



Staging the Personal

A Guide to Safe and Ethical Practice

Clark Baim



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“Staging the Personal brings into sharp relief the ethics of creating theatre from personal stories. Charting the rise of practice that blurs the boundaries between theatre and therapy, the book offers us the Drama Spiral—a superb practical tool for practitioners navigating the often risky terrain of personal disclosure, exposure, and vulnerability.”

—Alice O’Grady, *Professor in Applied Performance, School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds, UK*

“Clark Baim is one of the most inspirational theatre facilitators working in the world today. Drawing from a long history of working in prisons with Geese Theatre, and then subsequently in his own psychodrama practice, the book meticulously details an ethics of care about staging personal lives on the stage or in a drama workshop. Baim argues for a robust framework for safe, flexible and intentional practice that unpacks a facilitator’s intuition into a carefully constructed approach. At the heart of this book is the presentation and description of the Drama Spiral—a thoroughly useful model applicable to diverse theatre practices—that deserves a key place in how we conceive of and facilitate work with participants’ real stories.”

—Michael Balfour, *Professor of Theatre and Performance, School of the Arts and Media, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia*

“Clark Baim combines both his expert theoretical knowledge and practical experience as a psychodramatist and drama facilitator to explore the risks of using real people’s stories in theatre making. In doing so he offers the Drama Spiral—a timely and vital methodology for navigating safe and ethical practice when staging personal stories that should be compulsory reading for theatre makers everywhere.”

—Dr Selina Busby, *Course Leader MA Applied Theatre, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, UK*

“The *theater of personal stories* provides unique opportunities for performers and spectators to experience the power of narrative through performance. Personal stories have the strength to galvanise socio-political movements, advocate on behalf of others, educate, raise awareness, and support therapeutic processes. Yet, without appropriate safeguards and training, theater practitioners can, albeit unintentionally, expose, exploit, and ultimately harm participants, performers, and spectators alike. This pioneering book is, therefore, urgently needed. It provides

theater practitioners with a theory-driven pragmatic framework with which to support their practice using clear ethical guidance. This book is a joy to read and an essential tool for theater practitioners, students, scholars, and researchers working in this field.”

—Dr Stephanie Kewley, *Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology, Researcher in Applied Theatre in Criminal Justice Contexts, School of Psychology, Faculty of Health, Liverpool John Moores University, UK*

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Introduction

SHORT SUMMARY OF THIS BOOK

This book examines the history, ethics and intentions of staging people's personal stories and offers theater-makers detailed guidance and a practical model—called the Drama Spiral—to support safe and ethical practice.

Contemporary theater has crossed boldly into therapeutic terrain and is now the site of radical self-exposure. Stage productions that would once have seemed shockingly personal and exposing have become commonplace, as people reveal their personal stories to audiences with ever-increasing candor. While there are many successful and inspirational examples of such productions, at the same time, there are significant risks inherent in putting people's private lives on the stage, particularly when their stories focus on unresolved difficulties or when the performers may be vulnerable.

These risks have prompted the need for a robust framework for safe, ethical, flexible and intentional practice by theater-makers. In order to create a broader spectrum of ethical risk-taking where practitioners can negotiate blurred boundaries in safe and creative ways, this book draws on relevant therapeutic principles and guidelines in order to re-connect therapy and theater and promote best practice in the *theater of personal stories*—a term intended to cover the myriad forms of theater that make use of people's personal stories.

The book describes a pragmatic framework that synthesizes theory and practice from the fields of theater and performance studies, psychodrama

and attachment narrative therapy. This integrated framework has four elements, which are explored respectively in Chaps. 2, 3, 4 and 5: (2) *History*: understanding the roots of the theater of personal stories in traditions of art, oral history, social activism, theater and therapy; (3) *Ethics*: incorporating wide-ranging ethical issues inherent in staging personal stories; (4) *Praxis*: structuring participatory theater processes to regulate the level of personal disclosure among participants; and (5) *Intentions*: having a clear purpose in mind when workshoping personal stories and presenting them to audiences. Considered together as an integrated whole, the four elements of the framework are intended to provide a basis for safe and ethical practice in staging personal stories for theater-makers, educators, participant-performers, scholars and researchers.

THE RAPID RISE OF THE THEATER OF PERSONAL STORIES

In recent decades, there has been a rapid hybridization of theater forms and approaches that draw directly on the personal and collective stories of participants, performers, audiences and citizens with stories to tell (Foster 1996; Heddon 2008; Leffler 2012; Martin 2013; Salas 1993). From autobiographical drama to investigatory and documentary plays, from theater of witness to self-revelatory forms, theater-makers are drawing on lived experience and creating powerful work that is transformative for participant-performers, for auto-ethnographic performers, and for audiences and spect-actors (Boal 1979, 1995; Cohen-Cruz 2006; Emunah 2015; Pendzik et al. 2016).

While real events have been a subject of the theater going back to the plays of ancient Greece, since the latter part of the twentieth century there has been a distinct shift within the theater that amounts to a genuine innovation in the way that stories are sourced and presented in the theater. Since the late 1960s, and accelerating since the 1990s, something genuinely new has been taking place on the international stage, a step-change that foregrounds individuals and the particulars of their lives, their personal stories, their subjective experience and their personal struggles as the subject matter for theater-making (Garde and Mumford 2016; Heddon 2008; Landy and Montgomery 2012; Snow 2016). The proliferation of forms and artists presenting such work is vast and increasing, showing every sign of being here to stay. As *Guardian* theater critic Lyn Gardner has written about autobiographical performances on the stage, ‘as audiences, we like the idea that we are getting something from the horse’s

Praxis: The Drama Spiral

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I describe the Drama Spiral, a model developed to help theater practitioners make decisions during workshops or rehearsal processes where participants' personal or collective stories might be used. The Drama Spiral is focused on praxis—turning theory and research into action. Praxis is the third element of the four-part framework described in the introduction.

The Drama Spiral is a graduated and reflexive model that provides practical guidance to theater practitioners. It is intended to help the practitioner work safely and ethically in a purposefully eclectic manner along the continuum from low focus, discussion-based or activity-based groups to high focus work in groups where individuals enact their personal life stories. The aim is to provide an integrative model of drama facilitation encompassing the whole spectrum of distance from the source material (i.e. from highly distant for the individual participant to closely autobiographical) and to articulate the key factors to bear in mind in theater practice with personal stories, based on insights from the fields of theater and performance studies, psychodrama, dramatherapy, Attachment Narrative Therapy and related forms.

Perhaps controversially, the Drama Spiral includes within the scope of the theater practitioner themes and topics that are ordinarily presumed to be the exclusive domain of qualified therapists, most particularly psychodramatists and dramatherapists. I offer guidance within the chapter and

thoughts regarding why and how even the most vulnerable topics (and people) should remain—*with necessary safeguards, including appropriate training for and supervision of the practitioner*—within the purview of theater and performance.

THE IMPETUS FOR CREATING THE DRAMA SPIRAL

The Drama Spiral ('the Spiral') emerged in the context of the field work I conducted in the development of this book. It also developed as an outgrowth of my earlier work presenting issue-based, interactive performances and facilitating workshops and creative residencies with Geese Theatre Company in the USA and UK (Baim et al. 2002). My training in traditional and improvisational theater as well as explicitly therapeutic uses of techniques derived from theater (i.e. psychodrama) has made me acutely aware of the ethical and safety issues surrounding the use of personal disclosure and personal story, and equally aware of the many contexts in which it is inappropriate, unsafe or unethical to elicit personal disclosure and personal narratives. I am also aware of the many contexts in which participants are eager to join in theater workshops but would run a mile from anything called 'therapy'—let alone something called 'psychodrama,' which sounds intimidating for many people.

The early idea of creating the Spiral arose from my having received numerous enquiries over the years from universities and drama schools, requesting that I teach students the distinctions and commonalities between theater (including applied theater) and psychodrama. These workshops have consistently shown that theater students are acutely interested in the inter-relationship between these fields of practice and are equally interested in the boundaries between what might be considered the primary terrain of theater, and what might be considered the primary terrain of psychodrama, dramatherapy and psychotherapy. Much of the focus of these workshops has been on how the varied methods use personal narrative and how each has techniques for maintaining safety and optimal distance. As I reflect on the process of developing the Spiral, I recall the process of writing the Geese Theatre Handbook (Baim et al. 2002). That process required a thorough examination of what were, up until then, largely intuitive processes. Faced with the challenge of writing that handbook, we began an arduous, multiple-layered, five-year process of breaking down our approach to theater games, drama workshops, structuring sessions and creating and performing original, issue-based

productions, into a series of discrete steps. Having gone through that laborious process, I knew that a visual model that is readily accessible, with a series of different phases, but without a prescribed order, would likely be of most use.

In order to provide students, practitioners, participant-performers, educators and researchers with a useful model, I developed the Drama Spiral as a decision-making tool for theater practitioners negotiating the complex, contested and inherently risky terrain of personal stories (Baim 2017). The Spiral represents an integration of theory and practical insights from the fields of action research, applied theater, dramatherapy, psychodrama, psychotherapy, systems theory (Lewin 1948), group work, experiential therapy (Ringer and Gillis 1995) and Attachment Narrative Therapy (Dallos and Vetere 2009). It also integrates the many well-established principles and practices of working collaboratively in the creation of devised work with groups (Govan et al. 2007; Heddon and Milling 2005).

THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE DRAMA SPIRAL

Using the processes of reflective inquiry (Dewey 1933; Freire 1972, 1974; Lyons 2010; Schön 1983) and action research (Anisur Rahman 1993; Freeman 2010; Lewin 1948; Zuber-Skerritt 1996), I field tested evolving iterations of the Drama Spiral over five years. During the field work, more than 350 people participated in workshops and offered their reactions, suggestions for refinement, clarifying questions and constructive critical feedback. As the model evolved towards its most recent formulation (see Fig. 4.2), I was able to see that groups readily grasp the essential features of the Spiral. For groups with some understanding of participatory theater, the Spiral is understood almost immediately and is seen as a useful tool to help shape thinking, structure activities and regulate distance. In Drama Spiral workshops, groups ‘put the Spiral to work,’ demonstrating with a high degree of accuracy scenes adjusted appropriately for each ring of the Spiral. This has given me confidence that the Spiral may need only relatively small refinements from this point forward. However, it will inevitably remain a work in progress.

During the development phase, the process of action research produced feedback and new ideas, leading to knowledge generation regarding the following eight key features of the Spiral, its design, its content and its intention as a model. Ideas that were tested out or which emerged include:

1. The rhizomatic design of the Drama Spiral.
2. The Drama Spiral as a decision-making tool.
3. The four quadrants around the outer edge of the Spiral, representing phases of work and key processes within each phase.
4. Drama processes at each ring of the Spiral, and their graduated differentiation.
5. The colors of the rings.
6. The icons for each ring of the Spiral.
7. The decision-making factors informing which part of the Spiral is used.
8. The range of drama strategies that can be used to regulate distance.

These eight features are each discussed and explained in the rest of this chapter.

THE RHIZOMATIC DESIGN OF THE DRAMA SPIRAL

The Drama Spiral is intended to offer a clear and effective means for safely regulating the degree of distance and focus as required in any drama-based process, from single sessions to long-term groups. *Distance regulation* is a term used in psychology to describe how members of a family or social group regulate their emotional closeness and distance from each other (Byng-Hall and Campbell 1981; Eriksson 2011). In the context of the Drama Spiral model, I have borrowed the term and define distance regulation as the process by which a facilitator guides a session so that the material and issues explored are pitched at the right level of aesthetic and emotional distance in order to maintain safety, ethical responsibility and respect for personal boundaries (Bannister 1991; Barnes 2009; Casson 2004; Jennings 2011; Rifkin 2010).

