiences in relation to their creativity, health and wellbeing.

All quotations from participants are shown in italics, using their punctuation in the written words. I have used my own punctuation in sentences transcribed from focus group meetings. Where the quote refers to something said, or written, by a participant in an earlier sentence, I have put my own words in, in square brackets, to assist the understanding of the quotation. The quotes come from 42 different participants, each of whom has a pseudonym. I have also used the initials of the group that they come from and their age, in order to assist the reader to visualise and remember individuals. The group initials are as follows:

AC - Arts Centre group
CC - Community Centre group
DC - Day Centre group
R - Rural group
5.2 Overview of the Physical Self

I have distinguished two key aspects of how participants described their experiences of the drama and physical theatre work, in relation to their physical self. The first is how the work affected their awareness and use of their body, primarily in relation to their physical health. The second aspect is how they experienced and used their body as a vehicle for creative self-expression and theatre-making. The chapter is therefore laid out under two main headings, Body Awareness and Creative Expression. Body Awareness comprises the sub-headings of Flexibility and Mobility; Posture, Balance and Coordination; Confidence. Creative Expression comprises the sub-headings of Creating with the Body and Learning Physical Theatre-Making Skills.

5.3 Body Awareness

‘I discovered an improved body awareness, the reason why I trip up so much, and some things to do about it!’ (Sally, AC, 63)

‘I’ve never been very good at bodies. I’ve sort of ignored it. If you take a bit of notice of actually what happens, it can be helpful’ (Catherine, AC, 84)

‘Some of the warm up movements have been really effective and encouraged me to observe my physical actions more closely’ (Grace, AC, 67)

The ‘waking up’ of the body, using Feldenkrais Method and other gentle physical exercises, meant that participants’ began to develop greater awareness of their own physicality. Through first observing how they stand, where their weight is, how they move and then paying attention to how each joint or muscle is connected they could then begin to use their body differently and possibly in a more economical and efficient manner. Catherine, quoted above, also remarked, ‘I have been very aware of what my grandson said, “Remember your body is not just for carrying your head around”’. This greater awareness of her body led her to write, ‘I have been most interested between the abilities of each side of the body and [when going up and down stairs] I have realised that I much prefer to hold on with my right hand’. Gaining awareness of what one does habitually with one’s body can be viewed as a first step in choosing to do things differently, exploring possibilities for more effective movement options should one wish. This is indicated in Sally’s words:

‘Definite improved body awareness – makes me think more about balance, and be a little less clumsy’ (Sally, AC, 63)

The words Sally has underlined, ‘think’ and ‘be’, indicate her realisation that by turning her awareness to how she uses her body, she can subsequently begin to act in a more effective manner.
Some participants recognised that they might have lost some previous awareness of their bodies that they had had when they were younger, and that it could be beneficial to reconnect with joints and muscles they might not have been using recently:

‘Physical exercises that help us use some of our muscles that some of us have not used before or have not used for a long time’ (Clara, CC, 68)

‘As I've got older I realise, since coming here, that I have forgotten about body awareness’ (Sally, AC, 63)

‘My experience of more fluid movements has really helped me to move better. I've realised that my body was stuck’ (Martha, AC, 59)

‘I can feel it has worked muscles I have rarely used’ (Debbie, AC, 61)

‘It introduces physical exercise/movement in a gentle non-threatening way. It highlighted the areas that I need to strengthen, for example knees and shoulders’ (Danielle, CC, 56)

‘It’s a great opportunity to come and just stretch a bit remember that I’ve got a body that doesn’t just sit down’ (Josie, AC, 60)

As can be seen above, these participants recognised that there were physical habits that they had adopted over time, often without realising. Consequently, they had stopped using some muscles and/or had begun to move only in certain and sometimes limiting ways. The participants generally felt that it was beneficial to become more aware of how they were using, or not using, their body and then begin to explore a greater range of movement.

5.3i Flexibility and Mobility

As participants gained greater awareness of their bodies, so they frequently described their shoulders, using words such as, ‘looser’, ‘freer’, ‘more relaxed’, ‘stretched’; their arms, ‘longer’, ‘heavier’; or their feet, ‘lighter’, as a result of doing specific exercises. Several participants said they felt more physically relaxed and noticed improved mobility and flexibility which they described as being of benefit to their health and wellbeing:

‘I feel more agile than I have done recently’ (Maite, CC, 70)

‘I am sure if it was a regular activity there would be health benefits. Some of the warm up movement exercises felt soothing as well as stretching’ (Tracey, CC, 59)
‘Exercises are making me much freer in the joints and back to sweeping gestures rather than tight’ (Patricia, R, 79)

‘Physically looser, more centred/awake’ (Josie, AC, 60)

‘I could feel how it had relaxed and loosened up the related parts of the body and made them more responsive’ (Annie, AC, 55)

‘Encouraged me to think about loosening up and flexibility’ (Alice, AC, 62)

‘I found it particularly interesting to be able to sit down gracefully and I love that’ (Grace, AC, 67)

Overall participants noted that they experienced greater physical flexibility in general and more control over how they used their bodies. Additionally, two participants commented on the exercises helping them with specific health issues. Martha (AC, 59) wrote that she had had two frozen shoulders over the previous six years. She said, after four weeks, that the Feldenkrais exercises were ‘really good for my shoulders’, noting that, ‘the gradual process is such a different approach from physiotherapy’. Debbie (AC, 61) wrote at the end of the final workshops:

‘I have had cancer twice and a double mastectomy and I have arthritis all of which cause me ongoing pain and I find it hard to be mobile – The drama sessions have improved my mobility, I find I can walk more easily, have less pain and feel more energised after them’

Debbie also said that her partner had noticed her improved mobility and flexibility over the duration of the workshops. She wrote that on occasions she had found some of the exercises difficult but nonetheless felt that it was always worthwhile trying to do them. She particularly found difficult an exercise designed to assist getting onto the floor and up again in an efficient and economic manner that involved spiralling the body. It was an exercise that even some of the more mobile people found challenging initially but recognised could have long term benefit and build people’s confidence should they fall. It was also an exercise that probably required longer practice to master than we had in the sessions. Debbie wrote, ‘still can’t get up and down from the floor easily but trying is good exercise’ and Hilary (AC, 80) wrote, ‘I learned how to get up from the floor. When I got home and tried it for myself, I found I could not do it properly’. Jess (CC, 65) and Grace (AC, 67), both of whom had fewer mobility issues said, respectively, ‘the Feldenkrais has been interesting and I found the spiral quite taxing (good thing)’ and ‘I found it particularly interesting to be able to sit down gracefully and I love that! The way you taught us you know, the tripod, I can’t get up! But that’s um, great.’ Despite
participants finding this exercise challenging, many showed motivation in wanting to keep trying.

Two other people also commented that they had found some of the physical exercises challenging but nonetheless felt they could be beneficial to their health:

‘I don’t always enjoy the physical movement (and have been quite restricted in the last month) but I do think the stretching etc. is making me a bit more mobile’ (Mary, CC, 72)

‘I think every individual has something that they find more difficult, as I expressed before, I find the floor exercises although I do feel relaxed after them but some of them I find difficult’ (Rachel, AC, 71)

5.3ii Posture, Balance and Coordination

Participants’ comments across the groups indicated that several people noticed improvements in their posture, balance and coordination as a consequence of doing exercises that focused on greater body awareness, combined with ones specifically about ‘standing taller’ and ‘walking lighter’. Some comments include:

‘It’s taught me to be aware of trying to be straight, of sitting up straight, walking straight, which can only be good because as you get older you droop, and you don’t need to droop’ (Catherine, AC, 84)

‘More aware of posture, sometimes now walking more upright’ (Karen, AC, 58)

‘I am taking notice of my posture and balance’ (Alex, AC, 65)

‘Helped me to enhance the equilibrium, coordination and posture’ (Clara, CC, 68)

‘It’s been really good for coordination of brain and body’ (Lucy, R, 76)

Hilary (80) and Catherine (84), the oldest members in the Arts Centre group wrote that the workshops had particularly helped their balance. Catherine noted the practical benefit of improved balance, saying, ‘I can stand on one leg much better than I used to be able to and so it does make putting my trousers on in the morning so much easier’. These experiences indicate that the work might support people to maintain independence in the longer term.

Donald (R, 94) also noticed some beneficial effects of the work on his walking and pain levels. He has Parkinson’s disease and therefore has some difficulty with movement, speech and eyesight. Donald told me at the end of the fourth week that his ‘arthritis
had eased off' and that his feet felt 'lighter'. Then, at the end of the fifth session, he asked the group to help him lengthen his stick as he felt that it was too short for him, indicating that he was now walking more upright.

There were two people who overall did not find the exercises beneficial for them, for different reasons. Olivia (AC, 74) who has Fibromyalgia would frequently do the exercises despite me suggesting that she watch if it was painful. In the focus group she said: ‘I haven’t enjoyed all this lying about, I know it’s important to relax yourself, but I haven’t enjoyed doing it because my body is older, although you’ve said don’t do it if it hurts, when you’ve got an older body and you see these young things doing it, you think I’ll do it then you injure yourself and it hurts’. For Olivia, the best way she felt she could deal with her pain was through the drama games and improvisations as they were fun and distraction for her.

Sandra (CC, 70-75) also said that she had not enjoyed some of the exercises as she felt that they confirmed things she was not good at, ‘balancing’ and ‘coordination’. Unlike Olivia, Sandra did not enjoy the games and improvisation either. She appeared to feel self-conscious about joining in with activities, despite encouragement from the rest of the group. Sandra often preferred to sit out and watch the other participants, writing, ‘I have learnt that it is nicer for me to watch than to participate.’. Unfortunately, however, because the room was very cold, this was often not comfortable for her either.

Overall, positive experiences and perceptions of the impacts of the physical exercises were reported by most participants in the Arts Centre and the Rural groups. From observations recorded in my journal and also based on comments from participants, there are likely to be a number of reasons for this: in the Arts Centre group, the space we used was at an arts venue and therefore environmentally suited to the kind of body-focused work we were doing; the group was very cohesive, with participants commenting on trusting one another and feeling part of a team, so they were therefore likely to feel more confident in trying new things out; there was relatively good continuity within the group and so time for individuals to become aware of changes in their body’s function; the group comprised more people in their 60s than other groups and included several articulate people from a relatively high socio-economic background and having had a variety of other cultural experiences. Additionally, a large proportion of the group did, or had done, yoga, dance and/or Pilates, so they could both relate the work to other physical activities and have a range of words to describe their experiences. In the Rural group, similarly, the group knew and trusted one
another, so had the confidence to ‘have a go’ (Gemma, 70-75) and there was good continuity over the weeks. Although the space was less conducive to physical work and comprised older individuals with more physical challenges, nonetheless, because the group was small, I was more able to tailor what we did to individual needs and interests. However, in contrast to the Arts Centre group, we did not do as many weeks, so it is not possible to tell what impact there might have been had we continued over a longer period of time.

The Community Centre and the Day Centre groups commented less on any positive impacts of the physical work. In the Community Centre group, in the first term, the room was not conducive to focused physical work, it was cold and the floor was hard, this reduced the range of exercises we could do and also to some extent affected participants’ attitude to the work. Participants commented more on the impacts of the work in the second term when we changed spaces and the make-up of the group was also different. There was also less continuity regarding participants in this group, in that the group membership changed over the course of the programme and some participants attended for a limited number of sessions. Despite this, even some people who only came two or three times reported that they noticed some difference in their body’s flexibility and mobility.

With regard to the Day Centre group, the overall lack of mobility within the group and my inexperience in working with people with physical and cognitive impairments made it challenging for me to find activities that participants reported to be noticeably beneficial. The majority of individuals used walking aids and some were in wheelchairs which meant that they used their muscles in limited ways. Some people found it painful to do exercises that involved lifting their arms and several people said that they found the exercises quite tiring. However, despite some participants participating in the exercises less than others, those people that did, reported noticing at the time that their shoulders felt looser and freer and their arms longer.

5.3iii Confidence

In the sessions I encouraged participants to ‘have a go’, whilst always reiterating that the Feldenkrais and other physical exercises aimed to be gentle, exploratory and playful, and that they should never do anything that was painful or try to go beyond what they were comfortable with doing. If someone was finding that an exercise was too difficult then I would suggest that they make the movement smaller or sit out and visualise themselves doing it, rather than actually doing it. I also told the groups that I had had a hip replacement and that consequently I found some things easier to do
than others, so there was no pressure to do everything. With the exception of Olivia, described above, most participants who found particular exercises too difficult were confident to sit out for short periods of time. Pamela (DC, 80) would often do an exercise just on one side of her body as her other shoulder hurt from a fall. She would then watch whilst the rest of the group worked on the other side. Rachel (AC, 71) and Catherine (AC 84) had this exchange in a focus group:

Rachel: *If I’m finding it difficult I don’t feel embarrassed if I just get up and sit and watch, it’s OK.*

Catherine: *I know, there is a lot of freedom, you know, one is encouraged to join in…*

Rachel: *Yes…*

Catherine: *…at everything, but it doesn’t matter if you don’t…*

Rachel: *No, exactly you…*

Catherine: *You don’t, you, you don’t feel, as you say, sort of embarrassed or that anybody, anybody is going to be upset…*

At the same time, the following exchange between myself and Gemma (R, 70-75) from the rural group indicates that she might normally have chosen to sit out but was glad in the end that she had not. Probably because the group was very small, she felt initially that it was hard to opt out. Equally, because the group was very small and everyone had some mobility problems, we went at a fairly slow pace and I could more easily give people individual attention than in the larger groups. Gemma gained self-confidence as a result of rising to the challenge:

Me: *Are there any things you’ve not enjoyed?*

Gemma: *I must say I’ve had some anxiety about some, somethings, but only because I was worrying about my shortcomings as you say, we’ve all got physical problems and because I…*

Me: *And do you feel that anxiety is still there?*

Gemma: *No, no I think to a large extent you, you kind of laid it to rest, having persuaded me to have a go instead of just sitting out and saying I can’t do it and the limbering up exercises have been, been good haven’t they?*

Throughout the workshops I was therefore aware that some people found the physical exercises more difficult than others and that it was very important to gently encourage everyone and build their confidence whilst continuously reminding people to stop if anything began to hurt. Some, like Donald and Gemma appeared to enjoy the challenge and gained confidence as a result, whereas for others the challenge was too
great and in the case of Sandra, described in the previous section, even undermined her confidence. I sought to find a balance between simple and more complex exercises and between exercises that might have been viewed as being for their own sake and ones that were physical but of a more playful and improvisatory nature as I discuss in section 5.4.

**Body Confidence**

Overall, for several participants, the physical exercises appeared to boost their confidence in what they could do with their bodies, both inside and outside the sessions. Grace (AC, 67) wrote, ‘I have developed greater confidence in my degree of flexibility in day to day use.’ Indeed, some participants indicated surprise at feeling that they had achieved more than they had thought they would have been capable of at the outset. This was particularly so with the Rural group:

‘I’ve moved more than I thought I would be able to do in a landlocked situation. I know I can move in water but I didn’t know I could move on land’ (Patricia, 79)

‘We’ve all got physical limitations and I think we’ve done pretty well’ (Lucy, 76)

This group also expressed surprised at how much Donald, the oldest member with Parkinson’s, had been able to do, exchanging these words in a focus group when he was not there:

Patricia: *For Donald it’s been quite amazing I think, he’s been able to…*

Gemma: *Yes, how well he’s coped…*

Patricia: *…have a bash at everything…*

Not only did some participants gain greater confidence in their bodies during the sessions but they also described experiences outside the session. For example, Catherine wrote in her journal:

‘So glad you encouraged us to ‘walk tall’ – it is so easy not to especially as one gets old. Looking about in the street etc. people who hold themselves straight and tall look so much more alive.’

This reflects what I had observed about Catherine when she arrived at the session in the fifth week. I wrote in my journal ‘Catherine looking taller, face more open and smiling.’ This was also observed by one of the participants, Josie (60), who commented to me at the end of the session how much happier and more confident she thought Catherine appeared to be when she had arrived that morning.
Vocal confidence

The workshop sessions also focused on a physical approach to developing the voice, deepening the breathing, playing with pitch and projection and expanding vocal range. Participants indicated that they had gained confidence in using their voices in ways they would not do usually in everyday life, including screaming and shouting. Some people described a sense of greater wellbeing and others experienced improved articulation and communication:

‘I enjoy using my voice, I find that energises me’ (Mary, AC, 72)

‘Some of the verbal communications involving sound/song I found empowering’ (Stacey, AC, 57)

‘Loved being given permission to scream!’ (Josie, AC, 60)

‘I enjoyed throwing my voice’ (Pamela, DC, 80-85)

‘I don’t often shout or use such a commanding voice in everyday life’ (Martha, AC, 59)

Emma (DC, 60-65) and Donald (R, 94) were the two participants who had particular speech difficulties and who were both noticeably clearer and louder at the end of the sessions. Emma returned to the Day Centre group in the Spring term having missed several of the Autumn sessions because she had had a stroke. Before the stroke, she had stood up and confidently recited Shakespeare to the group, saying that her ambition was to get an Oscar. When she returned, she was in a wheelchair and spoke only in a whisper. Emma often said that she was too tired to join the sessions and came to half of the ones we did that term. I observed and reported in my journal that at the start of sessions I could often barely hear her but by the end of the session she was frequently speaking much more clearly and audibly again. Whilst sometimes hesitant to join the sessions, once we had started Emma quickly became involved and often made suggestions as to how to extend a game, exercise or improvisation. For example, when throwing the ball to one another she suggested that instead of doing this randomly, that we tried to do it in alphabetical order of names and then in reverse alphabetical order. This was challenging for everyone but as Sylvia (75-80) said at the end of the session, ‘we’ve all laughed a lot’. Emma herself said ‘I go home and think about it in bed’, indicating that the sessions stimulated her creative thinking and motivated her participation.

Donald had told me that his Parkinson’s disease affected his ability to articulate well when he spoke. One day we recreated a scene from an old photograph, belonging to one of the group, of a college student rowing team. The participants first chose a
person in the photo that they wanted to be and then attempted to copy the individual's pose and gestures. They then entered an ‘as if’ role-play situation, imagining what their selected character might be saying. We improvised conversations and ‘hot-seated’ the different characters. Donald took on the character of the rowing team coach and in the improvisations he spoke completely fluently, with no obvious speech impairment at all. It was as if the imaginary situation had freed him from his everyday difficulties. Unfortunately, he did not attend the final focus group session, so I was unable to discuss the experience with him directly, but the other members of the group commented on Donald in the following dialogue:

Patricia:  *particularly the, err… role play*

Lucy:  *He was amazingly good, wasn’t he….? [talking over one another in agreement]*

Patricia:  *He was really good on that…*

Gemma:  *Yes, quite….*

Me:  *Because he said at the first session that he had problems with speaking and articulation but he didn’t at all, did he?*

Lucy:  *He didn’t when he got into the roles and things*

Gemma:  *No….*

Lucy:  *I think he thoroughly enjoyed it*

Patricia:  *Yes, it is physically part of his Parkinson’s but, he completely forgot it, when he was in role [yeses from others in background]*

Lucy:  *I think he enjoyed the challenge, I don’t think he thought he could do any of it…*

Patricia:  *…that’s right…*

Overall, one can see from these examples that use of the voice is a combination of breathing and use of vocal muscles, combined with letting go of previous ways of being and improved self-confidence. Finding a deeper and stronger voice was an empowering experience for several people.

5.4 Creative Expression

‘Good exercise but so different to exercise’ (Alice, AC, 62)

In Chapter 4, on methodology, I explained that a key aim of the work, based on Pagneux’s practice and including Feldenkrais Method exercises, was the ‘waking up’ of the body. This ‘waking up’ is a different kind of exercise from that of the gym or yoga
for example, which often focuses on strengthening, building or flexing particular muscles or joints. Whilst ‘waking up’ the theatre-making body may do these things and therefore be ‘good exercise’ for a healthier body, it is also, as Alice says, ‘so different from exercise’. One of the main aims of ‘waking up’ the body is to develop disponibilité in the individual, (readiness and openness) and ‘lifefulness’ (attentiveness and engagement), as a preparation for creative play and performance. Through the ‘waking up’ exercises the performer gains greater physical self-awareness and thereby more understanding and control of their body. As a result, they can explore and begin to use a wider range of gesture, movement and vocal possibilities in creative play than they might have done previously. Several participants in the workshops expressed some surprise at the amount of physical work we did, whilst at the same time noting that this had then made them think about theatre-making in a different way:

‘I was quite surprised by how physical it was. You don’t sort of see drama with physicality but in a way you should, it’s the characters you are playing or whatever’ (Isla, AC, 59)

‘I hadn’t realised how much physical movement we would do as part of a session. However, this has been a great experience’ (Martha, AC, 59)

‘A lot more physical-related exercises than I was expecting but I enjoyed them and found them useful’ (Annie, AC, 55)

‘One thing that was new was Sarah using the term “economy of movement” and that made perfect sense to me. As I have been writing this I’m more and more struck by the value of the physicality that we engaged in’ (Mary, CC, 72)

‘I now see drama as physical, being aware of others, distance, body language, eye contact’ (Rachel, AC, 71)

5.4i Creating with the body

Developing disponibilité, through heightened physical awareness, together with greater flexibility, lightness and range of movement, was the basis for exploring and expanding participants’ creative, physical theatre-making skills. Many participants commented on enjoying gaining skills in using their body to express themselves in new, non-verbal, creative ways. This was particularly noticeable amongst the Arts Centre group. This group comprised the most people who expressed an interest in specifically developing performance skills, although some participants from the other groups did make similar comments:

‘Reinforced for me that we can use our bodies as a tool in acting’ (Annie, AC, 55)

‘Being in the body and expressing’ (Josie, AC, 60)
'How to portray different moods/genres, with just a look, a word or change in posture’ (Isla, AC, 59)

'I really, personally, really enjoyed that balance between the creative drama side based on the physical side of it' (Sally, AC, 63)

'I have enjoyed learning to express myself without talking just by movement’ (Maite, CC, aged 70)

Disponibilité concerns the individual first being more conscious of and open to their own body and then gaining a heightened awareness of where they are and what they and others are doing, in the space around them. This experience is expressed in the following comments:

‘An awareness of where other people are in time and space’ (Grace, AC, 67)

'I have become more aware of myself in relation to others and the environment. I am more aware of posture and communication (Christine, AC, 74)

'Being aware of other people both physically and emotionally’ (Isla, AC, aged 59)

'Made me aware of the physicality and use of space rather than the words’ (Annie, AC, 55)

‘I can see they [the exercises] are designed to keep you alert, aware, in touch with others in the room. To help make connection, not verbally, using eye contact and touch’ (Debbie, AC, 61)

As participants gained greater awareness of their physical relationship to others and the environment, so they simultaneously began to work as a more cohesive group together, with greater complicité (rapport). They developed understanding of the use of space, form, rhythm, movement, action and gesture to make and convey theatrical meaning. The photos below show examples of creative, physical contact between participants, exploring different forms of non-verbal, imagistic communication.
Figure 8. Exploring fixed point and making physical connection with different parts of the body
These photographs are examples of an activity involving participants moving around the room, light, tall and making eye contact with one another. Then responding to a clap, they would stop in a fixed point (freeze), exploring new possibilities for gesture, connecting with one another through different parts of the body and creating playful, improvised group sculptures. These sculptures might be the catalyst for a few spontaneous words or phrases, indicating a possible dramatic relationship or situation. The improvised words would arise as a response to the physical image rather than any pre-scripted or planned text. In this way, participants experienced ways of creating theatre that for many was different from their previous understanding or experience of theatre-making.

