

Changemakers E-Portfolio

Investigation Summary:

At the start of this module, I knew immediately that I wanted to focus solely on how to improve the BA Acting course at UWTSD because as an acting student I felt I was unhappy with some aspects of the course- I wanted to take the opportunity to investigate something that could potentially positively impact me and peers greatly. I took the time to evaluate which parts of the course I felt could be improved and then based my investigation off of my findings.

The Research Question:

My course mate Anna and I both felt that the range of plays we have studied on our course was not a sufficient amount to effectively train us into being well-rounded actors- and we wanted this to change, we only ever studied dark themed plays. Using S.W.O.T analysis and SMART goals (see appendix 1 for evidence of this), we created the most achievable- yet still desirable research topic and mutually agreed upon our final research question being ***“What are the benefits of studying a wider range of plays at University and should our course have a larger variety of genres to be studied?”*** Through both primary and secondary research, including meetings with our course leader and a questionnaire shared between other students on our course, I feel our investigation was sufficient in providing a reason for a possible positive change to the course and a solution to the problem found.

Social Value Created:

One of the main reasonings for focussing on this topic was the positive social value that would've been created if our research outcome was successful to a more than satisfactory level. Our research question aimed to improve the quality of education being received by students on our course- which would improve the educational studies and the morale of a set group of individuals. In addition to this, the social value is increased when taking into account the idea that our education will impact our future careers, so there's an increased vitality in improving one's own education where possible. Furthermore, this was a topic Anna and I had felt very passionate about months prior to the start of this module- we felt that researching a cause that we personally connected to was just as important as resolving issues in not only our education but also our peers' education.

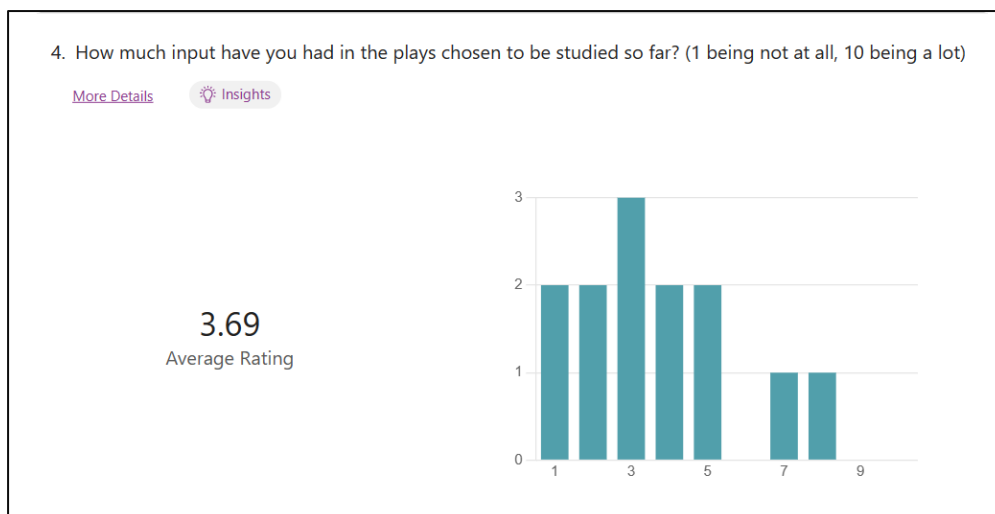
Primary Research:

To continue, Anna and I spent the first week of research setting a plan that would guide us into the right direction regarding changing the variety of course materials studied withing the BA Acting course (see Appendix 2 for evidence of this)- the first step of this plan was to see how much interest there was in this topic among all three year groups studying the course. To do this, we created a survey that would directly break down if and why other students wanted change. Furthermore, the feedback from the questionnaire also helped shape how we looked at the rest of our investigation- if the results weren't what we expected them to be, our study would have little to no point at all. However, if the feedback gave us the results we were looking for- we would be able to continue our research, and have a more generalised idea on what direction we could take things in.