If we first consider a simple continuum which runs from low to high focus, at the left end of the continuum are purely fictional characters and scenarios (i.e. at a great distance from the personal life stories of the people involved in the process), while on the right end of the continuum are highly personal characters and scenes (i.e. the scenes and characters represented in the drama are based directly on one or more people present in the workshop, and indeed may be portrayed by the people themselves). This spectrum of dramatic distance can be illustrated by the simple linear continuum seen in Fig. 4.1:



Fig. 4.1 The continuum of distant to personal scenes

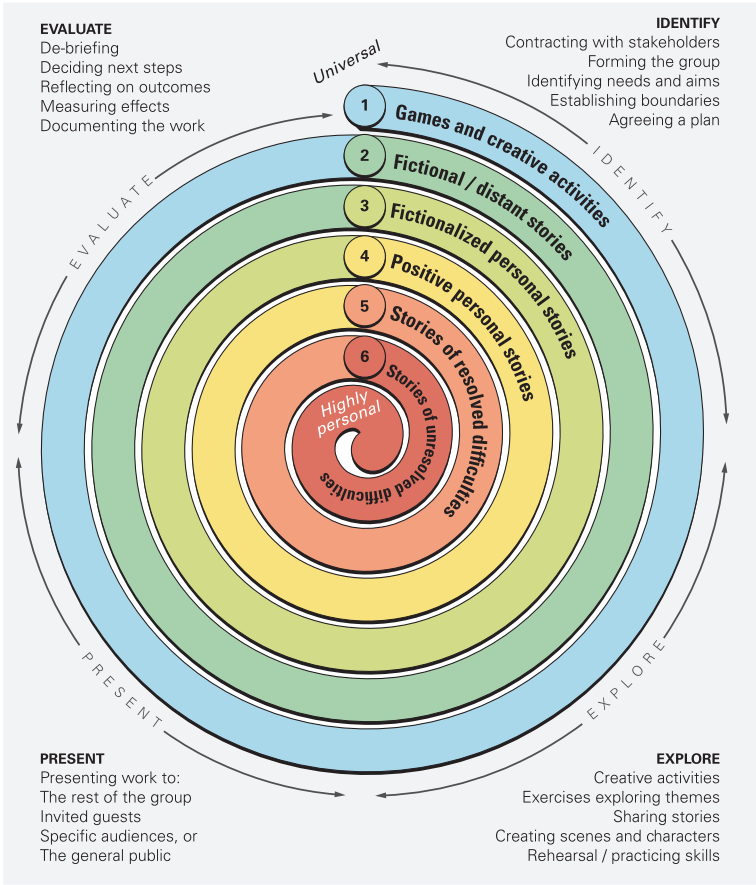
In developing the Drama Spiral, I have expanded the concept of the continuum to include a more recursive and multi-factorial approach which better reflects the complexity and heuristic nature of theater processes. The Drama Spiral takes the idea of the continuum and curves it into a spiral which both ‘spirals in’ and ‘spirals out.’ The Spiral can be thought of as a type of map on which one can plot the processes involved in participatory theater practice. There are six rings of the Spiral, with each ring representing a different phase of working (see Fig. 4.2). As one works closer to the center of the Spiral, the topics and scenes become more personal and sensitive for the participants. The positioning of the six rings on the Spiral is indicative only, suggesting that some elements will normally be used earlier in drama processes, and some will usually come later. Facilitators can move in and out of the Spiral as needed and as appropriate at any point in a session or activity.

The outer ring of the Spiral—the first ring—will typically include theater games, exercises and other creative activities that are distant from the personal life stories of the participants. In the second ring of the Spiral are scenes, characters and plotlines that are fictional, or one step removed from the lives of the participants. They may reflect universal themes and archetypes, or real events not related directly to the participants, and there is no sense that the scenes are based upon or draw directly from the life stories of anyone present. In the third ring, the stories portrayed are fictionalized, distant versions of the participants’ stories. Where scenes have been drawn from personal stories, in their final form they will bear only a faint, fictionalized echo of the original material. By contrast, scenes at the inner three rings of the Spiral—rings 4, 5 and 6—will be highly personal to the participants, directly portraying aspects of their life experiences with little or no fictional distance. These gradations among and between the six rings of the Spiral are fully explained later in this chapter.

There are advantages to using a spiral as opposed to a linear continuum or other forms, such as a grid. The image of the spiral tries to capture the spontaneous movement between techniques that typically occurs during

The Drama Spiral

Clark Baim 2015



The Drama Spiral is a decision-making tool intended to help theatre and arts practitioners to work safely and ethically along the continuum from the fictional to the highly personal. In the outer rings, participants are involved in creative activities and work at the metaphorical and fictional level. As one 'spirals in' towards the centre, the rings represent stories that are increasingly personal and sensitive for the participants. Each ring of the Spiral includes four important processes: *Identify*, *Explore*, *Present* and *Evaluate*.

Fig. 4.2 The Drama Spiral: Regulating distance in participatory theater and performance. Graphic design: Valentina D'Efilippo

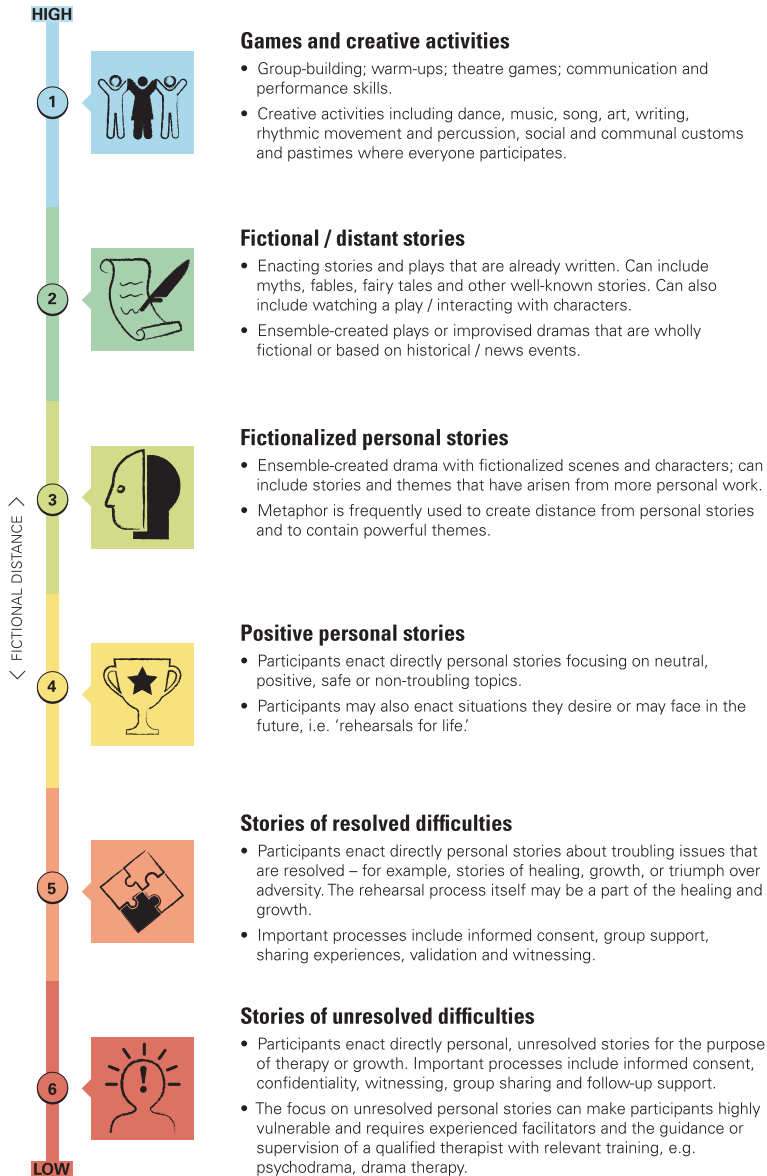


Fig. 4.2 (continued)

theater workshops. Facilitators and participants may move from one ring of the Spiral to an adjacent ring or even one further away with little or no notice, and this often works like an improvised dance or a musical jam, with themes being revisited with variations based on the needs, interests, sensitivities, resilience and progress of the group members. When this dance is going well, everyone enjoys the process. However, even the most experienced facilitators can sometimes be tripped up by spontaneous processes that emerge during a workshop or rehearsal, and suddenly may find themselves working with very raw and vulnerable material without warning. Facilitators need simple, quick reference points that can be shared with participants, to help everyone understand the levels at which they are working. Skilled facilitators can then move nimbly from one technique or process to the next, with deft negotiation of a wide number of variables as they perceive the group process and the varying needs and levels of involvement of participants. Stating this with reference to the Spiral, facilitators and groups ‘spiral in’ and ‘spiral out’ as needed, and as appropriate at any point in a session or activity, in the best interests of the participants and with the overall aims of the project in mind. This process is sometimes called *rhizomatic* (Deleuze and Guattari 1980), a term borrowed from botany and used to describe multiple, layered, evolving, unfolding, branching and recursive processes of human interaction and learning, as compared with more hierarchical, prescriptive, fixed, binary or strictly sequential processes.

THE DRAMA SPIRAL AS A DECISION-MAKING TOOL

The Drama Spiral (Fig. 4.2.) is a *decision-making tool*. That is, it has the following elements and intentions, adapted from Krogerus and Tschäppeler (2008):

Simplification The Spiral is meant to simplify by including the elements of drama processes that are most relevant to the regulation of distance. The model does not focus on how one creates an interesting plot or takes creative risks. Instead, it focuses primarily on how one can facilitate drama-based sessions that integrate personal material in a safe manner with the optimal degree of distance.

Pragmatic The Spiral is meant to be a pragmatic, useful tool for guiding facilitators in making choices before, during and after drama-based sessions. It is also easily shared with most participant groups, who often like to know why the facilitator makes the choices they do. This also helps participants to share in the decision-making.

Summing Up The Spiral is meant to sum up complex concepts and inter-related dynamics that occur in drama-based activities.

Visual The Spiral is intentionally visual, as the spiral image quickly captures a process that otherwise can be difficult to capture in words. One way of thinking about the Spiral is that it is a visualized model of theater processes that incorporate personal stories, which also incorporates the structure of action research. The sequence of steps used in action research (*identify, investigate, explore, act, evaluate, amend plan, take second step, repeat process as necessary ...*) is often presented as an ever-extending spiral of recursive steps. Thompson (2003: 124 and 140), for example, refers to the spiral form of action research.

Organizing and Plotting The Spiral is meant to help facilitators organize and order their decision-making. For example, facilitators who make decisions based on the Spiral are quickly able to ‘place’ or ‘plot’ their decisions on the Spiral, as a sort of visual filing system.

Method The Spiral is meant to offer a method of making decisions, but it does not provide the answers for the facilitator. Facilitators will find that answers emerge once they have applied the model and worked with it in the context of the work they are planning or facilitating.

THE FOUR QUADRANTS AROUND THE OUTER EDGE OF THE SPIRAL

As Fig. 4.2 shows, each ring of the Spiral includes four important processes that are essential to working safely, transparently and effectively with groups of people involved in ensemble-created theater. The four processes are:

1. *Identify*
2. *Explore*
3. *Present*
4. *Evaluate*

Each of the four processes is in a quadrant of the Spiral. These four processes—and a range of sub-processes within each of them—occur at each ring of the Spiral. Some of the sub-processes are more associated with early stages of a group, some with later stages, and some are equally relevant throughout the stages of a group. The important point is that all these processes are essential to participatory theater and should be borne in mind when making decisions about the appropriate level of personal disclosure in an activity, session or project. These are explained as follows:

Identify

In the upper right quadrant, which is the starting place for each ring of the Spiral, is the process of *identifying*. This includes:

Contracting with Stakeholders This includes establishing the mandate for the work and contracting with stakeholders about what the remit of the work will be. For example, if the facilitator is working for an agency, organization or institution, there will typically be a verbal or written contract or agreement about the purpose, scope and scale of the work to be undertaken. It is important to give thought to who the various stakeholders are, i.e. who is likely to be affected in some way by the work, who has influence over the project and who is funding the work. As part of the process of preparation and considering stakeholders, it is important for facilitators to consider the ‘big picture’ and to understand the potential systemic and socio-political impact of the work. It is also crucial to consider the ethical position of the proposed project and to consider the safety and welfare of the participants before, during and after the project (Sajjani 2010). For example, if working with one group in an institution, how might the work be seen by other groups, by the institution as a whole, or by the community outside the gate (Thompson 2005, 2009)? How might conflicts or misunderstandings be forestalled? How could the various stakeholders be included, e.g. as allies, as consultants, as a resource for the rehearsal process, as invited audiences or as potential future participants? Working in a prison, for example, if there is a woodworking class or a carpentry

workshop, can they be involved in building the set? Can the officers take part in the workshops, rehearsals or the play alongside the inmates? Can they assist backstage, or help the cast members learn their lines? Can family and friends, or members of the public, or professionals working in other prisons or in community-based organizations, be invited in as audience members? Can local business owners be invited to see the productions, to learn about the lives of returning citizens they may want to employ in the future? All of these approaches have been tried and tested, and all represent ways of building bridges and involving stakeholders in the creative process.