For some participants this imagistic and more abstract way of working was ‘weird’ (Hilary, AC 80-85), whereas for others they described it as expanding their creative experiences of making theatre. For example, at the time of the workshops, Sally (AC,
63) was participating in a large scale, professional outdoor production, that featured volunteer members of the community in various crowd scenes. She explained in the focus group how she found it very regimented, she said they were told ‘[this is] what you do and this is how to do it’ and she felt that it was only ‘a little bit creative’. In contrast, she described her experience of the drama workshops as being ‘at the other end of a continuum’. Olivia (AC, 74) agreed with her and compared her own previous drama experience with the current workshops. ‘In drama groups before, I knew I was a tall alto and I knew exactly where I’d be on the stage and it gets quite boring in the end. And then you do something and you just, then you just explore the other side of the stage and it’s releasing’. Olivia’s comment indicates that not only did she find the work we did stimulated other aspects of her creativity but that the experience of doing this was, as she says, ‘releasing’. This can be interpreted as a positive experience for her wellbeing as I discuss further in the next chapter. Equally, Olivia is the person in the first photograph (Figure 8) who is standing on one leg, so, despite living with severe physical pain (Fibromyalgia), it can be seen that she was fully engaging in the physicality of the work. This improvised movement exercise has opened up new possibilities for her and she appears to have temporarily forgotten her pain.

5.4ii Learning physical theatre-making skills

Introducing and using new physical ways to make theatre was at the heart of my drama methodology throughout the sessions. Whether the group was doing a Feldenkrais exercise, a clapping game, telling a story through action or exploring gestures and movements in space, the focus was always on developing creative skills. I found that some participants such as those in the Arts Centre often wanted to know why we were doing specific exercises, whereas participants at the Day Centre, for example, did not ask many questions and generally got involved in whatever I proposed. This is most likely because a majority of Arts Centre participants had expressed a specific desire to develop their drama skills and wanted to learn and experience different processes, styles and aspects of theatre-making. They had independently chosen to sign up and make time and travel arrangements to attend the sessions. In contrast, the Day Centre participants were already in the building and were used to attending activities that were proposed to them and that staff thought they might enjoy. The drama sessions were an opportunity for them to socialise and do something a little different together, exploring their collective creativity, rather than necessarily learning specific new skills.

Even though the motivations for joining a group might be different for different people, the starting point for many of the activities was the same with each group. Participants then worked within their own physical and creative capacities and interests. An
example of both groups engaging and learning from the same creative starting point is the machine improvisation in small groups that I outlined in Table 2 in Chapter 4. This improvisation was based on a Feldenkrais exercise that we had done earlier in the session and involved participants collaborating in small groups, using action and sound, to make an imaginary machine. I explained to the Arts Centre group that the exercise involved working within specific parameters, or limits of movement. This meant that as performers they would have to explore and play with creative possibilities outside of those that they might usually default to. This can often result in unexpected, surprising and imaginative outcomes. Participants displayed a great variety of rhythm, form and sound as they creatively played together, each group’s final improvisation being very different from that of others. Several people commented on having enjoyed the activity a lot.

The Day Centre group worked in two small groups and everyone was involved in making a machine with their bodies and voices based on some of the movement we had done earlier. In the Day Centre improvisations, participants tended to copy one another vocally and gesturally. This could be interpreted as being less creative, yet they were still using and stretching their bodies and voices in new and different ways to make something original together. Afterwards the shared view was that they had ‘enjoyed being together and having fun’.

In relation to further developing physical theatre-making skills, several individuals in the Arts Centre group specifically asked if they could learn more about different ways of creating characters and do more creative improvisation together. To this end I introduced them to some exercises that would extend their experiences of physical creation and explore in more depth the mind / body connection in theatre-making. I introduced them to Lecoq’s ‘Seven Levels of Tension’ exercise (Lecoq and Bradbury, 2006; Kemp, 2012) and also various status games and exercises, as a basis for then improvising some short physical scenes in small groups. The ‘Seven Levels of Tension’ exercise involves deliberately increasing and decreasing the physical tension in one’s body, from level 0 to level 7, and observing at the same time how that affects the character’s mental state. For example, high levels of physical tension can be used to generate characters displaying anxiety and frenetic, uncontrolled actions, whereas low levels of physical tension can support creating characters who are very relaxed or even lethargic. Scenarios and improvisations can then be set up where characters operating at different levels of tension meet and interact together. Some of the participants’ responses to the work include:
'The scenes showing change in body tension and how we react to it were fun' (Debbie, 61)

'I didn’t realise there were so many different ways of walking' (Olivia, 74)

'It all helps to how you are being on stage and how you move, how you perceive other characters and how you react to them, so I think that was very good to learn those skills' (Rachel, 71)

'I’m increasing the ability to connect words and meaning to the body' (Annie, AC, 55)

I started this section, Creative Expression, with a quote from Alice, describing how she felt the exercise in the session was good but also ‘so different to exercise’. The Seven States of Tension exercise is an example of a physically demanding exercise which is explicitly used as a way of creating different types of theatre characters. Despite it being a theatre exercise, Alice, nonetheless, made a connection through it, to how she perceived herself in her everyday life. Talking about the exercise, Alice commented that she felt the exercise makes you ‘sort of aware of where you are at generally’. She then explained further:

‘I think quite often I’m in kind of ‘business’ [level 3] or the sort of ‘surprised’ [level 4] mode and I think that’s a kind of learnt thing, I think…so it’s kind of using more energy than I probably need to in everyday life, so it’s a lesson to be a bit more laid back [level 2], I think’

The exercise prompted Alice to reflect on the everyday levels of tension that she often carries in her body’s muscles and therefore made her more conscious of the possible benefits of relaxing more. In this way Alice indicated an awareness of how the creative work can also impact on a person’s general health and wellbeing.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have described how many participants found the physical aspects of the work that we did to be new and sometimes challenging for them. Several people commented that they had not previously thought of drama as being a physical activity but now saw it in a different light. A few participants found the exercises strange or uncomfortable and felt that it was hard for them to engage fully in some of the physical aspects of the sessions. Most participants felt that through doing the exercises to ‘wake up’ the body they developed a heightened awareness of their physical selves. In terms of health and wellbeing, many participants reported feeling both more relaxed and more alert after the sessions. Some reported specific benefits, including, better posture, balance and mobility, both inside and outside the sessions. Many participants gained greater confidence in their physical and vocal abilities, and developed their
physical creative skills, using their bodies as the starting point for the creation of characters and improvised scenes together. They also sometimes connected greater physical awareness to aspects of improved wellbeing. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings on the impacts of the drama work on participants’ mental, psychological and emotional selves.
Chapter 6 Findings – Mental, Psychological and Emotional Self

6.1 Introduction

This research is framed through a phenomenological lens and so explores the lived experience of the impacts of the work on participants’ bodies and minds. In the previous chapter I examined my findings in relation to participants’ experiences of the drama workshops in relation to their physical selves; their physical health, self-confidence and creative expression through the body. I now examine participants’ experiences concerning their perceptions of the effects, and affects, of the workshop activities on their mental, psychological and emotional selves. Through analysis of participants’ descriptions of their experiences, I have identified four main themes that I discuss in this chapter under the headings of: Mental Alertness; Mood; Explore, Experiment, Express; Developing Creative Self-confidence.

6.2 Mental Alertness

6.2i Mind/body coordination

Feldenkrais (1966) considered that the body and mind were two aspects of the same state and therefore, ‘waking up’ the body is also likely to ‘wake up’ the mind. Indeed, several of the workshop participants used similar words to those used to describe some of the physical activities, when describing the effects that they felt that the activities also had on their minds, words such as ‘stretch’, ‘energise’, ‘stimulate’ and ‘enliven’. Likewise, many of the games, exercises and improvisations were specifically designed to elicit quick and spontaneous physical and mental responses, and participants commented on them as:

‘Sharpening responses’ (Gemma, R, 75-80)

‘It wakes us up’ (Pamela, DC, 80-85)

‘It makes our minds work and our brains work’ (Charlotte, DC, 80-85)

‘I felt I had been physically and mentally exercised by the activities and enlivened by the end of the sessions’ (Stacey, AC, 59)

‘I felt slow and scattered when I arrived – much more focused and upbeat by the end’ (Josie, AC, 60)

Participants therefore noticed that much of the work had the effect of waking up their minds alongside their bodies. For some people, this was challenging at times, particularly the games and exercises that deliberately required physical and mental coordination. However, in the main, participants reported that despite the challenge, they felt it to be beneficial to stimulate their minds and bodies simultaneously.
'My coordination is not great and I find that even in the “ball” and “zip/ zap” exercises my brain isn’t as sharp as some people’s. Actually this has always been the case so it doesn’t worry me too much. But I do feel the benefit of 5 or 10 minutes doing that. It all seems to help’ (Mary, CC, 72)

‘I would just like to go on doing exercises and playing games and trying to improve as I’m rather slow’ (Catherine, CC, 84)

‘Putting words, action, sounds etc. into small group scenarios is therapeutic, “kickstarts the old brains!!”’ (Rachel, AC, 71)

‘I’ve found it’s been really good for, um, coordination of the brain and body’ (Lucy, R, 76)

6.2ii Memory

Some people also commented on how sometimes the games and the improvisations required them to use their memories alongside any spontaneous mind/body coordination. Amongst these people, were participants who had no obvious memory issues and yet commented that they felt that the games were useful for making them use their memories, even if at times this might be somewhat challenging. Sally (AC, 63) said she felt that the games ‘get you into that rhythm of focus and concentration and remembering and being a little bit more alert etc.’. Clara (CC, 68) wrote, ‘although the exercises appeared simple they made us think and use sequences that became rather complicated for our memories’. Whilst Clara found this challenging at times, she also commented that she felt that the ‘relaxed environment’ meant that they could ‘laugh from our mistakes’. In contrast, Sandra (70-75), in the same group, wrote that she did not enjoy aspects of the work that involved memory. In the same way that she did not enjoy the physical exercises, Sandra said about the activities that involved coordination and memory, that they were ‘too challenging and reminded me of things I am not good at’. She implied that the activities made her feel anxious and that she did not enjoy doing things where she might make mistakes and therefore, she preferred not to do them.

The use of activities that involved memory was particularly significant in the Day Centre group. Many people found games and improvisations that included remembering to be challenging. Roger (75-80) frequently mentioned to me his frustration at realising that he could not remember as well as before. At the same time, he also said that although the improvisations and word games were challenging, ‘it gets you thinking’ and ‘I enjoy making things up’. There was always a balance to be found between continuing with an activity because some people enjoyed the challenge or deciding that it was too difficult and that it would be better to do something else. A particular example of a game that was challenging for everyone in the Day Centre group was the ‘zip zap’ game,
mentioned by Mary above (see description in appendix 11). It was a very popular game with the Arts Centre group, however, when I introduced it to the Day Centre participants, they found it quite confusing, so after a short while we stopped and moved on to a different activity that was easier for everyone to participate in. Also, in the Day Centre group, we sometimes developed short scenarios or told stories involving the whole group. Repeating these could be challenging for people’s memories, so often we changed and invented new words whenever someone had forgotten what they had said before. In this way, the emphasis was on the enjoyment of the telling rather than the remembering. In relation to storytelling, Pamela, who was the most verbal person in the group, commented that when we told stories, she preferred it when we made up an original story rather than retelling a familiar one, saying, ‘because you aren’t trying to remember something you thought you ought to know’. Judith (93) who was living with dementia, was always very engaged in the physical activities but often opted out of activities involving a lot of words or discussion. I tried whenever possible to combine verbal activities with actions and/or song as a way of keeping everyone involved and feeling included. Judith did participate to a greater extent when words were combined with action.

In relation to remembering as part of a role-play improvisation, Donald’s (R, 94) fellow participants commented, as described in the previous chapter, that Donald appeared to enjoy rising to the physical and mental challenges and they were surprised at how much he remembered from one week to the next.

6.3 Mood

‘One day I came and I was in a foul mood because something had happened and I left, you know, really high, I’d had a lot of fun and a lot of laughter’
(Debbie, AC, 61)

Many participants, liked Debbie quoted above, referred to feeling that their mood was enhanced or uplifted when they came to the drama workshops. They used words including, ‘happy’, ‘joy’, ‘cheerful’, ‘energised’, to describe how they felt after a session:

‘I feel lighter and happier!’ (Martha, AC, 59)
‘Sheer enjoyment leaves me feeling good!’ (Sally, AC, 63)
‘I find it really, very, very good for mood lifting’ (Rachel, AC, 71)
‘I consistently feel much better by the end than when I started – brighter mood and looser more relaxed body’ (Josie, AC, 60)
There appeared to be two main reasons why participants felt that the workshops enhanced their mood. Several people commented on them being fun and laughing a lot, others described the sessions as being immersive or mindful, perhaps indicating, both directly and indirectly, that during the time they were there, they forgot about their concerns and worries of the outside world.

The immersive nature of the activities was indicated in comments that several participants made regarding experiencing time going quickly:

- ‘The time passed quickly and the sessions were immersive’ (Stacey, AC, aged 57)
- ‘Time goes extremely fast’ (Martha, AC, aged 59)
- ‘The time went very quickly – lots happening…’ (Josie, AC, 60)
- ‘Time passed quickly’ (Lucy, R, aged 76)
- ‘Time flies’ (Clive, DC, 60-65)
- ‘The sessions went very quickly and when I got home I was certainly more relaxed and quite tired!’ (Penny AC, 66)

A direct connection between immersion in an activity and enhanced mood can be seen in this exchange between myself and some participants from the Arts Centre group at the end of the first term:

Josie (60): It's one of those situations, activities, experiences, where you have to be there, you have to be present. You have to be in the moment and so in doing that you forget about everything, all the other things that are maybe cluttering up your brain, or you’re concerned about, so I really like that. Yes, for those two hours we’re just here doing this and all the rest can go to pot, and sharing that with others

Me: Is that anything that anyone else experienced?

Rachel (71): Oh, I definitely agree with that, because I mean, I sometimes come down, head full of stuff, family problems and then you just get into the mood, the mode and you share with everybody the… and just forget about that. As I said before, I do feel that when I've been, that I go away feeling refreshed, reinvigorated and good

Annie (55): Yes, a sort of mindfulness aspect to it… immersion

The ‘mindful’ and ‘immersive’ aspects of the workshops were particularly commented on by those people who experienced mental health and physical health issues. Annie, quoted above, suffers from depression. In her feedback, she frequently commented on how the sessions had helped her to deal with her mental health:
‘Attending the workshops has helped my mental health, as they have been opportunities to be mindful, given me something to concentrate on and use my creativity’

‘Participating occupied my mind and helped my depression’

‘It has helped me be more active despite my depression’

Olivia (AC, 74) described the immersion in the drama activities as being beneficial to helping her forget about the constant pain she is in from having Fibromyalgia. After the first session, she wrote in her journal that ‘one very important practice to deal with pain in DISTRACTION! and it was evident after our first class I had not even thought about my pain’. She re-iterated this in the final questionnaire, writing, ‘during each session I was so totally absorbed I forgot any aches and pains’. Similarly, Debbie (AC, 62) who was recovering from surgery and has pain from arthritis, wrote, ‘my mood is always lifted and the group experience lets me forget about myself, concentrate on having fun and learning new skills’.

Overall, the combination of the immersive nature of the activities and having fun with other people meant that participants frequently left the sessions feeling in a better state of wellbeing than they had when they arrived. For many people this enhanced mood then carried over into their everyday lives. I specifically discuss aspects of the workshops concerning fun and laughter in more detail in Chapter 7 on the Individual and the Group, as they particularly relate to participants' experiences in the context of the whole group.

6.4 Explore, Experiment, Express

6.4i Creative exploration

In Chapter 5, I described how several participants had commented that the workshops had made them think differently about drama and theatre-making and understand the importance and significance of using the body to create characters and make meaning. Communicating through non-verbal language, gesture and action had expanded their experience and understanding of theatre both as performers and audience members. For example, I have already described how Olivia (AC,74) felt that the sessions enabled her to ‘explore the other side of the stage’ in comparison to the more rigid and predetermined nature of her previous drama experiences. She also said that the workshops enabled her to ‘experiment with ideas I may not have thought about’. Similarly, other participants also commented on experiencing the work as exploratory and experimental:
'I felt less that I was ‘doing drama’ than just being in an exploratory, embodied, creative environment’ (Josie, AC, 60)

‘The use of poetry and scenarios in small groups allowed me to explore my creative side which I enjoyed’ (Isla, AC, 59)

‘Encouraged me to experiment with my physical presentation and emotional expression’ (Grace, AC, 67)

Several participants felt that the exploratory and experimental nature of the activities gave them new opportunities to stimulate and develop their creative expression and imagination:

‘I love the expression of myself’ (Mary, CC, 71)

‘I enjoy making things up’ (Roger, DC, 75-80)

‘Stimulates the creative juices’ (Alex, AC, 64)

‘I discovered the power of drama to communicate, express and feel more’ (Debbie, AC, 61)

‘More imaginative’ (Rachel, AC, 71)

‘It has heightened my creativity’ (Christine, AC, 74)

‘It helped me to be more creative - a skill that I always wanted to develop’ (Clara, CC, 68)

Donald (R, 94) said at the end of the first session, ‘all the work this afternoon was as if I was at drama school, first lessons, opening new worlds for me’. A few weeks later he told me that he felt the work was impacting on his creativity, in that he was ‘moving away’ from only painting trees in the art group and was now experimenting with other creative possibilities. These comments by participants on experiencing heightened creativity, indicate that they felt that the workshops gave them opportunities to embrace new learning, develop new skills and expand their horizons, regardless of their age or previous experience.

As well as supporting their creativity, some participants also felt that they enjoyed and benefitted from doing an activity that enabled them to explore and experiment without having to have a specific objective or outcome at the end. Although they often liked to know the purpose behind an exercise or improvisation, they also enjoyed the journey into the unknown. This was touched on in the first focus group session with four of the Arts Centre participants. At the beginning of the session, I asked people what they had enjoyed about coming. First of all, Catherine (84) replied, saying, ‘I’ve no idea, no idea, I just enjoy coming’. She then continued, I don’t know
what, what we are going to do next and whether I can do it or not and sometimes I can and sometimes I can’t. Josie (60) then responded, ‘that sounds like there’s an adventure in it and a bit of risk, maybe?’ The group returned to the topic of not having a prescribed outcome towards the end of the session, when we discussed whether or not they would like to do a play together. Rachel was quite keen on the idea and Annie said that she did not mind but that she particularly enjoyed the ‘exploring side of things’. Catherine and Josie then had the following exchange about putting on a performance:

Catherine: It cuts, cuts out any sideways movement. If you start, if you start to do something and you’re aiming at…you’ve got to keep going that way but if about here, suddenly something arises, it’s so nice to be able to go that way which you can’t do if you’re aiming at this thing…

Me: So you prefer not to have a thing to aim at

Catherine: Yes

Josie: Yes, I agree, I think there is something, umm, quite precious really about us doing something that is, in some ways, non-utilitarian, without that kind of object focus and so we’re not self-conscious, we’re less self-conscious…

Overall, although the exploratory nature of the workshops was different from most people’s previous experiences or understandings of drama, participants described enjoying the freedom they felt they had to do something that was ‘non-utilitarian’ and without a specific, pre-determined objective. In this way the workshops supported an open and spontaneous approach to creative self-expression, something that might also have been different from the demands placed on many participants in their everyday lives.

6.4ii Spontaneity and liberation

In Chapter 4, I explained that one of the key elements of Pagneux and Gaulier’s training is the development of the performer’s physical and mental disponibilité to play and make theatre. The mental aspects of disponibilité primarily concern a performers’ openness and readiness to respond spontaneously and without judgement, to others. Disponibilité means learning to ‘say yes’ to another person’s proposition, accepting their suggestion however unexpected or unusual it might seem. Disponibilité is particularly useful in improvisation, where participants’ spontaneous response to one another can often lead to unexpected and surprising avenues for creative expression. This in turn can also generate feelings of liberation.
Several people commented that spontaneous improvisation was sometimes challenging for them, as it meant that they stepped out of familiar structures or ways of doing things. However, many also felt that this was a positive experience, encouraging them to think and act in new and different ways, boosting their self-confidence in the process. Martha (AC, 59) wrote a lot in her journal about her experiences of doing improvisation:

- ‘This approach is challenging, but I find it’s good for me to get away from a structured approach’
- ‘Makes me feel I can be creative or more spontaneous’
- ‘It was good to try to be spontaneous instead of too rigid’
- ‘You have to feel confident to have a go. No structure creates freedom’

Martha’s thoughts about her overall experience can be summarised in these words:

- ‘All of the above activities [improvisations] make you feel confident, even though they contain so many uncertainties. A paradox?’

