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## A Reflective Practitioner Case Study Approach to Researching Verbatim Theatre

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## A Reflective Practitioner Case Study Approach to Researching Verbatim Theatre

### Abstract

The Reflective Practitioner Case Study (RPCS) methodology, as defined by John O'Toole in *Doing Drama Research* (2006), is situated within the broader category of qualitative practice-led research, with a focus on inducing practice based data for analysis and research. This article details my application of the RPCS methodology when researching the process and impact of verbatim theatre practice within the context of writing and performing the verbatim play *bald heads & blue stars*. I provide examples of the triangulated documentation of the creative process, demonstrate strategic planning for the induction of data in order to research the values that influence practice, and the approach used to explore the impact that being involved in a verbatim theatre process has on the interview subjects. While elsewhere I have published the findings of my research into the verbatim theatre process, values and impact of the *bald heads & blue stars* project, this article focuses specifically on the strategic implementation of various RPCS methods, such as interviewing, critically reflective journals (both written and audio recorded) and the archiving of external and integral materials related to the practice of writing and performing a verbatim play. This article systematically outlines the comprehensive and triangulated approach for inducing data and documenting a creative project when conducting practice-led research using a Reflective Practitioner Case Study.

### Keywords

Practice-Led Research, Reflective Practitioner, Case Study, Verbatim Theatre

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## A Reflective Practitioner Case Study Approach to Researching Verbatim Theatre

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My practice as a theatre artist and interest as a researcher has been driven by an eagerness to engage with and understand the process, practice and impact of verbatim theatre, especially when that practice is situated within a value system of empowerment for the community of storytellers. My approach to verbatim theatre involves interviewing a community about a topic or event (or spending time immersed within a community), recording these conversations, and then translating these stories through the dramatic languages into a performance. The methodology I have used to frame this research into verbatim theatre is a practice-led Reflective Practitioner Case Study (O’Toole, 2006). In 2014 I wrote and performed in a verbatim play titled *bald heads & blue stars*, triangulating a documentation of this process and strategic induction of data in order to research the values that influence practice, the method or process employed by practitioners when creating new verbatim work and finally, and perhaps most significantly, the impact that being involved in a verbatim theatre process has on the interview subjects. I have published a selection of these research findings, with one article focused on rehearsing and performing a verbatim play in “[Acting in Verbatim Theatre: An Australian Case Study](#)” (Peters, 2016), and another based on the responses from the interview subjects titled “[The Impact of Participating in a Verbatim Theatre Process](#)” (Peters, 2017). As significant as these findings are in their contribution to the field of verbatim theatre research, the unique application of the Reflective Practitioner Case Study methodology to the *bald heads & blue stars* project is equally significant, as it exemplifies the rigorous and

comprehensive methods that can enable further research to occur. I hope that the examples, models and frameworks for engaging with communities, interviewing, surveying, and documenting creative development and theatre practice discussed in this article may serve as inspiration or provocation for other practice-led researchers.

### **Process Overview**

My verbatim theatre practice involves interviewing a community on a certain topic or event, recording these conversations and using the stories as stimulus for the creative development of performance. Verbatim theatre's process provides opportunities for people to speak about their lives and lived experiences, to tell the stories that matter to them about who they are and what they care about, and to have these stories shared with a broader audience through performance. My assumption at the outset of this project was that verbatim theatre would provide the opportunity for communities who are rarely visible in mainstream media to be acknowledged and represented. The interview participants in this verbatim project (who I refer to as the community of storytellers) were women with alopecia. Alopecia is an autoimmune condition that results in varying degrees of hair loss and I interviewed fifteen women from across Queensland (Australia) who have experienced this condition. I am a member of this community of women and also of the Australia Alopecia Areata Foundation (AAAF), and this has significantly aided my ability to facilitate connection with the broader alopecia community. I have had alopecia since I was three years old and have lived with almost complete hairloss on my scalp since the age of 24. This intimate firsthand experience meant that I had some understanding of the unique challenges of living with this condition and had keenly felt the lack of representation of people like me in my consumption of the arts. One of my motivations for choosing to focus on alopecia for this research project was the opportunity to address this lack of representation.

