



Win, Lose or Draw:
A self-reflected journey of a young
Asian Playback leader in learning the art
of leadership in leading Playback
Theatre group

By Agnes Law Mei Lin

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(A self reflective journey of a young Asian playback leader in learning the art of leadership in leading Playback Theatre (PT) group)

Introduction by author

I first discovered playback theatre in New Zealand summer school. Participants from all over the Pacific and Asia gathered to do this form of theatre which is so personally involved in our own life stories. Both my teachers, Bev Hosking and Christian Penny had great working partnership in providing me a good grounding in playback and introducing me to the PT community. The communal living and learning playback for two weeks left a deep impression in my heart till now. After that, I have been introducing playback theatre in Singapore and founded the first playback group in 2002: Tapestry Playback Theatre. Being the first playback leader in Singapore is a lonely journey. I realised that I have to deal with ongoing interpersonal issues of the company and my own hangs up as a leader despite having little experience in theatre training and leading PT rehearsals. I sometimes wished there is a manual for PT leaders when they first lead PT groups. With the task of writing an essay for my playback leadership project and reflecting on my own journey of leading my PT group in Singapore, I am determined to find out what it means to be a strong or resilient playback leader.

Raise up your hand, if you are a born leader

Have you ever heard someone say “oh, he is a born leader or she is a natural leader.”? As I reflect on these statements and the leaders whom they refer to, I tried to imagine what it means by being a born leader or natural leader? As I recalled the words which were used to describe such a leader, a few words came to my mind; responsible, charisma, talent, outgoing personality, persuasive, strong, and influential and the list goes on. I am not quite sure how many ticks I would get if I go out and ask people about my leadership or whether I am a born leader. My critical self shouted “Agnes, you are far from being a born leader. You are neither outgoing nor persuasive at all!” Well, as I shut the inner critical voice of mine, I think further, how many people are actually born to be leaders? Unless you are born to the royal families, you are no where near.

I thought of all the people who are in leadership positions whom I had a personal encounter with over the years. People such as my pastors and fellowship heads from my church, president choir of my college, my employers from work places and numerous of playback seniors in the PT circle. I can't help by thinking that all these leaders come in all shapes and sizes! Not only that, they are all so different in personalities, working styles and habits! Of course, all of them have a blend of a few outstanding virtues which I have mentioned earlier. I recalled those experiences of chatting with them at different times and a number of them did lament of the difficulties in managing the people under their charge. I figure that in order to lead a group well or an organisation well, you do not need to be a so called born leader, all it takes its lots of perseverance and hard work. I thought of great political leader like Winston Churchill, and our country's Mentor Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew are exemplary examples.

In my humble case, I had been taking charge of a class or leading a group since I was 14. As I look into my own growth as a leader over the past 15 years in leading several groups and now being the leader of a PT group in Singapore, I am increasingly aware of its challenges. At the same time, I am learning to celebrate the milestones of my own leadership growth too.

Knowing thyself (yourself)

Over the years, being a self help fanatical young lady, I browse through several personality books hoping to find some sort of confirmation of my personality. Because of my profession as a social worker, I often have to deal with people with multi faceted problems in my counselling room. Since then, I have developed a more sensitive perception of others based on theories from the books I picked up and my keen observations. I find my professional training very helpful in my PT leadership journey as I deal with actors in my company and conduct several type of audience (young children, families and elders) in my community. The whole dynamic of getting a company going required quite a strong personality and tenacity to do so.

Regarding personality, I was informed that people who are Sanguine (active and cheerful) and Choleric (easily angered, aggressive) are born leaders. (Stevens,1994). A few years ago, I did the personality test but I came out as Melanloric (depressive) and phlegmatic (easy and calm) type. C.G Jung (1875–1961), Swiss psychiatrist who created analytical psychology and psychological types such as extravert and introvert were first elaborated by him. Through the training programme of my work organisation, I also did Myers Briggs personality test and DISC personality profile hoping to understand my working styles and raise my own self awareness. It seems like I am extravert in my thinking style and I would have my ideas going when I am discussing with a group of people rather than sitting down on my own to think through a plan. Typically, the extravert has 'an outgoing, candid and accommodating nature that adapts easily to a given situation, quickly forms attachments and set aside any possible misgivings, will often venture forth with careless confidence into unknown situations'(Stevens, 1994, pg 87). I am also a non conflict avoidance kind of person. I rather go to sleep or take a nap then to deal with the stress of dealing with conflicts. Having said that, I have to be careful that I do not locked myself and lives like what my personality profile tells me to. There is always room for self improvements I believe. What about being resilient?

As I look to historical records of great leaders in the theatrical worlds, I soon discovered that people like Stanislavsky and Copeau possess a great amount of drive and fight against the systems they are in (Barba and Savarese, 2005). These famous theatrical leaders work tirelessly to research on different ways to do their rehearsals and keep improving on their craft and to find what's alive on stage for the actors and audience. Same goes for Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas when they first discovered this improvised theatre called playback theatre. They have to trust their instinct and keep working on defining and refining this new theatre form which is now practiced all over the world. This kind of spirit I learnt from these theatre teachers is indeed remarkable and inspiring.

I also conducted a written open survey to my eighty colleagues who are working in the social service agency in Singapore to find out about their views on what is a good leader? Fifteen responded to my survey.

They listed these following qualities. The number next to the particular adjective indicates the no of respondents that put down the adjective. A good leader is... humble, integrity, good achiever, take control, sensitive, plan ahead (4), thinking and observation skills, appreciate others for their efforts, compassionate, relational, good listener (2), task oriented, goal achiever, visionary (2), foresight (3), knowing how to bring out the potential of others, flexible (2).

I thought this list is rather impressive. As I reflect on the values and mission statements of playback theatre, I saw the similarities of this list and the mission statement. Interestingly, the people surveyed seemed to have a need for their leaders to know what's ahead or plan ahead. When I translated this to playback rehearsals and practices, it would mean being prepared for rehearsal. But my exposure in more matured PT group such as Playback AME, the decision to work on any PT form is jointly made by PT leader and the group members during rehearsals.

In Acts of Service, Jonathan describes the leader of a Non Scripted leader (NSL) group is liable to be multi-functional. The director, the conductor, even the founder may be embodied in one individual. However, I think the need to balance all three roles well is not always an easy task and it requires lots of self awareness too.