Although Martha views her experiences as a paradox, it is possible that having to be spontaneous challenged her to ‘think on her feet’, and because she then found she could do it, she felt more confident in herself and consequently experienced freedom. For several other people, this paradoxical relationship between acting spontaneously, in uncertainty and gaining confidence at the same time, also manifested itself as feelings of freedom and liberation, as can be seen here:

- ‘I have experienced the joy of improvisation and the freedom to ‘let go’ and experiment with movement and voice’ (Olivia, AC, 74)
- ‘I found it to be a bit therapeutic etc. too, ie in a cleansing way/letting out feelings/trying new ways of being’ (Alice, AC, 62)
- ‘I could try and be myself in many ways. I don’t have to conform but be myself, nobody tells me to be like everybody else’ (Alicia, CC, 77)
- ‘Improvisation and spontaneous acting was done without inhibition and with confidence’ (Clara, CC, 68)
- ‘We did the improvisations, that was really, really good. Yes, quite freeing, quite freeing’ (Isla, AC, 59)
- ‘I love the sense of freedom that the class provides – to express, to experiment, to be loud to have fun’ (Mary, AC, 72)

Some other participants, particularly Sandra (CC, 70-75), did not experience liberation or freedom in the way the people above have expressed. Sandra was not comfortable
in the sessions. This implies that the activities were not appropriate for everyone, or possibly they needed to be adapted more, to support people who are less confident, to feel safe. Sandra’s comments about feeling that the activities reminded her of things that she was not good at, indicate that she was not confident to ‘let go’ and try out new things without worrying about the outcome. Conversely, her friend Emily (CC, 71) said, ‘the co-ordination exercises were especially good for reminding me not to take myself too seriously, or to be overly concerned with ‘getting it right’. It was fun & liberating.’

Whilst participants primarily linked the feeling of freedom and liberation to having opportunities for creative experimentation and expression, they also sometimes made an explicit or implicit connection to what they felt might be appropriate behaviour for their age. They perceived that the creative possibilities of being able to ‘let go’ and experiment with other ways of being, despite their older ages, were of positive benefit to their wellbeing. I have already described Alicia’s (CC, 77) experience of feeling that she could be herself and did not have to conform to other people’s expectations. She also summed up her experience of the first term as the following:

‘It made me feel so good and I had not felt that way for a long time, I could dance, do poems, say and do strange things and never felt ridiculous at my age of 77, it is difficult in everyday life to behave in that manner as people judge you with consequences sometimes, so, thank you again’

Similarly, Mary (CC, 72) said:

‘I want to tap into the part of myself that is BIG….and not just be a nice elderly woman’ and ‘the sessions nourished a part of me that doesn’t get an ‘outing’ very often’

Sally (AC, 63) wrote in her final questionnaire:

‘Spontaneous improvisation – in thought word and deed! Reintroduced me to lost skills and certainly enhanced the creativity involved – cannot think of any other single thing that I have done in getting older that has achieved this!’

Debbie (AC, 61) also felt that the creative expression that she experienced in the workshops was an element of what she saw as combatting societal expectations of older age. She wrote in her journal:

‘I am all for thwarting these expectations usually, I become more outrageous as I age’

Debbie’s words also demonstrate a level of self-confidence, of not minding what other people might think of her regardless of what she is doing. For other participants, the experience of being in a room with other older people appeared to play a part in
enabling them to ‘let go’. The Arts Centre recruitment advertising, whilst not barring younger people, did say that it specifically welcomed older people. In a focus group discussion, Rachel (71) said:

‘I think what is nice about these classes is that you leave age at the door when you come. And I think we’ve all felt that, that when we are here, I won’t say we’re ageless but that it’s just not…, you’re here as yourself and you can be yourself completely, you’re not categorised in any way’

Rachel then continued, saying that whilst she was happy to have younger people and that she wouldn’t feel ‘inferior’ or ‘different’, she also felt that ‘with the same age group it does have benefits’. Catherine, who at 84 was the oldest person in the group, concurred, saying she had been looking for something for adults for a number of years and that ‘when it said older, you know older was a good thing. I was, I was even more confident. I wanted to come but I was more confident because it had said that’.

In general, therefore, participants felt that being with other ‘older people’ was conducive to creating an atmosphere which was non-judgemental and where they could feel confident to explore and express themselves, without being hampered by the expectations that perhaps mixed generation groups might place on them, i.e., expectations regarding ‘acting their age’. Being with other older people gave them greater confidence to express parts of themselves that might be hidden from everyday view.

6.5 Developing creative self-confidence

Not many of the workshop participants in any of the groups had done much drama before and very few had any experience of a physical and improvisatory approach to theatre-making. At the same time, many participants had said at the start that one of their main motivations for coming to the workshops was to learn new drama skills and have opportunities to express themselves creatively. Reasons for joining the workshops included:

‘Learn acting skills’ (Clara, CC, 68)

‘Have my idea of ‘drama’ extended’ (Jess, CC, 64)

‘Doing something creative and expressive and have always secretly wished to join a drama group’ (Alice, AC, 62)

‘I have always loved theatre and now I’m approaching retirement have time to explore once more!’ (Alex, AC, 64)
As can be seen, many participants particularly wanted to develop and expand their creative drama and theatre-making skills. At the same time, several people also described drama as a process that could be scary, involving stepping out of their comfort zone, whilst also viewing that this could be beneficial to their self-confidence and even empowering. The relationship and development between stepping out of one’s comfort zone and building confidence, over a period of time, can be seen in the words of Isla. At the start of the workshops, Isla (AC, 59) wrote that she had recently retired from working with children and now she wanted to ‘have a go myself!’ She wanted to:

‘Develop my creativity, self expression, increase confidence’

She also told me that she specifically wanted to come to these classes where she felt she would learn drama skills, rather than join an amateur dramatics group in which she thought everyone would already know one another and she might feel she did not belong. Three months into the workshops Isla wrote that the games and exercises:

‘Challenged perceptions of how we move, how we interact with people and how we use our voices’

and that she had found out:

‘How much I enjoy being creative and performing in a safe environment, it increased my confidence in being creative’

Seven months later Isla wrote:

‘I also liked the challenge of the improvisation scenes. I believe this has been another positive experience increasing my confidence and giving an outlet for my creative side that otherwise I would not have been able to develop’

Finally, 18 months after she had first joined, Isla reflected on her overall experience:
‘I learnt that stepping out of your comfort zone can bring great personal reward. I discovered that I enjoyed learning how to improvise scenes with others, it was quite liberating’

Isla’s statements show that she had a desire to develop her creative abilities whilst also recognising that this might be challenging and involve stepping out of her usual comfort zone. Her responses imply that doing this is easier to do in an environment where people feel safe and supported. Isla also indicates that gently pushing one’s boundaries can be a rewarding experience that builds creative self-confidence which might also carry over into everyday life as well.

Comments from other participants indicated that there were several people who experienced participating in drama as both challenging and confidence building:

‘Improvisation is well out of my comfort zone’ and ‘the trips to the [AC] have given me further interest in drama overall and a bit more confidence to express myself’ (Penny, 66)

‘I discovered that taking risks could be exciting and help me keep growing’ (Josie, 60)

‘Fun, challenging, enjoyable, sense of achievement – through all the sessions’ (Sally, 63)

In the Rural group, Lucy (76) said that the workshops were:

‘[A] bit of an emotional challenge – I’ve enjoyed it more than I thought I would, because I didn’t think it was my sort of thing’

In the Day Centre group Roger (75-80) said, at the end of all the sessions, that:

‘It’s challenging, there’s a different edge to drama and improvising. It’s completely different [from other activities]’

Several participants described themselves as feeling more confident in general, after attending the workshops:

‘More confident, more self-esteem’ (Rachel, AC, 71)

‘I am pleased I have found the confidence to contribute verbally’ (Christine, AC, 74)

‘It has increased my confidence’ (Grace, AC, 67)

‘I have become more confident in my creativity’ (Debbie, AC, 61)

‘I felt more confident at thinking about ideas’ (Martha, AC, 59)
‘Some of us did not have much experience in acting, however improvisation and spontaneous acting was done without any inhibition and with confidence’ (Clara, CC 68)

‘Regarding creativity, I never see myself having as much of that quality but I really enjoyed stretching myself’ (Mary, CC, 72)

There were a few people who described the work as being too challenging, although they had enjoyed being part of the group and meeting new people. Janice (AC 65-70) said that she had found the workshops to be ‘more exposing than some art forms’ although the sessions had ‘encouraged me to be ‘seen’ performing together – and ‘heard’ when making sounds’. Sandra (CC, 70-75) said she found the sessions ‘challenging and a bit stressful’ and ‘I have learnt that drama is hard work and I admire those that put on performances. I have learnt for me it is nicer to watch rather than participate’. Janice and Sandra chose not to come back after the first term which indicates that some people may prefer other types of creative expression that are possibly less exposing, such as painting, crafts or writing.

Some people felt that some parts of the workshops were more challenging than others, particularly in terms of the improvisatory acting elements. For example, Catherine (AC, 84) said she really enjoyed the elements of the games and physical exercises but was less enthusiastic about the improvisation activities that were more orientated towards developing performance skills, of which there were more in the group that she was in, particularly in the second term. In her final questionnaire Catherine wrote:

‘I’m not keen on the improvisations. I expect that and more is where it is all leading and now I know I definitely do not want to act’

However, although Catherine felt that she did not want to continue doing drama herself, if it was more focused on performance, she felt that she had deepened her understanding of theatre-making skills and processes, which would enhance her future participation as an audience member:

‘I now have a much greater appreciation of what goes, or should go, into acting and this will add to my enjoyment of stage productions in the future’

6.6 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the mental, psychological and emotional experiences of participants in the drama workshops. These were grouped under four themes, Mental Alertness; Mood; Explore, Experiment, Express; Developing Creative Self-confidence. Many participants commented that they felt that the sessions were
beneficial for their mental health and wellbeing. They felt more mentally awake and cognitively stimulated through doing the drama activities. They described the sessions as being fun and immersive which meant that they forgot about everyday worries, concerns and sometimes physical pain. Many participants found the sessions to be creatively engaging, encouraging them to explore and express parts of themselves that may often be hidden from view. Their responses suggested that being with other older people freed them from expectations to ‘act their age’ which further supported them to express themselves openly. A few people said they found the improvisatory nature of some activities too challenging and did not perceive any obvious benefit. Nevertheless, their responses suggested that the sessions could help them to enjoy and appreciate performances they would watch in future, which may have some benefit to their wellbeing. In contrast, although several participants experienced being outside their comfort zone and pushing their boundaries, they felt that this enabled them to build their creative self-confidence. Several people described participation in the drama and physical theatre activities and improvisations as a liberating experience. Their experiences of *Le Jeu, disponibilité* and *complicité* engendered a sense of freedom and release and the opportunity to challenge societal norms.

In this chapter and Chapter 5, I have examined participants’ experiences and perceptions of the workshops on their physical, mental, psychological and emotional selves. It is useful to separate the physical and mental experiences, in order to understand the range, depth and variety of experiences and impacts of the work. Equally, as I explained in 5.1, participants themselves often described these two aspects of the work separately. This is possibly because the physical and improvisatory aspects of the drama workshops were new to many people and they were, therefore, particularly conscious of how these new experiences affected both their body and their mind individually. It may also be because participants were specifically thinking about their creativity, health and wellbeing and therefore separated what they perceived to be the impacts of different activities in each of these areas; thinking about the physical impacts more in relation to health and the mental aspects more in relation to wellbeing and creativity.

However, whilst participants often described their physical and mental experiences separately, there were also people who used the same, or similar, words for both. For example, words such as ‘stretching’ or ‘exercised’, which are more often associated with the body, were used to describe the stimulation of the mind and conversely ‘waking up’, which might be considered more of a mental activity, was used to describe the experience of using the body. This indicates an awareness of the interrelationship
between body and mind, as I discussed in Chapter 4, and the fact that in theatre-making, the whole individual is engaged in and affected by the experience. In this respect, several participants commented on how the work involved increased coordination between the body and mind and how they had also gained an increased understanding of the relationship between the two. For example:

‘I’ve found it’s been really good for, um, coordination of the brain and body’
(Lucy, R, 76)

‘I have greater awareness of body language now and it has been interesting to explore how our thoughts, intentions and feelings are expressed through our bodies’ (Annie, AC, 55)

A number of participants also described how stepping out their comfort zone enabled them to use and express both their mind and their body in new ways, experiencing an increased self-confidence in their physical, creative and emotional self. Grace (AC, 67) summed this up when she wrote that drama ‘engages the physical, the mental and the creative at the same time’. In this way drama, and physical theatre in particular, can be considered to be a holistic creative practice that affects the whole of the person’s being, often simultaneously.

Of all the participants, Josie, (AC, 60), was the individual who spoke most specifically about the holistic nature of the work and her experience of its impact on her whole self. In the focus group she said:

‘I find it stretching physically but also psychologically, it takes you beyond your limits really, up to, beyond your limits, my limits and that’s very good to be challenged, I think, and I find that aspect of the process quite integrating. There’s something about, when I was thinking about it, about joining up what’s inside and what’s outside and bringing them together, so that you just feel more whole in yourself’.

In the next chapter, I look at how the whole or holistic individual self relates to the other participants in the workshop group.
Chapter 7 Findings – The Individual and the Group

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the experiences of the individual participant in relation to the rest of the workshop group. In the same way that participants described their physical and mental experiences to be closely connected, so they frequently talked about the significance of the relationship between themselves and other group members. This included both the social aspects of being together with others, as well as the opportunities for creative collaborative learning. Participatory drama and theatre-making, unlike some other arts activities such as painting, crafts or creative writing, are usually collaborative group activities where people interact together, rather than working individually. Almost all the activities that I ran with participants were undertaken as a whole group or sometimes in smaller groups. Even the individual Feldenkrais and breathing/vocal exercises were mostly done in a circle, so participants could see one another and exchange experiences together. Many of the individual exercises led seamlessly into group improvisations. In this chapter, I therefore describe and analyse my findings on the relationship between the individual and the group. This is under the headings of: Meeting People; Group Creation; Play; Learning Together.

7.2 Meeting people

At the start of the workshops, almost half of participants indicated in the initial questionnaire I gave them, that one of the reasons that they had come to the sessions was to meet and socialise with new or existing friends. For example, Christine (AC, 74) wrote ‘meeting new people’ and Mary (CC, 72) ‘meet new people and have new experiences’, as reasons for joining the workshops. Janice (AC, 70-75) said she had come for ‘company, maybe make new friends’ and Karen (AC, 57) said ‘meet people’.

Several participants described meeting people as being good for their wellbeing, with some people particularly noting that their lifestyles meant that they often spent a lot of time alone, either because of the nature of their work/retirement or because they lived on their own. They felt that it was important for them to spend time with others. Christine said, ‘as a fine artist I spend creative time mostly alone. Drama is interactive and social’. Josie (AC, 60), a writer, wrote that drama ‘connects with others’ and Grace (AC, 67) who lives on her own, described the sessions as a ‘a thoroughly enjoyable, positive social experience’.

Some people viewed themselves as being primarily ‘loners’, describing themselves as often feeling more comfortable spending time on their own. Nevertheless, they also
acknowledged that being with other people was integral to their wellbeing and viewed the drama sessions as opportunities to socialise:

‘I don’t believe that my natural preference for my own company is entirely healthy and I feel that the group was beneficial in terms of mental wellbeing. It forced me to be more sociable’ (Emily, CC, 71)

‘I very much enjoyed learning techniques and interacting with the others as I am a very solitary person and far from demonstrative’ (Penny AC 66)

Matilda (AC, 62), a visual artist, commented to me outside of the sessions how she finds social situations in general challenging, particularly with people she does not know well. However, she wrote that she enjoyed the ‘collaboration’ involved in drama and felt that her wellbeing was improved by making herself be ‘more sociable’. In the focus group she said ‘[Art is] very sort of individual in the main. I quite like the cohesion and working together [of drama]’. This suggests that sharing a common interest, or activity, with other group members and collaborating on this together, provides a focus that facilitates social interaction. The workshops offered ways of accessing opportunities to socialise for these participants.

Although none of the people above make any specific connection between older age and isolation, Patricia (R, 79) felt that the longer a person has behaved in a certain way the harder it can be for them to adopt new behaviours. She said it is ‘a challenge - once one gets to be a loner it’s a big thing to change’. Donald (R, 94) remarked that as an older person living on his own, ‘it would be a very lonely life without going to different places and seeing different people. You have to make an effort to meet people, otherwise you are stuck at home in front of the TV’. For Donald, even if it was not always easy to go out and meet people, he felt that it was important for his wellbeing to interact with others. He has Parkinson’s, cannot drive and lives on his own in a very rural area, therefore seeing people is not always straightforward. Other participants also commented on what they perceived as the possible negative consequences of social isolation, either for themselves or for others. Clara (CC, 68) commented that ‘participating means eliminating loneliness and isolation that generally makes people depressed’. Indeed, Annie (AC, 55) wrote, ‘I am prone to depression, and the combination of the physical side and the human interaction has helped to bring me out of my thought patterns’. For Annie, when she could get to the drama sessions (often she was late), the creative activities and social exchange with others enabled her to break her habitual thought processes and ease her depression. She also said, ‘participating occupied my mind and helped with my depression along with the social side’.
Overall, almost all participants commented at the end of the workshops that their experience of being in the group had given them an opportunity for positive social interaction. Alice (AC, 62) wrote that she had enjoyed ‘meeting new people’. Catherine and Sally, (AC, 84 and 63), both said that they had particularly enjoyed the ‘good company’. Even Sandra (CC, 70-75) who had found the drama work particularly challenging, wrote, ‘I enjoyed meeting the others in the group very much’.

Participants in the Day Centre also indicated that they regarded taking part in the drama as being a beneficial social activity. Although they attended the Day Centre on a weekly basis, from my observations most of participants did not appear to know one another very well. The men and women sat on separate tables in the main room and whilst they might be next to, or opposite, another person, very few people appeared to be interacting with one another on the occasions that I entered the room. The drama sessions therefore stimulated new social interaction and exchange. Charlotte (80-85) commented ‘I like the company’ and Judith (93) who lives with dementia and who I never saw speaking to anyone outside of the sessions, said, ‘I enjoy being with everyone together’ and ‘with friends together having fun’.

For many people, the social side of the group sessions was a particular aspect that they enjoyed, aside from the actual doing of the drama. The Rural group always started our meetings with a cup of tea. This was an important part of their coming together and I usually had to gently but firmly encourage them to stop chatting in order to get the drama sessions started. This may also have been an indicator that they were slightly anxious about the drama sessions, though once we did start, they got involved very quickly. Equally, the Community Centre group used to stop for a short tea break in the middle of the session and again sometimes the chat ran over the time allotted. Although often the conversation was about experiences participants had had in their lives that related to a drama improvisation or activity we had just been doing. Several members of the Arts Centre group were keen to go for coffee or lunch together, after the session. Here the conversation was often about the week people had had but sometimes it was about a particular activity we had done in the drama that then stimulated thoughts and conversation. In contrast there were other people who only wanted to be involved in the drama work and who did not wish to participate socially outside of sessions. In particular, Catherine (AC, 84) who wrote that she enjoyed the company of the group, however she did not ever join in socially, even at an end of term gathering when everyone else went to a café together. Catherine’s daughter told me that her mother does not really enjoy what she sees as small talk. It seemed that Catherine prefers to benefit from social interaction and relationships that had a
particular focus. In the main, however, most people enjoyed the opportunity to socialise with one another.

7.3 Group creation

7.3i Creating together

Whilst many participants did enjoy the social aspects of the drama, a lot of participants also said that one of the most important things for them was the opportunity that drama gave for creative collaboration; that is making art together. In the Arts Centre group, Alex (64) said, in answer to a question about how drama differed for him to other activities, ‘it’s shared, shared creativity, that’s what’s different for me, because in a writing group you are probably doing it on your own by and large, in a yoga group it’s very on your own’. Several people, particularly in the Arts Centre group commented on how they enjoyed being with ‘like-minded’ creative people. For example, Christine (74) who had written ‘meeting new people’ as a reason for joining also said that she was hoping for ‘exploration with peer group of creativity through movement and drama’. For many of these people, it was important that they were in a group with other people who they considered shared a common interest in drama and theatre-making. Alice (62) wrote that she wanted to ‘meet like minded people’ and Rachel (71) wanted to be with ‘people with similar interests’. Debbie (61) wrote in her journal that, ‘it’s good to meet some like minded potty folk’ and Isla (59) said in the focus group that she had enjoyed having ‘a chance to be creative with other people who want to be creative and who are willing to let themselves go and not be held back’. For many participants it was important to be with other people who were happy to try out something new and explore their creative potential together. They felt that the group was an essential support and stimulus for their creative expression and described their experience of creating in the group as:

‘Taking part in group activity is enjoyable and assists in stimulating the creative juices’ (Alex, AC, 64)

‘I experienced a fulfilling creativity in group work as I had never previously known’ (Sally, AC, 63).

‘I enjoyed the partner and group work and felt it was a creative experience’ (Jess, CC, 64)

‘We bounce ideas off each other and react to each other’s actions during exercises’ (Annie, AC, 55)

‘I like it when we take time to discover ideas/words together and the group connects in a different way’ (Josie, AC, 60)
Even those people who were less confident about doing drama commented at the end that the element of creating in a group, with other people, was what they had enjoyed most:

‘I enjoyed most the creating together’ (Janice, AC, 70-75)

‘Enjoyed meeting others and creating together’ (Karen, AC, 58)

The participants from the Day Centre did not specifically use the word creativity in their feedback but several people commented on how they enjoyed the fact that the sessions were different from other kinds of experiences they had at the centre. The centre offers many arts activities to clients, and this is in evidence in artwork displayed around the building, however they are almost all visual arts activities where people work on their own. The interactive nature of the drama sessions was therefore very much in contrast to other activities on offer. Comments from the group included:

‘Good doing things together’ and ‘it’s different’ (Pamela, 80-85)

‘It’s something different, a change from sitting looking at one another’ (Charlotte, 80-85)

‘There’s a different edge to drama and improvising. It’s completely different’ (Roger, 80-85)

Judith (93) lives with dementia and I never saw her communicating with anyone else outside of the drama sessions. She was, however, particularly engaged in many of the non-verbal activities we did and whilst sometimes she questioned why she was there and what we were doing, her body language indicated an involvement with the group that I did not observe when she was in the main room. Indeed, she was often the leader in physical activities involving group coordination and rhythm, frequently smiling and even standing up and dancing on one occasion. It appeared that the non-verbal or non-narrative-led activities enabled her to interact with other people and be included in ways that other group activities at the centre might not.

