

Remembering the Past, Building the Future

Research Paper

The European Reminiscence Network in London is a partner in this Europe For Citizens project, working in local partnership with the **University of Greenwich, the Greenwich Pensioners Forum** and two local **Greenwich primary schools**.

Transnationally, as a result of this Europe for Citizens project, we have been cooperating with Memorare Pacem - Dresden (DE), led by **Matthias Neutzner**, project with young people performing their grandparents' memories of war and with **Jugend- und Kultur Projekt**, in terms of direct input and international perspective.

Our research for the project was directly connected to the Europe for Citizens programme and the objectives of the Remembering the Past: Building the Future project:

1. We addressed how art can enhance knowledge, understanding and raise awareness regarding the impact of WWII on UK citizens and how collaborative working across generations can build empathy and mutual respect.
2. We utilized oral history, through individual interviews and group sessions, assembling a body of collective memory
3. Memories were transcribed and edited for future publication and use for generation of theatre productions involving older people
4. We used different tools, such as group interviews and discussions, dramatic improvisation, verbatim transcript of memories, artworks, photography, documentary films, etc. to trace the past and connect it to the present situation
5. We worked across generations and cultures, building understanding through working together
6. Overall, we have fostered a culture of remembrance through our research our preparation and our performances.

Numbers in London involved in *Remembering the Past – Building the Future*:

18 Drama Students autumn 2015
6 History students 2
90 School children in April 2016
60 school children November 2016
10 Older people
6 Visitors from project partners
6 University of Greenwich faculty
70 Delegates to autumn 2015 open day
50 Delegates to the 9th December 2016 workshop

Total numbers involved in London: 316

Research reading for students participating in the project involved the following publications:

Reminiscence Theatre: Making Theatre from Memories by Pam Schweitzer published 2007 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Theatre in Education by Pam Schweitzer, published 1980, by Methuen in their Young Drama series

Age Exchanges: Reminiscence Projects for Children and Older People by Pam Schweitzer, published 1993 by Age Exchange Publications

Talking in Class: Oral History and the National Curriculum by Alan Redfern published 1996 by Oral History Society, UK

Talking Time! A Guide to Oral History for Schools by Maggie Hewitt and Annie Harris published 1992 Tower Hamlets Education, London

Our starting point

Our starting point was set up a special project within the University of Greenwich working across disciplines of Drama and History. Through this project, we would research, record and interpret the experience of local older people during World War II.

We would look especially at their memories of childhood in the war years.

We would focus especially on the evacuation of London children from their homes to the countryside in 1939 and how this impacted on family life and relationships.

We would conduct interviews with local older people connected to the Greenwich Pensioners' Forum, with whom we had begun to build a relationship, and others.

We also planned to utilize previously conducted oral history interviews around this topic, stored in the Reminiscence Theatre Archive run by the European Reminiscence Network and placed at the University of Greenwich.

Creative development:

We wanted to explore the possibilities of **creative development of the recorded memories into performance**, especially pieces of verbatim reminiscence theatre, older people's theatre, theatre in education and curriculum work involving children in schools.

We wanted to explore how to **make links** between faculty and students of drama and history at the University of Greenwich, local community organizations involving older people, and local schools, so that they could work positively together on creative development of the reminiscences emerging from the interviews.

We also wanted to **explore the impact on older people** of participating in such a project and on **students** of working with older people on a creative endeavour.

We wanted to explore how children in schools, who were the same age now as the wartime evacuated children, would respond to stories of that time told to them by

- older people and
- students (through theatre-in-education shows).

We wanted to design an intervention which would increase their intergenerational understanding and empathy.

Preparation:

We planned a programme of work over a university year including the following:

1. Involving older people

Recording interviews and discussions around wartime memories with 8 older people from Greenwich Pensioners Forum

Exploration of these interviews through **improvisation**

The making of a **short play** to be performed by the group

The making of a **booklet of their memories** to share with a wider group.

2. Involving University students from University of Greenwich

Introducing them to the concept of learning about the past through interviewing older people

Introducing them to the concept of making theatre from recorded memories

Helping them make theatre shows and perform them to:

a) older people in sheltered housing units and

b) children in primary schools

3. Involving school children

Children working with students in the classroom as part of a Theatre-in-Education show, which would reach them about life for children in wartime Britain

Children listening to, and working with, older people telling stories about their childhood wartime experience

4. Recording all this work photographically and on DVD and creating a photographic exhibition

5. Assessing the impact on these activities on the parties involved:

a) older people b) students c) children in primary schools

6. Disseminating the resulting project experience via the website of the European Reminiscence Network and our Europe for Citizens project 'Understanding the Past: Building the Future'

A Record of our research and practical work:

Meetings with older people to record their memories:

Pam Schweitzer conducted 8 meetings with a group of older people aged 81 to 98 from the Greenwich Pensioners Forum in autumn 2015. The first four meetings were devoted to recording their memories individually and in a small group.