Jonathan also elaborates that a non scripted leader has to be a truly balanced individual who accepts this position of special responsibility and encourages both artistic and personal autonomy in others. The ideal NST leader possesses a high measure of both charisma and substance. Despite saying that, he also stresses that a leader is also a fallible human being (Fox, 1986, p170). I think it is important for a PT leader to acknowledge his /her own strengths and admits that he/ she has weaknesses too. I find that I am constantly in touch with my self and going for personal development courses like psychodrama and engaging in self help activities eg journaling and drawings. I recently recalled doing a piece of psychodrama work which I entitled "how to tell others how I feel about them without feeling apologetic about it." It was a milestone for me. I experienced healing from my core from the negative experiences in my childhood days to my working environment and personal relationships. Engaging in Dance therapy foundational training also gave me the insights on how I can be more self appreciating and being more confident in engaging with others. Learning to sense others through movement and without the use of words was new to me. Group processing during dance therapy lessons were superb in helping me make sense of the dynamic process of movements with my classmates. When I came back to Singapore during my school holidays, my co PT leader, Anne commented to me that she has seen a positive change in me, a more confident person. I believe all these new training and development courses are helping me to be resilient as a person so that I can lead a group with confidence.

Because of my training stint with Playback AME in London, I also find myself enlarging and learning how to stay alive on stage while I portray a character or a feeling. When I returned back to my own PT group for a short break, they noticed a change in me in dealing with company rehearsals and appreciated the refreshing changes which I brought in when I joined in the rehearsals.

I remembered my Chinese teacher once taught me about Sun Tze, the great strategic thinker from imperial China. Sun Tze gave me a clue on what it means to a

strong leader. Sun Tzu on the Art of War has been used in business management and in political arena. I remember one famous saying goes like this:

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”

Though we do not seek to find enemies in the PT communities or fight a war with other PT groups. I want to look at this saying in a broader sense. The key element in the saying indicated that if you want to succeed in what you do, you jolly well get to know yourself and other players first. Hence I always try my best to get to meet other PT players to network wherever I am and to watch their performances to show my support and as a way to improve my own understanding of PT work. I recalled some of my experiences in watching PT performances. Sitting there among the audience, I usually asked myself what is unique about this conductor or the team of actors which I can learn from. Are there any surprises or disappointment? I remembered watching a PT performance conducted indoors in Hong Kong (HK). The conductor was rather soft. It was frustrating for me to try to catch what she was saying and at the same time trying to translate for my friend who was sitting next to me who didn't understand the language. On the other hand, I discovered that the actors were using lots of imagery work and the musician only used empty plastic bottles and household items to do his music and it worked out really well! Upon reflections, I suspect it might be the acoustic of the venue which made it harder to hear as the air conditioner were blowing near us. Initially, the team had planned to hold the performance outdoor but it rained just before the show started. It brought my attention to our own outdoor performance when I conducted at the botanical gardens for someone's birthday. The bad lightning and the poor acoustic didn't help as well. Since then, as the conductor, I always make sure that the audience at the back of my performances can hear me and whether I need any translations on stage! I also started to challenge my company members to use the non-literal way of telling or acting a story or feeling.

In Oct 2005, my company was preparing for a performance, a day before I was due to leave London for overseas studies. At the last hour, I was informed that my ex-company members were coming to watch our performance. I was surprised by this piece of news. However, I was very at peace with myself and displayed confidence in conducting during the performance. I was feeling rather glad that all except one came and watch the performance and bid farewell to me. I even conducted two stories from my ex co members. It felt very surreal for me. I was thankful that I could support them on the playback stage as the conductor for that evening. I acknowledged them at the end of the performance for their support in playback. After that, I received a feedback from one of them that I have improved in my skills as a conductor and I was definitely more at ease with myself and with the audience. However, I also heard feedback from a few of them saying that they were expecting more 'deep stories' or tears shed among the audience. Well, I think part of being a resilient leader is not to argue over their expectations as PT players as compared to the here and now process which I had carefully led as the conductor. Despite that, I thought this sort of positive exchange were really wonderful as we have modelled what it means to be supportive in a PT community despite having differences in the past. It was another milestone for me. Having to face my ex co-members and conducting them in a PT performance requires lots of letting go of my own hurts,

own fears and being confident of who I am and what I can delivered as a PT conductor.

Win, lose or draw

When I was younger, I used to watch this American TV's game show called Win, lose or Draw. The contestants who have answered a question correctly get a chance to spin this big wheel and let the spin or fate decide which prize they would get. They may win something, lose a turn or draw on something. My heart always aches for the contestant if he/she spins a bankrupt column and all their points would be taken away. For me, leading a PT group is like spinning of the big wheel. The managing of group relationships and the one to one communication is like a big game show to me. Though there isn't any reward in monetary terms I could get but the whole adrenalin of not knowing what's going to happen seems exciting.

Speaking about games which people play, I remembered my professional training in Transactional Analysis (TA) which I took in Singapore. The founder, Eric Berne developed a system of analysis of transactions called Transactional Analysis (TA) which helps us make sense of our human communication using the ego state models and the 'games which people play'. According to Eric, people learn to play games in childhood as often the best possible response to family and life circumstances. The motivation in continuing to do so as adults is the need for stimulus, structure and as a substitute for security. The Institute of Transactional Analysis in United Kingdom further elaborates in their website on their description on TA 101 that games are predictable patterns of indirect communications using ulterior transactions. They are played out of our awareness. Games analysis identifies these patterns and their consequences. The structural analysis identifies three ego states: the Parent, Adult and Child are all present in us. It enables us to clarify our life experiences, thoughts and feelings, examining how we learned our beliefs and values from our parents and other parent figures, and how being in different ego states can influence our behaviour and relationships. Analysis of transactions examines both social and psychological forms of human communication using the ego state model to diagram the types of transactions. Transactions may be open and clear, or combined with ulterior messages. After my training in TA 101, I then understood that good communications stemmed from people who are able to communicate at their Adult ego stage. Most often, communication is stuck when both person are communicating on the Parent or Child ego stage and not at the Adult ego state. TA model may seem to be a guiding model for me to understand my group members better.

Well, if I compare PT group with reality shows like Big Brothers (where 10-12 infamous personalities stayed in the same house for 2 month and not allowed to have any contact with the outside world. Each week, the viewers would vote out the most unpopular one until only one most popular contestant would emerge at the end of the show). Well, the reality of PT group which I lead is, you do not vote any 'unpopular' one out but you try to find a way to help everyone work together artistically for a long period of time. As the artistic director, I have to lead PT rehearsals and at the same time, I have to manage group dynamics. It is a big challenge trying to manage both responsibilities at the same time. Yet, that's the main job description for any PT leader.

After lots of consideration, I have decided to share in this essay a few of the personalities which I have stuck communications with in the process of managing the PT group, firstly by using the TA model. I have no intention to spark off any debate or argument however I hope by writing this essay, I can learn from my own mistakes and to reflect from my past experience in leading PT group. Though it is not always necessary or helpful to give someone a label but I thought it would be easier to name some of these distinct characters whom may be present in some of the PT groups to help us understand how as PT leaders, we can learn to lead with confidence and resilience. All names have been changed to protect the privacy of others.