Forming the Group This might include, where appropriate, drawing up admission criteria, taster sessions, intake interviews, assessment, prioritization and ‘road shows’ to recruit participants.

Identifying Needs and Aims This might include a range of activities aimed at helping participants to clarify their needs and interests, and agreeing aims with them.

Establishing Boundaries This typically includes establishing policies and principles of safe practice such as cooperation, physical safety, acceptable and unacceptable behavior, group norms, asking questions, saying ‘no,’ confidentiality within limits, respect, boundaries regarding touch, time-keeping, etc. The implications for the theater practitioner are profound, particularly when facilitating processes that lead to people recalling, sharing and perhaps presenting their personal stories. Participants may have many implicit or explicit questions and concerns about the drama process: How is a story to be recalled? By what means? Which stories are important? How should the story be told? Whose perspective will be given priority? Will the story be challenged or interrogated? If so, by whom and how will this be negotiated? Who will have control over the story? Will I be able to tell my story in my own language, or in ways that make sense to me? Will my story be respected, even if it is not fully understood? Will it leave my control and be co-opted by others? If so, will I have any say over this? Will I be able to decide what the ‘meaning’ of my story is, if it has any meaning at all? Or, will I be pathologized, labeled or judged harshly because of my story (a point considered by Rifkin 2010: 22)? How will the process help me? How might it hurt me? Will it leave me embarrassed or ashamed? Or feeling good, or relieved, or moved in some meaningful way

that makes it worth the emotional effort? These are just some of the questions that emerge when we think about boundaries.

Agreeing a Plan Sometimes, agreeing a plan may simply mean agreeing to participate in the next activity. At other times, agreement might include a verbal or written agreement to participate in a long-term project. In any case, it is important to gain the agreement and consent of participants at the outset of participatory workshops.

Explore

The lower right quadrant includes:

Creative Exercises This is a wide-ranging category and includes theater games, group-building activities, sound and movement, collective singing, dance, movement and percussion, group experiential exercises and warm-ups, and related activities.

Exercises Exploring Themes This could include any of the creative exercises and has the added focus that the activity is used to highlight a given theme that is relevant to the participants. Typical themes might include balance, using the body and senses, trust, boundaries, cooperation, freedom to choose, looking to the future, empathy, consequences, becoming aware of inner thoughts and feelings, or assertiveness.

Sharing Stories As part of the process of exploring themes and creating dramatic scenes, participants may share fictional stories they know, or experiences of their own, in order to provide the inspiration for dramatic action. How personal and sensitive the stories are will depend on many factors and will be subject to regular monitoring, and possible revision by the facilitator in cooperation with the group.

Creating Scenes and Characters As the participants explore dramatic situations, they may be encouraged to create scenes and characters and to improvise dialogue. Where appropriate to the situation and the focus of the work, the participants can be encouraged to more fully explore and develop scenes and characters. In some situations, scripted plays might be used.

Rehearsal and Practicing Skills As part of the workshop process, participants are helped to develop the skills and craft of performance, characterization, improvisation, voice and movement, collaboration, speaking in front of audiences, and all performance-related skills. Related to this, the participants are helped to rehearse short or long sequences—or indeed, entire plays—for presentation to others.

Present

The lower left quadrant represents the part of the theater-making process where people present their work to others. Where the performance includes personal stories, it is important to give special consideration to which type of audience is appropriate:

The Rest of the Group In some situations, members of a group will present their work to the rest of the group. For example, one half of the group may present a scene to the other half, and vice versa.

Invited Guests In other situations, the participants may develop a performance or presentation for invited guests. For example, in a closed institution, this might include other residents and staff of the institution.

Specific Audiences In another situation, this might include a presentation to specific audiences, for example a school audience, or people attending a conference on a special topic.

General Public Where appropriate, presentations or performances may also be offered to the general public.

Evaluate

The upper left quadrant includes several crucial processes related to evaluation:

De-Briefing This includes, for example, hearing feedback at the end of an activity, exercise, session or series of sessions. How have the participants experienced the session? What did they enjoy? What would they like more of? Less of? What do they want to remember from this session? What are they left wondering about? How is the group process going? How are

people working together and looking after each other? De-briefing also includes de-roling, sensitive listening, sharing common experiences, talking about feelings, and encouraging mutual support among the participants.

Deciding Next Steps When deciding next steps, the facilitator considers the feedback from the participants, assesses a range of factors about the remit and scope and timing of the project, individual and group needs, and coordinates group processes so they proceed to a greater or lesser degree with the guidance of the facilitator. Some groups will need strong guidance and leadership, while others may be largely self-directed, with the facilitator holding the space and helping to give shape to the process. This is also the part of the process at each ring of the Spiral where the facilitator and the group might decide to ‘spiral in’ or ‘spiral out’—or indeed to stay at the same level of personal disclosure.

Reflecting on Outcomes Towards the end of an activity, a session or a series of sessions, the facilitator and the participants may take time to reflect on the outcome of the work. Did it go as planned? What benefits arose from the work? Were these as intended? Were there any unintended outcomes (positive, neutral or negative)? If there were negative incidents or outcomes, how can we repair any ruptures, and what lessons can be learned?

Measuring Effects The range of effects may be very wide, and depending on the group, the context, the duration of the work and other factors, the focus on specific and measurable effects may or may not be appropriate. In some contexts, the most appropriate ‘effect’ may be to assess to what extent the participants enjoyed their time together. In other contexts, it may be appropriate to assess other effects such as—depending on the context—improved psychological or social functioning, emotional well-being, occupational performance or learning, or concrete and practical changes that may emerge from the theater process. In institutional settings, effects may also include changes that are system-wide, for example, improved relations between staff, residents and different departments, or an improved atmosphere in the institution.

Documenting the Work This includes processes such as photographing and video recording sessions (where appropriate), systematically preserving the stages of development of the work, storing important written

materials, negotiating how the work will be preserved, safely archiving the work, and sharing the process and outcomes with key stakeholders and—where appropriate—with the public. Sant (2017) offers a range of up-to-date ideas regarding the practical, aesthetic, ethical and legal issues related to documenting and preserving performances and theater-led processes. Marsh (2014) is also a useful guide to the processes, aesthetics and ethics of documenting performance art and related practices.

DESCRIPTION OF DRAMA PROCESSES AT EACH RING OF THE SPIRAL

First Ring: Games and Creative Activities



The outermost ring of the Spiral (see Fig. 4.2) includes elements such as group introductions, establishing group norms, group-building exercises, trust exercises and related activities aimed at deepening the communication and spontaneity of the group and participants. This may include a wide range of theater games, music, movement, dance, song, sound and rhythm, art or other artistic means to encourage expression.

In most situations, facilitators will begin new groups using exercises and activities at this first stage of the Spiral, before considering moving inwards on the Spiral if that is appropriate. There are many contexts in which it will be appropriate to work only at rings 1 and 2—the outermost rings—of the Spiral.

Personal Disclosure At this ring of the Spiral, in general little or no explicitly stated personal disclosure is sought, although it is acknowledged that the work may have profound personal meaning and connections that remain private. In some of the examples below, personal and collective material may be sought, but this is meant to be done with a light touch, and any personal material is meant to be in focus only briefly. Where personal material is sought in this light touch way, it can serve as a sort of overture, a brief glimpse of what working at rings 3, 4, 5 and 6 might entail. In other words, this will give participants a little taste of what it feels like to disclose some personal material or something about their community, region, culture or country. This is important because it means that, later in the process, the participants can make a more informed choice about whether they feel safe and ready to work further into the Spiral.

Theater and Drama Processes at This Stage May Include

- Group-building exercises, theater games, energizers and warm-ups.
- Trust exercises and related activities.
- Communication exercises.
- Developing theater and performance skills.
- Dance, singing, music, art, writing to encourage expression, creation and connection.
- Sound and movement exercises.
- Social and communal customs and pastimes where everyone participates.
- Reading a play or script, or watching a play.
- Playing out *social scenes*: brief elements of personal and collective life. These should be brief, ‘light touch’ scenes portraying elements of cultural life or personal/family activities that focus only in the lightest way (if at all) on personal history or circumstances. For example: *From my home (or a place I have called home): famous local legends, local heroes or historical events; Recreational activities people typically do there; Local customs, songs, traditions, pastimes or sayings; Work/industry/local products/local occupations/things we are known for; A gesture or behavior that I do every day which is typical for people from my locale or region (for example, during my commute, or preparing meals, or my work); A gesture or behavior common in my family/community; A cultural ritual or daily practice from my region, e.g. tea making, cooking, greeting a stranger or greeting a friend, or family member, cleaning the home, going for water, gathering wood, working, shopping, farming, eating meals, family practices at children’s bed time, sport and recreation, hobbies; Cultural practices or behaviors that signify people at different ages, e.g. children, teens, young adults, parents, older adults; Practices that signal different occupations, working tasks, lifestyles, walks of life, times of year, times of day (e.g. starting the day, commuting, walking to school, eating lunch, etc.), religious practices, holidays, child rearing; Religious or secular or national festivals; Significant life events such as courtship, marriage, baptism, name days or birthdays, or funerals and memorials; important events in our culture, including for example our history, our industry, our heritage, our schools, our natural environment, our society, our famous buildings, sport, arts, work, religion, politics; Gestures, skills, knowledge, behaviors*

and roles that are passed down from generation to generation; Something that connects us all in small and large ways (see Thompson 2003: 129, 133 for related ideas)

- General level discussion of these activities—for example: after doing a communication exercise, discussing the elements of good communication. Or after sharing scenes from cultural life, sharing and developing ideas and new scenes emerging from discussion.

Second Ring: Fictional/Distant Stories



The second ring of the Spiral includes involvement by participants in *one step removed* (i.e. fictional or distant) sculpts, scenes, role plays and other drama-based activities. The scenes and characters are fictional, i.e. distinct and different from the autobiographical details of the people present. Alternatively, the stories staged may be of real events which are distant from the lives of the people present (e.g. a news event from afar, an historical event, or a story based on eyewitness testimony). This stage also includes rehearsal and performance of fictional plays and enacting stories and plays that are already written, that is, from the literary canon.

Personal Disclosure In the second ring of the Spiral, little or no explicitly named personal disclosure is sought from participants, although—as with work in the first ring—it is acknowledged that the work may have profound personal meaning and connections that remain private. In addition, the stories chosen for enactment may be deliberately chosen to reflect key issues pertinent to the participant group.

Theater and Drama Processes at This Stage May Include

- Enacting stories, poems and plays that are already written. Can include myths, traditional stories, folk tales, fables, fairy tales, films, superhero stories and other well-known stories, including epics that are foundational to the culture—for example the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* in India.
- Ensemble-created sculpts, scenes, plays and improvised dramas that are wholly fictional, or based on historical/news events. This can

include scenes inspired by themes that have arisen from working at inner rings of the Spiral prior to ‘spiraling out’ to this ring of the Spiral.