History students on a work placement with the European Reminiscence Network, and drama students interested in supporting the project, transcribed these interviews on computer.

The Drama students showed their reminiscence theatre work concerning the end of the war to the older people as a stimulus for discussion between generations.

Meetings with older people to perform their memories

In the sessions 5-8 with the older people, dramatic improvisation was introduced.

None of the older people had performed before, but they agreed to work on a play

together growing out of these improvisations. In the case of an older person who found this too traumatic, she was very happy to have her part taken by a theatre lecturer, Heather Lilley, who had been helping direct the emerging show. The older people performed their show at a Reminiscence Theatre and Oral History Day at the University, to which other older people from the Greenwich Pensioners Forum and other University students and members of the general public were invited. Over 70 people attended. The older people were invited to the Town Hall to meet the Mayor of Greenwich and to enjoy a special celebratory lunch

Third Year Drama students prepared a piece of reminiscence theatre under the direction of Charlotte Price-Stevens, supported by Pam Schweitzer and Heather Lilley, to perform at the above Reminiscence Theatre and Oral History Day at the University, to which other students and older people from the Greenwich Pensioners Forum were invited.

Transnational involvement in Reminiscence and Oral History Day:

In our first open day to celebrate this project, we invited our Dresden partners to participate. They were able to bring an international element to the occasion, by offering a conference presentation and by bringing a work-in-progress performance by school students from Dresden around the stories they had heard from their grandparents and other elders in Germany about their wartime experience. On the following day, we provided the opportunity for these young people to work with older people from London in a Drama Workshop led by Pam Schweitzer from the European Reminiscence Network. In this workshop, the young and old listened to one another's stories in small groups and then explored them together through dramatic improvisation. This joint activity created a strong feeling of affection and understanding (both intergenerationally and internationally) and had a big impact on all concerned. (see pictures)

Theatre-in-Education:

In spring 2016, the project moved forward with the creation of a **pilot Theatre-in-Education production on the subject of the wartime evacuation** of London schoolchildren to the safety of the countryside. A Drama Student on a work placement with the European Reminiscence Network, took responsibility to work with fellow-students and direct a participatory show aimed at local school children and involving our older people from the Greenwich Pensioners' Forum. Charlotte, the older people and the students performed for 3 classes in 2 schools (aged 9-11) with great impact and success. They took the children on a journey into the war years and helped them to experience what it might have been like to leave home at an early age and travel far away to live with parents one did not know, leaving behind everything familiar for an unknown time and place.

Having the older people in the classroom to talk to the children about their experience made a huge difference, especially as the children began to explore the elders' stories through improvisations in small groups.

Tess Van Leuven, a **Researcher** attached to the project through the Drama programme carried out **an evaluation of the project**, involving children, teachers, older people and student performers, and this is added as an appendix. 90 children were involved and 6 teachers in 2 schools: Charlton Manor School and Meridian Primary School.

There is also **photographic and video recording** of this production. The university recognized the commitment of Charlotte and her fellow-students to the project. Charlotte earned a first class degree as a result. Kurt Alexander Schweitzer from the European Reminiscence Network has created a photographic exhibition reflecting intergenerational drama work on this project.

Autumn 2016, a further stage of the project took place:

25 X 2nd Year Drama students have been introduced to Reminiscence Theatre and Theatre-in-Education as a new part of their 'Applied Theatre' course with Pam Schweitzer.

Over 8 weeks, 25 drama students are spending one morning a week with Pam Schweitzer, learning about making theatre from memories, **meeting older people and carrying out research and making 3 original productions:** two aimed at young people in schools and two aimed at older people in sheltered housing units.

First they met 8 older people, listening to their memories, learning about their wartime experience as children and young people, improvising scenes around these memories with the older people and enjoying working together. Then they found a structure for the stories so they could be communicated to other people (whether older people or schoolchildren).

The students rehearsed these productions in schools and performed them in their intended venues on 24th November 2016. Two shows were performed for junior school children aged nine years old in local schools for two classes. 60 children, four teachers and four older people were involved in the performance, supported by ERN personnel and university staff. One show was performed in a local sheltered housing scheme for 30 older people. All linking administration was provided by the ERN.

Two History Students on a new work placement with the European Reminiscence Network worked on interviewing, transcribing and publishing memories of the war years. Their publication '*Wartime Memories*' was ready to be launched at our forthcoming international workshop, with support from the History Department of the University of Greenwich.