1. Dealing with a senior member

June is the oldest member of my group. She is considered by my group as the senior and the experienced one given her age and experience in drama. She is outspoken, efficient, and prompt and shows care by giving Christmas gifts and offering practical advice to the group. However, sometimes, she can come across as Ms Authoritarian and she communicates at a Parent ego state with me, straddling between a CP (Critical Parent) and AP (Authoritarian Parent). She often likes to have individual late night phone conversations with me to evaluate on my leadership style and confront my way of handling the members as she said 'she can't bottle up her feelings anymore'. She is sometimes critical, blunt and believes 'she ought to be the bad guy' to say the truth (her version) to me. She has high expectations on the PT leader and gets frustrated when her expectations are not met. She prides herself to be always on time for rehearsals or any PT activities. She would also email me to give me feedback about her distress on people who are late for rehearsal and urge me to set a good role model for the rest of the group by being punctual. She also insists that I would discuss the punctuality issue with the whole group as soon as possible. Once in a while, she also feels a need to give me a good scolding thinking that it is for my good. One day, I was having a meal with June as she asked me out to apologise for her rude behaviour. At the back of my mind, I know that I can't win her over by 'performing to her standard' and I do not want to play the game of communication with her. I shared with her my motivation to lead the PT group and my genuine love for the group. She suddenly burst into tears and said that she was guilty and ashamed for treating me so badly and she was touched by my sincerity and care for the members. I was rather relieved to see her being touched by my sharing and I believed that it was the beginning of a friendship as two female adults or sisters in Christ. We patched up and I thought that we both had cleared up our misunderstanding. However, after that episode, June continues to study me closely and take the next opportunity to tell me off whenever she thinks I made a mistake or manage the group badly.

2. Dealing with a young 'conservative' member

Jessy is a new PT member of my group. She is a young executive in her early 20s, friendly, outspoken, enthusiastic and enjoys doing playback. However, she came across to me as Ms Conservative. She prefers the tried and tested methods of doing playback and questioned me whenever I suggested a new method of training in PT practices. One day, I brought in an experienced theatre director to help my PT group to fine tune our acting skills over a period of 4- 5 sessions. Each of us was assigned to a scripted play, to study it, rehearse it and to deliver it on the stage at the end of the project. She rejected the idea as she argued that as a PT actor, we should only learn playback and should not branch out to do scripted plays. We, despite having consulted everyone in the PT group of their need to improve on their acting ability

and getting their consensus of having this acting teacher, Jessy continue to show me reluctance to this acting project. At another time, she also argued that as a PT conductor, I should stick to the old method of warming up audience as we had a 'good performance'. She also insisted that we should stick to the same PT opening for our future performances as it has been tried and tested and worked. Then I didn't know how I could convince Ms Conservative that our repeated audience were bored with our acting skills and our presentation styles as I had received verbal feedback from some of them. There seems to be a resistant from her every time we proposed a new structure or introduce new methods of perceiving things in the PT company. She sees herself as the underdog for the rest of the members who are quieter and she always thinks that she is representing the majority of the votes.

3. Dealing with an egoistic actor

Victor is an actor in his early 30s when he first joined our PT group. He is another outspoken, friendly and helpful guy to the group. However, a few of my PT members aren't able to 'click' with him. His body language seems to indicate a big ego. Some of the members feedback to me that they find him proud and a show off. They are irritated with him rattling about how much theatre experience he has. Victor sometimes operates on a child ego state as well. He has a bit of a rebellious 'child syndrome' and likes to challenge PT leaders in rehearsals by being different or indifferent. His playfulness may be his strength in rehearsals however; he rebels or goes against rules being set. He thinks that the group needs to move forward in our artistic training and we as a group need to challenge ourselves. Hence he takes on the 'responsibility' to be the rebellious kid and upset the rules and to prove a point to the rest. That created tension and chaos in the group as majority of the members aren't trained in theatre in the first place. Even some of them who are more conversed in theatre aren't able to see his point! Halfway through a PT performance, Victor took on the liberty as the PT actor to sit on the teller on stage and did his theatre dialogue for a whole one minute! That shocked me and the rest of my PT performers. The PT rituals which we maintained to create the safe space for the teller to watch his story was broken! Most of us were shocked! However, we had to resume ourselves and carried on the show. After which during debrief, Victor tried to justify his 'artistic choice' but we couldn't agree with him. He was frustrated as well. Eventually, he chose to leave our PT group.

Power, norms and conformity in PT group

If we look at Abraham Maslow's hierarchical model of human needs, self actualisation is the highest ranked need which each individual wants to achieve. However, this could mean different meaning to different people. Being a young PT leader, I always hope to inspire others to work towards self actualisation. However, I constantly find myself having to think carefully what I say or not say in the PT group as I have 8 or 9 other unique individuals whom are listening to me. How do I share a clear message across without sounding offensive is often the question in my mind? How much power should I give to certain individual in the group? Why do I want to give him/her the power? How would other people respond to my choice as the leader? Who is resisting my power as the leader and why is he/she doing so? There is a saying that goes 'Birds of the feathers flock together'. Which are the sub-groups in my PT company? What draws them to come together and what sort of power do they represent in the PT group? Or have I given enough talking space for the minority in my group?

Professor Fathali Moghaddam mentioned in his book "Great ideas in Psychology" describes conformity as changes in behaviour that arise from real or imagined group pressure, is the glue that holds society (in this case, a PT group) together. Each of us in our every day life is repeatedly influenced by real or imagined group pressures. In most cultures, we are brought up to be told to always do the right thing and behave ourselves. And I also discover in the Chinese culture, age plays a large part. The older you are, the wiser you ought to be or the most experienced around and the due respect to be given to the older ones. That maybe was my initial hurdle with June. Though we are all young Chinese graduates (except one who is of Malay origin and the other a Eurasian) and we are all living in a cosmopolitan society like Singapore, we can't help by still being guided by the cultural stereotypes which have been instilled in us since we were young. There is also a negative connotation about conformity in some places, especially in the artistic world. Artists are famous in being regarded as 'non-conformist' and that properly explains Victor's behaviour with the PT group. Despite conformity having a negative connotation, it is central in our every day life. Also, with group norms, it decreases the degrees of freedom of oneself and the group. Take Victor for instance, the group has established a group norm in doing PT rehearsals and have gotten used to the safe and non threatening style of PT training which I or my co-leader facilitate. When Victor comes to our group, the rest of the members have difficulties adjusting to him and his working style during practices. In addition, Victor didn't conform to the group norm and insist that we ought to move forward and challenge ourselves artistically. In the end, he gave up on the PT group and chose to move on as he can't 'persuade' us to let go of the group norm which we have established. Prof Fathali mentioned that those who reject majority established norms open up the possibility of innovations and new ways of doing things. Yet at that time, my PT group wasn't ready to take the risk of forming a new group norm. I am also aware that Victor has less common background as the rest, as most of us work in the social service or education sector. Having Victor go, is a mutual decision made. It seems that as the PT leader, I wasn't ready to change and to train the way how Victor trains. I was prepared to let him go as I also found him not a 'group person', more like a solo.