- Can also include watching a play and/or interacting with characters in a play using forum, aside, ‘hot seating,’ interactive improvisational theater or related techniques where the audience speaks with characters, or discusses the characters and their choices.
- Developing life skills and effective roles using skills practice role play and related skills development.
- Enacting stories, poems or plays that deliberately include a process of integration within them, i.e. a process leading towards justice and life-affirming qualities. Where relevant, this can serve as a warm-up for later work at the inner rings of the Spiral, where integrative work takes place at the personal level. Rumi’s poem ‘The Guest House’ serves as an example of integration. In the poem, all parts of the self are welcome in the ‘home’ of the self.
- Approaches that typically operate at this level include drama-in-education, sociodrama, ‘living newspaper,’ and drama workshops aimed at personal growth, development and empowerment. This is a partial list only.
- Sample titles or stimulus topics at this stage might include, for example: *‘The journey’*; *‘Letting go/saying goodbye’*; *‘The negotiation’*; *‘The discovery’*; *‘Peer pressure’*; *‘The role model’*; *‘The argument’*; *‘The secret’*; *‘The lie’*; *‘The outsider’*; *‘Hitting rock bottom’*; *‘Breakdown in communication’*; *‘The victim who refused to be a victim’*; *‘The noble leader/the corrupt leader’*; *‘The fight’*; *‘Consequences’*; *‘The family’*; *‘The situation.’* Or a task such as ‘Create a new myth, or fable, or superhero origin story.’ Adages and aphorisms can also be used as titles. Examples: *‘When we sing together, our hearts beat together.’* *‘The axe forgets; the tree remembers.’* *‘When elephants fight, the grass suffers most.’* *‘There are no villains, only those who deal with pain by passing it quickly on.’* *‘When you seek revenge, dig two graves.’* *‘When you help people who have nothing, you may realize you have everything.’*

This is only a beginning list; the possibilities at this level are as limitless as drama itself, and the aims are very broad.

Third Ring: Fictionalized Personal Stories



The third ring includes fictionalized scenes and plays which are enacted at a medium distance from personal stories of the participants. For example, a scene may be performed which is based on a personal story of one of the participants, but where the setting and characters have been fictionalized in order to offer anonymity and create a safe distance. This technique is useful, for example, when the participant may feel exposed or vulnerable sharing directly personal stories.

Personal Disclosure In this ring of the Spiral, personal material is typically sought during the rehearsal process, later to be fictionalized. We are therefore moving into more personal terrain, with important implications for working with sensitivity and care. This is even more important when working with vulnerable populations because traumatized individuals may not be aware of their vulnerability, and it is up to the drama practitioner to watch for this and work safely with this understanding. The third ring of the Spiral may also include personal level discussion, where personal connections are explicitly sought and worked into the process. While some personal disclosure is needed to work at this level, it is also acknowledged that the work may have personal meaning and connections that remain private.

Theater and Drama Processes at This Stage May Include

- Any of the activities from rings one and two of the Spiral, but with personal connections explicitly sought and discussed.
- Sharing personal stories as part of the process of creating theater.
- Ensemble-created drama, community drama, reminiscence theater, verbatim theater, documentary theater and related approaches with ‘fictionalized’/one step removed scenes and characters. Performers do not play the role of themselves or people they know, although they may do this in a fictionalized form.
- Can include stories and themes that have arisen from more personal work.

When the optimal place to work is at the third ring of the Spiral, metaphor is typically used to create distance from personal stories and to

contain powerful themes. An example of working in metaphor would be creating the story of an alien landing on Earth as a metaphor for the experience of refugees settling in a new country, or a former inmate resettling in the community, or a student moving to a new school. Casson (2004), Chesner (1995), Dayton (1990), Holmwood (2014), Jennings (2009, 2011), Linds (1996) and Perrow (2012) provide many examples and thorough guidance about the concept of working through metaphor, the concept of the ‘containing metaphor’ and notions around regulating aesthetic distance. Bannister (1991) and Boal (1995) offer further useful guidance. Students and practitioners of applied theater will be familiar with Boal’s concept of ‘metaxis,’ describing the participant’s encounter with the space between the world of their reality and the image of their reality, created by themselves (Boal 1995: 43; Linds 1996). The third ring represents that part of the drama process where the ‘space between’ is cultivated, and this can be done using all the tools in the dramatist’s and director’s toolkit.

Fourth Ring: Positive Personal Stories



At the fourth ring of the Spiral, participant-performers enact directly personal scenes that relate to strengths, success, empowerment, and positive episodes from the past—or they focus on safe, neutral or, non-troubling topics. Examples may include scenes of accomplishment, affirmation, aspiration, making a positive contribution, gratitude, growing, learning, helping others, positive memories, positive relationships, significant moments or developmental transitions (example: ‘The birth of a new role’), or celebrations. Participants may also rehearse and enact scenes they desire or may face in the future, that is, ‘rehearsals for life.’ Or participants may enact situations from their current life in order to develop positive social skills and strategies to handle personal situations (Kipper 1986; Yablonsky 1976; Baim et al. 2002).

Personal Disclosure and Support When personal material is explicitly used as the basis of the drama, or otherwise enacted or spoken about, participants should be encouraged to share their connections with each other’s stories and to demonstrate sensitive listening and support. Facilitators will need to allow adequate time for this sharing, discussion, mutual support and containment.

Theater and Drama Processes at This Stage May Include

- Ensemble-created drama, community drama, reminiscence theater, verbatim theater, documentary theater, testimonial theater, ethno-theater and related approaches, focusing on positive, safe or non-troubling topics and personal stories. Performers may play the role of themselves or people they know.
- Participants enact their personal life circumstances to develop positive social skills and strategies to handle personal situations from their current lives.
- Participants rehearse and enact scenes they desire or may face in the future, i.e. ‘rehearsals for life.’ As part of this process, participants can present for each other suggestions and examples of how challenging life situations might be handled. In psychodrama, this is called *role training*, *educational psychodrama* or *social psychodrama*, depending on the variation used.
- Frozen picture/sculpting techniques.
- A variation that may be useful in applied theater contexts is *rehearsed psychodrama*, where participants direct the rehearsal and presentation of scenes from their life.
- Also included at this ring of the Spiral are *social scenes/collective stories* around positive experiences that people share (see ideas for ring one of the Spiral). The difference here is that the scenes may have a more personal focus or they may be explored at more depth. Examples might include the theme of holidays; traditions; national celebrations; religious festivals; secular festivals; games and sports; positive historical events, etc.

Sample Titles or Story Prompts at This Ring of the Spiral

- A positive memory.
- A precious time, or event, in my life/our lives.
- A time when I have felt connected to other people/to the whole of the world.
- Me in my element, doing what I love to do.
- A place where I find strength/a place that I associate with positive memories and feelings. Or, a place where we find strength.
- My first friend, or a favorite memory of being with a friend, or friends.
- An achievement I am/we are proud of.

- A chance encounter or occurrence that became a pivotal moment in my life.
- Something I am proud of about my culture/my family/my community/my region/my country.
- The love I feel for my people.
- Something I am good at/something I know how to do.
- A memory I have of making something/working with my hands.
- The work I do/we do.
- Someone I want to thank.
- Someone who gives me strength/an example of a time they gave me strength.
- A relationship that is important to me.
- Where or how I/we get strength from my/our ancestors.
- A letter I would like to write to (or an encounter I would like to have with) my parent/grandparent/ancestor. A letter from them to me.
- When I have fallen in love, or felt loved.
- Something or someone I love/A message to someone I love.
- A time I have said 'yes' to love and connection.
- When I have joined with others in a meaningful, or satisfying way.
- A memory of listening to music, playing music, dancing or singing.
- A role model for me, and what they offered as an example of how to be in the world.
- A role model of moral strength and dignity.
- A role I aspire to.
- A future I imagine for myself, my family or my culture/country.
- Something I want to celebrate.
- How faith, spirituality or philosophy are important to me.
- A ritual or practice that is precious to me.
- What gives my life meaning.
- A moment in my life when my life took a new direction/when I made a key decision.
- The birth of a new role (i.e. a moment when I took on a new role that I had never had before, such as sibling, student, partner, godparent, employee, immigrant, aunt/uncle, etc.).
- A role I am proud of, and a moment of joy or satisfaction I have had in this role. Or, a responsibility I am glad to fulfil.
- A time when I spoke out for/took action for justice.
- Fighting for a cause I believe in.
- A time when I defended myself.

- A time when I defended or protected or advocated for someone else.
- A challenge I am facing now and dealing with successfully.
- A ‘perfect moment’ or ‘golden moment’ I have experienced in my life (often, this is a moment without words).
- A time I learned an important lesson.
- A time I helped someone else, or alleviated someone’s suffering.
- An imagined scene from my most likely/most hoped-for future.
- How I want it to be in (X) years/How I will get there (enact one or more intermediate scenes along the journey).
- A time when I made a difference for someone else/when they made a difference for me.
- An example of how I care for myself, and how I care for someone else/other people.
- Some great advice, support or encouragement I once received.
- A moment of awe, or mystery that I have experienced.
- A transformational moment, or experience.
- A memory of a rich sensory experience.
- A memory of a moment filled with meaning.
- When I have experienced, or witnessed something beautiful.
- How I relax, and find peace and serenity. What this means to me.
- A special time with my family.
- A time of sharing laughter with family or friends.
- A time of celebration I have shared with others.
- A time when I experienced simple pleasures with family or friends.
- The people who have made a difference to me.
- People who are important to me/The people who I am important to.
- A precious moment with a family member, relative, colleague or friend.
- A tradition in my family or community or workplace or culture.
- A time when I have enjoyed being out in the natural world.
- A time when I have had an adventure outdoors.
- A time when I have experienced a rush of excitement/adrenaline.
- A way that I am different now as compared with my younger self.
- A belief, idea, person, practice or custom that gives me strength.
- A favorite pet, or animal I have known—and a good memory I have of being with them.
- A song I love to sing (maybe, sing it solo or with others).
- Music I love to play (play it).
- Dance and movement that brings me joy (show us/involve us).

- A film, book, play, poem, piece of music, story, speech, meeting, etc. that has meaning to me or that changed my life for the better.
- An aspect of my family, community, culture or society that gives me strength.
- Something or someone I would like to celebrate.
- A truth teller I admire (perhaps: a scene from their life).
- A time I admired someone's character or achievement.
- What I want my legacy to be/How I want to be remembered.

Comment Facilitators should be aware that, depending on the topic and the sensitivities of the person in focus, this type of work may be at stage five or six of the Spiral (see below). This will vary, person to person. At the same time, it is important to note that, philosophically, this ring of the Spiral tries to emphasize strengths, competence, self-efficacy and resilience rather than trauma, loss, vulnerability, dysfunction and insufficiency. It will be important to clarify with your group the intent of ring 4 of the Spiral, so that participants understand the intention behind enacting positive personal stories. The approach of enacting positive personal stories is inspired by research within the field of positive psychology, which demonstrates the many ways in which people can be helped by focusing not on their difficulties but instead, on their strengths, talents, resilience and positive goals, and the people, activities and other aspects of life that bring them strength and joy (Seligman 2011). The focus is on growth, integration, wellbeing, connection, belonging, and making a contribution to the world.

Fifth Ring: Difficult and Resolved Stories



Working in the fifth ring of the Spiral, participants enact directly personal stories about troubling issues that are resolved—for example, stories of healing, growth, or overcoming adversity. The scenes enacted may once have proved difficult or painful for the participant to face and may also have been traumatic and unresolved in the past, but they are now resolved. This is what might be termed ‘nonclinical’ psychodrama, because the issues addressed do not require clinical working through, e.g. in a therapeutic setting. Put another way, at this ring of the Spiral we are staging scenes focused on *post-traumatic growth* (Frankl 1959; Kessler 2019)—as compared with *post-traumatic stress*. Part of the intention of

working at the fifth ring of the Spiral is to tap into the insight and wisdom that participants may have gained from their life experiences and challenges they have faced, worked through and resolved.

This level of working requires shrewd judgment by the facilitator to ensure that the work stays within safe bounds. The facilitator must be skilled and experienced enough to understand how to assess whether and to what degree events that were difficult, painful or traumatizing for the participant in the past are resolved in the present. Detailed guidance about how to make this judgment is given later in this chapter in the sub-section entitled 'Factors influencing which part of the Spiral is used.'