### **Ethics and Participant Recruitment**

After receiving ethical clearance through the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) I began by contacting the president of the AAAF who sent out information and a call for participants to their database of members and promoted the project through social media. This call invited women with alopecia who were interested in sharing their experiences and stories to contact me via an email I had created specifically for the project, myalopeciastory@gmail.com. I was interviewed by a local newspaper, *The Toowoomba Chronicle*, and on ABC Southern Queensland local radio to raise awareness about the project and hopefully recruit more participants from a broader geographic area. When potential participant storytellers contacted me, I facilitated a rigorous process of informed consent that began with a response to their emails with a narrative and informal explanation of the project and my expectations of the storytellers. If the storytellers agreed a second time that they would like to be involved I then sent the official information and consent form and began organising dates, times, and locations for the interviews. The consent process continued at two further junctures in the project. After this initial digital contact, I had 15 women who agreed to participate in the project and they became the community of storytellers. Interestingly, of these 15 women, two indicated that they first heard about the project through radio, two through the newspaper, ten through the connection with AAAF and one as a referral by another storyteller. This suggests that connections with peak bodies associated with the community you are trying to engage with is a successful strategy for recruitment, and also provides a third party for the participants to contact in the event that they have concerns about the project.

## **Community Immersion and Interviewing**

Community immersion was the first phase of the verbatim theatre model that was implemented in this research project and there are three facets to this practice (a) building awareness of the project and its outcomes; (b) active engagement with individuals and events from the focus community; (c) a commitment to support that community. This triangulated approach to the community immersion process is effective in generating awareness of and participation in the project, enhancing the playwright's ability to write about and with the community from a position of increased understanding as well as providing a framework for long term engagement with the alopecia community. I therefore define community immersion in a verbatim theatre process as an ethical practice designed to introduce the artist to the storytelling community and the community to the artist.

I travelled from Toowoomba and Roma to each of the storyteller's home towns in order to conduct the interviews, travelling as far north as Cairns (1660kms), west to Longreach (1050kms) and east to the southern coast of QLD (150kms) across a period of 5 months. The interviews took place at a location chosen by the storyteller, with nine interviews occurring in a public location such as a café or restaurant, and six interviews at a home address. The second phase of my approach to informed consent occurred at the outset of the interview when I explained verbally what my intentions were for the project and how I would use their stories to create a performance which aimed to represent in a theatrical way what it means to live with alopecia, how this might effect someone's sense of identity as a woman, how it informs their relationships with others, and how women with alopecia responded to the challenges of this condition. I extended this verbal explanation to describe how I might use our recorded conversation to inform the characters and stories presented in the play, potentially using parts of their stories word for word in the performance, or creating characters in the play through the amalgamation of elements from many participants stories. I elaborated in lay terms how the project was integral to my PhD research into verbatim theatre, and that I was also seeking to understand what is involved in writing a verbatim play, and what impact participating in this project might have for them as participants. It became apparent within the first two interviews that the concept of research was associated with medicine and science amongst the community of storytellers, so it was important for me to distinguish that my research was related to theatre and storytelling – I wasn't trying to cure alopecia through my research.

It was very important to many of the storytellers that they would not be identified through name or age in the script or performance text and that I would be the only person to listen back to the audio recording – although they were happy for others to read the typed transcripts. These conversations resulted in over 20 hours of interview material which I then transcribed for use in creative development. I refer to these documents throughout my research as Interview Transcripts (IT) and they are numbered in the order in which I conducted the interviews. For example, the third storyteller I interviewed is identified as (IT 3). After each of these interviews I would critically reflect on my practice as an interviewer, either verbally through an audio recording (which is then transcribed as a Reflective Transcript, coded as RT) or through the use of a reflective journal framework. Using both verbal and written methods for documenting my experience of the interview and coding this induced data proved useful for capturing different elements of the experience, and organising and correlating material, and this is discussed in greater detail under the journal subheading later in this article. After the interview the storytellers received the first of three surveys, asking them about their experience of being interviewed for this project in order to induce data relating to my research question around the impact of participation for the storytellers. The survey was administered anonymously through the software program Survey Monkey and 14 of the 15 women completed this survey. The second survey was sent after the storytellers had the opportunity to

read a draft of the script, and the final survey sent after the performances of *bald heads & blue stars*.