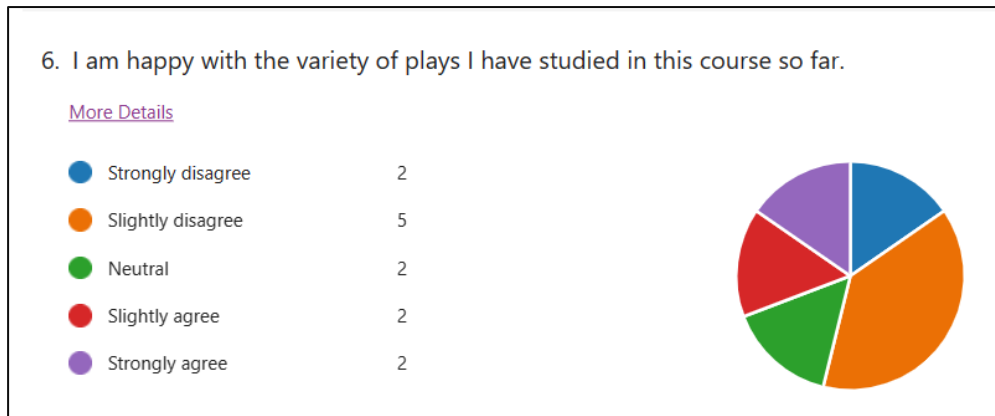
To summarise, the main gist of the questionnaire established what level the participants were studying at, the participants opinions on the specific course aspect we were researching and whether or not they feel this could be improved. To start with, we asked the participants how they personally felt about the plays studied on this course- most answers resonated with Anna and I's personal beliefs which helped us solidify our plan and want to improve the course.

2	anonymous	All very similar genre - dark and gory
3	anonymous	They're not varied at all. We also don't get an option. We get what we're given basically
4	anonymous	I have liked them, yet they have all been very dark or serious
5	anonymous	They have been very inconsistent, good plays with good themes but the plays weren't the best to perform
6	anonymous	Interesting plays.
7	anonymous	Very dark and cover a lot of tough topics
8	anonymous	Sometimes intense but really good.
9	anonymous	Feel informed and more knowledgeable
10	anonymous	Enjoyed them so far but all been quite dark

Upon analysing the questionnaire results, I can conclude that a vast majority of the plays that have been studied on this course have been dark and not entirely varied. This is shown by the results stating a large number of participants in the questionnaire had stated this fact- which creates the impression that Anna and I are not alone in our concerns regarding variety. On the other hand, we can also conclude that not everyone feels this way, and some are happy with the type of plays that are studied- though the majority mentions all plays being dark in some way. In addition to this, we also asked participants to which extent did they feel they had a voice in choosing what to read/study as part of the course.



On closer examination, more than half of the participants rated the input at average or lower- with the mean rating being 3.69- this suggests that the majority of the BA Acting students that participated in our survey feel their input in what course materials are studied is less than satisfactory- also giving Anna and I more of a reason to push for change. In continuation with this, our survey also collected data that would suggest the majority of our participants are unhappy with the variety of plays studied- which would infer that change is also sought after by the majority of the participants.



Upon closer look, 70% of participants were neutral, disagree or strongly disagree when referring to the above statement which suggests a large group of students are somewhat unhappy to an extent with the course that they are studying- this again solidifies the need to explore this topic in further detail to make the course more enjoyable for the students studying it and to also make the syllabus more beneficial to training actors. However, I can appreciate the fact that not every participant again stated unhappiness with the course which meant our investigative aims couldn't be too detrimental to the courses overall structure as it is seen as successful to some students.

To conclude, the questionnaire exposed me to important information that was vital in progressing forward with the investigation as we identified what aspect exactly needed working on and to what degree did people want this to be improved.

Moving on, the next step in our research plan was to arrange a meeting with our course leader, Lynne Seymour, to discuss the possibilities of introducing a wider variety of course materials into the course and to get her professional opinion on our idea as a whole- prior to this meeting we briefly planned a few questions to ask her so we had some sort of structure before going in (see Appendix 3 for evidence of this). To start with, we took the time to fully talk through our concerns with not studying a wider range of plays on the course and referred to the questionnaire that was created to show our peers also had relatively similar opinions and that there was some form of demand behind this investigation. Lynne was very understanding when it came to this topic and took time to really listen to our concerns and what we had to say as a whole.

In addition to this, Lynne stated that our initial idea of getting the students more involved in choosing course material would be near enough impossible to carry out and succeed in for a number of different reasons including the fact that lecturers require a certain level of knowledge on certain plays to be able to carry out sessions on them- which Anna and I understood entirely. As well as, the darker plays we study often have more substance or 'meat' to them, which makes it a lot easier for pupils to emotionally unpack and interact with. However, Lynne was willing to look into our concerns further and there will be discussions with other lecturers to see where some changes can be made in regards to choice and variety.

To conclude, the meeting with Lynne to discuss this matter went well, although it's now clear that our initial planned outcome isn't viable, having any sort of impact on the course and how it's run is important to both Anna and I as we feel very passionate about this course, so I'm still happy at the possible resolve for our issue.

