

Appendix No 29b CR report on video collaboration for ‘Hidden’

Post Production Report

Video Collaboration with Community Response - Hep C Drama ‘Hidden’ Results / review by Gary Sargent and Robbie Byrne

ROLES	-	Camera / Editor
TITLE	-	“Hidden”
GENRE	-	Factual Drama
DURATION	-	40 minutes
RECORDING DATES	-	January – April 2005

Introduction

In 2004 Community Response facilitated a group of people in creating a drama piece to mark the 2004 Hepatitis C Awareness Day. Through a series of workshops the group created a story based on the lived experience of a community affected by Hepatitis C, explored through improvisation and role-plays.

Hidden was based on the Forum and Legislative theatre techniques of Augusto Boal. This style was chosen because it combined the high emotional awareness of a situation created by live theatre with direct community consultation. The purpose of this project was to bring the voices and experiences of people, affected by Hepatitis C, to the attention of the Drugs Task Forces and the Health Service Executive in order to influence policy development on Hepatitis C.

Each play was performed to a community group in a live setting. After presentation the characters within the play would re-emerge taking questions from the floor on the content within the play. Importantly, these questions were always answered from their characters perspective, allowing the individual concerned to maintain anonymity or personal connection to the subject material. The maintenance of personality by the cast, even when questioned, ensures Boal’s consultation process of material, cast and audience as a single bound entity.

Video Application

During the initial stages of performance, video recording of the play, within the live setting, was identified as both an appropriate archival tool, and an appropriate method of capture for the diverse and often heated debate that followed the plays presentation. The use of video in this particular capacity was potentially problematic, primarily because it was feared it might affect individuals being open and honest with themselves and others in the post performance setting.

Video capture of the consultation process after each performance did however open up the possibility of accurately recording the views being expressed. This avoided a

situation where the drama group or those connected to it could in any way misunderstand or misreport the findings as they saw them at the end of the exercise.

It also ensured that any findings found could potentially be presented to the Health Board Executive in a tangible, raw and honest manner, which on reflection demonstrated the real, active and current views on Hepatitis C.

Hidden was eventually performed a total of 13 times in order to consult with a wide range of groups and was seen by more than 500 people between July 2004 and April 2005. Audiences included the Family Support Network, prisoners, service-users, service providers and secondary school students.

Results

The initial fears that the video recording may in some way interfere with the genuine open audience participation were emphatically disproved. It was agreed that the video effectively captured the interaction and debate of the consultation process, the powerful audience animation and the rewards Boal's techniques can achieve. It verified the audiences thoughts and grievances, the consistencies of misinformation within the current medical service, and the discrepancies between the family support available and the support required. Significantly it also clearly demonstrated the role of Community Response and the drama group as facilitators to discussion and not as the directive protagonists.

The informal filming approach used was also an important aspect to the projects success. Cameras were often left running at all times in a static location, intrusive camera close ups were avoided and the pace of discussion was never interrupted to facilitate camera or microphone movement. The intrinsic benefits of this casual approach certainly improved the openness of audience participation. It did however make camerawork difficult at times and left little or no 'negotiated' gaps between questions and answers. This would later make editing the final piece rather tricky. The use of two cameras towards the end of the project helped to reduce these problems.

The seating arrangements and acoustics of the different locations involved also presented particular problems. Sound quality was perhaps the most telling, with the use of large halls and gymnasiums in some cases making sound quality very difficult to control. The static camera approach and the unpredictable nature of the discussion often clashed. Individuals were sometimes themselves hidden behind other audience members and this caused the loss of the individual's body language on camera and loss of their audible sound. It was agreed on reflection that future project venues would be visited prior to filming by the film crew, minimising any possible problems audience seating may have on picture and sound.

Familiarity with the video equipment by the group was not a fundamental concern. During the early stages of filming however better camera preparation and shot execution would have improved the results; i.e. less camera panning and zooming from audience to respondent, better choice of camera location and better knowledge of camera sound settings. With respect all of these aspects improved as the project developed. A simple setting discrepancy on the video camera to long play recording mode, although somewhat insignificant from a recording point of view, did make life

in the editing room a little more difficult. Without accurate time code in the long play setting, individual tapes in some cases had to be captured manually through Final Cut Pro. This became very time-consuming as opposed to the bulk capture facility usually available. The recording heads on the lead camera also caused problems. The heads once misaligned, continued to record three separate performances of the play before the error was discovered. This led to picture and sound loss on all three performances to such a point that they were unusable. It was agreed that in future projects the material would be reviewed to identify technical problems or glitches before another show.

It was agreed a substantial portion of the editing time could be eradicated during the completion of the next project. Preparation and knowledge of the Hidden material available was shady in that performances had been spread out over a nine-month period and no review of the footage had been done. Without any notes or reference to individual tapes each performance had to be watched from beginning to end to identify and glean the important points within. The suggestion that the group drew up a treatment at this point helped to develop and focus them to identify and group material in a storyboard like method. This agreed concept then became the skeletal framework for the completed piece. The failure of the main hard drive and the loss of the final draft was a debilitating blow to a great deal of hard work, but the final product is probably better because of it.

In conclusion the video recording of Hidden achieved more than what was probably expected of it, in that the final film provides an active animated support to the true sense of feeling among those who have been affected or touched by Hepatitis C in Ireland. Like those who took part in the performances the videos function is undoubtedly met, to simply to tell the their truth, the community's, as it really is.