### **Creative Development**

I devised and facilitated five creative development workshops as part of my process towards writing the play with 14 second year undergraduate students across a three month period. These students were aged between 17 and 19 and consisted of six male and eight female students. We read through the transcribed stories and early drafts of the play and discussed their theatrical resonance and possibility for performance. I refer to these students as collaborating artists and asked them to document their involvement in the workshops through structured journal entries. This documentation provided additional perspectives on the practice and process of creative development, providing detail and insight to what can occur in these collaborative moments. These are coded as Collaborating Artist Journals (CAJ) with a corresponding number, and after the workshop process I had collated 21 CAJ's. These workshops were an integral component of the creative development process, as they provided opportunities for me to work with other artists who were skilled in dramatic languages and could provide insight and provocations for translating stories and themes from the interview data into engaging moments of performance. Their collaboration on the project highlighted how elements of the storyteller's experience might resonate with anyone who had the experience of feeling different, not just women with alopecia. I incorporated the collaborating artists' feedback into my playwriting and prepared a draft script to send out to the storytellers, giving them the opportunity to provide feedback to me personally through email, as well as being invited to complete the second anonymous survey about their experience of reading the play and their opinion on its content and structure. Nine storytellers completed this survey and their feedback was incorporated into my playwriting process and provided data for understanding the impact on the storytellers of reading their experiences in the form of a play script.

### **Rehearsal and Performance**

At the outset of the research project I envisioned that I may be involved in some aspect of the production, however had not intended to be a member of the cast, anticipating that a position further removed would enable me to observe the rehearsal from a holistic perspective. While writing I realised that positioning myself within the rehearsal process from the perspective of actor would provide opportunities to explore the form of verbatim theatre in an embodied way. It also would enable an embodiment of female baldness in the performance, which was a feature many of the storytellers expressed in our interviews they desired to see in the production. As I both have alopecia and a background in performing in local community theatre productions, the decision to cast me in the play was made collaboratively with the director, David Burton. The cast were invited to complete three reflections across the production period; two during the rehearsal phase and one post performance. I also had three critical discussions with Burton across the production period, and these were transcribed as reflective transcripts (RTs).

There were four performances between the 28<sup>th</sup> August 2014 – 30<sup>th</sup> August 2014 at the University of Southern Queensland, and seven storytellers were able to attend the closing night performance. One week after the final performance the storytellers who attended the production were sent the third and final survey asking them about their experience of viewing the live performance. Five storytellers completed this survey, and a month after the closing night performance I wrote my final journal entry which marked the end of the case study.

### Reflective Practitioner Case Study (RPCS)

The Reflective Practitioner Case Study (RPCS) methodology, as defined by John O'Toole in *Doing Drama Research* (2006), is situated within the broader category of qualitative practice-led research, with a focus on inducing practice-based data for analysis. This approach allows the artist's practice to "merge seamlessly into how we research" (O'Toole, 2006, p. 56), and the practice that forms the bedrock of this case study is the writing and performing of *bald heads & blue stars*. The RPCS "rejects the traditional social sciences outside in approach to researching professional contexts" (2006, p. 57) and instead places emphasis on the practitioners "own construction of meaning, purpose and significance" (2006, p. 57). Cheryl Stock, a dancer who has applied the RPCS to her research on choreography explains that rather than solely depending on removed observations, in this methodology "the experience and body of the practitioner is placed along-side the text of the observer thus contributing a much needed dual perspective" (2000, p. 2). This approach acknowledges my position as the practitioner (in the context of this research, a verbatim theatre playwright) as being a valid, personal and contextualised perspective from which to reflect and research. In practice-led research the "practice is the principal research activity" (Hasegan, 2006, p. 7) and throughout my project the practice has continually influenced and shaped the research frameworks, particularly the frameworks for documentation. Baz Kershaw is an international leader on practice-led research and describes it as combining "creative doing with reflexive being" (2011, p. 64), where the researcher reflects on the artistic process that they themselves are conducting and the documentation of this reflection, alongside the practice itself, becomes research data.

A reflective practitioner is someone who critically reflects on their practice with the specific goal of identifying what that practice is, how it is actioned and what impact it has on the practice context. In a RPCS this reflection is induced and documented through a variety of case study methods, creating data sets which relate to specific elements of practice. The practitioner can then analyse these diverse data sets in combination with their embodied knowledge of the creative output and in reference to (and in conversation with) the broader field of literature. In this model there is no hierarchy between the roles of artist and researcher; they are both equally necessary in the production of new knowledge. Sharon Grady in "Towards the Practice of Theory in Practice" explains the relationship between the two roles as being "symbiotically linked", that "sometimes our focus may be on analysis, at others times on practice, but there should always exist a dialectical relationship between theorising and practice" (1996, p. 61). Taylor and O'Toole both emphasise the importance of this dialectical relationship, referring to the process with Donald Schön's phrase "reflection-in-action" (O'Toole, 2006, p. 56; Taylor, 1996, p. 28). Schön explains that the reflective practitioner "does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively...He does not separate thinking from doing... [and] his experimenting is a kind of action" (Taylor, 1996, p. 28). In my research this has meant that while the documentation of practice may occur through case study methods such as journal entries and surveys, the learning is occurring during the workshops and rehearsals, during the interviews with the storytellers, and during the physical act of writing the play.