The resulting shows were performed again on 9th December when the European Reminiscence Network hosted a Reminiscence Theatre Workshop day at the University of Greenwich, to which partners in our Europe for Citizens were invited. This constituted the finale of our lengthy 'local event' and was part of our contribution to the 'Remembering the Past: Building the Future' project.

Here is the **programme** for the Reminiscence Theatre Workshop on 9th December 2016.

Running Order for Friday 9th December 2016

10am Welcome, involving University students and volunteers greeting 50 delegates.

10.00 Presentations from Myrto Pertsinidi (Dresden), Monika Malobacka (Wroclaw, Poland), Matthias Neutzner (Dresden) and Pam Schweitzer (Greenwich)

11.45 Coffee break

12.00 Listening to older people's stories of their wartime experience and also their experience of participating in the project. Older people involved were: Ann and John Webb, Alan and Jennifer Lee Williams, Jean Wilkins, Pam Lyne, Alex Schweitzer followed by discussion led by Pam Schweitzer

13.00 Launch of a new book of reminiscences created by history students, Fern Ball and Fatjet Curraj, supported by Pam Schweitzer and June Balshaw .

1315 Lunch

14.00 Three Applied Theatre student presentations with feedback from students, schools involved and older people. Followed by discussion including older people who had been involved in the making of the shows.

16.00 A group discussion in which feedback to the day was given by 40 participants, commenting on the memorable nature of the papers and performances they had seen and heard.

Summary of responses to the International Workshop:

Delegates' responses were noted and a summary of their evaluation forms is to be found later in this report. In short, they expressed their appreciation of such transnational working within Europe as a means of promoting international and inter-generational understanding and mutual appreciation. Different people commented on the many different aspects of the day, from the reports of our project partners from Germany and Poland, to the contribution of the older people and their memories and finally to the students who had shared their work on this day.

General conclusions:

This has been an extraordinary project involving so many people from different ages and backgrounds, building understanding and appreciation. The open days have attracted large numbers of delegates who have been very happy with the events and expressed their enthusiasm. We have been able to build up a database of interested individuals and organizations who have expressed their desire for further involvement in our events. We have increased the profile of the university in the community by building links with schools, local pensioners' organizations and other voluntary sector groups.

Appendices

Appendix 1:

Numbers involved in the project *Remembering the Past – Building the Future*:

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Appendix 2:

Project Outputs:

An original play by older people from Greenwich Pensioners' Forum based on their memories

A book of wartime memories and photographs prepared by history students

5 performances for school children

5 new productions created by Greenwich students of drama

2 events: an open day and an international workshop on reminiscence and theatre

Much new learning and new connections across cultures and generations

Appendix 3:

Theatre-in-Education performance in Meridian School and in Charlton Manor School, south east London May 2016

Children's responses to "Remembering the Past, Building the Future":

What did you think of today's performance?

"It was brilliant as it is a chance for children to learn through going back in time."

"100% 100% It touched me so much."

"It was very gripping to hear people's stories."

"I think it was amazing and fun. Best day ever. I loved the lovely visitors and it was really fun!"

"Good and epic. 10/10"

"Brilliant, one of a kind."

"It was amazing, I loved it."

“It was so, so fun because it felt like what really happened in the war.”

“Now we know more about World War II.”

“I was amazed by how much we learnt.”

“It was great because the people who told us the stories were actual people during the war.”

“They (students and elderly) were really good at acting and talking to us.”

“It was good and very fun to pretend to be children evacuees.”

“We all got nametags and saw a lady put on a gas mask.”

“It was really fun because I really enjoyed us acting as evacuees. I also enjoyed the acting.”

“The old people were funny!!! The true stories were cool.”

“It was good because they told sad stories.”

“It was like the past became the present.”

“Like nothing I’ve ever seen before.”

“I thought it was very well planned out, it was really fun to join in and react to the stories.”

“I think it really brought me to the past.”

“Brilliant as we had fun while learning!”

“I think it was great because the acting was so realistic and although I knew it wasn’t real, it was very clever to make it seem so real.”

“I didn’t really enjoy the workshop very much.”

Which bit did you enjoy most?

“I enjoyed the selection the most because I got chosen by a farmer and had to walk the dog.”

“When Joan (one of the old people) told us about her experiences.”

“Listening to the stories about the people in the war.”

“Seeing my great, great uncle.”

“When the people (elderly) told us about war.”

“I loved the life stories.”

“I liked the bit when we went under the tables and when the older people told their story.”

“The acting and the time freeze.”

“I enjoyed the acting, it was so fun.”

