NYU | STEINHARDT

ARTSPRAXIS

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 2b | 2020

SOCIAL JUSTICE PRACTICES FOR EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

ARTSPRAXIS

Emphasizing critical analysis of the arts in society.

ISSN: 1552-5236

ArtsPraxis Volume 7, Issue 2b looked to engage members of the global Educational Theatre community in dialogue around current research and practice. This call for papers was released in concert with the publication of ArtsPraxis Volume 7, Issue 1 and upon the launch of the new ArtsPraxis homepage. The submission deadline for Volume 7, Issue 2b was July 15, 2020.

Submissions fell under the category of Social Justice Practices for Educational Theatre.

Social Justice Practices for Educational Theatre

As of early June, 2020, we found ourselves about ten days into international protests following the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Protesters the world over made specific calls to action: acknowledge that black lives matter, educate yourself about social and racial injustice, and change the legal system that allows these heinous acts to go unpunished. In thinking through how we in the field of educational theatre could proactively address these needs, I reminded myself that there were many artists and educators who were already deeply engaged in this work. And while scholarship and practice around racial and social justice permeate so much of what we do, it was a good time to document current examples of best practices, organize them, and share them. As such, we prepared a companion issue of ArtsPraxis—this one, Volume 7, Issue 2b. We welcomed teachers, drama therapists, applied theatre practitioners, theatre-makers, performance artists, and scholars to offer vocabularies, ideas, strategies, practices, measures, and outcomes that responded to Social Justice Practices for Educational Theatre.

Article submissions addressed one of the following questions:

- How and why do we engage with social justice and anti-racist practices in the teaching of drama and theatre?
- How do teaching artists navigate social justice topics and liberatory pedagogy in their work?
- What is the role of drama education in social justice and anti-racist education?

- What is theatre for social justice and anti-racist pedagogy; what contribution do they make to social discourse?
- How do we prepare future theatre artists and educators to interrogate and promote social and racial justice?
- Who are the beneficiaries of theatre for social and racial justice?
- How can integrated-arts curricula facilitate teaching and learning about social justice?
- How is Theatre for Social Justice, in its diverse manifestations, reflected in our arts education research practices?
- How do we assess students' understanding of social justice in drama education and applied theatre programs?
- How can drama provide a forum to explore social justice and racism?
- What are innovative strategies for using drama to stimulate dialogue, interaction and change at this time?
- What ethical questions should the artist/educator consider when navigating social justice and anti-racist topics?
- How is theatre for young audiences actively pursuing a social justice agenda?
- Theatre for Young Audiences has always been in the forefront of theatrical innovation. So how can social justice be centered in work for young audiences?

We encouraged article submissions from interdisciplinary artists, educators, and scholars engaged in work associated with these topics. Our goals were to motivate a dialogue among a wide variety of practitioners and researchers that would enrich the development of educational theatre in the coming years.

Call for Papers
Papers were to be no longer than 4,000 words, had to be accompanied by a 200 word abstract and 100 word biographies for the author(s), and conformed to APA style manual. For this issue, articles could include traditional academic scholarship and narratives of practice.

Reviewing Procedures
Each article will be sent to two members of the editorial board. They will provide advice on the following:

- Whether the article should be published with no revisions/with revisions.
- The contribution the article makes to the arts community.
- Specific recommendations to the author about improving the article.
- Other publishing outlets if the article is considered unacceptable.

Editorial correspondence should be addressed to Jonathan P. Jones, New York University, Program in Educational Theatre, Pless Hall, 82 Washington Square East, Rm 223, New York, NY 10003, USA. Email: jonathan.jones@nyu.edu

ARTSPRAXIS

Volume 7 Issue 2b December 2020

Social Justice Practices for Educational Theatre

Editorial: I Can't Breathe i
Jonathan P. Jones

Tear the Walls Down: A Case for Abolitionist Pedagogy in Arts Education Teacher Training Programs 1
Durell Cooper

Identity Matters. All. The. Time. Questions to Encourage Best Practices in Applied Theatre 12
Rebecca Brown Adelman, Trent Norman, & Saira Yasmin Hamidi

Natasha Gordon in Conversation with Lucy Jeffery: 'It was around 7.27pm that suddenly diversity walked through the door' 26
Lucy Jeffery

***ImaginingOtherwise*: A Glossary of Arts Education Practice on the Cape Flats** 53
Aylwyn Walsh, Alexandra Sutherland, Ashley Visagie, & Paul Routledge

Process Drama as a Liberatory Practice 79
Joshua Rashon Streeter

Drama in Education as a Form of Critical Pedagogy: Democratising Classrooms in Chile 92
Catalina Villanueva & Carmel O'Sullivan

Theatre for Liberating Social Work Education 116
Alexis Jemal, Tabatha R. Lopez, Jenny Hipscher, & Brennan O'Rourke

A Welcoming Space for Whom?: Race and Inclusion in Suburban High School Theater Programs 132
Amanda Brown

ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 2b

Editorial: I Can't Breathe

JONATHAN P. JONES
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

I can't breathe.

This sentence has haunted me for all of my life.

As a young person, growing up in an idealized setting in Central Islip, a hamlet on Long Island, New York, widely known as the birthplace of post-war suburbia, tranquility and community subsumed my life. Most homes on our street, Myrtle Avenue, were different shades of the same three bedroom, split-level ranch. Next door at number 29 lived the Barbera family: mom (who shared a first name with my maternal grandmother, Doris), dad, elder son, and younger daughter, Lisa Marie. Understand, these are my earliest memories of the neighborhood and my life. The son would drive his Pontiac Firebird (black with light brown and gold namesake firebird appliqué on the hood)—naturally too fast and too loud, but appropriately seductive for the mid-1980s. When she got her license at 16, Lisa would drive her parents' newly purchased Dodge Aries. I'd watch from the window as they would come and go. If my siblings or I were out in the front yard,

Lisa would always give a wave with a warm, welcoming smile. This is what neighbors were to me—a picture-perfect painting of family and community.

Occasionally, I would go out alone in our backyard and climb along the fence that separated our yard from theirs. In summer, Lisa frequently sunbathed in a bikini on a folding lounge chair. Tanning, driving—this is what being a teenager appeared to be. But there was something more inviting—something that undoubtedly marked my life in more ways than I could possibly have imagined in those early years. Lisa had a singing voice like an angel. And so, it was no wonder that she was cast in the lead roles of her high school musicals: Dorothy Gayle in *The Wizard of Oz* in 1982 and Sandy Dumbrowski in *Grease* in 1983. This was 1980s American suburbia—and this was just what you did—what you *aspired* to do.

Figure 1: Lisa Barbera as Dorothy Gayle in the 1982 Central Islip Senior High School Production of *The Wizard of Oz*, directed by Matt Paduano.

Those performances were my first trips to the theatre. The auditorium at Central Islip Senior High School was cavernous—seating nearly a thousand audience members in the aqua blue upholstered chairs. It was a magical place then and it would continue to be later in my own teenage years. But as a child, sitting at the rear of the orchestra on house right, we watched as the girl next door was transported into the magical land of Oz—and I was hooked on theatre from that very moment.

And like the land of Oz, there was a dark underbelly to the idyllic suburban portrait—the human reality that nothing is ever so perfect as it seems. Lisa Barbera was afflicted with asthma. And so, just days after her 18th birthday in March of 1986, she found herself unable to breathe. As I recall, her mom found her—she'd collapsed at home. In the week that followed, she was hospitalized in a coma. I vividly remember my mom telling us that Lisa was improving—she could go to the bathroom on her own. At six years old, I'm not sure how I processed the physical properties of that—but I was told it was an improvement and that was the essential piece of information I needed to satiate my worry. There were a lot of prayers that week—and a lot of hope—but then came the tragic news.

At the time, I was in first grade at St. John of God School. Sister Eleanor was leading the morning prayers over the loudspeaker, as she did every day. Part of the morning ritual was to read off a list of intentions—folks for whom we should pray. The last on her list was a teenager who had passed away after a brief illness. My teacher, Mrs. Cone, asked if that was my neighbor, and I replied, "No, it can't be. My mom said she's doing better." And so I went through the day with hope and optimism riding high.

But Lisa wasn't better. She had died. My mom took my older sisters to the wake at Maloney's Funeral Home in the days that followed. I was too young to go—my mom was concerned that an open casket might be too traumatizing for me and my brother—the youngest of the five children—so only my three older sisters were allowed to go. After, my sister Tanya told me that the casket was closed. The family decided to donate her organs—she was "cut up," by Tanya's telling.

The next morning was the funeral service. We arrived to the church just as they were about to bring in the casket. As you can imagine, a popular senior in high school attracts a crowd, so my family had to stand through the service due to our late arrival and the short

supply of pews in the small parish church at St. John of God. Joseph, Lisa's dad, had his arm wrapped around Doris as they walked up the center aisle to their seats; she appeared tiny and child-like. Doris' face was so deeply red—a portrait of grief that has never managed to escape from my memory. We sang "On Eagle's Wings" at the close of the service, ever a staple in our church repertoire—forever tied to Lisa's funeral in my memory—long before Joe Biden would quote from the hymn during his victory speech when he was projected the winner of the 2020 United States' presidential election—a comforting tribute to the families of those who had lost a loved one to COVID-19.

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord
Who abide in his shadow for life
Say to the Lord, "My refuge—my rock in whom I trust"

And He will raise you up on eagle's wings
Bear you on the breath of dawn
Make you to shine like the sun
And hold you in the palm of His hands.

On the breath of dawn. We processed from the church down Wheeler Road that morning, passing the high school where those musical performances had embedded such joy into my soul. Along the one mile route to Queen of All Saints Cemetery, Lisa's peers paraded on the sidewalk for the entire journey. There was a final blessing in the small chapel, but it was much too small for the mourners to gather inside—so my family were out in the grass among the stricken classmates on that misty day. We waited in line and made our way inside—and there before her flower-covered silver casket, my mom whispered to us, "Say a prayer and say goodbye."

About two days later, Joseph came by our house to bring us some food. The outpouring of support from friends and neighbors had been overwhelming and there was just too much food for the three of them. My younger brother Jason didn't understand at all what had happened or why. We stood at the railing at the top of the stairs as Joseph relayed to my parents that they were holding it together as best they could. Jason piped in, "But where did Lisa go?" And Joe responded, "Well, she's gone over the rainbow."

Doris was never the same after that week so far as I could tell.

She never smiled. She rarely came by. She was ashen and red-faced, often silent and always sad. What else could she be? She never really recovered, and ten years later, she too died young. She was entombed in the mausoleum at Queen of All Saints where Lisa's body lay—mother and daughter together into eternity. Her daughter couldn't breathe and nothing could ever be the same.

HAUNTED

A few months later, my sister Nikki was hospitalized—she was 11 years old at the time. She shared the middle name 'Marie' with Lisa, and she too had asthma. One day, she told my mom that she couldn't breathe so they went to the doctor and he told them he had to admit her. While Nikki was in the hospital, my mom took us to the hospital parking lot—we were too young to go in as visitors, but she knew we needed to see her, even if only from the window. Because of Lisa. Having an asthma attack and going to the hospital meant only one thing in our young lives: she can't breathe and she's going to die. And so that viewing from the hospital window was for proof of life—to help us process that this time, things could be different. And thankfully, they were—but each day of Nikki's two week stay was no less terrifying for her or any of the rest of us.

My sister Tanya had asthma too, but it wasn't asthma that sent her to the hospital. Seven years after Lisa's untimely passing, Tanya and Nikki had taken a day off from school. My parents had been fighting much of the night, so they didn't want to leave my mom alone with my dad—but as my father passed out from drinking, my sisters decided to go see Nikki's boyfriend in the late morning. Much had changed in those seven years. Sun tanning was still a habitual part of summertime teenage existence, but driving wasn't an automatic privilege—at least not in our house, so they were walking. And as they crossed a busy intersection, Nikki was hit by a car. She was taken by ambulance to the hospital and a neighbor came to get my mom and take her there, leaving my father asleep in the house. He awoke when another neighbor came by to alert him of the accident and take him to the hospital as well. When my mom returned home with Tanya, Nikki, and my dad in the early afternoon, the fighting resumed. And as was the case in those days, my dad would get close to hitting my mom—and so Tanya stepped in between them. He hit her in the chest. She told him,

"Don't you *ever* put your hands on me again," and ran from the house.

A few minutes later, Tanya's friend Melanie came running into the house to tell my mother, "Tanya can't breathe."

And so my mom called 911. Police and an ambulance were there in no time. My brother Jason arrived home from school to this devastating scene. My mom told the police that she couldn't leave my drunken father home with Jason while she went to the hospital with Tanya—so the police told her that they would arrest my father and take him into custody if Tanya approved.

At this moment, my school bus turned the corner onto Myrtle Avenue. I'd been at school all day—I knew nothing of all that had transpired. But as we came up the road, there were the swirling lights of the ambulance and police cars—a sharp contrast to the suburban paradise of my youth. The younger kids on the bus said, "What's going on?" I looked from the window just as we were at number 29 and saw the police leading my father out of the house in handcuffs. My mom was talking with another group of police and trying to calm young Jason. After years of the drinking and abuse, I exclaimed, "Yes! They're finally taking him away."

When I got off the bus, I went to my mother. "Nikki's been in an accident," she told me. "I'm going to the hospital. Take care of your brother." And she climbed into the ambulance and they took off. And the police left. And when I went inside, there was Nikki, bruised and bandaged, crying on the couch. I was completely confused—wasn't *she* in the ambulance? Melanie sat with me. "It was Tanya in the ambulance," she said. "Your dad hit her in the chest and she couldn't breathe."

DISTRESSED

In September of 2011, I was visiting my family. My sister Danette was pregnant with her second son when she started to feel the familiar disquiet of early labor. As a teenager, I'd had a somewhat similar experience with my sister Nikki when she was pregnant with her first son, Zachary. I sat up with her all night as her contractions grew stronger and more close together. Between the pain, we talked about her hopes for her son and her anxieties about giving birth—up until we decided it was time to alert my mom that she needed to take her to the

hospital. But with Danette, this was a different situation—because it was much too early. At only seven months along, she drank some water and waited to see if the contractions would subside—but they never did. So I took her to the hospital.

There was a flurry of activity in the room over a period of hours—steroids to develop the baby's lungs ("just in case") and injections to stop the contractions—but little Steve came just the same. I have 3 nieces and 9 nephews now, but this was the only time I was in the room when one of them was born. Of the twelve, Steve was eighth in line, so my family had seen a lot of babies over a seventeen year period leading up to that time. And with each pregnancy, there was a steady flow of information—and those steroid shots to help the lungs develop were always spoken about, but never so necessary as they were then.

Danette was also born two months early, so this was not entirely unthinkable, but in the intervening decades between her birth and Steve's, hospital care had changed significantly. As such, it came as quite a shock that Steve would have to stay in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) for a month. So many wires and monitors, learning appropriate handwashing long before the pandemic made it customary, the smallest little cannula to deliver a steady flow of oxygen—these are the images that have stayed with me—and, of course, that he was the tiniest little baby I had ever seen.

His older brother Ian chose the baby's name. "Not Steven?" Danette asked. "No. His name is Steve," Ian replied. I was still there in the hospital later in the day when Ian arrived. Understand, the NICU is a quiet place. If anyone speaks, it is only in hushed tones as no one wants to disturb or distress the tiny newborns. The atmosphere was foreboding and I could sense Ian's apprehension as we approached. I helped him wash his hands and we followed his mother into the small corner of the NICU where Steve's incubator was set up. Ian had seen three of his cousins come home from the hospital—so he had a clear vision of what young Steve was meant to look like. And to his seven year old eyes, his expectations were unmet. He gave a small and quiet wave to his baby brother—a welcoming (Figure 2), of sorts. Ian didn't have a Lisa next door when he was six, so this experience was less alarming to him than it would have been for me at his age. "What are those tubes for," he asked. "Those are there to help him breathe," I told him. "Oh," he said. And I thought, *just keep breathing, little guy. Just*

keep breathing.

Figure 2: Ian waves hello to his little brother, Steve.

SCARRED AND HAUNTED

Over the last twenty years, I've lost four family members and one family friend to chronic obstructed pulmonary disease (COPD). First, it was my grandfather, Edwin L. Cole, in 2007. Just before his 80th birthday in 2002, he found himself unable to breathe. He was hospitalized for a short while and diagnosed. We had a large surprise gathering for the momentous birthday and I remember him coming into the fire-hall dragging an oxygen tank behind him. His hair was thinner than I remembered, as was he—though I'd only just seen him at Christmas a few months before. His voice was raspy, barely audible. He was slow and deliberate, a shadow of the man I had known for all of my life. And while he was grateful to have us there—his five daughters, twelve grandchildren, and the first handful of great-grandchildren—he struggled for every breath.

Just a few years prior, my mother, Donna Cole Jones, found herself in a similar situation. 27 years younger than her father, she too became ill and unable to breathe. She was hospitalized then for a short while and diagnosed. She'd smoked religiously since she was a

teenager, as had her parents before her, and we watched over a twenty-year period as her ability to breathe grew more challenging as each year passed. She continued working and shopping—going about her regular life—yet each time she came into the house, she would be gasping for air. “I have to catch my breath,” I heard her say dozens—if not hundreds—of times. She’d never stopped smoking though she’d tried to quit again and again. But, in a large and ever-growing family, there were a lot of difficult patches—and as her stress would rise, her need to smoke followed apace.

For the last two years of her life, she was home-bound. Simply walking from her bedroom to the kitchen winded her. Just last year, I was washing dishes on Christmas eve; she was looking at Facebook on the computer when I heard a loud and distressing gasp come from across the room. She’d just lost consciousness for a few minutes, but I didn’t know that at the time. “Call the ambulance,” I shouted to my sister, Danette. I knelt there cradling my mom in my arms and looked into her lost eyes and whispered, “Just keep breathing, mom. Just keep breathing.” The paramedics arrived shortly thereafter and by that time, she’d regained consciousness and had resumed flipping through pictures on Facebook. They said it was not unusual for someone in late-stage COPD to faint, but they saw no immediate evidence of stroke or heart attack. They recommended she go to the hospital to get checked out, but she refused. It was Christmas and she’d spent too many holidays in the hospital. She was staying home.

We came to her until COVID-19 kept us apart. And in her isolation, she smoked only more, asking at our daily calls, “When will things get back to normal?” I’m not one to sugarcoat difficult truths, so I responded, “I’m not sure they ever will.” And as the pandemic raged on, so too did her COPD, until it snuffed away her last breath.

In the intervening years, my cousins’ grandmother, Geraldine Cutrie, was also diagnosed. Tethered to her oxygen compressor, we visited her routinely. She did successfully quit smoking—but COPD is a progressive killer. Though her decline was less noticeable—at least to me—she too succumbed to her inability to breathe. Her son, my Uncle Douglas, followed suit, the day after my mom passed away. And just this fall, her granddaughter and his daughter, my cousin Tara’s best friend, Jackie Lynn Steele Haas, succumbed to the illness as well. And in each case, the mantra was omnipresent: I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe.

HUNTED

I only had one experience where I couldn't breathe. Around the age of ten or eleven, I walked alone to the 7-eleven convenience store which was around the corner from our house. My mom was volunteering for bingo night at St. John of God, my dad was at work, and my siblings were engaging in their latch-key mischief at home. I collected my coins and made my first adventure away from our house alone to buy a Slurpee and sunflower seeds.

I wasn't supposed to go out alone—no one even knew where I was—but this was a first moment of independence. I had enough money and I was emboldened by my budding-adolescence—and so I walked. While on the walk back—supplies successfully procured—three neighborhood boys approached my path. Mike and Simon Clark lived across the street from us. Simon was just a year older than me. They'd moved onto Myrtle Avenue a few years prior, sometime after Lisa Barbera's death and her family's subsequent moving away (the house bearing too many memories of their beloved Lisa)—though the Clark's too lived in one of the other cookie-cutter split-level ranch style houses. We were fast friends for a few years—but there were other influences in the neighborhood who were less kind. And as time went on, the Clark boys became better friends with Pedro Aragonese who lived on the next street. It was years in the making, but the unraveling of our friendship was complete by the time I'd made that journey.

Pedro and Mike egged on Simon. "Go on. Hit him."

I hadn't been much of a fighter as a kid, but I knew enough to know that running away wasn't an option. So I put my Slurpee and sunflower seeds down on the sidewalk and prepared to fight—whatever that was going to look like. 'Sucker punch' is the best characterization for what followed. One hit, straight to the gut. It wasn't much and didn't leave a mark—but it did its requisite damage. With the wind knocked out of me, I couldn't breathe.

I clutched my chest in horror. Pedro and Mike continued with their side coaching; this time focused on me. "Go on. Hit him back," they cajoled. But I could just barely catch my breath.

And so, this couldn't continue. After what seemed like forever, my wind returned and I burst into tears. I bent down, gathered my loot, and walked back to my house in shame. The boys were calling after me, "That's right. Run home you little cry baby!"

I tuned them out and walked on with less dignity but sure-fire gratitude for the air in my lungs.

TRAUMATIZED

As a living being, there is nothing so vital as the need for breath. Whether the ever-disappearing Amazon rainforest—artfully described as the earth's lungs—or the fish fleeing dead-zones in oxygen-depleted stretches of the ocean, the desperate need for breath is omnipresent in our modern world. And as a living, breathing being, the need for breath is well-known to me, but made all the more vivid by the afflictions and violence that stole the air from the lungs of those that I have loved. While Nikki, Tanya, and Steve overcame those early hospitalizations, so many more have been less lucky. And given these personal experiences, it is not at all surprising to me—though endlessly, hauntingly horrifying—to hear the cries for breath across this country and now around the world.

July 17, 2014—Eric Garner is put in a chokehold by police officers in New York City for selling loose cigarettes on the sidewalk. Unarmed and Black, his last words—his last pleas for mercy—are unsurprising and yet, horrifying. "I can't breathe."

August 24, 2019—Elijah McClain is put in a chokehold by police officers in Aurora, Colorado for wearing a ski mask and dancing in the street. Unarmed and Black, his pleas for mercy—are unsurprising and yet, horrifying. "I can't breathe."

May 25, 2020—in a Minneapolis street, a police officer places his knee on the neck of George Floyd for nine and a half minutes. Three other officers are on the scene and fail to intervene. Unarmed and Black, his pleas for mercy—are unsurprising and yet, horrifying. "I can't breathe."

In June of 2020, *The New York Times* documented 70 cases over the past decade where folks ranging in ages from 19 to 65—more than half Black—died at the hands of police after voicing, "I can't breathe" (Baker, et. al.). Each time I read one of their stories—each time I hear one of their names, that haunted feeling surrounds me. I've seen what asthma and COPD can do—and each time this intentional suffocation

is brought upon someone—often unarmed and Black—I am traumatized. Read their stories. Say their names. Stand against this inhumanity. They are just trying to breathe.

BREATHE

In a cable news appearance in the days following George Floyd’s murder, Maya Wiley, University Professor at the Milano School of Policy, Management, and Environment at The New School and now candidate for Mayor of New York City, described the moment in which we find ourselves as “a pandemic within a pandemic." The pandemic of racism, racial injustice, and oppression has been a feature of American life for 400 years. And be it a lynching, a chokehold, or a knee on the neck, suffocation has served as a potent threat to maintain the subjugation of a people who face shorter life expectancy (Bond & Herman, 2016) and “higher prevalences of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and chronic kidney disease” (Price-Haywood, et. al., 2020). And within this pandemic of racial oppression and disproportionate health afflictions, enter the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, and the viral pneumonia of COVID-19. Predictable but still shocking—“In a large cohort in Louisiana, 76.9% of the patients who were hospitalized with COVID-19 and 70.6% of those who died were black, whereas blacks comprise only 31% of the Ochsner Health population” (Price-Haywood, et. al., 2020).

As of this writing, the United States has surpassed 250,000 deaths from COVID-19 (Murphy and Siemaszko, 2020). Each day, hundreds or even thousands are added to that number. Every one, a name. Every name, a story. Every story, a heartbreak. I. Can’t. Breathe.

So what are we to do? At George Floyd’s funeral, Rev. Al Sharpton delivered a eulogy that appropriately responded to our predicament: take your knee off our neck.

> But God took an ordinary brother from the third ward, from the housing projects, that nobody thought much about but those that knew him and loved him. He took the rejected stone, the stone that the builder rejected. They rejected him for jobs. They rejected him for positions. They rejected him to play on certain teams. God

> took the rejected stone and made him the cornerstone of a movement that's going to change the whole wide world. I'm glad he wasn't one of these polished, bourgeois brothers, because we'd have still thought we was of no value. But George was just George. And now you have to understand if you bother any one of us, it's a value to all of us. Oh, if you would have had any idea that all of us would react, you'd have took your knee off his neck. If you had any idea that everybody from those in the third ward to those in Hollywood would show up in Houston and Minneapolis, and in Fayetteville, North Carolina, you'd have took your knee off his neck. If you had any idea that preachers, white and Black, was going to line up in a pandemic, when we're told to stay inside and we come out and march in the streets at the risk of our health, you'd have took your knee off his neck, because you thought his neck didn't mean nothing. But God made his neck to connect his head to his body. And you have no right to put your knee on that neck. (Sharpton, 2020)

This is not uniquely an American story. As Martin Luther King, Jr. told us, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (1963), so we all have work to do in service of removing the knee from the neck of the oppressed everywhere. For some, asthma is genetic; for others, it can be caused by air pollution. For environmental justice, we will fight. For many, COPD is caused by a history of smoking. For education and awareness, we will fight. For victims of domestic violence, we will fight. For victims of preventable disease, we will fight. And in the face of systemic racism, the cycle of poverty, implicit and explicit bias, we will fight.

Just last year, I quoted from Emma Lazarus’ *The New Colossus*, speaking then for the dignity and justice for refugees and immigrants. If we ever needed evidence, let it be clear—there is only one narrative—

> *Give me your tired, your poor,*
> *Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*
> *The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*
> *Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,*
> *I lift my lamp beside the golden door!* (Lazarus, 1883)

Yearning to breathe free. On eagle’s wings. Lisa Barbera. Edwin L.

Cole. Donna Cole Jones. Geraldine Cutrie. Douglas Cutrie. Jackie Lynn Steele Haas. Eric Garner. Elijah McClain. George Floyd. And too many more.

Take a deep breath. Lift your lamp. Welcome them in. And let's get to work.

PREVIEW OF ISSUES 7a AND 7b

Faced with lockdowns and the requisite turn to distance learning, educators everywhere took to action. My colleague, friend, and member of our editorial board, Daphnie Sicre, immediately put out an international call for suggestions and advice on how to teach theatre online, crowd-sourcing a life-raft of suggestions for all manner of activities and content, Teaching Theatre Online: A Shift in Pedagogy Amidst Coronavirus Outbreak. A month later, I realized that in light of new approaches being spearheaded across the field—whether for teaching theatre, directing and producing theatre, or using theatre to process trauma, isolation, and depression—the need to document this experience was vital, and so I put out a call for papers for Volume 7, Issue 2a—an issue that would be open to narratives of practice in order to draw in a cross section of practitioners from across the field, rather than prioritizing academic research to which we might normally adhere.

And then George Floyd was murdered. And my mom died two days later. And my uncle the day after that. And protests erupted across the United States and, indeed, around the world. And in spite of my grief, I saw very clearly the work ahead: "A pandemic within a pandemic," Maya Wiley said. In many fields, a total reassessment was needed: where have we failed and what can we do? In educational theatre, we were not immune—we needed that reassessment too. But as reading lists were furiously posted on social media; as well-meaning but perhaps ill-advised statements of solidarity were added to email signatures; as an outpouring of unheard voices in the theatre community flooded our consciousness, I realized—*I know some folks who have been in this fight for a long time—and while a reassessment is necessary, there is good work out there that we need to center—to promote—to raise up*. And so I put out another call, this time for

Volume 7, Issue 2b. We are only scratching the surface in these companion publications, but I am grateful to our contributors who have elected to share their work with us in order to push the field forward.

Issue 2a

In Issue 2a, the articles focus on educational theatre in the time of COVID-19 and cover the scope of classroom-based educational theatre practice in urban and rural K-12 settings, colleges and universities, and on implementing research-based theatre online. **Roxane E. Reynolds** describes her experience transitioning to remote instruction in a secondary school in Dallas, Texas. **Jessica Harris** illuminates the ways in which the digital divide (lack of access to high speed internet to rural areas and/or folks from low-socioeconomic backgrounds) in rural Fluvanna County, Virginia challenges theatre educators to re-think their approach to distanced learning.

On the college front, **Alexis Jemal, Brennan O'Rourke, Tabatha R. Lopez, and Jenny Hipscher** were tasked with devising a theatre in education (TIE) program for a course at CUNY School of Professional Studies in New York. Their liberation-based social work practice required a new approach as they transitioned online. **Cletus Moyo and Nkululeko Sibanda** document transitioning practical theatre courses to distance learning at Lupane State University in Zimbabwe, echoing the challenges related to equity and access that Harris experienced. **Chris Cook, Tetsuro Shigematsu, and George Belliveau** at the University of British Columbia in Canada query: What teaching practices endure in the online research-based theatre classroom, and what new ways practices were fostered through their emerging partnership with technology?

For the final article in this issue, **Saharra L. Dixon, Anna Gundersen, and Mary Holiman** take us out of the classroom and into the field with their reflection on creating and presenting *The #StayHome Project*, a devised ethnodrama. Their article explores theatre's ability to help communities process collective trauma, build resiliency, and facilitate dialogue around politics and what it means to return to a "new normal".

Issue 2b

In Issue 2b, the articles focus on social justice practices for educational

theatre. First are a series by theatre artists and practitioners who espouse theoretical frameworks for engaging in social justice theatre education and theatre making. **Durell Cooper** explores the connections between hip hop pedagogy and culturally responsive arts education in a 21st century arts education framework. **Rebecca Brown Adelman, Trent Norman, and Saira Yasmin Hamidi** propose ethical questions that artists and educators should consider when navigating social justice and anti-racist topics. **Lucy Jeffery** shares her conversation with award-winning playwright Natasha Gordon about her experience as a Caribbean-British actor and playwright whose debut play *Nine Night* (2018) made her the first black British female playwright to have a play staged in London's West End. The conversation evaluates the importance of Gordon's work and visibility on the National Theatre and West End stages. Finally, **Aylwyn Walsh, Alexandra Sutherland, Ashley Visagie, and Paul Routledge** present a glossary of arts education practice that they developed after analyzing the key social justice concerns faced by young people in Cape Flats, South Africa, setting them against the learning from their arts-based project, *ImaginingOtherwise*.

The second series includes articles that look at the possibilities for social justice in drama pedagogy. **Joshua Rashon Streeter** considers process drama as a liberatory practice to reposition theatre educators as critical pedagogues. **Catalina Villanueva and Carmel O'Sullivan** analyze the critical pedagogical potential of drama in education (DIE) for the practices of Chilean teachers. **Alexis Jemal, Tabatha R. Lopez, Jenny Hipscher, and Brennan O'Rourke** provide a critical reflection on their work and experience providing a forum for social work students to explore social and racial justice and innovative strategies for using drama to stimulate dialogue, interaction, and change. Lastly, **Amanda Brown** leaves us with a provocation for race and inclusion in theatre programs: For whom are we creating a welcoming space?

LOOKING AHEAD

Our next issue (Volume 8, Issue 1) will focus on articles under our general headings (drama in education, applied theatre, and theatre for young audiences/youth theatre) looking to engage members of the

educational theatre community in our ongoing discussions about theory and practice. In light of the breadth of contributions we received for these current issues, we will again include a call for narratives of practice in addition to traditional academic research. That issue will publish in mid-2021. Thereafter, look to the Program in Educational Theatre at NYU for information on the Verbatim Performance Lab and Volume 8, Issue 2 of *ArtsPraxis* which will again have a focus relating to current trends in the field—more specifics will be available when Volume 8, Issue 1 is launched. Until then, read, rest, recharge, and get to work.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Jones, J. P. (2020). Editorial: I can't breathe. *ArtsPraxis, 7* (2a and 2b), i-xix.

REFERENCES

Baker, M., Valentino-DeVries, J., Fernandez, M., & LaForgia, M. (2020, June 29). Three Words. 70 Cases. The Tragic History of 'I Can't Breathe.' The deaths of Eric Garner in New York and George Floyd in Minnesota created national outrage over the use of deadly police restraints. There were many others you didn't hear about. *The New York Times.*

Bond, M. J., & Herman, A. A. (2016). Lagging life expectancy for Black men: A public health imperative. *American Journal of Public Health, 106,* 7, pp. 1167-1169.

King, M. L., Jr. (1963, April 16). Letter from a Birmingham jail. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University.

Lazarus, E. (1883). The new colossus.

Murphy, J., & Siemaszko, C. (2020, November 18). U. S. surpasses 250,000 coronavirus deaths as virus mortality rate surges. *NBC News*.

Price-Haywood, E. G., Burton, J., Fort, D., & Seoane, L. (2020). Hospitalization and mortality among Black patients and white patients with COVID-19. *New England Journal of Medicine, 382*,

26, pp. 2534-2543. doi: 10.1056/NEJMsa2011686
Sharpton, A. (2020). George Floyd funeral eulogy transcript.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jonathan P. Jones, PhD is a graduate from the Program in Educational Theatre at New York University, where he earned both an M.A. and a Ph.D. He conducted his doctoral field research in fall 2013 and in spring of 2014 he completed his dissertation, *Drama Integration: Training Teachers to Use Process Drama in English Language Arts, Social Studies, and World Languages*. He received an additional M.A. in English at National University and his B.A. in Liberal Arts from the NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Jonathan is certified to teach English 6-12 in the state of California, where he taught Theatre and English for five years at North Hollywood High School and was honored with The Inspirational Educator Award by Universal Studios in 2006. Currently, Jonathan is an administrator, faculty member, coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor at NYU Steinhardt.

Jonathan has conducted drama workshops in and around New York City, London, and Los Angeles in schools and prisons. As a performer, he has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Town Hall, The Green Space, St. Patrick's Cathedral, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, The Southbank Centre in London UK, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. He co-produced a staged-reading of a new musical, The Throwbacks, at the New York Musical Theatre Festival in 2013.

Jonathan's directing credits include *Hamlet, Twelfth Night, Julius Caesar, Elsewhere in Elsinore, Dorothy Rides the Rainbow, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Bye Bye Birdie, The Laramie Project, Grease, Little Shop of Horrors*, and *West Side Story*. Assistant directing includes *Woyzeck* and *The Crucible*. As a performer, he has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Town Hall, The Green Space, St. Patrick's Cathedral, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, The Southbank Centre in London UK, Bord Gáis Energy Theatre in Dublin, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Production credits include co-producing a staged-reading of a new musical, *The Throwbacks*, at the New York Musical Theatre Festival and serving as

assistant production manager and occasionally as stage director for the New York City Gay Men's Chorus since 2014, most recently directing *Quiet No More: A Celebration of Stonewall* at Carnegie Hall for World Pride, 2019.