As Baker outlines in "Play Scripts as Knowledge Objects' scripts, both stage and screen plays should be valued as "research artefacts in their own right" (2018, p. 1) and that the act of creating them is a research practice that both creates and disseminates knowledge. My practice as a playwright and the resulting script and performance are equally vital aspects of research as the case study documentation, as they both produce knowledge. Stock explains that being both artist and researcher allows for the exploration of "connections between perception and

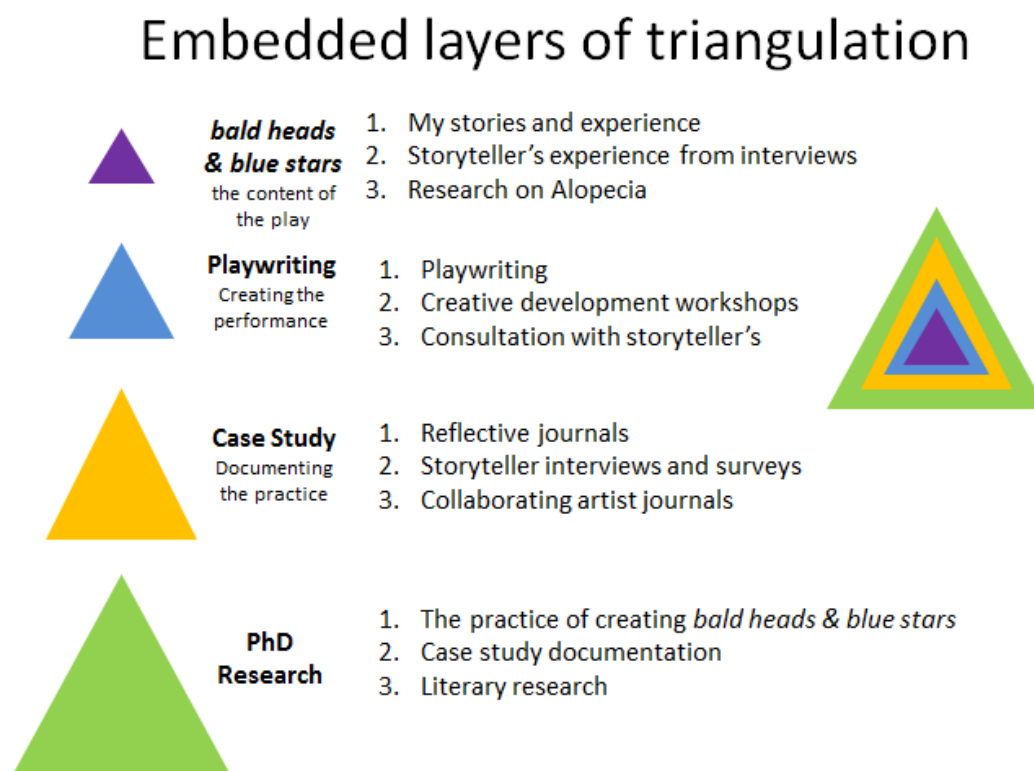
action, experience and cognition” (2000, p. 5) and therefore the nature of the RPCS is “not only relational but emergent, interactive and embodied” (2000, p. 5).

Roberta Mock in “Researching the Body in/as Performance” argues that documentation in practice-led research is always personal and subjective (2011, p. 228) and that this potential for research findings to only be relevant to one specific situation may be problematic when identifying findings that are transferable beyond that on research context. O’Toole (2006, p. 37) and Taylor (1996, p. 43) advocate that the integration of triangulation combats this concern and serves to validate and corroborate the findings; that triangulation in research ensures findings are plausible, credible and transferable (O’Toole, 2006, p. 37). In my research, triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources who reflect from their perspective on the practice and experience of the verbatim theatre practice and process. These sources are the storytellers, the collaborating artists and my own practice as playwright and actor. Taylor describes triangulation as the “process of confirming the believability of observations” (1996, p. 43). As the practice begins, various methods of documentation are employed which all serve to “chart your meta-thinking about the research, and pinpoint moments of insight” (O’Toole, 2006, p. 102). Through documenting individual moments of practice from multiple perspectives I am enhancing the believability and transferability of my research findings with the intent outlined by Barbara Bolt that “the knowledge claims that flow from practice-led research are able to be sustained beyond the particularity of a practice to contribute to the broader knowledge economy” (2007, p. 34). Bolt describes this contribution as “praxical knowledge” (2007, p. 34), when the findings have emerged from a convergence of practice, critical reflection and theory. Triangulation has been strategically employed in my approach to the RPCS to ensure the praxical knowledge that emerges can contribute significantly to both the academic field and the broader field of verbatim theatre practice.