“I enjoyed the stories most of all.”

“My favourite bit was the stories they told.”

“I enjoyed everything, also the stories told by the greatest storytellers.”

“The stories because it is inspiring.”

“Talking about war.”

“When we did drama.”

“The bit when we were doing the freeze pictures.”

“That one of the old people went to the same school!”

“When I got chosen because I had big muscles.”

“Pretending to be evacuees.”

“My favourite part was the acting.”

“I enjoyed the part where they were taking children in. It was funny and sometimes very serious.”

“I enjoyed watching the performances.”

“I enjoyed the songs.”

What did you learn from it?

“That some people had to go to war.”

“Teaching can be shown through activities.”

“How bombs exploded.”

“I learned it would be horrible to leave your parents.”

“I learned how it felt to be in the war.”

“It was much harder in World War II than now.”

“I learned that some children got evacuated.”

“The terrible and wonderful conditions that evacuees lived in.”

“What it felt like.”

“That it was hard to survive in the war.”

“I learned that you had to go under the table when the air raid sirens had sounded and when it’s only on one note you can come up.”

“That not all children were evacuated.”

“You shouldn’t take anything for granted.”

“I learned it would be very frightening to be an evacuee and to be tested whether you are strong enough to stay with someone.”

“Mostly I learned facts and stories from people who lived during the war.”

“How it felt for people experiencing the loss of family.”

“How kids felt when they were evacuated.”

“I learned evacuees could be very unfortunate but were sometimes lucky too.”

“I learned that if you were in the classroom and an air raid went off you would go under the desk and just hope for the best.”

“If you were under 5 your parents could come with you.”

“I learned that some children went into a shelter instead of evacuating.”

“I learned that some people can be really horrible (to evacuees) and children would have a code word to tell their parents back home (for instance really big kisses).”

“How hard it must have been to be separated from your parents for such a long time.”

Appendix 4:

“Remembering the Past, Building the Future”:

**Theatre-in-Education project Goodnight Children Everywhere April 2016
Feedback given by teachers to University of Greenwich researcher Tess Van Leeuwen**

“I had not come across theatre based on old people’s stories before – I thought it was a fantastic opportunity to hear real life stories. The older people brought the topic to life.” (Teacher)

“It was my first time experiencing theatre based on old people’s stories. It was a great idea! I loved the songs they all knew and sang.” (Teacher)

“The pupils benefitted as they remembered the details of the stories and are able to write their own narrative recounts in a more personal manner – referring to key memories and understanding the emotion.” (Teacher)

“The pupils benefitted as it was very dynamic and children enjoyed it. The freeze frame could have been done differently maybe. It could have been easier to do silent acting instead. The postcard activity was very interesting, but I would have prepared it a lot more. (Teacher)

“The older people were very engaging. I thought the role play from the students allowed the children to experience evacuation (they were very believable!). The story to represent Germany through football at the beginning was great but a little rushed – could have been talked about in more details.” (Teacher)

“The interaction was OK.” (Teacher)

Appendix 5:

Students’ and older people’s experience of “Remembering the Past, Building the Future”:

“The value of drama students, children and older people working together is that we all learn something new and we learn respect for each other.” (older person)

“The value of drama students, children and older people working together is you get a mix of ideas, opinions, views. It’s helpful as you see it from all different perspectives.” (student)

“The value of drama students, children and older people working together is you get a really varied and mixed set of opinions and values which make conversation between them really interesting! Telling of stories and learning from each other is also something to be valued.” (student)

“The value of drama students, children and older people working together is the sense of community and the levels of respect for one another as people increases. It also passes on unknown knowledge in a more engaging way.” (student)

“The value of drama students, children and older people working together is that it is important and valuable for young people to engage with history in order to keep it relevant. Also important to do work within the community.” (student)

“The value of drama students, children and older people working together is that seeing and doing is the best kind of learning, so drama is really useful. Having older people giving accounts of real stories is completely priceless.” (student)

“The value of drama students, children and older people working together is the mere interaction between two generations – the better we understand one another.” (older person)

“The value of drama students, children and older people working together is it’s important for ages to mix and share. Many families live far apart & don’t share experiences and history as well as bonding.” (older person)

“The value of drama students, children and older people working together is the spreading of knowledge between the generations.” (older person)

“The value in taking part is that it is really enjoyable working with the school children and drama students. Sad at times, but mostly happy.” (older person)

“Taking part was fun as I loved listening to the stories + helping the kids make some theatre.” (student)

“Working together on something that mixes our theatre experience and their interesting stories is very valuable.” (student)