Similarly, the Rural group, who already knew one another and met on a weekly basis to paint, also felt that the interactive nature of the group activities was very different from their usual ways of being with one another. Patricia (79) wrote, ‘we are accustomed to working happily alongside each other but not in combination’. Lucy (76) commented, ‘I know we are all friends anyway but it’s nice to meet in a different context’. They saw new sides of one another and experienced a different kind of creative stimulation from the group collaboration.
7.3ii Team building

Central to creating together was the building of group cohesion, the sense that each person was part of a team, working together and supporting one another in a shared endeavour. The drama activities aimed to generate experiences of *complicité* (described in Chapter 3.4i) and of being in a theatre-making ensemble. Each person was an individual in their own right and also a member of a creative whole, experiencing the rapport generated through group play and collaboration. I did not generally use the words *complicité* or ensemble in the sessions, as the focus was on doing the activities rather than theory, however participants often described the work as being like building a team, they felt they were working collectively and co-operatively and gaining trust and support from each other:

‘There was great working conditions and team commitment’ (Clara, CC, 68)

‘It was a great exercise in teamwork’ (Grace, AC, 67)

Rachel (AC, 71) frequently commented on teamwork as an element of the sessions that she particularly liked, ‘I’ve enjoyed the communications aspect, the games and also the posturing and the walking and the contact, I think that was quite teambuilding,’ and ‘I enjoyed the companionship and team spirit’.

For some people, although the group was made up of separate individuals, they felt that they experienced something different when they were all engaged in creating together. Annie (AC, 55) describes this as, ‘we could interact with each other to make something that’s bigger than the sum of its parts’. Similarly, Josie said, ‘I felt energised afterwards – a sense of being part of something bigger than I am’. Debbie wrote, ‘I like the clapping games we do and feel when we do it right it makes the group feel as one’. Similarly, at the end of a session in the Day Centre, when we had created a short improvised vocal piece together, Pamela (80-85) commented, ‘we found the tone together’. These experiences convey a sense that through working together as a team, participants could create and experience something more powerful than they could have done individually, on their own.

7.3iii Feeling included

A key aim of building *complicité* and developing a creative team spirit was that all participants should feel that they were included in and belonged to the group, regardless of prior drama experiences or ability. The example of Judith, above, who lives with dementia, indicates how someone was able to participate in many of the activities and not be defined by their illness.
Several participants commented on experiencing positive group dynamics and feeling comfortable with one another:

‘It’s nice to start to feel comfortable in a new group of people’ (Alice, AC, 62)

‘Group dynamics were excellent’ (Emily, CC, 70)

‘I meet interesting people eager to participate and with a great sense of camaraderie and respect for each other’ (Clara, CC, 68)

‘Made everyone feel valued and special’ (Olivia, AC, 74)

‘We are a supportive group and it feels non-threatening’ (Jess, CC, 64)

Feeling welcomed and included in the group was specifically mentioned by people who joined groups in later sessions. Violet (80-85) who joined the second term at the Day Centre said at the end of the first session that she thought the group was ‘very friendly’. Two of the three people who joined the Arts Centre group in the final term specifically commented on feeling welcomed and included. Penny (66) wrote, ‘the group was very welcoming. Several had participated previously but I did not feel out of place’. Martha (59) wrote at the start of her journal, ‘lots of fun games to introduce new people to the group – felt welcomed’. A few weeks later she wrote, ‘I felt confident to make suggestions. The group listened to ideas and it felt inclusive’. At the end of the term, Martha wrote, ‘the participants’ warmth and kindness has been continual. This makes me feel valued and accepted’. Despite joining the group towards the end of the sessions, Martha’s comments indicate that she felt that she belonged in the group and that her contributions were appreciated by those who had been there longer.

7.3iv Group size and energy

The size of the group was another factor that some participants also commented on, in terms of both how they felt included and also in relation to the group dynamics and energy. Most groups averaged about seven people; however, the Rural group was very small, and the Arts Centre group was much larger in the second term compared to the first. Josie (60) and Rachel (71) who attended the Arts Centre group when it was both smaller and larger, particularly commented on their experiences of the different sizes. They remarked on the intimacy of the smaller group and then feeling a little daunted at the start of being in a bigger group. Nonetheless, they both commented on experiencing that the bigger group bonded. Rachel said:

‘I think in a big group we still became a team which was interesting, we could all maybe go off into little cliques or something but we all worked in the end. I feel I know everybody even if I may forget their names!’
Josie said that she had initially found the size and make-up of the larger group somewhat challenging, noting that ‘the dynamic feels more active and busy’. She wrote in her journal ‘I’m not so good in large groups – hard to find my place in them. So feel less at home this term’. She also reflected that ‘finding her place’ was exacerbated by her not being able to join every week. However, she continued to come when she could and at the end of the term said that what she had appreciated most was:

‘The energy, just more people, you get more energy… to be around all that energy was just fantastic and added to that sense of play and freedom and kind of lack of self-consciousness and just going with it, so it’s quite infectious’

This indicates that as she became more comfortable with the larger numbers and different dynamic, so she enjoyed the higher energy levels associated with having more people and in turn felt energised herself by them.

Group energy was an aspect that was commented on by several participants and their experience often related to the size of the group. In the larger Arts Centre group, it was possible to play certain games that involved more people moving around the room and responding quickly to one another. Several people in this group described experiences of being energised by the group, ‘lots of energy and stimulus for creativity’ (Alex, 65), ‘participation in and contribution to group/team was especially energising and satisfying’ (Sally, 63) and ‘I feel more energised being in the group’ (Debbie, 61).

Conversely, at times, a smaller group size could affect energy levels negatively. For various reasons, there were often people absent in the Community Centre group, so on several occasions there were only three or four people. Mary (CC, 72) noted that ‘the absences in the group, particularly in view of the fact that the numbers were low, resulted in the energy of the group being low at times’. By contrast, when Mary joined the bigger Arts Centre group later in the year, she wrote, ‘it’s good to be part of something so energising and fun’. Equally, when a group is small, one person’s reluctance to join in can also affect the energy and focus of the whole group. This was particularly noticeable in the Community Centre group in the first term, when Sandra (70-75), who often found participating challenging, would drop out of a game or exercise part way through. This sometimes had the effect of breaking the focus and diminishing the group’s overall energy levels.

The Rural group was the smallest group. It was not a highly energetic group, due in part to the nature of the participants and the limited size of the space, however attendance was quite regular and there was a clear focus and commitment to the activities. Quite possibly because the group already knew one another it was harder for individuals to opt out of an activity and equally, they already had a certain level of trust
and confidence in being with each other. They were always willing to try out new games and exercises.

7.3v Trust and support

Some people, such as Debbie and Olivia in the Arts Centre group appeared to be more outgoing and confident in a group drama situation than others, they had both been involved in acting before. Debbie saying, ‘I get more outrageous as I age’ and Olivia (AC, 74) that she actively wanted to be watched by others, ‘I quite like being fun and showing off my playful side’ and ‘I love to act the ‘silly goat’, make people laugh’.

However, for many people, doing drama was something new and to some extent exposing, taking them out of their comfort zone, as I discussed in the previous chapter. They therefore needed to feel that they could trust and be supported by the group, if they were to feel confident enough to take creative risks with one another. Following an improvisation that we had done in the final session, Lucy (R, 77), commented to her companions in the focus group that maybe they could do some performances together in the future, ‘because we have confidence with each other’. She came back to the proposition later in the same conversation, confirming, ‘we know each other and trust one another enough to do it’. The members of this group already had a strong level of support for one another as they had been painting together for several years. Therefore, although drama was new to them, it was possible to build on these foundations and develop the trust required for them to take creative drama risks with one another. With other groups it was necessary to build trust and support from the outset, as taking risks in front of relative strangers can be challenging for people.

Indeed, some participants described experiencing a level of anxiety or uncertainty at the start of the workshops. Mary (CC. 72), reflecting back on how she had felt at the outset, wrote, ‘I felt a mixture of emotions from anticipation to apprehension. I experienced being out of my comfort zone with unfamiliar people in a setting where people seemed to have different ideas and expectations.’ Even, Rachel (AC, 71), who was the only participant who had attended previous drama sessions with me, said about the first term of workshops, ‘when we met on the first day we were a bit shy and reserved at first and then after the next session we really built up as team and trusted one another’. Rachel had a better idea of what to expect than many others and yet even she had felt a bit nervous at the start. The games and other exercises to build complicité were therefore all essential to enable participants to feel comfortable with one another and be able to take creative risks. ‘Trust’, ‘supportive’ and ‘non-judgemental’ were all words used by several participants to indicate their feelings about being in the group.
Annie (AC, 55) also described how her confidence was strengthened because everyone in the group was involved in the activities together. She felt that this helped to reduce any inhibitions she might have had. She said in the focus group at the end of term one:

‘There is the potential to feel rather silly doing some of these things but if everyone’s doing it, we’re all doing it together, so I think we got past the self-conscious thing quite quickly’

Nine months later she returned to the same topic, writing:

‘The sessions involve a lot of group interaction where we bounce ideas off each other and react to each other’s actions during exercises – this cooperation quickly reduces any sense of self consciousness, improving my confidence and encouraging me to contribute and act on my ideas’

Other participants also commented on gradually feeling more confident to share ideas and contribute creatively to the group. Early on Christine (AC, 74), who had less experience than some people of collaborative working, had written that she was finding it ‘really rewarding’ to work with others and was ‘pleased I have found the confidence to contribute verbally’. However, she also said, at the same time, that she had realised that she could ‘still be hurt/thrown by a sharp comment from another student’. At the end of the term she wrote, ‘I have become more adventurous in speaking out and less concerned about how others view me’. As complicité developed in the group and trust was established between people so they felt that they could take more risks, enjoy working together and feel more confident in themselves and their own creativity.

7.3vi Eye contact

A particular aspect of building complicité in the group, that the Arts Centre group discussed in the second focus group, was that of using the eyes, looking up and also making eye contact with other people. Several games and exercises were deliberately designed so that participants had to make eye contact with one another. In terms of developing theatre skills, this was to enhance creative, non-verbal communication between performers and also sometimes with the audience. Debbie (61) wrote in her journal that she understood that the activities ‘are designed to keep you alert, aware, in touch with others in the room. To help make a connection, not verbally, using eye contact and touch.’ Grace (67) commented that she had noticed in a concert she had been to, that the band member who had looked at the audience was much more enjoyable to watch than the rest of the band who looked down all the time. Some participants, however, felt that making eye contact had been a challenging experience for them, something they were not used to doing and yet, when they had managed to
do it, it could make them feel more confident. This was, therefore, another example of how challenge and confidence appeared to go hand in hand. Catherine (84) said in the focus group:

‘One of the things I find hardest, when doing these when we walk around and things, was the eye contact...it’s just one of those things that you never think it’s going to be hard, but it is, for me’

Isla then responded:

‘Is that about confidence, do you feel more self-confident, maybe that you can, make eye contact? I think it’s given me a bit more confidence…’

This was then followed by a discussion about when, where and why people felt comfortable talking to, or looking at, strangers. It ended with Alex (65) reflecting:

‘It was challenging at first, the eye contact and everything, it was more personal, yes, you’ve got to get used to doing it, with people you don’t know and I think that’s really good’

Overall, most participants felt that making eye contact was a beneficial thing to do in many circumstances. They thought that it could feel awkward if people were not used to it but that it also built people’s self-confidence and helped them to walk taller. A few months later, an informal conversation in a café with some of the participants, centred around the question: If older people tend to look down in the street when they walk and do not make eye contact with others, do they consequently ‘shrink’, occupy less space and become more invisible to the rest of society? The discussion included: whether the physical action of making eye contact means that a person looks more confident; whether they actually feel more confident when they make eye contact; whether making eye contact makes people feel more secure and visible in the world and whether any of these experiences are important to older people. There were no specific conclusions, except the sense that older people do often feel invisible in the street and that making eye contact is probably a good thing, however it might be harder to do in big cities. These interchanges between people indicate that the workshops also supported debate and created opportunities for participants to reflect on their status as older people and how this might be challenged in society.

7.4 Play

Playing together, or Le Jeu, was an experience highlighted by many participants in the workshops. This included playing games, playing together in spontaneous or semi-planned group improvisations and also adopting a playful, exploratory, approach to all
the activities, so it did not matter if mistakes were made, if someone was last or could not remember something. As Clara (CC, 68) said:

‘The course is done under a very relaxed environment that permit us to laugh from our mistakes adding enjoyment to activities and expansion to our spirits’

One of the consequences of ‘leaving age at the door’, that I discussed in 7.4, was that participants indicated that they experienced the workshops as safe spaces in order to try out new things. Participants felt comfortable and enjoyed being able to play with one another in a way that was not always possible in everyday life:

‘It’s like an opportunity to be a child again, isn’t it, which you don’t often have a chance for that’ (Josie, AC, 60)

‘Had an excuse to make a fool of oneself’ (Participant, DC)

For some people they were re-experiencing joyful aspects of childhood, but one person described it as an opportunity to experience something she felt she had missed out on to some extent. Sally (AC, 63) explained that she had grown up as an only child in an isolated village and had rarely experienced playing with other children. She described enjoying the sessions because ‘I just loved the chance to have a group game’ and continued ‘I think I can honestly say I have enjoyed absolutely every single bit of it, even making a fool of myself’. Annie (AC, 55) said, ‘the various exercises we do help to put into practice my creativity and often a sense of playfulness, which we don’t often get the chance to do in later years’. This implies that as one gets older there are fewer opportunities to play, either because of time constraints, or because of a feeling that it is not appropriate older adult behaviour. Similarly, Olivia (AC, 74) also enjoyed being able to be playful, she wrote in her journal, ‘I’m not afraid to make a fool of myself and make people laugh’ and in the focus group said, ‘I quite like being fun and showing off my playful side and you don’t do that walking the dog really’. This indicates that Olivia wanted to be visible but felt that she needed to be in a situation where it was socially acceptable to be silly. Drama, therefore, enabled her to have a legitimate audience.

7.4i Getting to know one another

Several participants commented on enjoying the process of playing as a way of getting to know one another. This was particularly the case in the Arts Centre group in the second term, when it was a much bigger group than previously. Rachel (71), who had attended previously smaller groups, said that she had wondered, ‘getting into a big group for the first time, I thought wow, is this going to work?’. She continued, saying she thought that it had worked, ‘we got to know each other through the games and
interactions’. Other people in the group also commented on how playing together had enabled the group to get to know one another and connect:

‘I enjoyed being a kid again and playing ball to learn people’s names, I thought that was great fun’ (Olivia, 74)

‘I think the games as well, to get to know each other as a group, which was really useful and relaxed us’ (Alex, 65)

‘It felt they [the games in the second term] were more playful in a kind of extrovert way, a more social and connected way’ (Josie, 60)

7.4ii Fun and laughter

Another intention was that the activities should be fun and enjoyable, regardless of whether they were specifically games, or they were improvisations or movement and coordination exercises. Finding pleasure and enjoyment through Le Jeu was central to the work. Participants across all the groups frequently used the word ‘fun’ to describe a variety of experiences, ranging from learning new skills, playing games and doing exercises together, or simply interacting with other people. For example, participants in the Arts Centre group said:

‘Using posture and gaze, and becoming different types of people, has been great fun’ (Grace, AC, 67)

‘A fun high energy session to start the new term’ (Josie, 60)

‘The scenes showing body tension and how we react to it were fun’ (Debbie, 61)

‘The exercises were fun and the company good’ (Catherine, 84)

‘Fun to be involved’ (Stacey, 57)

‘Every session what fun!’ (Olivia, 74)

The consensus opinion from the Day Centre group, at the end of the two terms, when I asked them what they had liked most, was, ‘we enjoy being together and having fun’. In the third session, Judith (93) who lives with dementia arrived saying, ‘What’s drama? I don’t have fun here’. However, at the end of the workshop she commented spontaneously that she was ‘with friends having fun’. In my journal I often wrote that we had laughed a lot together in the sessions and Sylvia (80-85) said at the end of the first session she came to, that she felt it was like being a child again, ‘we’ve all laughed’. Roger (80-85) also said, ‘I enjoy making things up – we laugh’. Several participants in other groups also commented on fun leading to laughter. Debbie (AC, 61) saying, ‘I find myself laughing a lot because it’s fun and the group members are so funny in their
expressions and interpretations’ and ‘I often find myself laughing at myself and others and their ingenuity’. Olivia (AC, 62) wrote that drama enabled her to, ‘have fun and lots of laughter’ and Martha (AC, 59) said, ‘the sessions can be serious, but there is also time for humour’.

7.5 Learning Together

7.5i Learning through group play

Martha’s comment above indicates that she felt that there were two sides to the workshops, having fun and also learning. These elements were not mutually exclusive but very much intertwined. This was highlighted by some of the other Arts Centre participants in the focus group. They enjoyed playing and having fun together and equally appreciated that the games were also about learning together in a theatre-making context. Participants were not just playing games for the sake of amusement, as children might, or as ‘icebreakers’ between people attending a conference, before they start the ‘serious discussion’. Play, or Le Jeu, is a central driver for creativity and to the development of physical theatre-making skills. The games and playful exercises were an essential part of building and developing complicité and disponibilité. Games were used in a variety of ways; to encourage spontaneous creative response, to understand the use of stillness and gesture, to improve co-ordination, practice eye contact and explore non-verbal reactions. For some people, knowing that the games were used for particular reasons aided their enjoyment and engagement. The following conversation between Sally (63) and Alex (65), in the Arts Centre group, demonstrates this:

Sally: That [the games] they happened to be fun was an additional bonus. They all had a very clear purpose, and yes it did get you into that rhythm of focus and concentration and remembering and being a little bit more alert etc etc. You know, and they happened to be fun

Alex: Yes, I liked the fact that they did have a purpose and it’s also built into the other exercises we did

Sally: Yes, absolutely, yes

Alex returned to the same topic later in the focus group, this time with Catherine (84) and Rachel (71):

Alex: You always had a reason why we were doing it [a game] and it linked to the next thing and for me that was really, because I’m quite a logical thinker you know

Catherine: The reasoning became clear
Alex: Yes
Rachel: I suppose that’s the foundations isn’t it. The brick building of the dramatisation

An example of Alex coming to understand the purpose behind a game can be seen in one of the first games he played with the group. This was a game that involved group members cooperating together, without talking, in order to prevent one person from occupying an empty chair. Whilst it sounds very simple, it involves close collaboration, eye contact, trust and a heightened awareness of where each person is in the space. At the start, Alex immediately started to tell everyone else what they should do and where they should go. I then reminded everyone that no talking was allowed and explained that the game was about working together as a team, using eye contact alone to connect and communicate with one another. It was noticeable that Alex then began to pay more attention to everyone else and respond in a more collegiate manner.

7.5ii Learning from one another

As well as learning skills from me, as the leader, many participants commented on how much they had learnt from others in the group. Isla (59), in the Arts Centre focus group, commented on the small group scenes they had created in response to verses of a poem:

‘The thing I liked was that you could actually see the different ways that people took that [the poem] and ran with it. You know they were all very different weren’t they? Which I thought was a good learning tool for everybody as well…to see what other people, how they took that and because we’re all different, weren’t we, we’re all different’

Similarly, Rachel (71) commented on the tableaux work we had done in the first term:

‘I thought that was very interesting, watching other people and seeing how it evolves, that’s something I never experienced before’

Even Debbie (61), who was one of the most apparently confident drama participants, noticed that the group work had made her think differently about her way of being on stage, in relation to others:

‘Everyone is so talented it makes me think of ways to improve. Particularly learnt today to pause, use silence more, to interact with group members rather than just do my own thing’
Martha (AC, 59), who joined the group for the final term, wrote various comments on other group members. These included general remarks on group performances, such as, ‘great’, ‘engrossing’, powerful experience’ and on individuals she said, ‘Olivia works spontaneously and reacts so positively’ and about Isla, ‘really appreciated Isla’s help on how to get down to the floor. She was very encouraging’. Participants’ experiences indicate that they felt they could support one another and at the same time learn from each other in a safe, collaborative and creative environment. Olivia (AC, 74) commented in her journal that ‘classes are enormous fun and it’s lovely seeing the shy members emerge from themselves’. She enjoyed learning herself and equally got pleasure from seeing other people develop and build their creative skills and confidence.

7.6 Summary

The findings from this chapter can be summarised in the words of Alice (AC, 62) who wrote in her end of term questionnaire:

‘I have really enjoyed the opportunity to take part and feel welcome and experience being a little outside my comfort zone with like minded people in a light hearted but very well structured environment. I have learned a lot’

The positive benefits of being part of a group were highlighted by many participants. Participants across all groups enjoyed having an opportunity to meet and socialise with others, alongside taking part in collaborative activities that were a little, or sometimes a lot, different from everyday life. Most people found the interactive activities fun and energising. They experienced play, or Le Jeu, as something that was fun and which also had purpose and depth. Participants appreciated being with people who shared similar desires to play, explore and create together. Being part of the group encouraged participants to build their confidence and do things they felt they could not do easily on their own. This might be doing exercises that they felt were beneficial to them, ‘I need the group experience to muster enough interest’ (Debbie, AC, 61), or making ‘a fool of myself’, which you can’t do walking the dog (Olivia AC, 74). Overall, many participants, like Alice above, felt that a friendly and supportive environment played a vital part in enabling them to take risks and learn new creative skills.
Chapter 8 Discussion

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters I have examined and analysed the findings from the drama workshops that I ran with four groups of older people in 2018/19. This chapter offers further analysis to move the study’s findings on, from insight into participants’ experiences and views, to exploration and understanding of those experiences within the broader context of theoretical frameworks and the wider social world. The chapter also considers whether, to what extent and in what ways, participant views and experiences might inform the development of future drama workshops for older people. The discussion takes place within the context of the Gadamerian hermeneutic process of ‘fusion of horizons’ as examined in Chapter 3. This ‘fusion of horizons’ integrates my prior artistic experience, as well as that acquired through the literature review process, with new knowledge gained from examining participants’ experiences and views. To aid analysis, the chapter is structured in three sections under the headings of creativity, health, wellbeing, as these reflect the aims of the study. They connect to the themes and sub themes of the findings, as shown in Table 5. below.