A major feature of this approach is that “different methods are combined with the purpose of illuminating a case from different angles: to triangulate by combining methodologies” (Johansson, 2003, p. 3). Triangulation is the “essence” (Johansson, 2003, p. 11) of case study methodology. Gillham’s book *Case Study Research Methods* (2000), Scholze and Tietje’s *Embedded Case Study Methods* (2002) and Christine Meyer’s “A Case in Case Study Methodology” (2001) all provide comprehensive instruction on structuring case studies and analysing their resulting data. Gillham warns that researchers need to be wary of being blinded by an assumed familiarity with the research context (2000, p. 18), to avoid self-censoring when reflecting and journaling (2000, p. 19) and to follow up on tacit knowledge (or intuition) with explicit evidence from the triangulation of sources (2000, p. 31). Significantly, Gillham embraces the use of case study methods for researching artistry as this enables “privileged access to thoughts, insights [and] mental discoveries” (2000, p. 90). Meyer writes that there are no stringent requirements for a case study approach; that the design of the research strategy is up to the researcher (2001, p. 329). One of the strengths then is that “it allows tailoring the design and data collection procedures to the research questions” (Meyer, 2001, p. 330) and this is a value I have applied in my approach. Verbatim theatre values the spoken word and therefore I have included a process of reflection that is audio recorded (the reflective transcripts, RT’s). In my research I focused on the practice of the verbatim theatre playwright, therefore journaling my own practice and triangulating this with the journals of the collaborating artists provided both a depth and breadth of documentation.

The following figure visually depicts the structure of my practice-led research within the framework of a RPCS. I have tailored my approach to richly incorporate triangulation, embed the practice of verbatim theatre and ensure the strategic and targeted induction of data.



Figure 1 *Embedded Layers of Triangulation*

Adam Ledger, writing specifically on the methods of documentation in practice-led research, references Angela Piccini and Baz Kershaw's division of documentation into two categories; external and integral. External documentation refers to what is produced around and after the creative practice, and integral refers to the "mass of heterogenous trace materials that the practice process creates" (2011, p. 166). Balancing external and integral documentation can improve the rigour and validity of practice-led research findings, in similar ways to triangulation. In my research the integral practice and documentation includes the interviews and transcripts from the 15 interviews with the alopecia community, workshop planning and facilitation, playbuilding materials, communication trails, media statements and performance documents (script, program and teachers notes). My external documentation relates to the case study methodology, including personal reflective journals, the collaborating artist's journals and surveys with the community of storytellers. In the above figure, the integral documentation is manifest in the inner two layers of triangulation, and external documentation in the outer two triangulations.

Ledger advocates that all documentation should be used as an integrated feature of any practice-led publication (2011, p. 171), as the knowledge and insights that the documentation creates is an "entirely valid creative research methodology" (2011, p. 183). Barrett's discussion on tacit and explicit knowledge aligns with Ledger's advice, as she states that through documentation of experiences, perspectives and reflections, practice-led research uses a subjective approach that can "bring into view particularities of lived experience" (2007, p. 143) and theorise the tacit knowledge created through embodied experiences. Qualitative research emphasises sensitivity over objectivity. "Sensitivity means having insight, being tuned into... It means being able to present the view of the participants and taking the role of the other through immersion in data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 32). Through sensitivity and immersion in the data the researcher can slowly begin to understand the story the data has to tell (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008, p. 33). In the publications resulting from this research I have endeavoured to embrace all elements of documentation, ranging from the sensitive and narrative based journal accounts through to the numerically quantifiable survey data.