Six months later, the PT group continued to train but with little progress. There I was, as the PT leader being confronted with this stagnation of our artistic growth and at the same time, battling with stuck communications with certain individuals like June and Jessy, I was more ready to challenge the group norm and to be a non conformist for once, hopefully to open up the PT group to new ideas and innovation. Introducing the theatre director as our acting teacher was one of the ways which I attempt to break the thinking paradigms of my group and hopefully to translate the new ideas into our playback skills. Most of them were keen with the idea. After the acting project was over, with the support of my co-leader, I share with the group of having the need to challenge ourselves artistically. To some of my members, it may seem like I was blowing the same horn as Victor who had left the group. At that stage, I didn't realise that this was the final straw to us splitting up as a group. Prof Fathali describes that the open society (or in this case, a PT group that is open enough) which leaves room for and even supports, non-conformity increases its own chances of survival and thriving. I wish I could help my group see this point then but unfortunately I couldn't and they were not open to new ideas. So while, I was taking my holiday overseas, the sub group of June and Jessy start to form and gather strength. They mis-constructed my sharing and concluded that I want to put an end to Tapestry or change Tapestry to a purely arts group with no motivation of serving

the community. I was given the news that they are forming their own PT group since 'Agnes (I) has a change of vision'.

In this instance, power is no longer being given to the PT leader but to the subgroup. I was shocked by the way how messages can be passed around and be mis-constructed so wrongly. So when I come back, I decided to have a meeting to clear the air. It was difficult in the beginning for everyone to speak their own mind. Two of my closer members questioned what's my vision for Tapestry? I told the group, my vision for tapestry and playback is an ambitious one. I want to support and mentor people who have a playback calling in education, arts or social work. I see Tapestry as a tree which would grow in branches and bare different fruits and I want to be the one to support my members to be playback leaders in their field. At the end, I ask my group to decide for themselves, whether they think they can continue to work with me as the PT leader and believe they can grow as PT members. People like June and Jessy had naturally decided to be on their own. As some other people had already believe in that idea that my vision had changed, they had sort of pledged their allegiance to the sub groups of June and Jessy and felt awkward to say no to the subgroup. The whole meeting ended with me in tears with two other of my closer members whom I have brought into the group. We were sad to part each other. They told me they have no doubts about my leadership and to be mentored by me but they have pledge their allegiance to the other group. However, they were relieved to know that I have not changed in my character and vision but at the same time, they wish I would learn to speak my mind earlier to save everyone from being confused. In the end, I felt that I was being sabotaged. I have only me, my co leader and a core member with me as the original group.

I was feeling upset and wondering how all that has happened. Later I realised that the group was subjected to a term called social influence. As Franzoi (1996) writes Social influence involves the exercise of social power by a person or group to change the attitudes or behaviour of others in a particular direction (cited in Eysenck, 2000). To define social influence further, it is the influence of a group (majority influence) or individual (minority influence or obedience) to modify the thinking, attitudes, and/ or behaviour of others. For eg, fashion trends are a consequence of majority influence, political and religious leaders and an example of minority influence, and complying with the demands of any authority figure, such as an employer, is an example of obedience (Eysenck, 2003). Conformity/ majority influence occurs when people adopt the behaviour, attitudes or values of the majority (dominant or largest group) after being exposed to their values or behaviour. In this instance, some of my PT members may have yield to group pressure (compliance), and want to join the sub group as they are subjected to both the informational and normative influence which believes in the superior knowledge or judgement of the Jessy and June alike and their individual desire to be liked or respected by other members. No wonder, it is hard to break away the decision that they have formed despite me clarifying my stand as the leader.

Well, I recalled political leaders like Chinese imperial emperors such as Qin Emperor (Paludan, 1998) who had overpowered bigger political and social systems to achieve his goal which may not necessary be desirable to others but it defines history and are written into history text books for young people like me to learn and reflect upon.

One and a half year on, the new group (which came out from the majority of my group) has become the second playback group in Singapore. As far as I know, they had decided to adopt a shared leadership style among the members in the group. I suspect this style of leadership could be their unconscious way of 'rebellious' against the defined (one or two leaders) leadership of my (previous) group.

Having to deal with the lost of 7 members in my group, is a big thing for me. I have to deal with my own feelings of abandonment, loss, grief and at the same time to stay strong for the members who are sticking with me. I questioned my own leadership ability and was at one stage, wanted to give up leading the PT group. My self confidence suffered. I didn't manage to recover from the grief as soon after our split, we have to work with one another for the Asia Playback Gathering which I developed. It was very tiring and tough process for me and with everyone involved. I felt the immense pain of losing some very close friendships in the PT group but I found it difficult to articulate out. On the other hand, I knew that those who have chosen to leave my group were experiencing a similar loss and hurt and perhaps they were equally lost in knowing how to repair the working relationship. I remembered Jonathan Fox's message of The Red Thread at the International Playback Conference in Japan that he begins by citing an African saying in order for both side to build peace, both have to show matured human behaviour. That was my guiding principle through out my working relations with my ex members and it is sometimes not always easy as it requires the determination and commitment of both parties.

With having members like June, Jessy and Victor, I was grappling with quite a few challenges like managing artistic expectations and at the same time, provide a open communications for myself and the group. Though I attempt to understand these three members with the TA model, however, it is not sufficient for me to establish a good communication going with them. Perhaps it was either them or me who has resistance operating on the adult ego stage. I want to challenge myself at this stage. I think I need to see the bigger picture of this resistance. I need to search deeper, understand what's their values, beliefs, their motivations and their worldviews and even their impressions about me both as an individual and as the authority figure. Clearly, all these mentioned forms part of the SELF. People do not naturally resist any person out of nothing. It is also about me having to deal with the here and now; meeting them at where they are. It seems so airy fairy saying all these. Basically, it is a call for all PT leaders, or least for me to understand the intrinsic part of the SELF. It has to begin with me. It is also often hard to admit this truth but I think communications seems stuck when both parties fail to reach a common understanding. Sometimes, as PT leaders, we may be guilty of pushing the blame of stuck communications onto our member's faults as they are seems to be the ones who have issues. But who doesn't? Therefore, I am in the process of evaluating how could I do things differently, if in future, I have members like June, Jessy or Victor.