At NYU, his courses have included Acting: Scene Study, American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Assessment of Student Work in Drama, Development of Theatre and Drama I, Devising Educational Drama Programs and Curricula, Directing Youth Theatre, Drama across the Curriculum and Beyond, Drama in Education I, Drama in Education II, Dramatic Activities in the Secondary Drama Classroom, Methods of Conducting Creative Drama, Theory of Creative Drama, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Elementary Drama, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Secondary Drama, Shakespeare's Theatre, and World Drama. Early in his placement at NYU, Jonathan served as teaching assistant for American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Seminar in Elementary Student Teaching, Theatre of Brecht and Beckett, and Theatre of Eugene O'Neill and worked as a course tutor and administrator for the study abroad program in London for three summers. He has supervised over 50 students in their student teaching placements in elementary and secondary schools in the New York City Area. Prior to becoming a teacher, Jonathan was an applicant services representative at NYU in the Graduate School of Arts and Science Enrollment Services Office for five years.

Recent publications include *Paradigms and Possibilities: A Festschrift in Honor of Philip Taylor* (2019) and Education at Roundabout: It's about Turning Classrooms into Theatres and the Theatre into a Classroom (with Jennifer DiBella and Mitch Matteson) in *Education and Theatres: Beyond the Four Walls* (edited by Michael Finneran and Michael Anderson; 2019).

In addition to his responsibilities at NYU, Jonathan teaches Fundamentals of Public Speaking, History of Theatre, and Introduction to Theatre at CUNY: Borough of Manhattan Community College.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 2b

Tear the Walls Down: A Case for Abolitionist Pedagogy in Arts Education Teacher Training Programs

DURELL COOPER

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

This article takes an investigative look at the role hip hop pedagogy could play in the liberation of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students through arts education curriculum while simultaneously interrogating the role of white co-conspirators in a school context. This article explores the connections between hip hop pedagogy and culturally responsive arts education in a 21st century arts education framework through exploring the usage of the hip hop cipher in classroom settings. Furthermore, this article explores the concept of abolitionist pedagogy and the role white educators should play in the culpability of the liberation movement of BIPOC students. Ideas of anti-racism, white fragility, and the violence perpetrated by schools on BIPOC students are highlighted in an attempt to mitigate further damage of BIPOC youth.

INTRODUCTION

The convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic of systemic racism has engendered an investigation into the original sin of modernity. Recently, I rewatched DuVernay's film *When They See Us* (*WTSU*) on Netflix which is a four part series detailing the infamous case of the Exonerated Five a.k.a. The Central Park Five. Unlike the documentary *13th,*[1] *WTSU* is a dramatized retelling of the story using historical facts pieced together from newspapers, police taps, interviews, etc. Without going into specifics of the case, suffice it to say it was a case of BIPOC teenage boys being presumed guilty before being afforded the privilege of innocent before proven guilty (DuVernay, 2019). Indeed the presumption of innocence is a fundamental right rarely afforded to BIPOC youth, or, as Anna Deavere Smith describes it, "Rich kids get 'mischief', poor kids get pathologized and incarcerated" to emphasize how society can work against those living in the margins (Zea, 2018).

Although, I am no longer a K-12 classroom teacher, I do remember my strategy of shifting their energies and it was always me standing at the door to greet them and let them know that at this moment we are in this together. Being an effective teacher requires an incredible amount of patience and hope, or, as Dr. Shawn Ginwright calls it in his seminal work, *Hope and Healing in Urban Education: How Urban Activists and Teachers are Reclaiming Matters of the Heart*, "radical hope" and "radical love" (2015, p. 38) to be effective in holistically educating BIPOC students. The hope that despite all of the historical evidence to the contrary that one day BIPOC students could inhabit a full life of liberation from the structural oppression and violence enacted upon them daily by the very same system meant to lead to their emancipation.

This article is being written during the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Tayler, Ahmaud Arbery, Rashard Brooks, Dominique Fells, Riah Milton and countless other slain Black lives. As an intersectional scholar who interrogates systems of inequality macrocosmically, I understand that a conversation on the educational industrial complex cannot happen in a vacuum without acknowledging that the first system of structural

[1] *13th* is a documentary by DuVernay in which "scholars, activists, and politicians analyze the criminalization of African Americans and the U. S. prison boom" (2016).

violence most BIPOC youth face first-hand is that of institutions of learning. Just as a white officer kneeled on the neck of George Floyd for over eight minutes, I have witnessed white educators and those of other hues use metaphorical knees to suffocate the dreams of BIPOC youth. This article is an indictment of the system as it currently exists in hopes of filing a motion towards reimagining the future of our schools. To be clear: this article will not offer any resolutions—only a rumination to dismantle the current system in order to rebuild it into what it should have been from the beginning.

INTERROGATING THE SYSTEM

The function of schools should be to educate and liberate BIPOC students, thus giving way to the ideological underpinnings of abolitionist pedagogy brilliantly articulated by critical race theorist Dr. Bettina Love in the work, *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*:

> To achieve the goals of abolitionist teaching, we must demand the impossible and employ a radical imagination focused on intersectional justice through community building and grassroots organizing…to help educators understand and recognize America and its schools as spaces of Whiteness, White rage, and White supremacy, all of which function to terrorize students of color. (Love, 2020, pp. 12-13)

Thus, we cannot expect schools, school administration, teachers, or other extensions of white supremacy culture to be both oppressor and liberator. In fact, in the truest Freirean principles of binary concepts, it is impossible. Schools should serve to break the cycle of structural violence that is perpetuated by systems of oppression such as criminal justice, housing, and health care. Instead, schools which should be a pathway towards freedom have turned into a tool used for manipulation to indoctrinate BIPOC students into white supremacy culture.

Many schools function to serve the interest of the prison industrial complex. *How?* By not providing curriculum that aims to teach critical thinking skills based in culturally relevant pedagogy, or, as Dr. Christopher Emdin in *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood…and the Rest of Y'all Too* calls it, "reality pedagogy," (Emdin, 2017, p. 27)

which has formed a school of thought he coined in his upcoming book, *Ratchetdemic* (2021). The goal of ratchetdemicology is to value the intuitional knowledge that BIPOC students bring into the classroom over the institutional knowledge they are being force-fed through whitewashed curriculum which does not speak to their epistemological understanding of self which has been forged through the genius of their lived experiences. Which is to say that BIPOC students' ancestral wisdom passed down epigenetically is just as valuable as information said students will acquire over the course of their academic careers from an institution. The same ancestral wisdom that helped Harriet Tubman use the stars to navigate towards liberation for herself and her people. Tubman did not formally study astrology or cosmology in a school. In fact, as an enslaved person it was illegal for her or any other enslaved person to learn how to read, write, or attend formal educational institutions. So her knowledge acquisition and survival hinged on her intuitional knowledge of the universe. Indeed, in another era perhaps she would have been an astrophysicist, but in her time, she used her genius to be an abolitionist. Dare I posit that ancestral or intuitional wisdom which is innate to BIPOC students is even more valuable than what any institution could ever teach them?

In the book *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*, Dr. Gholdy Muhammad articulates that:

> History from Black communities tells us that educators don't need to empower youth or give them brilliance or genius. Instead, the power and genius is already within them. Genius is the brilliance, intellect, ability, cleverness, and artistry that have been flowing through their minds and spirits across the generations. This cultivation calls for reaching back into students' histories and deeply knowing them and their ancestries to teach in ways that raise, grow, and develop their existing genius. (Muhammad & Love, 2020, p. 13)

In the above text Muhammad further accentuates the pricelessness of ancestral wisdom. In order to break the cycle of generational trauma inflicted upon BIPOC students in the educational industrial complex, it is necessary to reimagine the role of schools in our society and the role of white educators from that of an ally to that of a co-conspirator.

"Why?" Because as long as those with power function to protect the status quo they will never give up their position to that power leaving those living within the margins on the outside looking in.

It has been articulated by multiple unknown sources that allies take up space while co-conspirators take up risk. As a co-conspirator, white educators should aspire to be culpable in the liberation of BIPOC students. However, white educators cannot move from ally to co-conspirator without first confronting their privilege, "White folx cannot be co-conspirators until they deal with the emotionality of being White…Studying Whiteness, White rage, and violence is a fundamental step to moving from ally to co-conspirator" (Love, 2020, p. 144) elucidating the necessity for white people to negotiate their privilege in a space like an educational institution which has never been a neutral space, or, as Ibram X. Kendi writes in *How to be an Antiracist*, "Just as racist power racializes people, racist power racializes space" (2019, p. 169). Furthermore, white race theorist Robin Diangelo in her book titled, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* details the inoculation in white supremacist culture for white people was a byproduct of being born white and although most white people "[w]ould not choose to be socialized into racism and white supremacy. Unfortunately, we didn't have that choice" (2018, p. 69). She then goes on to write, "Now it is our responsibility to grapple with how this socialization manifests itself in our daily lives and how it shapes our responses when it is challenged" (Diangelo, 2018, p. 69), vividly detailing the necessary work white people need to do in order to reconcile with the privilege brought onto them by their whiteness.

Dare I posit that until a white educator has committed to doing the work necessary to fix one's self that they will never be fully engaged in the process of liberating BIPOC students in a system of structural oppression that historically has benefited white people? This ideology is the foundation of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; using binary concepts, "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people—they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress" (2000, p. 178), further compounding the pandemic of structural violence perpetuated in schools against BIPOC students. My intention through this article is not to provide a complete roadmap for white educators. Conversely, my people have been trying for over 400 years to try to

encourage white people to see our brilliance and recruit those willing to do the necessary righteous work over to the side of abolition, and frankly, it has gotten tiresome. The horses have been led to water for centuries and many of them have continually refused to drink. So, in true abolitionist call-in culture, if a white educator is willing to move from oppressor to liberator, then that is a journey said educator must take, first, independently, and secondly, collectively with others like them.

TOWARDS ABOLITION

In order to move more towards abolition, educators and school administrators—particularly those who are white and in power or those who have proximity to whiteness and power—must ask themselves what are they willing to give up in order to give in to the ancestral wisdom of BIPOC students? One such way is the incorporation of Hip Hop pedagogy into academic spaces and curriculum. In his book, *Hip Hop Genius: Remixing High School Education*, Sam Seidel cautions against the dangers of only teaching students canonized texts mandated by curricular standards:

> The enforcement of such beliefs can alienate students, deny educators the freedom to be creative, prevent students from being exposed to many excellent texts, and perpetuate racism, classism, sexism, and other systems of haterations. (2013, p. 90)

Seidel further posits:

> If hip-hop education is not limited to using hip-hop culture to entice students or engaging hip-hop music as content to study for the purpose of teaching academic skills, but instead is a continuation of the traditions of popular education and critical pedagogy, then it can be a movement toward liberation. (2013, p. 93)

This further expounds upon the usage of hip-hop pedagogy as a means of abolitionist teaching.

Delving into one specific aspect of hip-hop culture and the integration of hip-hop pedagogy with theatre pedagogy lies at the cross

sectional investigation of the phenomena of the cipher. Individuals stand in a circle almost equidistant from each other while displaying incredible verbal agility in an act that is equal parts defiance and collaboration. Call and response often plays an integral role in ciphers and requires the full attention of all members of the cipher, even those with a more passive role. Active listening is a crucial component in making a cipher successful. Indeed, the person speaking is looking to other members of the cipher for affirmation that the words they are saying are resonating with people both literally and figuratively. The cipher, in many ways, is collaboration personified.

Etymologically, the word cipher which comes from, "Middle French as cifre and Medieval Latin as cifra, from the Arabic صفر ṣifr = zero. 'Cipher' was later used for any decimal digit."[2] Now, given what we know about binary code, it is all either a numerical "0" or a "1." Furthermore, cipher, as a noun, according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, can also mean "a message in code" (2020) along with other possible meanings. Indeed, the cipher of which I speak takes place when people stand equidistant in a perfect circle facing one another in an exchange of words, sounds, energy, and frequencies. This is clearly a code—or at least a set of rules that may seem like chaos to an outsider not familiar with the phenomena—that allows for the interjection of words, sounds, or phrases by individual participants without rejection from the group. These interjections are known as ad-libs. The ad-lib serves multiple purposes in a cipher: it can encourage the speaker with the spotlight to continue on with their rhyme scheme; it could call attention to the fact that the participant who is adding the ad-lib is actively listening to the main speaker; or, it could be used as an alarm alerting the other participants of the cipher that the person who is adding the ad-lib is now ready to join the cipher as the primary speaker. One popular contemporary hip-hop group that effectively uses the ad-lib to add emphasis and color to their rhyme delivery is the trio the Migos, who is probably best known for their 2018 single 'Bad and Bougie.'[3] In it, many ad-libs can be heard throughout the song used by various members of the group to give a distinguishing characteristic to their oratorical catalog. What type of arts educator would oppose seeing students as actively engaged in one of their lessons as participants are in a hip-hop cipher?

[2] Cipher etymology by etymology.com
[3] 'Bad and Bougie' lyrics, by Migos

As an artist scholar I can see direct parallels with the skills developed in a cipher to the skills developed during improvisational (improv) theatre games, many of which also take place in a circle. It was education professor and author Marc Lamont Hill that first asked the question, “How could the notion of a ‘hip-hop cipher,’ which marks the democratic ethos of hip-hop culture, allow us to reimagine classroom participation?” (2009, p. 124), which further articulates my line of inquiry of the foundational democratic similarities between cipher participation and improvisation. The first rule of improv is to say, ‘yes and’, which is also the fundamental principle a hip-hop cipher is built off of. More parallels can be drawn in the use of techniques such as ad-libs that appear in both forms of art as well. Both art forms require a certain mental dexterity that require in-the-moment decision making. My goal is to continually build connections between what is taught as theatre education in traditional school settings (i.e., improv games) and what we could be taught as part of a hip hop infused curriculum (i.e., the cipher).

CONCLUSION

Hip-Hop scholar Brian Mooney developed a pedagogical framework that he calls “Breakbeat Pedagogy” in a book by the same name which he describes as, “the art of the Hip Hop event…to initiate a democratic space for the elements to live and thrive within a school community” (2016, p. 52). Mooney goes on to write about his positionality as a white hip hop pedagogue which serves as a call to action for other white educators:

> Coming to understand and accept my own privilege is a lifelong process…As uncomfortable as it might be, we must process the terms of our own privileges and reflect on what it means for us as teachers. This is perhaps the most ‘Hip Hop’ thing we can do. (2016, pp. 6-7)

This could not be a more honest statement. If an educator—white or otherwise—cannot be authentic, then their method to reach BIPOC students will simply not fully connect regardless of how “culturally relevant” (Ladson-Billings, 1995) their curriculum is made to be. Hip

hop culture is but a refracted perspective of individuals who have been traditionally marginalized and shut out from mainstream society by a refusal of that mainstream society to allow those individuals to fully assimilate. If an educator training program does not prepare teachers to understand and cultivate BIPOC students holistically from an epicenter of “radical love” (Ginwright, 2015) and abolitionist pedagogy, then that program is ultimately being built on a house of cards that perpetuates violence against the same students those teachers took a silent oath to liberate. And similar to other houses made of cards, that program will eventually crumble.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Cooper, D. (2020). Tear the walls down: A case for abolitionist pedagogy in arts education teacher training programs. *ArtsPraxis, 7* (2b), 1-11.

REFERENCES

DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. London: Allen Lane.

DuVernay, A. (Director). (2016). *13th* [Video file]. Kandoo Films.

DuVernay, A. (Director). (2019). *When they see us* [Video file]. Harpo Productions. Retrieved May 5, 2020.

Emdin, C. (2017). *For white folks who teach in the hood...and the rest of y'all too: Reality pedagogy and urban education*. New York: Beacon Press.

Emdin, C. (forthcoming, 2021). *Ratchetdemic*. New York: Beacon Press.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition. New York: Continuum International Publishing.

Freire, P. (2020). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed,* 30th Anniversary ed. New York: Continuum International Publishing.

Ginwright, S. (2016). *Hope and healing in urban education: How urban activists and teachers are reclaiming matters of the heart*. New York: Routledge.

Hill, M. (2009). *Beats, rhymes, and classroom life: Hip-hop pedagogy and the politics of identity*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Kendi, I. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. New York: One World.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice, 34,* 3, pp. 159-165. Retrieved June 14, 2020.

Love, B. (2020). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. New York: Beacon Press.

Merriam-Webster. (2020). Cipher. *The Merriam-Webster dictionary*.

Mooney, B. (2016). *Breakbeat pedagogy: Hip hop and spoken word beyond the classroom walls*. New York: Peter Lang.

Muhammad, G., & Love, B. L. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. New York: Scholastic.

Seidel, S. (2013). *Hip-hop genius: Remixing high school education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Smith, A. D. (2019). *Notes from the field*. New York: Anchor.

Zea, K. (Director), & Smith, A. D. (Writer). (2018). *Notes from the field* [Video file]. HBO Studios. Retrieved July 15, 2020.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Durell Cooper is the Founder and CEO of Cultural Innovation Group; a boutique consulting agency specializing in systems change and collaborative thought leadership. He is also a Program Officer at the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs overseeing grants administration for approximately 200 arts and cultural organizations. He is a dual-state certified arts educator holding credentials in both Texas and New York State as a Theater teacher. Prior to joining DCLA, he worked at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc. in the Marketing Department conducting outreach to veteran service organizations and for Lincoln Center Education recruiting and training teaching artists as well as several community engagement initiatives aimed at increasing equity and inclusion in NYC public schools. He's been a panelist for Lincoln Center Education's Summer Forum and the New York State Council on the Arts. Durell is a 2018 Graduate of Stanford's Impact Program for Arts Leaders (IPAL) as well as a 2017 graduate of the

National Guild's Community Arts Education Leadership Institute (CAELI). He is also the creator and host of the web series, *Flow*. Currently, he is pursuing his Doctorate at New York University.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 2b

Identity Matters. All. The. Time.
Questions to Encourage Best Practices in Applied Theatre

REBECCA BROWN ADELMAN

TRENT NORMAN

SAIRA YASMIN HAMIDI

AFFINITY ARTS CONSULTING

ABSTRACT

As applied theatre practitioners we have the opportunity to foster work and dialogues as the demand and responsibility to talk about race is heightened in the U.S. Our decades of experience support that identity is always at play and must be addressed in our theatre work otherwise we are doing a disservice to the art and community. We feel the responsibility to be conscious of identity and intentional with it in order to make theatre that is accessible to all. We have found highlighting identity is an essential tool to create, engage, and practice skills in the dialogues we strive to inspire and in opportunities for transformation and growth. It connects us to probe "what ethical questions should artists and educators consider when navigating social justice and anti-racist topics?" Over our two plus decades of working together and

creating, performing, and facilitating interactive theatre performances on social justice and anti-racists topics, our experience has brought us to learn, time and time again, that identity and its impact matter.

While facilitating a performance about race at a conference in Boulder, Colorado, the predominately white audience was having a lively conversation that was infused with a colorblind ideology. Statements claiming "I treat everyone the same" and "I don't see race" were very present during the session. The tenor of the conversation changed when a woman in the front row raised her hand to say, "If you do not see me as a Black woman, then you don't see me at all."

Our experience is that white people generally do not want to talk about racial identity. This is not uncommon, "In a colorblind world, whites, who are unlikely to experience the negative effects of race, can actively ignore the continued significance of racism in American society, justify the current social order, and feel more comfortable with their relative privileged standing in society. Racial-ethnic minorities however, who regularly experience the negative effects of race, experience colorblind ideologies differently. In a world that denies their racially marked experiences and outcomes, racial-ethnic minorities feel less comfortable, less invested…" (Fryberg and Stephens, 2010). Avoiding the history and impact of race does not make racism disappear. It is our belief that an ongoing self-interrogation of identity, particularly race, in all forms of theatre, is an important competency to have as much as the theatrical techniques themselves. By integrating the concept of identity into our practice, we have the ability to produce brave conversations and necessary dialogues.

The following experience underscores how identity continuously manifests in our applied theatre work. Furthermore, it exemplifies the potential for ongoing learning that stems from our responsive approach to facilitation. During the hot-seat[1] portion of a performance primarily addressing socio-economic status, a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) actor in the scene expressed frustration about the interactions they were having and muttered, "Argh. Fucking white

[1] Hot seating is a common drama strategy where a performer or participant in role answers questions from the audience or fellow participants who may or may not be in role (Clark, Dobson, Goode, & Neelands, 1997, p. 60).

people." This unrehearsed moment changed the focus of the conversation away from socio-economic status to race. Audience members pushed the actor, who was still in character, to recant their statement. The actor defended their position and did not succumb to the pressure to apologize. Instead they owned their frustrated reaction based on their experiences of whiteness. We shifted focus and facilitated the impact of the moment within the larger context of race, campus climate, class, and how identity impacts our perceptions and experiences.

Clearly, the gritty, real, and raw experiences of people from different identities working their way through race needed further investigation. We created a performance called *F'N White People*. The new scene involved three friends (two BIPOC, one white) sharing their experiences on a predominantly white campus, where one of the BIPOC characters says the titular line. The scenario explores the impact of race from different perspectives while the characters navigate their emotions and struggle to stay engaged with each other. It also portrays the hard work required to maintain relationships.

We debuted *F'N White People* as a public performance. The title generated attention and its publicity was met with controversy and contention. Performance night had a packed house and included top university administrators. People attended expecting conflict. What the performance delivered was a deliberate dive into race while staying connected despite all the complicated emotions. The scene became one of our most requested on campus and in the community. In addition to providing opportunities for deeper dialogues on race, the performance had other impacts as well.

Coauthor Saira shares:

> My first experience of the ensemble was at a public performance about transgender identities and their complexities. After the show, I approached one of the actors and introduced myself. I had heard of upcoming auditions and wanted to get a sense from him if it was going to be worth my time. We were both BIPOC actors trying to effect positive sociocultural change at the predominantly white institution. I asked him what the ensemble was like and whether it was just another campus theatre group of well-intended white liberals. He knew exactly what I meant. "Naw, we have a show called *F'N White People*," he shared. I understood instantly that

> this ensemble was different and wasn't afraid to address issues of whiteness and white supremacy. What I didn't know then was that it would soon become my new creative and political family.

_____

We are applied theatre practitioners. Trent identifies as a Black man, Rebecca as a white woman, and Saira as a Desi woman. Our practices use the tools of theatre to explore concepts of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) with interactive trainings, workshops, and performances. Augusto Boal states:

> I offer some proof that theatre is a weapon. A very efficient weapon...For this reason, the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilize it for domination. In doing so, they change the very concept of what 'theatre' is. But the theatre can also be a weapon for liberation. For that, it is necessary to create appropriate theatrical forms. Change is imperative. (Boal, 1974)

As creatives, in the context of domination, we keep learning how to consider the larger implications of identity and its sociopolitical impacts when making theatre in order to bend our efforts towards liberation.

Rebecca and Trent formed The Interactive Theatre Project (ITP) in 1999 at the University of Colorado, Boulder and are the co-founders of Affinity Arts Consulting (AAC). We structured both organizations from a commitment to represent as many identities, seen and unseen, in the communities we practice. Our co-leadership design was intentional. We strive to share power and responsibility across our organizations, particularly with an ongoing awareness of our various identities and how they relate to who we are, who we serve and how we operate. That practice has profoundly influenced how we create and deliver for our audiences. There are many ethical questions we consider as we navigate social justice and anti-racist topics. In this paper, we will explore some questions we use in applied theatre to explore race. There are certainly more than we have included here.

HOW DOES IDENTITY MATTER?

We believe humans filter experiences through identity whether they are aware of it or not. That filtering processes information through our conscious and unconscious biases. Performance has the power to unearth unconscious biases by creating an emotional connection through dialogue or character or conflict. When some of those biases show up we are often surprised at the subtle and specific ways they manifest.

In a diversity training, Trent and Rebecca acted in ITP's scenario, *The Way It Is*, centering race and identity in a conflict between two characters. In the scene, an employee witnesses white colleagues touching a Black, female colleague's hair in the office break room. The concerned employee, played by Trent, approaches the supervisor, played by Rebecca, who, from her position of power and privilege, misses the context and cumulative impact of the incident. There was a moment when Trent inadvertently rests his foot on the rung of a chair as he spoke. The debrief with the audience afterwards went something like this:

> "I found the employee to be incredibly aggressive," one person stated.
>
> "He was totally out of line," another remarked.
>
> "I cannot believe his hostility, especially toward his supervisor!" one exclaimed.

Trent remembers:

> Audience members had significant issues with my character (and by extension, me) talking to my supervisor with my leg propped up on a chair. In particular, I remember one white male saying they found the action "completely inappropriate." The question and answer component became a discussion about the positioning of my foot. At one point someone remarked that I had my foot on the actual seat of the chair (which I did not) in order to intimidate and bully the supervisor. As the character, I fielded many questions about appropriate behavior, and as the actor, I felt the audience

> was zeroing in on this one action. They were misinterpreting it, protecting the white woman from the Black man; losing sight of the larger context of a Black woman's hair being touched by white colleagues and the climate that allows for that to occur. The cultural history between Black men and white women had to be considered. Whether that is Rosewood in 1923 or Amy Cooper in Central Park in 2020, the dynamics of race and gender are hard to ignore in this interaction. I decided to show that the questions from the audience made a significant impact on the character's confidence and autonomy, stating, "maybe it really is time for me to leave this place and find another place to work."
>
> Rebecca remembers:
>
> As an actor, I was surprised at how protective people were of me and how angry they were at Trent's character. I also remember trying to figure out what exactly caused them to perceive him as so hostile since his demeanor was calm and soft spoken. As we reflect on this incident, my memory imagined his foot on the chair I was sitting in because the level to which people magnified that single, unrehearsed moment felt unwarranted. As I examine through a facilitator lens, I am struck by how much my own racial privilege protected me from the audience's interrogation. I did not experience a personal impact that needed to be worked through afterwards. What this performance taught me was how identity plays into even the smallest of actions and statements. It has led me down the path of awareness and curiosity about identity, especially around visible identities like race and gender expression, and their impact on everything.

The audience response to the subtle gesture by a Black man in the interaction with a white woman spoke volumes. When confronted with race, where a BIPOC is speaking about their experience and concern, the audience moved to protect whiteness. We purposefully highlight identity in performances and techniques, such as image theatre,[2] as a way for us to dig into the issues and experiences. We have even

[2] "In Image Theatre, performers form tableaux representing an oppressive situation, and spectators are invited to interpret and suggest changes to the tableaux" (*Britannica,* 2020).

intentionally incorporated the resting foot gesture into future performances of this piece.

SHOULD WE USE OUR OWN IDENTITIES TO ENGAGE WITH OTHERS?

Being informed about our own identities and how they impact others is an entryway to engagement. We believe that race is a social construct, not an innate behavioral or biological trait that has such significant distinctions as to create the divisions that exist. Our conceptions of race are based largely in psychological and behavioral influential patterns. Those patterns have meaning made by those who consume and are subject to interpretation. As artists, our role is not only to examine identity for others but for ourselves as well. Continuous self-reflection and self-awareness about our own identities is critical to engage productively and responsibly in this work. “As members of human communities, our identities are fundamentally constructed in relation to others and to the cultures in which we are embedded” (Bell, L. A, 2007, pp. 8-9). Learning about our identities helps us to understand the social structures of which we are a part. Additionally, it highlights which of our identities are in more proximity to power, and how we may use that positioning in our social justice work.

A framework we use is the Matrix of Oppression. The Matrix of Oppression gives examples of social identity categories such as race, sex, gender, religion, sexual orientation, class, ability, and age. Within the identity categories, there are examples of social groups and a further examination of the advantages and disadvantages afforded to members of each.

> Social groups are afforded different status in the United States based on a multiplicity of historical, political, and social factors. These different statuses affect the abilities of people of the different groups to access needed resources. Some social group members are afforded an advantage, whereas other social groups are disadvantaged based on their social group memberships. (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007, p. 57)

Part of learning about identity is reflecting on our own identities and

understanding where we hold positions that feel undermined and unheard and, just as important, the places where we have privilege. In addition to our own lives and work experiences, The Matrix of Oppression has been a guiding tool for our own self-reflection and as a means for us to engage around identity. It is a foundational element of our applied theatre work.

HOW DO WE MANAGE THE INTERSECTIONS OF IDENTITY?

There is no quick fix. The answer is not necessarily to create more diverse characters and casts though this is desperately needed and no doubt deeper exploration will surface in the current climate. Going a bit deeper than adding or re-casting a character here or there in the journey is to keep the impact of identity in mind as we create, cast, and facilitate. In doing this, we must also acknowledge the timeframes we are given as well as the context while highlighting one or two elements of identity at a time.

Our piece entitled *Just Another Party* explores sexual assault. We performed this scene for first year student orientation at a predominantly white institution; presented biweekly, to upwards of 500 participants in each session. As producers, we were juggling a considerable amount of performances with the need for multiple actors of four per cast. We cast an actor who identified as a Latinx man in the role of Steve who is accused of committing sexual assault at a college party. Our intentions were to fulfill a demand as well as give a talented actor an opportunity to play a challenging role. We were not meaning to bring the intersection of race and sexual assault into the dialogue and yet, by our casting choice, that is exactly what we did. The BIPOC actor was cast opposite a white female actor. At the time, there was a lot of press and attention around the institution's football program, which was being investigated for sexual assault by some of its players. After the performance, the audience asked questions to the actors while they stayed in character. During the first several weeks, the first question without fail was asked to the BIPOC actor playing Steve, "Do you play for the football team?" This was always met with laughter from the crowd and, we observed, this question was never asked when a white actor played the same role. The participants used humor as a means to deflect from having real dialogue about sexual assault and all that was happening in the community.

We had to reassess. We came up with a strategy for how the actor would respond to the question around what it meant for a BIPOC student to attend a predominately white institution. Given an hour and fifteen minutes for the entire session and the large audience size, we could not effectively address both sexual assault and race and do them justice. We had to focus on sexual assault in this particular instance as the directive from the university. We remain cognizant of how time restraints limit us to addressing a small number of issues in a single session. To try and tackle too many dilutes the impact and has the ability to do more harm than good. As we moved forward with this specific project, we made sure that we did not cast a man of color in the alleged perpetrator role unless there was the time and ability to truly unpack what that meant.

The understanding of identity, its impact, and the intersectionality of identities creates more intentional work. To create and cast a performance addressing violence against women is a different experience if the perpetrator in that scenario is a white male or a BIPOC male. To cast a BIPOC man in a scene about violence against women particularly if the victim or survivor in the scenario is a white woman, one must understand the deep historical context of that choice and prepare to facilitate that as a larger conversation. Not doing so only perpetuates a historical and painful myth particularly about Black men as predators, hypersexual, and dangerous. Incidentally, when a white actor played Steve the audience's focus was on how the allegations would ruin his life.

To add another layer, it is important for us to incorporate multiple identities in our theatre pieces without the impact of those identities being the focal point, as means of representation. An ensemble member shared with us, "It would be nice to see a character who is gender nonconforming without that having to be discussed." As we create, we stay mindful of representing identity and how identities would impact the performed subject matter and vice versa. It feels like an important balancing act we continue to navigate as artists.

IS IT ARTISTICALLY NECESSARY TO THINK ABOUT IDENTITY?

In his Golden Globe acceptance speech for Best Actor in his role in the series *This Is Us*, Sterling K. Brown talks about "colorblind" casting

where identity is an afterthought or, if taken into consideration, is a means toward diversifying and also leans towards tokenism. Brown lauds the creator of the show Dan Fogelman and says, “You wrote a role for a Black man. That could only be played by a Black man.” He goes on to say, “I appreciate that I am being seen for who I am and being appreciated for who I am. And it makes it more difficult to dismiss me or to dismiss anyone who looks like me” (Victor, 2018). These words ring true as we strive to create theatre that shares stories of all human experience. We cannot authentically do that if we don’t think about how intricately identity shapes those situations and experiences and stories. Depending on how we can create our applied theatre performances, a devised context encourages performers to bring and use all elements of their identities into a piece. As writers, we tackle important social issues, create characters, and delve into the impact of a character's racial identity that informs what happens and how the piece develops. We have learned from our own mistakes, that writing the characters first and then casting from a diverse pool is not always the best course. “The social identity development models help us anticipate and plan for the potential collision…of contradictory but strongly held worldviews among participants across social identity groups and also within social identity groups…these social identity development models also serve to remind us as facilitators,” and as theatre makers, “that we, too, have our own social identity perspectives that both characterize and limit our worldviews and from which we tend to generalize what we believe that participants…ought to do, feel, and think” (Adams, Jones, & Tatum, 2007, p. 406). By creating characters with identity in mind, we are able to make more accessible characters, move beyond stereotypes, and give audiences the opportunity to hear and engage with stories that are similar and different from their own. As white American Theatre is being called to action and challenged to change by organizations such as The Ground We Stand On, we can move forward and create theatre that is truly representative of many lived experiences and not just through the lens of a particular privileged group.

HOW CAN WE BUILD AWARENESS AROUND IDENTITY?

It feels important for us to help people acknowledge identity in order to speak about it. As previously mentioned it has become clear from our

experience, that we are always processing through identity whether we are conscious of it or not. We have also discovered that talking about the concept of identity does not allow people to experience its impact. It seems we have to experience identity from an emotional framework and not only from a logical perspective. We were curious how we could use our theatrical techniques as a means to emphasize the feeling response that comes up around identity. Years ago, Trent and Rebecca were conducting a facilitation workshop in West Virginia and tried an experiment. We took a set of blanket statements that seem to be standard, rationalized responses around race and other identities. For example, “Not everything is about race” and “I have the right to wear whatever I want.” One of us made the statement and then the other repeated it trying to replicate the same tone, inflection, and gesture. We then asked the participants to react and highlight the differences.

This short and simple exercise brought up a lot for people similar in some ways to the gesture of the aforementioned foot on the chair “incident.” It was interesting to hear people say things like, “When Trent said it, I felt…” and “When Rebecca said it, I felt…” By encouraging the participants to explore their reactions and feelings without judgments heightened their awareness around identity.

“The switch” is another interactive technique we use in our performances as a vehicle to highlight the impact of identity. Our performance entitled *Let Me Out*, written by a member of our theatre ensemble, captures his experience and struggle as a gay man wanting to openly express his love for his partner without fear. In the performance the two men kiss. After the performance, when we are facilitating the interactive components, we replay the moment of the kiss and have people share their reactions and feelings. Then we incorporate the switch and replace the male identified actors with two female identified actors. The female identified actors repeat a few lines of the original dialogue and then kiss. We ask the audience for reactions and responses. One particularly profound moment was when an audience member responded, “Oh my god. It’s different. I don’t want it to be, but it is.” This moment enabled a vulnerable and heartfelt dialogue among the group where a deeper exploration of homophobia and heterosexism was examined.

Most participants do not want to believe that they harbor

> prejudices about groups of people. Confronting these prejudices in themselves and others is difficult. Participants need to open themselves up to the discomfort and uncertainty of questioning what is familiar, comfortable, and unquestioned. (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007, p. 52)

Applied theatre is a vehicle to allow us to have honest reactions, without shame, and be able to voice them aloud. It is a significant approach to challenge our belief systems and build empathy for others.

WHAT OTHER ETHICAL QUESTIONS SHOULD WE CONSIDER?