### Methods of Practice and Documentation

The methods of practice used to research the process, form and impact of verbatim theatre are the interviewing of the community of storytellers, facilitating creative development workshops, playwriting, rehearsing and performing. Due to the practice-led approach of this research, these methods are simultaneously methods of practice and methods of research. This section will discuss each of the external methods of documentation and provide an explicit summary of the integral documentation that was collected as data for analysis.

### Reflective Journals and Reflective Transcripts

There are two categories of journals in this research; my personal reflective journals and the collaborating artist journals. The personal journals are designed to document my practice and my thinking around that practice, to be a place of reflection and inquiry. Ortlipp explains that through the act of writing out her critical self-reflection she was prompted to “change my approach during the research process” (2008, p. 699) as reflective journals not only serve to “create transparency in the research process” they can also “have concrete effects on the research design” (2008, p. 696). I embraced this flexible approach and allowed both the practice and the research to influence the structure of my journal framework throughout the case study, and this resulted in four versions of the framework. My initial journal frameworks (one and two) were highly coded and prescriptive (figure two below shows the first page of this framework) as I was trying to apply all of my theoretical learning around reflective journaling to the document.

**Figure 2 Early Journal Framework**

Journal Number		Reflective Transcript Number	
Date		Feedback Number	

**Communities speaking: Creating Collaborative Verbatim Theatre**

Research Question	What was done and by who?	How was it done?	Why was it done? Concerns/challenges?	What needs to happen now?	Related theory
<p><b>1. Document and examine the praxis of the enabling artist in the transformation of living story into performance.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is my role in the process?</li> <li>• How do my choices (artistic/organisational/methodological etc) affect the shape of the script?</li> <li>• What methods do I use throughout the process, and how do I adapt these as necessary?</li> <li>• How does my story affect the shape of the play?</li> </ul>					

This became too constrictive and when reading Gillham’s advice on case study methods and particularly on not self-censoring, I adapted the framework to better suit my practice. Journal Framework Three (Figure Three) became more flexible and freeform. I was becoming

immersed in the project and no longer required constant reminders of the questions and focus as I knew them intimately. I was also struggling to separate my reflections into the separate categories for each research question. I felt that they overlapped and that one reflection actually held resonance for a number of my research questions.

**Figure 3 Journal Framework Three**

Journal Number		Reflective Transcript Number	
Date		CAJ Number	
<b><i>bald heads &amp; blue stars: A theory, method and impact of Verbatim Theatre practice</i></b>			
<b>Artist Notes</b>			
<b>Researcher Notes</b>			

The shift into rehearsal also marked a shift in my thinking about the research. I needed a clearer guide for my reflections that would assist me in thinking about the practice in complex ways as I was unsure how the rehearsal process may assist with the research. This resulted in Journal Framework Four (Figure Four). I realised that being involved in the performance gave me an incredible insight into form and process and that I had been researching form all along, but from the perspective of reading written playtexts rather than physical live performance.

**Figure 4 Journal Framework Four**

Journal Number		Date		Collaborating artists Reflective Transcript Number	
<b><i>bald heads &amp; blue stars: A theory, method and impact of Verbatim Theatre practice</i></b>					
Research Questions			Critical Reflections		
<b>VT Practice and process</b> What methods and practices do the collaborating artists (director, actors, tech team etc) use in this process? <b>VT form</b> What is the practice of rehearsal teaching me about the possibilities of the VT form? <b>Playwright's practice</b> What am I learning about the practice of the playwright/facilitating artist, both their role now during rehearsals, and in hindsight?					
<b>Values/philosophy</b> What's prioritised or important? What underpins the decisions/choices made in the practice?					
<b>Impact</b> What impact does the verbatim nature of the work have on the artists? To what extent do I learn about the impact on the interview participants?					
<b>Research Notes</b> What else is happening in the rehearsal process that might be pertinent to the data? Personal un-coded note section					

Structuring the journal reflections was vital to generating relevant data that could contain both depth and breadth whilst also allowing for research anomalies to be captured. As evidenced by the evolving journal frameworks, elements of the methods were adapted throughout the research project to more comprehensively induce and collect data that would paint a more complete and rounded picture of the practice. This reflects Meyer's assertion that the benefit of a practice-led approach is that the methods can be tailored to the research (2001, p. 330), and Ortlipp's suggestion that the frameworks for documentation should not be static, but rather flexible and responsive to the process (2008, p. 699).

