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ARTSPRAXIS

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ARTSPRAXIS provides a platform for contributors to interrogate why the arts matter and how the arts can be persuasively argued for in a range of domains. The pressing issues which face the arts in society will be deconstructed. Contributors are encouraged to write in a friendly and accessible manner appropriate to a wide readership. Nonetheless, contributions should be informed and scholarly, and must demonstrate the author's knowledge of the material being discussed. Clear compelling arguments are preferred, arguments which are logically and comprehensively supported by the appropriate literature. Authors are encouraged to articulate how their research design best fits the question (s) being examined. Research design includes the full range of quantitative-qualitative methods, including arts-based inquiry; case study, narrative and ethnography; historical and autobiographical; experimental and quasi-experimental analysis; survey and correlation research. Articles which push the boundaries of research design and those which encourage innovative methods of presenting findings are encouraged.

ARTSPRAXIS Volume 6, Issue 1 engages members of the global Educational Theatre community in dialogue around current research and practice in three categories:

- Drama in Education (i.e., studies in drama/theatre curriculum, special education, integrated arts, assessment and evaluation)
- Applied Theatre (i.e., studies in community-based theatre, theatre of the oppressed, the teaching artist, diversity and inclusion)
- Theatre for Young Audiences and Play Production (i.e., studies in acting, directing, dramaturgy, playwriting, dramatic literature, theatre technology, arts-based research methodologies)

Key questions contributors were asked to consider included:

Drama in Education

- How and why do we teach drama and theatre in schools and community settings?
- How do the roles and responsibilities of the teaching artist differ from those of the classroom teacher (primary, secondary or higher education)?
- What is the contemporary role of drama and theatre in arts education?
- How do we prepare future theatre artists and educators in the 21st century?
- What are innovative ways of devising original works and/or teaching theatre using various aesthetic forms, media, and/or technology?
- To what extent can the study of global theatre forms impact students' learning?

- To what extent should we distinguish theatre-making from drama as a learning medium?
- How can integrated-arts curricula facilitate teaching, learning and presenting the craft of theatre?
- How do we assess students' aesthetic understanding and awareness?
- What research supports the potential of drama as a learning medium?
- How do drama and theatre make connections across curricular content areas and beyond schools?
- How do drama and theatre education contribute to lifelong learning?
- What role do drama and theatre play in community agencies?

Applied Theatre

- How can drama provide a forum to explore ideas?
- What are innovative strategies for using drama to stimulate dialogue, interaction and change?
- How is theatre being used to rehabilitate people in prisons, health facilities, and elsewhere?
- How do we prepare future artists/educators for work in applied theatre?
- What ethical questions should the artist/educator consider in their work?
- In what ways are aesthetics important in applied theatre? How do we negotiate a commitment to both the process and product of applied theatre work?
- How do artist/educators assess participants' understandings in an applied theatre project?
- What are the major tensions in the field and how are these being addressed?
- To what extent has recent research on affect influenced community-based praxis?

Theatre for Young Audiences/Play Production

- Theatre for young audiences is an international movement and the borders are breaking down so how do we present and respond to work from other countries?
- Who exactly are our new audiences-- who are we talking to?
- Are we as brave as we think we are? How does what we think we should do relate to what we want to do as artists?
- Is the writer at the heart of future theatre creation? What has happened to dramaturgy in the brave new world of immersive, experiential, visual/physical theatre?
- Theatre for Young Audiences has always been in the forefront of theatrical innovation. So what is next?
- What have we learned about nurturing the artist of the future-- playwriting, theatre-making, performance?
- How do artists establish rigorous, intentional new works development processes that are innovative and sustainable?
- How does accountability serve the stakeholders in a new works development process?
- How do we define and measure success in theatre for young audiences?
- We encourage article submissions from interdisciplinary artists, educators, and scholars engaged in work associated with the forum topics. Our goals are to motivate a dialogue among a wide variety of practitioners and researchers that will enrich the development of educational theatre in the coming years.

We encouraged article submissions from interdisciplinary artists and scholars across the many fields engaged in performance as activism. Our goals were to motivate a dialogue among a wide variety of practitioners and researchers that will enrich the development of educational theatre in the coming years.

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.

