

MODULE A: ETHICS

When using verbatim techniques to make a piece of theatre it is essential to understand the ethics of what we're doing. Transparency is key – we need to convey to the people we're gathering stories from why we're doing it and how we will use the material.

Obtaining permissions is also crucial. We used the permissions form available with the rest of this resource which explained exactly what we were doing and gave the interviewee the opportunity to explain parts of the interview they didn't want us to use. It's also important to be clear with interviewees about how and for how long their interview will be stored.

We knew we have a duty to represent people fairly. In some cases we made the decision to change names or references. The 2 school related interviews in section 5 have been redacted, which means we have removed names of schools and changed names of people in the stories to maintain their privacy.

We also decided to merge some stories and to add some imagined narrative which came out of the themes and topics which emerged from the interview process.

Examples:

- The story about the theatre going into administration was represented exactly as it was told to us, but staged in a different space in the theatre. The voice over is an actual news story from the archive.
- The wardrobe mistress character was developed from what the actor had gathered anecdotally, so she's kind of a mixture of different wardrobe staff pulled together into one exaggerated character.
- The idea of the back end of the cow looking for the front end was where we took a few more liberties artistically because it gave us the device we needed to provide one of the through lines of the show.

All of these approaches are valid in Verbatim Theatre as long as the ethical implications have been explored.

We wanted to ensure that we had the appropriate light and shade and balance of tone between light-hearted sections and more poignant or serious parts.

There were some stories we chose not to include. Look at the Tom Welch interview (7 mins in). The ethics of selecting material has to consider the audience as well as the interviewee. You may wish to look at this and discuss why we chose not to include this.

A major part of the ethics of verbatim theatre is also representation. We knew that we had a responsibility to think about whose stories they are and who has the right to tell them. We had to remember the challenge of playing real people as opposed to fictional characters and about how we portray lived experience.

DISCUSSION TASK

Look back at the interview with Rona. She talks about her time performing at the Northcott and also acting for screen in a piece filmed in lockdown.

She talks about disabled actor Cherylee Houston providing a voice over for her thoughts.

Rona: It's good if someone doesn't know what I'm saying..... I've seen her on Coronation Street... And I know she would know how I feel.

Craig: Because Cherylee's disabled as well?

Rona: Yes.

Discuss why you think the decision was made to have a disabled actor provide the voice over of Rona's inner thoughts. What do you think this added to the piece? Ethically, why do you think the director made this decision?