The frameworks developed for the collaborating artists were created specifically for and tailored to their unique involvement in the practice. I facilitated creative development workshops and then invited the undergraduate students to think about the activities and discussion that we had undertaken during the workshop, documenting these practices in relation to what we did as a whole group and what they did individually. O'Toole states that "students and even professionals do not automatically understand how to create and structure a reflective journal so that it is reflective" (2006, p. 107), therefore creating frameworks for both myself and the collaborating artists allowed me to target and scaffold specific areas of practice and align the discourse and language of the documents to each participant group. Similarly, throughout the rehearsal process I devised a series of reflective questions specific to the focus of our practice in that stage of rehearsal, or that related to the specific challenges and breakthroughs the cast had been experiencing. My fellow actors were invited to complete three journal reflections at various junctures in the production period, two during rehearsal and one post performance.

The journals were a place where we wrote "in order to learn and to understand" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 700), a place where a gut response to the practice and research becomes the first stage of analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 2), a place to "depict journeys of developing awareness" and provide "opportunities to highlight habitual thinking" (Harris, 2008, p. 315). The reflective transcripts are another method for documenting and reflecting on my practice, however the crucial difference is that they are audio recorded reflections that I then transcribed. In this way my method reflects the values of my arts practice; valuing the uniqueness of vocal expression, the faster pace of speaking and the non-linear thought tracking that occurred when we spoke. Kershaw raises the question, where is knowledge located? (2011, p. 84) and is it possible to learn and know through doing and being? He suggests that through performance "philosophy becomes action and the location of knowledge is temporarily entirely undone" (2011, p. 84). Initially this was a method I only applied to my personal documentation of practice, however when reading back over the journals from the creative development workshops I noticed that one of the collaborators was very self-conscious about their ability to spell. The comments made on the journal document implied a self-consciousness by the collaborator, and it was not my intent that participation in the process would be disempowering. I had not previously perceived literacy to be a barrier, however after reading over the journals I decided to incorporate the option of spoken journal reflections during the rehearsal process. This allowed the physicality of expression and the actor's body and breath to influence the way the cast reflected on their embodied experience in the process.

## Surveys

In his article on language and meaning in qualitative research, Polkinghorne states that the reason we gather data is to "provide evidence for the experience" we are researching (2005, p. 138) and clarifies that experience is very different to behaviour. We can observe behaviour, such as my observations of the storytellers after our interview, however it is not possible to observe someone's experience. Therefore, other methods of data collection are required, and

in my research, I induced data on the experience of being involved in a verbatim theatre project through the use of three targeted and anonymous surveys. These surveys were designed to explore how the storytellers felt about being involved in the project, and what impact certain elements of my practice as the interviewer and playwright had on their experience. The survey responses also influenced the process and artistry, providing an additional avenue for the storytellers to be included throughout the process.

The intent of a good survey is to measure a specific phenomenon (Fink, 1995; Fowler, 2009). However, as there is minimal research into the impact of verbatim theatre on storytellers my central objective was not necessarily to measure a phenomenon, but rather to see if there is something to measure, and what that might be. My goal in devising the surveys was to ascertain how participating in a verbatim theatre process influenced the storytellers emotionally, socially, in relation to their understanding of alopecia and their identity as a community. Rather than a quantifiably measurable outcome, my participant surveys were designed to produce information that describes discourses, experiences and behaviour (Fink, 1995, p. 14). My surveys targeted three key junctures in the verbatim theatre process; the interview, the text and the performance. The literature on surveys and questionnaires discusses intent, question design, piloting the questions, dissemination and analysis of response. It suggests the most crucial factor for a researcher to consider when choosing a survey method is what you intend to use the data for (Fink, 1995, p. 3; Thomas, 1999, p. 2). All other variables in survey design are based on the central objective of the researcher, as this will determine type, mode, complexity and analysis methods.

To ensure that I induced data specific to my research questions it was imperative that I incorporate a balance of open and closed questions. Gillham states that open questions are harder to analyse but useful when seeking opinions and judgements (2007, p. 5). In contrast, closed questions are easier to analyse and compare (Fowler, 2009, p. 101), so my surveys are designed to benefit from the advantages of both approaches. Some of the closed questions in my surveys are “adjective checklists” (Thomas, 1999, p. 15), promoted for their value in gathering information about feelings, and it was important to provide respondents with an equal number of positive and negative adjectives. The second type of closed question is a rating scale which enables me to ascertain the degree to which a person feels about a topic (Thomas, 1999, p. 21) rather than just what they felt. However, as Gillham points out, scaled responses do not allow for the answering of why a respondent feels a certain way (2007, p. 32). This is where the value of open questions was embraced in my approach.