Cover image from NYU's Program in Educational Theatre, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, a play by Rick Elice with music by Wayne Barker, based on the novel by Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson, directed by Amy Cordileone.

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Editorial: A New Colossus

[JONATHAN P. JONES](#)

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Emma Lazarus' epochal words are never far from my mind. She lived and died just four blocks from where I now sit. A few times a week, I walk past the rowhouse in which she lived; I pause and think about her brief time there. Her family had just moved into the residence at 18 West 10th Street when she set sail for Europe—on a journey that happened to overlap with an art exhibition to raise funds for the completion of what would become the Statue of Liberty. For the occasion, Lazarus wrote:

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles.* (Lazarus, 1883)

It seems we've gone far-afield from that intention, haven't we? And in light of the intense pressure to close doors and seal borders, we can get caught up in a culture that mollifies itself with dreams of the Mother

of Dragons. And while I too take time to indulge in *Game of Thrones*, we must get back to work. We again must forge a new colossus—but this time, what we need is a colossus of the mind. Let it be our art. Let it be our ideas. Our ideals. Our vision for what the world ought to be—one where we ask more questions; where we do not accept no for an answer; where we promote empathy; where we listen more; where we encourage; where we engage. Let our work stand as a beacon to all, drawing them in from the dark of night.

IN THIS ISSUE

Our contributions in this issue come from artists, educators, and activists—all working towards bringing light to dark places. We begin with two theoretical frameworks from different parts of the world; one at the start of her scholarly work and the other following a solid career of contributions to the field. **Xiaojin Niu** explores the interaction between theatre and modern power with an examination of sexuality study. **Roger Wooster** revisits an old question at a new time: whether we should draw a distinction between theatre-making and drama as a learning medium.

As applied theatre practitioners continue to engage in theatre practices with diverse populations, we have three contributions interrogating powerful topics. **Jennifer Wong** looks at the importance of being an outsider, pondering the strengths that come from this positionality; **Sarah Woodland** looks to aesthetics, navigating an approach to support incarcerated participants in truth-telling; and **Julie Rada** gains a deeper understanding of a familiar drama strategy, asking participants to witness each other while in prison.

The final sequence of articles takes a close look at how theatre educates. **Rivka Rocchio** recounts her time using drama to teach English in Samoa, revealing ways in which drama can level the playing field between insider and outsider. **Mark Branner** and **Mike Poblete** document successful iterations of theatre for babies and outline a list of characteristics for this emerging field. **Manjima Chatterjee** defines material theatre as an aesthetic experience that promotes democracy in the performance space. Finally, Jennifer Essex wrestles with two categories of audience participation in children's interactive dance theatre: 'interactors' and 'non-interactors,' defining and problematizing each.

LOOKING AHEAD

Having recently concluded another thought-provoking dialogue at the 2019 NYU Forum on Theatre and Health, our next issue ([Volume 6, Issue 2](#)) will focus on articles under that same heading. Contributions have been accepted from Forum participants and other practitioners who are engaged in this transformative and necessary work. That issue will publish in the fall. Thereafter, look to the Program in Educational Theatre at NYU for the [2020 Forum on Humanities and the Arts](#), the [Verbatim Performance Lab](#), and [Volume 7, Issue 1](#) of [ArtsPraxis](#) which will feature articles on the three categories of our work: drama in education, applied theatre, and theatre for young audiences.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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REFERENCES

Lazarus, E. (1883). [The new colossus](#).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jonathan P. Jones 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 has conducted drama workshops in and around New York City, London, and Los Angeles in schools and prisons. He 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. In 2008, he was awarded a fellowship through the National

Endowment for the Humanities and participated in the Teaching Shakespeare Institute at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. Currently, Jonathan is an administrator, faculty member, coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor at NYU Steinhardt. In addition to his responsibilities at NYU, he teaches Fundamentals of Speech and Introduction to Theatre at The Borough of Manhattan Community College.

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.

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).