As I reflect upon my own self and the way I manage my own emotions in dealing with stuck communications in the PT group, I referred to a book which I had first come across a few years ago by Dr Lerner called 'The Dance of Anger: A woman's guide to changing the patterns of intimate relationships' which described some ladies having the "nice lady" syndrome. It describes that we tends to stay silent even if we do feel angry as we rather keep it to our selves in order to avoid the possibility of open conflict. In addition, we may also avoid making clear statements about what we think and feel when we suspect that such clarity would make another person

uncomfortable and expose differences between us (Lerner, 2004). Immediately, I could identify myself of having that syndrome and I instantly linked this to the way I had managed the communication in the group before we had the split. Then I remembered I was very conscious of playing the non confrontational role when it comes to airing out difference and I only wanted to facilitate the rest of my PT group to share their differences and not about mine. I learnt that if I behaved in this way, my primary energy is directed toward protecting another person and preserving the harmony of our relationships at the expense of me defining my clear self (Lerner, 2004). I didn't realise that I may lose the clarity of self because I was putting lots of efforts into 'reading' other member's reactions and at the same time, ensuring that I don't rock the boat in my PT group. By doing this, I had become less and less of an expert about my own thoughts, feelings and wants of being part of the group. Now I understand why it was the necessary thing that my closer members want to hear me stating my opinions and nudging me repeatedly to say out what I truly feel and want from the group. For once, I had to overcome the 'nice lady syndrome' in me.

Speaking about anger, as I reflect on my stuck communication with June, I wondered to myself why she is always angry with me. Initially I thought I may be the cause of her anger or maybe my 'nice lady' syndrome gets in the way of our communication. But surely, I can't be blame or be responsible for all the outbreak of anger she had towards me. Dr Lerner encouraged her readers not to be afraid of anger as anger is something I or the other person feel and it exists for a reason and deserve our attention. She also mentioned that feeling anger may indicated a problem, but venting anger does not solve it as venting anger only serve to maintain and even rigidify, the old rules and patterns in a relationship, thus ensuring changes does not occur (Lerner, 2004, p.4). Now I am more aware that June's attempt to change my beliefs of behaviour by calling me on the phone and venting her anger are not working because this predicated, patterned way only escalate the problem between us. In addition, my 'nice lady' syndrome would only cause me to handle our anger by distancing emotionally from her which of course would not solve the matter.

Anna Chesner, co-leader of Playback AME in which she mentioned in her article on "Playback Theatre and Group Communications" that the process of becoming a playback company is complex. It involved learning the skills and forms of the method, its philosophy, culture and spirit, as well as developing into an ensemble at artistic and interpersonal levels. She goes on and elaborate that there are two levels of company's process which we are dealing with, one the inward level of the process in which we deal with the constantly evolving group and personal commitment, and the outward level of company's process in which the group look at how they can serve the playback audience as they look at the skills and capacity of the company (Chesner and Hahn, 2002). As I have discussed in great length earlier on my struggle in balancing the artistic and interpersonal levels and facilitating the inward and outward level of my company's process, I want to find out how can I continue to be resilient and keep myself abreast of the ongoing dynamics of the company's process. As what Jonathan Fox said in his chapter on Company life in his book 'Acts of Service', he mentioned that playback group comes together for one than 1 show; there is continuity and there is a strong sense of collaboration. He went on and compares a playback group to a family which goes through several stages including termination (Fox, 1986).

As I think about the analogy of family in PT groups with the function of love and care and nurturing of relationships within the PT group or family, then every word

an individual say or action done in the group would possibly have a cause and effect on another person or the group. The intensity of the relationships fostered in the PT group can be overwhelming to some people especially when we use our own personal stories as a basis of rehearsals. It can be therapeutic and at the same time, attachments can be formed over time rather quickly. Subgroup emerges as they can identify with the roles they played in the group, the interest they shared or the similar life experiences they may have. However, I also suspect that people group together when they have similar past group experiences (usually negative) as way to find support and give strength to stand against certain rigidity of the leadership which may be present in the PT group. With the analogy of the family, PT leaders may be seen (unconsciously) by some group members as the 'father' or 'mother' of the group, performing the functions to teach, guide and nurture. However, when these functions aren't always present or reciprocated, interpersonal tensions and conflict may arise. PT members may also see PT leader as an image of their own rigid and authoritarian father or incapable parent which they have been fighting to differentiate from their own natural family systems. In this case, each individual in the group plays a role not necessarily by choice but was perceived by the individual as necessary for the 'survival of the group' which in some way, may be related to the roles they may be playing in their own family of origin or which is absent in their own family. Having said that, the PT leaders are also picking up certain roles to play which they may perceive are necessary for the group's growth. However this perception is not always accurate or needed for the healthy functioning of the group.

As I reflect on the past conflict I have encountered in my PT group and trying to make further sense of it, psychological theories tell me that theories of conflicts can be categorised into two groups. Firstly, the rational theories such as realistic conflict theory, based on materialism and balance and the second group of conflict is the displaced aggression, which proposed that conflict is not rational, materialist or balanced. Displaced aggression is not balanced because the aggressors generally are not aware of why they are attacking a third-party target. Displaced aggression is not materialist because it is feelings, emotions and psychological experiences and not the material conditions that fundamentally shape behaviour in this realm (Moghaddam, 2005).

Displaced aggression is best considered in the context of Freud's broader understanding of the role and nature of the unconscious. Sigmund Freud (1856—1939), the father of psychology developed this idea of the unconscious. The unconscious has had fundamental implications for therapy and applied psychology. Each individual comes to work out a personal social contract with parents and other authorities (in this case, PT leader) representing the larger society. On one hand, by conforming to the morality of their cultures, individuals gain acceptance and support from others; they become part of the human group. However, on the other hand, certain wishes, motives and feelings are repressed by individuals, as they struggle to conform to the norms and values of their PT group culture. The cost of such repression is sometimes enormous, and so high that it cripples the individual and prevents healthy functioning (Moghaddam, 2005, p.51). Sometimes, these anxieties and fears are so enormous that in order to avoid being disabled, individuals may employ various defense mechanisms, behavioural and cognitive strategies intended to reduce anxiety.

In Freud's model, displaced aggression is one of secondary defense mechanisms, the primary one being repression. Other important examples include projection, whereby what are actually one's own wishes, motives and thoughts are attributed to another person or group rather than oneself (Moghaddam, 2005, p.181). Projection plays an important role in inter-group relations. For eg, instead of correctly recognizing their own fear and hatred of the A group, the B group proclaims that the A group hate and want to destroy us. We must attack them first." Another secondary defense mechanism is rationalization, whereby individuals reinterpret their own thoughts and feelings to make them more acceptable. Rationalization also plays an important role at the inter-group level. For example, as we learn throughout history, those who have waged war and invaded other countries have often claimed that they are "liberators", and just as groups of terrorists often claim themselves to be "freedom fighters".

