

Report - Theatre

GCDE has been trialled as being integrated into the curriculum of the MA Theatre and Performative Practices in 2022-23, in line with our plans. Because of the combined challenges of teaching theatre in the not-quite-post-Covid era, and because of our ongoing learning from our teaching process, some of our plans were not fully realised. However, other unforeseen aspects of GCDE were integrated into the curriculum. While Section I below reports on DR6001, in Section II, we explore how DR6002 engaged deeply with a particular GCDE related theme in a way we had not originally foreseen. For an evaluation of our implementation, please see the below.

Section I: Foreseen delivery in DR6001, MA Theatre and Performative Practices 'Performance and Activisms' year:

Concepts from new immersive audience studies were used to explore how the students imagine audience engagement with their topics, and to explore how students might raise awareness of activist topics in audience members in innovative ways. The reading lists for the module included works on intercultural theatre, postcolonial theories of theatre and performance, and above all activist approaches to how the intersectional politics of marginalisation affect theatre.

We report on achievements against the plan for 2021-22. Our plan included delivery of the following themes (report on delivery after proposal)

- A. Theatre and change for children: activist children's theatre – from local to global models. **Effectuated**. Delivered together with (B) using children with profound and multiple learning disAbilities as a case study.
- B. Theatre and disAbility: to include the representation of disAbility in cross-cultural and global contexts. **Effectuated**. Delivered together with (A), and with videographed input from international disAbility/performance mentor/activist Caroline Bowditch.
- C. Theatre, migration, racialisation, and othering: to include far more emphasis on exploring the ethno-centric and racialist-imperialist aesthetic values embedded in the post-Industrial/Western performance systems – who gets silenced by our aesthetics around the world? **Effectuated**. We addressed the history of theatre and the colonial mentalities that have sometimes underpinned it. We explored how these attitudes still influence how artists stage, and audiences perceive, the politics of the post-colonial on stage. This formed a core part of the readings in the Theatre & Racialisation theme. The consciousness-raising work of Ghanaian-British artist Harold Offeh was especially explored as a critical lens through which to understand post-colonial and neo-colonial perspectives on

- racialisation and marginalisation, and how to address these within performer-audience relations in meaningful and transformative ways.
- D. Theatre, performance and feminisms: to include both local and global feminisms. **Effectuated, though the topic of feminisms is so large that the emphasis had to be on feminist potentials, and the topic was expanded significantly in semester 2.**
 - E. Theatre, popular making practices and disenfranchised macrocommunities (using the Cork's Dragon of Shandon events, and the history and current incarnation of Shandon, Cork as a community case study): to include a case study on migration to Shandon, and the Nigerian diaspora's engagement with the Shandon projects. **Effectuated via internships and engagement with students in the Dragon of Shandon events**, but the case study event did not take place due to the complexities of integration with post-Covid delivery and limitations placed on the Shandon collaboration by Covid restrictions, quantity of work assigned by us, and timings. **However, this thematic was extended into semester 2, DR6002, as was (D), as part of an engagement with ecofeminism; and the students continued work with Cork Community ArtLink** with more in-depth reflection on a slightly different but parallel topic. See section II for more details.
 - F. Theatre and super-diversity (this year exceptionally, as a critical engagement with UNIC's first city-lab in Liege, Belgium): to include case studies that try to evaluate the problems and degree of 'success' of this particular intercultural experiment, embedded in the EU's debatable and often cosmetic commitment to financing and fostering intercultural understanding in Education (we will link this to an examination of the European Commission's current New European Bauhaus programmes and emphasis on 'cultural heritage' to the exclusion of migrant territories and marginalised and racialised histories). **Effectuated but changed.** 4 of our students attended the Liege super-diversity event as a mini-internship experience and wrote reflections on it. However, rather than the NEB programmes, the emphasis was on exploring intercultural and intersectional engagement within the workshop itself - NEB proved too unwieldy for the students to engage with and integrate in this timeframe.
 - G. Theatre and the notion of the queered outsider: to include surveys of queer performance activism in three case study non-Western environments. **Only part effectuated**, through readings on the dynamics of HIV transmission/mourning, rather than focusing on three distinct case studies.
 - H. Theatre and marginalised languages: using Irish as a case study and then moving on to select two to three other marginalised languages and reflect on their performance histories (we will especially use Virginie Magnat's 'Performative Power of Vocality' and its intercultural emphasis here). **Effectuated**, but using other sources than Magnat due to a need to streamline theoretical input. The case

study of Irish remained the focus, and we did not specifically study works in other marginalised languages: rather we focused on the implications of thinking about performances in marginalised languages more generally.

- I. Theatre and alternative mechanisms of production and dissemination: we will look at a sample Irish and another 'global south' festival in case studies, and theatre, the human body, somatics, and ecology: eco-theatres to focus on our involvement in the Global Water Dances project and its successes and failures.
Only part effectuated within DR6001, due to the complexities of introducing substantive extra curricular materials in semester 1; but **these thematics were addressed in DR6002 in other ways**.

How we planned do this:

In addition to enhancing our pedagogy as per the above, we foresaw:

- Asking students to each teach a seminar in a GCDE theme;
- Developing reflective exhibitions in the Research Catalogue that explored some of these topics.

Of the above two actions, the second was achieved with strong engagement. Because of the complications of Covid, the first bullet point was not achieved. See evaluatory reflections below.