There certainly is more to consider as we continue to navigate social justice and anti- racist issues. The more we ask ethical questions about social justice and how to be anti-racist in our work, the more that will be uncovered. As our consciousness around identity grows, its impact continues to be felt. For example, the emotional labor of performing these interactive, socially charged scenes on actors and facilitators from marginalized identities is significant. As one of our ensemble members once expressed to us, “I can de-role my character but I can’t de-role my Blackness.” Thus we need to question how to further support and equitably compensate for the work being done. We need to examine, form, and institute better support systems for applied theatre, and all theatre, to be truly inclusive. As the Broadway actor Jelani Alladin states in a *New York Times* interview, “Each person’s experience with the systematic racism of the Great White Way is unique. They are all valid. They must all be communicated, in hopes of successful and inclusive collaboration led with care. It is possible” (interviewed by Michael Paulson, June 10, 2020). Thus, more questions need to be asked of ourselves and more examination of our own identities around where we hold and do not hold privilege, needs to be done so that we work our applied theatre methods with a form of care.

SHOULD WE PERSONALLY BE DOING THE SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ANTI-RACIST WORK THAT WE HOPE TO INSPIRE OTHERS TO DO WITH OUR APPLIED THEATRE PERFORMANCES?

The answer here is quite simple. Yes.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Brown Adelman, R., Norman, T., & Hamidi, S. Y. (2020). Identity matters. All. The. Time. Questions to encourage best practices in applied theatre. *ArtsPraxis, 7* (2b), 12-25.

REFERENCES

Adams, M., Bell, L. A., Griffin, P. (Eds.). (2007). *Teaching for diversity and social justice*, second edition. New York: Routledge.

Adams, M., Jones, J., Tatum, B. D. (2007). Knowing Our Students. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice*, second edition, (pp. 395-410). New York: Routledge.

Alladin, J. (2020, June 10). How do we right this wrong? We come to the table with demands. Interview by Michael Paulson. Four Black Artists On How Racism Corrodes The Theatre World. *The New York Times*.

Bell, L. A. (2007). Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice,* second edition, (pp.1-14). New York: Routledge.

Boal, A. (1974). *Teatro de Oprimido*, Trans 1979. New York: Theatre Communications Group Inc.

Clark, J., Dobson, W., Goode, T., & Neelands, J. (1997). *Lessons for the living: Drama and the integrated curriculum*. Newmarket, Ontario: Mayfair Cornerstone Limited.

Daniels, V. (2018). Sterling K. Brown's Golden Globe acceptance speech: 'I am being seen for who I am.' *The New York Times*.

Encyclopedia Britannica. (2020). Augusto Boal. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Fryberg, S., & Stephens N. (2010). When the world is colorblind,

American Indians are invisible: A diversity science approach. *Psychological Inquiry, 21*, pp. 115-119.

Hardiman, R., Jackson, B., Griffin, P. (2007). Conceptual foundations for social justice education. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice*, second edition, (pp. 35-66). New York: Routledge.

The Ground We Stand On. (2020). Dear white American theatre.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Authors Trent Norman and Rebecca Brown Adelman, were co-founders and co-directors of The Interactive Theatre Project at the University of Colorado at Boulder from 1999-2015. They are founding partners of Affinity Arts Consulting. They have created, written, directed, produced and facilitated hundreds of interactive theatre performances addressing social justice and community issues. They were awarded the NYU Swortzell Award for Innovation in applied theatre in 2016. During this time of stay at home orders and civil unrest, they have translated their in-person interactive training format to be delivered via Zoom and have been offering webinars on race.

Saira Yasmin Hamidi is a performer and longtime ensemble member of the Interactive Theatre Project, which is now the Affinity Arts Consulting ensemble. She is a community organizer working toward health equity, in the most comprehensive of definitions, for all people in Colorado.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 2b

Natasha Gordon in Conversation with Lucy Jeffery: 'It was around 7.27pm that suddenly diversity walked through the door'

LUCY JEFFERY

MIDSWEDEN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Award-winning playwright Natasha Gordon talks to Lucy Jeffery about her experience as a Caribbean-British actor and playwright whose debut play Nine Night *(2018) made her the first black British female playwright to have a play staged in London's West End. The discussion ranges from Gordon's own experiences of gendered and racial injustices as a young actor to how these prejudices are evident in the audience demographic of theatres today. It focuses on* Nine Night*'s exploration of how second-generation, specifically Jamaican-British, immigrants experience tensions concerning identity, belonging, and displacement in the wake of the 2018 Windrush Scandal. As the conversation evaluates the importance of Gordon's work and visibility on the National Theatre and West End stages, it contributes to the recent underrepresentation of black voices, a concern expressed in the widespread Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name protests that have*

taken place in America and the UK in 2020. The conversation, which took place at the University of Reading as part of the 'Race and Performance Today' series (organised by Jeffery and Matthew McFrederick), also responds to Michael Peters's (2015) call to challenge the whiteness of curricula in British and American universities.

In 1968, shortly after Tommie Smith and John Carlos clenched their fists and raised their arms in a Black Power salute at the Mexico Olympics, the Conservative MP Enoch Powell said: '[t]he West Indian or Asian does not by being born in England become an Englishman. In law he is a United Kingdom citizen, by birth in fact he is a West Indian or Asian still' (cited in Smithies and Fiddick, 1969, p. 77). Forty-eight years later, the then newly elected British Prime Minister Theresa May made the following comment during the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham: '[t]he lesson of Britain is that we are a country built on the bonds of family, community, citizenship […] But if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what the very word "citizenship" means.' (May, 2016) Whilst responses to May's speech have highlighted the fascist overtones in her rhetoric (Davis and Hollis, 2018), in 2018 William Galinsky led an enquiry into how and why theatre is made and for who, naming his five days of installations, performance, and debate that took place in the National Theatre of Scotland: 'Citizen of Nowhere.'[1] It is this scrutiny of and artistic retaliation to attitudes toward race, immigration, and belonging that is not only a rich source of creativity, but a necessary voice in an increasingly racially and politically divisive time. This is now promoted by #BlackLivesMatter (founded in 2013 by Patrise Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi) which aims to 'eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes' by 'combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black

[1] Joyce McMillan wrote for *The Scotsman* that Galinsky and the artistic director for the National Theatre of Scotland, Jackie Wylie, were inspired 'by the idea, as old as ancient Greece, of theatre as a civic space, in which a community can gather to reflect the crises it is experiencing, and— perhaps— to find a more human and humane way through those moments of disruption.' (McMillan, 2018)

imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy' (blacklivesmatter.com). Indeed, as the interview below with black British playwright Natasha Gordon (b. 1976) highlights, much of the energy in new British writing is coming from black writers whose work investigates both established society and the variety of cultures within it.

The interview with Gordon took place on 14 March 2019 and belongs to a two-part series of 'In Conversation' events organised by myself and Matthew McFrederick.[2] It falls under the umbrella of the 'Race in Performance Today' series that we initiated at the University of Reading in 2018 with the aim of diversifying the curriculum to encourage discussion of issues regarding racial representation. The conversations with playwrights Inua Ellams and Natasha Gordon acknowledge and challenge Michael Peters's (2015) observation that 'the curriculum is white comprised of "white ideas" by "white authors" and is a result of colonialism that has normalized whiteness and made blackness invisible' (p. 641). As the interview below reveals, Gordon's work focuses on themes of power and empowerment, implicitly challenging white hegemonic dominance by centralising the black body and its attendant signifiers of blackness. As the first black British female writer to have a play staged in the West End, Gordon herself breaks new ground and stands at the forefront of the whiteness debate in theatre and education sectors. Her debut play *Nine Night*, which premiered at the National's Dorfman Theatre on 30 April 2018 and had its first West End performance at Trafalgar Studios on 1 December 2018, allows us to recognise that race can be a unifying category as it captures a set of cultural experiences.[3] At the end of the play, the young Anita (played by Rebekah Murrell) realises that '[w]e're all fragments of someone or something, a mitosis of souls fighting to find our core being' (Gordon, 2018, p. 74). As Harvey Young (2013) states, '[d]espite the historical baggage of race, the concept is not unredeemably negative. Although divisive—as all categories are—it can be used to rally a sense of cultural pride that is not necessarily

[2] The live recordings of these interviews can be viewed on YouTube: 'Inua Ellams In Conversation – Minghella Studios, University of Reading', [accessed 8 July 2020]; 'Natasha Gordon In Conversation – Minghella Studios, University of Reading', [accessed 8 July 2020]

[3] For *Nine Night*, Gordon won the Most Promising Playwright award at the 2018 Evening Standard Theatre Awards and the Critics' Circle Theatre Award. She was awarded an MBE in 2020 for her services to drama.

dependent upon the denigration of others' (p. 7). The connection between racial representation and the arts is currently caught in a promising and precarious tension that, due to political divisiveness, does not always provide scope for race to be seen as a positive term. Even though the run of Gordon's play at the West End's Trafalgar Studios broke boundaries, it's location, in the shadow of Nelson's Column, suggests that black British theatre still occupies a grey space between prejudice and equality. In his review of the play, Michael Billington acknowledges Gordon's sensitivity to this tension when he describes Gordon's overarching theme as 'the ability to inhabit two cultures and to acknowledge one's ancestral past while living fully in the present' (Billington, 2018), a dynamic that acquired added resonance in light of the contemporaneous Windrush Scandal and that has intensified since the 2020 Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name protests.[4]

Despite this interview focusing on black British theatre, I do not want to suggest that there is one 'black theatre.' As Felix Cross, the artistic director of Nitro (previously, the Black Theatre Co-operative) said in response to being asked 'what is black theatre?':

> Is it when Black actors get on the stage? Is it when a Black writer writes a play? Is it when the company's owned by Black people? Is it when it comes from a certain sensibility? Is there a style? Is there a different kind of language? Is there a different play structure? I don't know. (cited in Davis and Fuchs, 2006, p. 224)

In line with Cross's comment, the interview makes clear the extraordinary range of social experiences and cultural identities that compose the category 'black.' As a politically and culturally constructed category which resists being pinned-down by a fixed set of cultural 'norms', black theatre offers us new ways of thinking about what it is to be a citizen in an increasingly fractured world; a world that seems intent on defining by difference and determining the ethnicity of its people depending on what side of a wall they reside. On the back of

[4] The 2018 Windrush Scandal affected British subjects who had arrived in the UK from Caribbean countries between 1948 and 1971. It is named after the Empire Windrush ship that brought one of the first groups of West Indian migrants to the UK in 1948. Eighty-three people of the so called 'Windrush generation' were deported from the UK by the Home Office and many more were detained, denied benefits and medical care, and lost their jobs or homes.

such challenges, we celebrate the fact that the Black Theatre Archives project at the National Theatre in London is cataloguing information for every play written by a Black British playwright and that with *Nine Night* Natasha Gordon became the first black British female to have a play staged in the West End.[5] These are signs, perhaps, that barriers, or even walls, can be taken down.[6]

THE INTERVIEW

Lucy Jeffery: Natasha welcome to the Bulmershe Theatre at the University of Reading.

Natasha Gordon: Thank you.

LJ: Just to give everyone a little bit of context of Natasha's visit, this year we added Natasha's play *Nine Night* to the curriculum for 'Introduction to Theatre' [convened by Jeffery in the Department of Film, Theatre & Television] to explore issues surrounding race and representation in British theatre, which we might talk about in a little bit more detail shortly, but I would like to begin by asking you about your learning. Natasha, perhaps we could start at the beginning. I was wondering if you could speak about your British-Jamaican upbringing in terms of the literature and stories you heard and read growing up.

NG: That's a good one. Hello everybody. That's such a good question because I think the assumption is made that when you are a writer that you've had a literary influence in your upbringing, which wasn't the case with me at all. I was raised singlehandedly by my mother [who] raised me and my brother, and she had a job looking after the elderly and worked really long shifts so there was no sense of bedtime stories or passing on stories from her family, it was really that you went to school to learn and it was school that you got your literary knowledge. The only books we really had in the house were two massive encyclopaedias because she wanted us to learn and she wanted us to study but didn't really realise that two massive encyclopaedias was not

[5] For a discussion between Winsome Pinnock and Jasmine Lee-Jones about the presence of black female playwrights in Britain, see Akbar (2020).
[6] Please note that to improve clarity of expression, the interview has been lightly edited.

the way to help your children to tackle literature.

LJ: No Harry Potter? [*Laughter*.]

NG: No Harry Potter. She didn't have the time. So my brother is seven years older than me and it was going to one of his parent's evenings that his English teacher took out a book of stories from Anansi and I think—I'm trying to remember how old I was, I was probably age seven—that was the first book or collection of stories that I remember reading and remember being…I wouldn't have been able to articulate it at the time but there was something about a white woman handing to my family a book about stories that come from an African folklore and culture that sort of opened something up inside.[7] I'm a slow reader as well so books were always a chore for me so it was really much later on, when I was in secondary school probably and I started to discover plays because you can read them much more quickly and there's a sort of visceral connection to a play that is less cerebral, that I started to discover and appreciate the power of the spoken word.

LJ: So, what then were your early experiences of seeing and first performing in theatre like, having had this enthusiastic enjoyment of reading plays?

NG: Well it was just amazing to me. Probably the first ever play I performed was *Song of the Dark Queen*, based on Boudicca.[8] It was a production that my drama school teacher, when I was thirteen or fourteen, took to Edinburgh and, for me, just being able to use words to *express* emotion, energy, dialogue in a safe space, I remember that being a moment of waking up and realising there was a way to experience words that was something other than reading a book.

LJ: And then did you find that enhance later on as you started to think of this as a profession that you'd go into?

NG: Yeah, I mean it was this same drama teacher that encouraged me

[7] The *Jamaica Anansi Stories* was written by Martha Warren Beckwith, published in 1924. These stories are a collection of folklore, riddles, and transcriptions of folk music centred on the Jamaican trickster Anansi.
[8] Nigel Bryant's *The Play of 'Song for a Dark Queen' from the novel by Rosemary Sutcliff* was published in 1984.

to go to drama school. I'd never heard of drama school, didn't know what it was, but I'd done some drama lessons with Anna Scher who used to run a drama club in North London.[9] Anna Scher's approach was all completely improvisational so no text at all, but it was much later on being at drama school that I immersed myself more in different works from [Harold] Pinter to [Henrik] Ibsen to August Wilson.

LJ: Okay, so a huge variety of…

NG: A huge variety, yeah.

LJ: And so how then did that move into you starting to create theatre? Did you have these ideas and want to write them down early on?

NG: No, never. [*Laughter*.] I always just wanted to be an actor. You know, I think you go to drama school at whatever age you are, I was twenty-one when I started, and for me I just wanted to act because that was something that I understood, I knew how to do that, I understood how that worked. And when I left drama school, I was really lucky for the first seven to eight years where I pretty much worked constantly. I was on tour lots and then I sort of got to this point where I was no longer young enough, I was twenty-eight, I no longer *looked* young enough to play the mouthy South Londoners that I was going up for, and then I didn't look old enough to upgrade to the mother roles and so the work started to dry up and become much less interesting. If I was going up for a TV job it was always to be the support to the lead or even in theatre it was never the lead roles, it was always about supporting or being part of an ensemble, which I absolutely love, but at the same time there was this frustration that after this three years of intense classical training that I felt like I wasn't being allowed to explore my craft. A very good actress friend of mine Sharon Duncan-Brewster, [who] lots of you would recognise, she gathered together me and a few of her other actress friends, all of a similar age, all over forty or approaching forty, and said: '[i]s it just me or does it feel like parts are becoming less interesting the older we get and, if that's the case, are

[9] The Anna Scher Theatre School is a community-based drama school based in Islington. It was founded by Scher in 1968.

we happy with that? No. And what can we do about it?'[10] One of the things we decided to do about that was to come together every four to six weeks and support each other. First of all just to get out gripes and groans about injustices in the business, and then it evolved from there to: '[h]old on, we've been doing this job for twenty years, there must be something else in our skill set that we want to explore.' So that was the first time that I picked up a pen and decided to have a go at writing. I didn't even know that it was going to be a play, I was just writing a few scenes, voices that I could hear in my head, and I'd always had this fascination between a Jamaican funeral and British funerals that I'd been to. They're polar opposites, just down to the basics, the length. I'd go to British funerals, predominantly the ones I've been to have been cremations, the whole service is over within half an hour; you go to a Jamaican funeral at half an hour you've just greeted. [*Laughter*.] So I had this thing in the back of my mind that I wanted to do something about that but didn't know, didn't feel like I had the tools to explore what that was. So it was through this group—we called [ourselves] the 'Brunch Discussion' because we would meet at eleven o'clock and for ages we tried to think of a different name but couldn't come up with one so just left it as 'The Brunch'—that I would bring scenes to the group and we would read them, the actresses would give me notes, I'd go away and write a bit more and then would put them down. Then my grandmother passed away, so we're talking coming up to five years ago now, and that was the first time that I experienced Nine Night and was completely blown away by the force of this tradition and couldn't quite believe that I didn't know anything about it.

LJ: For some audience members who might not have had the good fortune to see *Nine Night*, could you explain the ritual?

NG: Yes, so the ritual is nine nights of mourning that takes place before the funeral. It can be after [the funeral]; the thing is with nine night, there are no rules per se, it's a flexible tradition. But at the heart of it, it's the family and friends of the deceased coming together to celebrate the life of the deceased. It takes on this other element in that it's really important that the spirit goes well. So the thinking behind it is

[10] Sharon Duncan-Brewster (b. 1976) has appeared in several television dramas including the BBC's *EastEnders* (2009), *Doctor Who* (2009), *Years and Years* (2019), and is currently playing Roz Marchetti in Netflix's *Sex Education* (2019-present).

that it's on the ninth night that the spirit will return to the house and it's up to the family and friends to help the spirit to move through the house and pass on to the other world, wherever the other world may be, whatever the other world means to you. There's that sense that you don't hold on to the dead energy, you let the energy go. Essentially it's a celebration where people come together, they tell stories about the deceased, they eat food, there's lots of eating, there's lots of drinking. [*Laughter*.] I wrote the play as a way to explore my own feelings about it because I found the whole thing completely overwhelming and didn't know what to expect.

LJ: So it was necessary then, perhaps, on a personal level for you to write this, but also for us to see this, to get a chance to be introduced to this ritual.

NG: Yes.

LJ: That's absolutely amazing. I imagine that on that more political side, the Windrush Generation and the news from the Home Office in 2014 must have really been in your mind and in your heart when writing the play. Were you aware of the political weight that it would carry because it's quite a prescient moment?[11]

NG: No, it's coincidence. When I wrote the play, the scandal hadn't blown up. *The Guardian* had been, I think, reporting on it but it hadn't blown up to the scandal that it turned into last year [2018] but I suppose what we can take from that is that [one] of the themes that I'm exploring in the play is this thing about being a second generation Jamaican and how, wherever you're from, actually when you're a second generation [there's] always that conflict between holding on to your parents culture and rituals and what they pass on to you but at the same time you're having to find your own way here. So you're a bit of them and you're a little bit of here, you're a little bit of this and you're a little bit of that, and you're constantly working out and recalibrating how you fit in and where your voice fits. I remember the point that the

[11] The 2014 Immigration Act, which the Government called its 'hostile environment' approach, led to many from the Windrush generation not having formal papers to prove their lawful status and facing immigration checks, with some being wrongly detained and deported, in spite of their British citizenship.

scandal hit; I had just been tackling in rehearsals with a line that Lorraine has in the last scene where she says to Trudy her half-sister about her mother Gloria, she says to Trudy 'You were right not to come to England. Mum wanted you but England didn't' (Gordon, 2018, p. 83) and it was a line that always, it never sat easy with me. I think it never sat easy with me because it suddenly felt like quite a big political theme that I wasn't covering anywhere else and I tousled with how much can this line sit in this domestic piece and not take it off track. And I remember saying to the actress at the time, because I played Lorraine in the West End but not at the National, and I kept saying to her 'I'm going to do something about that line because it's not quite it', and then of course the scandal hit and we all went 'No, that line has to absolutely stand as it is.'

LJ: Yes, it's implications with regards to immigration and diaspora communities really packs a punch, you're right it's an important line that does stand out. I suppose two strands that maybe we could talk about are the intercultural hybridity that you're mentioning, yourself being British-Jamaican, and the intergenerational conversations. Was any of your own upbringing coming to the fore when you were writing?

NG: Yeah, definitely. My mum is highly spiritual, I would say, over being highly religious, and she would tell me things about her upbringing that would just seem so odd and so strange. Her grandparents were Maroons, the Maroons were slaves that fought the British for their independence, and she would say things about her grandfather speaking in his native tongue and she'd talk about him flying up, he'd get into a, not frenzy what's the word, a trance, and he would easily fly up into a tree and it would be for his wife, her grandmother, to coax him down speaking their native tongue that my mother never learned. Now you could imagine growing up here being told this stuff was not something that you could then go to the playground and chat to with your friends about because it was too weird. There would be rituals that she would have about how you would hang washing up on the washing line. She would go mad if she came out and saw that a t-shirt was hung the wrong way around, she would go mad because that would disturb the spirits. There were all these sorts of supernatural elements to my childhood that were never explained, they were just put out there. So, in the last scene of the play

where, and for those people who didn't see it, part of the nine night tradition and disorientating the spirit is that on the ninth night you move into the deceased bedroom and you rearrange their furniture so that they'll be disorientated when they return; this was something that my mum wanted to do, but my grandad [who's] still alive and with us, me, and my siblings felt really uncomfortable about doing that but it was really important to my mum that we did. Anyway we did it because there was no way we can go into grandad's bedroom and start moving his furniture around when he's just lost his wife of fifty-odd years. That was the first time that I really felt a huge clash between our cultures and understanding and I just remember feeling like I had really let her down, which I still feel because at the end of the day we didn't do that. But then it was all so strange because she never explained any of these rituals. I think there is something as well about when you're an immigrant and you, especially for my mum's generation and for the Windrush generation even more, when you come to a country and you're trying to fit in and you're trying to assimilate, you don't make so much reference to how things were back home. You're just trying to get on, get your head down and make it work, make it work for your family, or certainly that was my family's choice.

LJ: Largely I've been thinking about it and it seems to be about passing on from generation to generation, as you're saying. And a lot to do with mothers and daughters, or aunts and nieces—with Gloria or Aunt Maggie, and Lorraine, Anita and Anita's daughter Rosa—and the sense of continuing that. And also [about] that sense of what the home actually is as you go on from generation to generation, the consciousness of your culture, and how rooted you then feel in your home; whether you feel it adopted or that it is your home. How much then did you put the idea of immigration at the heart of *Nine Night* when you were writing it?

NG: Well I guess subconsciously it had to have been leading me the whole way because it starts with Gloria but has travelled from Jamaica and Lorraine and Robert's generation is my generation so I'm looking at what it means to fight back in a different way to Gloria's generation which is really reflective, I think, of what we've seen in society for my generation [who] have gone: '[a]ctually, no we're not just going to fit in and shut up, we are going to challenge the status quo.' It's not

something that is referenced so much in *Nine Night* because essentially it's a play about grief, but certainly those themes are skirting around the outside.

LJ: I made a note here of Anita dealing with this struggle when she talks about everybody 'jamming in [the] room and making a space for [her]' (Gordon, 2018, p. 74) and that wonderful realist set full of colour, full of vibrancy and *life*, and I wondered how your work with Rajha Shakiry, the designer for *Nine Night*, helped you develop this sense of space and home.

NG: Well I showed Rajha photos from my grandparent's home and that look [*Points to backdrop image of set*.] is iconic. It's different because this is the kitchen so typically what you have in a Jamaican household, you would have a front room that would almost be like the museum piece [*Laughter*.] and its where all the crockery is from the wedding or things you've bought with your hard earned cash and it all is [on] display in the glass cabinet and it's not to be touched, it is only to be looked at. And there are ornaments all over the place. Because it was set in the kitchen, I guess it's mine and Rajha's cheat of how much you can bring the living room element into the kitchen space. So you can see there is a glass cabinet just behind the table there, but it is a room that most people from the Caribbean would look at completely recognise, I think.

LJ: In places, you get a sense of it from this image, the play is so joyous and it's hilarious. I think the comedy is a really important facet in a play that, as you say, is dealing with loss and grief. How much of the tone of the play is shaped by the director, Roy Alexander Weise? I heard that he would often start with dance warm-ups or introduce games and music into rehearsals.

NG: Yes, so, in terms of the comedy then those are the sounds, I mean the dialogue that I've grown up with. We had a fantastic movement director, Shelley Maxwell, [who] is Jamaican. She brought with her this extra added element that I could only have dreamt of really because she's grown up in the nine night tradition, and the Kumina Dance, which is the dance that takes place after that moment, Shelley knew really well because she'd grown up dancing it and then

studied it at dance school.[12] So she would lead a warm-up every warming and the warm-up would be really general at the beginning and then the last five minutes we would come together and do the Kumina. She also brought in with her two fantastic drummers that go to funerals and nine nights and play the African drums as part of the Kumina ceremony. So we had this amazing session where they came in and they spent two hours with us and talked us through the ritual and showed us the dance and it was such a fantastic moment for us because it suddenly embedded the whole ritual into something really *real*. After the end of that two hour session you felt as though the ancestors were in the room with us which was the whole, which was exactly what I wanted to achieve for Anita, that moment when she's in that nine night room that she comes out and she expresses to us something that she's experienced back there that we haven't been party to, or certainly Lorraine hasn't been party to because she's still so locked in her 'traditional' grief, let's say.

LJ: For an audience, you really get a terrific sense of that rhythm and that energy, and it's just a joy in those moments, especially when Anita is dancing and swirling around by the back door; it's a wonderful moment. Something that really struck me when I first saw *Nine Night* at the Trafalgar Studios was the audience demographic and, in the moment where Trudy who's in the striped top comes in and opens her suitcase and takes out the mangoes, the…

NG: Rum.

LJ: Of course the rum, many a rum, and the sweet potatoes, the plantains; people in the audience around me were saying these words aloud, it was such a familiar culture to them. For me, as a Welsh-British theatre goer, I was not familiar with this and then I read a review by Paul Taylor in *The Independent* that said the play 'generates an atmosphere of inclusion' (Taylor, 2018) and that's certainly true, we all experience loss and we have a connection with one or many of the characters, but I was very aware that I was outside of a community that

[12] In the play, Uncle Vince (played by Karl Collins) explains that Trudy's (Michelle Greenidge) Kumina dance is 'more dan a dance. Is a way of life. […] Dem can dance it all dem like but is only de people weh grow inna it, know de real Kumina.' (Gordon, 2018, p. 65)

I hadn't previously had access to. It was a fantastic experience for me, therefore, to be engaged with this but I was wondering, did you have an audience in mind when you were writing *Nine Night*?

NG: So it's really, I was in both a fortunate and unfortunate position in that when I wrote *Nine Night* I wasn't writing it for the National Theatre. I was writing it for myself. I was writing it because I needed to get this feeling out of being a second generation coming [for] the first time to this tradition that I had no previous knowledge of. That also gave me freedom because I wasn't thinking about censoring myself, I wasn't thinking about making the Patois understandable for a National Theatre, traditional audience. It was purely inner expression, for me. So I wasn't thinking about an audience in mind until, obviously, I hear that the National want to do it and then of course I started to panic and I started to panic because, exactly that, knowing what a National Theatre audience looks like typically, the worry about how much would they understand, how much would they be able to connect to the characters and the experience. And then knowing the reality that the Jamaican and Caribbean and African people that I would want to see it probably wouldn't get to the National in time anyway, before the end of the run because it was only a five week run…So marketing worked really hard to make sure that the posters went out into the right places and into the community.[13] I remember the feeling in the first preview of being in the auditorium around 7:24PM and looking around and seeing a traditional National Theatre audience and thinking 'Here we go' and then I kid you not, it was around 7:27PM that suddenly diversity walked through the door.[14] [*Laughter*.]

LJ: Kept you waiting.

NG: Completely. And it was just the most incredible…it was already an experience for me to just sit and watch to see how many people of colour were in that audience, and when I use that term I don't mean to

[13] For Winsome Pinnock the audience demographic of both the National Theatre and the Royal Court remains a contentious issue. As Elizabeth Sakellaridou (2011) explains, '[i]n an interview in 1997 and a short essay on black British theatre in 1999, [Pinnock] expresses her disappointment with these institutions' failure to introduce effective mixed-audience policies.' (p. 383)

[14] Founded in 2018, the Black Ticket Project, a crowdfunded scheme aimed at ensuring young black people see plays with a black British focus, supported *Nine Night*.

offend anybody. It's also because I can't quite bear BAME and haven't quite worked out what the expression should be so if I say 'people of colour' we understand what I mean. So for me the play had already begun sitting in the audience and going 'Oh my God word has spread' because what I expected might happen is that word would spread towards the end of the run, but it was right there from the beginning. I sat and I watched that first preview and, no offense to the actors but I have to say, I was just mostly looking around the room in the auditorium and watching the different responses. You had some black people rolling around in laughter, hitting the chairs in front of them, and a more traditional audience watching *that* experience taking place around them [*Laughter*.] and then looking out front and experiencing something that they felt outside of but were still able to connect to the sense of family. You know grief being such a universal story, there is something in that story that you can connect to whether you get all of the Patois, whether you get the essence of the Patois, we know what those relationships look like.

LJ: Absolutely, and it was the joy that was delivered from the stage into the audience that certainly made it a wonderful learning experience for me and also a very fun evening at the theatre. And I continue to learn because I notice that in the programme there's a recipe for Guinness Punch and I'm just wondering if you [can] make a mean rum cocktail or help me with mine? [*Laughter*.]

NG: I can certainly help you with yours, Lucy. Or at least I think I can. I mean, this is what I mean sometimes about suddenly turning so British, I haven't made a mean Guinness Punch for years yet it is something that I would have every Sunday as part of my rice and peas and chicken. There's a lot of Guinness in Guinness Punch, there's quite a bit of rum in Guinness Punch and this is something that I would be drinking from age dot.

LJ: Excellent. [*Laughter*.] Palmed off with the idea of some milk in there as well I hear.

NG: Yeah, I'm happy to help you out with yours.

LJ: Just more rum really, isn't it?

NG: Just more rum, exactly.

LJ: On a more serious note, on the one hand I think we should celebrate the fact that you are the first black British female playwright to have a play on at the West End. It's a tremendous achievement. But, on the other hand, it's quite unsettling that it's 2018, or was 2018, when this first happened. How do *you* feel about this?

NG: It's a very bittersweet experience, really. I was saying to Lucy that the first time I heard that was the case was from the playwright Winsome Pinnock and we were having a very casual conversation after the play finished in the Dorfman and she asked if there [were] any future plans for the play and I said, I wasn't actually supposed to say at that point because it hadn't been announced yet, 'It looks like we're going to get a West End transfer.'[15] Winsome turned to me and said, 'You do realise that will make you the first black British female playwright to have a play on in the West End?' And my mouth just dropped. I said to her 'Winsome that's impossible, who can we ask, who would know this, where can we get clarification about that because that's just not possible?' There I was sat next to a fantastic established playwright of twenty-odd years asking who we should check-in with, whether that was the case. [*Laughter*.] So it immediately made me feel sick inside and then immediately very angry, it was a while before it was anything that I could celebrate, really. I only celebrate it in the vein of…I see it as a collective achievement, I see it as the achievement of the Winsome Pinnocks and the debbie tucker greens and the Bola Agbajes that have worked for years and because of their excellence [have] paved the path for me to be able to be labelled as the first. But for me, more importantly, it's when we're talking about the second, the third, the fourth, that is when we're talking about real progress.

LJ: That generosity of spirit that you've shared is really tremendous

[15] Winsome Pinnock (b. 1961) is the first black British female writer to have a play produced by the National Theatre. Her play *Leave Taking* shares similar themes to *Nine Night* as it is about a woman from the West Indies who, having come to England to raise her two daughters in North London, experiences frictions between the two countries and cultures. It premiered at the Liverpool Playhouse Studio on 11 November 1987, was toured by the National Theatre's education department in 1994, and was revived at the Bush Theatre, London, on 24 May 2018.

and quite empowering, I think, maybe even to people in this room thinking about working on their own productions and plays. More broadly then, where do you think we are in terms of Britain's relationship to representations of race in its theatres?

NG: We're getting better. There is no doubt that we're getting better because I'm here, right? So we're definitely getting better. Inua [Ellams] was here. But we have a long way to go. I've just come back from New York and in New York the theatre scene in terms of diversity and the canon of work by African American playwrights; it is completely different. You're seeing work being produced by African American playwrights *all the time* and that was a revelation to me to go and experience last week. I think that they would themselves say that this is a breakthrough for them too, but even if it is a breakthrough for them too it's still happening on a much larger scale than it is happening here. We're doing better, but we've got a *long*, long way to go.

LJ: To pick up on that thought of you being here, one of the ongoing initiatives in this Department is to deliver modules that are appropriately inclusive and diverse and then to bring the conversation full circle, picking up on Matt's [Matthew McFrederick] introduction, what do you think of the project of British universities in terms of broadening their curriculum?[16]

NG: It's excellent. It can only be excellent and therefore end up truly changing the landscape. When I was at drama school twenty years ago, when I say that we looked at August Wilson, it was really a tiny part of the module that we looked at the history of theatre, but as an influence I learned much more [about] the structure of Pinter and Ibsen and [Samuel] Beckett, Shakespeare. All of course incredible playwrights, but there was nothing like this when I was at drama school and therefore, even though I had the most incredible experience, it was also really difficult because I turned myself inside out in order to try not to feel constantly like I was on the outside of an experience. So [the

[16] In an article for *The Guardian* in 2019, Alison Flood reported on Swansea University's new module that focuses on books longlisted each year for the International Dylan Thomas Prize, making initial steps towards the decolonisation of the English Literature curriculum by replacing dead, white make authors with more black and ethnic writers (Flood, 2019).

fact] universities are addressing that and not [paying] lip service to it but are actually putting on these modules is incredible.

LJ: Do you have any advice for us to keep doing it and to get better at it, or is that a bit of an unfair question to put you on the spot?

NG: It's a huge question, I mean I think that you're already doing fantastic things in that you're taking your students to see what's out there…

LJ: First-hand.

NG: Yes so they're getting that first-hand experience and going to *all* theatres and not just it being London centric but going to the regionals. I think that's really important, and getting people in as much as you can. It sounds like you're doing the things that you should be doing that'll make the difference. I'll definitely have a think about it, if things come to me then I will for sure.

LJ: Well we're lucky if you can give us some ideas. Before I continue to bombard you with unfair questions can I open it out to the audience because I'm sure that students and colleagues have so many things to ask, so if you just pop your hand up.

Audience member: Can I ask a bit more about your choice to include a white character within the play?

NG: Great question. For me growing up in my family, having a white person has always been a part of my family so, like lots of people have said to me, it's been interesting introducing a white character almost as the outsider that we learn, for an audience that is not Caribbean, about the tradition through her which was never really my intention. I think it goes back to the Windrush generation assimilating when they came to this country and there being mixed relationships in this country from the 30s, 40s, 50s, so that when I look at a Caribbean family I never see just a sea of black faces, I see people from everywhere. So that's what Sophie [played by Hattie Ladbury] represents for me—she represents the assimilation that happens when two cultures come together. What's interesting is that in one of the early drafts, a director friend that

I'd sent the play to really questioned the use of Sophie and said 'I don't think you need her.' I really tousled with that for a while and in the end I sort of went I think that the point I'm taking is that I'm not quite earning her on the page so if I do have this white character in this black family then I need to be really clear about why she's there, what she's saying, and what she's representing. Does that make sense?

Audience member: Do you have a thinking process or things you usually do, a method that helps you build a play?