Freud's idea on displace aggression are associated with his therapy experiences with transference, a process through which patients transfer feelings and experiences with transference, a process through which patients transfer feelings and experiences from earlier experiences onto the therapist. For eg, a patient who had a particularly difficult relationship with a hard to please father transfers her hostility to the new authority figure of the therapist and says to the therapist, " Don't' tell me what to do". The idea of displaced aggression incorporates similar transference of feelings, thoughts, and experiences but from one (usually powerful) source of discomfort to an alternative (usually less powerful or threatening) target (Moghaddam, 2005).

As I continue to reflect on my struggle with the other member, Jessy, I am more aware of the PT leader I need to acknowledge the support she may need from me being a new PT member in the group. Her resistance towards new training style may be due to her need to feel secure as a PT actor. I wondered how I could have done things otherwise to show my support and my confidence in her and at the same time, to engage with her on the discussion of the need to raise training standards of the group. In addition, I know that the group did see me as the founder of playback theatre in Singapore and sometimes joked about me being the mother of playback theatre and later the father of playback theatre as my co-leader, Anne was refer to the mother of playback. Putting jokes aside, I do believe the group is locked in this whole 'parental and child' dynamics which is especially prevalent at the last stage of our company life, debating over company matters like shared leadership, and whose ownership and searching a renewed vision for the group and which eventually leads to the split.

Now, I am more comforted after I find out about these theories and trying to find some meaning to my intense struggle with my ex members. Though I admit that I may not have all the answers to leading a good PT group, I am definitely hopeful to be more aware of human dynamics in my current PT group.

Jo Salas mentioned in her article "What is 'Good enough' playback theatre"; many people come to playback with a background in one but not both of these areas- artists who are unsophisticated in human relationships or helpers and healers who are undeveloped as artist. Training that emphasizes the importance of both sides can help people acquire the balance that is essential (Fox and Dauber, 1999).

I have also figure out being a PT leader is not always about the leader should always have the last say or has to win. How do we create a win-win situation in a PT group? Recently, I recalled a company reflection time in which I facilitate an exercise to get everyone to share their honest feedback about company issues like the directions, visions and training. It was an exercise which I adapted from a psychodrama workshop. I put up four chairs. In each chair, I put a coloured fabric cloth on it. I name the red chair as your rewards and achievements for being in the PT Company, the black chair as your fears, doubts about being in the PT Company, the gold chair as your hopes and dreams about the PT group and the white chair as any other thing or feelings you want to share. The instructions were anyone can take turns to stand behind any coloured chair and share. They can go up as often as they want and to whichever cloth which they are inclined to. I hope that this process would help everyone to listen to each other, the quieter ones would have a chance to speak and at the same time, we only need to represent ourselves and not others. There isn't any competition or drawing of alliance as well. Very quickly, all 5 of us (a new group) were engaged in a process of active listening and are non-defensive in our speech. We speak from our hearts and hear each other. At one time, we were debating on artistic expectations as adults. It was also the time when I confronted some of my own fears as PT leader to speak boldly of my passionate view about inclusion of people of other faiths and this inclusion would only strengthen the vision of our group and the work we are doing in the community. My co leader shared about her frustrations of having to be the middle man all the time. She wished that people would communicate to each other instead of going through her. At the end of 1.5 hours, we wrapped out the process and we fixed another time to deal with some of the company matters. So in the next meeting, we managed to list down some outcomes and objectives of the group for the next half of the year.

Through that simple exercise, I had managed to create an open and rather safe communication process in my PT group and facilitate the meeting of each other, and at the same time acknowledging our similar or different views without having to be on the defensive side. It was a milestone for me as the PT leader and also for Tapestry.

The dynamics of co-leadership

In January 2002, I was filled with joy and excitement after having attended the summer school in New Zealand. Then I came back to Singapore and hosted the first introductory playback workshop conducted by Bev Hosking. Bev encouraged me to start a playback theatre group in Singapore so that I can train regularly with others and make plans to do playback in the community. Of course, I was excited and wanted to make that happened. So after the introductory playback workshop, Bev and I identified some participants who showed potential and a good heart to do playback. I approached the few of them and initiated the idea and they were enthusiastic about it. Together, we founded the first Playback theatre group and I was given the role of the leader. For the first year, I was leading the group as the sole leader and there were only 5 or 6 of us from that workshop. A few people came and were part of the group but left after a short while due to other commitments. It was a cosy group where everyone was able to demonstrate love and concern and needs were met more readily. The relatively smaller group size helps to facilitate communications during rehearsals and perhaps the group's need to grow and survive together as a pioneer playback group was greater then. Subsequently, some

other people joined through other introductory playback workshops and through working with me in the social work agency. There were ten of us by January 2004.

During that time, I was closer to a few of them, particularly with Anne. She was one of the participants in the introductory playback workshop and understood the heart of playback. She brings with her a sanguine personality; musical talent and training in psychology which I believed were my weaknesses. She is passionate about playback, takes high ownership of the tasks given and demonstrates her love and care for the group. She meets the criteria of what Jonathan fox describes NST leader as having high measure of both substance and charisma. (Fox, 1986) Of course, an NST leader had to be a chosen one (Fox, 1986). The group recognises her as the other leader assisting me in company's matters and training.

It is after our trip to School of playback theatre in July 2003, both Anne and I got even closer together as friends, sisters in Christ and colleagues of playback giving support to each other. It was perhaps Anne's first initiation of being recognised as the leader of Tapestry. Anne and I developed a strong working relationship which was built on trust, support, mutual respect and our love for God. We would call or meet up before and after playback rehearsals to discuss on the training progress and evaluate on group dynamics. We would talk for hours about it. Despite being different, we were surprisingly like minded in many ways.

As I reflect upon the dynamics of co-leadership, I wonder whether our love for playback and motivation to build a strong playback group can sometimes be overwhelming to the group. For me, the process of transition in being the sole PT leader to having a co-leader sharing my load of leadership burdens was not a difficult one. Of course, there were a few considerations or decisions I had to make along the way as I try to find space for this co-leadership to work well in the group. I was thinking about some of those questions mentioned in my essay under the section on Power, norms and conformity in PT group about how much power do I give to certain individual; and in this case, my co-leader and how would other group members response to my choice. Though Anne and I were close and work well together, there were some group issues which I find it hard to articulate and debrief with her then. It was perhaps my fear of losing this friendship and lack of confidence in dealing with differing views between Anne and I that stopped me. As there were ten of us in the group, alliance were drawn and some people were closer to Anne and they prefer to take their opinions further with Anne and vice versa as some other members prefer to speak with me. Then, I see this alliance as healthy and it was good that the individual's needs or questions were met by either one of the leaders. We felt like family. Anne and I were regarded as parents of the group.