Examples of theater approaches that typically (although not exclusively) work with people's difficult and resolved stories include self-revelatory performance (Emunah 2015), auto-ethnographic performance (Pendzik et al. 2016), autobiographical theater (Heddon 2008; Stephenson 2013), theater of witness (Sepinuck 2013) and testimonial theater (Farber 2008, Forsyth 2013; Stuart-Fisher 2009).

Personal Disclosure and Support At this stage of the Spiral, participants are encouraged to share personal stories and connections for mutual learning and support. Important processes include informed consent, group support, sharing experiences, validation and witnessing. The rehearsal process itself may be a part of the healing and growth.

Theater and Drama Processes at This Stage May Include

- Creating and/or performing ensemble-created drama, community drama, reminiscence theater, documentary theater, verbatim theater, testimonial theater or related forms, focusing to a greater or lesser extent on troubling/stressful issues that are resolved for the participants/performers.
- Frozen picture/sculpting techniques.
- A variation that may be useful in applied theater contexts is *rehearsed psychodrama*, where participants direct the rehearsal and presentation of scenes from their life. A helpful technique with difficult and resolved stories (i.e. ring 5) is to have the teller of the story not only cast the scene and direct the scene, but also to stand apart from the scene when it is played for the audience/rest of the group. This means that someone else plays the role of the teller/protagonist. This is a distance regulation technique.

- Also included at this ring of the Spiral are collective stories around traumatic events from the past which the participants have recovered from, i.e. issues that have in the past led to collective trauma or events that have affected all or, many people in the group. Examples might include recovery from natural disasters, national crises, crimes, illness, pandemics, accidents or political events.

Sample Titles or Story Prompts at This Ring of the Spiral

- A turning point in my life.
- A time when I faced and overcame my fear.
- A time when I stood my ground in very difficult or complex circumstances.
- When I think about the challenges I face, what I find (or would find) helpful from other people is ... (show us the scene).
- A difficult or painful experience that I have recovered from, and that I want others to know about.
- An aspect of my life that I want to share with you, and to be witnessed.
- A time in my life when I needed other people and they were there for me.
- A time when I was angry/sad/afraid/needed love and comfort, and someone was there for me.
- When my friends/family/our community/our city/our region/our nation came together to help each other to face a crisis.
- Something I (or we) have recovered from/my journey through recovery.
- Finding the strength to get through difficult or painful times.
- A challenge I (or we) have faced and overcome.
- A change I made and how I did it (and what or who helped me make the change).
- How I have learned and grown from painful experience/overcoming adversity.
- A difficult choice I made.
- A choice I am proud of.
- How I see things now compared with how I saw things then.
- How I was then, and how I am different now (emphasizing growth and learning).
- A time when I learned I can change and move on.
- A time I made a mistake and what I learned.

- A time I made a mistake and apologized/set things right.
- A time when my beliefs, ideas or assumptions were tested.
- A time in my life that changed me or my view of myself, or someone else.
- A time in my life when hope or persistence made all the difference.
- A time when I have said what I believed, rather than what was comfortable.
- A difficult or uncomfortable conversation I have had.
- When I have had to learn and adapt quickly to a new situation.
- A time in my life when I learned new information that changed the way I understand myself, a family member, my friend, or the world.
- When I made a big decision that made all the difference.
- When I was at a low point, and how I got up again.
- When I turned defeat into success/disaster into opportunity.
- Hitting rock bottom and finding hope.
- An experience of grief or loss, and the meaning I make of this experience.
- How we remember those we have lost, in my culture/my family.
- Something I regret doing, and what I learned from that experience.
- One time I figured out something from my past and put some pieces of the puzzle together.
- Finding my voice.
- How my experiences have helped me to help others.
- Something I do much better now than in the past.
- An internal strength that I draw on when I face difficulties/something inside that keeps me strong.
- More abstract: 'Strong at the broken places.' 'We all share in common the deepest secrets.'

Comment While there are potential risks when working with material based on overcoming and resolving difficult life experiences, there are also great potential benefits. Working at this ring of the Spiral taps into the insight and wisdom that participants may have gained from their life experiences and challenges they have faced, worked through and resolved.

The explorations at ring 5 of the Spiral can be linked to the positive and developmental focus of Rosi Braidotti and her nomadic philosophy. Nomadic theory explores the ways in which the process of creation,

development and integration is in constant and ongoing dialogue with multiple layers of competing discourses, out of which can emerge new, dynamic, resilient and generative politics of affirmation (Braidotti 2012). Braidotti's concept of focusing on what is affirmative, positive, generative and developmental is explored more fully in Chap. 5, which addresses the intentions of the theater of personal stories.

Sixth Ring: Difficult and Unresolved Stories



The sixth, innermost ring of the Spiral is the most personally sensitive. Here, participants are helped to stage scenes that are still difficult and unresolved for them, for the purposes of personal and communal healing, gaining insight, resolving pain, easing fears, being witnessed and, in some situations, advocating for social change and social justice, so that others do not have to suffer in the same way.

The focus on difficult and unresolved personal stories can make participants highly vulnerable. Where the facilitator is not a trained therapist, in order to maintain safe practice and appropriate boundaries, they should have the guidance or supervision of a qualified therapist with relevant training, for example in psychodrama, dramatherapy, experiential therapy or related therapy or counseling methods. In any case, before entering this terrain, the theater worker should receive specific training in working safely with these issues.

Personal Disclosure and Support Working at this level, participants will typically share personal or collective stories about situations where they may have been highly vulnerable during, or after the episode. To maintain safety and ethical boundaries, important processes at this level of working include informed consent, well-integrated and supportive contexts for ensemble working, confidentiality, compassionate witnessing, validation, group sharing, reflective supervision and follow-up support. It is crucial to develop and maintain an atmosphere of support, trust, good will and safety, in order to promote a positive, developmental and healing atmosphere where people can find their way towards resolution and strength.

Theater and Drama Processes at This Stage May Include

- Creating and/or performing scenes focusing to a greater or lesser extent on difficult issues that are unresolved for the participants. A wide variety of strategies for regulating the pace and intensity of the scenes may be used. These are described later in this chapter.
- Frozen picture/sculpting techniques.
- Psychodrama and dramatherapy addressing personal, unresolved issues.
- To preserve clear boundaries, it may be helpful to use structured forms of personal exploration such as Boal's (1995) *Rainbow of Desires* and *Cop-in-the-Head* techniques, or other structured exercises described in, for example, Baim et al. (2002), Blatner (1997), Chesner (1995), Dayton (1990) and many other resources.
- Also included at this ring of the Spiral are collective stories around traumatic and unresolved issues, e.g. issues that have led to collective trauma or events that have affected all or many people in the group. Examples might include natural disasters, climate-related catastrophes, national crises, war, pandemics, civil unrest or other political events.

Sample Titles or Story Prompts at This Ring of the Spiral

- A challenge I am facing now, where I am trying to cope (Or, a challenge we all face, where we are trying to cope).
- A problem I/we need help with/where I/we need support from others.
- A story I/we want to share, to help me/us (and perhaps to help others).
- Unfinished business that is holding me back or still hurts, or confuses me.
- Hidden injuries.
- Trying to get unstuck from the past.
- What never happened, but should have. (Create the desired scene that never happened.)
- How things were/how I wish they'd been different.
- Finding better ways to solve my problems/deal with my suffering.
- When I need to know I have a connection to other people; when I really need help from others.

- A setback in my life that I am still recovering from/that still affects me.
- Something that (or someone who) is holding me back, or causing me distress.
- Something that is unhelpful or destructive about my culture, region or country.
- Something I want to be a part of changing about my culture, region or country.
- An event or experience I and/or my family went through/are going through, and how I/we are trying to recover.
- An event or experience we in this group (or in this region/country) all went through/are going through—and how we are trying to recover.
- My internal struggles/conflicts.
- Where we have conflict, and how we are trying to find peace and reconciliation.
- Finding understanding and compassion for all ‘parts’ of me.
- A time when I have been a reluctant or unexpected witness to suffering.
- Speaking my truth/finding words for what has been unspoken up to now.
- Something I must say, because it is eating me inside.
- My conflicts with another person/other people: trying to get past these, and move on.
- I want the world to know this about me....
- Me in a dangerous, or high-risk situation in the past/present/future.
- A change or adjustment I am struggling to make, where I need support and help.
- When I needed comfort/love and it was not there.
- When comfort/love was available, and I ignored or rejected it, or it was difficult to accept.
- The last time I was angry/sad/afraid.
- Coping with my feelings.
- A compassionate conversation with my ‘inner critic.’
- A problem my family faces while I am in prison/hospital/treatment: My place in that story.
- Throwing off a burden that does not belong to me.
- Finding my voice and taking back my ability to say ‘no.’

- A hidden legacy from my family or ancestors that I want to hand back to them.
- Regrets.
- Remorse.
- Someone or something I grieve for.
- Making amends.
- Learning from painful experience.
- Growing and learning to love and trust again.
- Unburdening myself of something that is not mine.
- Figuring out something from my past (putting the pieces of the puzzle together).
- Missing home.
- How things could be in the future if...
- Words I needed to hear from my parents/family. Words my child/my friend/my partner needs to hear from me.
- Where I am now/where I want to be/what's standing in between the two.
- The story of my life/a story that remains with me.
- Something that remains unfinished from my past.

Comment There must always be a clear reason and intent for working at the innermost ring of the Spiral. Chapter 5, which focuses on the *intentions* of the theater of personal stories, offers specific and detailed guidance about the intent of working at ring 6 of the Spiral. Most pointedly, the key guidance is that theater practice focused on ring 6 of the Spiral should have a clearly articulated *integrative* intention, i.e. a rationale that the work will be helpful and integrative in some way for the participant-performer(s) and also for audiences.

THE COLORS OF THE SIX RINGS OF THE SPIRAL

Where the Spiral is pictured in color, each of the six rings has a different color. The idea behind the use of color is to help the practitioner and participants to make clear distinctions between the different rings of the Spiral.

The color changes in gradations from blue at the outer edge to red at the innermost ring. Broadly speaking, the color blue is meant to represent a part of the process where the material is not emotionally exposing or reliant on personal disclosure of sensitive stories. It is emotionally 'cool' territory, especially regarding personal revelation. (This does mean that

the material will not be powerful or emotional; the distinction is primarily to do with the degree of self-revelation around sensitive material.) As one ‘spirals in’ towards the center, the colors of the rings become warmer and warmer, until we are at the red center. The color red used in ring 6 of the Spiral is meant to capture the ‘emotional heat’ of work that is highly personal, revealing, sensitive and potentially destabilizing.

THE ICONS FOR EACH RING OF THE SPIRAL

Another design feature of the Spiral is the use of icons to represent each ring of the Spiral. The icons also follow the color coding appropriate to the ring they describe.

- **Games and creative activities:** This icon—three people with their arms raised and connected—is meant to capture the notion of positive activities in diverse groups.
- **Fictional/distant stories:** This icon—a scroll and quill—is meant to convey the idea of fictional and creative scripts and stories.
- **Fictionalized personal stories:** This icon—a person behind a mask—is meant to indicate that the personal version of a story has been obscured by ‘masking’ key elements through the process of fictionalization.
- **Positive personal stories:** This icon—a trophy cup—is meant to convey the idea of positive and rewarding personal experiences.
- **Difficult and resolved stories:** This icon—a puzzle with the last piece fitted—conveys the idea that an event is resolved, i.e. the last piece of the puzzle has been put together, and the result is an image that is complete and intact.
- **Difficult and unresolved stories:** This icon—a person in an alarmed state with an exclamation mark—is meant to convey the idea of material that is still potentially alarming, unresolved and highly charged.

FACTORS INFLUENCING WHICH PART OF THE SPIRAL IS USED

During theater workshops, there are a range of factors that influence the degree of personal disclosure by participants. Some of the main factors are:

Contract with the Group In some professional, institutional or other contexts, it is inappropriate to ask participants to reveal personal material. In such instances, the facilitator must lead the workshop in such a way that scenes and discussion keep to the outer rings of the Spiral.