NG: This is my first play so I haven't quite discovered a process yet but what I know is helpful is being able to be in the world of the play for four consecutive days before I take my head out and do anything else. There's something about the accumulation of thinking 'in the world of' that allows me to deepen the voices or deepen the experience that I'm trying to convey. What else? Sometimes things come to me having a run, getting out. I think I spend a lot of time thinking before I actually get down to writing which means by the time I come to sit down to write there's actually a lot more than I think that's going going to come out in this splurge on the page, if that makes any sense. I think that because I haven't really discovered what my process is, I'm learning that now to be honest.

Audience member: So, like Lucy was talking about, [for] some members of your audience unfamiliar with Jamaican culture, [were] there any parts of the play […] besides Patois that you thought they might struggle with or feel alienated by within your work?

NG: Yeah, completely. But in the end I thought well, do you know what, especially for a National Theatre audience, if they were to go and see a Chaucer and come out and understand Chaucer most of them would give themselves a pat on the back at how well they did at tuning in their ear. I think the Patois is exactly the same in that respect, you just have to tune in. Or when you sit down and you watch Shakespeare, the first ten, twenty minutes you're recalibrating and your ear is finely tuning, all of your senses, everything becomes heightened to be able to grasp onto and catch the experience. For me, making the audience work hard is really important.

Audience member: I want to know what your experience was like playing as Lorraine and I guess with that comes the question of how much of you was in her and how much of her was in you?

NG: It was hard and I had made lots of assumptions about learning the lines. Generally as an actor I learn lines quite quickly. Lorraine was probably the hardest part I have ever learned and there was something about as the writer thinking that I knew a general sense of one of her speeches and then realising when I'd get up on my feet that I hadn't quite made the link between one word joining and the next. It was also hard because some of her was so close to home because she was my voice questioning the tradition. When you don't have that distance, your perspective can become skew-whiffed. So it's definitely the most challenging part I have ever played, but then here's the beauty of being an actor over being a writer: when you're an actor you're in a room in a scene with other people so it's never just about you, you have your co-workers to rely on. As an actor my process, which is similar to being a writer, is thinking about what I'm trying to get from the other person in the scene, what's the action that I'm actively trying to achieve. As soon as you do that you take the pressure off 'how am I doing' and you're just thinking about what you're trying to do so whenever I would feel panicked or overwhelmed then those are the tools that I would take myself back to. It was also the most incredible experience to be able to speak my own words and there came a point where I stopped seeing it as my own words, it became an acting job like any other acting job.

LJ: I can't promise to play Sophie but could you give us a little bit of Lorraine now, would that be alright? I know that you've left *Nine Night* behind, but I've got a copy.

NG: Yes! Have you got a bit in mind?

LJ: Up to you entirely. I know there's plenty to choose form but have a flick through. How cruel I'm being.

NG: Okay, has anybody got any ideas about which bit I should do, anybody that's seen the play? Go on dive in.

LJ: Maybe the '[i]t's not about money' bit later on?

NG: 'It's not about money.' Okay maybe, as I don't have my glasses [*Laughter*.]

LJ: I've set you up for a fall, I'm so sorry…

NG: Not at all. So let's see what I can remember of '[i]t's not about money', Robert…'It's not about money, Robert. Look at her. I know exactly what she wants. But I don't know what she's going to do with it. All that bitterness, blistering inside of [her]. You sent her from this life to the next carrying shame. You can't do any more. She was sick for months. Where were you she asked me over and over again, "Trudy call?" "Trudy coming?" I've always been rubbish at lying, but, my God, I got good at it by the end. Have you ever seen disappointment on a dying face? It's not like she didn't try and make it up to you. When Alvin left. She sent for you. Finally, she could have the family she'd always wanted. She called you up. Begged you to come. Didn't she? What? Can't you remember? We do—don't we, Robert' (Gordon, 2018, p. 83) I've just completely, looking at you going that's not Robert…[*Laughter and applause*.]

LJ: I'm not quite embodying Robert [played by Oliver Alvin-Wilson]. That was wonderful, a real treat. I'll have to work on that. [*Laughter*.] Any more questions from the audience?

Audience member: You mentioned coming together with a group of fellow actors and workshopping the script with them, how does one get the best out of a similar arrangement?

NG: You mean gathering a group of friends to read your work?

Audience member: Yes, or just having a group in which to bounce ideas back and forth.

NG: So these are actresses [who] I completely trust, we've been friends for a long time and I think the most important thing when you show somebody your piece of work or you're getting advice or feedback is that they are people, it doesn't matter how long you've known them, but they are people whose opinions you trust and that's something that's harder to call because it's about a gut instinct. You

want people to understand your work, your vision, your voice as true and as like you as possible, you want to be critiqued, you want feedback, you want them to open out your thinking but you ultimately want them to have understood the essence of what you're trying to say. That's key for me. I had shown *Nine Night* to three directors and they all had a completely different response. If it wasn't for one of those directors then the play may never have gone on, so it's really important that you share your work too, I think. Does that answer your question?

Audience member: I'm interested in British identity and relationships to colonialism and why it seems much harder to have the conversations about people of colour when it's British. We had, for example, Lorraine Hansberry on the West End in the 60s, why is it that dominant images of what it means to be British don't include diaspora, don't include immigrants, don't include the range of people that actually live here? I guess I'm interested in how you might speak to that and have you felt an opening up at any point in relationship to that?[17]
NG: I'm just trying to unpick the question.

Audience member: It seems like British people can talk about race when it's happening in America but it's hard for them to talk about it [in] a British context.

NG: Got you. I think it's because of our connection to slavery. I think it's easier to talk about race in America and see the story of the African slaves in America different to here because we didn't have slaves in that immense workforce way on British soil. We had it over in the colonies. So I think that's the key essence to the problem. It's so difficult because when I speak to a younger generation that have grown up with Black British Month that takes place every October, I get this swelling sense of frustration from them that they also don't want slavery thrown in their faces constantly, they want a positive connection to their race. So this is the battle and the tension that we always have because at the same time I feel like we don't talk about slavery enough and the ramification, and how still today we can see

[17] Five months after Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* debuted in New York, making it the first play written by a black woman to be performed on Broadway, it appeared in London's West End, playing at the Adelphi Theatre from 4 August 1959.

the fallout of slavery. It's a very difficult thing to talk about and I think it's also one of the reasons for my mum and my grandparent's generation, why they speak less about their African ancestry. I remember having a conversation, or trying to have a conversation, with my grandma once about slavery and she said to me: 'I don't know about that.' It was a complete lockdown because it's still so painful and it's still so close. We haven't had the same level of movement, we haven't had a Civil Rights Movement here in the same way that there has been in the States and so therefore the progression in terms of talking about race is different, we're still behind. Until we can find a way to get over that, we're always going to be at this sticking point.

LJ: That's a fascinating response. Any more questions?

Audience member: As far as national identity is concerned, […] would you ever consider putting this play on outside of Britain or do you think it is a British play, from where you've written it?

NG: I would love to put this play on outside of Britain. In fact, it has been on at a drama school in Jamaica which I would've loved to have seen. I think it went really well. I would love to see it in America where there's also a huge Caribbean population. I'd be really interested to see it, of course there are certain references, my mother in law said something, it wasn't even to do with America, '[i]f it went outside of London Tash, you'd have to take out the bus references because nobody would know the 236 and the 43' [*Laughter*.], which I don't think is the case because the point is not the bus numbers themselves it's just the fact that Auntie Maggie [played by Cecilia Noble] thinks that she needs to name all of these different buses. I would love to see the response outside of London and outside of the UK, I think it would be really fascinating to see what holds. My sense of it is there are certain things that are specific to growing up in North London, but I think my general sense of it is because it's about grief I think it would reach quite far and wide, I think, I hope.

LJ: Perhaps we have time for just another couple of questions.

Audience member: You mentioned, fairly quickly, that 'and then the National Theatre was interested.' [*Laughter*.] It's a huge step, it seems

to me, and I was wondering if you could talk just a little bit about how the National Theatre became interested and particularly given that the National Theatre haven't been noted for…I mean there have been some plays by quite a diverse group but they're not common, they're few and far between. So I just wondered if you could talk a little bit about how the National became interested and the relationship of the director to that process.

NG: Sure. As I said, I sent the play out to three different directors. One of those directors was Dominic Cooke who's an associate at the National.[18] I had worked with Dom three times as an actor and, talking about showing your work to people you can trust, Dom was absolutely one of those people, and so I had this feedback meeting with Dom where he said 'I love the play.' So that was the first 'okay.' And then he said: 'I hope you don't mind, but I've sent it on to the National Theatre studio.' So that was the second 'okay.' And then he said '[l]ook, I'm going to be perfectly honest with you, I'm not saying that it's going to end up on the National stage but what I'm saying is that you've invested enough in this play that I think it's a great play and I think the studio should give you a workshop.' So I got in touch with the studio and I think within a month I was in doing a workshop with a different director, with Indhu Rubasingham [who] runs the Kiln.[19] We had a two or three day workshop and they asked me to go away and write another draft based on that, based on the notes that I received. I wrote another draft and they came back within six weeks to two months. I opened my emails and saw an email from Emily McLaughlin [who] is head of new work at the National studio saying 'Meeting with Rufus' and that was the third 'okay.'[20] Even then at that point, seeing the email, I didn't dare believe that that meeting was saying 'yes we love it and we want to do it.' I thought it might be Rufus taking time out to say

[18] Dominic Cooke is a National Theatre Associate Director. He made his directing debut at the National in November 2011 with Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* starring Lenny Henry and Claude Blakey. At the National, he has also directed plays by Caryl Churchill, August Wilson, and Stephen Sondheim and James Goldman

[19] Located in Brent, London's most culturally diverse borough, the Kiln Theatre prioritises its multicultural perspective and international vision. It was initially known as the Tricycle Theatre, founded by Shirley Barrie and Ken Chubb. In 1984 it gained reputation as a major political theatre under the artistic direction of Nicolas Kent. In 2012, Indu Rubasingham became artistic director and, after architectural renovation, it reopened in September 2018 as the Kiln Theatre.

[20] Rufus Norris has been the Director of the National Theatre since March 2015.

‘[l]ook, this is great, it’s not quite there yet, we’ll give you a few more workshops, we’ll stay with you, we’ll help you develop it and keep talking about it.’ And it was my partner [who] pointed out that Rufus Norris was not going to take time out of his diary to give me a pep-talk. [*Laughter*.] It was the most incredible feeling when he said it, I remember saying to him ‘[c]an you just not talk for a minute because I need to take in what you’ve said otherwise nothing will go in.’ So we did sit in an awkward two minute silence whilst I composed myself. Then, as to how Roy [Alexander Weise] became involved; that was through the National really. I hadn’t seen Roy’s work and at the time it was a tough decision because the directors that I really loved or had worked with before who I trust were all unavailable and the National had been tracking Roy’s career for the past couple of years so they brought us together and also brought in the lovely and amazing Shelley Maxwell, the Movement Director. It was a real collaboration between the three of us.

Audience member: You weren’t worried that it wasn’t a woman director?

NG: No, I wasn’t and for me it didn’t even need to be a black director either. It just needed to be somebody [who] understood my vision. There is obviously something really useful when working with somebody who has that shorthand, but for me a good director is a good director and they will investigate and interrogate a script in the same way that anybody would. I’d love to work with a woman director next time around though, that’s for sure. It would be amazing.

LJ: After the huge success of *Nine Night*, before you go, what’s next for Natasha Gordon?

NG: Wow, wow, wow. [*Laughter*.] So I am currently, possibly, turning *Nine Night* into a TV adaptation but I’m hesitant about that because it’s a long process and writing for TV is so completely different to theatre so I really do feel like I’m learning from scratch. I have another commission with the National so I’m just looking at what there is to say next.

LJ: Well you’re keeping a sense of mystery. [*Laughter*.] I’m very

excited to find out what that will be and I'm hoping that you'll come back again and talk with us about that, should the occasion arise.

NG: For sure.

LJ: Could you all please join me in applauding Natasha Gordon. Thank you so much.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Jeffery, L. (2020). Natasha Gordon in Conversation with Lucy Jeffery: 'It was around 7.27pm that suddenly diversity walked through the door'. *ArtsPraxis, 7* (2b), 26-52.

REFERENCES

Akbar, A. (2020). Winsome Pinnock meets Jasmine Lee-Jones: "Some UK theatres have never staged a black British play". *The Guardian*, 25 June 2020.

Billington, M. (2018). *Nine Night* review—Joy and grief as generations collide at Jamaican wake. *The Guardian*, 1 May 2018.

Davis, G. and Fuchs, A. (2006). *Staging new Britain: Aspects of black and South Asian British theatre practice*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Davis, J. and Hollis, A. (2018). Theresa May's brexit speech had shades of Hitler. *The Guardian*, 12 October 2018.

Flood, A. (2019). Swansea University announces "decolonised" English course. *The Guardian*, 6 February 2019.

Gordon, N. (2018). *Nine Night*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Khan-Cullors, P., Garza, A., and Tometi, O. (n.d.). About. Blacklivesmatter.com.

May, T. (2016). Theresa May's conference speech in full. *The Telegraph,* 5 October 2016.

McMillan, J. (2018). NTS to explore the social impact of the internet in new Citizen of Nowhere festival. *The Scotsman,* 5 November 2018.

Peters, Michael A. (2015). Why is my curriculum white? *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 47* (7), 641-646.

Sakellaridou, E. (2011). Winsome Pinnock. In *The Methuen Drama guide to contemporary British playwrights* (eds.) Martin Middeke, Peter Paul Schnierer, and Aleks Sierz. London: Methuen.

Smithies, B. and Fiddick, P. (1969). *Enoch Powell on immigration*. London: Sphere Books, Ltd.

Taylor, P. (2018). *Nine Night*, National Theatre, London, review; Natasha Gordon's debut play buzzes with comic energy. *The Independent*, 1 May 2018.

Young, H. (2013). *Theatre and race*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Lucy Jeffery is a Postdoctoral Researcher at Mittuniversitetet, Sweden. She completed her PhD thesis on Beckett's use of music and the visual arts at the University of Reading where she was a Lecturer and Postdoctoral Researcher for the Samuel Beckett Research Centre (2017-20). She has published chapters in edited collections and articles on the work of Beckett, Harold Pinter, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Ezra Pound. Her articles have appeared in the *Journal of Beckett Studies, Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media, Interdisciplinary Literary Studies, Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, The Harold Pinter Review*, and *Word & Image*.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 2b

ImaginingOtherwise: A Glossary of Arts Education Practice on the Cape Flats

AYLWYN WALSH

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

ALEXANDRA SUTHERLAND

TSHISIMANI CENTRE FOR ACTIVIST EDUCATION & UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

ASHLEY VISAGIE

BOTTOMUP & UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

PAUL ROUTLEDGE

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

ABSTRACT

ImaginingOtherwise *is a cross disciplinary collaboration grounded in artistic practice, activism and youth-led social change. Located in Cape Town, South Africa, this is a year-long project of engagement with the arts for young people from the Cape Flats and from migrant backgrounds based in other areas of the city. The project asks how young people make sense of race and spatial inequalities. We aim to reflect on the role of creativity in the context of violence and economic*

and developmental dispossession, asking: How does using the arts for social change produce educational and activist alternatives? We consider how dialogic creative arts generates a theory and practice of social change by, with, and for peripheralized young people in the city.

In this collaborative text, we draw out the key social justice concerns faced by young people in South Africa, setting them against the learning from our arts-based project. Moving beyond the framing of the context of race, violence and dispossession, we explore how these critical ideas move towards a useful set of tools for arts education. We do this in the format of a glossary; which we see as building a methodology of participation in the arts as radical possibility—and invitation towards ImaginingOtherwise*.*

ImaginingOtherwise is a cross disciplinary collaboration grounded in artistic practice, activism and youth-led social change. Located in Cape Town, South Africa, this is a year-long project of engagement with the arts for young people from the Cape Flats and young people from migrant backgrounds in other areas in Cape Town. The project asks how young people make sense of race and spatial inequalities in Cape Town. We aim to reflect on the role of creativity in the context of violence and economic and developmental dispossession, asking: How does using the arts for social change produce educational and activist alternatives? We consider how dialogic creative arts generate a theory and practice of social change by, with, and for peripheralized young people in Cape Town.

PROJECT CONTEXT: CONTINUITITES OF VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN SPATIAL POLITICS

South Africa is notorious for both legislating racial segregation in policies under Apartheid (1948-1994). Between the 17th and the early 19th centuries it was colonized by both Dutch and British forces that laid claim to land, brutalized local populations and ruled by violence. The country is also widely lauded for a largely peaceful transition to democracy under Nelson Mandela. The dominant story that rests on a simplistic binary of years framed by hatred as opposed to a post-

democratic 'rainbow nation', does little to reveal the ongoing and pernicious conflict, poverty and government denial that characterizes much of the country.

European settlement in South Africa originated in the Cape in 1652. The city of Cape Town as the site of slavery in South Africa from 1650s until the 1830s led to segregation policies in the late 19th century. This inheritance demarcates it spatially, culturally, and socially as distinct with regards to how race and space can be investigated. For example, there is a persistent myth about Black Africans (as distinct from descendents of slaves, referred to as Coloured by white settlers) having no claims to roots in Cape Town.[1] Bickford-Smith (2001) maps the ways in which Africans have been systematically excluded as ever having a rightful claim to live in, and declare Cape Town a 'home'. From the turn of the 19th Century to today, Black Africans have been told that their only right to be in the city is as labourers. Segregation and forced removal policies of Africans can be traced back to the early 1900s forcing Africans further and further away from the city, long before the implementation of Apartheid in 1948.

This legacy persists, with South Africa's biggest growing township-Khayelitsha situated thirty kilometres from Cape Town's city centre (and thus, far from much urban labour). In 1955, the Coloured Labour Preference Policy established the 'Eiselen Line' (named after the Minister of Native Affairs at the time and lasting until 1984) which divided the province into regions that ensured that employers hired Coloured workers before African workers (Cole, 2012). The forced removal of Coloured people onto the Cape Flats from the late 1960s was also a spatial manipulation to ensure that Coloured labourers were closer to white employment than Black labourers. The legacy of these policies and the racial hierarchy engineered by segregationist policies that narrated Coloured people as having ostensibly more rights than African people persists. This results in stark divisions between white, Black and Coloured communities.

From a social justice perspective, there is no longer any political

[1] 'Coloured' as a term is deployed sociologically. Testament to the complex persistence of spatial and economic arrangements of Apartheid—Coloured continues to be used as a (heterogeneous) racialised identity. This does not speak to the ways in which people identify positively with the term Coloured, imbuing it with new meaning. It's also a constant conversation in work with young people in relation to Black Consciousness, and the political usage of the term 'Black'.

'preference' for Coloured communities who suffer from poverty, unemployment, and a lack of access to decent housing, health care and education that persists for so-called 'previously disadvantaged' communities across South Africa. The Cape Flats are largely mapped by gang rule and parts have the highest murder rate per capita in the world (Lindegaard, 2018). The legacy of Apartheid social engineering means that activism and politics continue to be racially divided between Coloured and Black communities who often regard each other with suspicion. This is exacerbated by a volatile political climate and the emergence of hyper-nationalist politics such as the group 'Gatvol Capetonian' (fed up Capetonian) which advocates Cape Town for Coloured people and not for Black Africans, riding on the myth that Xhosa people first came to Cape Town in the 1900s and therefore have no claim as 'original' people. The Apartheid strategy of creating a Coloured identity/race group as a buffer between the white minority and the black majority plays itself out in pernicious and divisive ways in the city (Jacobs, 2018).

SPATIAL SHIFTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IMPERATIVES

There are two critical moments or 'shifts' in the history of the Cape Flats that are helpful to understand the production of the (social-)space of the Cape Flats, and the related complex identities which are constructed in relation to this particular place. The particularities of the Cape Flats are intertwined with broader social, political and economic changes that took place in South Africa in the 1950s and in the 1990s. Contemporary conundrums such as why the ruling party fails to secure the Western Cape province (of which the Cape Flats is part) in elections, as well as witnessing the emergence of political groups who mobilize on the basis of narrow (and nationalist) identity in the Cape Flats or why memes about 'Coloured' identity or culture are trending on social media may also be explained in relation to the these shifts or changes, and how social actors construct identities in relation to these changes.

The first of these shifts is the changes that were instigated by the Group Areas Act. Through the Group Areas Act (the Bantustan Policy), a racialized division of space was implemented through the forced removal and relocation of families to areas like the Cape Flats (and

others such as Atlantis or Ocean View). This spatialization of race persists and is easily visually illustrated through the use of race-dot maps (such as those produced by Adrian Frith, n.d.). This shift has had multiple effects on people who live in the Cape Flats which are not adequately grasped by the limited amount of literature that has been produced. The 'Cape Flats' (which actually refers to a flat-land area) is forged out of a history of dispossession and dislocation (the psychic pain which led to some taking their own lives) and was embedded into the hierarchical race and class stratified design of the apartheid model city as a whole (which aimed to locate cheap labour close to industrial zones and away from whites-only zones). At the micro-level, many of the spaces of the Cape Flats are also characterized by high density living in multi-story tenement buildings (similar to 'the projects' in the US and high-rise council housing in the UK). Bright flood lights and road layouts are designed to be easily cordoned off and controlled by police, and they are marked by a particular aesthetic of absence (the absence of trees and foliage, the absence of designated recreational spaces, the absence of public services and amenities). In short, while individual actors and groups form subcultures and attempt to write new stories and identities, it is on and against this backdrop of a space produced through dispossession and dislocation, which actors construct identities for themselves. Identity is refracted in different ways in relation to these real losses both past and contemporary.

The second shift is brought about through the advent of the new democracy in 1994 and the changes which preceded the 1994 elections, such as the desegregation of schooling in the early 1990s. This period was characterized by a discourse of triumphalism, optimism and hope that the democratic government would enact political and economic changes that would transform lived realities of working-class people in ghettos and urban townships like those in the Cape Flats. Accompanying this, for a significant number of people, were hopes of restitution or reparations (including the many families who are still fighting to return to the land and homes from which they were displaced). While the changes brought about in the 1990s through elections, the government of national unity and the enactment of the constitution along with policy suites relating to key sectors were fundamental first order changes, to the effect that South Africans no longer live under the rule and law of Apartheid, now experience freedom of movement (albeit constrained by class dynamics) and are

able to participate in democratic processes, they have not been accompanied by similar economic changes (in fact, economic inequality has been exacerbated under the effects of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Plan and its successor the National Development Plan).

In the education sector for example, the effects of these changes have afforded a small fraction of people the chance to be integrated into the fortified/ former model-C schools, while urban township and ghetto schools which serve the majority of students, remain under-resourced and understaffed. As a result of such under-resourcing, one of the schools involved in this project had been involved in a picket action in which students marched to the department of education district office in Ottery to demand more teachers (Francke, 2020). Similarly, parent and activist groups in Mitchell's Plain (where some students reside), have been raising concern about the lack of space in schools, which results in the failure of the state to be able to accommodate all students within the public school system.

Ironically, a further negative consequence of the teacher rationalisation plan and other austerity-based measures adopted in the 1990s has resulted in the diminishing of aspects of school life (such as music, art and sport programmes) in Coloured (House of Assembly) schools. This resulting exodus of middle-class families following the de-racialization of schools and the effects of austerity-based budgets, have produced what might be described as poor schools for poor people. 1994 might therefore be described as a failed transition (from a Lefebvrean perspective), or a transition which has not resulted in the production of a new space for people who live in the Cape Flats. This second critical moment with its set of changes therefore entrenches feelings of loss in terms of dispossession and introduces a new accompanying sense of loss of hope in the ability of the new state to make good on its promises of liberation and freedom.

Beyond resourcing, all of the schools involved in *ImaginingOtherwise* exist in spaces that are beholden to the territorialisation of street gangs. Our young people testified that for those who walk to and from school, this implies navigating across the invisible yet tangible borders of street gangs and feeling vulnerable when doing so. For this reason, many students walk home in groups and avoid after-school activities that might require them to leave school in smaller numbers or on their own. Even during the strict lockdown

implemented because of COVID-19, students reported incidents of gang violence, and more than one incident in which a young person like themselves had been affected, this reflected also in the title of a local news article during the lockdown: 'Cape Flats families bury their children on Youth Day' (Geach, 2020). These realities render the organisation and sustainability of after-school programmes for youth a significant challenge, the success of which often depends on the availability of safe transport. Whilst community violence is not a direct school resourcing issue, it speaks to the lack of provisions all round which produce the attenuated space of the ghetto, and the ways in which the *conditions* for community violence are reproduced.

In this nexus, identities are constructed in different ways, and draw on different discursive frameworks. Identity constructions such as 'Coloured' are sometimes mobilized as defence mechanisms, as in the case of the recent satirical meme ('if Coloured culture doesn't exist then why…'?), drawing out the tacit experiences of culture and lived experience as tantamount to identity-formation. Some examples are:

> "If Coloured culture doesn't exist then why is "hello jy" [hello you] a threat instead of a greeting?"
>
> "If Coloured culture doesn't exist then why do we all know the difference between 'now now' and 'just now'?"
>
> "If Coloured culture didn't exist, where would we get koeksisters [a syrup doughnut, covered in desiccated coconut] on Sundays?"

At other times the identity constructions are rejected as assimilationist, in opposition to colonial or Apartheid arrangements and politics—and even then there are differences when some people claim non-racism and reject classification altogether while others who equally reject the term Coloured adopt quasi-nationalist frames such as Khoe-san (in an appeal to indigineity). At the very far right end, groups have emerged in which race and even separatist politics are re-inscribed. Most important to note however, is the manner in which all of these identities and political stances are formed in relation to experiences of genuine loss. Whether the categorisation and labelling is accepted or rejected, it must necessarily be read against the social, economic and political history of the Cape Flats (in the Western Cape and more generally in

South Africa). Some of the identity constructions reify race, locking young people into the constructions of others, while other constructions offer hope of imagining the self as freed from the trappings of a colonial logic. Others still attempt to subvert existing labels and imbue them with new meaning. The different constructions speak to the manner in which structure constrains like a force-field, yet never entirely determining how agents imagine themselves in relation to others.

IMAGININGOTHERWISE: COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

Cape Town therefore exemplifies the violent story of nationhood: its geography retains stark divisions and remnants of 'forced removals' and 'separate development' (which were central policies of the Apartheid state). It is an environment of extremes and paradoxes with excessive wealth and privilege in some places with others characterized by deprivation, overcrowding and poor sanitation. As a result, many young people across poor communities live in fear and degrees of poverty in a city still dominated by Apartheid engineering. Today, young people in the city of Cape Town face questions of 'hope' and 'the future' as seemingly pre-determined narratives. For working class and poor children and young people of the Cape Flats, the quality of education, their access to resources to enable life-chances, and their home lives are often chaotic and framed by violence of local gangs, drugs and poverty. It can be difficult to imagine alternatives. However, as a fundamental tenet of activist education, we must be able to imagine alternatives to begin to manifest the future we desire.

The *ImaginingOtherwise* project aims to challenge youth disempowerment related to lack of resources as a consequence of systematic erasure and forgetting. The co-creator collective of young people seeks to establish a sense of place beyond the systemic identification of place with gangs, drugs and lives characterized by violence. In a context so fraught by the politics of language, dispossession and exclusion, our international collaboration—of UK-based academics and South African grassroots organisations—needed to work through, consciously, our understandings without unwittingly replicating assumptions that could be culturally loaded. This mutual sense of meaning-making is well known in arts processes, but

often overlooked in how projects are set up. We propose that it can be a generative and enlightening process to produce a set of shared terms that characterize the work (particularly around the interconnected issues of safeguarding, ethics and reflective praxis).

The project partners, Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education and BottomUp as well as researchers from the University of Leeds deliver arts-based activism and education, with an explicit focus on young people's participation in the community and mentorship programmes. Both partners in Cape Town are explicitly activist in intent: Tshisimani develops programmes for grassroots activist education, often using the arts, and mounts several youth arts projects across the year. BottomUp is a small NGO working on youth leadership and critical thinking to challenge the current status of education in under-resourced schools in the Cape Flats. The researchers based in the UK have backgrounds in arts education and scholar activism in several countries, with a focus on participatory arts-based methods. Our intention was to build capacity through intensive workshops led by local artists: with outcomes including film and performance, storyboards and visual arts. We hope that the cross-arts collaborative storying of experiences and dissemination enables a wide audience to engage with what young people identify in their communities for developing resilience.

PROJECT PEDAGOGY AND GLOSSARY FORMAT

ImaginingOtherwise is one of several projects funded by 'Changing the Story', a multi-national co-production project focused on post conflict settings and arts approaches to understanding youth engagement in civil society. 'Changing the Story' is funded by the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), distributed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

The project team had initially planned to run three intensive training camps in different art-forms as well as to bring young people to specific sites of historical importance and cultural heritage. Just as activities were beginning, the South African state instituted strict lockdown measures related to COVID-19. As a result, the team needed to pivot and work through the many challenges related to how to engage and keep young people motivated despite having had little time together to forge a sense of common goals. Instead of a main

focus on performance which was our initial plan, we developed a different shape to the *ImaginingOtherwise* endeavours—including building a group from the bottom up via a dedicated whatsapp group, hosting online workshops, sharing artistic collaborative activities. These included young people mapping out their relations to space and their neighbourhoods: moving beyond physical landmarks to incorporate hopes, fears and memories in order to better understand people's lived experience. Although we started in the here and now, the art-forms enabled us to build visions through fiction, imagination, and speculation that opened up rather than closed down how people 'read' and represent their attachments to place. Our chosen pedagogy had to do with strategic need to keep the project going despite the lockdown, and so was informed by (a) pandemic impacts and the format of online working and, (b) providing a set of spatial as well as racial and youth artistic 'lenses' through which the everyday experiences of being young, Black and marginalized are imagined.

Our project commissioned artist mentors to facilitate workshops in visual arts, creative writing, and digital film-making. This required a shift in emphasis on technical skills alongside the focus on race, space and injustice as thematic lenses of the project. The fact that we needed to learn on the go inspired the format of the glossary—in the hope that practitioners in other contexts would be able to recognise the approaches, and work towards new and other ways of working beyond pandemic times. The work we consider in the glossary relates to how we have needed to rely on shared and developing goals for social justice while delivering high quality participatory arts.

Drawing on the team's collective experience in working with marginalized young people and the arts as a method for critical engagement in public life, we approach contexts of violence and exclusion via arts pedagogies, under the tutelage of the professional artist mentors. The focus on techniques, skills development and drafting via feedback was a very different model to what we had envisaged. Their emphasis on care and crafting as well as editing was necessary because the participants were working and developing materials alone and then coming together online to share them. This required a different emphasis, where usually group devising and chorus activities would shape the outcomes. What we discovered, in our openness and capacity to adapt, is the value of collaborative arts education approaches to social justice.

To that end, working from the critical arts pedagogies of the project, and inspired by the format of ArtsAdmin's *A is for Action* (2010), we offer this glossary to promote some of the pressing issues of social justice and the arts, and how these have manifested in our project. As readers use the glossary, they'll note we have cross-referred between themes and terms, demonstrating our understanding of how social justice issues intersect and relate in sometimes unexpected ways. We do not offer a chronological understanding of the form and content of delivery: instead, the glossary format is a move towards building a methodology of participation in the arts as a radical possibility—and invitation towards *ImaginingOtherwise*.

GLOSSARY

Arts Activism (see Freedom & Unfreedom)

Arts Activism (or artivism) as a field of study and practice has been theorized and documented predominantly from the Global North (see Boyde & Mitchell, 2012; Duncombe, 2002; Duncombe, 2016) Arts Activism employs artistic processes for activist purposes (and vice-versa). Recognising that those in power manipulate spectacle, signs, and symbols as tools of persuasion, arts-activists reclaim how signs and symbols can be used as modes of resistance. Our project aims for young people to identify as arts-activists: creative citizens who are able to name and express their sense of social change and justice through artistic media that is then disseminated to diverse audiences.

For Duncombe '...the very *activity* of producing culture has political meaning. In a society built around the principle that we should consume what others have produced for us...creating your own culture…takes on a rebellious act. The first act of politics is simply to act' (2002, p.7).

Bridge (see Racism & Resistance)

The pursuit of understanding across difference needs to account for those differences rather than presume assimilation. This is especially significant in the context of South Africa, where legacies of the Apartheid Group Areas Act mean that racial segregation persists. Our project, located in a specific geographical area includes young people

with migrant backgrounds as well as 'Coloured' young people.

A social justice arts practice makes a virtue of different languages, forms and aesthetics. As Cherríe Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa remind us in This Bridge Called My Back, (1981) the bridge builds understanding from one side to another—embracing the potential for uncertainty, difficulty and the need for translation (of different kinds). It places emphasis on the work of 'crossing' as a creative world-building potential.

This is a valuable intervention: the areas our mapping activities showed are routinely divided into territories by gang violence, where young people must navigate borders of safe and unsafe routes between home and school. A further outcome related to bridging and crossing involved the integration of youth from African migrant communities with young people from the Cape Flats. This was a result of decreased numbers of participants due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the decision to include a migrant youth arts group that Tshisimani had worked with previously. These youth would ordinarily not have interacted—yet got to know and enjoy each other, understand their own contexts of violence and exclusion, and create artistic work together.

Co-Creation (see Dialogue)

Co-creation is a trend in cross-disciplinary and development research contexts that seeks to generate research activity that is meaningful for those it serves. Working with activist-education partners, our pace needed to incorporate reflexivity, collective decision-making and lots of choices. Our young co-creators in the project were able to devise how they wanted to participate by choosing art-form specific workshops with mentoring from established artists, writers and film-makers. What characterizes co-creation is a promise of inclusive practice alongside its need for flexibility to accommodate the imaginations and desires of all stakeholders.

Dialogue (see Co-Creation)

Dialogue is a crucial element of any arts-based collaboration and is rooted in relational aesthetics and ethics. A relational aesthetics focuses artistic practice on human relations and their social context, with artists acting as facilitators, and art understood as information

produced and communicated by its makers—in this case Cape Flats youth (Bourriaud, 2002). A relational ethics extends this to include the notion of difference in relation, constituted in an intersubjective manner where difference is neither denied, essentialized, nor exoticized but rather engaged with in an enabling and potentially transformative way (Katz, 1992; Kitchin, 1999).

Given the project was driven by the lived experiences of Cape Flats youth, the relational ethics practiced was about decolonizing ourselves, getting used to not being the expert, through the process of mutual discovery and beginning to know one another. Such a dialogue is attentive to the social context of our collaboration and our situatedness with respect to that context. It was enacted in a material, embodied way, for example through attempts to fashion relations of friendship, solidarity, and empathy.

Exclusion (see Freedom & Unfreedom)

South Africa is often used as a case study of exemplary state violence in the form of exclusion and containment. The Apartheid state (under the aegis of 'social engineering') perpetrated atrocities for decades in the wake of colonial rule. Between the British and the Dutch settlers, their epic 'achievements' decimating the land, pillaging and extracting wealth resulted in a nation state of containment, oppression and biopolitical governance.

The country is still characterized by exclusion in terms of land, which means that black people continue to (working class children and young people in South Africa) grow up in racially segregated areas; that their experiences of education are differential because of legacies of funding; and that there is much grassroots work to be done to challenge and shift the ingrained exclusionary effects of the Apartheid state. The project participants come from poor and working class backgrounds which means that they are excluded from the city of Cape Town. The further one lives from the iconic Table Mountain, the more people are denied access to all the city has to offer: economically, culturally, environmentally and politically.