However, there came a point in time both Anne and I worked so well together, that the group is resisting our power and our efforts as leaders. By the third quarter of 2004, the cracks were showing in the group. I think we 'ran ahead' of the group. At the same time, the members (or children) have grown up and want to have more ownership and say in the decision making. In addition, I was dealing with some of the stuck communications with certain individuals as mentioned in my essay. The stuck communications were also taking place between Anne and the members. There were times when Anne and I were playing the role of the 'good cop' and 'bad cop' in the group. I was dealing with my nice lady syndrome; I wasn't able to voice out my opinions then. Instead, I choose the collaborative stance and want to ensure

I don't rock the boat. Whereas, Anne was being honest and bold in airing some of the frustrations we had as leaders. Eventually, Tapestry split in February 2005.

After the split, both Anne and I continue to lead Tapestry, recruiting new members into the group. With the split, both of us were nursing the loss. We talked about it and processed through. We cried, prayed about it and supported each other. Though we both felt the lost, we dealt with it differently. I guess grieving is a very personal process. Someone once told us that something needs to die, so that something new would take place. I agree. Something new has taken place in this co-leadership. I saw the maturity that we both grow as co-leaders the past year. We knew we are not perfect and we made mistakes in the past. We were also dealing with our own hang ups as leaders such as jealousy, competition and unmet needs. Though we may not speak about our hang ups or our struggles all the time, through these experiences, we developed resilience and confidence in ourselves. We are now seen as equal partners in leading the current PT group. I have learnt to voice out my opinions even if there are different from her or other members. It takes lots of humility and openness to accept someone else as a strong leader and I believe both of us have learnt to model it for the group. Though I may not be able to describe how Anne feels or think entirely about leadership and her own journey in being a leader, I hope that one day the picture would get clearer for me. Now both Anne and I adopt a more collaborative stance with the new group. I am still learning to make space for Anne to perform her role as the leader and eventually I hope I can one day make space for some other person to rise up and share the leadership role.

Overcoming the odds

The idea of an Asian Playback Gathering (APG) was a seed that was being sown in my heart when I was at the International Playback Conference in Japan in 2003. There I was thinking about the sharing by Jonathon on the Red Thread and I was interested in the work and challenges which PT groups in Asia are encountering. However, with the limited time, it was hard to have a good chat with all Asian PT groups at the conference. When Kayo Munakata, whose group, Playback AZ organised the conference was speaking to me about her wish to see an Asian playback gathering and encourage me to think about taking up the challenge. I saw it as a sign to commit myself to it and as if like Kayo has read my mind. I also see this project as a potential growth for myself as an Asian PT leader and believe strongly that my group would benefit largely from the cross cultural/ international exposure which I had experienced so positively. I mentioned this idea to PT seniors like Veronica Needa, Bev Hosking and Jonathon Fox who had done tremendous PT work in Asia regarding their opinion of having this gathering and their comments were positive. Some time later, I decided to share this idea with my group. There were positive and negative comments and our main concern was funding. However, I was determined to see this gathering take place in Singapore. Having spoken to a few PT leaders across the region, I believe that people are interested to network and to improve on our PT skills. Especially it is harder for PT leaders and PT groups in Asia to get access to PT schools in New York and New Zealand due to lack of funding and certain political restrictions, providing an Asian Playback Gathering in Singapore may be a more possible choice for them to come. At that time of preparing APG, Tapestry had just split up and it was a trying time to chair the meetings as relationships were volatile. In the APG, there were 3 main planning committees: Funding/Marketing, Logistics and Programming and it properly didn't help in the power differentiation when the members whom stayed with me in the original group were holding the in-charge

roles. At the same time, all of us involved in the gathering were holding full time jobs and it made it even harder to coordinate efforts together.

As I have not run any playback gatherings in the past, I have to rely on my own experiences in organising events. I also rallied the support of my own social work agency to give me the freedom to work on APG during office hours. Fortunately, my agency saw the value of playback theatre and its importance for the Asian communities and agreed to let me work on this project for 6 months. Their support was pivotal for the success of this gathering. My agency was willing to render administrative support at the later stage of our APG preparation and waiver of rental charge of workshop rooms at the gathering which I was thankful for.

In terms of programming n APG, I wanted to give a platform for Asian PT leaders to lead workshops or interest groups to share their work with us. However, it was difficult for us to confirm the programming as some of our PT leaders had difficulties trying to raise the airfare to come to Singapore. Indeed, it was a big lesson to learn for me as how can I ensure PT leaders to come and teach us PT skills and at the same time, providing the monetary support. Being a non profit group like Tapestry, fund raising and sponsorship would definitely be needed. Despite writing to several major organisations to raise funds for APG, none were willing to commit any monetary help except to offer some verbal encouragement. As playback theatre was still in their infantile period in Singapore, I wasn't totally surprised by the poor response. But we had to act fast. Hence we look into our own PT community for support. Tapestry raised funds through the proceeds of our PT performance, kind donation from audience, and proceeds of running a two day introductory playback workshop. We also put up a fund raising performance on one of the APG nights with the partnership of two Asian PT members, Josephine from Taiwan and Aki from Japan. At the same time, we also received donations from Jonathon Fox, Jo Salas, Playback AZ and Yellow Cube. With the raised collection of money, we were able to support 7 PT leaders to participate in the APG.

The 3 day event closed with great success. With the support of the School of Playback Theatre (NY), International Playback Theatre Network (IPTN) and supportive PT seniors like Veronica Needa to circulate the news of this gathering, we managed to gather 60 over PT participants representing countries such as Taiwan, Singapore, Philippines, Macau, India, Hong Kong, Japan and Australia at the gathering. We had a wonderful time connecting with one another. There was lots of discussion on how to get access to PT trainings, and sharing of PT work with one another. People were already discussing on how to collaborate on a national level. There were simply so much to take in and I was totally won over by the strength and resilience of the Asian playback leaders presented at the gathering and the many battles they have to fight to bring PT work to the unreachable or forsaken groups in communities such as India and Philippines. I was pleased that the Singapore Playback community could play host in the gathering and at the same time, my hearts went out to those who couldn't raise the money to attend the gathering.

Leading the first Asian Playback Gathering was indeed a milestone for me as a PT leader in learning to overcome the odds. Though the process of organising it was not easy but it was worth it. The red thread of the gathering was about building new friendships and repairing old wounds. This was further illustrated in Kimberly Creasman's article on Reconciliation at the Asian Playback Gathering at the Interplay issue Dec 2005. The act of apology from our Japanese Playback friends regarding

the Japanese Occupation touched a raw nerve in those who attended the jamming time. This humble act had broken walls and repaired many emotional and psychological hurts which were present in us since our forefathers' time. Indeed, the APG ended with a hope in me that Tapestry and Yellow Cube would one day learn to deal with our past hurts and be able to continue the PT journey well and co exists as equal partners in this small PT community in Singapore and in Asia.