Comfort with Personal Disclosure In general, theater workshops start with general exercises at the outer edge of the Spiral and work inward as appropriate. Some individuals in the group may be comfortable working at the center of the Spiral (e.g. with a great deal of self-disclosure around sensitive topics), while others would prefer to be on the outer Spiral edge (i.e. disclosing very little of their personal life). This may shift during a single session, and indeed it may shift during the course of an exercise. This is a dynamic factor and subject to continual shift which is highly multi-factorial.

Personal Focus Similarly, the level of focus on any individual is an important factor. In high focus activities, the whole of the group's attention is on one or two individuals for a significant amount of time. The focus is higher still when the nature of the material portrayed is highly personal. In general, groups need to begin with low focus activities, and only later, if appropriate, move to medium and high focus activities.

Vulnerability and Risk It may be that the participants have had experiences that make them vulnerable in certain ways that require work at a distance, i.e. at the outer rings of the Spiral. Issues such as unresolved trauma or loss, current addiction, recent victimization, social isolation, illness, or other forms of current or ongoing danger, may mean—in certain contexts—that work needs to stay at the outer rings of the Spiral.

Readiness Level of the Group Some groups will need a great deal of work using games, exercises, group building and ice breaking activities at the outer edge of the Spiral in order to build enough trust and cohesiveness to move inward on the Spiral and reveal anything of themselves and their personal stories. Other groups may knit together quickly and want to work at emotional depth much sooner.

Practitioner/Director Skill and Training Practitioners and directors must work with an awareness of how far their training has prepared them to safely work with participants' personal material, particularly troubling,

unresolved or traumatic material. Where they have not had such training and preparation, practitioners are well advised to work in the outer parts of the Spiral and certainly not at ring 6 of the Spiral.

Indicators That It May Be Appropriate to Work Closer to the Center of the Spiral When the group members have agreed that they wish to work with more personal material and around sensitive topics, and where it is appropriate to do so, the practitioner may choose to ‘spiral in’ with the group and work at levels five and six. To do so, the practitioner will need to have sensitivity and awareness around key indicators that signal whether or not a given participant is ready to work on such a personal and sensitive level of disclosure. As a general principle, the practitioner should aim to work within the participant’s *zone of proximal development*, that is, to present sufficient challenge to offer opportunities for the participant to genuinely develop, without stretching them so far that they (or the other group members) panic, or shut down. This is a key pedagogical principle set forth by Vygotsky (1978) and is a cornerstone concept within educational and therapeutic contexts. Key indicators that you are working within the zone of proximal development include:

1. Is the participant working spontaneously and creatively at their current stage of disclosure, such that they can make an informed and reflective decision about whether to move to a higher level of disclosure?
2. How integrated is the participant with the rest of the group? If they reveal personal and sensitive information about themselves, are they likely to find support from the group? How integrated is the group generally?
3. Is the participant able to take a graduated approach to the telling of their story? For example, it may be best to tell the story using a gradual approach: First, tell the story verbally. Then, if ready and able and if it is appropriate, set the scene and tell the story as a narrated scene with actor/participants moving in silence (or, alternatively, play the story as a radio play, again with no action). After this, if the participant can go to the next level of enactment, stage the scene in increments, using any or all techniques as needed to regulate distance. At this point, the participant telling the story should normally be out of the scene and someone else plays their role. At some point, the participant may be able to go into the scene in their own role. This is not a strict requirement and

there are many instances where it is more appropriate if they do not go into their own role, particularly if it is a moment where they were traumatized. This sort of reenactment typically demands a great deal of training and sensitivity on the part of the practitioner, in order to avoid re-traumatizing the participant, or distressing the group.

DRAMA-BASED STRATEGIES FOR REGULATING DISTANCE

In order to make best use of the Spiral, practitioners should be aware of the array of techniques that can create distance between a participant's personal story and the scenes created from their story. Even if there is no fictional distance, many of these techniques can still be used to regulate the pace and intensity of the material for the individual. Such techniques, which can be used at any ring of the Spiral, include:

Character and Casting Variations

- Using fictional names.
- Having other people play the role of the person whose story is represented.
- Changing the ages or other particulars of the characters such as their gender, occupation, national origin, social roles or other cultural specifics.
- Creating characters whose personality is similar to but not exactly like the person whose story is in focus.
- Creating characters that amalgamate, or merge several people.
- Using selected elements or characters from the original but translating them into other contexts.
- Changing species, for example, a human story becomes a story with animals as the protagonists. Or some characters are animals, and some are humans.
- Adding or subtracting characters.

Scenes/Plot/Story/Theme Variation

- Amalgamating several stories or story elements into one.
- Altering the plot and introducing new plot twists for the purposes of dramatization.

- Focusing on the *theme* of the original source material and changing some or all of the particulars. This can include working entirely in metaphor, i.e. the entire story can be contained within an encompassing metaphor.
- Similarly, working in abstraction at the level of aesthetic and emotional truth (the ‘heart’s truth’), without ‘pinning down’ meanings. With some scenes or passages of the drama, not making literal sense may be the best way to convey the effect you intend. This would be the stage equivalent of Lewis Carroll’s poem *The Jabberwocky*, where it is precisely because we cannot accurately determine the meaning of every word that the imagination is sparked and our creative contribution to the meaning is required. Many of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poems work in similar ways, using neologisms that convey thematic resonance, but which are not defined words.
- Combining the person’s story with a traditional and/or well-known story, e.g. using their story as the basis of a new version of *Red Riding Hood*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Odyssey*, *Lord of the Rings*, etc.
- Bringing in new or unusual perspectives. For example, imagined characters or characters representing real people but from other times and places (or other types of anachronism). Or, imagining the story from the point of view of an inanimate object, or from the point of view of another observer, or from an animal such as the family pet. Or, telling the story from one’s own point of view at different points in time, including the future, or from a different internal point of view or aspect of self (my reactive self, versus my reflective self).

Time/Setting Variation

- Changing the time period of the play. For example, setting it in another time, altering the amount of time elapsed during the story, or moving back and forth through time.
- Using different settings which are real places.
- Using fictional settings, either lightly or strongly fictionalized (i.e. near or far in metaphorical ‘distance’ from the personal stories of those present), including setting it on another planet/fantasy world.

Techniques/Conventions

- Using theatrical stylizing techniques and conventions, e.g. freeze frame, fast forward, flashback, reverse/rewind, voice-over, silent acting, asides, direct address to the audience, soliloquy, segue.
- Using a ‘stop/start’ control mechanism, e.g. giving the person whose story is being shared a ‘remote control’ that can start or stop (or rewind, pause, fast forward, mute, etc.) the action. Such a theatrical device can offer the person a sense of being able to control the intensity of the impact of telling/sharing their story.
- Using the distancing effect of having a play within a play.
- Breaking the action with intrusions such as anachronisms, or consciously adjusting the ‘frame’ around the story, for example by alternating between the ‘as if’ world of the story and the ‘here and now’ world of the storyteller/performer. Or, between the ‘as if’ world of the story and another ‘as if’—including moments that happened during the process of researching or creating the performance/script. There are many ways of making explicit the act of story-making and storytelling, and playing with the six-way transactions between storyteller, actors, director, characters, story and audience.
- Similarly, making explicit the processes behind the performance. For example, making explicit reference to the rehearsal process and the decision-making process used in rehearsal.
- Noting that some of the story is ‘real’ and some is not. Example: An aside to the audience: ‘This really happened.’
- Using storytelling devices such as a third party who tells the story having witnessed it or heard about it.

Absent Presence of a Character

- There are many ways to convey the ‘absent presence’ (Mahfouz 2012) of a character or characters, which can be an extremely useful technique for regulating distance. Examples include: sound effects associated with the character, recorded or offstage voices, an overheard conversation where the people are not seen, projected video or still images of the person, a drawing of the person or a drawing made by the person, the person’s signature on a document, a gesture or movement used by the person, or a mark of some kind left behind by the person—for example, a special symbol associated with them (Heathcote 1984: 166–7).

- Absent presence can also be conveyed by the impersonation of the absent person, bringing them to life in front of the audience.
- Absent presence can also be conveyed by reading a letter, email or other sort of message from the person, or a diary entry, or the presence of an unopened gift addressed to them, or another of the person's possessions or an object that represents them, or symbolically brings them 'into the room' (war medals are an example of this, or boxes of correspondence, important documents or other belongings).
- Musical themes or sound or lighting themes are another way to convey 'absent presence'—an example might include a character's signature tune, or signature instrument, noise or voice, being heard, in combination with some other signal of their presence (e.g. one of their possessions). A related example would be music or sounds (e.g. birdsong) that the person loves, or loved.
- Further examples of absent presence include footprints, an empty throne or seat, a photograph, an empty picture frame, a shadow, a silhouette, a rider-less horse, a historical document or historical record or reference to the person, or an item of clothing draped over the back of a chair or hung on a washing line.
- Any of these ideas can be augmented with elements of interaction and 'completion' by the audience. For example, a character may give the audience an opportunity to hold an object that came from the actual place or scene being described. Or, as another example, the audience may be given scripted dialogue to read, which is the verbatim speech of the person being represented or discussed.

Aesthetic Devices

- Finding a genre, theatrical style or trope that will transform the story in some way, e.g. comedy, farce, slapstick, adventure-thriller, film noir, Nordic noir, 'Bergmanesque,' opera/musical, Elizabethan drama, documentary, faux documentary ('mockumentary'), soap opera, reality TV or 'augmented reality' TV show, 'meta' commentary approaches like Gogglebox, or a Greek chorus, courtroom drama, police procedural, rom-com, sci-fi, fantasy fiction, fan fiction, buddy movie, cowboy western, war film, disaster film, boxing film, vaudeville, variety show, burlesque, silent movie/melodrama, Bollywood, children's TV, game show, nature program, awards ceremony, talent show, music video, radio play, food or travel program,

news program, satire, parody, circus, puppet show, Greek tragedy, fairy tale, Christmas panto, standup comedy, the tale of the underdog triumphing against the odds, parable, fable, myth, superhero story, hero's journey, *deus ex machina*, performance art, etc.

- Using a talk show format, where the person is interviewed on stage. A variation that can be useful: While they talk, scenes are played out to illustrate the stories they tell.
- Using a voice-over or otherwise using a narrator role.
- Multimedia, for example film or slide projections or audio voices, music or environmental sounds. Such a technique could be used, for example, to interweave a personal story with the social/cultural context of the time. An example would be someone narrating or enacting a scene from their life, while on the backdrop a scene from their location at the time they are describing is projected, and we hear the sounds associated with what they are describing. While this is not, strictly speaking, a distancing technique, it does embed the individual's story within a broader social and cultural context, which is a form of regulating distance in that it emphasizes connection to place and context, rather than isolation and solipsism.
- Finding a game or other activity that metaphorically captures some of the key elements of the person's story. For example, if their story involves losing something valuable to them, the group can play the game of hide and seek and weave this into the drama.
- Similarly, using symbolic or metaphorical actions, objects or environmental factors that chime with or underscore the truth or essence of a story, character or plot element. Example: a cleansing rain at a moment of transition during the process of grieving, a light coming on when truth is illuminated, or a needle skipping at the end of a record as a relationship comes to an end.
- A related technique would be to make tangible what the character relates as their subjective reality, or their metaphorical or imaginary or desired reality. As an example, a character may be hearing voices in their head, and we hear the voices. Or a character may be imagining a world where reassuring characters come to comfort them at night, and we meet these characters. As a further example, a character may imagine a hoped-for scenario where they have a super-power, or where the world or their life is transformed somehow.
- Using visual or sound-based motifs. For example, sounds and music of a particular time or place, or design motifs, objects, props, food,

colors, actions or activities associated with particular times, places, events, populations or occupations.