Freedom & Unfreedom (see Arts Activism, Exclusion, Hope)

When the arts are used as a means of engaging young people critically, we need to conceive of how access to the arts sits within the

context of social landscapes of hopelessness and futures that seem 'disposable' (Evans & Giroux, 2015).

One activity asked young people to create stories that give insight into how they feel youth are 'disposable', and to imagine what needs to change. In the project, we are determined to engage across the anger and frustration of political hopelessness and social exclusion that we might call 'unfreedom' to get young people to see freedom might look like in terms beyond merely capitalism's markers of success. Freedom, as articulated in Tshisimani's work with young people, is understood as being heard, being valued and being respected. It is also about engaging with the tools of critical pedagogy.

Gift

When participants are given a space, time and opportunity to engage in meaning-making, we imagine the encounter with one another to be a gift. Arts activism is seen as a gift—suggesting that aesthetic pursuits are not about pre-determined ends (as in many educational encounters in a test-driven and highly unequal schooling system). Rather, there is a question of an offering by artists that can be taken up by participants.

'The gift' must also be decolonized: it is not only about wealth and privilege bestowing 'gifts' upon poor and peripheralized young people. We recognize everyone's role in the exchange of time, imagination, stories, experiences and energy that goes into collaboration as a gift. This has become significant during South Africa's stringent lockdown, in which young people were not generally able to meet or see one another for social time.

Hope

[Critical] Hope is anchored in an understanding that history is made and that because systems of oppression have been built by human action, they can also be undone through human action. It's not a blind optimism but a belief that change is possible through the praxis cycle of action-reflection that is central to a Freirean approach (Freire, 1971). Like the saying by Antonio Gramsci to have pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will, hope is believing change is possible and the recognition that it won't be easy. This recognition of effortful pursuit and working through challenges also characterizes the theatre of the oppressed (Boal, 1992).

The reality of life of the Cape Flats is not going to change to tomorrow. The systems of oppression that bind these communities were built over a long time. Yet critical hope is the confidence that when young people learn to name the oppressive powers, they will be able to better confront them, and to engage in the creative act of re-making and re-naming the world. This happens in the process of workshops, in the individuals' arts outcomes, and in their moves towards curating an online repository for their work.

ImaginingOtherwise

Our project sets up different participatory arts practices for young people to come together to explore what is 'not yet' manifest in their world. The project creates a space to share experiences, and explore these spaces of 'not yet'—often beyond verbal forms, which was a highlight for participants.

When social and political conditions have meant that their life-stories are blighted by violence, and diminished by the churn of racial capitalism, then we see the need to build activist potential: not just in naming their circumstances, but in imagining differently and thereby, in seeking repertoires of possibility for their own future. As Jill Dolan has theorized about the performing arts:

> politics lie in the desire to feel the potential of elsewhere. The politics lie in our willingness to attend or to create performance at all, to come together in real places—whether theaters or dance clubs—to explore in imaginary spaces the potential of the "not yet" and the "not here." (Dolan, 2005, p. 20)

Thinking about this in relation to the Black radical project, Robin Kelley offers:

> the most powerful, visionary dreams of a new society don't come from little think tanks of smart people or out of the atomized, individualistic world of consumer capitalism where raging against the status quo is simply the hip thing to do. Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge. (Kelley, 2002, p. 8)

Justice (see Neo-Colonial Liberalism)

Cornel West says "[N]ever forget that justice is what love looks like in public" (2011). Confronted by the numerous injustices perpetrated by neo-colonial Liberalism, arts-based projects have a responsibility to attempt to nurture the ground from which (social) justice can emerge. Taking justice seriously within arts-based projects consists of encouraging young people's participation on their own terms; recognising all participants' gendered, raced and classed positionalities; and attempting to effect the fair and equal distribution (e.g. of resources) (see Scholsberg, 2007). South African schools in these neighbourhoods rarely offer any arts engagement so this access to high quality resources and expert mentors is a different distribution that can enable participation.

What is crucial about such an engagement is that a practice rooted in justice brings to the fore debates over power relations and rights, and in particular (in)equalities and exclusions concerning participation, recognition and distribution. Such inequalities and exclusions can begin to be effectively transformed through the practices of collective arts-based education.

Kindness (see Hope, Justice, Pedagogy as Possibility)

Kindness requires explicit dwelling in how creativity and dialogue can nurture and embody sympathetic and empathetic forms of collaboration. Commencing through a slow uncovering of the personal lifeworlds of young people in the initial workshops, the project proceeded through discussion and a relational ethics, that enabled the shaping and crafting of a pedagogy grounded in arts-based praxis. We developed a co-created ethics of care and kindness that will inform future practices at the centre. In project monitoring, several participants reflect that they feel safe and honoured by the project set up.

The practice of kindness grounds and shapes the possibilities of justice operating in such an endeavour.

Labour (see Co-Creation, Dialogue)

Arts-based projects require multiple interrelated labours: emotional, intellectual, and material as well as reproductive labour. Emotional labour is required for participants to confront feelings of fear, stress, uncertainty and hope in their everyday lifeworlds and generously share

them with others. Intellectual labour is required to make sense of such experiences in order to communicate and reimagine them in artistic ways. Material labour is then required for the physical drawing of maps, the writing of stories and the crafting of films. Reproductive labour is required to nurture relationships of care, trust and mutual responsibility that enable a relational ethics to be fashioned (Hardt and Negri, 2006).

We recognize the psychological labour of being trapped at home under lockdown conditions. In reflections, young people said they have no privacy due to cramped living conditions while participating: in zoom meetings, some people had to join from outside in the street, or while looking after a toddler, or trying to set up a film set in small spaces.

Mapping (see Arts Activism)

Our project premise was based on how we might engage students in thinking about space and place. Participants were asked to develop maps that told a story of their neighbourhood, and share that amongst the group. Young people shared how they navigate places of fear and places of uncertainty but also spoke of places of hope in their stories.

Mapping in this way visualized how their everyday lives are sites of many different struggles: overcrowding; gangs and peers who have dropped out of schools; fears of sexual violence and abuse in addition to generational poverty. They also mapped close-knit communities; caring and creative friendship groups and hopes for the future. As we moved into this exercise, we saw mapping as a way of holding contradictions; and mapping of different eras to include histories of oppression and personal memories.

Activities that draw on different art-forms can encourage ways of thinking about how space and injustice come together. Mapping is both an opportunity to represent what is there and chart out hopes for the future, and as such, is a powerful shift towards mobilising arts activists to see, represent and question their locatedness.

Neo-Colonial Liberalism

This project and its participants operate under the global to local context of neo-colonial liberalism. The privileging of market forces to organize all aspects of life have led to increased inequalities of wealth and power within and between countries. Global and multilateral

institutions and transnational corporations combine with national elites to perpetuate colonial forms of exploitation configuring countries such as South Africa as sources of cheap raw materials and cheap labour. For the young people of Cape Flats this manifests locally as a landscape of widespread poverty, unemployment, marginalization and social exclusion. In such a context, arts-based pedagogies nurture the possibility for a 'poetry of the future' (Marx, 1972) to be imagined.

Max Haiven also signals the importance of the imagination in resisting the crisis of power that characterizes the hopelessness of neo-colonial liberalism (2014).

Online (see Justice, Quarantine Art, Tech or Digital Divide, WhatsApp-as-Arts-Education, Zoomism)

The primary means of communication and co-creation for this project was online due to the restrictions of the global pandemic. Webbed together through a key organising tool of the mobile phone, young people were subjected to bandwidth restrictions and overload; signal interruption; and finite data provision. While such disruptions could be viewed as symptomatic of their broader social and technological marginalisation, virtual space also enabled young people to map and share their lifeworlds, attend workshops, and craft their own stories.

As such, being online provided the means by which the primary constituents of social justice—distribution, recognition, and participation—could be enabled.

Pedagogy as Possibility

The students have a very good understanding of their own school and community situation but such understandings are frequently rooted in individual experiences. The challenge is in finding ways to begin with these experiences but to develop a 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 2000) that recognizes the linkages between personal experiences and public issues, as well as to develop the capacities for social analysis that leads to collective action.

Many participants—because they have 'received' what BottomUp calls 'antidialogical' education in under-resourced schools—have not had opportunities to exercise their creative and intellectual potential and have participated in an education system that has not expected or required very much from them. In the past in South Africa, it would

have been called ‘gutter education’.

In our approach ‘possibility’ includes the opportunity to ‘fail’, to experiment and to collaborate to discover new outcomes.

Quarantine Art

Bell and Desai (2011, p. 287) argue that the arts should play a central part in any social justice practice. This is because as much as social justice practices ask us to ‘use our critical faculties to grasp the complex and invidious ways that systems of oppression operate, we also need to engage aesthetic and sensory capacities so as to create and experiment with alternative possibilities—imagining what could otherwise be’.

Art making and social justice are collective activities—what happens in quarantine when we are isolated? For us, quarantine art meant creating via social platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom: sharing stories, collectively creating poetry in response to quarantine. In a visual art workshop we viewed artistic responses to the Spanish flu, and connected it to the ways that this pandemic had shaped racial segregation in Cape Town. Quarantine art is art that names, images, and stories illness: physical and societal.

Racism & Resistance (see Exclusion)

Race is, as Kwame Appiah says, one of the ‘lies that bind’ (2018). South Africa’s origins are rested on stories about race and racism.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore examines how racism is a fatal coupling of power and difference (Gilmore, 2002). Racism manifests as state sanctioned differential treatment that results in ‘premature death’ (Gilmore, 2002). Post-Apartheid South Africa is still blighted by the structuring difference: underdevelopment, lack of infrastructure maintenance and political pursuits of ‘development’ that reach towards neo-colonial liberalism rather than equitable reconstruction and development and fair funding structures for basic needs, including schools, housing and access to work.

Yet, in the context of a country always already mapped out by systemic and everyday racism, how can young people generate their capacity for resistance? The alternative is to submit to the logic of neo-colonial liberalism, which governs and structures life. Our project’s aim to engage imagination, hope and resistance to prefigure another

world is of course a long term project of social justice. Racism cannot be ameliorated by one project, but our activities made space for resisting racism's enduring harms.

Stories

ImaginingOtherwise emerged from a funding stream for participatory arts projects that engage youth in post-conflict settings called 'Changing the Story'. We approached the understanding of stories across multiple art-forms in order to engage different young people.

South Africa's cultural practices build on oral histories. Cultural practices are a place for shared experiences through narrative, and a claim to collective meaning making in and through aesthetic engagement. Storying and storymaking are a part of everyday life, and our young people were quick to bring place, character, structure to story-making workshops.

In addition to these practical workshops, we invite young people to critique the prevalence of the single 'story': 'there is no alternative'. We work through the arts to conceive of the seeming inevitability of 'no future' that goes along with racialized deprivation, poverty and violence, and how that can be re-told. The results are stories (plural) that speak of courage, persistence, resistance and hope.

Tech or Digital Divide (see Online)

Data costs in South Africa are some of the highest in the world and network connectivity is inconsistent. The move to online learning during lock down has exacerbated South Africa's inequalities resulting in the majority of young people in school and higher education severely disadvantaged by the lack of resources to enable online access.

In order to keep people engaged and to challenge the potential that lockdown had to fracture any sense of community we had anticipated, we re-routed funds to enable people to access phones and provided data for joining online creative workshops. In later workshops, we provided further access to arts materials to create filmed stories and visual arts outcomes.

Ubuntu (see Bridge, Dialogue, Kindness)

Commonly translated into the principle 'I am because we are', Ubuntu is a philosophy of the Bantu speaking peoples in Africa, in which

motion is the principle of being, or as Madlingozi puts it, a disposition that no one is a person but 'always becoming a person' (2020, p. 51). Through motion all beings exist in an incessant flow of interactions and change. It embodies the ethical position of caring for oneself and others: to be human is to be in relation to and interdependent with others (Ramose, 2015). In many ways this philosophy underpins the relational ethics that this arts-based project has sought to nurture.

Voice

Our project follows a legacy of participatory arts: by engaging and extending young people's participation in arts activities, and by building a creative community that is characterized by collaboration, compromise and dialogue, we anticipate that co-creators will feel warmed up to exercise their voices in articulating their realities as well as utilize their capacity to voice their hopes for the future.

We nonetheless recognize the limitations of 'giving voice' that we hear in arts and social justice. Chalfen & Luttrell write critically of claims in participatory arts projects that seek to foreground their:

> ability to 'give voice' to marginalized less powerful people. The tacit assumption is that putting cameras into the hands of participants is a resource for having a 'say' in public discourse and decision-making. Yet, how is 'voice' being conceptualized, produced and analysed? … With what certainty can we attribute whose voice is whose? (2010, p. 198)

WhatsApp-as-Arts-Education (see Online, Tech or Digital Divide)

WhatsApp is widely used on the African content as a cost effective, immediate platform. The use of voice-notes, videos, emojis and text created an online experience whereby participants could creatively explore responses to facilitator prompts. Through WhatsApp we created collective poems around experiences of our neighbourhoods during lockdown, emoji stories, and responses to prompts such as what 'disposable youth' might mean.

In the lockdown, these activities facilitated a way to build the group remotely in ways that would ordinarily be achieved through the use of creative exercises in a workshop. These short tasks built trust, community, playfulness and intimacy.

X (see Mapping)

The mark that is made to indicate a point on a map. In this project, X represented the location in which each young person lived. From this starting point, the project encouraged young people to think about the places in which they lived and how they felt about these places. Cape Flats neighbourhoods were mapped—through personal neighbourhood street diagrams, videos, short written vignettes, and voices notes—as places of fear and uncertainty, or as places of caring and friendship. This mapping lays the seeds for a counter-mapping, for the reimagining of young people's lifeworlds through artistic media.

Youth (see Pedagogy as Possibility)

For the young people of Cape Flats, lifeworlds are frequently those of widespread poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion, their voices frequently unheard or ignored. Arts-based pedagogies have attempted to take seriously the desire of young people to be heard, valued and respected, not least by providing the conditions whereby young people can become co-creators in the project, with the space to devise the contours of their participation. We have found that the young people are characterized by sensitivity, energy and vision—speaking with a quiet power about their homeplaces, and with imagination concerning the potential for different ways of being and living. While we recognize that young peoples' immediate realities cannot be magically transformed, this project begins a call & response mode (Cohen-Cruz, 2010) as a process of opening up terrains of possibility for the future.

Zoomism (see Online, Tech or Digital Divide, Quarantine Art, WhatsApp-as-Arts-Education)

Zoom is a remote work (remote-control) platform that has invaded our homes, extending the reach of Empire. Some people have said we no longer 'work from home' but 'live from work'. Yet Zoom as a technology may also be co-opted for resistance as we have done with *ImaginingOtherwise*, and as many activists have done in the face of lockdown, when traditional modes of organising are much harder to do. It allows us to build relations across geographical boundaries and provides us with 'room' to think and build together.

However, in the context of South Africa's 'digital divide,' we must

remain vigilant about proclaiming a right to democractic space of possibility. Lack of privacy, proximity to others and the bad technical infrastructures mean that participant access to zoom is not guaranteed, and is not necessarily a 'safe space.'

SUGGESTED CITATION

Walsh, A., Sutherland, A., Visagie, A., & Routledge, P. (2020). *ImaginingOtherwise*: A glossary of arts education practice on the Cape Flats. *ArtsPraxis, 7* (2b), 53-78.

REFERENCES

Artsadmin. (2010). *A is for action: A glossary for art & activism*. London: ArtsAdmin.

Appiah, K. A. (2018). *The lies that bind: Rethinking identity*. London: Profile Books.

Bell, L. & Desai, D. (2011). 'Imagining Otherwise: Connecting the arts and social justice to envision and act for change: Special issue introduction.' *Equity & Excellence in Education, 44* (3), 287-295.

Bickford-Smith, V. (2001). Mapping Cape Town: From slavery to Apartheid. In Field, S. (Ed.). *Lost communities, living memories: Remembering forced removals in Cape Town*. Cape Town: David Philip, 15-26.

Boal, A. (1992). *Games for actors and non-actors*. Transl. by A. Jackson. London: Routledge.

Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational aesthetics*. Paris: Les Presses du réel

Boyde, A & Mitchell, D. (2016). *Beautiful trouble. A toolbox for revolution*. New York: OR Books.

Cohen-Cruz, J. (2010). *Engaging performance: Theatre as call and response*. London: Routledge.

Cole, J. (2012). *Behind and beyond the Eiselen line*. Cape Town: St George's Cathedral Crypt Memory and Witness Centre.

Dolan, J. (2005). *Utopia in performance: Finding hope at the theatre*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Duncombe, S. (2002). *The cultural resistance reader*. London: Verso.

Duncombe, S. (2016). Affect and effect: Artful protest and political

impact. In Nielsen, H., Fiiig, C., Loftganger, J. Olesen, T., Stephensen, J. & Sorensen, M.P. (eds.) *The Democratic Public Sphere: Current challenges and prospects*. Aarhus University Press, 433-452.

Evans, B. & Giroux, H. (2015). *Disposable futures: The seduction of violence in the age of spectacle*. San Francisco: City Lights.

Freire, P. (1971). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.

Francke, R. L. (2020). Grassy Park pupils march on WCED to improve school. *Dailyvoice.co.za*. Retrieved on 28 October 2020.

Frith, A. (n.d). Dot Maps. Retrieved on 24 October 2020.

Geach, B. (2020). Cape Flats families bury their children on Youth Day. *News 24*. 19 June 2020. Retrieved on 28 October 20202.

Gilmore, R. W. (2002) Fatal couplings of power and difference: Notes on racism and geography. *The Professional Geographer, 54* (1), 15-24.

Giroux, H. (1996). *Fugitive cultures: Race, violence & youth*. New York: Routledge.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2006). *Multitude*. London: Penguin Books.

Haiven, M. (2014). *Crises of imagination: crises of power: Capitalism, creativity and the commons*. London: Zed Books.

Jacobs, S. (2018). The Limits of Coloured Nationalism. *Mail & Guardian Online*. 13 June 2018. Retrieved 28 October 2020.

Katz, C. (1992). All the world is staged: Intellectuals and the process of ethnography. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 10*, 495-510.

Kelley, R.G. (2002). *Freedom dreams: The black radical tradition*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Kitchin, R.M. (1999). Ethics and morals in geographical studies of disability, in Proctor, J. and Smith, D. (eds.) *Geography and ethics: Journeys through a moral terrain*. London: Routledge, 223-236.

Lindegaard, M.R. (2018). *Surviving gangs, violence and racism in Cape Town: Ghetto chameleons*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Luttrell, W. & Chalfen, R. (2010). Lifting up voices of participatory visual research. *Visual Studies, 25* (3), 197-200.

Madlingozi, T. (2020). There is neither truth nor reconciliation in so-called ‘South-Africa.’ *The Funambulist: Politics of Space & Bodies* (30), 46-51.

Marx, K. (1972). 'The Eighteenth brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' in Tucker, R.C. (ed) *The Marx-Engels reader*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 436-525.

Mills, C.W. (2000). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moraga, C. & Anzaldúa, G. (eds.) (1981). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color.* San Francisco: Kitchentable Press.

Ramose, M. B. (2015). 'Ubuntu' in D'Alisa, G.; Demaria, F. and Kallis, G. (eds) *Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era.* London: Routledge, 212-214.

West, C. (2011). Cornel West: Justice is what love looks like in public. April 17, 2011. Retrieved on October 28, 2020.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Aylwyn Walsh is Associate Professor of Performance and Social Change at the University of Leeds in the School of Performance and Cultural Industries. She is programme leader of the MA in Applied Theatre & Intervention and artistic director of Ministry of Untold Stories. Her book *Prison Cultures* maps performance, resistance and desire in women's prisons (Intellect, 2019). She co-edited *Remapping Crisis: A Guide to Athens* (Zero books, 2014). Much of her research has engaged with incarceration and the role of theatre and performance in carceral contexts. Grounded in feminist and decolonial approaches to practice, she has considered the relationship between performance and activism, protest and participation. Methodologically, recent work is informed by co-creation and participation, and she is currently working on youth, dispossession and arts activism in South Africa.

Alexandra Sutherland is a current arts-educator-activist with the Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education in Cape Town, former Associate Professor in Applied Theatre at Rhodes University, and current Research Associate at the University of Cape Town. Her work involves developing arts-based pedagogies for political education with grass roots movements and organisations as well as supporting these movements to incorporate the arts in campaigns, education and activism. Her published research has focused on gender and theatre in prisons and the political possibilities of theatre spaces in rigid

institutions.

Ashley Visagie is Canon Collins PhD candidate in education at the University of Cape Town. He is co-founder of BottomUp, the partner organisation that promotes critical thinking and social justice among high school youth. He has completed an MA: Strategic Foresight (Regent) and an M.Ed (Policy, Leadership & Change) at UCT focusing on the transmission of symbolic violence in an urban township school. He is also a member of the radical scholarship collective, Thinking Space, and a contributor to the *Daily Maverick*.

Paul Routledge is Professor in Contentious Politics and Social Change in the School of Geography, University of Leeds. His research interests include critical geopolitics, climate justice and social movements. He has long-standing research experience concerning protest and the practices of social movements in the Majority World (South and Southeast Asia), and in the Minority World, focusing on the spatiality of resistance practices and the practical, political and ethical challenges of scholar activism. He is author of *Space Invaders: Radical Geographies of Protest* (Pluto Press, 2017) and *Terrains of Resistance: Nonviolent Social Movements and the Contestation of Place in India* (Praeger, 1993), co-author (with Andrew Cumbers) of *Global Justice Networks: Geographies of Transnational Solidarity* (MUP, 2009) amongst others.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 2b

Process Drama as a Liberatory Practice

JOSHUA RASHON STREETER

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

How do we prepare future educators and artists to interrogate and promote social and racial justice in the classroom? *This article considers process drama as a liberatory practice to reposition theatre educators as critical pedagogues. Responding to the need for educational reform, the author argues that drama should be included in PK-12 theatre classrooms and therefore taught in pre-service education and teaching artist training programs at the university level. While a complex artistic form, the author provides suggestions for planning a process drama through the lens of story-making and social justice education.*

INTRODUCTION

As an artist and educator of color, I recognize the complex systems I am working within. I see the field continue to train white educators and

artists to enter into diverse spaces, with little effort to recruit and retain artists and educators of color. I also acknowledge my contribution to this system-wide issue, as I teach future educators at a historically and predominately white institution. For this reason, I challenge myself to adopt anti-racist pedagogies that push back against long-held practices in PK-16 education.

In my current position, I serve as the coordinator for the PK-12 theatre education licensure and teaching artist concentration. These two tracks of study live within the undergraduate (B.A.) theatre major and each course is rooted in critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is best defined as a collection of "radical principles, beliefs, and practices that contribute to an emancipatory ideal of democratic schooling" (Darder et al., 2003, p. 2). Therefore, aspects of culturally responsive practice (Ladson-Billings, 1994), social justice education (Bell, 2016), and critically oriented drama education (Gonzales, 2013) are central to each theatre education class. As the teacher of six theatre education courses (not including student teaching), I use the tools of theatre, specifically drama pedagogy, to support our work together as adult learners *and* more effectively explore, experience, dialogue, question, and reflect.

This article considers what a critical theatre educator offers to the exploration of story in a classroom. I advocate for process drama to be a form taught within pre-service theatre teacher and teaching artist training programs. I position process drama as a liberatory pedagogy and provide a critical reflection on ways it can be more easily implemented by considering the tools and skills available to theatre artists.

ANTI-RACIST EDUCATION & PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING

Anti-racist education pulls upon critical race theory, critical pedagogy, and anti-oppressive education (Lynch et al, 2017) to acknowledge, unpack, and analyze systems of power and oppression embedded in social, political, and cultural structures. As a way to prompt change, these practices are often an essential aspect of pre-service teacher training programs (Boyd et al 2016; Lawrence & Tatum, 1998; Howard & Milner, 2014). Noting that much of the teaching force is white, many studies have focused on whiteness studies as a critical aspect of

teacher identity development (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ohito, 2016; Stachowiak & Dell, Utt & Tochluk, 2020).

There is often a disconnect between theory and practice in pre-service theatre teacher training. With a heavy focus on production and performance, theatre educators are trained to hone in on *what* is being taught, not *how* it is being taught (Kishimoto, 2018). I am interested in ways the field can shift focus to *how* theatre is being taught. This includes moving past multicultural education as diversity and forward into troubled histories and stories of the past with an "attempt to teach about race and racism in a way that fosters critical analytical skills" (Kishimoto, 2018, p. 541).

As a "teacher of teachers", it is my responsibility to model ethical, creative, and evidence-based practices that challenge the educational systems the university students I teach grew up in. Though drama pedagogy remains "historically marginalized" (van de Water et al., 2015, p. 10), process drama, a specific form of the work, equips teachers and teaching artists with a mechanism to create change from within the systems they inhabit. Thus, developing a personal social justice and anti-racist teaching practice to be used with youth in PK-12 classrooms.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN A PK-12 THEATRE EDUCATION PROGRAM

The courses I teach serve as "methods courses", a university class that illustrates teaching practices for applications in the field. It is not lost on me the power of pedagogy to shape the practice of future educators, artists, and activists. Critical pedagogy in a methods course asks pre-service teachers and teaching artists-in-training to:

> Recognize how schools have historically embraced theories and practices that function to unite knowledge and power in ways that sustain asymmetrical relations of power under the guise of neutral and apolitical views of education—views that are intimately linked to ideologies shaped by power, politics, history, culture, and economics. (Darder et al., 2003, p. 11)

The intentional use of critical pedagogy allows college students to reflect on the education system and make sense of it in relation to

power, privilege, dominance, and exclusion. As a modality for learning in the academy, college students start to recognize how a particular pedagogical approach can develop a more equitable and justice PK-12 classroom. Unlike the almost 200 theatre majors at James Madison University, the few students enrolled in the theatre education licensure program and teaching artist concentration will more frequently work "directly and dialogically" with young people in classroom and community settings, thus "contribut[ing] actively to local communities' discourses through critically… [and] socially engaged principals" (Omatsa & Chappell, 2015, p. 192).

In an education program, it is essential to demonstrate artistic pedagogies and theatrical forms that expand entry points of theatre for young people. While James Madison University exists as a historically and predominately white institution, the college students I work with will enter diverse classrooms in the local community, as Harrisonburg, VA, is a refugee resettlement area and over 50 languages are spoken in the public schools (HCPS). Making theatre accessible to all is a key element of public education. To connect theory to practice, I model active and dramatic strategies (Dawson & Lee, 2018; Edmiston, 2014) and various artistic forms of drama through the six methods courses.[1] Pre-service teachers and teaching artists-in-training draw upon these strategies, conventions, and theatrical approaches when leading classes on their own in the field. For undergraduate theatre majors, inquiry-based work that utilizes one's own body, voice, and imagination is a radical departure from the product-based and text-based work that they were exposed to in middle and high school theatre. Consequently, the use of drama pedagogy within the university curriculum is an intentional choice to disrupt and challenge the "traditional", or the established and widely used, practices within the field of theatre education at large.

To shift the pedagogies of the field, change must begin in pre-service teacher training programs. Lee, Cawthon, and Dawson (2013) argue that to influence educational reform, training in pedagogical conceptual change should be the focus of pre-service teacher education. The use of critical pedagogy in the university program ideally creates a cycle of change-making or at the very least, an

[1] Terminology for the various forms of educational drama is discussed by Gatt (2009), noting that there is "no national or international consensus as to the terminology of drama in schools" (p. 167).

attempt towards widening the lens of awareness to positively impact the self and others. If a teacher education program works to utilize critical pedagogies consistently and pervasively within the college classroom, it sets the stage for university students to wrestle with such theories and practices within the theatre major. The translation of critical pedagogy from a university methods course to a PK-12 theatre classroom “take[s] young people beyond the world they are familiar with and makes clear how classroom knowledge, values, desires, and social relations are always implicated in power" (Giroux, 2020, p. 5). This illustrates the direct relationship between teacher education and the young people it serves, while also highlighting the disconnect between our field’s current practices and responsive educational models.

PROCESS DRAMA AS A LIBERATORY PEDAGOGY

Process drama is a non-linear, multi-day form of dramatic exploration through story. This specific form of drama uses a range of theatre and drama strategies and focuses on "creative expression through the key performing arts skills of ensemble, imagination, embodiment, and narrative/story" (Dawson & Lee, 2018, p. 341).[2] To benefit young people and their learning, participants are asked to "imagine, enact, and reflect upon the human experience" (Davis & Bemh, 1978). One of the most notable characteristics of drama is that the teacher “works from *inside* the drama, functioning as [a] in-role facilitator” and participants become “co-collaborators with the facilitator to help shape the drama” (van de Water et al., 2015, p. 50).

Process drama can transform spaces, communities, and curriculum. As Dawson and Lee (2018) state, “[drama-based pedagogy] offers educators tools and a structure to activate their pedagogical beliefs that align with sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) and critical theories of learning (Friere, 2007; hooks, 1994)” (p. 17). In a time where the need for social justice practice in educational theatre is more present than ever, drama pedagogy combines “creative and critical inquiry and expression” (van de Water et al., 2015, p. 8). As young people work to navigate in and out of role, a student

[2] A codified system for these strategies exists by Neelands & Goode (2015) and Dawson & Lee (2018).

“metaxically negotiates their individual history, their character’s individual history, and the temporal relationships of role, a complex temporal relationship between character, individual and classroom community” (Munday et al., 2016, p. 78).

This liminal space holds the potential for personal and social development. Meaningful exploration is contingent upon an engaging story that holds dramatic potential—the opportunity for expandable moments and perspective-taking—while maintaining the ability to question and critique the fictional structures and analyze outside forces that shape a character’s world views, values, thoughts, and actions. The non-linear, extended drama structure “allows the participants to explore [the] notion of belonging, of family and community relationships, of caring, or revenge, of absence and banishment, all from within the process [drama]" (O'Neill, 1995, p. 3). Therefore, learning through and around the narrative "may change [young people's] understanding of who they are, and who[m] they might become, both in the classroom and the world beyond the school” (Edmiston, 2014, p. 4).

AN ARTISTIC APPROACH TO PLANNING PROCESS DRAMA

When intentionally planned and skillfully facilitated, storytelling experiences invite individuals to a critically reflective recognition of their identities and power (Bell & Roberts, 2010; Bell, 2010). As a “teacher of teachers”, I believe a lesson planning process around a social issue allows pre-service educators and teaching artists-in-training the opportunity to reflect and unpack their own educational and cultural experiences related to the topic before working with young people. Therefore, offering the opportunity to explore social, cultural, and political systems that shape individual knowledge of an issue and reflect on experience learning (or not learning) about the topic in their own PK-12 education.

The planning of process drama is widely discussed in our field (Bowell & Heap, 2013; Edmiston, 2014; O’Neill, 1995) and scholars of color, such as Johnny Saldaña (1995) and Carmen Medina (2004), have built upon these frameworks, considering how drama supports a young person’s development from a critical and cultural perspective. However, process drama is an extremely challenging and complex

form of drama to teach at the undergraduate level compared to the study of story drama, creative drama, and arts integration. The fluidity of the work, as modeled by Heathcote, Edmiston, O'Neill, and other key practitioners, does not support emerging drama educators who are working to interweave theatre practice with educational methods and concepts. To combat this challenge, I re-imagined how to plan a process drama with college students, specifically thinking about the aesthetic conventions available to undergraduate theatre majors.

Theatre educators possess skills, knowledge, and abilities in a range of areas within performing arts. If drama is planned with a specific set of dramaturgical tools in mind, it more feasibly provides an artist the means to use process drama in the PK-12 classroom. I considered what the artist knows, specifically the twenty-first-century theatre-maker, and how that knowledge can be co-opted to develop a story-making framework. As theatre-makers *and* drama specialists, we use story—we build stories, inhabit stories, tell stories, and reflect on stories to understand ourselves, each other, and the world around us. So, the elements of story-making become the essential components of planning a process drama.

Story to Content / Content to Story

Using an arts-integration planning framework, I applied Dawson and Lee's (2018) "story to content inquiry" and "content inquiry to story" approach (p. 224-225) to process drama. I ask the university students to fill in the following sentence frame: "The story of _____ to explore _____." They begin with either the historical event/individual or a social issue. I intentionally ask students to leave the other "blank" blank. For example, "The story of _____ to explore immigration." or "The story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah to explore _____." Students then brainstorm ideas to fill in the other side of the blank—what kind of story (fictional or real) could be used to explore this social issue or what social issue could be explored using this individual or group's story. Once they have filled both sides of the sentence stem, students complete some research and create a web of all the people, locations, and events that can be explored in the drama, intentionally pushing past what knowledge they know from their own schooling.

Developing a Narrative Arc

To begin mapping the “story” of the process drama, I reference a narrative arc and discuss each of the terms with the class. For planning purposes, I use the following terms: stasis, inciting incident, rising action, complications, climax, falling action, and new stasis. Together we map out the arc with yarn and large index cards on the floor. Then, I add a different color string to the map to note the difference between the "play" and the "story". A character in a play often has experiences before and after, noting how the story extends past what we see on stage. Rather than positioning these moments before stasis and after new stasis as an epilogue or prologue, I ask the pre-service educators and teaching artists-in-training to think about these as out-of-role opportunities to build into and out of the drama. Before stepping into the story and beginning role work (identified as the stasis of the play), I ask students to think about how they can (1) develop a community contract with the young people they are working with, (2) use a theatre game as metaphor to build ensemble and link to the theme of the drama, and (3) use an activating dialogue strategy to allow young people to express their opinions, prior knowledge, or relevant thoughts on the social issue or event.[3]

Plotting Episodic Time Structure

As the university students identify the events for exploration within their process drama, I ask them to recall dramatic (performance) structures that use flashbacks or other non-linear narrative forms for story-making. Here we begin to delineate between the “story” and the “plot”, noting that a plot refers to how the story is told within the play. Connecting the non-linear and episodic format of a process drama to plot structures of dramatic literature helps theatre majors contextualize curricular planning as a playwriting process. This allows students the freedom to use conventions of drama pedagogy to explore character, setting, situation, conflict, theme, or social issue. As they move between the episodes within the story, I ask the pre-service teachers and teaching artists-in-training to consider what information moves the story forward or complicates the drama, intentionally building to the climax. In a drama based on a historical figure or event, the climax is

[3] Theatre Game as Metaphor and Activating Dialogue are specific categories of Drama-Based Pedagogy as codified and theorized by Dawson and Lee (2018).

often the aspect of the story we know, which extends the ability to question and complicate previously held knowledge by identifying what we know, how we know it, who knows it, and what perspectives are left out of the story. To develop a cohesive process drama, college students deeply research the people, events, time period, and social issue by engaging critically in the topic themselves.

Why Here? Why Now?

Thinking dramaturgically, the fluid movement between in- and out-of-role experiences where young people are both "the player" and "the audience" allows meaning to be made through creating, participating, reflecting, and witnessing. An embodied experience means that young people will carry the drama experience with them as they move out of the classroom and into the world. As the process drama comes to a close and the new stasis is explored, I ask the students to connect to the current moment through the curricular plan. *How does this event (real or fictional) and social issue relate to 2020?* Through drama strategies, like headlines or writing-in-role, teachers can shift the level of activity (Dawson & Lee, 2018) while also connecting back to the unit's enduring understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Unpacking the quintessential dramaturgical question "Why here? Why now?" (a truncation of the expanded question by Brockett, 1997; Lang, 2017; Brown, 2011) makes the historical event or social issue more relevant to young people.