EVALUATION OF CONTENT and RESULTS OF OUR EXPLORATIONS IN DR6001

Strengths: Students had the option to explore aspects of GCDE deeply, and were exposed to new ways of working and imagining the construction of otherness in performance contexts, and how our traditions of constructing otherness can be *challenged* and the vocabulary of performance *expanded* by this challenge; and much attention was paid to how we bring audiences along in these types of explorations, in order to raise consciousness about their ramifications. Selected students took a very activist approach to addressing themes related to GCDE in their optional final assignments, particularly regarding different approaches to feminisms, queerdom, and how the dynamics of intercultural linguistic imperialism might be countered. Global cultural areas studied by students included Mexico, India, and the post-colonial histories of marginalised languages in Europe.

Weaknesses and areas for improvement:

- 1 **Covid influences.** The ongoing Covid-related landscape meant that we were having to adapt our delivery to students whose ability to undertake physical embodiment practices were severely curtailed in the autumn semester. While forms of theatre practice had re-opened, degrees of social distancing, limitations on object-sharing,

touch, proximity and other contact, masking and vocalisation limits, and respiratory risk were still at play in the classroom. Students in the theatre sector had faced 16 months of severe curtailment of theatre-related activities, and their ability to engage with *embodied learning*: the area in which they excel, remained restricted. Our plans to integrate GCDE deeply into an existing teaching module had been based on **adding** in learning materials and further learning experiences into that pedagogy, but there was a degree of exhaustion with which the students were coping, and a certain cap existed on their abilities to integrate further material into their pedagogical experience. One independent learning experience that focused deeply on 'theatre and the world' – where students had to teach each other workshops - had to be actively curtailed, as students did not appear to be in a position to run this kind of session independently in autumn, and our 'part effectuated' achievements in (1) orbited around a too-crowded curriculum. While the students still engaged with the themes of GCDE very well, it would be important in the future to foreground GCDE components earlier in the semester and remove some other theoretical components in order to make space for GCDE related materials. It may be better in the future to focus on fewer thematic components but to take one component into depth.

- 2 Levels of intercultural experience, the biographical, and what inspires and opens doors of thought for students in the creative arts.** Some of our students in the programme arrived with very strongly developed levels of intercultural experience and familiarity with GCDE themes through their own life experience. Other students had less both intercultural and GCDE-related life experience. Because creative practices, including ones with analytical/theorised components, are partly derived from the personal richness of any given student-artist's life experience, and because such students are often inspired by personal histories and creative cartographies rather than theoretical concepts alone, we realised, upon reflection, that integrating much more exposure to **the biographies** as well as the bodies of work of artists who work in GCDE-related theatics, locations and environments should be more strongly emphasised. This is to be improved in the future.
- 3 Integration.** This year's students evidenced a far stronger need for dedicated time to integrate GCDE-related learnings than we expected – to deeply reflect on their thematic possibilities, implications and outcomes. We need to ensure adequate discussion and embodied learning ground the readings students do in deeper reflexive practice. This needs to be enhanced in the future. Essentially, we planned to do too much within the teaching time allotted, and need to streamline in the future.

Section II: Unplanned but significant GCDE-related content and delivery.

Although this was not originally foreseen in our proposed plans for 2021-22, scholar-artist Professor Jools Gilson, who had returned from a Fulbright Fellowship at the University of Colorado at Boulder, delivered module DR6002, spring semester, 15 credits, in a highly innovative manner, focused on the thematics of ecofeminism and its relationship to performance theory and practices, in ways much aligned with the thematics of GCDE.

Students developed two performance works for outdoor space (one that was integrated into the annual St Patrick's Day Parade in Cork City, with the support of Cork Community ArtLink; another on the UCC campus itself); and a collaborative, online, and indoor performance in exchange with students at the University of Colorado at Boulder, exploring how themes of ecology, bringing audiences messages of critical ecological importance, connection, hope, feminist approaches, consciousness-raising, and cross-cultural exchange might develop innovative forms of performance making, realisation and critical thinking. Extensive reading, reflexive writing and practice emerged from this process. A collaborative performance resulting from the process was delivered online, entitled:

Telling Tails: Intersectional Ecofeminist Stories for a Survivable Climate Future on 22 March 2022. As the poster described the event: "Supporting opportunities for creative expression can feed constructive hope, help students process negative emotions and experience positive emotions associated with climate, and sustain engagement in climate action." This was an official part of the *Parallel Event for the Non-Governmental Organizations Commission on the Status of Women 66 Forum (NGO CSW 66)* from 14 - 25 March 2022 run in conjunction with the United Nations.

The necessarily global remit of activist, ecological practices; eco-dramaturgies; and eco-feminism thus formed a core part of our MA pedagogy for 2021-22.

Section III: Overarching Conclusion

While we did a significant amount of work to bring aspects of GCDE into pedagogies for DR6001, the level of independence and personal choice given to students in this artistic-style learning environment meant that it was difficult for us to assess the *depth* of integration of the highly independent and individual learning pathways of our students. Our MA pedagogy for DR6001 has historically involved giving students the option to explore a wide range of themes in depth; they then choose which themes matter most to them. Our suggestions for improvement are largely based around finding ways to ensure that we inspire students to engage with these topics at depth, in ways that still concord with the

artistic freedom they need to produce work, and that give them the necessary time, space and activities to engage deeply with GCDE-related issues. DR6002, however, was an unforeseen deepening of GCDE-related thematics, and allowed students to grapple with thematics of intersectionality, inclusion, and our ecological futures in ways that opened doors to new avenues of thinking and practice.