Secondary Research

The next part of the intended plan was to create a list of sections we could individually investigate and to draw our own personal opinions from this type of research. Personally, my main objective was to look into the effect reading plays has on us as training actors and why reading a larger variety of plays is important. I was most interested on getting information about how variety in plays read helps training actors and found there was a number of benefits to reading a larger number of plays- including the idea that *"The more you read, the more confidently you can discuss plays and theatre more broadly."* (Unknown, 2017.) This gives you an advantage when not only applying for acting jobs in the future, as knowledge is desirable, but it also helps students during class discussions as they may feel more comfortable in talking through their opinion if they have a wider sense of knowledge in that area. It also became apparent to me that reading more plays would be beneficial in helping training actors understand character archetypes more- which then would transpire into helping them be able to play these archetypes more easily. To conclude, having more plays to look back on is very beneficial to training actors in more than one aspect and should be added somewhere into the course.

Moving on, the next part of the research plan was to look into other universities syllabus' if possible and see if their range was larger than the range studied at UWTSD and to then consider what impact that may have on students. However, one problem with this part of research is finding what materials other universities studied was tricky and finding exact parallels to course types was not an option. On the other hand, the course materials studied for Drama and Education at York University were varied and they studied 10 different texts within 10 weeks during September/October of 2020- proving how much more information they are able to access through their university course. Though this may seem positive on the surface, it's worth mentioning and understanding the fact that this may cause more stress for students but it does give them a more knowledgeable university education.

In addition to this, I also thought researching the benefits of having the ability to be a versatile actor was beneficial to my study- as it proved we needed more variety in our course to be able to perform in more than a small handful of genres. One source I looked at stated *"So in thinking about becoming a professional actor, think versatility. It's your best chance of regular employment."* (Scott, E. Unknown) The source explained the different mediums of acting and how this is needed to become successful- which blends into reading a wider range of plays and performing them or at least excerpts of them during study to get yourself familiar with the style and to familiarise yourself with being able to be versatile. To conclude, my secondary research helped gain a wider understanding almost from an outside point of view which set in stone the feelings I had about the project in the first plays and showed me that having a wider range of course materials is vital in this particular industry.

Conclusion:

To conclude overall, I am happy with the research I have conducted and can draw the conclusion from secondary research that more variety is absolutely needed within the course due to how beneficial it is to read a larger variety of plays especially as we only really study dark and gruesome plays (though I can understand why this is) more variety is favoured in that sense. In addition to this, the research shows that more variety gives training actors more versatility which is vital for successful careers, more variety also helps students understand different genres easier and expands their adaptability skills. Furthermore, I am happy with the feedback given to me by my Course Leader as I'm quite confident some form of change will now happen due to our research and concerns. Although I can understand why the course is run the way it is, and can understand the other side of the argument, I'm glad to hear progress on our side is being made.

Appendices:

Appendix 1

SWOT

Strengths- There is a lot to be done in terms of primary research, there could be a big interest in this cause, this is something I am passionate about.

Weaknesses- There may not be enough secondary evidence to back the case.

Opportunities- Our idea could help students be better at their crafts, our idea could help create more job opportunities if we're focussing on shaping students to be well-rounded actors, our idea could help students in a variety of ways (which will be discussed in the portfolio)

Threats- There may not be enough interest in the cause, there may not be a possible way that our idea can be implemented.

S- Specific? Is my investigation topic specific? Yes, it targets a specific area with in a specific course and the investigation question chosen shows this.

M- Measurable? Slightly, we can measure the success of the investigation by seeing whether or not change is eventually made to the course and the chosen topic area.

A- Achievable? Yes, with enough thorough research and interest, change can be made to our course to enhance the overall experience and widen the knowledge we get as students.

R- Realistic? Yes, UWTSD is excellent at listening to student concerns, bringing this up could easily help change be made- which is reassuring.

T- Time Based? This goal can easily be achieved or at least established within the few weeks we have to complete this module.

Appendix 2

We would do this by:

- investigating what has been studied on our course in the past.
- creating a survey for people doing our course to see what they think of our idea.
- to find options/ examples of plays we could study.
- talking to our course leader about the possibilities of this happening.
- research how doing this will impact our studies and the course.
- study courses similar to ours that study a wider range of plays.

What this could acheive (if done correctly):

- a more well rounded education.
- a better sense of theatre for students.

Appendix 3

QUESTIONS TO ASK LYNNE:

1. Firstly, explain research topic briefly
2. Ask if a variety of plays has ever been considered/ question why there isn't much variety
3. Mention questionnaire results and demand for change
4. Question if anything can be done.
5. Ask about possibilities to change the variety

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