CONCLUSION

This intentional story-making process considers how artists might be positioned to develop engaging, multi-dimensional experiences for young people to explore, inhabit, and reflect on. Through an anti-racist positioning and critical dramaturgical lens, this specialized form of drama works towards social change. The interrogation of a facilitators privilege and positionality as it relates to a teaching and learning context is essential to developing social justice educators.

Now is the time to adopt drama pedagogies as liberatory practices in PK-12 theatre education training programs in the United States. Within a changing world categorized by an interest in educational practices that depart from "traditional", "standard", or white-centered

models, teacher and artist training programs must adapt and shift to meet the needs of students at all levels—from primary to college. While one method or approach to theatre education alone will not create educational reform, intentional approaches to practice shift the field towards student-centered and dialogic ways of knowing. Process drama provides a platform to explore social issues and interrogate histories through embodied story-making, for both the facilitator and participant. This art form and teaching method is long overdue for inclusion in the field of theatre education at-large.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Streeter, J. R. (2020). Process drama as a liberatory practice. *ArtsPraxis, 7* (2b), 79-91.

REFERENCES

Ahmad, F. Z., & Boser, U. (2014). America's leaky pipeline for teachers of color: Getting more teachers of color into the classroom. Center for American Progress.

Bell, L. A. (2010). *Storytelling for social justice*. Routledge.

Bell, L. A. & Roberts, R. A. (2010). The storytelling project model: A theoretical framework for critical examination of racism through the arts. *Teacher College Record, 112* (9), 2295-2319.

Bell, L. A. (2016). Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education. In Adams, M. & Bell, L. A. (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (3rd Ed.) (pp. 3-26). Routledge.

Bowell, P. & Heap, B. (2013). *Planning process drama: Enriching teaching and learning* (2nd Ed.). Routledge.

Boyd, A. S., LaGarry, A. E., & Cain, J. M. (2016). Moving from self to systems: A framework for social justice centered on issues and action. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy. 7* (2), 171-198.

Brockett, O. G. (1997). Dramaturgy in Education Introduction. In Jonas, S., Proehl, G., & Lupu, M. (Eds.), *Dramaturgy in American theatre: A source book*. Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Brown, L. I. (2011). *The art of active dramaturgy: Transforming critical thought into dramatic action*. Focus.

Cowley, M. (2006). *Black ants and Buddhists: Thinking critically and teaching differently in the primary grades*. Stenhouse.

Darder, A., Baltonano, M., & Torres, R. D. (2003). *The critical pedagogy reader*. Routledge Falmer.

Davis, J. & Behm, T. (1978). Terminology of drama/theatre with and for children: A redefinition. *Children's Theatre Review, 27*, 10-11.

Dawson, K & Lee, B. (2018). *Drama-based pedagogy: Activating learning across the curriculum*. Intellect.

Edmiston, B. (2014). *Transforming teaching and learning with active and dramatic approaches: Engaging students across the curriculum*. Routledge.

Gatt, I. (2009). Changing perceptions, practice, and pedagogy: challenges for and ways into teacher change. *Journal of Transformative Education, 7* (2), 164-184. doi: 10.1177/1541344609339024

Giroux. H. A. (2020). On Critical Pedagogy (2nd Ed.). Bloomsbury.

Gonzales, J. (2013). Temporary Stages II: Critically Oriented Drama Education. Intellect.

Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS). (2017, Sept 30). Enrollment Statistics. Harrisonburg City Public Schools.

Howard, T. C., & Milner, R. H. (2014). Teacher preparation for urban schools. In R. H. Milner & Lomotey, K. (Eds.), *Handbook of urban education* (pp. 199-216). Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing Co.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Teaching in dangerous times: Culturally relevant approaches to teacher assessment. *The Journal of Negro Education, 67* (3), 255-267. doi: 10.2307/2668194

Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Preparing teachers for diverse student populations: A critical race theory perspective. *Review of Research in Education, 24*, 211–247. doi: 10.2307/1167271

Lang, T. (2017). *Essential dramaturgy: The mindset and skillset*. Routledge.

Lawrence, S. M. & Tatum, B. D. (1998). White racial identity and anti-racist education: A catalyst for change. Early Childhood Equity Alliance.

Lee, B., Cawthon, S., & Dawson, K. (2013). Elementary and secondary teacher self-efficacy for teaching and pedagogical conceptual change in drama-based professional development program.

Teaching and Teacher Education (30), 84-98. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2012.10.010

Levstik, L. & Barton, K. (2011). *Doing history: Investigating with children in elementary and middle schools* (4th Ed.). Routledge.

Lynch, I., Swartz, S., & Isaacs, D. (2017). Anti-racist moral education: A review of approaches, impact, and theoretical underpinnings from 2000 to 2015. *Journal of Moral Education, 46* (2), 129-144. doi: 10.1080/03057240.2016.1273825

Kyoko K. (2018). Anti-racist pedagogy: From faculty's self-reflection to organizing within and beyond the classroom. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 21* (4), 540-554. doi: 13613324.2016.1248824

Medina, C. L. (2004). Drama wor(l)ds: Explorations of Latina/o realistic fiction. *Language Arts, 81* (4), 272-282.

Mattson, R. (2008). Theatre of the assessed: drama-based pedagogies in the history classroom. *Radical History Review, 102*, 99-110. doi: 10.1215/01636545-2008-016

Munday, C., Anderson, M., Gibson, R., & Martin, A. (2016). Drama in schools: agency, community, and the classroom. In Freebody, K. & Finneran, M., *Drama and social justice: Theory, research, and practice in international contexts*. Routledge.

Neelands, J. & Goode, T. (2015). *Structuring drama work: 100 key conventions for theatre and drama* (3rd Ed). Cambridge UP.

Ohito. E. O. (2016). Making the emperor's new clothes visible in anti-racist teacher education: Enacting a pedagogy of discomfort with white preservice teachers, *Equity & Excellence in Education, 49* (4), 454-467. doi: 10.1080/10665684.2016.1226104

Omatsa, M. & Chappell, D. (2015). Theatre education in the academy: Major impacts of minor differences. *Theatre Topics, 25* (3), 185-197. doi: 10.1353/tt.2015.0035

O'Neill, C. (1995). *Drama worlds: A framework for process drama*. Heinemann.

Saldaña, Johnny. (1995). *Drama of color: Improvisation with multiethnic folklore*. Heinemann.

Stachowiak, D. M. & Dell, E. B. (2016). Critical social justice in teacher ed programs. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 7* (2), 5-14.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

Utt, J. & Tochluk, S. (2016). White teacher, know thyself: Improving anti-racist praxis through racial identity development. *Urban Education, 55* (1), 125-152. doi: 10.1177/0042085916648741

van de Water, M., McAvoy, M., and Hunt, K. (2015). *Drama and education: Performance methodologies for teaching and learning*. Routledge.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Joshua Rashon Streeter, MFA, is an Assistant Professor of Theatre Education at James Madison University, where he heads the theatre education licensure program and the teaching artist concentration. Joshua's work centers around drama pedagogy, critical pedagogy, and embodied learning. As a practice-based researcher, Joshua analyzes the pedagogies used in rehearsals and classrooms and explores the relationship between process and product in a creative learning experience. He continues to work as a theatre practitioner, specifically focusing on theatre for young audiences, youth theatre, and musical theatre. Joshua was named the 2015 Winifred Ward Scholar by the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) and served on the twelve-person committee to write the 2014 National Theatre Standards.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 2b

Drama in Education as a Form of Critical Pedagogy: Democratising Classrooms in Chile

CATALINA VILLANUEVA

UNIVERSIDAD DE CHILE

CARMEL O'SULLIVAN

TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

ABSTRACT

Drama in Education (DiE) is a valuable site for the practice of critical pedagogy. However, there is little research that explores the critical potential of drama as a methodology for teaching and learning across the curriculum in a Latin American context. This study analyses the critical pedagogical potential of DiE for the practices of Chilean teachers. Findings revealed that for most teachers, learning about DiE strengthened their critical pedagogical mission. Teachers recognised DiE's potential for democratising their classrooms. However, teachers also identified difficulties in the application of DiE, citing motivating equal participation in students, identifying drama strategies that best suited curricular aims, and insufficient time for reflection as particular challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Chilean education is recognised as an example of a market-oriented educational system (Bellei, Cabalin, & Orellana, 2014). In the 1980s, the dictatorial government of the time introduced neoliberal policies directed towards the decentralisation and privatisation of education, establishing a system regulated by the logic of supply, demand and competition, rather than social justice and equity (Corvalán, 2013).

These market-oriented policies enhanced socioeconomic school segregation, discrimination and inequality (Valenzuela et al., 2013; Bellei et al., 2014). The strong neoliberal orientation of the Chilean educational system and its negative social impact were denounced by Chilean people through recurrent protests beginning in the mid-2000s (González López & Parra Moreno, 2016). These protests, led by secondary and tertiary level students, demanded that education be understood as a basic universal right rather than as an individual commodity. A former president, Michelle Bachelet, developed educational reforms in 2014 that appeared to support a move away from a heavy market orientation in education. However, these reforms were received unfavourably by some who saw it as grounded on market-oriented narratives (López & Medrano, 2017). The unfairness of the educational system contributed to kindling the revolution on October 18th 2019, to which the current government of Sebastián Piñera responded with harsh repressive measures, resulting in the violation of human rights (OACNUDH, 2019). This social revolt led to a referendum where an overwhelming majority of Chileans voted to write a new Constitution that will replace the one written during the dictatorship which promoted a subsidiary rather than a well-being state (Watson, 2020).

Against this background, an examination of alternative approaches to pedagogy that challenge neoliberal conceptions of education appears necessary. Recognising that one of the tasks of critical pedagogy is to make schools "safe from the baneful influence of market logics" (Giroux & Giroux, 2006, p. 28), it seems pressing to inquire into teaching and learning methods that may help Chilean teachers bring this paradigm into their classrooms.

Critical pedagogy is presented as a heterogeneous educational movement committed to emancipatory social change and a just distribution of power (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009). Despite its longstanding presence in education, there are some who believe that

critical pedagogy has remained in the academy, emphasising theory over practice, and failing to reach a general teacher audience (Teemant, Leland, & Berghoff, 2014). In responding to mid-twentieth century social movements such as feminist, African, Native American, Aboriginal, disabled civil rights, and gay and lesbian rights, critical pedagogues are now interplaying with multiple postdiscourses around transformative identity (gendered, racial, social, temporal, cultural, etc.) to change the conditions of the oppressed, disadvantaged and marginalised. Such multiple perspectives problematize original theories on critical pedagogy, causing the movement to transform and ramify. Therefore, there is a need to discuss alternative and critical pedagogies in contextualised ways, exploring different approaches to bring them into practice, whilst acknowledging that consequent tensions and problems might arise in that practice.

Drama and theatre education has long been identified as a valuable site for critical pedagogy (Doyle, 1993). While some scholarship developed in recent years analysing this in more depth (Freebody & Finneran, 2016; O'Connor, 2013), limited research is available that focuses on a Latin American context. Moreover, there is a scarcity of studies on critical pedagogy and Drama in Education (DiE), understood in the context of this article as a methodology for teaching and learning across the curriculum (Ackroyd, 2007).

In this article, we report on a 15-hour Teacher Professional Development (TPD) workshop using DiE as a form of critical pedagogy, undertaken by teachers in a Chilean school. Although the main study was much larger, our focus here is on teachers' experiences of being introduced to DiE strategies which were developed on the other side of the world by renowned European drama pioneers. Specifically, we wanted to explore these teachers' evaluation of the TPD sessions and whether they saw potential in DiE as a form of critical pedagogy in their classrooms.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND DRAMA IN EDUCATION

A crucial first step in this inquiry was to clarify what we understood by critical pedagogy. This was a challenging task considering the prolific body of literature which has developed around this educational paradigm. But in spite of its heterogeneity, we were able to identify

shared principles in Paulo Freire's oeuvre and in more recently published articles on critical pedagogy (see Villanueva & O'Sullivan, 2019). The most fundamental of these is a transformative aim towards social justice. While some commentators question its effectiveness to provoke tangible social change (Rouhani, 2012), we argue that it can, at the very least, present teachers with a valuable framework through which to question the political role of education, highlighting possibilities to act as social agents in promoting social justice. Based on neo-Marxist critical theory, critical pedagogues understand society as a network of power relationships that result in the oppression of certain groups (McLaren, 2008). In this context, education is not neutral, but reflects a selection of knowledge coherent with dominant ideologies. Consequently, schools are spaces where social injustices can be reproduced, but also where they can be resisted and transformed (Giroux, 1985).

At a classroom level, critical pedagogues contest what Freire termed a "banking model" of education (Freire, 2000, p. 71). In that model, teachers are the holders of valid knowledge, while students are empty vessels to be filled. A hierarchy between standard knowledge and everyday knowledge is thus perpetuated, establishing a vertical, authoritarian relationship between teacher and students. In contrast, critical pedagogues promote a democratic model. This implies a valorisation of the students' lived experience and interests, which are integrated into the learning process. Instead of teacher-monologue, a dialogue is fostered where knowledge is constructed collaboratively and where both teacher and pupils learn (Shor & Freire, 1987). Through critical dialogue, students can be empowered to question knowledge and their taken-for-granted views of the world. However, critical pedagogy's principles are not unproblematic. The feasibility of creating a dialogic space where all involved can participate equally is challenged by some (Bali, 2014; Ellsworth, 1989). For these authors, critical dialogue can actually become repressive rather than liberating in certain contexts, particularly in multicultural classrooms where competing worldviews exist.

While some writers argue that the act of disrupting the verticality of the teacher-student relationship can "be an act of social justice itself" (Breunig, 2009, p. 255), for most, the purpose of dialogical approaches is to promote *conscientization* or critical consciousness (Chubbuck, 2007). Advanced by Freire (1973), conscientization refers to the ability

of critically analysing reality and our possibilities of transforming it. It implies becoming "aware of the various levels of power and privilege operating on, in, and through different aspects of [our] lives" (King-White, 2012, p. 390), as well as our means for altering oppressive ideologies and practices. Conscientization is, therefore, related to notions of critical thinking and empowerment and it entails a problematization of curriculum contents so that social justice issues can be addressed (Horton & Freire, 1990). Again, this concept is challenged by some, who have denounced its paternalistic and indoctrinating potential (Ellsworth, 1989; Greenhalgh-Spencer, 2014). From a postmodern stance, these authors question the teacher's entitlement to determine what counts as just, challenging meta-narratives of social justice. However, others respond to this criticism by arguing that if moral principles rest on too relative grounds it becomes impossible to name social injustice, and critical pedagogy's emancipatory aim can be neutralised (Chubbuck, 2007).

Based on these principles, we explored seminal writers on DiE. Referring to a commonly perceived symbiosis between DiE and critical pedagogy, Grady (2003) highlighted the dangers of establishing "accidental" alliances in the field (p. 79). She noted a patronising potential in critical pedagogy and therefore called for rigorous reflection on the aims and ideologies underlying our practices. In this study we attempt to embrace Grady's clarion call, acknowledging that there are no intrinsic qualities to DiE per se, but rather "it is what we do, through our own human agency, with drama that determines the specific pedagogy and specific powers" of the medium (Neelands, 2004, p. 48). Adhering to critical pedagogy's transformative goals, but aware of the need for constant reflection, we embarked on an analysis of the writings of a sample of DiE pioneers from the anglophone world (Dorothy Heathcote, Gavin Bolton, Cecily O'Neill and Jonothan Neelands) with the aim of exploring the connections between their theories and critical pedagogy. We hoped to identify potential opportunities and challenges for the subsequent application of DiE as a form of critical pedagogy in Chilean classrooms. Although O'Neill and, especially Neelands, aim explicitly at transforming social injustice through DiE (Neelands & O'Connor, 2010; Taylor & Warner, 2006), all four pioneers agree that effecting transformation is a primordial goal in drama. In addition, they share a belief that the creation of democratic classrooms is fundamental to DiE. Basing learning on students' lived

experience is advocated by all. They are also adamant about the capacity of drama to subvert the traditionally vertical teacher-student relationships, particularly through the 'teacher-in-role' strategy, where a teacher assumes a role from within the fiction and interacts with students usually framed in a collective role. Moreover, dialogue is central to the work of these pioneering drama educators. This is illustrated in O'Neill's (Taylor & Warner, 2006) characterisation of drama as "a model for authentic classroom dialogue" (p. 112) because of its collective and inquiry-driven nature. Involving students emotionally and intellectually, verbally and physically, is understood as increasing the chances of creating an accessible space for equal participation in DiE. However, the varied forms of engagement that drama offers can pose challenges to realising critical dialogue in classrooms (Villanueva & O'Sullivan, 2020).

In DiE teachers facilitate students to challenge and question their previous perceptions of the world, provoking changes in understanding, which could potentially lead to conscientization. However, the dramatic experience does not lend itself easily to pre-established goals. O'Neill (1995), for example, is clear that a lack of flexibility over learning goals in drama can hinder possibilities for discovery. Bolton similarly remarks that "while it is possible to indicate the door that is being opened by the play or the classroom drama sequence, one cannot specify what any one individual will learn, or even guarantee that s/he will go through that door!" (Bolton & Davis, 2010, p. 52). So even when an educator might plan a drama with the aim of developing students' critical awareness about a particular theme, there are no assurances that the fluid dramatic experience will result in the achievement of such goals. This is due to the extent of the creative responsibility that students have over the development of the dramatic journey, especially in process-drama approaches (O'Neill, 1995). Arguably, this could make DiE less effective in the pursuit of critical pedagogical goals. However, applying critical pedagogy through DiE may help avoid risks relating to indoctrination, as the teacher appears to have less control over the destiny of the lesson than in more traditional approaches.

In terms of the role of the teacher in regulating the moral compass of the dramatic experience, there are some differences amongst these pioneers. For Heathcote (1991), students "must forge their own truths for themselves" (p. 70), without being encumbered, at least at an

earlier stage in the dramatic work, by their teacher's moral judgements. This view seems more aligned with postmodern voices in the critical pedagogy literature that challenge the universalising and paternalistic potential of the paradigm. Neelands (2005), on the other hand, seems to hold a stricter view, believing that teachers should have "no concerns about either banning, or confounding, prejudicial images and characterisation" (p. 61). For him, an excessively non-interventionist teacher stance can actually reproduce oppressive behaviour and opinions in the classroom. The modern/postmodern debate evident in the literature emerges again in relation to the level of moral guidance, if any, that teachers should/could pursue in drama education. However, there is consensus in the field that as human beings have agency, it is our role and responsibility as drama educators to facilitate this ability to actively resist and critique the failure of society to serve large diverse populations who remain marginalized and exploited.

In a country and continent where inequality rages (Aste Leiva, 2020), we were keen to explore whether drama could provide a forum to explore social justice issues through a critical pedagogical lens, and how best we might do that whilst working within the demands of busy school schedules. As drama is mostly limited to extra-curricular spaces in Chilean schools, teachers are generally unaware of drama's potential as a teaching and learning methodology (Aguilar & Arias, 2008). Indeed, Chilean teachers' lack of awareness of DiE makes sense in view of its origins in the Anglophone world (O'Toole, 1992), where most of its theory is written in English. A crucial aim therefore of this TPD programme was to make this body of knowledge accessible to Chilean teachers through an extended in-school workshop.

METHODOLOGY

In this study we adopted a case-study methodology within an overall qualitative approach. This responded to our philosophical assumptions as researchers and our goal of including the views of the various actors involved in the phenomenon under study. We did not aim at producing generalisable conclusions. Instead, we intended to understand the phenomenon in its particularity. Adhering to a critical educational research paradigm (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011), we pursued catalytic validity to motivate teachers in becoming

more aware of their transformative power (Lather, 1986). The case, a school in Santiago, Chile, welcomed the project, and offered a unique setting: a secular, co-educational school comprising pre-school, primary, and secondary levels. Funding was provided by the State and from a private managing body, and students paid no tuition fees. When the fieldwork took place (2016-2017), over 80% of the school's student population (approx. 450) was considered vulnerable because of their low socioeconomic status. Students had low attendance rates, high attrition, and low academic achievement. The school's mission was to educate individuals who are "socially committed, critical and responsible towards the transformation of reality" (Mission Statement, n.d., *our translation*). At the time of the fieldwork, the school was attempting to concretise a recently adopted critical pedagogical ethos. However, they were experiencing challenges, such as reluctance by some teachers to embrace the paradigm, and considerable student apathy (Interview, Head of Teaching Staff). Therefore, school management reported being keen to explore practical ways of supporting staff's enactment of critical pedagogy in classrooms.

In response, a 15-hour workshop on DiE as a form of critical pedagogy was facilitated by Dr Catalina Villanueva (first author) with the 15 teachers who signed up to participate. Following that, eight of those teachers volunteered to coplan and coteach with Catalina over a 9-week period, applying what they had learnt in the workshop to their own classroom. In this article, we focus on their responses to the workshop component of the TPD programme.

Methods for gathering data included participant and non-participant observation, interviews, document analysis, audio and video recording, questionnaires, and drama conventions. Data were gathered from the 15 teachers, the Principal and the Head of Teaching Staff. Ethical permission to conduct this research was granted by Trinity College Dublin, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

SETTING THE SCENE

A diverse group of teachers participated in the workshop from across the school (see figures 1 and 2). We note that Drama is not a subject on the curriculum in Chile.

Baseline data revealed a common tendency towards critical

pedagogy in teachers' thinking, particularly in their student-centred inclinations and in their general support of social justice, conscientization, and transformation as educational aims. However, according to baseline observations, only a third reported being familiar with critical pedagogy, and the majority did not see themselves as critical pedagogues. This reflects the broader context in Chile where educational theory and practice is closer aligned with a constructivist rather than a critical paradigm. Efforts to democratise their classrooms were visible in a majority of teachers' lessons, however, only a few provoked a critical reflection of students' previous experiences, and fewer still established explicit links between curricular contents and

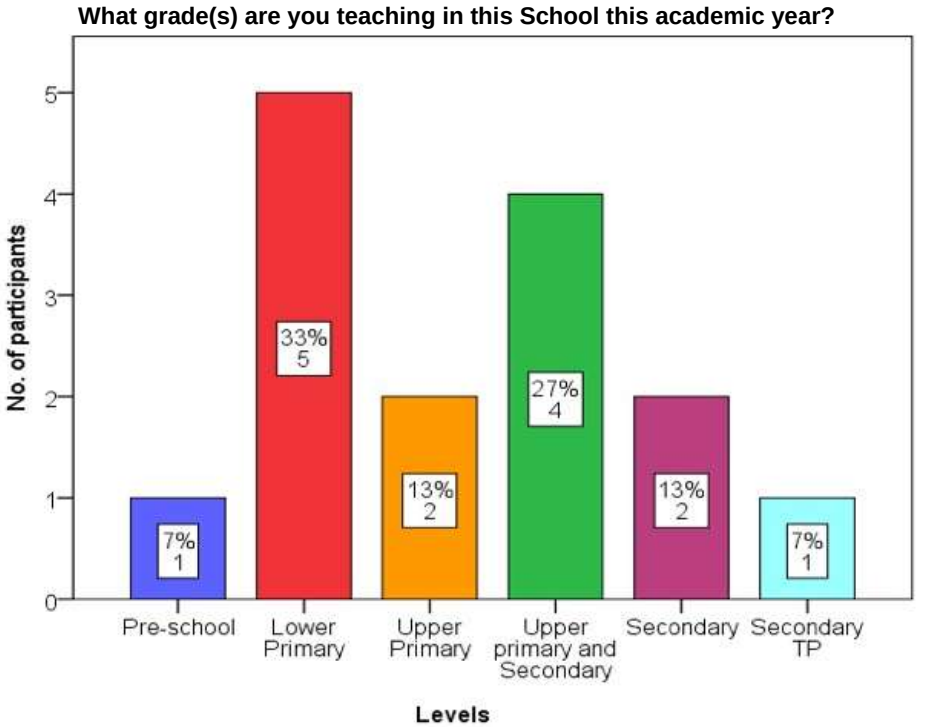

Figure 1. Grades taught by teachers

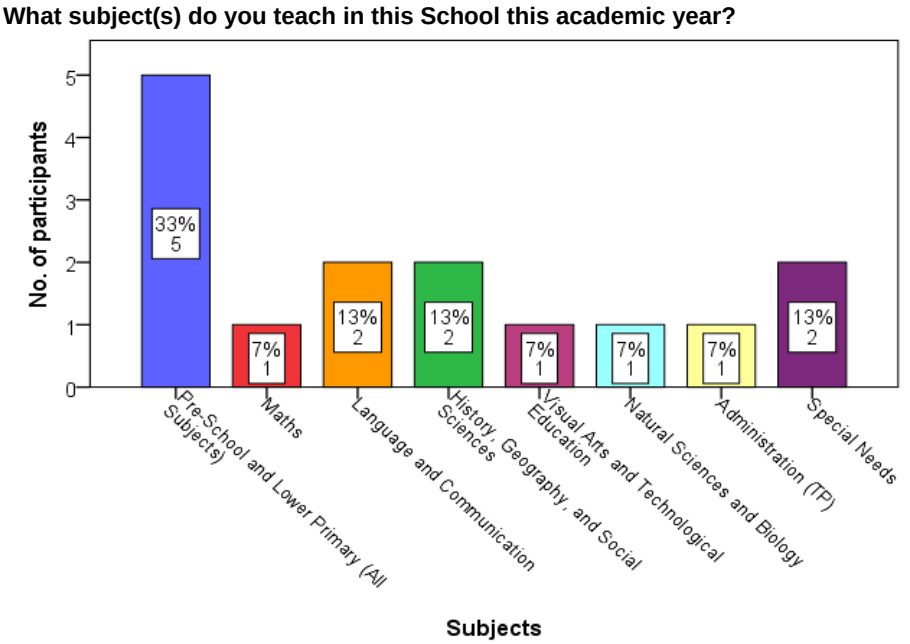

Figure 2. Subject areas taught by teachers

social justice issues. Taken together, the data suggested that critical pedagogy was not being strongly enacted in these teachers' practices despite its adoption as the school ethos. In addition, baseline data revealed teachers had little or no previous knowledge of DiE.

THE DRAMA IN EDUCATION WORKSHOP

The workshop was designed to introduce teachers to basic principles and practices about DiE, promoting exploration of the critical possibilities, and potential challenges of using several DiE strategies advanced by renowned figures in the field. The sessions followed an experiential format meaning that Catalina modelled demonstration lesson plans while teachers engaged as learners. The aim was to experience, first-hand, a process of learning and teaching across the curriculum through DiE.

The first demonstration lesson was based on Neelands' scheme of work on *Antigone* (2005, pp. 67–75). It addressed the Chilean subject areas of Language and Communication, History, Geography, Social Sciences, and Visual Arts at secondary school level. It included a

number of drama conventions (Neelands & Goode, 2015) such as 'conscience-alley' and 'teacher-in-role'. Many teachers highlighted the democratising potential of the teacher-in-role strategy, perceiving the value of an educator's active involvement alongside their students as a way of challenging traditional classroom hierarchies and disrupting authoritarian teacher-student relationships. A smaller number also appreciated the promotion of critical thinking and argumentation through the conscience-alley convention. However, potential difficulties were identified in relation to the 'whoosh! storytelling strategy' with a few expressing concern that students may be reluctant to participate if they were unfamiliar with the story. Concerns about possible teasing from classmates when watching others perform were also noted. These comments queried how a space for equal participation could be created when more performative-based drama strategies were used which may intimidate or silence some students in the class. Others wondered how DiE could be applied in non-humanistic subject areas. In order to address this, one of the demonstration lessons focused on the subject areas of Biology and Maths at upper primary/lower secondary level. In this session, teachers experienced a Mantle of the Expert inspired approach. Developed by Dorothy Heathcote (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995), Mantle of the Expert (MoE) places students in role as experts and invites them to work collaboratively using a task-based, problem solving methodology. Here, the teachers assumed the role of nutritionists who were asked to help a young girl with an eating disorder. Teachers rated the interdisciplinary nature of MoE highly, seeing it as a tool for transforming the official curriculum. Several identified that investing students with responsibility in MoE could lead to empowerment and ownership of their learning. The role of teacher in MoE as an active participant working alongside students, was also highly valued.

In order to problematize the official curriculum and thus examine DiE's critical-pedagogical potential, one of our goals in this demonstration session was to invite participants to explore the influence of the market on cultural ideas of beauty. However, judging by their in-role contributions, only a few picked up on this. Afterwards, an interesting conversation developed around the importance of fostering social criticality in students about issues such as eating disorders, rather than just studying them from a purely health-related perspective. MoE's potential for opening critical discussion was

foregrounded here. However, very few actively participated in this conversation. We had hoped that more might become involved in the debate, revealing our own flawed agenda setting, but when they didn't, it substantiated the notion of the indeterminacy of DiE and the unlikelihood of pushing participants to draw pre-set conclusions.

This demonstration lesson was critiqued by Sofía, a primary school teacher, who said: "I don't know how attractive for students this theme would be". Her remarks provoked a dialogue about the balance between students' interests and a teacher's goals when planning DiE lessons, something we ourselves experienced. For Michelle, a pre-school teacher, addressing younger students' interests and broadening them out into society could be problematic, since these are sometimes restricted by their socio-cultural context. Several were concerned about the indeterminacy of DiE in relation to achieving specified curricular objectives. The teachers' discussion revealed a tension between the time and energy required to plan meaningful, engaging, and challenging experiences through DiE, against the uncertainty of outcomes achieved. This underscores a duality in education systems globally which also effects the practice of DiE; education systems demand mastery of pre-determined outcomes, but critical pedagogy and DiE cannot by definition deliver fixed and closed outcomes.

Another demonstration lesson followed a process-drama format (O'Neill, 1995). Touching on issues of prejudice and stereotype in the story of *The Three Little Pigs*, it was linked with the subject areas of Language and Communication, and Orientation (a curriculum area addressing social and personal education in Chile) for lower primary level. Based on Philip Taylor's storydrama (2000, pp. 9–18) exploring a classical fairy tale from an alternative angle, it included strategies such as role-play, student-in-role, teacher-in-role, and still-image. Teachers reflected on the critical possibilities they envisioned in a lesson such as this with children, particularly in the questioning of taken-for-granted positions that was fostered through the dramatic process. They also valued opportunities to examine multiple perspectives through strategies such as still-image and thought-tracking.

We used drama to explore and unpack teachers' different views and knowledge about critical pedagogy in order to increase their self-awareness about the critical pedagogical potential of their own practices. For example, in one activity, teachers were presented with a series of quotes about critical pedagogy (placed at intervals on the

floor), and asked to choose the quote that interested them most and form groups accordingly. In those groups, teachers created still-images that deconstructed and represented their response to the selected quote (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Teachers working on their still-images about critical pedagogy

The quotes reflected multifaceted understandings of critical pedagogy, and led to an animated debate. One secondary teacher, Laura, chose the following quote about critical pedagogy's indoctrinating potential: "Though more subtly (without making explicit use of force), oppressive power may also be exerted in [critical pedagogy] when trying to influence people's beliefs and actions" (Sicilia-Camacho & Fernández-Balboa, 2009, p. 450). She and her teammate constructed an image of a puppet master standing over a puppet, controlled by strings. In her explanation, Laura said:

> Many times we speak, or some speak, about being critical pedagogues, but (…) we are not giving the opportunity for students to choose their own actions without influencing them. (…) It's like if I, as a Biology teacher, said 'support abortion, support abortion, support abortion' but I never gave them the vision from the other side. (Laura, video, June 30, 2016)

To this, Violeta, a language teacher who stood out in the baseline data as knowledgeable about and committed to critical pedagogy, responded:

> I believe that supporting critical pedagogy does not mean that you impose something, rather, you take sides about an issue (…) I think it is essential to show everything, the thing is that there is a part of that everything that has never been shown. (Violeta, video, June 30, 2016)

A lively debate ensued between having an explicitly critical position as a teacher, avoiding imposition of viewpoints, and/or adhering to outcome-based standards, echoing the disputes between modern and postmodern perspectives on critical pedagogy in the literature. It also touched upon notions of teacher as "neutral information deliverer" (Brownstein, 2007, p. 510) in standards-driven systems of education that devalue multi-layered notions of truth, knowledge, and intelligence, requiring teachers to instruct students in curricular facts only. These teachers were beginning to deconstruct a mechanistic psychological paradigm which serves to alienate and disempower students, leaving little space for creative, critical thinking. A modernist belief in the supremacy of 'objective' facts still prevails in Chile and in many countries worldwide, where a teacher's role is to deliver facts, and students' role is to receive them without question, interpretation "or otherwise making sense of them" (Brownstein, 2007, p. 515).

Beyond this particular debate, teachers' open and diverse interpretations of critical pedagogy became real and visible during sessions, such as through their pictorial representations of a critical pedagogue, following a role-on-the-wall convention. While all agreed that reflexivity was a key trait of a critical pedagogue, half emphasised the critical educator's ability to generate a democratic classroom by promoting equal participation and dialogue, and the other half prioritised the emancipatory goal and political role of a critical educator. Although several remarked that DiE can be a valuable way of approaching social justice issues, interest in dealing with these matters explicitly in their classrooms was not evident amongst the majority. Rather, most identified DiE's potential in creating democratic, dialogic and communicative classrooms. A distinction between these two elements of critical pedagogy emerged in the post-workshop

evaluations, which by the end of the larger TPD project several months later, had become even more complex.

IMPACT OF DIE AS A FORM OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

After the week long workshop, eight out of the 15 teachers continued to engage with the TPD programme. They co-planned and co-taught with Catalina over a further nine weeks. However, at the end of the school year, all 15 teachers who participated in the workshop were invited to complete a final retrospective questionnaire to assess the impact of this experience on their professional lives.

Teachers evaluated the workshop component very positively (6.4 out of a top rating of 7), commending its structure, timetable and experiential format, and identifying the new and relevant knowledge, skills, and strategies they experienced. Teachers most valued the opportunity to experience and 'live through' DiE strategies, and as one primary teacher reported, it gave teachers a chance to be "in other's shoes, living and experiencing what students would feel when performing the different strategies" (Tamara). Several mentioned the importance of the critical pedagogical premises being demonstrated not only in the contents of the TPD workshop, but also in its implementation. One secondary school teacher stated that "the whole process was marked by critical reflection and mediation. From the day when the proposal was presented to us [by Catalina as facilitator-researcher] until the last classroom visit" (Patilla). However, concerns were expressed about the shortage of time for reflection to really dig into the social justice issues which emerged either directly or obliquely, and all noted that 15 contact hours was insufficient to introduce newcomers to DiE. We also found this challenging, especially when our aim was to achieve a balance between theory and practice in the delivery.

Teachers' stances on, and practice of critical pedagogy had shifted eight months on. A third were now problematizing their curriculum contents so that social justice issues could be addressed, and over 70% reported that the workshop helped them reflect about critical pedagogy, promoting a deeper understanding and/or a reconsideration of the paradigm. This seems to have influenced several teachers' self-identification as critical pedagogues, with a third

more describing themselves in that category by the end of the school year (Figure 4).

