**Limitless Best Practice Guide**

**Project: The Arrival**

1. **Outline the basic parameters of the workshop**

**Age range of participants**

The participants were 14 - 18 years old

**Length of workshop**

3 hours per day (10am to 1pm) over 3 days (12-14 July 2016)

**Setting/host for the workshop (i.e. school etc) – was it new to you, had you worked there before?**

We were hosted by Hope For Autism in Airdrie. We were both familiar with the host and venue, and had worked there on three previous occasions.

**Number of creative practitioners**

2 lead facilitators, Murray Wason and Thom Scullion plus one assistant, Sarah Galloway

**Number of participants**
5 young people 14 - 18 years old

**Relationship with the participants, was it new, had you worked together before?**

We had worked with the Hope for Autism organisation in Airdrie on 3 separate occasions. Starting with a Summer School in 2012. On each of the projects we used a Process Drama model as the main structure of the work. Limitless offered the opportunity to reestablish the connection we made over the previous sessions.

**Overview of their place on the spectrum (verbal/non verbal etc) where you can**

4 out of 5 participants were fully verbal in communication. One participant was less able to communicate verbally and chose when he wanted to be more involved in the workshops.

**Who from that setting/host did you collaborate with in the design or delivery of the workshop**

We made contact with Anna and Karen. Karen was our contact on previous visits and we organised over email the dates and times of the sessions with Karen and Anna. They invited their groups to be involved and see who was available for the sessions.

**Who from the host/setting was physically present during the workshops and in what capacity (carers/teaches etc)**

During the workshops, Hope For Autism provided two members of volunteer supporting staff, and our primary contact, Anna, was always in the building, and dropped in and out of our sessions when she could.

1. **Do's and Don'ts**

**Planning:**

* Be flexible in your plan - Think about the first session being a way of getting to know the level of the group in terms of confidence and experience. How far can you take the drama and what active questions can you ask in the space with the group? Don’t cram in too many activities to get through; Plan activities with space around them, and have a couple of spare ideas on the back-burner in case you end up with time to spare. Some activities may take much longer than you anticipated, and others may come to a natural end sooner than you expected. Remember to have a few different options for the sessions so that you can quickly adapt the session if you feel you want to shift direction during the session.
* We found it very useful to base our fiction and Process Drama on an existing story. *The Arrival*,a graphic novel by Shaun Tan, offered a clear story and bold imagery for us to select from. The rich content of the book worked on many emotional and political levels and this allowed us a strong foundation for the action and investigation of the workshops. Following a narrative through the process drama offered multiple performance opportunities too.
* Deep learning - Don’t be reluctant to ask big questions. Think about deep learning rather than surface learning. Drama allows us to tackle the personal issues and the global. Remember the learning you want to focus on with the group and aim towards this wherever possible. We found it helpful to recap regularly after each exercise and update the group regularly on our progress. They were always excited to find out where the adventure would lead next.

**Practitioners:**

* Remember to discuss the workshop with your co-facilitator(s) throughout each session. Effective communication between the leaders is vital to keep on track. It’s ok to ask each other questions in front of the participants and to adapt the plan as you go.
* Use roleplay. Because this is an experiential form of drama, it is really effective if the facilitators are able to portray certain characters in order to advance the narrative. For example, at one point in the drama we were attempting to get into a new country. Murray portrayed a border security guard whom we must convince of our legitimacy before we could move on to the next part of the story. Through this convention of 'facilitator-in-role', we can gently affect the narrative without breaking our immersion within the fictional world.
* Use costume 'signifiers'. When utilising 'facilitator-in-role', it is wise to keep costume to a minimum, in order that you can switch in and out of character effortlessly and immediately. For the above example of the border guard, Murray simply put on a hat and sunglasses to signify the character he was portraying. It can be helpful (though not always necessary) to briefly define these signifiers before using them. (E.g. "Can we all agree that when I put on this hat and these sunglasses, I am going to become a security guard?")

