## Research project outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the project</th>
<th>Imagining Autism: Drama, Performance and Intermediality as Interventions for Autistic Spectrum Conditions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chief investigator(s)</td>
<td>Julie Beadle-Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other partners</td>
<td>Nicola Shaughnessy, Melissa Trimmingham School of Arts, University of Kent</td>
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<td>David Wilkinson, School of Psychology, University of Kent</td>
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<td>Jennifer Leigh, Lisa Richardson and Rebecca Whelton</td>
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<td>Funder</td>
<td>Arts and Humanities Research Council</td>
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<td>Duration of project</td>
<td>30 months</td>
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<td>Start date</td>
<td>October 2011</td>
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### Background and rationale

This project is a collaboration between the disciplines of drama and psychology. The main aim is to test the hypothesis that the problems which characterize autism (communication, social interaction, imagination) can be ameliorated through drama-based interventions using participatory and interactive sessions. The project sets out to establish proof on concept for the intervention and to identify the best evaluation measures to use for a larger scale efficacy trial.

The project uses drama techniques as an intervention for autism to facilitate language and communication, sociability and empathy and imagination and creativity, working with 12 children aged 5-11, with an autism diagnosis.

### Aims and objectives

The project aims to find out

- To what extent can Autistic Spectrum Conditions be ameliorated through drama?
- How can interactive performance practices be used to enhance our understanding of the autistic imagination?
- In what ways and to what extent do children with autism engage with these creative interactions e.g. imitation, symbolic play, imagination and embodied understanding?

Secondly, the evaluation of the project is aiming to explore:

- How can this best be evaluated?
- Do such interventions result in improved spontaneous ability in the areas of imitation, imagination, emotional recognition, empathy, language and communication, social skills (e.g. eye contact, joint attention, initiating social contact, responding to social contact)
- Can this effect be generalized? i.e. Does performance on basic cognitive tasks indicate that the intervention exerts widespread change on mental functioning in addition to any change in the
### Methods (100 words)

The evaluation will combine a multiple baseline design with a repeated measures pre-post intervention design. The intervention will be delivered to 3 groups of 6-8 children.

The measures used will be evaluating:
- Diagnosis and adaptive functioning
- Cognitive functioning
- Social Imagination, socialisation and social communication.

The Autism Diagnostic Observation Scale (ADOS) will be the main outcome measure.

Observations will use a mixed methods approach, combining momentary time sampling and interval recording approaches. Ratings of social skills, imagination and play will also be made by teachers and parents.

### Status

The project is currently in progress. The intervention has begun in school 1, and baseline data are being gathered for all other participating schools.

### Key findings (if completed) (200 words)

### Resulting publications (if completed)