The Interaction between Theatre and Modern Power with an Examination of Sexuality Study in Schooling

[XIAOJIN NIU](#)

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

The application of theatre is usually considered as powerful and special. It makes people move, embody, and reflect. But what indeed makes theatre a different tool to liberate oppression and change reality? Why does it have to be theatre? As an alternative to the studies that try to seek for the answers from theatre itself, Michel Foucault's modern power theory sheds light on a new possibility to disclose the essence and function of theatre when it is applied to solving real human issues. Qualitative research by a contemporary sociologist C. J. Pascoe about students' sexuality in a high school bridges Foucault's modern power and theatre as she defined school performances an exception in the hyper-masculine environment, which exemplified both Foucault's power theory and theatre's particularity. Hence, grounded on Pascoe's research, this article attempts to describe theatre's speciality in dismantling the ubiquitous modern power that operates in the masculine culture of a high school, with a

hope that more practitioners in education and theatre will develop awareness for bigger changes.

In 2007, C. J. Pascoe published her sociological research about hypermasculinity culture in the schooling system as the book, *Dude, You're a Fag*. Through the lens of the research site, River High, Pascoe (2007) studied how hypermasculinity was produced and reproduced among the students, faculty, and administrators. She argued that the sexuality she studied, in fact, was a public discourse that could be examined by the power relation that Foucault theorized, rather than a personal narrative (Pascoe, 2011, p. 21). This modern power relation was producing and then reproducing the hypermasculine and oppressive cultures at the school. However, Pascoe (2007) identified theatre as a means to escape from the relentless compulsive masculinity. She noted: "After watching what boys endured daily at River High, I found this dramatic performance a space of liberation and relaxation" (Pascoe, 2007, p. 81). Therefore, inspired by Pascoe's empirical research and Foucault's power theory, I argue that theatre may have the ability to make modern power operate differently. Since I agree that this modern power is everywhere and cannot be exteriorized (Foucault, 1990, p. 93), I have no intention to prove that theatre is capable of breaking down modern power and changing the world through that. Rather, I intend to go deeper into the nature of theatre to capture the different ways that it interacts with modern power, and to analyze how these interactions open the door for a certain amount of liberation from the oppression that modern power produces. In the face of the increasing discourse about engaging sexuality in schools and the performing arts world, this examination may offer some insights for the conversation and promote actual change.

This article draws from studies of both sociology and theatre disciplines. Foucault's theories regarding modern power from both *The History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish* serve as the theoretical base for this article. Among his various ideas of power relations, I will focus on the concept of power fluidity, normalization, and the "technology of the body." Pascoe's empirical research on sexuality in schooling is a practical connection between modern power and

theatre. Furthermore, this article also looks into theatre-related theories and practices, covering Victor Turner's study, Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, empirical research of drama in education, as well as my personal experiences to explain theatre's capacity to utilize or dismantle the mechanism of modern power that operates in hypermasculinity.

To begin with, it is necessary to first understand the three ways modern power penetrates the hypermasculinity culture that Pascoe investigated. On the one hand, there were the non-binary and fluid power relation existing in the "fag" epithet. According to Pascoe (2007), the "fag" discourse was a way that most boys practiced to manifest their masculinity. By calling other boys "fags," they assured their own identity as being masculine and powerful (p. 60). Thus, there was no pre-determined hierarchy among the practitioners of the "fag" discourse. Anyone involved in the discourse could be labeled as "fag" at one point when they were called out; and be seen as a normal, masculine boy, if they initiated the discourse and turned someone else into "fag." The constant shifting between the subject and the object of the discourse can be explained by Foucault's (1990) theorization on power's fluidity, which breaks through the duality between the dominant and the dominated (Foucault, 1990, p. 94), and allows power to flow through all its participants.

On the other hand, it is also very clear that students at River High were pushed by the hypermasculine discourse to walk towards the norms of masculinity. Pascoe (2011) sees gender norms permeating at River High, which is presented by the "getting girls" ritual, a ritual where boys relentlessly talk, act, and compete to have sexual intercourse with girls. This ritual is believed by many boys to be an affirmation of their masculinity and mastery, and is homogenized and normalized as a part of their lives (Pascoe, 2011, p. 73). Pascoe (2011) also discovered that this process of normalization, thereafter, "reaffirmed a sexualized inequality central to the gender order at River High" (p. 73). This discovery exemplifies Foucault's (1995) depiction of normalization as an "instrument of power" (p. 184).