Table 5. Summary of themes and sub-themes in relation to creativity, health and wellbeing

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<tr>
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<th>Creativity</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Wellbeing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Self</td>
<td>Creating with the body – physical exploration and expression</td>
<td>Improved posture, balance and flexibility</td>
<td>Greater physical and vocal confidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved breathing and voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental, Psychological</td>
<td>Stepping out of one’s comfort zone</td>
<td>Improved mental alertness and cognition</td>
<td>Mental stimulation - spontaneity and imagination</td>
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<td>and Emotional Self</td>
<td>Freedom to develop new possible selves</td>
<td></td>
<td>Enhanced mood</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Greater creative self-confidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Learning new skills</td>
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<td>The Individual and The</td>
<td>Creative collaboration and sharing, through play and improvisation</td>
<td>Improved coordination and physical responses to others</td>
<td>Meeting and socialising with others</td>
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<td>Group</td>
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<td>Playing together and having fun</td>
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<td>Building trust and support</td>
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<td>Combating ageism</td>
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8.2 Creativity

At the start of this thesis (Chapter 1.3), I defined creativity, within this research, as encompassing participants’ experiences of having new ideas, thinking differently and using their imagination to make something that is original to them. I also identified, in Chapter 2, that much of the research on drama and other participatory arts activities with older people, neglects any examination of participants’ experiences of the creative or aesthetic value of the experience. Participants are frequently only asked about the perceived impacts of their arts experiences on their health and wellbeing (Bernard and Rickett, 2017; Dowlen, 2020). However, Thompson (2009) contends that the aesthetic experience should not be overlooked when evaluating and analysing the processes of creative activities. He argues that participatory drama research should examine the affective, as much as the effective, impacts of the practice. In this context therefore, this study, set out to particularly explore older people’s creative and affective experiences, alongside those of health and wellbeing, of the impact of participating in a series a drama workshops. Through the workshops I introduced older people to the physical theatre, actor training practices of Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux. My methodology combined key aspects of Gaulier and Pagneux’s work, alongside other drama activities and practices gained from my lengthy professional experience as a theatre-maker and teacher.

Creative Motivation

From the findings, it was clear that a primary motivation for most participants to join the workshop sessions was to develop and express their creativity through theatre-making, in collaboration with other people. Participants’ creative motivation for joining the groups substantiates Cohen et al.’s (2006, p. 728) claim that ‘many people seek involvement [in the arts] for the natural appeal of the art; secondary positive health benefits are an added bonus’. Making art is therefore what usually draws people to workshops and groups such as these, where they may also consequentially experience health and wellbeing benefits. Indeed, Matarasso (2012), writing about older artists, contends that there are many activities that could support older people’s health and wellbeing, such as walking, sports activities or looking after grandchildren. However, he argues that what is unique about arts activities is that they are concerned with making something new and original, this brings empowerment and agency to the maker:

By creating something that did not exist she makes an event that changes reality, however slightly, and gains agency in her own existence. She expresses something of the unique nature of that existence and in doing so becomes a subject, not only an object. (Matarasso, 2012, p. 70)
Although most participants had not done much drama before, or not for many years, they were interested in the opportunity to develop their creative potential and learn new creative skills with others. Writing about art and ageing, Matarasso (2012) and McCormick (2017) contend that there is no age limit to making art and that creative energy does not diminish with age. In her book on creative ageing, which discusses examples of participatory theatre-making with older people in different parts of the world, McCormick (2017 p. 232) concludes that ‘it is simply about harnessing creativity and supporting it to develop’.

In relation to theories of ageing, the findings from this study support Havighurst’s ‘continuity theory’ (1957; 1968) that people have particular ideas, habits, or ways of being throughout their lives and do not change suddenly into an something unknown just because they are older. They also substantiate Baltes and Baltes’ (1990) ‘selective optimisation with compensation theory’ that as people age, they may let go of a wider range of activities and start to selectively choose specific goals that they feel are attainable and enable them to continue grow. At the same time, some participants remarked that they felt more confident and comfortable coming to an activity which was aimed at older people rather a wider age range, which fits with ‘cohort and age-stratification theories’ (Riley, 1971). Although, there were other participants who said that age mattered less than the fact that they were with people who shared similar creative interests.

**Creative collaboration**

Whilst developing individual, personal creativity was an important motivation factor for many people to join the workshops, several people also commented on the importance, for them, of drama being about ‘shared creativity’ with other ‘like-minded’ people. They either said from the outset, that they wanted to be involved in collaborative creative practice, and/or, reflected on this being a significant feature of the experience at the end of the workshops. They enjoyed being part of a group with a common creative aim. Johnston describes drama as a ‘specifically community activity’. He says:

> The more we engage with the art form, the more we appreciate and value collaboration. The more we collaborate the more possibilities open to us as theatre-makers. (Johnston, 2015, p. 4)

The approach to the drama work, through games, *Le Jeu*, improvisation and ensemble building activities, developing *disponibilité* and *complicité*, meant that participants had to work and play collaboratively and cooperatively together. Participants commented
frequently on enjoying playing together. They saw this as a fun way to get to know one another, building team spirit and group trust which then gave them the security and confidence to take individual and collective creative risks. Theatre director, Annabel Arden (2012, 35:55) says about theatre-making, ‘we really can do nothing alone…the miracle appears when the people work together’. Indeed, several participants commented on feeling that there were times when the group felt as if it were one body, operating as a single unit, rather than as separate, unconnected individuals.

**Creative Play and Improvisation**

Several people also commented on how they appreciated that the games and other playful activities were useful to develop their creativity and imagination, as well as learning specific theatre-making skills. One of the foundations of the methodologies for the workshops was *Le Jeu* (play) as explained in Chapter 3. Murray (2010, p. 223) describes *Le Jeu* as being ‘the driver of creativity’ and Guitard et al. (2005) identify creativity as one of the most significant components of playfulness. In her book on playfulness and its relationship to creativity and imagination, Lieberman (1977) makes a distinction between adult leisure activities such as playing chess or bridge, and other activities, like doing sculpture or quilting. Whilst both demand focus and concentration, Lieberman argues that the former are not inherently conducive to playfulness, as they have a primary focus on winning, whereas the latter involve using one’s creativity and imagination and can engender experiences of flow, as I discuss later in 8.4. It would therefore appear that creativity and play are intimately connected. Etchells (1999, p. 53) defines creative play as ‘a state in which meaning is in flux, in which possibility thrives, in which versions multiply’. For many people this was a very different approach to drama, particularly compared to previous experiences they may have had in school plays or amateur dramatics. Participants were encouraged to develop and explore their creativity in an environment that was based on playful, non-judgemental discovery, where mistakes did not matter and there was no right or wrong. Some people did not enjoy the open-endedness and uncertainty of a spontaneous, playful and exploratory approach to theatre-making. However, others found it to be a liberating experience. They enjoyed bouncing ideas off one another and discovering new, unexpected, possibilities for creative interaction. Indeed, several participants reported having fun laughing at their mistakes, and rather than viewing them as something wrong, saw them as leading to other creative possibilities.

Several participants also noted that the focus on a more improvised approach to much of the work took them out of their comfort zone, whilst recognising that it encouraged original creative thinking and built their self-confidence. Improvisation is closely
connected to play and has been found to be a useful tool for increasing divergent thinking and creativity in educational and work settings (DeBettignies and Goldstein, 2019). This research study extends DeBettignies and Golstein’s work which was primarily with children. Their study on the impact of improvisation on children’s self-concept found that there was significant improvement, particularly amongst those children who started with low self-concept scores. They conclude that this is because improvisation focusses on ‘constructs that would appear to underpin self-concept, such as working in agreement, spontaneity, commitment, and being present in the moment’ (ibid. p. 9). DeBettignies and Goldstein recommended that further research should take place, looking at the outcomes of improvisation with other age groups, including adolescents and adults. The improvisatory nature of much of the drama work in this study means that it can add to knowledge in this area. Several participants commented on how the playful improvisations encouraged cooperation between people, they also reported experiences of being immersed in the work and developing greater self-confidence.

Improvisation demands spontaneous action that can engender creative thinking and at the same time challenge preconceived notions of behaviour. Theatre educator and pioneer of improvisation games, Viola Spolin explains the value of spontaneity for an individual:

Through spontaneity we are re-formed into ourselves. It creates an explosion that for the moment frees us from handed down frames of reference, memory choked with old facts and information and undigested theories and techniques of other people's findings. Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when we are faced with a reality and see it, explore it, and act accordingly. In this reality the bits and pieces of ourselves function as an organic whole. It is the time of discovery, of experiencing, of creative expression. (Spolin, 1973, p. 4)

Although spontaneous improvisation was a new experience for many participants, often taking them out of their comfort zone, it was equally often one that built confidence and empowerment. Many participants described feeling a sense of release and freedom as a result. This supports McLaughlin’s research on improvisation and the liberation of the individual, that he outlined in a paper for the 2021 Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA) conference. McLaughlin (2021 p. 7) argues that spontaneity and improvisation are routes to liberation from self-censorship or self-imposed regulation, enabling the performer to ‘access and express their creative imagination’. Indeed, through creative improvisation, some participants described feeling that they had permission to act in ways that might break societal norms, or
conventions, of what they felt were acceptable behaviours for older people. They could experiment with new ‘possible selves’.

**New ‘Possible Selves’**

Participants in this research study commented on how creative play and improvisation enabled them to experiment with and express parts of themselves that may usually be hidden from public view. In this way they could experience other ‘possible selves’ as have been described in other arts and ageing projects. For example, Creech *et al.* (2014 p. 76), in their research on older people making music, introduced the notion that music-making could be ‘a vehicle for redefining one’s identity or rediscovering a lost ‘possible self’’. Additionally, they contend that these ‘possible musical selves have also been found to be related to a sustained sense of autonomy and control in individuals’ lives’ (*ibid.* p. 79). Similarly, Crossick and Kaszynska, in *Understanding the value of arts & culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project*, describe the experiences of older people’s participation in an improvisatory dance group on expression of other selves:

> A recurrent theme in their descriptions of the sessions is the difference between the self that they daily perform for others and the more authentic self they say they experience in the absorption of the improvisatory dance sessions. As one observed of her own identity ‘there’s more to me than putting that coat on and going to Fenwicks’ (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016, pp. 45-46)

In expressing other parts of themselves, through their creativity, the participants in all these participatory arts projects can be seen to refute theories of ageing, such as the ‘disengagement theory’, that viewed older people as quietly withdrawing from society and resting, and the ‘age stratification theory’ that dictates what is ‘normal’ behaviour or an acceptable expression of self for any specific age cohort.

Through the embodied, physical theatre practices that I introduced to participants for this research, they were able to explore and express multiple versions of themselves in a safe and supportive environment. Even more than in participatory music and dance, participants could discover a range of physical gestures, rhythms and voices, creating and playing with a wide variety of fictitious scenarios and characters. Participants could scream and shout, make unusual noises, walk, move, speak and behave in ways that were very different from normal life. They could, as Mary said, be ‘BIG’. In these ways participants could also challenge ageist attitudes and notions of how older people are expected to, or feel they should, behave. This concurs with Bernard and Rickett’s (2017, e22) findings on drama with older people, that, ‘dramatic role play and devising appear to be particularly effective in producing a safe space for expressing and challenging age-related stereotypes’.
8.3 Health

This section discusses the findings in relation to participants’ health and particularly how the workshops impacted on their physical awareness and experiences of their body as described in Chapter’s 5 and 6. Several participants reported improvements in posture, balance, mobility and reduction in pain. Some people also appeared to have greater ease in breathing which positively affected their speaking and vocal articulation. Overall, many participants became more confident in their bodies and in using a greater range of movement than they had previously.

I began most sessions with some Feldenkrais Method exercises, and/or other physical exercises, designed to develop participants’ physical awareness, as shown in Table 2. These exercises were based on Pagneux’s work and form an integral part of her practice. However, as Arden (2012, 14:33) says of Pagneux’s work, it is not about ‘getting fitter’, it concerns the ‘wake up’ of the body. The intention is to develop heightened body awareness and through this the individual’s physical and mental disponibilité, in preparation to play, as described in Chapter 3. This meant that often Feldenkrais exercises used at the start of sessions, were playfully integrated into a later improvisation. Overall, less time was spent on specific Feldenkrais exercises that would have been in a dedicated Feldenkrais class, nonetheless, the findings indicated that several participants also experienced health benefits, similar to those found in a number of studies on Feldenkrais, as I explain in the next sections.

Balance, Mobility and Pain Reduction

The findings from the study, as outlined in Chapter 5, suggest that the heightened physical awareness described by several participants, combined with exercises to gently stretch and enliven muscles, might have led to improvements in posture, balance and mobility, which often extended beyond the sessions into everyday life. According to the International Guild of Feldenkrais Practitioners, improvements in posture and balance, aid lighter walking and mobility, and can also alleviate joint pain. In an interview I did with Vesna Puric, the President of the Guild, she explained:

If you are rounded when you are walking, it’s going to be also that your knees in the long run will be in pain because of a heaviness in the knees, whilst if you lengthen the spine there is a sort of lightness and you don’t crash the bones into one another. (Puric, 2020)

The improvements in balance and mobility, coupled with reduction in pain, that some participants described, are similar to those found in several studies with older people who have attended regular Feldenkrais sessions. For example:
Connors et al. (2011) ran a controlled trial in Melbourne of 26, over 65 year olds, who attended twice weekly Feldenkrais classes for 10 weeks alongside 37 similar aged people who received no intervention. They found that the intervention group improved in several measures on balance and mobility.

Webb et al. (2013) ran a study with 15 older people with osteoarthritis who attended twice-weekly Feldenkrais classes over 30 weeks. The participants all reported improvements in balance, walking and also the ability to manage pain.

Broome et al. (2015) ran a phenomenological study on the perceived benefits of Feldenkrais Method with eight older people in Queensland who attended weekly classes over an 8-week period. Participants reported improved body awareness and reduction in pain.

In Brazil, Teixeira-Machado et al. (2015) looked into the effects of Feldenkrais Method with older people with Parkinson’s Disease. This study noted both physical as well as emotional benefits resulting from the exercises. The study was with 30 people who were divided into an intervention and a control group. It found that the participants in the intervention group who received 50 hours of Feldenkrais showed reduced depression and better quality of life measures than the control group. Some people also reported improved ease of movement, agility and strength all of which made them feel less anxious about being on their own and consequently they felt that they were more able to be independent.

These examples, above, indicate that attending Feldenkrais Method classes has been beneficial for many older people, even for those considered to be frail, that is, with restricted mobility, cognitive or other degenerative diseases. Uniquely, findings from my study indicate that improved posture, balance, mobility and reduction in pain might be achieved in sessions where Feldenkrais exercises form only part of the activities and are being used to ‘wake up’ the body in preparation for the theatre-making activities, rather than for specific rehabilitation and health benefits aims. A significant aspect of Feldenkrais Method is that it is very gentle and can therefore be used with people of all physical abilities. It does not require specific equipment and exercises can often be done sitting down. In this way all participants in the drama groups were able to participate in this element of the sessions and feel included, regardless of their physical state. Several participants commented on feeling that they had exercised their bodies but in a different way from other exercise, they felt it was a more integrated experience. This echoes responses from some of the participants in Broome et al.’s study, cited above. These participants said that they felt Feldenkrais suited them, as older people, as it did not require the high energy of a gym, with one participant saying, ‘you feel like
you’ve done a workout, even though it has been slow and relaxed and so on, you feel as if you’ve used your body’ (Broome et al. 2015, p. 122).

The integrated nature of the Feldenkrais exercises, alongside other physical activities employed in the sessions, meant that all parts of the body were engaged, from feet to head. This often included a particular focus on using the eyes to give direction to movement. Whilst initially, some participants found this challenging, in the longer term they described finding it useful as well. Using the eyes to give direction helped to improve posture and balance, as well as developing greater awareness and confidence of moving through space, in relation to others. Puric explains that one of the reasons that a person may trip over is that their fear of falling means that they look down when walking, rather than using their eyes to lead their movement, consequently:

The whole spine would be slouching forward and the breathing would be less efficient because the chest sinks and you end up being stiffer, so if something happens, you are less available to catch yourself if you lose balance. (Puric, 2020)

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that participants’ experiences of engaging different muscles in continuously changing ways was beneficial, as this meant that the person’s whole body was exercised and stimulated at the same time. Despite using limited amounts of Feldenkrais exercises in the sessions, these findings echo Webb et al.’s (2013, p. 2) explanation of the aims of Feldenkrais Method, to achieve ‘a heightened self-awareness, an expansion of a person’s repertoire of movement, and improved functioning where the whole body cooperates in movement’.

Breathing and voice

The integrated nature of Feldenkrais work combined with other vocal activities meant that some participants noticed a beneficial impact on their breathing and consequently their voice. This was also noted by Connors et al. (2011) in their study of the benefits of Feldenkrais with older people. Breathing affects voice and speech. In her book on Feldenkrais for actors, movement director, Victoria Worsley, explains that moving and breathing involve using the same muscles, therefore:

Any of the parts of ourselves that we habitually hold, tighten, compress or simply leave out of the picture may also be places we need to use in different ways for the breath and to make sound. (Worsley, 2018, p. 207)

Two of the people in the drama groups who had issues with mobility and posture also had speech difficulties. These were Donald who has Parkinson’s Disease (PD) and Emma who had a stroke between the first and second terms of the workshops.
Responses from both people and other participants, as well as my observation notes, suggested that there was some improvement in the power of their voices and clarity of speech at the end of some of the drama sessions. The use of the voice is also closely linked to a person’s posture and breathing. Voice coach, Patsy Rodenburg (2020 p.16), notes ‘it is no coincidence that actors still working into their eighties have one thing in common: great posture.’ She explains that ‘when you tighten or slump the spine it not only affects the breath, voice and speech but also our thinking, feeling and self-esteem’. This indicates that improved posture and breathing help to develop enhanced physical and mental self-confidence and together these factors support better vocal ability.

Donald was the only participant in the workshops who was living with PD so there is no other participant to compare him with and specific literature on the disease and theatre practice is limited. However, the nature of drama practice itself, as well as potentially improved posture and breathing, may have contributed to increased clarity in Donald’s speech. It was noticeable that Donald demonstrated greater articulation and improved memory in the role-play sessions when he was playing a character that he had invented. Donald’s experience does appear to be supported by findings from a study that took place in Italy by Modugno et al. (2010). This was a pilot three-year study with 20 PD patients, 10 in a theatre intervention group and 10 in a control group, to see whether theatre-making could reduce disability and improve quality of life (QoL). The researchers concluded, ‘that active theater has positive and stable effects on the cognitive, affective, and motor domains of PD patients, thus improving their overall QoL’ (Modugno et al., 2010, p. 2312). They posit that one of the reasons for this might be that ‘to perform on stage, patients are forced to control their movements, thoughts, and emotions carefully’ (ibid.). They also noted that theatre requires personal interaction and socialisation which reduces feelings of isolation and helps PD patients to regain self-confidence. In discussing Modugno et al.’s research in relation to the effect of theatre training on cognitive functions, Sofia (2014) posits that theatre training causes neuromotor alterations when the actor explores and discovers ways of being and moving that are different from everyday life. She concludes that because theatre practice is holistic, involving all aspects of the person’s organisation that it is likely that the practice ‘stimulates brain plasticity in a more complete way, accelerating mechanisms of recovery and creation of alternative cognitive strategies’ (Sofia, 2014, p. 180).

Overall, the findings indicate that the physical exercises and theatre-making activities used in the drama workshops for this study, might have helped to sustain or improve
many participants’ functioning mobility. In this way it can be seen that workshop sessions, such as these, could be a potential pathway to supporting the realisation of strategies such as *Transforming Later Lives* (2018), the NHS *Long Term Plan* (2019) and the WHO (2020) *Decade of Healthy Ageing Action Plan*. *Transforming Later Lives* (p. 11) encourages older people to engage in more physical exercise as one of the ways to achieve their goal for ‘people to have five more years of preventable disability’. The NHS *Long Term Plan* (p. 17) has identified, amongst other things, that, ‘falls prevention schemes, including exercise classes and strength and balance training, can significantly reduce the likelihood of falls and are cost effective in reducing admissions to hospital’. The *Decade of Healthy Ageing Action Plan* (p. 3) argues for a ‘shift in focus from considering healthy ageing as the absence of disease to fostering the functional ability that enables older people to be and to do what they value’.

Although older people may join a drama group for reasons other than primarily exercise, the embodied and holistic nature of theatre-making, particularly when it also includes elements such as Feldenkrais work, can have secondary benefits, in that it may contribute to improvements in participants’ physical health. The focus of Feldenkrais exercises on the gentle integration of the whole body may be attractive to older people who are more reluctant to take part in conventional exercise programmes for fear of falling or increased pain.

**Distraction from pain**

Whilst many participants reported that the physical exercises helped to improve mobility and flexibility and decrease joint pain, this was not so for Olivia. Olivia has Fibromyalgia and lives with chronic pain. She said that the greatest health benefit she felt from the drama sessions was from the fun and laughter she experienced which distracted her from her pain. She described being so involved and immersed in the activities that she sometimes she forgot about the pain completely. This concurs with advice from The NHS website (2021), in its section on *10 Ways to Reduce Pain*. It lists distraction or shifting one’s attention onto something else, as an effective method for pain reduction, saying ‘get stuck into an activity that you enjoy or find stimulating’.

Clinical Psychologist, Malcolm Johnson (2005), writing about how distraction works in pain management, explains:

> Attention voluntarily directed away from pain has the capacity to reduce the pain experience and increase pain tolerance, which is reflected in altered responding in some pain-responsive brain regions. (Johnson, 2005, p. 94)
However, Johnson also warns that too much distraction may be unhelpful as pain sufferers can do too much and then feel greater pain subsequently. There were certainly occasions when Olivia reported feeling an increase in pain after doing specific physical exercises. However, she also said that, overall, the greater benefit was from the enjoyment she experienced in the sessions, and she had a desire to continue doing drama in the future. Olivia’s experience indicates the importance of frequently reminding participants of not overdoing a physical activity and it is quite acceptable to sit out and watch whenever they would like. It is also important to ensure that participants understand the risks involved so that they can make an informed decision about their participation.

**Cognition**

Many participants reported improved cognition, in terms of describing that they felt that their brains were more awake, their mind/body coordination improved, their responses were sharper and that they felt more mentally alert by the end of the sessions. They noticed that several of the activities had stimulated their memory and recall. This concurs with findings from other research on drama and ageing, particularly that of Noice et al. (1999; 2004), Noice and Noice (2006; 2008), Cohen (2006) and Stuckey and Nobel (2010). For example, Noice et al.’s 2004 study looking at a four-week theatre intervention with a group of participants alongside a control group, found that those who took part in the drama activities showed significant improvement in recall, problem-solving and memory span.