“The value in taking part is that I gained experience in a possible career in teaching in future. It was also enjoyable to engage with the children and see them learning and excited.” (student)

“It was really rewarding to watch children engage with older people, listen to one another and asking questions – it was valuable to watch history being kept alive.” (student)

“I valued seeing young people learning – it seemed easier for them as they were listening, doing and seeing – I valued being part of that. I shared my love of drama!” (student)

“The value in taking part was that it brought back memories that I hadn’t thought of for years.” (older person)

“It was great to find the children had genuine interest and had obviously done a lot of research and made some good pictures. Very rewarding for us.” (older person)

“The value of taking part was the passing of our experiences.” (older person)

“I enjoyed role play with the children most.” (older person)

“I enjoyed knowing the children were having fun and learning best. It was very rewarding.” (student)

“I enjoyed watching the older people and children interacting.” (student)

“I enjoyed using my skills as an actor to recreate a woman in the countryside picking children when they were evacuated.” (student)

“Helping the children with their freeze frames and getting to know their characters and interests towards the elderly and watching them under their tables was very enjoyable.” (student)

“My favourite part was getting the children to do their freeze frames – it was really illustrative of their learning and they really enjoyed themselves.” (student)

“I really enjoyed the children’s reaction and enthusiasm, especially for getting under the table!!!” (older person)

“I enjoyed the spontaneity from everyone! The children were very well behaved and eager to participate – well tutored obviously.” (older person)

“I enjoyed acting with the children.” (older person)

Appendix 6:

Description of Evacuation Performance and drama students’ responses

Submitted by Charlotte Price-Stevens

On Monday 25th April and Tuesday 26th April the Reminiscence Theatre Archive Company went to two primary schools, Meridian Primary School and Charlton Manor Primary School to perform an interactive performance and learning experience based on evacuation during World War II in London.

We took the children on a journey where we first explained the geography of the war through a simple story. It was based in a school playground that emulated the spread of the war through Europe. Once this was explained we then took the children 'back in time' to 1939, where the children experienced evacuation for themselves and when on a journey to the countryside and met many characters along the way, played by both University of Greenwich drama students and members of the Greenwich Pensioners Forum who were once evacuees themselves. On their journey, the children met a teacher, a billeting officer and prospective billeted parents who lived in the village.

During this experience the children were able to make their own identity tags and write postcards home to their families with drawn pictures of things they had seen. Additionally, we help the children make freeze frames and short scenes based on the real life stories told to them by the older people, enabling them to showcase what they had learnt.

Cast:

Charlotte Price-Stevens
Ilona Bell
Emily Peplow
Grace Seale

Cast Comments:

Charlotte:

Making interactive theatre for the children was a really fantastic experience. The children we evidently able to learn so much more from hearing the real life stories from people who had experienced evacuation in World War II. Hearing the real stories, I think, helped them understand what the war was like on an emotional level, as I think that is just as important as the historical facts. Having us act out different moments and characters really explained things in a simple but exciting way for the children, it helped them understand through seeing and doing.

Ilona:

I really enjoyed the experience of creating theatre aimed at children and setting the correct tone, which I thought was a really good experience for future careers in teaching or for going into applied drama. I also thought that using the older people

made the historical events seem more real as though it's real and not just made up and doesn't distance the children.

Emily:

I really enjoyed interacting the children, getting to know their characters, seeing them enjoy what we were doing and really getting involved. It felt rewarding being a part of something they thought was fun and educational. Having the older people there was so important because they were actually there, it's retelling history and bringing it to life – it makes it more real for the children, they were really engaged with the stories and wanted to know more by asking questions. It gives them a sense of community too because the older people were local when they were the children's age and are still.

Grace:

I thought the use of the older people's real stories really helped engage the children, as it seemed like real life in front of them. I thought making the little freeze frames was a good idea as it was an enjoyable way for the children to show what they had learnt.

Appendix 7:

Responses by some of the delegates to 9th December 2016:

"More of this! Enabling work in different countries to be shared and seeing how others interpret memories"

"I enjoyed the interviews with older people because it was the best way to find out about their memories. I also loved the performances."

"I enjoyed seeing the photographs of the children participating in the show in their school and of their rapt attention."

"The play by the students was magnificent. I had tears in my eyes. The story was very moving. It was a real journey into the past."

"I really enjoyed the play by the drama students, but all of the day was enjoyable."

"I loved the presentation from Germany by Matthias and some of the stories and images of Dresden. Also Alex's speech about his wartime childhood in Germany and the reuniting with his family was to the point and very moving."

"I loved the Polish speaker's video of her grandmother's recollections. That was so special."

"The day will give me ideas on how to work with all generations on history, memories and building identity."