Consequently, the normalization transforms the students who participate in the masculinity culture into the "docile bodies" that Foucault pictured. Here comes Foucault's "micro-physics," the "technology of the body" theory, which assures that controlled bodies regulate themselves to observe the norms. According to Foucault

(1995), "Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (p. 202). This "micro-physics" mechanism can be detected from the behaviors of both boys and girls at River High. For instance, Rebeca, a lesbian student, always denied her feminine body features and claimed her masculinity. She also interacted with other girls in the way which most boys would do, such as treating a girl's outfit in a sexual way and imitating sex moves in front of a crowd (Pascoe, 2011, p. 96). Pascoe (2011) interpreted Rebeca's behavior as a means for her to win popularity and social power because she positioned and voiced her physique as part of the dominant masculine power (p. 97). In short, the realizations of power fluidity, normalization, and "micro-physics" in the schooling at River High will later serve as examples for my argument about theatre and modern power.

In the conclusion of her book, Pascoe (2007) wrote that, "Play, in this sense, is not just about fun but is a way of constructing the social world" (p. 163). Though she used the word "play" instead of "theatre," I find this quote a good starting point to examine modern power in theatre, since it is because of the playful elements that theatre matters. Admittedly, there is a broad vocabulary associated with what I just described: play, drama, performance, and each of them stands for an independent but interrelated concept. To fulfill the goal of this paper and to make it concise, I chose to go with the vocabulary "theatre" because it expresses a stronger sense of space and formation, and it comprises many essential elements from play, drama, and performance. Moreover, since I will also take theatre classes and theatre education practices into consideration in this paper, the word "theatre" is broader in the sense that it is not confined within merely a staged performance. Building on the vocabulary clarification, the following passage attempts to illustrate that theatre, including both staged performance and dramatic practices, can help its practitioners to identify the process of normalization, to challenge the mechanism of "micro-physics", and to pursue equality and liberation.

To begin with, to examine how theatre works to impact modern power, I contend that theatre needs to be seen as a form of discourse. When thinking about theatre, we probably would imagine a special space with a stage and an auditorium facing the stage. In this space,

the actors performing on stage tell a story with verbal communications, physical movements, and external aids like sets, props, and light/sound effects. On the other hand, the spectators are confined in their seats, watching, feeling, and experiencing the performance simultaneously. In this sense, it falls under the definition of a form of discourse that Foucault (1995) described as “the vehicle of a kind of incessant back-and-forth movement of forms of subjugation and schemas of knowledge” (p. 98). Apparently, theatre is a way to deliver knowledge and some truth. In the meantime, it does contain a back-and-forth movement of power, which is the power fluidity in the actor-spectator relation. Only if we see theatre as a form of discourse can we continue the discussion about the interplay between theatre and power, as Foucault (1990) noted, “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p. 101). When Pascoe (2007) was describing how shocked she was during the school musical performance, she mentioned several times that theatre was where the “fag” discourse disappeared (Pascoe, 2007, p. 78). Her observation and feeling at that night of drama proved that theatre was a form of discourse where a reality was uncovered and retold, and this form influenced the way through which modern power operated.

What makes the discourse special in theatre is that it can simultaneously exhibit the truth of life on stage and implicate the knowledge beneath the coat of “playfulness.” On the one hand, theatre is an art of mimicking reality and revealing truth. Marjorie Boulton noted that theatre is a “literature that walks and talks before our eyes, meant to be performed, ‘acted’ we might say, rather than seen as marks on paper and sights, sounds, and action in our heads” (as cited in Turner, 1982, p. 105). In this sense, theatre depicts a reality with the liveliest method—with actors embodying characters to relive events, with specific set design to represent the circumstances, and with some aesthetic choices to evoke spectators’ emotions. It is a form of discourse that invites us to open our senses and imagination to relive a story, an experience, or an emotion. Under the collaboration of all these elements, the truth or knowledge delivered by theatre can be more tangible and acceptable. On the other hand, theatre is play, in the sense of being a serious game—moving real life to an artificially crafted space, and having actors take on roles to become someone else. Far from being fake, theatre actually plays with truth from a

distance, which creates an illusion yet a mirror for the spectators to reflect on the social reality being told on stage. Turner (1982) claimed that this playfulness of theatre “fantasized reality even while it realizes fantasy. It also allows the spectator his human dignity, his right to treat all he sees in an as-if, subjunctive way” (p. 121). Therefore, the lively representation of truth and the playfulness inherited in the art form makes theatre a special place of discourse to manifest power relations.