It would appear that one of the main reasons for these improvements in areas of cognition is because of the way that much drama practice integrates use of both mind and body. Cadman (2015), in her thesis on acting and cognition, discusses the relationship between the mental and physical activities of theatre-making. She says that during the process of acting the actor is re-presentation the character’s experience to the audience not their own experience, but, at the same time the actor is using their own body as the medium for expression. Cadman (2015, p. 131) explains that this means that ‘both the actor’s experiencing self (predominantly right-brain activity) and remembering self (predominantly left hemisphere) are necessary in this representation’. Consequently, both parts of the brain are simultaneously engaged in the activity, in relation with the body. The action of doing drama may therefore provide cognitive stimulation and exercise.

Specifically, regarding drama and memory, Utterback (2014) conducted a study exploring gesture and memory with 43 students. He found that the students best
remembered text when they used gestures alongside the words. Utterback (2014, pp. 152-154) surmises that gesture helps actors to make meaning through the body, it ‘allows the body to do the words’. He contends that memory ‘is not merely a mental activity confined to an isolated brain but a rich interaction of body within a contextualized world’, gestures, therefore, ‘are providing a cognitive prop that assists in the encoding of memory’. In this way the embodied nature of drama integrates mind and body so that work on the physical being of a person also affects their cognitive being and can therefore assist with recall and memory.

However, whilst some of the work in the drama sessions did involve using recall and remembering short pieces of text, much of it was based on improvisation and so stimulated other aspects of cognition. The work encouraged what participants described as imaginative, in the moment, spontaneous and original thought processes. They noted that many of the games and exercises demanded quick thinking responses and often involved ‘bouncing ideas off one another’. These findings are similar to those of Yamamoto’s (2020) study on improvisation with older women in a Mid-Atlantic Community Center in the USA. Yamamoto writes that research on improvisation differs from much of the previous research on drama and older people because it does not involve memory of text but rather requires participants to spontaneously generate original material. Like many of the participants in this study, participants in Yamanoto’s research reported feeling that their brains were stimulated and exercised by the improvisation activities they were involved in.

The improvisatory nature of the work in my study also appeared to support participants such as Judith who was living with dementia, it was noticeable that she remained much more engaged in the spontaneous, ‘in the moment’ activities, rather than those based on remembering. In this way, improvisation can be viewed as an approach to theatre-making that is inclusive for people with cognitive impairments and diseases. Even Pamela, in the same group who did not have any diagnosed cognitive impairments or problems with memory, commented that she preferred creating original stories rather than trying to ‘remember something you think you ought to know’. An Australian study by Stevens (2012) on improvisation and comedy with people living with dementia concluded that people with memory loss symptoms were possibly suited to improvisation because they respond ‘in the moment’ and do not over think things or need to rely on memory. This is also similar to Basting’s TimeSlips (2001; 2009; 2013) programmes and the later Penelope Project (Basting et al., 2016) based on improvisational storytelling workshops with people living with dementia, as discussed in Chapter 2. In this work participants’ creativity is encouraged through imagination rather
than recall, in order to promote inclusion of people with memory problems and cognitive deficits. These programmes and projects have been seen to increase the social participation of people living with dementia and also improve relationships with carers.

Overall, the findings on the health benefits of the drama sessions substantiate the aims of Pagneux’s work, as described in Chapter 3. This is an approach to making theatre that seeks to generate ‘lifefulness’ through integrating mind and body. So, ‘waking up’ the body also ‘wakes up’ the mind. Pagneux explains:

The inner eye wakes up the imagination, when you wake up suddenly you see, you feel, you read and you say, ‘Ah this is it’. And that is the wake up of each part of the body, in relationship with the brain. (Pagneux, 2012, 17:30)

In this way, theatre-making is a holistic process that can have positive impacts on many different aspects of an individual’s physical and cognitive health, as well as on their creativity and wellbeing.

8.4 Wellbeing

The holistic nature of the drama sessions, engaging both body and mind, also meant that whilst not all participants reported specific health benefits, almost everyone described experiences of subjective wellbeing. Participants commented on having had fun, feeling energised and being in a better mood at the end of the sessions than when they had arrived. Several people described the sessions as being immersive so that they forgot about concerns and anxieties in everyday life. Participants also commented on having enjoyed the opportunities that the drama sessions gave them for engagement in purposeful activities, socialisation with others, play and playfulness. These experiences concur with many of those described as being elements of the multi-dimensional nature of wellbeing (Ryff, 1989; Diener and Suh, 1997; Ryan and Deci, 2001), including pleasure, life-satisfaction, meaningfulness and self-actualization, as outlined in Chapter 2.3.

Enhanced mood, immersion and purpose

Participants in this study reported experiences similar to those found in other arts and wellbeing research, as discussed in Chapter 2.5i. For example, improved life satisfaction and reduction in anxiety and depression. They frequently described feelings of enhanced mood during and at the end of sessions, such as, ‘happy’, ‘cheerful’, ‘much better by the end than when I started’, ‘really high’. In this way their comments mirror those from participants in Farrally’s report (2019) for Arts Council
England’s *Celebrating Age* Wiltshire project. The report cites participants saying that the arts sessions made them feel:

- Uplifted
- Very happy and very warm feelings
- Came in feeling low and went out with a high
- Very exhilarating and forget all of the world’s woes
- Elated, glad I came
- Happy
- Life is still good even when you are old. This morning has been wonderful

(Farally, 2019, p. 6)

Whilst the participants in the *Celebrating Age* Wiltshire project reported experiencing similar improved mood to participants in this study, at the same time, their arts engagement was primarily as passive recipients of experiences such as concerts, or involvement in individual craft-based activities. In this way they differed from participants in the drama workshops who were actively engaged in making art with others. It is noticeable, therefore, that the drama participants, as well as describing enhanced mood, often commented on the pleasure they experienced from being immersed in playing and creating with others, and from learning new skills. In this way, their experiences are closer to those of the participants in Yamamoto’s 2020 study on improvisation with older people. Yamamoto’s group describe the sessions as enabling them to have fun with others and forget about their day-to-day concerns whilst also continuing to grow and learn.

The experiences of participants in this research, of enhanced mood, immersion and purpose, also fit with Peterson et al. ’s (2005) * Orientations to Happiness Framework* (OHF) as described in Chapter 2. The OHF proposes that people seek happiness through three different, but not incompatible orientations, or pathways, which are pleasure, meaning and engagement. The sessions combined opportunities for participants to experience all three happiness orientations. Participants frequently used the word ‘fun’ to describe the drama sessions. The foundations of Gaulier’s practice lie in the individual finding pleasure in theatre-making games and activities, regardless of their simplicity or complexity. Gaulier (2007, p. 193) says, ‘I love theatre whose origins are found in the realms of pleasure’. The work had meaning and purpose for people, as they described being able to learn and develop their creative and theatre-making skills. Participants also experienced engagement or immersion in the sessions, commenting on feeling that time passed very quickly and that they were often so involved in the activities that they forgot about outside concerns or worries, or, in the case of Olivia, her pain. This level of total engagement can be associated with what Csikszentmihalyi calls ‘flow’ as outlined in Chapter 2.3. He explains:
When an activity is thoroughly engrossing there is not enough attention left over to allow a person to consider either the past or the future, or any other temporarily irrelevant stimuli. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 62)

This is also similar to how Skinner describes older people’s experiences of happiness that arise from immersion in dancing. Based on findings from three case studies with older people involved in social dancing in the UK, Northern Ireland and USA, Skinner posits that the participants all dance in what he calls ‘the here and now’ and this is what generates positive feelings. He explains:

The immediacy of dancing, rather than the prelude to the dancing or the tea or return home after the dancing, resulted in the feelings of happiness, the sudden absence of aches and pains, the release of endorphins, the loss of self-consciousness, and the sudden motility realised. (Skinner, 2013, p. 27)

Overall, the experiences of many of the participants in the drama sessions concurred with Ohbi et al.’s (2021) research on OHF and lifelong learning and older adults which concluded that whole-person wellbeing lies at the intersection of the three OHF components pleasure, meaning, and engagement.

Personal growth and learning new skills are considered to be key elements of ‘successful ageing’ (Fisher, 1992; Bowling and Dieppe 2005; Schneider and McCoy 2017). However, ‘successful ageing’ is often criticised for not including people who may be frail or in poor health. Nonetheless, the participants in the Day Centre, who were generally more frail than those in other groups, commented on enjoying being able to interact with others in different ways from usual and engaging in activities that were new to them. In this way, the sessions also supported ‘active’ and ‘healthy ageing’ agendas, that encourage all older people’s continued participation in society. For example, The WHO (2002) Active Ageing: A Policy Framework sets out to advocate for the rights of all older people to experience improved quality of life, regardless of whether they are frail, disabled or dependent. Equally, The WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing: A Plan of Action (2020), reaffirms the importance of all older people having access to opportunities across their life-course, with an emphasis on participation, inclusivity and no one being left behind.

Socialisation

Many participants cited meeting people and making new friends as reasons for coming to the workshops as well as being aspects of the sessions that everyone had enjoyed, through playing and creating together. Even those people who had not enjoyed the drama activities as much as others, commented on appreciating the opportunities the
sessions gave for socialisation and connection with others. Whilst some participants said that age did not matter in the workshops, others also remarked that they felt more confident and comfortable coming to an activity which was aimed at older people rather a wider age range. To some extent this fits in with ‘cohort theory’, however, at the same time this was generally less important for participants than the fact that people shared similar creative interests.

Opportunities for socialisation are considered to be important for people in later life to combat possible isolation which can result from retirement from work, bereavement of family and friends, or illness, disability or frailty which might limit opportunities to go out and meet others (Bowling, 2005; Van Mil and Hopkins, 2015). Social isolation and loneliness can be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of older people – a phenomenon that has recently been brought to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic and is highlighted in the WHO’s (2021) advocacy brief on social isolation and loneliness amongst older people which describes the damage to older people’s health and wellbeing from social distancing and self-isolation rules.

Durcan and Bell (2015), in their practice resource for reducing isolation across the life course for Public Health England, note the importance of older people retaining social relations in supporting their health and improved longevity. Their resource suggests that people’s lives can be enhanced through sharing activities and experiences. In particular, Durcan and Bell (ibid. p. 43) state that ‘engagement with the creative arts can help individuals build and maintain social connections and can be beneficial for health and wellbeing’. These impacts are expanded upon further in Dadswell et al.’s. (2017) conceptual review of literature exploring the many ways in which participatory arts can counteract loneliness. For example, with specific reference to drama, the review cites the Creative Gymnasium project in Coventry in which qualitative data from participants indicated that ‘the peer group showed a commitment to and reliance on one another, which led to friendships, support and a sense of community cohesion’ (ibid. p. 114). Overall, the review concludes that the participatory arts enhance social relations, a sense of belonging and meaningful social participation. This research study indicates that these positive impacts are as applicable to older people as they are to any other groups.

Play and Playfulness
The ability to play and engage in playful activities were aspects of the drama workshops frequently cited by participants as ones that they had particularly enjoyed. As well as play being a driver for harnessing creativity, as discussed in 8.2, many
participants viewed playing together as contributing to generating feelings of wellbeing. They had fun playing games to get to know one another and build what they described as ‘team spirit’ and trust, through collaboration and cooperation. Their responses were similar to those of Yamamoto’s (2020) improvisation group of older women who also described how playing together developed ‘teamwork’ and ‘cooperation’ and created an environment where they felt supported and could trust one another. This concurs Spolin’s (1973) view that playing games is a highly social activity that promotes working together because everyone has to agree to the rules and then interact with one another in meeting the game’s objective.

As well as promoting and developing group cohesion, the focus of the drama sessions on play, or Le Jeu, allowed participants to have fun and pleasure in ways that were different from everyday life. Johnston (2005, p. 5) writes, ‘drama facilitates playfulness which revitalises our inner energies and extends our self-perceptions. It is axiomatic that drama begins with play’. Play lies at the heart of Gaulier and Pagneux’s theatre-making practices, as outlined in Chapter 3. Gaulier (2007, p. 212) writes, ‘theatre equals the pleasure of the game plus a play’ and Pagneux (2012, 43:53) has said, ‘I like to play, the spirit of the child is always in me’. The sessions therefore both gave permission to and encouraged participants to play and explore their playfulness with others.

Some people described feeling that outside of the sessions they either did not have opportunities to play, or that it was not appropriate for people of their age. For some, they felt that they were experiencing being like a child again and that they could be ‘silly’ without feeling that they would be judged negatively by others. Participants in the drama sessions described enjoying the freedom to play as they had when they were children, combined with experiencing freedom from expectations of age-appropriate behaviour. Several participants commented on enjoying being all older adults together where age did not define what they felt they could, or could not, do. These experiences demonstrate the influences of ageism in society, where older adults may start to limit what they feel they can do because of perceived societal or internal disapproval (Scholl and Sabat, 2008; Swift et al., 2017; Office and Fuente-Núñez, 2018). They also substantiate the ‘cohort theory’ of ageing, which assumes that particular types of behaviour and attitudes belong to specific age groups. The drama sessions gave participants permission to play and experience playfulness. This sense of freedom from expectations is echoed in Guitard et al.’s (2005) research on understanding playfulness in adults which concludes that having a playful attitude to life enables adults, amongst other things, to distance themselves from conventions. Similarly, the participants in
Yamoto’s (2020) improvisation group also describe feeling that the playful nature of the sessions allowed them to ‘be silly’ together, in a way that is often not accepted in everyday life.

Several of the participants in the drama workshops commented on appreciating that the games were the building blocks for learning different aspects of theatre-making and possibly, for some participants, this supported their feelings that they ‘had permission’ to play. Raphael (2013) writes in her PhD about how drama can make adult play possible because it has a very clear purpose:

> Play has an energy generated by fun and joy but it is far from trivial, it can be serious and productive work. Drama legitimises play and makes learning in this way acceptable for older children and adults. (Raphael, 2013, p. 64)

Play, within a drama context, is used with the specific intention of enabling the learning of new skills. Yamamoto (2020, p. 230) says that her group described their learning about improvisation as ‘serious (not be confused with solemn) play’. Equally, Schneider and McCoy, in their study on serious fun, older people and square dancing, contend that it is precisely the relationship between play and the seriousness of learning new arts skills that generates experiences of ‘fun’ for the older adults in their study. They observe that the dance participants ‘engage seriously with a complex activity that brings the fun of play into their lives’ (Schneider and McCoy, 2017, p. 56).

Playfulness has also been seen to be associated with positive feelings of wellbeing in other research. For example, from her studies on playfulness, imagination and creativity, Lieberman (1977, p. 6) identified three components of playfulness which she describes as ‘spontaneity, sense of humour and manifest joy’. These were also elements of the drama sessions that participants commented on as being important to their wellbeing. Building on Lieberman’s work which primarily focused on children, Guitard et al. (2005) sought to further understand playfulness in adults. From a study involving in depth interviews with 15 people, they concluded that playfulness for adults involves the same components identified by Lieberman, plus creativity and pleasure. Again, these were experiences frequently described by participants in this research. Further to Guitard’s research, Chang et al. (2016) studied the relationship between playfulness and resilience in older women. The study was with 167 members of the USA based, Red Hat Society that describes itself as an international playgroup for women. Participants filled in monthly questionnaires over a year. They concluded that frequently engaging in playful activities over a period of time can support mental and physical health and help to develop or sustain older people’s resilience. Scheider and
McCoy (2017, p. 56), in their aforementioned research on play and dance with older people, conclude that ‘play is an essential element of a life well lived and of successful aging’.

In terms of their own theatre practice, Gaulier and Pagneux themselves do not express any interest in improving performers’ wellbeing through play. As Murray (2010, p. 234) says about Pagneux, her practice is ‘neither for therapeutic reasons, nor to make her students feel happier’. However, I would argue that Guitard et al.’s five components of playfulness: creativity, curiosity, sense of humour, pleasure and spontaneity, are embedded in and threaded throughout their work. Participants in my sessions, which were based on Pagneux and Gaulier’s approaches, commented frequently on experiencing some, if not all, of these elements, thus indicating the relationship of play, in older people’s theatre-making, to wellbeing. Whilst there has not been much research specifically about Gaulier and Pagneux’s methodologies in relation to wellbeing, two studies, by Balfour et al. and by McDonald et al., have gone some way towards examining how Le Jeu may support positive wellbeing experiences. Although both studies focus primarily on the use of clown, as outlined in Chapter 3.4ii, which was not part of my practice in this study, they also refer frequently to the significance of Le Jeu and complicité in underpinning the work, which were integral to my sessions.

Balfour et al. discuss the work of performers Clark Crystal and Anna Yen who use clown with people living with dementia. Crystal and Yen both studied with Gaulier and additionally Yen trained with Pagneux and is a Feldenkrais practitioner. Balfour et al. (2019, p. 106) observe that Crystal and Yen’s practice is based on a philosophy of ‘spontaneity, connection and respectful playfulness’. They describe how Le Jeu and a spirit of playfulness are employed to ‘construct an atmosphere of openness and non-judgemental attitudes that are crucial for people with dementia to feel accepted’ (ibid. p. 116). The work is very much about being present and in the moment, engaging playfully with the situation and mood of the older people involved. They explain how the artists’ complicité assists them in generating a ‘shared understanding of the temperature in the room’ and therefore being able to respond to the immediacy of individual needs (ibid. p. 114). In the second study McDonald et al. research the use of clown and Le Jeu with drama students rehearsing King Lear. They conclude that ‘the power of ‘play’ to contest and disrupt, allowed the actors to be freed from expectations’ this led to ‘the observed wellbeing of resilience’ amongst the students (McDonald et al. 2019, p. 81). Whilst the participants in both these studies are different from those of my research, the studies nonetheless indicate how Gaulier and Pagneux’s use of Le Jeu can enhance wellbeing through the creation of open, non-judgemental spaces that
enable participants to experience feelings of freedom from expectation which in turn support greater confidence and self-esteem. This study therefore extends this knowledge by examining how Le Jeu, along with other aspects of Gaulier and Pagneux’s practice, can positively affect the wellbeing not just of older people living with dementia in residential care or drama students, but a wide range of older adults.

8.5 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the findings from the study in the context of the wider research on ageing and the arts, and drama in particular. I have also discussed participants’ experiences in the context of research on creativity, health and wellbeing. In relation to creativity, the findings support other research that shows that developing personal art form experience and skills, are the primary drivers for older people to engage in arts activities. However due to lack of research on what these creative experiences mean to older people, little is known about the aesthetic and affective impacts of the work. The findings therefore add to the knowledge of how older people experience and understand their drama participation and what it means to them in terms of cultural value. The findings demonstrate that older people particularly appreciate the collaborative nature of drama and enjoy being able to share their creativity with others. They also indicate that for many people the physical approach to theatre-making was a new experience for them. Participants developed and expanded their art form knowledge through engaging in an embodied practice that was combined with an emphasis on exploration, play and improvisation. This enabled participants to learn new creative skills. Many participants enjoyed the playful approach to the work. Research has shown that play and playfulness are connected to, and are drivers for, creativity. Several people felt that they stepped out of their usual comfort zones and discovered new forms of creative self-expression which they described as freeing and liberating. The drama activities therefore encouraged and supported many of the participants to discover new ‘possible selves’, ways of being and self-expression. In this way the study’s findings echoed those of research into older people making music. These experiences can be empowering and challenge ageist stereotypes.

Regarding the health benefits of the work, the focus on the use of the body and Feldenkrais exercises in particular, helped to improve several people’s posture, mobility and flexibility. This was similar to the findings in other studies on the use of Feldenkrais Method. The work appeared to support participants’ cognition, particularly generating a sense of mental alertness and to some extent improving recall and memory which is similar to research findings from other studies on drama with older
people. The work also aligns with research on theatre as an embodied activity where the use of gesture supports improved memory. At the same time, the improvisatory nature of much of the work supported people who experienced memory loss, as there was an emphasis on spontaneous response. This echoes other research on the positive impacts of improvisation, particularly with people living with dementia.

In relation to wellbeing, many participants reported enhanced mood, including having fun and feeling that time passed quickly. The findings support research on happiness, indicating that happiness lies at the intersection of pleasure, meaning and engagement. Participants described enjoying having the opportunity to socialise and meet new people, thereby complementing research on the benefits of socialisation in order to combat potentially negative impacts of isolation and loneliness in older age. They also enjoyed the opportunities that drama gave for playing together which has been seen to support wellbeing. Collaborative play and group improvisation engendered experiences of teamwork and team spirit that are commonly cited as being significant elements of theatre-making. Team spirit created a secure environment in which participants could take risks and build self-confidence. The findings also extended the current limited research on how specifically Le Jeu and complicité can support positive experiences of wellbeing.

Overall, the findings extend current knowledge about the creative and cultural experiences of older people engaging in participatory drama in general and physical theatre practices, in particular. The approach to theatre-making that I used in this research was based on developing participants’ experiences Le Jeu, complicité and disponibilité, adapted from the methodologies and practices of Gaulier and Pagneux. The indications are that participation in these embodied practices can be a holistic and ‘lifeful’ experience for older people, that engages the mind and body in playful and creative collaboration with others. In this way the findings complement and extend research on ‘active’ and ‘successful ageing’, indicating that physical theatre practice is one that all older people can engage in, regardless of physical and mental health and from which many may derive benefits that encompass their creativity, health and wellbeing.
Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the findings in relation to the wider context of research on ageing and the arts and specifically in relation to older people’s creativity, health and wellbeing. In this chapter, I conclude this study by reflecting first on my own experience as an artist, researcher and older person taking on this research work. I then discuss the contribution this study makes to original knowledge. I examine the limitations of the study and outline recommendations for future research. I finally discuss the legacy of the work.

9.2 My experience of the research

Prior to undertaking this study, my experience of doing physical theatre with older people was relatively limited. I had worked with a small group of active older people who were between the ages of 55-75. I had not ever asked these people to reflect on or tell me what their drama experiences meant to them, although some had mentioned in passing that they had noticed improvements in their mobility and less pain in their joints. This research has therefore enabled me to develop and extend my knowledge and experience of working with a wider range of older people from various backgrounds, with ages up to 94 and sometimes with physical, cognitive and mental challenges. I have learnt and am continuing to learn how best to adapt the work to suit multiple needs. The research process has also enabled me to systematically gather the views and perspectives from a relatively large group of older people, over a sustained period of time and using a variety of methods, in order to understand the impacts of the work for them. I am therefore hugely grateful for the time that each participant gave me to engage with the work and describe their experiences, as I could not have done this study without them.