**Physical Space:**

* Take time to ensure that participants are comfortable, and that their individual needs are being met. E.g. If you are going to play a piece of music, work with the participants to set a noise level that everyone is happy with.
* We have developed a way of defining the physical space of the hall or room over time when working with ASD participants. We make a barrier of a line of chairs or cones down the middle of the space and name each side. One half of the room is the “real world” and one half is the “drama world”. This distinction is very helpful to compartmentalise the space for the participants and allows us to create an entrance and exit from the drama. Being clear about when we are engaged in the drama world was hugely beneficial for the young people. It works well to avoid confusion in the space and see the edges of the dramatic world.
* If your workshop will be based in a room that is normally used by participants for other activities, try - within reason - to clear and neutralise the space, and remove any obvious distractions that might pull participants attention away from the drama. This adapting of the space requires sensitivity and a light touch. The aim is to work with a 'fresh canvas' and facilitate focus, but not to force anything. For example, in the Hope For Autism space there is a door in the main hall that leads to the sensory room. In this scenario we would close the door so it's not immediately visible and distracting to participants.

**Communication:**

* Talk about what you're going to do before you do it. We found it useful at the start of every session to give a general explanation of what we would be doing over the day. On a smaller scale, we would give space to introducing any new characters or ideas to the group. There is a balance to be struck between the dramatic tension of 'what will happen next?' and giving the group ample time to process new information at their own pace.
* Don't be fearful of communication difficulties. You may find at times that you are struggling to understand information a participant is sharing with you, and vice versa, that you are struggling to effectively communicate your own ideas to the group. In these situations, don't panic! Remember that communication can be tricky for all of us at times, and that this is allowed. Take your time, don't be afraid to repeat questions, and avail yourself of the support workers who may have deeper insight into the communication dynamics of individual participants.
* Don’t keep the drama a secret if the group needs to know more. We found that some members of the group needed more information about where the drama was heading than perhaps other young people would need. This means that demystifying the outcome of an exercise helped the young people to relax and engage more. Of course this can be a fine balance to achieve as you may not want to give away too much about the end of a fiction or dramatic moment. However, being open about the aims of an exercise or activity can help understanding and emotional engagement.

**Support:**

* Don’t forget the support workers and staff in the room. Is there a way that they can be incorporated into the drama? What is their most effective place in the room, and their role in the workshop. Discuss this with them. Ask what normally happens. They will have deeper knowledge of the individual members of the group and they will have valuable insights that will allow you to direct the workshop more effectively.

**Other considerations**

* Dynamic energy - Try not to keep the energy of the workshop on one level for too long. Be sensitive to the needs of the participants. It may be that high energy games and activities are really useful to get everyone ready for the fiction but equally it is helpful to balance the action with lower energy, reflective or meditative moments. It may be useful to think about solo moments of reflection as well depending on the learning style of individual participants. This requires sensitive facilitation and being aware of signs the participants need to move on.
* Breaks - Don’t forget to have regular breaks. Perhaps earlier than you were thinking!

**3. A final summary**

**Preparing for your workshop:**

* Before starting work with a new group, gather as much information as possible about the context you'll be working in. Ensure you have made your needs clear to the hosts and that everything will be in place in time for the first session.
* To this end, arrange a site visit beforehand if you can. It is incredibly useful to see everything in situ before your workshop. There will always be elements of the workshop environment you'll have to adapt to, e.g. space restrictions, sound bleed, participants having a routine where they stop for snacks a certain time, etc. The clearer a picture you can get of the context ahead of doing your workshop, the more able you'll be to adapt and respond.
* Plan flexibly with room for activities to breathe, but do consider the overall shape of the workshops, and anchor them in a clear and interesting learning question.

**During the workshop:**

* Keep your workshop focused, anchor yourself in the enquiry, if in doubt, refer to your Learning Question. Tangents, surprises, and new directions will undoubtedly emerge, and that is a good thing! But the clearer you are in your original intention, the better your instincts will be for what tangential or divergent paths to follow. Keep communicating actively with your co-facilitator(s), there's no need to hide these discussions from the participants.

**After the workshop:**

* Make it a high priority to leave time in the session for recap and reflection. Think of the end of the day as 'completing the circle'. Whatever your Learning Question was at the start of the day, revisit it now - What new information do we have?
* Similarly, complete the circle of the overall project, by factoring in time to transition out of this experience back into the world outside the drama room. Take time to remember what has happened during your time together as a group, and articulate (through varying and creative modes of communication) what you are all 'taking away' with you as you leave the project. Put the same craft and care into the ending as you would for any other part of the project.