I created these surveys in Survey Monkey and emailed the link to the storytellers. While Fink warns there is some risk of attrition in self-administered surveys (1995, p. 58) Fowler suggests that they are ideal when dealing with sensitive topics as the participant “does not have to admit directly to an interviewer socially undesirable or negatively valued characteristics or behaviour” (2009, p. 74). This was pertinent in my research as I developed a relationship with the storytellers and they may not have wished to openly criticise me or the project. However, attrition was certainly a challenge; while I had 14 of the 15 storytellers complete the first survey reflecting on the experience of being interviewed, this reduced to only nine respondents in the second survey about the draft of the script and five for the survey that reflected on the live performance (although only seven of the storytellers were able to attend the production, so this final statistic is five respondents out of a possible seven). While the duration of the project may have affected the rate of attrition (it was approximately 18 months from interview to performance), some of the storytellers indicated in their first survey response that their main agenda in being involved in the project was not to see the stories transformed into performance, but rather to simply meet another person with alopecia. Having satisfied their own goals early on in the process, this may account for some of the attrition in this project.

## Integral Documentation (Interview Transcripts, Communication Trails, Publicity)

The integral documentation in this case study was predominantly a collation of documents that were created as part of the artistic practice, such as the email communication with storytellers, planning documents for workshops and media articles. The one exemption to this is the Interview Transcript Framework (figure five) as I designed this document specifically for this research project.

**Figure 5 Interview Transcript Framework**

Interview Details	
Interview Transcript No.	
Date of interview	
Date of transcription	
Participants in interview	
Location of interview	
Interview Duration	
Related notes ( <i>relationship, interruptions, concerns etc</i> )	
Reflective Transcript No.	

Interview Transcript	
<i>Transcript</i>	<i>Artistic impulse</i>

I have included in this framework a space for artistic impulse and this is a direct reference to Abbs' five phases of art making. Abbs states that the art making process begins with an impulse, it is a "stirring of the psyche which through expression desires clarification and integration" (1989, p. 195). When transcribing the interview, I would often have bursts of ideas or imagine moments of performance, and this column allowed me to document this impulse instantly and parallel to the material that stimulated that impulse. It is in some ways similar to O'Toole's description of memos as a method of documentation, as it serves to "pinpoint moments of insight" (2006, p. 102).

## Review and Conclusion

Regularity and structure were two key features of my approach to the RPCS. Ensuring that I was consistently documenting practice, either through my own reflective journals or through interviews and journals from the collaborating artists, was crucial. Maintaining regularity ensures that a more complex picture of the thinking, choices and strategies embodied in the practice-led process can be captured. This meant routinely reflecting after each interview with the alopecia community, facilitating time during the creative development workshops for the student collaborators to reflect on their involvement, and following up regularly on survey completion. Structure is equally important. Creating practice-specific questions that frame reflection and prompt a broad consideration and deconstruction of practice is vital to inducing rich, relevant and triangulated data. This was highlighted through the cast's journal reflections during rehearsal. I provided four to five questions, however always left the final question very open in an effort to provide a place for reflections outside the scope of my framework. The responses to this question were always brief, or conveyed that they had too much to say and so didn't write anything. In contrast, targeted and structured questions resulted in specific and

detailed responses from participants across the research, providing insight to their experience of the process and their contribution to the practice.

Triangulation proved vital in my immersion in the data and analysis of themes and patterns. It enabled me to write about the practice of verbatim theatre with warranted assertability (Lingard, 2013). This means that I understand the contextual nature of my findings and am prepared for critique, however, based on my practice and what I can learn from the data induced in this research, coupled with a review of the literary field, this is what I assert to know about verbatim theatre at this time. Being able to draw on the reflections of multiple parties across the process, particularly the community of storytellers through the survey data, enabled my findings to be warranted. While beyond the scope of this article to discuss in detail, the specific application of the RPCS methodology in the *bald heads & blue stars* projected resulted in a detailed articulation of an engaged verbatim theatre theory of practice, the development of a model for creating verbatim theatre, and evidence to support the fact that being involved in a verbatim theatre process can positively contribute towards the development of community and transformed perspectives of the self. The Reflective Practitioner Case Study has proved to be a valuable methodology for practice-led research about verbatim theatre as it is comprehensive, responsive and enables the shaping of methods to suit the particularities of artistic practice.

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