- Creating a metaphor, song or other aesthetic enrichment of a personal story. For example, the story might be told in such a way that it is metaphorical and personal at the same time. For examples of artistically rich evocations of childhood, one could start with the Beatles' *Penny Lane* or *Strawberry Fields Forever* for inspiration.
- Other aesthetic techniques might include various adaptations of verbatim techniques. For example, the original words of the people who lived the actual events could be audio recorded and replayed during performance, with the actors lip-syncing their words and acting in time to the audio soundtrack.
- Proximity and related variables: Playing with qualities such as big versus small, close versus far, voiced versus silent, loud and quiet, moving and still, observer and observed.

Process Variations

- During the process of theater-making with personal stories, the practitioner can work with the group to set in place various conventions that can help to regulate distance in practical ways. For example, you can establish a convention whereby the teller of the story stands apart from the actors and the scene, in effect creating space between themselves and their story. In such an instance, someone else would be playing the role of the teller in the story, as the teller stands apart from the scene.
- Similarly, during the process of creating scenes based on real life experiences, the teller of the story can also be the director of the scene (with the theater practitioner offering guidance as needed). This can reaffirm for the teller that they will retain control over the story and how it is told. In addition, by taking the role of the director, and facilitating a repeated rehearsal of the material, this process can help to take the emotional heat out of a memory, and help the teller of the story to achieve mastery and confidence in relation to a story and memory that may previously have been destabilizing and/or unresolved.

Co-creation with Audiences

- ***Audience involvement:*** Another strategy which can help to regulate distance is to involve the audience in creative ways, so stories become shared and transformed in both rehearsed and unrehearsed ways. Example: Hand dialogue cards to audience members, which they read as part of the scene. If the scene is explicitly personal, the dialogue could be the real-life dialogue from the real-life person or people, i.e. their exact words. A variation of this technique is used by Jane English in her production *20b*, described in Chap. 2.
- ***Co-created performance:*** To extend this idea, we can involve audiences in a *communal*, *cooperative* and *co-created* type of performance in the theater of personal stories. The degree of trust, candor, open-heartedness and ensemble solidarity needed to work safely with personal stories means that the theater of personal stories is a particularly appropriate context for establishing an informal, creatively charged relationship between the audience and the performers. To create this informal atmosphere, you can, for example, experiment with how the audience and the performers are positioned in relation to each other and how the performers relate to the audience members. In psychodrama groups, the group often starts seated in a circle. As the group warms up, the protagonist emerges through facilitated group processes and the drama spontaneously unfolds under the guidance of the director. Taking this process as an inspiration and applying it to the theater of personal stories, the performers and the audience can begin seated in a circle, as equals. It will be useful to signal to the audience some of the hopes, intentions and safety/boundary issues as you begin, and also to let them know that they will be an integral part of bringing the story to life. (A warm-up process may be needed to bring the audience into a state of readiness to support the performance and become involved.) As the play begins, the performers (as rehearsed) rise from or perform from their seats in the circle as and when their part in the play begins. In such a format, having established a relationship of equals, the performers can play continually with the possibilities of involving the audience as readily available reference points and ‘members of the cast.’ The audience members thus become an integral part of the drama, co-creating possibilities—live and in-the-moment—with the performers. Audience members might be invited to volunteer, for example, to fulfill a role, or roles

required onstage by a performer, for example to be ‘my family,’ or ‘my best friend on the day we met,’ or ‘my daughter who came to visit me,’ or ‘my brother/sister, who stood by me in my time of need.’ Or a volunteer might become an inspirational figure from history or any person needed in the drama, or a pet, an inanimate object, a threshold, a path, a mountain, a sign, a letter, an idea, a breeze, a wave, birdsong, or an inner voice—the possibilities are endless. This hybrid form of rehearsed and spontaneous co-creative theater need not be confined to rings 4, 5 and 6 of the Spiral (i.e. explicitly personal stories); performances using this approach can focus on any part of the Spiral, several parts simultaneously, or different parts of the Spiral at different points in the performance. Various degrees of improvisation with the audience members can be used, as needed and as appropriate. The whole audience can be involved in creating sound effects, voices, musical accompaniment, choral interludes or celebrations or rites of passage that may include dance, singing, scripted elements, poetry and traditional rituals. New dialogue, actions, scenes, scenic elements, characters and possibilities can emerge, as the rehearsed aspects of the performance and the unrehearsed elements mix in this spontaneously emergent form. Taking time at the end of the performance for de-roling, sharing and general discussion is an essential feature of this type of co-creation, as audience members are likely to have many feelings and responses to the roles and the scenes they have been involved in.

CASE STUDY: RE-LIVE’S *MEMORIA*

An example of a theater production that could be said to operate at the sixth, innermost ring of the Drama Spiral is Re-Live’s November 2014 production entitled *Memoria*, performed for public audiences at Cardiff’s Chapter Theater. The play was performed for three nights to sold-out audiences and live streamed to more than 4000 people in twelve countries. At the time of going to press, a video of the production is still accessible via Re-Live’s website.

I focus on *Memoria* because it is a clear example of best practice at the sixth, innermost ring of the Drama Spiral. It stands as an excellent example of ethical, flexible, safe and reflexive practice where participant-performers present their personal stories around difficult and unresolved issues.

Memoria is among the very best examples I have seen of theater practice at the sixth ring of the Spiral. I use *Memoria* as a case study because it demonstrates how theater practitioners can work with integrity with participants' difficult and unresolved personal stories, and do this work in ways that are unique to theater and highly integrative—without apology, and without trying to imitate the processes of psychotherapy.

Memoria featured the autobiographical performances of people living with dementia. The cast also included their family members and the social care professionals involved in their care. In this sensitively staged production, the performers shared their life stories and the challenges they face in living with dementia, or caring for people with dementia. Theorizing the production through the lens of the Drama Spiral, *Memoria* explored the terrain at ring 6 of the Spiral, i.e. difficult and unresolved stories that are painful, fearful and ongoing. With seriousness and humor, the performers presenting their personal stories did not shy away from the stark realities of the illness, its effects on them and their families, and the struggles many patients and their families have in finding appropriate and sensitive care, support and medical attention. The production was a powerful sharing of human experience, and was also informative: on the night I saw the production, many policy makers and social care and medical professionals were in the audience and reflected on their learning during the question and answer session after the performance.

The Work of Re-Live

The founders of Re-Live, Karin Diamond and Alison O'Connor, describe Re-Live as a specialist Arts in Health organization focused on designing and delivering performance-led interventions and experiential training programs for professionals. *Memoria* was a program designed for both public audiences as well as professionals. The theater production was part of a larger project, which includes a training program. The company has received commissions to deliver life story work and dementia care training for a range of regional governments, in Wales and England. Part of this work is done in partnership with Cardiff University, with the ambitious aim of transforming dementia care training. At the time of writing, Re-Live continues its work focused on dementia care, among its other programs of work including work with war veterans, survivors of conflict, and older adults.

O'Connor and Diamond describe their approach as *life story theater*—a form of theater where people are helped to share stories about key aspects of their lives with audiences (O'Connor and Diamond 2014). It is a form of theater which is perhaps most closely related to documentary, verbatim and testimonial theater. Within Re-Live's approach to life story theater, there is also an explicit aim of promoting positive social change.

Looking at Memoria Through the Lens of the Drama Spiral

While there are many lenses through which we might analyze *Memoria*, in order to focus on the key issues in this book, I shall restrict my analysis to considering how the play relates to the Drama Spiral and to the themes of safety, ethical practice and integration in the theater of personal stories.

Memoria serves as an example of how theater can operate safely and ethically at the innermost ring of the Drama Spiral when carefully framed and thoughtfully facilitated by skilled practitioners. As elaborated in this chapter, the sixth, innermost ring of the Spiral is the most personal and sensitive. Here, participants are helped to stage scenes that are still difficult and unresolved for them. Working at the innermost ring of the Spiral requires explicit consideration of ethics from multiple points of reference, and ethical issues abound in a production such as *Memoria*. Thinking back to the wide range of ethical issues that are explored in Chap. 3, we can see that in *Memoria*, questions arise regarding informed consent, patient confidentiality, and the confidentiality of family members and professionals involved with the people on stage. Further ethical issues include the effects on audiences, and the effects of involvement on participants. In exploring these issues during discussion with O'Connor and Diamond, they described to me the ways in which they consider these and other ethical issues and address them with ongoing adaptations throughout the theater-making process. It would be fair to say that ethical concerns are just as important to O'Connor and Diamond as artistic issues and the social mission of the organization. The focus on ethics is required not just because of the vulnerabilities of their participant groups, but also because of the highly personal nature of their *Life Story Theater* approach, which purposefully elicits autobiographical material around difficult and possibly painful, ongoing themes in people's lives.

There are a number of directorial choices within the production of *Memoria* that signal the careful consideration of ethical processes. This

included using the technique of onstage interview to allow the performers' personal stories to be told without requiring them to remember monologues. For example, in an early scene, Karen, a woman who has been diagnosed with younger onset dementia, is interviewed on a park bench by the co-director, Alison O'Connor. She speaks about the devastating effects of being given the diagnosis, and how difficult it was telling her children and her husband. She also speaks about how some of her friends have abandoned her, not knowing what to do or say. This technique of collaborative dialogue, and a number of other, related techniques used in the production, seemed to capture perfectly the idea advocated by Anne Davis Basting in her writing and practical work on dementia care and care for older adults, where she promotes the idea of working collaboratively with the person and encouraging them to be an active participant in promoting their own wellbeing (Basting 1998, 2009; Basting et al. 2016).

Similarly, there was frequent use of pre-recorded voiceovers, played back while the person whose voice is heard is seen onstage. This was an effective way of including monologues without requiring people to remember their lines. In the fifth scene, for example, Jeanette, Patrick and Karen are onstage (they are not 'in character'—they are simply themselves). Their voices are heard on a recorded voice-over. We hear them recall life's pleasures, activities they like doing such as singing and playing music. They also speak of loss, such as the loss of the joy of reading, 'because it's difficult to remember what you have read,' and the loss of the pleasures and routines of their old life, including work. Grief hangs heavily in this scene.

Other notable adaptations included the slow and steady pace of the scenes and the scene changes, the very simple staging (including minimal movement once onstage), and the fact that none of the participant-performers with dementia were left alone onstage. There was always someone nearby, within just a few feet, in case they needed assistance, or a prompt. This sort of scaffolding was present in every scene, providing an infrastructure supporting the memory and action of each cast member. And while this infrastructure had, on the one hand, a purely pragmatic aspect, in that it supported the participation of the cast members, it also represented a kind of meta-choreography of embodied memory and history. For example, in one of Jill's scenes, we see her onstage while we hear her recorded voiceover, recounting her profound grief when she realized

her husband Chris would not be coming home again. Onstage, Jill is very still, writing occasionally in her journal. On the backdrop, we see a montage of scenes of their life together, raising their sons. The counterpoint of voiceover, onstage actions and photographs from the family album work as a harmonious juxtaposition with powerfully affective resonance. It feels like a richly meditative witnessing, precious and reflective. Within the context of the safe, careful, supportive and deeply empathic staging and production, it feels like a profound, rare privilege to have someone share such personal and heartfelt memories and relationships with us. In other scenes in the play, there are variations on this theme, where memory, history, action, sound effects, live music and visual images play in harmony and counterpoint in such a way as to keep the audience engaged with fresh combinations and techniques—while also being adapted to the particular capacity and needs of the individual cast member. This integrated use of scaffolding and juxtaposed elements of staging is perhaps the strongest and most notable aspect of the aesthetic as well as ethical production values of *Memoria*.

If we reflect on the notion of ethics and the many facets of ethical practice that were explored in Chap. 3, we can see that O'Connor and Diamond worked in ethical and sensitive ways in the staging. The techniques used were sensitively adapted to the capacities of the participant-performers within their zone of proximal development, and this approach allowed them to be maximally active in the performance, depending on what they could do.

The ethical sensitivity and strength of *Memoria* also extended to the themes embedded within the play. For example, throughout the play there was a balance of shadow and light: when a scene focused on the fearful, exhausting and debilitating aspects of dementia, this was soon juxtaposed with the strengths of the participant-performers, their pleasures, their humor, their treasured memories and relationships, and their dignity as individuals. Each person was able to tell aspects of their life story in simple scenes that were played at the slow and steady pace of contemplative reflection. The autobiographical stories were often augmented by the projection of images from their family albums, offering an invitation to the audience to see the onstage performers as individuals with a rich personal and family history.