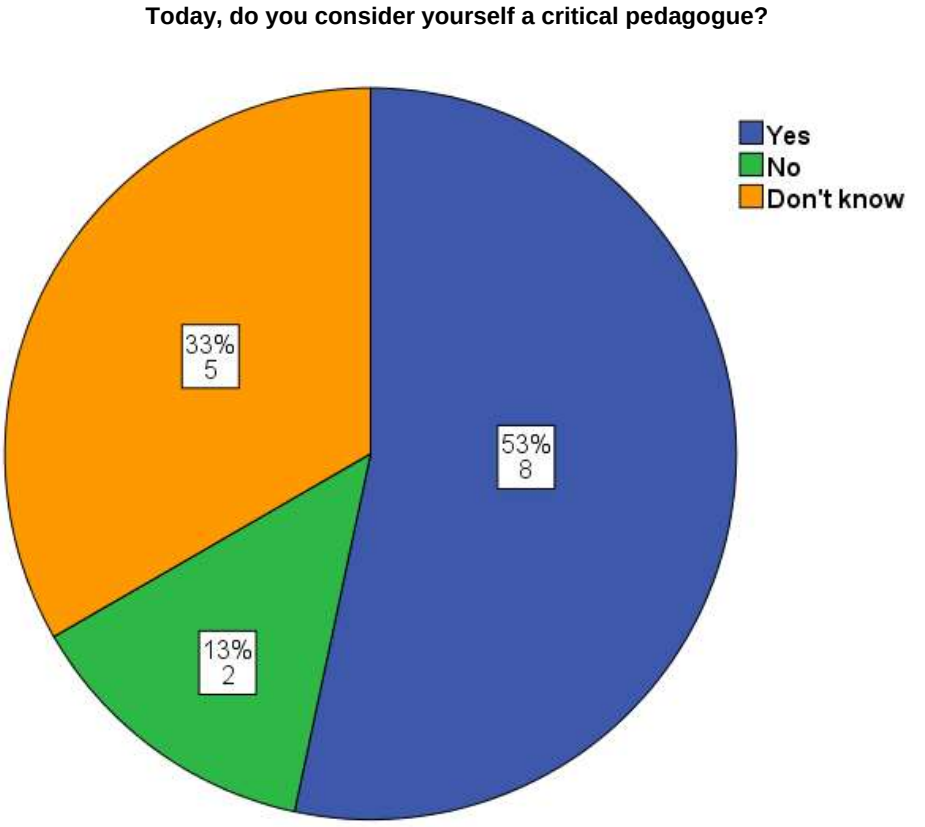

Figure 4. Teachers' self-identification in relation to critical pedagogy in final questionnaire

In the post-project analysis, only one teacher could be described as experiencing a transformational shift in beliefs about education when assessed against Mezirow's (2012) conceptual framework of transformative adult learning. However, there is evidence of what Mezirow (1978) calls "a disorienting dilemma" (p. 7) which signals the beginning phase of the transformative process. Our teachers reported the value of this collective, arts-based process of critical examination of their value judgements, normative assumptions and expectations around student abilities and behaviours. When faced with new knowledge and a heightened awareness about critical pedagogy and DiE, old meanings and perspectives appeared inadequate. However,

while many teachers reported being ready for change, and eager to dethrone positivistic epistemologies (objective facts) in favour of more phenomenological hermeneutics which "allow teachers and students to respect the epistemologies of a diversity of cultures, genders, races and religions that comprise a typical classroom by dialogically examining and understanding the nature of 'truth' in terms of multilogical (i.e. non-Western, female, etc) perspectives" (Brownstein, 2007, p. 518), several felt the educational system in which they worked wasn't yet ready for such changes. For example, Roberto, an upper secondary Language teacher who had initially self-identified as a critical educator, now expressed doubts about whether he had fully grasped the meaning of the concept at all. Although he adheres to transformative aims, he now sees this paradigm as unfeasible in his professional context. The workshop had informed and developed his understanding, and for him now critical pedagogy is "a tool to transform society and to make it more equal, something that many of us aim to achieve, but which is really very difficult in the context and reality we live in (including the curriculum we must answer to)" (Roberto, final questionnaire).

Patilla, a Visual Arts and Technology teacher, seems to have taken the opposite journey. He did not originally identify as a critical educator, explaining that he saw critical pedagogy as a dated approach (first interview). However, in the final questionnaire, he declared himself a critical pedagogue, stating that the workshop helped him to "re-read the socio-critical model", defining it now as an educational approach that "fosters reflection on the discursive-ideologies existing in culture (…) enabling a transformation of our reality" (Patilla, final questionnaire). For Patilla, DiE "can be a highly efficacious tool when first approaching the student with a socio-critical way of thinking". He also highlighted the democratic value of DiE, seeing that it "neutralises the types of hierarchical relationships in the classroom", opening meaningful and motivating spaces "for the participation of all". Patilla was one of the most enthusiastic participants in this TPD programme, going on to create his own DiE strategies that connected critical reflection with his students' visual culture.

All teachers reported that learning about DiE and applying it in their lessons potentiated their critical pedagogical mission, with Violetta noting that "[DiE] facilitated my work within the socio-critical paradigm",

and it helped Gonzalo "to link the notion of social critique with concrete classroom practice". For Michelle, besides being a useful way of "generating consciousness" and giving her kindergarten students more "spaces for protagonism", DiE helped her reflect about her own teaching practice "especially when using the teacher-in-role strategy".

However, data suggest that working through DiE involved stepping out of teachers' comfort zones, inviting students to do so also, and investing greater time and effort in their lessons than previously. Motivating equal participation in students, identifying drama strategies that best suited curricular aims and students' learning styles, and insufficient time during classes for reflection were signposted as challenges. However, encouragingly, just under 80% (n=14) reported being very likely to apply DiE in their lessons in the following school year (Figure 5).

How likely are you to integrate DiE in your lessons in the next academic year?

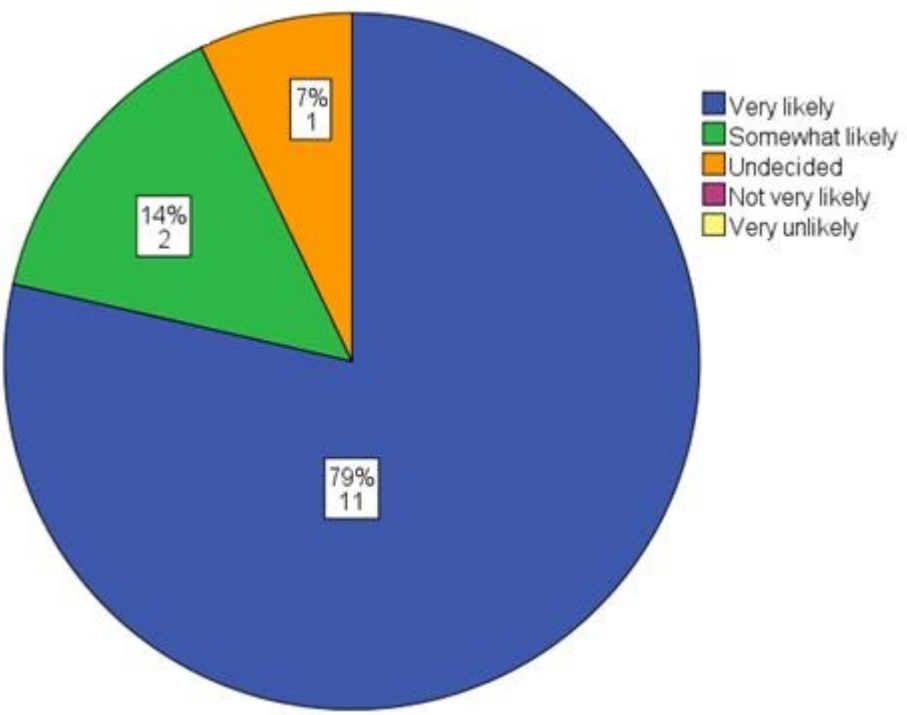

Figure 5. Likelihood of teacher-participants' future application of DiE

CONCLUSION

Findings suggest that these teachers' engagement with DiE as a form of critical pedagogy, whilst not transformative, had a positive impact on their professional lives. Results support that DiE strategies, originated on the other side of the world, may be useful to Chilean teachers in their exploration of critical pedagogical practices. Whilst tensions emerged regarding teachers' differing understandings of critical pedagogy, and no teacher fully enacted all its principles in practice during the study, there is evidence that for some it demanded a reformulation of the curriculum in order to include open discussions of social justice issues. Others focused instead on the democratization of their classroom. Although openly addressing social justice issues is vital to moving beyond a constructivist approach and into a critical one (Breunig, 2011), these teachers' democratisation of the learning experience facilitated through drama, could potentially be constituted as 'a form of critical pedagogy', or at least a powerful first step in that direction. In an era where on one side of the world newspaper headlines such as in *Chile Today* report 'Opposition decries Supreme Court nominee's record on human rights cases' (July 10, 2020), 'Chilean billionaires see net worth grow amid pandemic' (July 10, 2020), and 'President Piñera vetoes bill that prohibits cut of basic services during pandemic' (July 9, 2020), and on the other side *The New York Times* headline reads: 'Can we please talk about Black Lives Matter for one second' (July 2, 2002), the British playwright Edward Bond's words seem as relevant and challenging as they did some 20 years ago:

> Only the human mind can ask *why*. It is a question the human mind must ask. Once it has asked it of anything, it must ask it of everything. For all *what* and *when* answers there is an open or covert *why* question. Finally, *why* can never be answered. Any *why* answer leads to another why question. *Why* is the imagination's question. Only minds able to imagine may ask it. (Bond, 1998, p. 2, italics in original)

We are indebted to the teachers in this study for going on a journey that brought us all a little closer to understanding how we might harness the potential of DiE as a form of critical pedagogy to create

classrooms where students and teachers are confident in questioning the dominant social, historic, political and economic ideologies reproduced in schools; where students and teachers are comfortable in accepting a lack of certainty about the world "they operate with and in" (Brownstein, 2007, p. 518); and where lived experience and interpretative ways of knowing resist traditional positivistic pedagogies.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Villanueva, C., & O'Sullivan, C. (2020). Drama in education as a form of critical pedagogy: Democratising classrooms in Chile. *ArtsPraxis, 7* (2b), 92-115.

REFERENCES

Ackroyd, J. (2007). Applied theatre: An exclusionary discourse? *Applied Theatre Researcher, 8*.

Aguilar, M., & Arias, Ó. (2008). Acercamiento a la realidad de la Pedagogía Teatral aplicada a los establecimientos educacionales de la Región Metropolitana.

Aste Leiva, B. (2020). Estallido social en Chile: la persistencia de la Constitución neoliberal como problema. *DPCE Online, 42* (1).

Bali, M. (2014). Why doesn't this feel empowering? The challenges of web-based intercultural dialogue. *Teaching in Higher Education, 19*, 208–215. doi: 10.1080/13562517.2014.867620

Bellei, C., Cabalin, C., & Orellana, V. (2014). The 2011 Chilean student movement against neoliberal educational policies. *Studies in Higher Education, 39* (3), 426–440. doi: 10.1080/03075079.2014.896179

Bolton, G. M., & Davis, D. (2010). *Gavin Bolton: essential writings*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.

Bond, E. (1998). Rough notes on drama. In: C. O' Sullivan and G. Williams (Eds), *Building Bridges: Laying the foundations for child-centred curriculum in drama and education* (1-12). Birmingham: The National Association for the Teaching of Drama.

Breunig, M. (2009). Teaching for and about critical pedagogy in the post-secondary classroom. *Studies in Social Justice, 3* (2), 247–

262.
Breunig, M. (2011). Problematizing critical pedagogy. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 3* (3), 2–23.
Brownstein, A. (2007). Critical epistemology: An alternative lens on education and intelligence. In: J. L. Kincheloe & R. A. Horn (Eds.), *The Praeger handbook of education and psychology* (510-520). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publishers.
Chubbuck, S. M. (2007). Socially just teaching and the complementarity of Ignatian pedagogy and critical pedagogy. *Christian Higher Education, 6*, 239–265. doi: 10.1080/15363750701268145
Corvalán, J. (2013). La narrativa educacional chilena y su proceso de transformación reciente: Un análisis sociológico-histórico. *Revista Folios, 0* (37).
Darder, A., Baltodano, M., & Torres, R. D. (Eds.). (2009). *The critical pedagogy reader* (2nd ed). New York, NY: Routledge.
Doyle, C. (1993). *Raising curtains on education: Drama as a site for critical pedagogy*. Westport, CT.: Praeger.
Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review, 59* (3), 297–325.
Freebody, K., & Finneran, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Drama and social justice: Theory, research and practice in international contexts*. London: New York: Routledge.
Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum.
Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary edition). New York: Continuum.
Giroux, H. A. (1985). Introduction. In P. Freire (Ed.), *The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation* (xi-xxvi). CT: Bergin & Garvey.
Giroux, H. A., & Giroux, S. S. (2006). Challenging neoliberalism's new world order: The promise of critical pedagogy. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, 6* (1), 21–32. doi: 10.1177/1532708605282810
González López, J., & Parra Moreno, D. (2016). Mercantilización de la educación. comentarios sobre la reforma educativa en Chile 2015. *Revista Enfoques Educacionales, 13* (1), 71–89.
Grady, S. (2003). Accidental Marxists?: The challenge of critical and

feminist pedagogies for the practice of applied drama. *Youth Theatre Journal, 17* (1), 65–81. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2003.10012553

Greenhalgh-Spencer, H. (2014). Guattari's ecosophy and implications for Pedagogy. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 48* (2), 323–338. doi: 10.1111/1467-9752.12060

Heathcote, D. (1991). *Collected writings on education and drama*. (L. Johnson & C. O'Neill, Eds.) (1st edition). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Heathcote, D., & Bolton, G. M. (1995). *Drama for learning: Dorothy Heathcote's mantle of the expert approach to education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Horton, M., & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Kincheloe, J. L., McLaren, P., & Steinberg, S. R. (2011). Critical pedagogy and qualitative research: Moving to the bricolage. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th edition, pp. 163–177). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

King-White, R. (2012). Oh Henry!: Physical cultural studies' critical pedagogical imperative. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 29* (3), 285–408.

Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange, 17* (4), 63–84. doi: 10.1007/BF01807017

López, P., & Medrano, C. (2017, September 20). Mario Aguilar y Ley de Desmunicipalización: "Se hizo a espaldas del movimiento social". Diario Universidad de Chile.

McLaren, P. (2008). Critical pedagogy: A look at the major concepts. In Darder, Antonia, M. Baltodano, & R. D. Torres (Eds.) *The critical pedagogy reader*, (2nd edition, 61–83). New York, NY: Routledge.

Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education, 28* (2), 100-110.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Neelands, J. (2004). Miracles are happening: Beyond the rhetoric of transformation in the Western traditions of drama education.

Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 9 (1), 47-56. doi: 10.1080/1356978042000185902

Neelands, J. (2005). *Beginning drama 11-14* (2nd edition). London: Routledge.

Neelands, J., & Goode, T. (2015). *Structuring drama work* (3rd edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Neelands, J., & O'Connor, P. J. (2010). *Creating democratic citizenship through drama education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

O'Connor, P. (2013). Drama as critical pedagogy: Re-imagining terrorism. In M. Anderson & J. Dunn (Eds.), *How drama activates learning: Contemporary research and practice* (pp. 125–134). London; New York: Bloomsbury.

Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos. Informe sobre la Misión a Chile 30 de octubre – 22 de noviembre de 2019. Santiago: OACNUDH.

O'Neill, C. (1995). *Drama worlds: A framework for process drama* (1st edition). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Drama.

O'Toole, J. (1992). *The process of drama: Negotiating art and meaning*. London; New York: Routledge.

Rouhani, F. (2012). Practice what you teach: Facilitating anarchism in and out of the classroom. *Antipode, 44* (5), 1726-1741. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01030.x

Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education*. South Hadley, Mass: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.

Sicilia-Camacho, A., & Fernández-Balboa, J. M. (2009). Reflecting on the moral bases of critical pedagogy in PETE: Toward a Foucaultian perspective on ethics and the care of the self. *Sport, Education and Society, 14* (4), 443–463. doi: 10.1080/13573320903217166

Taylor, P. (2000). *The drama classroom: Action, reflection, transformation*. London; New York: Routledge Falmer.

Taylor, P., & Warner, C. D. (2006). *Structure and spontaneity: The process drama of Cecily O'Neill*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.

Teemant, A., Leland, C., & Berghoff, B. (2014). Development and validation of a measure of Critical Stance for instructional coaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 39*, 136–147. doi:

10.1016/j.tate.2013.11.008
Villanueva, C., & O'Sullivan, C. (2019) Analyzing the degree of consensus in current academic literature on critical pedagogy. *Scenario, XIII*, 2. doi: 10.33178/scenario.13.2.6
Villanueva, C., & O'Sullivan, C. (2020) Dramatic codifications: possibilities and roadblocks for promoting critical reflection through drama in Chile. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 25* (4), 526-542. doi: 10.1080/13569783.2020.1783994
Watson, K. (2020, October 26). Celebration but hard work has just begun. BBC News.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Catalina Villanueva is a recent PhD graduate and member of the Arts Education Research Group (AERG), School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. Catalina's teaching and research interests are in critical pedagogy and social justice through applied drama, and in drama across the curriculum in the Chilean school context. She currently teaches at Universidad de Chile, and works as a freelance teaching artist.

Carmel O'Sullivan is convenor of the Arts Education Research Group (AERG) and Professor in Education in Trinity College Dublin. Carmel's teaching and research interests are drawn from drama in education, and she is currently involved in several funded projects in the areas of Social Drama and Autism, early childhood arts education, and an arts-based work readiness program called Career LEAP for disadvantaged young people facing significant barriers to entering the workplace.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 2b

Theatre for Liberating Social Work Education

ALEXIS JEMAL

HUNTER COLLEGE, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

TABATHA R. LOPEZ

JENNY HIPSCHER

BRENNAN O'ROURKE

CUNY SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

ABSTRACT

Four graduate students ("company") explored the use of applied theatre to facilitate liberation-based social work education. This paper is an anecdotal, critical reflection on the authors' work and experience providing a forum for social work students to explore social and racial justice and innovative strategies for using drama to stimulate dialogue, interaction and change at this time. Within the devising process, the company, occupying multiple intersecting identities, reflected on our lived experiences of inconsistencies between the intended purposes of social work practice and the actual process and effects of the services provided; all of which connect to social work education. The central questions that the company and participants (i.e., social work students)

explored through the Theatre in Education (TIE) project were: What is Freirian praxis (i.e., critical reflection and critical action) in clinical social work and what are its implications for social workers and their clients? These questions investigated how siloed processes can lead to oppressive practices and outcomes. By integrating applied theatre with social work's Transformative Potential Development Model, a philosophical and practice-based framework, the company invited participants to engage in praxis on multiple levels. The intrapersonal level requires self-awareness and assessment, entailing reflection on individual identities and lived experiences. The interpersonal/relational level requires an intersectional approach, cultural competency, empathy, and humility. The macro/systemic level requires analysis of how dynamics of power (such as racism and transphobia) transpire; and, an understanding that individuals' behaviors do not exist in a vacuum of personal responsibility, but are informed by systemic and structural oppressions (i.e. macro processes have micro consequences). The bridging of reflection and action at these multiple levels of analysis comprises a liberatory pedagogy, a more holistic approach to social work education and practice in the field.

The term, "artivist," is used to identify those who locate themselves at the intersection of artist and activist as they use their craft for social and racial justice (Sandoval, 2008, p. 82). Many times, artistic activists will find themselves in non-creative community organizing spaces or in artistic spaces that are not socially conscious. One educational program that may produce artivists is the Master of Arts in Applied Theatre (MAAT) program at CUNY School of Professional Studies (SPS). The program is grounded in Liberatory Educational Theorist Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The program leads by example as it follows the problem-posing educational model it teaches. Thus, students are being taught how to be liberatory educators while engaging in a liberatory education process. A major component of Freire's education for liberation is *praxis*. Freire defines praxis as: "the action and reflection of [humans/people] upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2000, p. 51). This paper will provide an overview and reflection of a student company's project that questioned and explored the following with social work students through Theatre in

Education[1] (TIE): “What is praxis in clinical social work? And what are the implications of it for social workers and their clients?

In June 2020, an original student-developed and led TIE program, *The File*, was implemented in a field simulation class for Master’s level social work students. Social work is a field that has much overlap with applied theatre. One major commonality is that both fields of study may work with marginalized populations and engage with social justice theory and practice. One claim to fame for the field of social work is that it is the only profession that has a professional and ethical mandate to oppose oppression. Yet, similar to all professional fields, it is not free from racial bias and problematic action that perpetuates white supremacy. For example, on a listserv of professional social workers, in response to an inquiry about how the field of social work could support the Black Lives Matter Movement, some social workers responded, “All Lives Matter.” This response demonstrated an extreme lack of awareness regarding how the lives of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) have been historically devalued in the US and how the continuation of that devaluation has led to the many deaths of Black people at the hands of law enforcement. As such, it is important that social workers and other helping professionals provide services that are accessible, inclusive and culturally responsive.

One of the field’s barriers to socially-just practice is that clinical social work interventions often focus on individual-level factors and behavioral change without understanding or addressing the ways in which macro structures of oppression affect and inform clients’ behaviors (Windsor, Alessi, Jemal, 2015). This limited scope of focus and intervention may perpetuate oppression through the false narratives of choice. The train of thinking is, “if they just made a better choice, then…” However, a critical interrogation of this thinking that examines systemic-level causal factors that limit individual-level choices will reveal that the choices one has are not usually without systemic limitations. For example, when a Black person is confronted by white armed individuals (whether police or vigilantes) should they

[1] The term TIE generally refers to the use of theatre for explicit educational purposes, closely allied to the school curriculum and mostly taking place in educational contexts--schools, colleges, youth clubs, sometimes in museums and at historic sites. It tends to be a highly portable form of theatre, using minimal sets and lighting (if any), but practiced by specialist professional companies who aim to bring high-quality performance work into the classroom, school hall, or other venue. Above all, it will usually involve some element of interaction with the audience. (Jackson, 2008, p. 133)

stand their ground like Trayvon Martin or should they run like Ahmaud Arbery or should they cooperate like George Floyd? When a person's choices leave no other options but to be harmed, then we have a clear measure of the civility of a society.

Another potential oppression perpetuation trap is the "white savior" complex. One of the ethical principles listed in the Social Work's code of ethics is that "Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person" (NASW, 2017). This entails that social workers support clients' social determination; that is, the clients' will, capacity and opportunity to meet their needs in a way that does not harm themselves, others or society. The issue with executing this principle is that social workers may use white, Eurocentric perspectives to interpret clients' behaviors and decisions; thereby, unintentionally perpetuating white supremacy. The "white savior" complex is grounded in white supremacy, as it stems from the belief that marginalized and disempowered cultures must be saved by their white superior counterparts from their ways of thinking, believing and doing in order to be better humans and have better lives. For this reason, the skill to think critically about one's own thinking and act critically against oppressive forces is a crucial skill to implement in social work practice, which must be taught with social work education.

Developing awareness of systemic inequalities and dynamics that abound in professional fields of practice, especially those like social work and applied theatre, is important because of the potential to (re)traumatize and harm marginalized and disadvantaged populations. A practitioner that lacks awareness of oppression and privilege, of their social location and its impact on the work, is a dangerous practitioner. This is how a field mandated to do anti-oppression work perpetuates oppressive practices in education and practice (Jemal, 2017b). For this reason, fields that have direct impact on human lives have a responsibility to participate in continuous social and racial justice education, so practice can be culturally competent, congruent, and considerate of the ways in which practice can support liberation or commit further harms.

Social work education and, by extension, practice can either uphold the status quo, reinforcing and perpetuating systemic inequalities, or employ critical/radical approaches to address these macro-level forces and their effects on clients' lives. Paulo Freire (2000, p. 34) noted,

> There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes ‘‘the practice of freedom,’’ the means by which people deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

Likewise, social work education can either function as a means to integrate social work students into conformity with systems and institutions that perpetuate white supremacy or create social workers who will work to dismantle systems of inequity. To accomplish these dismantling objectives, scholars have contributed to the integration of Applied Theatre and social work education. Applied theatre practitioners used the work of Augusto Boal with social work students to analyze and effect change in situations in which social work practitioners encounter daily contradictions (e.g., how to protect children and support families?) (Spratt, Houston, & Mahill, 2000). Also, a verbatim theatre project created performances developed from interviews of parents of sexually abused children which provided social workers the opportunity to try interventions, reflect and modify (Leonard, Gupta, Fisher & Low, 2016).

Similarly, the TIE program, *The File*, was created and facilitated by a group of four students from the MAAT program at CUNY SPS to explore how applied theatre could use innovative strategies to stimulate dialogue, interaction, and change within social work education. *The File* was conducted in a field simulation class for Master of Social Work students at an urban school of social work in the northeast. *The File* explores issues of social and racial justice through its use of liberatory pedagogy and exploration of anti-racist practices in three ways:

1. Bridging the micro-macro divide
2. Using an intersectional approach
3. Incorporating the Transformative Potential Development Model (TPDM)

BRIDGING THE MICRO-MACRO DIVIDE

The File incorporated the Liberation Health Model for participants to examine the individual (micro) and the systemic (macro) causal factors as a means to reflect with participants on their positionality and agency as future clinical social work practitioners. The Liberation Health Model is a tool that raises awareness of the connections between the micro and macro domains by helping participants to think on multi-levels (personal, institutional and cultural). This analysis leads to an integrated understanding of factors that contribute to the identified problem (Kant, 2015). This is important because macro processes have micro consequences which then shape communities and policies. For example, the parent-child relationship in the home usually reflects the oppressive social structure and cultural conditions (Freire, 2000).

Additionally, *The File* used an original convention called 'Role-in-a-File'[2] to explore factors at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, micro, mezzo, and macro levels. The file contained various documents that explored different angles of the issue. The student company placed the participants in-role as social worker professors on a committee and tasked them with deciding what to do about a student whose academic standing was in jeopardy. Through the performance of a scripted scene followed by the drama convention of Role-in-a-File, participants learned the main MSW student character ("Grey") had taken actions with a client in their field placement that perpetuated oppression and were problematic (i.e., Grey did not follow agency policy and called child protective services on their client's mother). Furthermore, the character, Grey Marling, had not been well-supported by their academic institution or field supervisor. As the drama unfolded, the participants gradually moved from an initial overt criticism of Grey and approval of the professor's actions in the scene toward a more holistic view, recognizing the systemic pedagogical issues to be addressed and the challenges of addressing them. In the next part of the session, the company-facilitators explicitly challenged participants to develop multi-level protocols, or action steps, to address these issues. These

[2] An adaptation of **'**Role-in-a-Room,' which is a convention that invites participants to reflect on objects found in a fictional character's room to surmise what those objects might reveal about that person and interrogate initial assumptions (C. Vine, personal communication, September 28, 2019). In our adapted 'Role-in-a-file', participants explored the contents of Grey Marling's student file. Through questions and discussion, they investigated the details of what happened in the scenario, learning more about the character and their socio-political context.

protocols allowed participants to explore the relationship between the individual (micro) and the systemic (macro) in the field of clinical social work. The convention worked as a means to reflect with participants on their positionality and agency as future clinical social work practitioners. This multi-level understanding is necessary for holistic problem solving.

INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

One approach that is holistic at its core is intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). Dehumanizing forces break people into single identities or, at the opposite extreme, stereotype an individual based on group membership. A person is not seen or valued for their authentic self. Then the world interacts with the person based on this single, stereotyped identity as ex-offender, student, employee, on public assistance, female, black, trans; and not as a whole person who occupies a variety of oppressed and/or privileged identities. Every person and, by extension every group, is intersectional and to deny that complexity is to dehumanize. Because all oppressions are connected and rooted in systemic experiences of access to and deprivation of power to meet one's human needs, dehumanization attacks a person's wellness as a human being simply for being human. As such, the dehumanization process strips every person of identity, imagination and initiative (Menakem, 2017).

To support the devising process, the company acknowledged their intersecting identities, such as being a person of color and/or a sexual minority or from other marginalized identities. We also used our lived experiences with social work or holistic wellness to inform the devising process. For example, member(s) of the company are in the field of social work or have a background in holistic healthcare/massage therapy, or have experience working with social workers as clients or colleagues, or have had a more familiar relationship with a social worker as a close family friend.

The File incorporated an intersectional approach through the development and use of complex and multi-dimensional characters. One of the main characters in the scene, "Grey," is white and transgender and has a non-apparent disability. This character is a graduate social work student in a field placement at an agency that

serves trans youth. Grey is working with a young transgender, non-binary client who is a black LatinX high school student. One way to explore social and racial justice issues is to have multi-dimensional characters that occupy various and intersecting, marginalized social identities and explore relational aspects within historical and socio-political contexts. The scene also allows the exploration of issues, actions and reactions to occur that are integrally related to the identities and social location of the characters. Thus, the scene provided familiar occurrences in a social work context: For example, Grey may have misinterpreted the client's mom's communication through a white lens; Grey was abruptly asked to leave the client's home; Grey felt the need to call the Administration for Children's Services (ACS); Grey's field placement was in jeopardy of being terminated; Grey had another altercation in their MSW clinical class with a LatinX woman of color student; Grey may be at risk of not graduating. Through reflection questions and problematizing as facilitators and participants in-role, we unpacked these dehumanizing interactions to reveal the hidden dynamics, often overlooked because of (un)conscious bias and the automatic response to impose punishment. Participants (i.e., social work students) engaged in dialogue to determine how to prevent oppressive social work practice and ways to respond that allow practitioners to be held accountable in a restorative and redemptive, rather than, a punishing manner (e.g., cancel culture). The invitation that our program offered to engage in praxis with this content tested the participants' ability to respond to these occurrences in a holistic manner that did not isolate or disconnect these events from their larger sociopolitical and cultural contexts. What *The File* hopefully demonstrates is that when we interact with slices of identity rather than the wholeness of our humanity, we cut ourselves off from genuine connection, support, and sense of belonging—necessary components for racial justice.

Educational theorist Paulo Freire asserts that, "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (2000, p. 72). As such, a participant centered educational and artistic focus directs TIE facilitators to consider a wide range of factors that impact clients', students', participants' (including the facilitators) own identities and agendas, and to trust and acknowledge the lived experience of folks

from marginalized and oppressed communities. Participant centeredness also allows practitioners to generate relevant material specific to the target population and to avoid overgeneralization and stereotyping. In this way, relationship-building becomes integral to the foundation of knowledge-building for liberating education.

Cultural invasion, as defined by Freire, is a "phenomenon [in which] the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression" (Freire, 2000, pp. 152-154). It is also part of the legacies of colonization and slavery: institutions that dehumanized millions and attempted to strip those oppressed people of their imaginations (Carruthers, 2018, pp. 25-26; Menakem, 2017, pp. xiv-xv, xviii). Many applied theatre conventions allow participants to reverse/erase/undo narratives pre-imposed upon those who are most in need of radical social justice orientation, education and practice. For example, participants were encouraged to use their developed protocol from an earlier section of the TIE program to interact with Grey. In their roles as professors, the participants were given the opportunity to practice thinking critically about issues, themes, and obstacles that often plague marginalized communities and center the lived experience of those most impacted. This empowered stance can help social service providers and educators circumvent Freire's concept of "cultural invasion" in "be[ing] clear that an agenda of change from the outside is more often an imposition than an act of liberation" (Thompson, 2012, p. 17). By acknowledging and working personal identities into praxis, facilitators and participants can critically examine their relationship to the work and to each other, with greater awareness of how their identities shape perspectives and influence their practice.

INCORPORATING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The File's content was greatly informed by the Transformative Potential Development Model (TPDM) that consists of five prongs:

1. Relationship-building
2. Consciousness

3. Accountability/Responsibility
4. Efficacy/Capacity
5. Action (Bussey, Jemal, & Caliste, 2020)

Transformative consciousness has three levels to consider: denial, blame, and critical consciousness. Transformative action also consists of three levels: destructive, avoidant and critical action (Jemal, 2017a; Jemal & Bussey, 2020). The content of the piece aimed to portray a student and social work professor at the non-critical consciousness (denial and blame) and non-critical action (destructive and avoidant) levels. By interrogating the actions and interactions of these models in conjunction with the use and application of the liberation health framework, participants were challenged to identify ways to facilitate the student and social work professor's ascendance to critical transformative consciousness and action. The combination of critical consciousness and critical action creates critical transformative potential (Bussey et al., 2018). One way for participants to develop their transformative potential, the goal of the project, is to approach the issues presented from a critical consciousness perspective and respond with critical action. However, scholars have noted that a gap exists between critical consciousness and critical action in that people who may have a critical awareness (i.e., a structural understanding and analysis of individual-level issues) may not always act in a critical way (i.e., work to address oppression) (Bussey, Jemal, & Caliste, 2020). To bridge that divide, TPDM offers two prongs:

1. Accountability/Responsibility, which helps people to see a role for themselves in perpetuating the problem and/or enacting solutions.
2. Efficacy/Capacity, which provides opportunities to improve skills, reinforce strengths of know-how, and build capacity. (Bussey, Jemal, & Caliste, 2020)

Bussey et al. discusses the use of applied theatre to work on each prong.

Sections of *The File* developed each prong of TPDM to accomplish the project goal: To explore with participants the relationship between the individual (micro) and the systemic (macro) in the field of clinical social work as a means to reflect with participants

on their positionality and agency as clinical social work educators. The scene and the post-scene questions facilitated consciousness-raising. The critical questioning about the scene begins to excavate assumptions and ways of thinking at denial or blame levels. The review of the virtual file facilitated accountability/responsibility. Participants interrogated the file for a fuller socio-cultural context that compelled the identified problem to occur. The Liberation Health framework challenged participants to work on accountability/responsibility and efficacy/capacity and to excavate multi-level (personal, institutional and cultural) factors while simultaneously learning and practicing the skill of multi-level assessment. The developed protocol intervened on the action level by having participants think about ways to address this situation and similar situations in the future. The last part included an escalation in events that gave participants the opportunity to put their protocols into action by stepping into role and using forum[3]-type theatre conventions.