The first way that theatre makes a difference in modern power's operation is that it cleverly makes use of power fluidity to realize an effective power exchange between the actor and the spectator. This power fluidity was described by Foucault (1990) that:

Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix—no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body. (p. 94)

Moreover, Foucault (1995) also argued that beside the non-binary power relation, power could be exercised among a group of people with no exact order and be passed down from one to another (Foucault, 1995, p. 202). In theatre, similarly, if we can notice that actors and spectators are exercising power upon each other—whether it is about actors delivering knowledge to their spectators, or spectators demanding the actors to entertain them – we can then detect that there is power exercising in this relation. However, because theatre has the ability to mimic reality and evoke emotions, the power relation between the two sides becomes more complicated, and therefore sheds light on potential changes. To make it clear, it is necessary to introduce Turner's (1982) “reflexivity” theory. According to Turner (1982), reflexivity is “the ways in which a group tries to scrutinize, portray, understand, and then act on itself” (p. 75). In other words, reflexivity penetrates the barrier between the staged reality and the living reality, between the objective world that people see on stage and their subjective selves. This inherent shifting between actor and spectator, as well as the shifting between the staged performance and the reality it shadows can be viewed as a way to understand the fluidity in power relation. To describe the people under the surveillance of Panopticon system, Foucault (1995) wrote that “He is seen, but he does not see;

he is the object of information, never a subject in communication” (p. 200). Whereas in theatre, “To be reflexive is to be at once one’s own subject and direct object” (Turner, 1982, p. 100). Loacker (2013) concluded in her empirical study about Foucault’s power structure and performers’ subjectivity that performers were trained to saturate themselves in their subjective being, which resulted in their tendency to develop independency and self-governance apart from the external demands that was normalized by modern power (p. 36). In theatre, one’s subjective and objective worlds are combined together, because theatre provides a space for people to see. As a result of this possibility to see, communication and transformation outside of the discourse can be realized.

Therefore, the power fluidity that is embedded in theatre is leading to liberation and change, instead of the reproduction of oppression. If we take a look at the boys at River High who were manipulated by the hypermasculinity culture, a theatrical performance about the “fag” epithet may make a difference because it would allow the boys to see their own reality. For instance, the *Mr. Cougar* performance at River High was a contest to award the senior boys who performed the most popular skits, which usually were parodies about other school boys (Pascoe, 2007, p. 16). In a possible alternative scenario of the *Mr. Cougar*, a participant could see his life on stage, and live in his subjectivity. Thus, he might obtain different perspective to see his life, and transfer this realization from the stage to his reality. In this sense, the “fag” epithet might fall apart as the performers reach the realization and decide to claim their independence to challenge that norm.

This fluidity of power further ensures the continuous operation of power’s mechanisms. Besides recognizing that theatre invites power fluidity to realize change, it is equally helpful to recognize the role that theatre plays in resisting the mechanisms produced and sustained by modern power. According to Foucault (1995), there are three components that can be found in the mechanisms of modern power—normalization, homogeneity, and hierarchy (Foucault, 1995, p. 184). Whereas in theatre, these mechanisms may fail since theatre practices enable people’s physical and cognitive realization of the power.

The process of normalization firstly imposes an invisible training of human bodies. “Place the bodies in a little world of signals to each of which is attached a single, obligatory response” (Foucault, 1995, p. 166). In the meantime, this training of bodies is invisible. According to

Foucault (1995), “Disciplinary power, on the other hand, is exercised through its invisibility, at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility” (p. 187). The first step theatre can do to realize change is to help its practitioners acquire the awareness to identify the micro-physics of norms imprinted on their bodies. Besides the “reflexive” nature of theatre, which enables spectators to see, the playful nature of theatre also provides a protection for spectators to recognize power’s invisibility. As Pascoe (2007) pointed out in her book, “Theater as a symbolic and metaphorical space is important in this sense. It is a place where it is okay and even required to try on different characters” (p. 165). This awareness of normalization then leads to the possibility of de-mechanizing the body.