Through undertaking this study, I have gained a better understanding of how my theatre practice, based on the work of Gaulier and Pagneux, might have positive benefits for older people’s creativity and self-expression. I have also been able to explore the potentials for my practice to support older people’s wellbeing and sense of self, as well as their physical health and cognition. Whilst there were many experiences that participants had in common, overall, I was continually reminded that older people are a heterogenous group and that each older person has their own individual experience of how the work affects them and what aspects of the work they enjoy most. Running the drama workshops was a stimulating, energising and at times challenging experience for me. I continually had to reassess what I was doing, to find
the most appropriate activities and strategies for working with each group and sometimes each individual. The best activities were very often ones that combined fun with gentle challenge and enabled participants to collaborate creatively together in a supportive environment. These were often simple games and exercises to which different levels of complexity could be added, together with a variety of opportunities for participants to develop and extend their creative skills. In order to do this, I drew on my experience of 40 years of theatre-making and teaching, my work with Pagneux and Gaulier and also with drama educator Dorothy Heathcote. I have discovered that the playful, exploratory and improvisatory nature of the work that we did was often very different from most people’s previous knowledge and experience of drama and theatre-making, either as a participant or audience member. Having fun, through structured play or Le Jeu, complicité and disponibilité, enabled participants to let go of everyday concerns or expectations and at the same time extend and build self-confidence in their performance skills. Whilst some people did not enjoy this more spontaneous aspect of the work, many people appreciated the freedom it allowed for experimentation and self-expression, particularly when they felt they were part of a trusting group environment in which they could step out of their usual comfort zone and build self-confidence. As a facilitator, I took on the responsibility of gently pushing participants’ boundaries within a supportive environment. Similar to many of the participants, I also experienced the sessions as being great fun, whilst often taking me out of my comfort zone. They pushed my own boundaries as an artist and teacher.

As an older person, taking on this research project 36 years after my previous academic experience, I have found the study process to be challenging on many levels. I have had to learn about such things as theoretical frameworks, methodology, data collection, ethics and data analysis. It has not been an easy journey but as a result, I have been able to extend and deepen my knowledge of academic research. This has enabled me to examine my own practice and also understand where it sits in relation to that of other creative practitioners, as well as researchers working with older people. Heuristics, hermeneutic phenomenology and Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ have framed and facilitated my examination and analysis of participants’ drama experiences from multiple perspectives. These theoretical frameworks have enabled me to explore the potential impacts of my practice for older people engaging in theatre-making. Consequently, I have gained new and rich insights into how older people might experience the work, what it means to them, what they gain from it and why. In these ways my horizon has ‘fused’ with those of the participants and I now have a much deeper understanding of the processes and impacts of the practice than I had before. As an expert in physical theatre practices, the new knowledge that I have gained as a
researcher will enable me to apply my creative practices in the wider pedagogical and academic fields of creative ageing.

This study has also enabled me to learn about and develop skills in data collection and analysis. I have been able to explore the advantages and disadvantages of different types of data collection. For example: the differences between questionnaires that ask several questions that may receive only short answers, or one question that might elicit a much longer and possibly more nuanced response; the value of focus groups to both generate interesting and surprising conversations as participants share their thoughts with one another, whilst also having the potential to get side-tracked and lose sight of the topic; journals are very useful for gathering rich data on an ongoing basis but are asking a bigger commitment from participants, so there may be, as was the case, fewer returned than given out; I have also experimented with creative ways of looking at the data which has enabled other perspectives but can then be more difficult to incorporate into the data analysis process. I have experienced that data collection is also challenging to do when one is also the artist/facilitator. Whilst the researcher position was not compromised, it can nonetheless be difficult at times to both lead a creative session and research it simultaneously. Equally, it was also sometimes hard to gather visual data at the same time as leading the workshops, so much of the visual data was of poor quality or did not always capture the moment as well as it might have. Finally, as the workshop leader, I was conscious of not wishing to influence what participants might say. I have therefore had to develop my own reflexivity, in order to acknowledge any preconceived notions and biases I might have had. Overall, despite some challenges in data collection and analysis, the processes have enabled me to gain a richness and depth of understanding of the potential value of my practice for older people.

9.3 The study’s contribution to knowledge

The study contributes to, extends, and adds originality to, existing knowledge on the arts and ageing, with a specific focus on knowledge about the experiences and impacts of physical theatre practice with older people. The study specifically contributes original knowledge to research on the cultural and creative value of older people making theatre. This area has been identified as having been under researched, with most studies on the benefits of theatre-making with older people having a primary focus on health and wellbeing outcomes (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016; Bernard and Rickett, 2017). This study examined equally, participants’ creative, health and wellbeing experiences and sought to uncover the affective, as well as the effective, impacts of
the work. As a hermeneutic phenomenological study, it therefore explored the holistic, lived experiences of the individuals who participated in the drama workshops.

**Creativity**

The research contributes original knowledge to the understanding of older people’s experiences of developing their creativity through participating in physical theatre practices, based primarily on the work of Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier. The research findings indicate that there are many aspects of physical theatre actor training that can be made accessible to all people, regardless of age or physical or mental ability. The emphasis of the workshops on developing ‘lifeful’ experiences of *Le Jeu, disponibilité* and *complicité* meant that they were inclusive. Everyone was encouraged to participate and collaborate, in a supportive and non-judgemental environment. At the same time, the work gently pushed older people’s creative boundaries on multiple levels, encouraging them to explore new ways to make theatre, with a particular focus on physical expression, combined with spontaneous and imaginative use of their creative minds. The work therefore integrated the whole person, mind-in-body and body-in mind (Zarrilli, 2004), as discussed in Chapter 3.4. The research suggests that a playful, exploratory and improvisational approach to the theatre-making can encourage older people to experience freedom and liberation from societal expectations. This supports research that indicates that play can support creative thinking and liberation from conventions (Spolin, 1963; Lieberman, 1977; Yamamoto 2020; McLaughlin 2021). The study suggests that by developing physical theatre skills for creative exploration, older people can discover and express ‘possible selves’ (Creech et al., 2014) that may have been hidden or lost. In this way the research extends existing knowledge on participatory arts and the self, that has been gained from studies on music-making with older people (*ibid.*).

The study suggests that older people’s main motivation for engaging in drama is to develop their creative knowledge and skills, in collaboration with other ‘like-minded’ people. This supports previous research that indicates that most older people take up creative activities because they are attracted to the making of art, rather than because they are looking for any particular health or wellbeing benefits. Whilst any subsequent health and wellbeing benefits are likely to be welcomed, they are usually secondary to participants’ primary reason for engaging in a new creative activity (Cohen, 2006; Matarasso, 2012). This research also extends knowledge from creative ageing studies that suggests that creativity does not disappear with age, it just needs opportunities and support to flourish. Additionally, the development of a person’s creativity,
regardless of their age, can generate experiences of empowerment and agency for the maker (Matarasso, 2012; McCormick, 2017).

**Health**

The study extends existing knowledge on the beneficial effects that participatory drama can have on older people’s physical health. The physical aspects of the work support ‘active ageing’ policies and show that through engagement in drama activities, it is possible for many older people to be involved in gentle exercise, regardless of physical or cognitive challenges. The integrated nature of many of the activities indicated that physical theatre practices can support some improvements in physical health without the need for participants to go to specialist exercise classes. For example, my methodology, which blended some Feldenkrais Method exercises with other creative activities that encouraged increased body awareness, indicated that it was possible to improve posture, mobility, balance and reduction in joint pain, for some people, without needing to go to a dedicated Feldenkrais class. Equally, improvement in posture, combined with imaginative role-play, appeared to assist improvement in breathing and voice, again without needing to go to a specialist voice coach. The focus on improvisation indicated that everyone could be involved at some point during a session, regardless of cognitive ability. This therefore added to existing research on improvisatory drama practices with people living with dementia (Basting 2001; 2009; 2013; Balfour et al. 2019). Although only one person in the study had Parkinson’s Disease, the study added, in a small way, to research on drama and theatre-making in this area (Modugno et al., 2010; Heiberger et al., 2011; Sofia, 2014).

**Wellbeing**

The collaborative nature of drama promotes social interaction and thereby supports older people’s continued participation in society. In this way the study contributed to research and policy studies on ‘active ageing’ and studies on older people, isolation and loneliness. A primary focus of the drama sessions was on play, having fun together and building complicité or team spirit. Many people therefore experienced enhanced mood and happiness within a supportive and non-judgemental environment. The study therefore adds to the limited research that exists on the beneficial wellbeing effects of using Le Jeu and complicité (Balfour et al., 2019; McDonald et al., 2019). It also adds to the limited research on improvisation with older people which found that participants enjoyed being able to be ‘silly’ and having fun playing together, in a supportive environment (Yamamoto, 2020). Overall, the study supports research that suggests that drama and theatre-making can build self-confidence and contribute to
counteracting ageist stereotypes, both internal and societal (Bernard et al., 2015; Bernard and Rickett, 2017).

Table 6. below, gives a summary of the original contribution that this study gives to existing knowledge about the participatory arts, drama and ageing.

**Table 6. Original contribution to knowledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of research</th>
<th>Existing knowledge</th>
<th>Findings from this study</th>
<th>Original contribution to knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creativity</strong></td>
<td>Creativity does not diminish with age (Matarasso, 2012; McCormick, 2017)</td>
<td>The physical and playful approaches to theatre-making were new for many people</td>
<td>Suggests that older people have a continued interest in developing and expanding their creative knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making art with others is the primary driver for older people to join a drama group (Cohen, 2006)</td>
<td>Older people expressed wanting to have opportunities to share and develop their creativity with other similar minded people</td>
<td>Drama enables collaborative and creative group interactions to take place. Creating together is fun, enlivening and 'lifeful'. It generates a strong sense of a shared creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Play and playfulness</strong></td>
<td>Play and playfulness are useful ways for people of all ages to develop creativity and imagination (Spolin, 1963; Lieberman, 1977; Yamamoto, 2020)</td>
<td>Older people enjoy having opportunities to play together. Play generates original thinking and supports liberation from conventional behaviour</td>
<td>Suggests that Le Jeu stimulates curiosity, alternative ways of creative thinking and behaving regardless of age or physical/cognitive abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play and improvisation encourage a 'yes and' spontaneous approach to creative working, an acceptance of other people's ideas (Spolin, 1963; Johnstone, 1981; Johnston, 1998)</td>
<td>Participants experienced permission to explore and experiment without judgement</td>
<td>Suggests that Le Jeu and disponibilité, which underpin an improvisatory approach to theatre-making, can generate stimulating and liberating experiences for older people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Policies</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Drama</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health policies encourage older people to participate in physical exercise but they do not always want to, or, are not able to engage in more strenuous activities such as going to a gym, swimming or even walking (NHS, 2019; WHO, 2020)</td>
<td>Feldenkrais Method is considered to help with improving body awareness and general flexibility. For older people this can mean improved posture, balance, mobility, breathing, reduction in pain (Conors et al., 2011; Broome et al., 2015; Teixeira et al., 2015).</td>
<td>From observation almost all participants were able to engage in the Feldenkrais and other physical drama activities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The slow and gentle nature of the Feldenkrais exercises mean that they can be adapted to all ages and abilities. The integrated nature of Feldenkrais means that the whole body is engaged.

**Suggests that despite the workshops not being Feldenkrais classes, the use of Feldenkrais exercises to ‘wake up’ the body for drama, can also have beneficial physical consequences for older people.**

| The participatory arts can support and develop the expression of other possible selves (Creech et al., 2014; Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016) | Participants experienced being able to use their bodies and voices in multiple ways, expressing parts of themselves that are often hidden from public view. This can take people out of their comfort zone but also build confidence in the process | Suggests that drama can be both an exposing art form and one that enables and allows a range of personal expression |

**Participants reported greater alertness and more original and imaginative thinking**

**Suggests that the spontaneous nature of Le Jeu and improvisation activities encourages greater mental alertness.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wellbeing</th>
<th>Drama can help to support improved motor and memory skills in people with Parkinson’s Disease (Modugno et al., 2010)</th>
<th>The one participant with Parkinson’s Disease reported better walking. Other participants noticed improved clarity of speech and memory</th>
<th>Suggests improvements in posture also affect walking and breathing. Participation in drama role play, which means taking on a character other than oneself, appears to support improved clarity of articulation and memory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement in an activity one enjoys can be a distraction from pain (Johnson, 2005; NHS, 2021)</td>
<td>One participant with Fibromyalgia described the fun she experienced in the workshops as enabling her to forget about her ongoing pain</td>
<td>Suggests that finding the right activity to suit an individual’s personality (in this case drama) can reduce experiences of pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in the arts supports many wellbeing aims – social participation and connection, feelings of happiness, engagement in meaningful activities and personal growth (Durcan &amp; Bell, 2015; Dadswell et al., 2017; APPG, 2017)</td>
<td>Participants reported having fun, enjoying meeting people, interacting in different ways from usual, learning new skills and building confidence</td>
<td>Suggests that the playful and improvisatory nature of this approach to drama is very inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiences of ‘flow’ lead to enhanced mood and reduction in anxiety (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Peterson et al., 2005)</td>
<td>Participants described sessions as being immersive, so they forgot about outside worries and concerns</td>
<td>Suggests that improvisation and play/Le Jeu with older people enables them to act in the moment which can enhance mood and feelings of happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theatre is an embodied activity. In physical theatre practices, in particular, body and mind are of equal importance (Zarrilli, 2004; 2007; Murray &amp; Keefe, 2016)</td>
<td>Participants discovered and learnt about making meaning through their bodies, physical self-expression. They experienced a sense of mind and body integration, that it was a holistic experience</td>
<td>Suggests that the holistic experience of physical theatre-making positively engages and stimulates older people’s minds and bodies, regardless of physical/cognitive abilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 (continued)

| Making art is creating something new and original, it can be an empowering experience that gives agency to the artist. (Matarasso, 2012; Bernard and Rickett, 2017; McCormick, 2017) | Participants described feeling more self-confident and empowered through the creative expression of themselves, in new and different ways | Suggests that theatre-making based on Le Jeu, disponibilité and complicité enhances the sense of self and conveys agency to the performer, challenging societal and internalised perceptions of ageism. |

9.4 Limitations

In this section I discuss the limitations of the study. This is then followed in section 9.5 by recommendations and implications for future practice and research, including recommendations for how to redress some of the limitations outlined below.

9.4i Researcher bias

This is a hermeneutic phenomenological and heuristic study that explores the lived experiences of a group of older people engaging in actor training through participation in a series of workshops led by myself as artist, facilitator and researcher. As the artist/facilitator, I brought over 40 years of experience in theatre-making and teaching to the study, however I also brought my own biases towards what I considered might be the potential benefits of this type of activity. As the researcher, I have endeavoured to hold this awareness of bias throughout the research process and have practised reflexivity as discussed in Chapter 4. I am nonetheless aware that my biases may have affected interpretations that I have made of participants' experiences. To offset these limitations, I have discussed the findings with my supervisors and with a retired colleague from the university who has used thematic analysis in her work. I also shared the findings with some of the participants from two of the groups, as a form of member checking. I am also aware that as both artist and researcher it was often difficult for me to lead the sessions creatively and at the same time observe and remember individual responses to the work for data collection. To offset this limitation, I took notes as soon as I could after sessions, as well as some photographs and videos during sessions, which supported the data analysis.
9.4ii Working with older people who have multiple needs

Whilst I had been running an adult drama group at the Arts Centre for some years prior to the start of this research, the majority of older people I had been working with were in relatively good physical and mental health. I had no previous experience of working with people with physical or cognitive disabilities. It was therefore challenging to introduce my practices to groups of people with multiple needs, as in the Day Centre group. I was discovering, along with participants, what did and did not work well with them, and adapting as I went along. If I were to start working with a group such as this again, I would have a better understanding of what kinds of activities work best and how to introduce them so that everyone can feel included.

9.4iii Quality of experience

The quality of the drama experience for participants was affected by a number of factors. In particular, the spaces in which we could meet, the amount of time I had with each group and the size and continuity of the group, as I explain below.

Space

Some of the spaces used for the fieldwork groups were not particularly suitable for drama work and therefore limited what we could. For example:

- The first term with the Community Centre group was in a very cold church hall, with hard floors. This meant that participants could not take off their shoes, which is helpful in Feldenkrais work in order to have a stronger connection with the floor, and because of the cold we could not spend a lot of time on some slower and more focussed activities. One of the participants was particularly unhappy about the cold and the distress of that person impacted on the mood of everyone else.

- The Rural group had a similar cold hard floor and also a lot of furniture which limited movement in the space.

- The Day Centre group met in a bar area which was full of tables and big heavy chairs. Although they could be moved, there was still only just enough space to make a circle that everyone could fit into. On occasions where the room was occupied, we had to move into one end of the main room where there were a lot of distractions from voices, radio in the kitchen and sometimes people passing through.
The factors described above all impacted on which activities it was possible to do and the overall quality of experience for participants. In contrast the group that ran in the Arts Centre was in a relatively spacious room, that was warm, light and airy, with carpeted floor which was conducive to moving around easily and working without shoes when needed. The Community Centre group moved to a space that was more conducive to drama work in the second term but unfortunately, although some new people joined, two people from the original group decided not to continue. Whilst the space was not the only reason for this, it was certainly a factor. The suitability of the space is therefore an important element to be taken into consideration when planning drama workshops.

**Time and travel**

The amount of time I had with each group also affected how much I could do with participants and how easily I could collect data. For example, the Day Centre group met after their afternoon tea, so sometimes we started quite late as it took time to get everyone ready. One person had to leave before the end of the session each week because of transport. We also had to finish very promptly because of buses collecting everyone else. The time slot was quite short compared to other groups and therefore there was not much time to both engage meaningfully in the activities and also then discuss participants’ experiences. The lack of time contributed to there being less data from this group.

The Rural group depended on one person picking everyone else up and taking them to her house and then home again, sometimes with my assistance. This put a lot of pressure on the host, and whilst it was possible to maintain this throughout the Autumn, she did not feel that she could continue into a second term, so consequently I was unable to run as many sessions with this group as with the others.

**Size and Continuity**

The size of the some of the groups meant that sometimes if participants were away, there were limitations on what it was possible to do with only a small number of people. On occasions there were only three people in the Community Centre group. Also, with this group, because different people missed each week, there was sometimes a lack of continuity in the work. At times, lack of continuity in the Day Centre group, because of illness or group members deciding to join other one-off activities, meant that some sessions were cancelled and then there could be a gap of two or three weeks between meetings. In both circumstances the size of the group and/or restarting after a gap,
meant that energy levels were sometimes lower than in groups with more people or better attendance.

9.4iv Sample

Sandelowski (1995) proposes that phenomenological studies should aim for ‘phenomenal variation’. This approach targets a population with experience of the phenomenon under consideration, but scopes for diversity within that population so that breadth of experience of the phenomenon can be maximised. Sandelowski (ibid. p. 182) contends that phenomenal variation is useful ‘in order to have representative coverage of variables likely to be important in understanding how diverse factors configure a whole’. In this study, ‘phenomenal variation' was to a large extent achieved. The cohort of participants was 42, which was larger than in many phenomenological studies. The make-up of the groups was such that it covered a wide range of ages from 55-94. The groups also comprised people with varying physical and cognitive abilities, from different socio-economic backgrounds and living in both rural and urban environments. Three people in the Community Centre group had Spanish as their first language, though all had lived in Britain for many years. This meant that findings captured a variety of experiences and views. Limitations of the sample were that there were only 5 men compared to 37 women, one group had no men and two groups only one man each, so it is not possible to draw any conclusions regarding differences in experiences according to gender. Also, variation was not achieved with regard to ethnicity, as all participants were white, which while this reflected the majority ethnicity of the populations of the areas in which the groups were based, did not reflect the UK population ethnicities as a whole.

9.4v Data collection

Data were collected from all groups, either written or verbally, however most data came from the Arts Centre Group. This is in part because they experienced the most sessions, had the most consistent attendance and gave the most written feedback through questionnaires and journals. Journals were a good way of collecting more in-depth thoughts and reflections from participants over time. It was therefore worth encouraging participants to do this, whilst recognising that not everyone had the time and inclination. The Arts Centre Group also participated in two focus groups that were a good way of generating conversations between people, often leading to unexpected and valuable comments and reflections. Whilst focus groups, or one-to-one interviews, would have been useful to run with other groups, particularly those who were less able to give written feedback, there was unfortunately not time, or a suitable space, to do
so. However, despite there being some limitations in the data collection with participants, data included in the findings reflects at least one response from each participant who attended the workshops.

Data collected from researcher observation was also limited as it was challenging for me to be simultaneously workshop leader and observer. It could have been helpful to have a research assistant to record what was happening whilst I led the creative activities. Equally, in terms of working across two disciplines (participatory arts and health), it could have been useful to incorporate expertise from different perspectives. However, an outside observer might also have made participants feel more self-conscious and therefore limited what they might do or say. Similarly, whilst more systematic video recording of sessions might have been useful for deeper analysis, this could also have influenced how participants responded to the work, so there would have been advantages and disadvantages.

9.5 Recommendations and implications for future practice and research

9.5i Recommendations and implications for future practice

Recommendations for work in health and social care settings

- The research indicated that whilst the drama sessions were particularly attractive to participants who wanted opportunities to be creative together with others, secondary outcomes suggested that the sessions also had the potential to improve participants’ health and wellbeing. Therefore, drama sessions, such as these, may be of interest to professionals working in health and social care settings who want to find alternative ways of encouraging older people to engage in rehabilitation or exercise. The playful and creative approach to the work might support those people who might be otherwise reluctant to join specific exercise classes
- Additionally, these sessions could be included in social prescribing resources, as a means to reduce social isolation and loneliness, build self-confidence and improve mental health.

Practical recommendations for running sessions

- The findings suggest that participants have the best experiences when sessions take place in a warm room with enough space to move around easily, a clean and wooden, or carpeted, floor and without interruptions
Participants enjoy the opportunity to have a cup of tea before, after or during the workshop. This supports beneficial social interaction in a different way from direct engagement in the drama work, however it means allowing enough time in the session and the space to do this so that this does not impinge on the actual work. Alternatively, groups comprised of independent and mobile participants may be happy to go to a nearby café after the session.

