



Dr Shelley Tracey

Abstract

The 'manuscript' in the title is a book co-authored, edited and researched by the presenter of this paper: *Between Ourselves: exploring interculturalism through intercommunity creative practice*. The book explores interculturalism, intercultural arts strategies and the practices of five community arts projects in Northern Ireland. This paper presents the processes of researching and creating the book. With regard to positive contact and collaboration between people from different cultures and communities in Northern Ireland, the 'inter' in intercultural is relatively limited. This paper explores the potential of the arts for developing the 'interlands' which might foster interaction and challenge negative attitudes towards 'the other'. Interculturalism in Northern Ireland is complicated by sectarianism, in relation to conflict between the twin majority Protestant and Catholic communities. A further layer to this complexity is the increase in the minority ethnic population from approximately 1% prior to 2007, to 11% after the opening up of the European Union. Newcomers to Northern Ireland are likely to experience racism and hate crimes, with Belfast declared as the Hate Crime Capital of Europe (2). The Northern Ireland assembly has not as yet finalised its Race Relations Strategy, or identified a coherent response to racism. However, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland developed an Intercultural Arts Strategy in 2013, with the aim of addressing discrimination, recognising diversity and challenging discrimination. The book presents the aims and practices of The Programme for Intercultural Arts Support (PICAS) through the lenses of its coordinator, Charo Lanao-Madden, in the form of dialogues with the author. These dialogues synthesise a series of interviews and the author's participation in initial and advanced intercultural arts facilitation training with Charo. The book explores these projects, drawing on their rationales, interviews with project workers and participants, and their arts-based outcomes. These included music, visual art, textile art and theatre. The five projects under review varied in relation to their main arts forms and collaborative processes. Two projects focused on young people, and highlighted the importance of identity work and social interaction. One of the music projects, *Fusion*, aimed at creating a piece of music which would integrate different cultural influences in Northern Ireland. Common to all five projects was a mentoring process for artists from minority ethnic groups, processes of reflection to identify learning from the project, and the use of multiple arts forms to facilitate their work. *Terra Nova*, for instance, used art and poetry to support the process of creating a series of five short plays about new arrivals to Northern Ireland. The processes and outcomes of each of the projects were mapped against a model of intercultural sensitivities.

Bio

Shelley Tracey is a researcher, poet and community arts facilitator. Her doctoral research gave teachers opportunities to explore and develop their personal and professional creativity. In 2015, she was Artist in the Community for the Arts Council Northern Ireland, with an intercultural creative writing project, A Write to a Sense of Belonging. She also received a Minority Ethnic Artist award (2013/14) from the Arts Council for a poetry project exploring experiences of migration to Northern Ireland. From 2002-2012, Shelley designed and facilitated tutor qualifications programmes at Queen's University Belfast for adult literacy practitioners from 2002-2012. An important part of the programme was the inclusion of learners in reading and writing poetry to enhance their confidence and voice as writers. Shelley's research interests and publications include mentoring, practitioner research, creativity and the development of a new poetic form, textpoetry.