In general, when actors prepare to get into their roles, they need to get rid of some of their habits in daily behaviors, in order to imagine and embody the roles’ movements and behaviors. They need to constantly identify the signals and de-mechanize their bodies. For instance, when I was playing the role of a 12-year old filthy orphan boy in a recent school production, I found it difficult because I am a female adult actress who has adapted a set of totally different and undetectable social norms through years of “body training.” But to play the role, I had to push myself to recognize the way in which my body usually functions to fit in the norms designed for females, and then adapt the behaviors which fit in the norms for orphan boys, such as frequently wiping his nose or scratching his head. These recognitions and strategies not only made the acting more convincing, but also made me realize how normalized I was in “performing” my gender role and social status. If it was not for acting out a boy in theatre, I would never be able to experience and realize how modern power operates through normalization.

Moreover, we always use theatrical games to warm up and prepare for theatre performances. For instance, the game invented by Augusto Boal, *Invasion of the Brain*, that asks participants to walk when they hear the direction “stop” and to stop when they hear the direction “walk” is an exercise for actors to detach from their habitual thinking and movement. According to Boal (2006):

Games help enable the de-mechanisation of the body and the mind alienated by the repetitive tasks of the day-to-day,

particularly those related to work and to the economic, environmental and social conditions of those who take part in them. The body in work as in play, as well as producing stimuli, responds to those it receives, creating, in itself, a muscular mask as strong as the mask of social behavior—both of which act directly on the thought and emotions which thus become stratified. (p. 5)

This quote corresponds with Foucault's (1995) self-sustainable mechanism where its subjects internalize the "gazes" and police themselves under the surveillance (Foucault, 1995, p. 177). These theatre practices and games actually are exercising the resistance to modern power.

In addition to helping recognize and de-mechanize micro-physics, theatre also connects people with empathy, which plays a key role in dismantling hierarchy in order to resist the modern power. This empathy is essential to Boal's (1979) theory of Theatre of the Oppressed. He used the following definition: "Empathy makes us feel as if we ourselves are experiencing what is actually happening to others" (p. 35). Here, he used the expression "as if" to suggest that there are no two people who could live the exact same life, just like the ruling class would not have a chance to really live a life of the ruled class. There are always differences between individuals, and therefore empathy comes into play when we try to understand one another. This ability is indispensable for theatre practice because only if the actors empathize their characters could they really live the characters; and only if the spectators empathize with the characters could they acquire the access to make change happen. Since ancient Greek tragedy, theatre has been working to evoke empathy. Boal (1979) interpreted Aristotle's theory in his book, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, arguing that empathy enables an emotional tie that makes the spectators gain the same emotions of the characters, and therefore there is a delegation of power produced through the process (Boal, 1979, p. 102). The application of theatre in education also demonstrates its advantage for empathy-building. In the current educational context where pro-social learning is emphasized, theatre-related teaching practices such as process drama help students think deeper and more actively, see beyond their own world, and connect with the bigger society (Neelands, 2009, p. 178). Styslinger (2000) specifically argued that

drama opens the door to multiple interpretation for students, which enables students to empathize more (p. 185). This empathy, though it sounds vague and only takes place on the emotional level, creates an access where students can realize true understanding. This understanding, therefore, can break the barriers between hierarchical differentiations. When I was in the cast of an interview theatre piece about LGBTQ+ youth, I learned about some coming out stories of the interviewees. Unsurprisingly, many of them took place in a performing space, like in a play or during a poem reading. It also turned out that the sexualities of many of them were accepted by their families. I cannot quantify how much empathy is produced in theatre and how much empathy is needed to move spectators to change the reality. But my experience in theatre told me that when facing the iron wall between different groups of people, empathy, though it sounds vague and frivolous, actually works its way through and achieves change.

In the last chapter of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1990) wrote, "Moreover, against this power that was still new in the nineteenth century, the forces that resisted relied for support on the very thing it invested, that is, on life and man as a living being" (p. 144). On the other hand, Boal (2006) made the following statement in *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*:

In the act of organizing human actions, they (theatres) show where we have been, where we are, and where we are going; who we are, what we feel and what we desire. For this reason we must all do theatre, to discover who we are and find out who we could become. (p. 62)

If modern power can work its way through oppression and inequality in the society, theatre, on the flip side, will work to realize changes in the power relation because it enables social practitioners to recognize themselves and their reality, and therefore to make changes happen.