The File convention asked participants to critically reflect on how the structural and systemic issues of white supremacy and power are perpetuated in the field of social work and academia; how these power structures affect their own social work education and practice; and, how their implicit biases, social identities, trauma, and unexamined "stuff" perpetuates the very -isms they are trying to eradicate. The facilitators, in role, interacted with the participants in their Zoom breakout rooms to discuss what actions to take with Grey. Participants reflected on and shared their experiences as social work students when they felt unsupported by the institution. It seemed that the participants, who occupied various social identities and positionality on a spectrum of privilege and oppression, identified with the student in the story. However, even though participants did not agree with Grey's behavior, the participants empathized with Grey, and also thought Grey should be held accountable in some way. A potential result of this reflective engagement was the realization that accountability is needed at multiple levels of the institution and that levels of accountability were missing. This led to an exploration or inquiry into what "multi-level accountability" meant or might look like in terms of action. Participants

[3] Forum theatre is a type of theatre created by Augusto Boal that engages spectators in the performance as actors, creating "spect-actors," influencing alternative outcomes (Boal, 1974). Spect-actors step in for the company's actors, which Boal identified as rehearsing for the revolution.

were given the opportunity to practice potential action steps in the forum-type component of the TIE project

Lastly, the social work student-participants reflected on the action they took and assessed how it worked, allowing the students to accomplish the project's objectives: 1) to question the meaning and application of liberation-based social work practice; 2) to share at least one concrete way to make their interactions more radical (i.e., rooted in a socio-political context); and, 3) to explore the value of liberation-based social work practice within a macro-social cultural context for themselves and their future clients. The TIE structure and content of *The File* combined Freirian praxis, the Liberation Health Model, and the Transformative Potential Development Model, while supporting participants to engage with the practical implications of the discovered possibilities via an embodied experience.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the potential ways that engagement in the TIE project created space to observe, articulate and implement praxis as understood by the social work students. When engaged in this work, what becomes immediately apparent, however, is that not only are we (the applied theatre practitioners) facilitating the transformative potential development for participants, but we are also participating in our own transformative potential development. As artivists who use applied theatre to promote social and racial justice, we created *The File* using a three-tiered approach. First, we recognize that we have biases and knowledge gaps to which we need to attend. Developing *The File* required us to draw from our lived experience to serve the social work students with whom we would be working. Thus, self-reflection, awareness and critique on how we move through the world are necessary components of work in social and racial justice. The second tier is understanding our role as educators and the need to be aware of how we affect individuals who are also situated in larger sociopolitical contexts. Lastly, we are educators whose educational practices influence participants, who, like social workers, will practice in the field and will need to reflect on their own practice decisions. Thus, the beneficiaries of this work are social work students or, more broadly, practitioners (i.e., people who work with people) and the clients of these practitioners.

Our student company identified gaps in the educational approaches and training processes of social work students from a radical pedagogical perspective. The team infused social work education with applied theatre during a field simulation class with MSW students by devising a TIE piece that incorporated praxis and liberation frameworks. This integration allowed participants various opportunities to reflect on racial and social justice themes and issues using a multi-level analysis. The TIE program used an interdisciplinary approach to expand opportunities for participants to explore potential action through an intersectional lens. Future research will be necessary to determine whether liberation-based social work education creates social workers with liberation-based methodologies and praxis.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Jemal, A., Lopez, T. R., Hipscher, J., & O'Rourke, B. (2020). Theatre for liberating social work education. *ArtsPraxis, 7* (2b), 116-131.

REFERENCES

Boal, A. (1974). *Theatre of the oppressed*. Theatre Communications Group.

Bussey, S., Jemal, A., & Caliste, S. (2020). *Transforming social work's potential in the field: A radical framework*. Social Work Education, in press.

Carruthers, C. A. (2018). *Unapologetic: A black, queer, and feminist mandate for radical movements*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989* (1), 139–167.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43* (6), 1241.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (30th anniversary ed). New York: Continuum (original work published 1970).

Jemal A. (2017a). *Critical consciousness: A critique and critical*

analysis of the literature, Urban Review, 49 (4), 602–626. doi: 10.1007/s11256-017-0411-3

Jemal A. (2017b). The opposition. *Journal of Progressive Human Services: Radical Thought and Practice (JPHS), 28* (3), 134–139. doi: 10.1080/10428232.2017.1343640.

Jemal, A. (2018). Transformative consciousness of health inequities: Oppression is a virus and critical consciousness is the antidote. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work, 3* (4), 202–215. doi: 10.1007/s41134-018-0061-8

Jemal, A., & Bussey, S. (2018). Transformative action: A theoretical framework for breaking new ground. *EJournal of Public Affairs*.

Kant, J. D. (2015). Towards a socially just social work practice: The liberation health model. *Critical and Radical Social Work, 3* (2), 309-19.

Leonard, K., Gupta, A., Fisher, A. S., & Low, K. (2016). From the mouths of mothers: Can drama facilitate reflective learning for social workers? *Social Work Education, 35* (4), 430-443.

Menakem, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies* [Kindle]. Retrieved July 12, 2020.

National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (approved 1996, revised 2017). Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers. Retrieved March 1, 2018.

Thompson, J. (2012). *Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and beyond*. Oxford: Peter Lang (original work published 2003).

Sandoval, C., & Latorre, G. (2008). Chicana/o artivism: Judy Baca's digital work with youth of color. In A. Everett (Ed.), *Learning race and ethnicity: Youth and digital media.* The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 81–108. doi: 10.1162/dmal.9780262550673.081

Spratt, T., Houston, S., & Mahill, T. (2000). Imaging the future: Theatre and change within the child protection system. *Child and Family Social Work, 5*, pp. 117 - 127

Windsor, L., Jemal, A., & Alessi, E. (2015). Cognitive behavioral therapy and substance using minorities: A meta-analysis. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology, 21* (2), 300-13.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Alexis Jemal, LCSW, LCADC, JD, PhD, assistant professor at Silberman School of Social Work-Hunter College, is a scholar, writer, artivist, educator, social entrepreneur and critical social worker whose mission is to recognize and respond to oppressive policies and practices to prevent and eliminate domination, exploitation and discrimination that pose barriers to life, wellness, liberty and justice. Dr. Jemal's research integrates participatory action research methods, critical theory and the creative arts to develop and test multi-level and multi-systemic socio-health practices that incorporate restorative justice frameworks, radical healing and liberation health models to address structural, community and interpersonal violence.

Tabatha R. Lopez (she/her/hers; they/them/theirs) holds a B.A. in ethnic studies and philosophy of the arts, and is a Queer, brown, Latinx, final year M.A. in Applied Theatre student. Tabatha's mission is to collaborate on artistic educational projects that aim to bridge and mend gaps between communities and generations through culturally responsive practices, critically engaged methods, and art-forms that facilitate community-based solutions through the power of story-telling, theatre, and community centeredness and participation. Of particular interest to Tabatha are the roots of systems, and community agency through empowerment and cultivation of decolonized knowledge.

Jenny Hipscher (she/her; they/them) is a Brooklyn-based theatre artist and massage therapist, pursuing a Master's in Applied Theater at CUNY. With a BA in American Studies from Wesleyan University, she has trained with Double Edge Theater, Pig Iron Theatre Company, and Bont's Independent Republic of Failure in Spain. She's been a member of Readymade Dance Theater in Albuquerque and GreenHouse Theatre Project in Columbia, MO, and is currently with Agile Rascal Bicycle Theatre. Integrating theatre, education, and the healing arts, Jenny continues to deepen her understanding of trauma-informed care and the ways systemic oppression is held and healed in individual and collective bodies.

Brennan O'Rourke (they/them; ze/zir) is a white, queer, trans-femme theatre practitioner, sexuality health educator, teaching artist and poet

dedicated to queer inclusivity and anti-oppressive practices. Brennan holds a BA in Dramatizing Justice from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study, which explored theatre and its relationship to communities' histories, identities and memories in efforts to create and imagine justice. As a director and facilitator, Brennan commits themself to stories that challenge and expand definitions of performance in ways that uplift the project of liberation. Brennan is currently pursuing an MA in Applied Theatre at CUNY School of Professional Studies.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 2b

A Welcoming Space for Whom?: Race and Inclusion in Suburban High School Theater Programs

AMANDA BROWN

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, TWIN CITIES

ABSTRACT

One of the most frequently cited points of pride for high school theater teachers is the inclusivity of their programs. Research in the past has demonstrated this narrative carries through to students as well, who often note that high school theater programs provide "physically and emotionally nurturing spaces...where niche community finds safe haven and encouragement of expression" (McCammon et al., 2012). As a teacher and researcher, I ask for whom are we creating these safe spaces? This literature review presents evidence that many theater programs, especially at majority-white schools, likely struggle to support and include BIPOC students, but that little research exists on BIPOC students' experiences or about how best to address this struggle to create racially inclusive theater communities. Because of this gap, I explore the existing literature on BIPOC students' experiences in majority-white schools and in diverse theater programs in urban schools and community programs, as well as work outside

academia that points toward potential underlying causes, solutions, and areas for additional inquiry.

As a former high school theater student and teacher, I've been steeped in the pervasive ideology that high school theater programs are inherently inclusive, "physically and emotionally nurturing spaces...where niche community finds safe haven and encouragement of expression" (McCammon et al., 2012, p. 11). In fact, former participants in high school theater programs consistently describe their high school theater programs as "safe environments" (p. 31) that gave them "a sense of belonging when [they] didn't fit in" (p. 34).

I found similar attitudes pervasive when, in my previous role as an urban[1] high school theater teacher, I attended the 2018 Broadway Teachers' Workshop in New York City, a professional development opportunity that, from my informal observations, seemed to be populated by mostly middle-class, white teachers from middle-class, suburban, predominantly white schools.[2] In casual conversation, one teacher noted that their theater program was like the "Island of Misfit Toys." Another bragged that her theater club *was* the Gay-Straight Alliance at her school. The inclusivity of programs was a general point of pride and a motivating factor of their work; however, I began to question for which students their programs offered safe haven during a talkback for *Once on this Island*, a show steeped in racial themes and performed by an all-Black cast. A teacher, who presented as a white woman, asked what I found to be a racially insensitive question about whether her majority-white school could perform *Once on this Island* since Broadway smash *Hamilton* had cast Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) as historically white figures, to approving nods from the crowd of over 100 educators. In discussion later, no one else seemed bothered by the question. I wondered whether BIPOC students would find "safe haven" in spaces created by these educators. My curiosity was further piqued by recent online discourse among theater teachers wondering if they could produce other popular musicals that require BIPOC cast members at schools with few BIPOC

[1] Throughout, I'll refer to suburban and predominantly white schools interchangeably.
[2] I define urban schools as those serving predominantly BIPOC students and/or students qualifying for free and reduced lunch in a major metro area.

students, like *In the Heights* and *Hairspray*, with the creators of *Hairspray* even green-lighting the idea of all-white productions (Liner, 2012; Peterson, 2018).

This led to my questioning the inclusivity narrative around high school theater programs, specifically at predominantly white schools, which according to a recent NCES survey are often the schools with the resources necessary to support robust theater programming (Duffy, 2016). My research was guided by the following questions: does the discourse around inclusivity in theater programs match the material practices? Sub questions I considered include: How are BIPOC students included or excluded from these programs? Are theater programs seen as "safe havens" for all students, regardless of race, and how does the race of students affect text selection, given that schools may only be able to create work featuring predominantly white casts?

In beginning this review, I reflected on the position from which I enter into this research. I am a cis-gendered, white, middle-class woman in my thirties who grew up attending majority-white suburban schools but have spent the whole of my teaching career in urban schools. As such, I am almost 15 years removed from regular experiences in suburban schools, thus my hypothesis cannot be investigated using my own recent experiences. I also cannot know the experiences of BIPOC students in a majority white theater programs. Perhaps tellingly, I didn't even interact with many when I was a theater student. Although I attended a performing arts magnet program that pulled from 16 different districts across my diverse Midwestern city, only one black student was enrolled in my sixty-student program the two years I attended. This is obviously a singular example that cannot prove my hypothesis about the environment of programs nationally, but it does point to an area for inquiry. I also currently support pre-service theatre teachers who are about to embark on careers in a wide swath of school environments who could benefit from our having access to such research.

In reviewing the literature, I found little that addressed my questions directly. The literature that dealt with issues of racial inequity and the centering of whiteness in high school theater programs was limited to reflective and theoretical pieces on inclusion and speculation about potential solutions. Because of the lack of empirical research, I widened my scope to explore related topics that could shed light on the

reality of predominantly white high school theatre programs. First, I explore the substantial literature focused on the experience of BIPOC students in predominantly white suburban schools generally. I then survey research in urban schools and community programs serving predominantly BIPOC students for insight into potential issues and solutions with carryover potential to suburban programs. Finally, I review non-academic literature from a popular theatre website to see if these questions are being explored in other spaces. I close by exposing areas ripe for future scholarship in theatre education that are especially urgent given our political climate and the changing demographics of America's suburbs (Florida, 2019).

HIGH SCHOOL THEATRE AND BIPOC STUDENT EXPERIENCE

In searching for literature specifically highlighting the experiences of BIPOC students in predominantly white high school theater programs, I found that while there is ample evidence to suggest this as an issue that does exist and is worthy of investigation, research into the reality of the situation and testing of potential solutions is minimal. Most literature centers on practitioner reflection, both from high school educators and those training future theatre teachers, that delve into ideas about what *could* work but rarely address why issues arise, how students experience them, or what works to address them.

Holes in the Overarching Narrative

McCammon et al. (2012) succinctly capture the overwhelmingly positive narrative of inclusivity in high school theater programs while also highlighting the gaps in knowledge around who, specifically, is having a positive experience, as the data collected from past participants in high school theater programs was not analyzed by race nor did any questions explicitly mention race as a factor that could impact participant experience. Traces of racial issues surface in participant answers that point to areas ripe for exploration. One participant noted that "you meet so many amazing and interesting people in theater, all with their own personal life stories and world views. It's one of the most diverse tribes in any school. You really get a sense of just how big the world is and how worthy of respect each person is. We change each other for the better in that environment" (p

34). Because of the lack of investigation into race in both the initial survey and subsequent analysis, it is unclear how race fits into the use of the word “diverse;” this could mean students from a variety of high school social groups, social classes, or racial groups.

Findings also revealed participants wishing their schools had tackled more “socially charged” material, “lament[ing]...‘conservative’ play choices” (p. 9). This suggests that some participants were operating in conservative, likely white spaces that, as other research suggests below, could be alienating to BIPOC students. It also suggests performances of white dominant, canonical texts were the norm for a number of respondents, texts that would ask students of color to either play historically white characters or opt-out, an issue explored specifically by Cousins (2000) in her examination of the ways high school plays uphold and reify mainstream culture. Relatedly, participants noted that while programs cultivated empathy, “conservative play script choices for production or an ethnically homogenous school population inhibited adolescent awareness of social and cultural issues” (p. 17). This reiterates Cousins’ (2000) thesis that performing exclusively white texts breeds majority-white programs, potentially excluding BIPOC students in an on-going cycle. This reading of the data will remain only a theory without an empirical exploration of BIPOC students’ perception of their high school theater programs.

Drama Teacher Reflections on Race and Inclusion

While I found no direct reflections from BIPOC students on their theatre experiences, several pieces illuminate teachers’ perspectives. In the earliest among them, Garcia (1997) highlights a similar gap in the literature, naming that “little is known about the extent that drama/theatre programs in elementary and secondary schools promote appreciation for cultural differences, and even less is known about their effectiveness" (p. 88). His survey of theatre teachers’ investment in multicultural education found that most teachers’ incorporation of “multiethnic” content revolved around ideas of colorblind tolerance and respect, with nine teachers noting they had no approach at all. Unsurprisingly, given the scholarship on race in predominantly white schools below, many of the teachers who taught through a colorblind lens or who did not address multiculturalism at all identified as white,

teaching in predominantly white schools. Unfortunately for students in these spaces, “the enforcement of color blindness serves to exacerbate, not alleviate, issues of race and racism for students of color in predominantly white schools” (Chapman, 2013, p. 625). Teachers who did claim to teach multiethnic content reported that, because of this pedagogy, their classrooms were places of “mutual respect,” which supports the narrative above that theatre programs and classrooms are generally discussed as welcoming and safe spaces for students. Garcia (1997) ends with a series of questions that, at this time, have yet to be comprehensively answered: “How can the field of drama/theatre education support teachers in their efforts to teach in multiethnic classrooms and create positive classroom environments” for everyone” (p. 100)?

Researcher and theatre teacher Jo Beth González, who leads a high school theatre program at a predominantly white school in suburban Ohio, attempts to answer this question, although her writing and research rarely includes the voices of BIPOC students. Two of her pieces, however, do lend credence to the hypothesis that white theater programs struggle to welcome BIPOC students (Gonzalez, 2015; González et al., 2006). Both focus on attempts to include Latinx and Black students, respectively, in productions that center their experiences—*Simply Maria* and *Hairspray!*—and “illuminate tensions and insights that evolve from the efforts of a generally white high school drama club to tackle…play[s] that speak…to a marginalized component of the school's student body" (González, 2006, p. 124). While they provide helpful insight into one teacher’s attempts to create community, there is little evidence offered as to whether the attempts at inclusion resulted in any material difference for students.

A more comprehensive look at drama teachers’ perspectives comes from Joan Lazarus’s ten year study recounted in *Signs of Change* (Lazarus, 2012). She shares teacher reflections on what she terms “socially responsible practice,” discussing a range of student identities that impact practice both in drama classes and after-school productions. She recounts that teachers in her study asked themselves, “who is my program for? Who is being served and excluded? Whose voice history, culture, language, aesthetics, and perspectives are being heard? Whose material do we study, develop and produce” (p. 123). In her brief section on “Theater, Race, and Privilege,” she touches on BIPOC student experiences through teacher

narratives noting that “many teachers wish they could reach more or different students in their schools and use theatre more effectively to engage the school community in dialogue and action” (p. 122). One of her participants—quoted in a companion article to the book (Lazarus, 2015)—interviewed her black students about why they were quiet in class and got a range of answers about feeling isolated, wanting to just go with the flow and not relating to the material, again, hinting at the existence of an inclusivity problem.

Schroeder-Arce names this problem directly, based on her own experiences, and explores solutions through her work with pre-service theatre teachers (Schroeder-Arce, 2016; 2017; 2019), specifically how theatre educators can interrupt the centering of whiteness and the erasure of students of color on high school stages. Her writing indicts white teachers and our educational theater system that erase BIPOC students and their lived experiences, pushing them to act out the white canon in programs centered on white norms. She theorizes that the mostly white students in her teacher education program attended theatre programs that produced white theater who will then, in turn, continue centering whiteness in their own practices. She also highlights the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in after school theatre programs and calls for more visibility of Latinx stories, specifically in Texas, where she works (2016). She notes this issue is especially salient in theatre education because, in our field, "young bodies regularly represent other bodies" (2017, p. 106). Additionally, she highlights the lack of specific tools and ideas given to teachers to do more than acknowledge their privilege and the failure of teacher prep programs to equip teachers to "disrupt hegemonic practice" (2017, p. 107).

Like Gonzalez (2015; González et al., 2006), Lazarus (2012; 2015) and others (Syler & Chen, 2017), Schroeder-Arce’s writing is reflective and practitioner-focused; she shares how she addresses this issue in her courses, but notes that "to really ever testify to the impact of such work would require in-depth, longitudinal study" (p. 112). Taken together, this literature lends validity to the idea that race, specifically the centering of white norms and the whiteness inherent in the theatrical canon often performed there, is playing a defining role in high school theater programs, potentially creating a hostile environment for BIPOC students, and that more study is necessary to reveal what strategies successfully create inclusive, anti-racist programs.

LOOKING TO OTHER SOURCES

Given the limited research on BIPOC students' experiences in predominantly white high school theatre programs, I widened my scope to explore research that could lend additional credence to my original hypothesis, offer potential solutions and point to avenues for future inquiry. I first looked to studies of BIPOC students' experiences in predominantly white schools as a whole. I then turned to the ways that drama and theatre are taken up in majority BIPOC schools and community programs, and finally, I explored writing outside of peer-reviewed journals to see if this conversation is happening elsewhere with insights that could be explored and built on in future empirical research. Patterns exposed in the literature provide insights that could illuminate a path forward for theatre teachers wishing to make inroads with BIPOC students by shedding light on why theater programs may read as inhospitable spaces.

BIPOC Student Experience in Suburban Schools

While a full account of scholarship related to issues of race in predominantly white high schools is beyond the scope of this review, an overview of ample research that has been done, especially in the last ten years, that centers students' voices to explore how majority-white school environments impact BIPOC students' experiences is instructive to my inquiries into whether high school theatre programs remain centered on whiteness and are potentially inhospitable to BIPOC students. Student voices are especially salient as the research on theatre specifically, as outlined above, rests almost exclusively at the teacher level. Overall, findings show that students struggle to feel a connection to their schools and to the teachers and counselors therein due to perceptions of unequal treatment and materially less access to the resources that make predominantly white schools so attractive to many families (Chapman, 2013; Diamond & Lewis, 2019; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014).

Chapman (2013) and Lewis and Diamond (2015) use student voice to expose the double standards and inequality that exists in how students experience majority-white high schools. Chapman (2013) first focuses on how "tracking, traditional curricula, teacher classroom practices, and student surveillance, sustain a racially hostile environment for students of color in majority-white suburban schools"

(p. 611). Diamond and Lewis (2019) focus on similar double-standards in discipline policies, highlighting that while written policies are race-neutral in design, in practice, they become imbued with "anti-Black cultural narratives that associate blackness with criminality and whiteness with innocence" (p.832). This ultimately results in Black students' behavior being read as more serious and dealt with more punitively than corresponding behavior from white students. These patterns paint a picture of hostility that could ultimately make putting oneself in a vulnerable position on stage less likely for BIPOC students.

Another possible issue for theatre programs could be resource accessibility, as explained by Lewis-McCoy (2014). In his book, *Inequality in the Promised Land*, Lewis-McCoy explores why, in schools ripe with opportunities, the most coveted educational resources often flow to white families. Both Lewis-McCoy and Lewis and Diamond (2015) observed the racializing of certain activities, especially those thought of as valuable to white families. Through this lens, it is possible that theatre and drama programs could be marked as a highly regarded resource; thus, white parents angle to gain better access to it, marking it a white space and one potentially inhospitable or inaccessible to BIPOC students.

Each author closes with potential solutions to the inequalities plaguing majority white and suburban schools. The common theme is a call for schools to truly grapple with the ways that race is impacting actions, whether consciously or unconsciously, and for those in power to be willing to make substantive changes to the practices that uphold inequality and white supremacy. In my experience as an educator, and as Schroeder-Arce (2017) laments, the former is usually much easier to tackle than the later but talk without material change is useless to BIPOC students.

Lessons from Urban Schools and Community Arts Organizations

In addition to looking at the work being done in suburban, predominantly white schools as a whole, theatre teachers could also take cues as to what issues and solutions may exist by looking at the work happening in urban schools and community arts organizations serving diverse populations. One example of what a successful program could look like comes from Woodland's (2018) work

researching an after-school youth theatre ensemble in Australia, Traction, that cultivated a community among diverse students she could only describe as one full of love.

Lessons certainly could be taken from that space and applied to diverse high school theater programs. While Woodland does include one late caveat on her research that there "may have been minorities within such a large group whose voices were quieted or silenced on these subjects" (p. 175), she notes that overall, she found that the ensemble created an ongoing circle of love that made their work successful, both personally and artistically:

> Love for drama united the young people; a sense of belonging or finding a home strengthened their capacity for artistic risk taking and aesthetic exploration; repeated rituals and practices of welcome, inclusion, and care formalized the ethics of respect and compassion in the ensemble, and further facilitated the affective dimensions of these; and all of this brought about a sense of loyalty and love for Traction itself as a community, and a desire to cultivate its loving ethos and communicate this to others. (p. 175)

Woodland captures both that the narrative that opened this paper of a loving theater community is possible while also specifically noting what it took to create such a community. She details that it took specific tactics and care from the facilitator to create a group unified across "age, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity" (p. 167), including talking explicitly about the need for community and calling out participants if folks were being left out, a norm which was then then reinforced explicitly by participants.

The research on community programs also highlights some pitfalls to be weary of in work with diverse groups of students. Both Edell (2013) and Snyder-Young (2011) explore how engaging in devising and Theater of the Oppressed work with students, often aimed at empowerment, can lead students to traffic in stereotypes and reproduce harmful discourses. Both caution teachers and facilitators working in diverse spaces to thoughtfully balance the need to allow students to express their own beliefs while mitigating the potential for harm.

Maloney Leaf and Ngo's (2020) research of a racially diverse community theatre production highlights the voices of young black

actors in the cast:

> [They] held the theatre organization accountable for its lack of diversity in staffing, inferring how this lack impacted both the production and also their experiences as minorities youth…One African American female youth especially noted the difference between the white director's life experiences and those of black characters in the play. (p. 90)

Another student questioned "the theatre company's performance season for its lack of representation of communities of color and its reluctance to include shows that explore the wide spectrum of black experience" (p. 90). BIPOC students in high school theatre settings likely have similar feelings about predominantly white programs. Maloney Leaf and Ngo note specifically that these reflections were given to researchers, away from their white director, which additionally adds credence to the argument that we cannot rely on teacher accounts of this issue to know the true reality for students.

Additionally, extensive research exists on using drama pedagogy as anti-bias pedagogy to investigate and interrupt systems of oppression. While much of this work has been happening in urban schools (Edmiston, 2012; Gallagher, 2000; Gallagher et al., 2013; Gallagher & Rivière, 2007; Gallagher & Rodricks, 2017; Perry & Rogers, 2011) and white affinity spaces (Tanner, 2014; 2016; Tanner et al., 2018), they do point to the potential for theater pedagogy to address or interrupt the patterns playing out for BIPOC students in suburban and majority white schools.

Writing Outside Academic Publishing

After finding little the addressed my initial research questions head-on in peer reviewed journals, I wondered what conversations were happening outside of academia. I limited my non-academic search to *Howlround*, both because of its mission to "amplify progressive, disruptive ideas about theatre and facilitate connection between diverse practitioners" (About, n.d.) and, selfishly, because their archives are easily accessible, unlike other popular magazines for theatre educators, which were more difficult and expensive to access. I would argue *Howlround*, however, is the most likely forum for these

conversations, given its mission, popularity, and availability. I found numerous discussions around the the whiteness of theatre programs but was again disappointed to see much of the conversation happening at the professional and collegiate level, rather than the high school level; however, many of these lessons and reflections could again be easily applied to high school.

Most notable, given my focus on student voice, was a recent piece by a collective BIPOC students from Boston University's BFA in Theatre program about "how [they] grew a student-centered anti-racist movement" in the wake of the murder of George Floyd (Gil et al., 2020). They end with a list of clear demands to dismantle white supremacy in their program that could easily be a call-out to many high school theatre programs as well. A similar piece by Miranda Haymon, a "young, Black, queer director and a proud graduate of a liberal arts college" calls out "Liberal arts theatre programs [for] failing their students of color" (Haymon, 2020). Taken together, these begin to illuminate a pattern of exclusion in collegiate theatre, an area many may think of as more progressive than high school theatre programs.
Other pieces reflecting on deficits in higher education include a piece on the need for more active inclusion in curriculum and syllabi (Valdes, 2020), the overwhelming whiteness of acting textbooks (Steiger, 2019), and a discussion of banking education (Freire et al., 2014) in relation to actor training (Harman, 2019). Only one piece meeting my search parameters centered high school theatre, which focused on censorship of high school plays (Serio, 2014); however, it centered students' collective experiences, rather than BIPOC students specifically. Interestingly, even in this non-academic space, most of the writing about race and inclusion in educational theater focuses on college theatre programs; while, like with all topics discussed above, it is not a stretch to imagine similar issues playing out in high schools, it would be beneficial to hear specifically about those issues from BIPOC high school students.

CONCLUSIONS AND CALLS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Despite inferences that can be drawn from high school theatre teacher reflections, accounts of BIPOC students' experiences in suburban schools and collegiate theatre programs, and the challenges of creating welcoming communities among diverse groups of students in

urban schools and community programs, it is ultimately impossible to know if BIPOC students feel welcome in our high school theater programs, and if not, what conditions could interrupt that reality if research is not conducted that centers student voices and experiences and then uses their guidance to move toward anti-racist practices. Suburban schools are only becoming more diverse (Florida, 2019), making this an imminent challenge to theatre teachers. If we continue to recreate the white dominant practices many of us, myself included, experienced as theatre students and fail to interrogate the racist implications of those practices, we will lose the diverse array of voices so many of us claim to want in our theatrical communities.

Theatre teachers have a unique opportunity as drama seems a natural balm to much of what is experienced by BIPOC in predominantly white schools—feeling unwelcome, silenced, and highly visible for all the wrong reasons (Prentki & Stinson, 2016). It seems that what students of color need most is "physically and emotionally nurturing spaces…[a] niche community [to find] safe haven and encouragement of expression" (McCammon et al., 2012, p. 11). If theater teachers can create this space for students, it could provide a haven for students to use theatre pedagogy to heal from and push back against the traumas they face in predominantly white spaces and provide a model for the rest of their school about what anti-racist spaces look like. Only by acknowledging the centering of whiteness and taking concrete steps to disrupt and change them will we truly create these safe havens and make a lifelong impact on *all* students.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Brown, A. (2020). A welcoming space for whom? Race and inclusion in suburban high school theater programs. *ArtsPraxis, 7* (2b), 132-148.

REFERENCES

About. (n.d.). HowlRound Theatre Commons.

Chapman, T. K. (2013). You can't erase race! Using CRT to explain the presence of race and racism in majority white suburban

schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 34* (4), 611–627. doi: 10.1080/01596306.2013.822619

Cousins, H. (2000). Upholding Mainstream Culture: The tradition of the American high school play. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 5* (1), 85–94. doi: 10.1080/135697800114212

Diamond, J. B., & Lewis, A. E. (2019). Race and Discipline at a Racially Mixed High School: Status, Capital, and the Practice of Organizational Routines. *Urban Education, 54* (6), 831–859. doi: 10.1177/0042085918814581

Duffy, P. (2016). Theatre curriculum in the US: A great tasting sandwich on stale bread. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 21* (1), 37–41. doi: 10.1080/13569783.2015.1127147

Edell, D. (2013). “Say it how it is”: Urban teenage girls challenge and perpetuate stereotypes through writing and performing theatre. *Youth Theatre Journal, 27* (1), 51–62. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2012.722903

Edmiston, B. (2012). Dramatic inquiry and anti-oppressive teaching. *Youth Theatre Journal, 26* (2), 105–119. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2012.722906

Florida, R. (2019, November 7). These aren’t your grandmother’s suburbs: How suburbia iIs changing. CityLab.

Freire, P., Bergman Ramos, M., & Ramos, M. B. (2014). *Pedagogy of the oppressed: 30th anniversary edition*. Bloomsbury Academic & Professional.

Gallagher, K. (2000). Interrupting “truths,” engaging perspectives, and enlarging the concept of “human” in classroom drama. *Youth Theatre Journal, 14* (1), 13–25. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2000.10012514

Gallagher, K., & Rivière, D. (2007). When drama praxis rocks the boat: Struggles of subjectivity, audience, and performance. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 12* (3), 319–330. doi: 10.1080/13569780701560412

Gallagher, K., & Rodricks, D. J. (2017). Hope despite hopelessness: Race, gender, and the pedagogies of drama/applied theatre as a relational ethic in neoliberal times. *Youth Theatre Journal, 31* (2), 114–128. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2017.1370625

Gallagher, K., Yaman Ntelioglou, B., & Wessels, A. (2013). “Listening to the affective life of injustice”: Drama pedagogy, race, identity, and learning. *Youth Theatre Journal, 27* (1), 7–19. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2013.779349

Garcia, L. (1997). Drama, theatre, and the infusion of multiethnic content: An exploratory study. *Youth Theatre Journal, 11*(1), 88–102. doi: 10.1080/08929092.1997.10012485

Gil, T. I., Rosegrant, M., Vargas, V., & Wade, C.-S. (2020, September 10). How we grew a student-centered anti-racist movement at our institution of learning. *HowlRound Theatre Commons*.

Gonzalez, J. B. (2015). Constructing a sustainable bridge: Welcoming all students in a high school drama program. *Youth Theatre Journal, 29* (2), 128–137. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2015.1084181

González, J. B., Cantú, R., & González, A. (2006). Staging whiteness: Possibilities for resistance and revelation in a high school production of simply Maria, or, the American dream. *Youth Theatre Journal, 20* (1), 124–139. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2006.10012591

Harman, S. (2019, January 30). Who is being triggered? *HowlRound Theatre Commons*.

Haymon, M. (2020, June 17). How liberal arts theatre programs are failing their students of color. HowlRound Theatre Commons.

Lazarus, J. (2012). Signs of change: New directions in theatre education. Intellect Books.

Lazarus, J. (2015). On the verge of change: New directions in secondary theatre education. *Applied Theatre Research, 3* (2), 149–161.

Lewis, A. E., & Diamond, J. B. (2015). Despite the best intentions: How racial inequality thrives in good schools. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.

Lewis-McCoy, R. L. (2014). Inequality in the promised land: Race, resources, and suburban schooling. Stanford University Press.

Liner, E. (2012, January 30). At Plano Children’s Theatre, they’ve shampooed all the black kids out of *Hairspray*. *Dallas Observer*.

Maloney Leaf, B., & Ngo, B. (2020). “Fear of what we don’t know”: Grappling with diversity in a youth theatre program. *Youth Theatre Journal, 34* (1), 78–94. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2019.1688210

McCammon, L. A., Saldaña, J., Hines, A., & Omasta, M. (2012).

Lifelong impact: Adult perceptions of their high school speech and/or theatre participation. *Youth Theatre Journal, 26* (1), 2–25. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2012.678223

Perry, M., & Rogers, T. (2011). Meddling with 'drama class', muddling 'urban': Imagining aspects of the urban feminine self through an experimental theatre process with youth. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 16* (2), 197–213. doi: 10.1080/13569783.2011.566989

Peterson, C. (2018, May 30). Should there be all-white productions of "Hairspray"? *OnStage Blog*.

Schroeder-Arce, R. (2016). *Zoot Suit*: Latino/a youth inclusion and exclusion on Texas stages. *Youth Theatre Journal, 30* (1), 35–49. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2015.1088911

Schroeder-Arce, R. (2017). Beyond acknowledgement of whiteness: Teaching white theatre teachers to examine their racial identity. *Youth Theatre Journal, 31* (2), 105–113. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2017.1370757

Schroeder-Arce, R. L. (2019). (Re)tracing la pastorela: Performance, policy, pedagogy and power. *Youth Theatre Journal, 33* (2), 129–138. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2019.1688744

Serio, J. (2014, January 2). Taking the drama out of high school. *HowlRound Theatre Commons*.

Snyder-Young, D. (2011). Rehearsals for revolution? Theatre of the Oppressed, dominant discourses, and democratic tensions. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 16* (1), 29–45. doi: 10.1080/13569783.2011.541600

Steiger, A. (2019, August 13). Whiteness, patriarchy, and resistance in actor training texts. *HowlRound Theatre Commons*.

Syler, C., & Chen, A. (2017). Casting youth/Developing identity: Casting and racial and ethnic identity development. *Youth Theatre Journal, 31* (2), 92–104. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2017.1370758

Tanner, S. J. (2014). A youth participatory action research (YPAR), theatrical inquiry into whiteness. Dissertation.

Tanner, S. J. (2016). Accounting for whiteness through collaborative fiction. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 21* (2), 183–195. doi: 10.1080/13569783.2016.1155404

Tanner, S. J., Miller, E. T., & Montgomery, S. (2018). We might play different parts: Theatrical improvisation and anti-racist pedagogy. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 23* (4), 523–538. doi: 10.1080/13569783.2018.1494557

Valdes, D. (2020, February 12). Beyond “decolonizing” the syllabus. *HowlRound Theatre Commons*.

Woodland, S. (2018). I Love You I Love You: Aesthetics of love in a culturally diverse youth theatre ensemble. *Youth Theatre Journal, 32* (2), 164–176. doi: 10.1080/08929092.2018.1520768

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Amanda Brown is a PhD candidate studying Arts in Education at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Previously, she worked in schools in Los Angeles and Chicago for ten years as an instructional coach and teacher of English, drama, history, and media studies. She holds an MA in Educational Theatre from NYU and a BS in Television and Film from Boston University.