To sum up, as a leader organising this APG, I have learnt a few lessons. Firstly, it is important for me to have a vision and be courageous to make that vision happens. Secondly, no matter how strong or capable I am as a leader, without the supportive team who believe in me or my vision, the gathering would not be a success. Thirdly, I have learnt not be afraid to ask for help and enlarge my network of volunteers. I was surprised that some of my old friends came forward and help out in this event despite not being part of the playback community and brought along their friends to help out too. It is such a joy to see them doing acts of service for the playback community. Lastly, I learnt to count my blessings. Through this event, I met up with several PT leaders whom have come forward to encourage and cheer me on and acknowledge the hard work I have put in. It feels great to be acknowledged and for once, not discounting myself. At the same time, I was humbled knowing that more can be done for future APG and felt encouraged knowing that many people shared my passion of building a strong PT community in Asia.

PT supervision and mentoring

Let's move on to think about supervision and mentoring issue in PT community. Being a PT leader in Asia, I find it challenging to find mentors or supervisors in my own communities. Especially when my group is the first playback group in Singapore, most often, I am left on my own to handle group matters and my own leadership challenges. The fortunate thing is I have a co-leader whom I can discuss openly and check in with her. But peer supervision is different from a mentor's supervision. The wealth of experience and neutral position of a senior mentor would help me in processing my own leadership issue. Bev Hosking, my playback supervisor lives in New Zealand. It is many miles away if I want to have a cup of tea with her!

The more developed playback communities are Japan and Hong Kong in Asia in which I believe would have more access to supervision and mentoring. However, taken into consideration the geographical distance and also the language differences, I think that Asian PT leaders like me have to literally go (fly) the extra mile to receive any kind of direct and face to face supervision. Of course, the virtual communications now are very advanced, I am in contact with my PT supervisor and PT teachers through emails or sometimes a phone call (it can be rather expensive but if I am desperate for some sort of personal support, I would call Bev!). So, it seems that supervision of PT leaders is rather limited in Singapore, or South East Asia. But the PT work can be a rather challenging one. We have to deal with PT group process (as mentioned) and also enhancing of skills and often, I am left to fiddle my way through group issues and going for overseas playback trainings to improve mainly on my PT skills.

As I refer to the theatre books and discovered that apprenticeship is an age old model for theatre students to receive education or artistic skills. Asian Arts forms refer to teachers as Masters. Usually, these Masters starts their own apprenticeship

when they are toddlers. The cycle of apprenticeship went on for several generations. Often Masters are referred to as the surrogate father or mother or sometimes referred to as god to worship at when they die. In Theatre Anthropology, apprenticeship is described as one to one relationship between the Master or sometimes referred to as Guru and student is a cornerstone of the learning system, implying a close and lasting contract between the two, based on love and devotion (Barba and Saverese, 2005).

I wonder what would happen if this sort of apprenticeship is placed in playback theatre. Often, this apprenticeship is hierarchical and in playback, we are more process orientated. Not long ago, one of the actors in my probationary programme stated that 'we do not want to train up new PT actors, who speak and act like us'. I thought there was a true statement. Sometimes, I caught my younger actors speak and act like me during rehearsal! Definitely, it is not a deliberate act on their part, but surely, I do not want to create moulds of myself in my playback group. I think it is hard to adopt the whole process of apprenticeship into playback theatre. However, we can adopt the spirit of apprenticeship, like the output of skills transfer with love and devotion into our PT leadership.

I think it is important as we look for PT supervisor to clarify the goals and expectations on both parties, sort of a verbal contract. Recently, Tapestry has renewed our mentoring relationship with Bev and Bev has indicated that she should be informed of any happenings at least and be in regular consultation with her. I was glad that she reminded me of this role which she can play and hold us accountable for company matters. At the same time, it got me thinking of how else we can get supervision from Bev despite the distance apart. I believe creativity is the way and continuous dialogue would be helpful to help both the PT mentor and PT group to find the best possible ways to give and receive supervision. The PT group has to first of all see the importance of PT supervision and at the same time, define their own learning goals and areas which they hope to grow in and communicate with their PT mentor. At the same time, maintaining positive relations with other PT groups in the region help to build the learning capacity of the PT group. I also hope that there are more initiatives of regional gatherings like the European and Asian playback gatherings which can take place to continue the learning and collaboration relationship in the wider PT community. Since the Asian playback gathering, small training gatherings have taken place like the one I heard of in Taiwan when few PT groups from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore attended. I think more of such trainings can be conducted. However, important factors such as finance and logistical concerns have to be thought through to include more interested PT groups to take advantage of training initiatives across countries.

I think PT leaders may echo some of the similar struggles that I had in managing a PT group and it may be necessary to think about how we can build a support group of PT leaders over a virtual web or finding the space and time to come for retreats to share and discuss on leadership challenges. In addition, this support network would prove to be more crucial and needed as PT leaders and PT groups travelled out to countries like China and Cambodia and work with other ingenious groups or community groups which have not heard of playback theatre. It is important for PT leaders to maintain accountability and find access to PT resources within wider community. Currently my group, Tapestry is working with Mercy Team International (MTI), a non government organisation (NGO) based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in transferring PT skills to their social service staffs which comprises local and overseas staff with an agreement of 3 short term training trips over a year. It was an

incredibly enriching time for Tapestry and the people were won over by what playback theatre could offer in our first trip. However, we are aware that we need to provide solid foundation of PT skills and at the same time to encourage MTI to be connected with the wider PT community and get access to PT senior like Bev for support and consultation as the work is immensely huge there. Therefore, I think that there is a space which can be created continuously to encourage professional sharing about their overseas or new incentives among PT leaders and groups like what we did at the forum during APG.

At the end of the day, being a PT leader is not entirely about the amount of PT knowledge or skills you have, or having a gregarious and outgoing personality but it is about adopting a humble attitude that you don't always know what to do and being honest about it and giving others the benefit of the doubt as it is not always about you or your leadership. Having said that, I strongly believe that PT leaders need to develop a strong confidence in your own self and it can only grow through time and having a commitment for self reflection and finding support. There is a Chinese cooking habit that prescribes that the longer you brew your herbal soup, the more aromatic and taster is the soup. At the same time, we do not need to be afraid to let go when the members are ready to launch off themselves or start to take up shared leadership in the group.

Conclusion

Last but not least, I finish off my essay with a reminder from the bible as I brace myself in my future PT leadership journey "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbals. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I gave all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Love and charity is like the heart and soul of playback leadership. It is about learning to first love myself and embraces the parts of me which I do not like. At the same time, it is about showing genuine love to my playback peers and group members. This unconditional love is often harder to demonstrate especially when we have our own needs and own hurts to deal with. However, without love for the work (playback) and love for our team members, we can't show charity and compassion to others and on stage. Playback requires us to enlarge our hearts and be generous in giving. When we are able to achieve that, the group or the community would embrace us back. That's the attitude I want to have and to demonstrate love and charity every time I lead the group to do playback.

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