

Glasgow Refugee Asylum and Migration Network (GRAMNet)

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That last week in August! A production manager's view ...

Dr Katja Frimberger has just completed her PhD in the area of Intercultural Education and Performance at the University of Glasgow. Over the last few months she has worked as production manager with production company [Showman Media](#), experiencing hands-on the joys of filmmaking. In the following blog post she describes how making a film together is a true bonding experience.

That last week in August! It's marked red in my calendar. A telling red. Red as in *important and alarming* and as in red my favourite colour – *lively, fresh and exciting*.



The colour psychology of my diary entry appropriately reflects my feelings during that week of filming five short films as *training videos* for the [Towards Ethical Health Care Translation research project](#) at the University of Glasgow in late August. My feelings oscillated between pure excitement and lingering anxiousness. But these are the emotional ingredients of every film production process. As production manager, I worked with Simon from production company *Showman Media*, who, with myself, was commissioned to make the films. I sent out casting calls, organised auditions, booked locations and arranged food for 25 people; I helped lugging big bags of filming gear around Glasgow, liaised with our contact people and made sure actors were fed, knew where and when to meet and what to wear and say, checking off shot-lists and ensuring we kept to the days schedule of scenes to be filmed, always with an eye on the clock. Sometimes I was the 'sound person' and operated the boom pole (a microphone on a long pole), held over my head until my arms and back hurt.

But within the stress of the production there were also the wonderful moments.

Having the opportunity to work with a professional filmmaker and learn the ins and outs of film production hands-on; meeting forty motivated volunteers who came to the auditions, curious to join the project and ready to give up two days of their lives to make a film with us; observing how the cast got to know each other and grew together as an 'ensemble' during rehearsal and filming; the shared giggles when something didn't quite go according to plan: somebody messing up their lines, actors' laughing fits during filming or me accidentally resting the boom pole on an actor's head when my arms temporarily caved in.



Boom mics closing in on actor's head

The sheer diversity of backgrounds and the rich pool of languages we were offered was mind-boggling: Luganga, Kinyarwanda, Zulu, Polish, Russian, Italian, French, Dutch, German, Spanish, BSL, Persian, Pashto, Urdu, Punjabi, Hinko and Mandarin. There were aspiring actors and actresses, a passionate, grassroots activist for women's rights, an investigative journalist from Cameroon, charity workers, a Russian scientist, education professionals from Pakistan, interpreters willing to play themselves, a young skateboarder, a former administrator from Teheran, a scriptwriting graduate keen to experience filmmaking from the actor's perspective and a retired Glaswegian school teacher curious to use his languages and give acting a try.

Actors' stories and personalities also often directly influenced the scriptwriting process the more we got to know everybody. Film two is about a skateboard kid who thinks he has broken his arm and film four reflects in the writing one of our participant's stories of having to leave his country and family behind.

The tensions that evolve from such a mix of people thrown together to make a film played out on rehearsal days, when the cast of each film met for the first time. The lunch breaks were filled with conversations about the nature of religion and the meaning of life in general (all true!), it was a mirror of that diversity and clash of worldviews. Our common focus on creating a film together in the given time-frame of only a day, positively 'forced' cast and crew to work out their differences.

In addition to the rehearsal of the written scripts, I led a three hour improvisational drama session with each cast in the morning before lunch. These improvisational, team-based 'listening' and 'interpreting' drama exercises playfully introduced participants to the improvisational nature and relationship-based aspects of interpreting situations as well as helped them to settle in the new space and with the other actors. Playful morning sessions, loosely based on exercises taken from Viola Spolin's 'Improvisation for the theatre' (Spolin, 1999), were designed to prepare actors for the script rehearsals, which required a degree of trust in the group and an openness to work with each other creatively.

For a short video of the workshops and a behind-the-scenes in the day of a tired sound operator, watch here: <http://vimeo.com/75256090>.

We are currently editing the footage and meeting all our actors again on the screen, and it feels as if there are old friends already. The intense experience of making a film together, even if we have only really met most of the cast for two full days, is a bonding event. The shared focus on 'getting the film done' and producing a good aesthetic end product requires commitment and openness for creative teamwork. On the way we, cast and crew, grew into a temporary artistic ensemble.

Our ethical and pedagogical acts when making the film together can't be neatly separated from the aesthetic development of the filmic end product. They were interwoven. The five drafts of the scripts are a good example for that interconnection between ethics, aesthetics and pedagogy. Each draft of the script evolved gradually, the more we got to know our actors.

Our last draft was the template for filming and resonated with the actors' personalities and strengths the most. Their roles in the scripts were almost written 'on their bodies' – to use a dodgy, literal translation from the German 'Ihre Rollen waren ihnen auf den Leib geschrieben' which captures that lively connection between the seemingly disembodied lines on paper and the actors' physical bodies.

Given the fact that we were making films about interpreting practice, in which the same 'messy process' of intercultural dialogue constantly challenges patients, doctors and interpreters to improvise and work things out together, the challenges of the film production can be seen in that same context of intercultural pedagogy. I am grateful for the experience of having met such a range interesting people who opened up their lives to us and with whom I now share the unique memory of having made a film together and looking forward to meeting them again soon and relive some of that experience. I can't wait to show them the final film and see their reactions. I know they will be proud.

If you would like to get a taster of the footage that we are editing into the five films at the moment, have a look here: <http://vimeo.com/73763422>.

Collection of improvisational theatre exercises:

Spolin, Viola (1999). *Improvisation for the Theater*, Third Edition. Evanston:Northwestern University Press.

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