Continuing on the thematic elements of the play, and how they reflected a high degree of ethical thinking and values, I noted how the play

balanced and integrated multiple perspectives in relation to the central theme of dementia. This was most plain to see in the fact that the cast included people living with dementia (Jeanette, Karen, Patrick) and also a husband (David, who is Jeanette's husband), Jill (whose husband had died of dementia several years earlier), Carri (whose mother currently has dementia), and Dawn (who manages a home for people with dementia). This casting allowed a variety of perspectives, which added to the overall impact of the play. It was informative and also revelatory.

By the same token, there was a balance of views in relation to critical assessment of the medical and care professions. While some of the cast spoke about the shortcomings and insensitivities of the care they received, or how inadequate their care was compared with patients with other diseases such as cancer, there were other cast members who recalled professionals who offered care and treatment with great sensitivity and effectiveness. For example, in one scene, Alison O'Connor interviews Jeanette and David—a couple married for fifty years—at the piano. Jeanette recalls seeing a range of specialists, and having to lobby exhaustingly hard, with the support of her daughters, to get a confirmed diagnosis. Her husband David then speaks about the shock of receiving a letter from the doctor after the diagnosis, addressed to 'Mrs. Carter and Carer.' He was outraged: 'I am her *husband*, not her *carer*.'

By contrast, Jill has a later monologue offering a very different view of the care her husband received. During her monologue, played as voiceover as she sits on a park bench, Jill recalls the protracted and difficult process she went through before she could agree to her husband Chris going into full time care. She then talks about the care home that Chris went into and how grateful she is towards the nurses, who showed him care and sensitivity up until his death. She asks rhetorically, 'Angels in heaven? In churches? No, they are here on Earth, and they wear blue tunics. And I thank God for them from the bottom of my heart!'

The contrast between Jeanette and David's experience of the health system, as compared with Jill's and her husband Chris', felt like an important balance because it represented complex reality rather than partisan agitprop. In some ways, *Memoria* was a campaigning piece, championing greater awareness of the issues around dementia and advocating for better services for dementia care. Given this, it may have been tempting to offer a biased view that stressed the inadequacy of the services in a plea for more investment in dementia care. It is notable that O'Connor and Diamond took a more nuanced approach and included points of view across the

spectrum, with some cast members offering harsh criticism and others praising the compassion and care their loved one received. This is a complex and mature approach, because it recognizes that many of the people in the audience would be people working in dementia care and would probably be turned off by a play that slated their profession without also focusing on the good services offered. While there is a time and a place for partisan protest, there is equally a time when the best strategy is to bring people along with you, from both sides of the argument.

The production had high aesthetic values and used photo-montage effects with a mix of projected images that included facts and figures, family album photos, images of specific settings like a hospital corridor, and also images of outdoor settings such as parks, woods and streams. On two occasions, there were interludes with music and images where relevant statistics were projected onto different parts of the scenery. One of the statistics informed us that ‘there are 44.4 million people across the world living with dementia, and that by 2050 this will rise to 135.5 million.’ Another statistic informed us that ‘In the UK, there are over 670,000 unpaid carers for people with dementia. Unpaid carers save the economy £11 billion per year.’ These images and statistics brought valuable context to the scenes. Looked at through the lens of ethics, the images from family albums can be seen as adding respectful context to the life stories of the participant-performers.

Perhaps the most powerful ethical aspect of *Memoria* was captured in an observation made by Karin Diamond in the Q&A session after the performance I attended. Karin mentioned her observations of dementia care during field research in Japan, and how people with dementia were encouraged to continue to do what gave them joy. She spoke about how she and Alison O’Connor had tried, with *Memoria*, to encourage the participant-performers to continue to do what they enjoy doing, and to use their voices to help other people.

There is also the important aspect of the ethical relationship with the audience. One of the notable features of Re-Live’s approach to the audience is how the performers and the onstage director (Alison) brought a sense of informality, naturalness and humor to the action onstage, such that the audience had a sense of joining in with a process focused on sharing, understanding and kindness towards others. The atmosphere established in the theater was one of sensitivity, empathy and shared experience. These were stories and people that any of us could relate to. Moreover, the cast shared their stories with us in such a way that we could encounter and

contemplate the themes and the stories with a feeling that, if we needed support, support was on hand. This was an intangible but nevertheless important aspect of the tone of the production. I was also impressed that there were posters, stands and informational leaflets available front of house, offering support and information for audience members affected by the issues in the production.

Memoria is also an example of how the theater of personal stories is increasingly breaking through barriers and making a direct address that provides a means for participant-performers to offer their unfettered viewpoints. Such is the urgency to communicate about the issues they face that the people involved in this production have boldly presented their lives and their personal stories to the world, free from the filter of—and potential silencing by—professional discourses and systems. Their confident presence on the stage, and their moving personal stories, also served to break through societal ignorance, stereotyping and stigmatizing of people (and their loved ones) experiencing dementia. In the case of this production, this direct approach led to some truly astonishing and memorable moments of encounter in the theater. The paradox presented by such a production is that to a very great degree its power lies in the vulnerability of the people whose lives are being presented and who are the most powerful proponents of telling their stories.

Given the particular sensitivities of this production, a crucial feature of *Memoria*—reflective of Re-Live's general approach to working with participant-performers—was the detailed groundwork and careful contracting done before and during the project, and the thoughtful support offered to participants long after the production concluded (O'Connor and Diamond 2014). When I met with O'Connor and Diamond two and a half years after the production had concluded, they were still in contact with the cast members, and some of the cast were still involved in support groups and in other projects facilitated by Re-Live. O'Connor and Diamond take a long view in relation to participant involvement, and they recognize that to some degree projects like *Memoria* fill a gap and serve the function of social support and social therapy that might be missing in statutory and voluntary sector services.

To sum up, *Memoria* demonstrated how theater can address highly personal themes with participants—even profoundly vulnerable themes—and maintain high levels of safety, ethical rigor and aesthetic form.

APPLYING THE DRAMA SPIRAL: SOME CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explained the Drama Spiral, the thinking behind it, and how to apply it. When I was developing the Drama Spiral, I was curious to discover whether it would be possible to delineate clear markers between theater and therapy. In my own practice as a theater-maker who also trained as a psychodrama psychotherapist, at one time I felt able to make clear distinctions between work that I would consider to be within the domain of theater and drama workshops, and work focused on individual and group psychotherapy. However, during my research leading to the development of the Drama Spiral, this distinction was challenged time and again by productions that were both successful as theater performances and equally successful at dealing with highly personal, ongoing and unresolved difficult stories. There is ample evidence of safe, ethical and aesthetically rich theater practice using people's personal and collective stories addressing even the most extreme forms of dangerous human experience.

It is no longer possible to place clear markers down regarding what material is reserved for the theater and what material is reserved for therapy. All types of traumatic and harrowing experiences can be and indeed have been dramatized and performed on the public stage, not just as first-person narratives, but in many cases by the very person who experienced the traumatic event in the first place. One could argue that this is the place where the distinction between theater and therapy reaches a vanishing point. With this in mind, I would propose these four factors as being most relevant when making decisions about which part of the Spiral to focus on:

1. *The skills, ethics and values of the practitioner.* This includes appropriate training, support, supervision and ongoing development of the practitioner.
2. *The readiness of the group.* This includes the group's ability to support the person who is telling their story, to ensure as far as possible that the process of telling and creating theater from their story is a positive and healing experience for them.
3. *The personal readiness and resilience of the participant telling their story.* There are many factors that influence how ready a person feels to share their story and/or to work with others to recreate their story. Practitioners will consider factors such as how integrated the person is in the group, how stable they are in terms of their interactions in the group, and how they cope at each stage of telling their

story. With sufficient internal strength and interpersonal functioning, participants might be able to make use of theater processes at any part of the Spiral.

4. *The correct context for and framing of the process.* This includes contracting, boundaries, timing, recruitment, preparation, choosing appropriate modes of presenting the work (including distance regulation techniques), mediation and integration with other systems and agencies to support the participants/performers, and follow-up. This also includes gaining informed consent and making people fully aware of the possible consequences of involvement.

The Spiral is not a cookbook, offering a recipe for designing successful workshops. It is instead a kind of road map, featuring landmarks, possible destinations, suggested routes, sights of interest, and hazards to avoid. It is then down to the skill of the facilitator to find, in collaboration with colleagues and participants, the destination and the means and route to get there. My intention in offering this structure is that it helps participatory theater work to stay ethical and informed, and sensitive to the needs, vulnerabilities and potentials of everyone concerned. I also hope that the Spiral offers theater practitioners a useful practical resource to help their decision-making and negotiation of risk, and prompts the exploration of new modes of working that generate new ideas and move beyond familiar tropes.

When we elicit participants' stories and work with them in a drama process, what is crucial is not really whether or not we focus on injury and risk or, on only positive stories; what is crucial is the skill of the practitioner in staying focused on ethical processes, working collaboratively in transparently negotiated processes with groups. For some groups, staying metaphorical will be where they feel able to work. Other groups may wish to portray their story in direct terms. With appropriate precautions and processes in place and with a reflexive, nuanced approach, skilled theater practitioners ought to be able to operate across the full spectrum of theatrical forms, from fourth-wall, fictional stories to the up-close-and-personal forms that include autobiographical performances around even the most vulnerable and risky topics.

To do this, the theater practitioner must have a solid grasp of the terrain they are working within, and the demarcations within the terrain that keep the work within appropriate borders. Where drama processes directly

access or explicitly refer to the personal and collective stories of participants, the theater practitioner is obligated to work within a coherent ethical framework of practice which includes a structured, transparent approach at each stage of the process. Recognizing this, the theater practitioner needs to be conscious of how far ‘into the Spiral’ one goes with the group. Moreover, the practitioner needs to work with the insight, broad view, ethics and integrity to ask searching questions about the motives, aims, parameters and potential impact of the work on the participants and audiences.

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"Staging the Personal brings into sharp relief the ethics of creating theatre from personal stories. Charting the rise of practice that blurs the boundaries between theatre and therapy, the book offers us the Drama Spiral—a superb practical tool for practitioners navigating the often risky terrain of personal disclosure, exposure, and vulnerability."

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"Clark Baim is one of the most inspirational theatre facilitators working in the world today. Drawing from a long history of working in prisons with Geese Theatre, and then subsequently in his own psychodrama practice, the book meticulously details an ethics of care about staging personal lives on the stage or in a drama workshop. Baim argues for a robust framework for safe, flexible and intentional practice that unpacks a facilitator's intuition into a carefully constructed approach. At the heart of this book is the presentation and description of the Drama Spiral—a thoroughly useful model applicable to diverse theatre practices—that deserves a key place in how we conceive of and facilitate work with participants' real stories."

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Contemporary theatre has crossed boldly into therapeutic terrain and is now the site of radical self-exposure. Performances that would once have seemed shockingly personal and exposing have become commonplace, as people reveal their personal stories to audiences with ever-increasing candour. This has prompted the need for a robust and pragmatic framework for safe, ethical practice in mainstream and applied theatre. In order to promote a wider range of ethical risk-taking where practitioners negotiate blurred boundaries in safe and artistically creative ways, this book examines the history, ethics, and intentions of staging personal stories and offers detailed guidance and a practical model to support best practice.

Clark Baim is the Director of the Birmingham Institute for Psychodrama and Honorary President of the British Psychodrama Association. After touring as a performer with the original USA company, in 1987 he was the founding Director of Geese Theatre Company UK, using applied theatre in criminal justice and social welfare settings. He is now on their Board of Trustees. Clark is co-author of the *Geese Theatre Handbook* (2002) and has published widely on applied theatre, psychodrama, criminal justice interventions, and attachment-based practice. He does extensive international work and regularly teaches on university drama courses. He holds a PhD from the University of Exeter, UK.

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