The findings suggest that in a drama workshop situation where there is not an obvious outcome, i.e. putting on a play, many participants appreciate having some understanding of the purposes of particular games and exercises, whilst not dwelling too long on theory to the detriment of practice. Equally, participants enjoy being able to give ideas about what aspects of drama they would like to explore/develop next, for example, more voice and character work.

When working with groups with multiple needs, it is useful to have some understanding of individual needs and interests, and also to have a range of activities in order that everyone can feel included and is able to participate. It is also helpful to have a support worker, who knows the individuals, present during the sessions. With regard to the specific nature of the Day Centre group, if I were to start again, I would explore possibilities of introducing more songs and rhymes alongside the Feldenkrais exercises, to keep the exercises more playful and fun for participants, in situations where there might be potential for boredom.

When working with older people, particularly in rural areas where there may be limited public transport and they do not all drive, it would be helpful to have a budget to support transport to the working venue. In this way the responsibility for transportation does not fall on individual participants’ shoulders.

The findings indicate that the size of the group also affects participants’ experiences, it is recommended to have a group of no smaller than 4 and no bigger than 20. A larger group can be broken down into smaller units so that everyone still feels that they belong.

9.5i Recommendations and implications for future research and research design

Recommendations for greater diversity of participant sample

Whilst this project involved a wide range of older people age-wise, from 55-94, there was limited ethnic diversity within the group and there were only 5 men out of 42 people. Future recommendations, therefore, are to explore ways to
run a project such as this with a wider ethnic mix of people and a different gender balance, to gain other perspectives and experiences.

Recommendations for future areas of research

Future areas of research could include:

- Further research on how play and improvisation can contribute to older people’s experiences of liberation from judgement and convention and how these experiences may counteract their experiences of age stereotyping
- Further research on how physical theatre and other participatory drama practices can positively support people living with Parkinson’s Disease
- Further research on how physical theatre and improvisation can support engagement and participation in drama with people living with dementia
- Research could also examine further how Pagneux’s use of Feldenkrais exercises might support improved mobility and flexibility for older people who might not necessarily want to attend specific exercise classes. Similarly, research could also explore further how best to introduce Feldenkrais work with less mobile participants in a fun and engaging way so that they want to continue doing it
- Research could examine the experiences of older people participating in physical theatre training sessions such as these and then creating their own theatre pieces to show to an outside audience. How the experiences of having to rehearse and then perform to others impact on older people’s creativity, health and wellbeing
- Further research could also involve older people themselves in the co-design of the research. They may become co-researchers, agreeing on the topic or issue to be explored, helping to formulate the research question, shaping the data collection process and analysis, as well as the dissemination of findings. In these ways, participatory research of this nature can enable participants to have a stronger voice in the research process, support wider ownership of the research and assist in addressing power differentials between researchers and participants (Cargo and Mercer, 2008).

9.6 Legacy

Since the end of the research workshop sessions, I have had contact with various members of the Community Centre group and two of them have been able to
participate in other drama and theatre-making opportunities that I have informed them about.

One of the impacts of the project was the forging and strengthening of relationships amongst members of the Arts Centre group. Group members expressed a keen interest in putting their newly acquired theatre-making skills into practice, in a public performance. Therefore, outside of this research, I have continued working with the group and directed 11 of the participants in a scripted play, Broken Pieces, that they performed in three community venues attached to public libraries, in December 2019. Following on from this and also stemming from the friendships formed and interests aroused through the research workshops, 13 of the participants, 2 from the Community Centre group and 11 from the Arts Centre group, were keen to find ways of continuing to create together during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Consequently, I worked online with group members and under my direction, they wrote and made a film, An Uncertain World, that explored their younger ‘liberated’ selves, in the 1960s and 70s, in relation to their experiences as older people under lockdown. The work was made in tandem with a similar group of older people in Amsterdam, run by theatre director Loes Hegger. Both groups appeared in one another’s films which had live online launches in March 2021. We are in the process of planning a new Anglo-Dutch project together.

Overall, the processes of doing this PhD have given me a wonderful opportunity to explore and examine in depth how Gaulier and Pagneux’s practices might positively impact older adults’ perceptions and experiences of their creativity, health and wellbeing. I have gained greater understanding of how a physical, playful and improvisatory approach to theatre-making, based on Le Jeu, complicité and disponibilité, can support older people to stay active, engaged and ‘lifeful’, regardless of any physical or mental limitations they might experience. I have discovered how older people’s theatre-making can engender experiences of empowerment and agency, thereby challenging internalised and societal perceptions of ageism. At the same time, I have had time and space to observe, reflect on and develop my own practice as an older artist and teacher, whilst also developing new skills as a researcher. The PhD has enabled me to make new contacts both within Northumbria University and other universities across the world, leading to possibilities for future collaborative research with colleagues working in similar and related fields of inquiry.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval

Research Ethics: Your submission has been approved

EthicsOnline@Northumbria
Wed 11/07/2018 18:05

To:
• sarah.kemp

Dear sarah.kemp,

Submission Ref: 9239

Following independent peer review of the above proposal*, I am pleased to inform you that APPROVAL has been granted on the basis of this proposal and subject to continued compliance with the University policies on ethics, informed consent, and any other policies applicable to your individual research. You should also have current Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) clearance if your research involves working with children and/or vulnerable adults.

* note: Staff Low Risk applications are auto-approved without independent peer review.

The University’s Policies and Procedures are here

All researchers must also notify this office of the following:

• Any significant changes to the study design, by submitting an ‘Ethics Amendment Form’
• Any incidents which have an adverse effect on participants, researchers or study outcomes, by submitting an ‘Ethical incident Form’
• Any suspension or abandonment of the study.

Please check your approved proposal for any Approval Conditions upon which approval has been made.
Appendix 2: Participant Information Form

An exploration of the role and impact of creative play and theatre making on the quality of life and wellbeing of older people

Research Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of Sarah Kemp’s PhD research. This sheet describes why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research? Sarah Kemp, who is studying at the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at Northumbria University

Title of the Research An exploration of the role and impact of creative play and theatre making on the quality of life and wellbeing of older people

What is the aim of the research? I wish to explore how the work of theatre practitioners Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier can be used in drama workshops with older people to develop creative theatre making skills and what impact this work might have on older people’s quality of life and sense of wellbeing.

Why have I been asked? You have been asked because you have expressed interest in developing your drama and theatre making skills and you are in the age bracket of 55+.

Do I have to take part? It is up to you whether you take part. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can stop at any time and you do not have to give any reason for changing your mind. It is possible to withdraw your information if you choose to leave the project. However, once the project has ended, if your information has been anonymised by this stage and integrated into the research findings it may not be possible for the information to be withdrawn.

What should I expect if I take part? You will take part in a weekly series of two-hour drama workshops taking place October/November 2018 and February/March 2019. There may also be a shared performance at the end of the workshop period for those people who wish to participate.

The workshops will consist of:

- gentle movement activities to waken up the body and develop greater awareness of self
- drama games to develop a sense of rhythm, space, complicity with the group and improvisation skills
- improvisations around topic areas proposed either by me or group members
- devising of scenes that may be shared with family, friends and other drama groups participating in the research

In addition I will ask you to:

- keep a journal/diary with brief reflections on each workshop
- contribute to individual and/or group discussion around drama and wellbeing
- agree to being recorded and/or videoed to assist me with planning, documenting, analysing and disseminating my research

Where will the workshops take place? The workshops will take place in a location near where you live.

Will I be paid for participating in the research? No.

What happens to the data collected? I will use the information gathered through our workshops and discussion to include in my PhD writing. This material could also be used at a presentation at an event or in a published article. I may quote from parts of my notes on the process, as well as from your words given during conversations and
interviews. All quotes will be anonymised, unless you give me permission to use your name.

What happens to the video recorded? If you agree and sign the release/consent form, video material may be used for my PhD, where appropriate. This could be for publication, for part of my PhD practice submission or presentations in the future. Video of your face will be pixelated, unless you have told me otherwise. You can request to see the material before it is used.

How is confidentiality maintained? All participants will be anonymous in my writing unless you agree not to be and you tell me you would like your own name to be used. I will not show pictures or videos of you without getting your permission first. All the data will be stored on the university secure “U” drive and/or in a secure cabinet at the university or my house. Any recordings, notes and dialogues not to be used with permission for further publication, will be destroyed in accordance with the University’s Information Security policy after the research.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind? It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in the research. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Are there any disadvantages of taking part? You are being asked to give up some of your time to take part in the study. During the workshops, if you find some of the movement exercises too physically demanding you can stop at any time. Equally, if you find any of the discussions or improvisations too emotional or upsetting you can withdraw at anytime.

What are the possible benefits of taking part? Whilst I don’t want to pre-empt any findings, I would hope that participants would find the workshops fun and stimulating and an opportunity to meet others and play and create together.

Will the outcomes of the research be published? The research will inform the central part of my PhD. It is also possible that the findings of the research will inform future articles and presentations.

Contact for further information Sarah Kemp, PhD student, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Northumbria University. sarah.c.kemp @northumbria.ac.uk
### Appendix 3: Risk Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Activity, Equipment, Materials, etc.</th>
<th>Hazard</th>
<th>Persons at risk</th>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Likelihood</th>
<th>Risk Rating</th>
<th>Control Measures Required</th>
<th>Final Result*</th>
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</table>
| 1        | Researcher running workshops on her own | Working alone with people she does not necessarily know. Physical or verbal abuse. | Researcher      | 5        | 1          | 5 (L)       | • All workshops will take place either in public buildings and/or with people known to the researcher  
• Booking system in place through centre organiser so that researcher and organizer know who to expect  
• Research will take place in daylight hours  
• Researcher will have mobile phone contact with supervisor and/or organiser of the workshop session | 5x1 = 5 (L)               |
| 2        | Workshop participants                | Injury or other health related problem occurs during the workshop     | Participants    | 5        | 5          |             | • Researcher will inform participants that they should stop any exercise if they feel any strain or discomfort  
• Researcher will make sure that the room is suitable for moving around and that there are no known trip hazards etc.  
• Researcher will have basic first aid kit and know who to contact eg workshop centre organizer should a more major health situation arise |             |
| 3        | Workshop participants                | Emotional distress                                                    | Participants    | 5        | 5          |             | • Researcher will ask all participants to respect confidentiality of what any participant says or does  
• Researcher will ask all participants to listen to and respect views of others  
• Researcher will ensure that all participants are free to leave at any time |             |
## Risk Assessment Form

### Does this Risk Assessment Require Further Specific Risk Assessment:

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### To be completed by the person undertaking the risk assessment

- **Name:**
- **Job Title:**
- **Signature:**
- **Date:**

### To be completed by the Line Manager

I consider this risk assessment to be suitable and sufficient to control the risks to the health & safety of both employees undertaking the tasks and any other person who may be affected by the activities.

- **Name:**
- **Job Title:**
- **Signature:**
- **Date:**

**NB – If Line Managers do not agree that the risk assessment is suitable and sufficient then the assessment must be reviewed and amended accordingly.**

### To ensure we are consistent in managing safety risks across the UNN please answer the following question and take any appropriate action: -

1. Can this risk assessment be shared and labelled as Generic to the University i.e. is the activity carried out within another faculty or department? **Y/ N**
2. Is there a related risk assessment that may require review and update following completion of this risk assessment? **Y/N**
Appendix 4: Participant Health Information Sheet

The physical exercises and movement activities that we will do in the workshops are for you to gain greater awareness of how your body works. Each person’s body is different. The exercises will be gentle but may involve using muscles that you don’t use frequently or have not used for a long time. Therefore, you may sometimes feel a bit achy or tired afterwards. We may also do work on the floor. In order to gain maximum from the activities, I recommend that you:

- wear loose clothing and are prepared to work in socks or bare feet
- bring a yoga mat for work that is on the floor if you feel that the floor is too hard
- bring water
- challenge your body to discover a greater awareness of how it works but do not force it to do anything that is painful or causes distress
- stop the movement if anything is painful or very uncomfortable
- tell me in private if there is anything you feel it would be useful for me to know that may impede your movement or make you feel uncomfortable eg. joint replacements, operations etc.

Please note any health related issues you tell me about will remain confidential.
Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN
Drama workshops to inform an exploration of the role and impact of creative play and theatre making on the quality of life and wellbeing of older people

STATEMENT                  PLEASE INITIAL TO CONFIRM:
I understand that the information gained from my participation in the workshops will be used for PhD study.                         Yes   No

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated [appropriate date] for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I agree to be videoed and photographed as part of this research and that part of this video or these images may be used in the PhD thesis and/or in future presentations

I understand that reasonable effort will be made to inform me of use of material for other presentation or publication. Nothing will be shared for personal or commercial gain.

I understand that if I choose to withdraw, information will be retained once it has been anonymised.

I agree to take part in this research

DECLARATION:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Signature:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of researcher:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Signature:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please return this form to Sarah Kemp, either in person at the next workshop session you attend or email sarah.c.kemp@northumbria.ac.uk
Appendix 6: Photograph and Video Release Form

Photograph & Video Release Form

I hereby grant permission to Sarah Kemp and Northumbria University to the rights contents of video taken by Sarah Kemp during drama workshops for her PhD thesis research.

Photographic, audio or video recordings may be used for the following purposes:
- Academic
- Non-commercial

By signing this release I understand this permission signifies that photographic or video recordings of me may be electronically displayed via the Internet or in the public educational or research setting.

There is no time limit on the validity of this release nor is there any geographic limitation on where these materials may be distributed.

By signing this form I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the above release and agree to be bound thereby. I hereby release any and all claims against Sarah Kemp or Northumbria University utilising this material for educational and research purposes.

Full Name_________________________________________________________________________

Street Address ________________________________________________________________

City ________________________________________________________________

Postal Code __________________________

Email Address_______________________________________________________________

Signature____________________________

Date____________________________
Appendix 7: Ethics Amendment

EthicsOnline@Northumbria
Wed 19/05/2021 14:25

To:

• sarah.kemp

Dear sarah.kemp

This email is to notify you that your coordinator (Juliana Thompson) has approved your amendment request in respect of Research Ethics submission 9239.

Research Ethics Home: Research Ethics Home

Please do not reply to this email. This is an unmonitored mailbox. If you are a student, queries should be discussed with your Module Tutor/Supervisor. If you are a member of staff please consult your Department Ethics Lead.

I hereby grant permission to Sarah Kemp and Northumbria University to use photographs from the drama workshop with Monika Pagneux in Barcelona, 2012, taken by Robert Golden, for her PhD thesis research. The PhD research is an exploration of Pagneux’s work on the creativity, health and wellbeing of older people.

Photographs may be used for the following purposes:
• Academic
• Non-commercial

By signing this release I understand this permission signifies that photographs may be electronically displayed via the Internet or in the public educational or research setting.

There is no time limit on the validity of this release nor is there any geographic limitation on where these materials may be distributed.

By signing this form I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the above release and agree to be bound thereby. I hereby release any and all claims against Sarah Kemp or Northumbria University utilising this material for educational and research purposes.

Full Name _______________________________________________________

Street Address ____________________________________________

City __________________________________________________________

Postal Code ________________________________________________
Appendix 8: Examples of Advertising for Participants

Adverts for Arts Centre brochure

Adult Drama Group

Tuesday October 2nd for 8 weeks 10.30 - 12.30

Free drama sessions led by Sarah Kemp (Théâtre Sans Frontières) as part of her PhD research on theatre making and older people. Develop your improvisation and devising skills through movement, games and other drama activities. Meet new people and have fun.

No previous experience necessary. All ages welcome but particularly those over 55.

For further information, contact sarah@tsf.org.uk

Adult Drama Group

Tuesday 19th February for 8 weeks 10.30 - 12.30

Drama sessions led by Sarah Kemp (Théâtre Sans Frontières) as part of her PhD research on theatre making and older people. Develop your drama skills through movement, games and other performance activities. Meet new people and have fun.

No previous experience necessary. All ages welcome but particularly those over 55.

For further information, contact sarah@tsf.org.uk
Advert for Community Centre group

All welcome (50+)
No experience necessary
NEW!

Drama Group

Join in and express yourself through a series of drama workshops with Sarah Kemp, who runs a theatre company and is researching how drama can improve the wellbeing of older people.

[Date/Time]
[Venue]

For further information phone [Researcher's contact details]
Appendix 9: Examples of Participant Questionnaires

First Session Questionnaire

Name……………………………………………………………………

Age………………………………

Date………………………….

Please jot down a few thoughts on:

Why you have come today, your expectations and what you hope to gain from participating in the Drama workshops.

How you are feeling today, with regard to the following categories.

Creativity

Health

Wellbeing

Thank you very much
Sarah Kemp, PhD student, Northumbria University
End of Drama Workshops questionnaire December 2018

Name…………………………………………………

Age (if you are happy to give this)…………………………..

Thinking about the sheet you filled in on the first day of the workshops, I’d be grateful if you could give me your comments and reflections on the following areas:

Did the workshops fulfil your initial expectations? Yes/no. In what way?

What did you enjoy most and what was most challenging?

Do you feel that the workshops impacted in any way on your health, wellbeing and creativity. If yes, in what way?

What do you feel you have learnt about drama/theatre as an artform, how have you developed your drama skills? In what way do you see being involved in drama as different from any other art form?

Is there anything you would like to do more or less of in the future? Or is there anything new you would like to do?

Any other comments

Thank you.

Sarah Kemp
Continuing Participant Questionnaire February 2019

Name………………………………………………………….
Age………………………….
Date…………………….

Please jot down a few thoughts about:

• why you have decided to continue with the drama group

• what you would like to get from the forthcoming sessions

• any ideas for stories or themes you would like to explore

Thank you very much
Sarah Kemp, PhD student, Northumbria University
End of Drama Workshops Questionnaire April 2019

Name: ..........................................................................

Please could you give me your thoughts and reflections on the following areas:

What have you enjoyed most about the drama workshops?

Have you noticed any difference or change in your health, wellbeing or creativity during the time you have attended the workshops? If yes, please describe

Do you do any other physical activity or are you involved in any other arts activity? If yes, what?

In your opinion, how does being involved in drama, as an art form, differ from other physical or artistic activities you do?

Any other comments about the drama workshops.

Many thanks for your time,

Sarah Kemp, PhD student, Northumbria University
### Appendix 10: Data Analysis Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May/June 2019</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; reading of questionnaires and journals to date from the groups, except Day Centre group</td>
<td>Colour coding of experiences of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• physical and mental impacts of the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• areas of challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• participants’ views on being part of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May/June 2019</td>
<td>Transcription and 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; reading of focus group recordings from Arts Centre and Rural groups and reading of post-it notes and my notes of conversations with groups</td>
<td>Colour coding of experiences of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• physical and mental impacts of the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• areas of challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• participants’ views on being part of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2019</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; reading of initial questionnaires from all except Day Centre groups</td>
<td>Additional/adjustment of coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td>Transcription and 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; reading of 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; focus group recording from Arts Centre group</td>
<td>Creation of five participant profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Coding of key observations for each participant, with quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Compare and contrast of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Distillation of each participant's story in five sentences written by me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; reading of all data</td>
<td>Compilation of participants’ views on the learning acquired through the workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Compilation of words used by participants to describe the groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td>Meeting with Principal Supervisor</td>
<td>Discussion of initial analysis of focus group transcriptions and potential themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td>4th reading of data</td>
<td>Initial identification of themes relating to participants’ experiences of their bodies, minds and their creativity within the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td>5th reading of data</td>
<td>Creation of tables showing the detailed impact of activities on participants’ creativity, sense of fun, collaboration, body awareness, mobility and posture – supported by participant quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td>Detailed reading of one participant’s data</td>
<td>Creative synthesis through an imagined conversation between one participant and voice teacher based on their actual words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2019</td>
<td>6th Reading of data</td>
<td>Creative synthesis through grouping of participant responses into a ‘poem’: I like, I enjoy, I feel, I think, I love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| December 2019   | 1st Reading of data from questionnaires from 4th workshops series in Arts Centre                                                                                                                      | Colour coding of experiences of:  
  - physical and mental impacts of the work  
  - areas of challenge  
  - participants’ views on being part of the group  
  Participant comments written on post-it notes and grouped together on a large chart according to commonalities. Groupings discussed with a critical friend and put into three initial themes: Playful Creativity, Social Interaction, Physical Self |
|                 | Discussion of themes and sub-themes with retired academic experienced in thematic analysis                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| January 2020    | First writing on possible themes                                                                                                                                                                        | Three initial possible themes:  
  Playful Creativity, Social Interaction, Physical Self                                                                                                                                               |
| May/June/July 2020 | Selection of five participants for deeper analysis. Re-reading of all their data – questionnaires, focus groups, journal entries                                                                        | Creation of five participant profiles  
 Coding of principle observations for each participant, with quotes  
 Compare and contrast' of participants  
 Distillation of each participant’s story in five sentences written by me  
 Mind map of possible codes and themes                                                                                                                                                     |
| August 2020     | Compilation of data from Day Centre group, taken from comments and observations in researcher notes                                                                                                     | Colour coding of experiences of:  
  - physical and mental impacts of the work  
  - areas of challenge  
  - participants’ views on being part of the group                                                                                                                                          |
### Appendix 10: Data Analysis Timetable (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>August 2020</th>
<th>Mapping of five participants experiences with complete data set to find commonalities</th>
<th>1st iteration of Findings chapters Themes redefined as: Physical Self; Psychological, Mental and Emotional Self; The Individual and the Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix 11: Zip, Zap, Boing, Game

Participants stand in a circle. One person says Zip and makes a gesture, as if passing a frisbee, to the person next to them, this continues around the circle. Once Zip is established, Zap can be added. Zap is a sound and action passed across the circle, it requires good eye contact so whoever is the receiver knows who they are. Boing is a response from the receiver, done with a hands up gesture, and bounces the game back to the sender, like a ball coming back from a wall. The receiver can always choose whether to continue the game with a Zip or Zap to someone else or pass the game back to the sender.

The aim of the game is to keep the momentum and pace up at all times, so there are no pauses between actions/words, it therefore relies on quick and spontaneous reactions by all involved, participants need to be ready and alert.

There are other levels of complexity that can be added to the game once everyone is comfortable with these three.