Pascoe (2007) ended her book by providing practical steps to disrupt the toxic hypermasculinity and to achieve gender equality in schooling systems. She hopes to see progress in legal protections, in school policies and curriculums, from teachers and administrators' actions, as well as in safe spaces, such as "drama performances" (p. 120-123). As gender and sexuality studies are progressing, education also attempts to develop better pro-social curriculums to reduce

relevant inequities. Under this social context, more people need to be involved to make a contribution, including theatre artists. Theatre communities may provide insightful data and findings to better entail the interaction between theatre and power, and to indicate future solutions for gender and sexuality inequality.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Xiaojin Niu is an educator, theatre artist, and researcher from China. Xiaojin has been teaching theatre to kids in and out of public school system, and facilitating drama in education professional development workshops for adults. She also participated in various theatre performances and created original plays for her students. Xiaojin's current passion and expectation of her work is to synthesize her teaching, artistic, and researching experiences to discover new possibilities for drama in education and education in general. Xiaojin is a current Ed.D. student of the Educational Theatre Program at NYU.

Exercising the Mind

[ROGER WOOSTER](#)

ABSTRACT

In this article I return to the question of whether we should draw a distinction between theatre-making and drama as a learning medium. Human beings, like all mammals, learn to survive through play. The skills we develop through playing enable us to learn about ourselves, others and our environment. Humans also have a prolonged period of protected and dependent childhood during which time we use our imaginations to envisage our futures and, unlike our mammalian brethren, become aware of our mortality. This ability to learn through play we continue to employ in our adult lives. Alongside this personal involvement in play there has also developed the art form of theatre. I argue that drama and theatre are different in the same way that school athletics are different from professional sport; they are related but not conjoined. Drama is an essential tool of 'play' that enables humans to critically examine the world as is and discover what part we can 'play' in shaping the future. As sport is to the body so drama is to the mind: it is important that all young people have access to this mind exercise as it is for them to access to physical activity.

Respect for drama and theatre in schools has always been somewhat tenuous. From the days of Peter Slade (*Child Drama*, 1954) and Brian Way (*Development through Drama*, 1967) UK drama teachers have always felt a need to justify their activities to colleagues who just ‘don’t get it.’ I will consider some of the ways that drama has been and continues to be defended in the education system. I will note the confusion in the minds of headteachers and educational authorities about the difference between drama in education and theatre/acting. This confusion is shared by students themselves who may misconstrue the drama lessons as a step on a career path to celebrity and riches—an ambivalence drama teachers and school authorities may be guilty of encouraging. I wish to remind us that the human quiddities that enable us to learn through drama and to undertake the art form of theatre are related but should not be confused.

Humans are not the only mammals that play. It is an instinctive developmental feature of all our mammalian relatives. We have only to observe the behaviour of kittens or lion cubs, lambs or deer—in fact any young mammals—to see that the play-fighting, the stalking and leaping are all preparing them for their adult lives, providing them with the hunting and defensive survival skills that will allow them in the future to produce progeny: “The young of animals play, as it were, by instinct and...the form of their play is a rehearsal for life” (Lowenfold, 1935, p. 207). The pioneer drama teacher Caldwell Cook put it thus: “It would not be wise to send a child innocent into the big world... [But] it is possible to hold rehearsals.... And that is Play” (Cook, 1917, p. 1). It is of note that these two commentators, the first writing from the world of child psychology and the second from that of drama in schools, should both use the metaphor of the ‘rehearsal’ for, as I hope to show, it is an aspect of drama and theatre that both unites and separates the two concepts.

There are though, ways in which these mammalian traits have led us to inhabit a far more complicated and frightening world. We have, if you will, nibbled at the fruit of knowledge and thus, unlike other animals we have a concept of the sun rising on another tomorrow, a desire to make that tomorrow better than today and a fear that it may not be so. We even know that one day there will be no tomorrow and that we will die.

The ability to play, to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, gives

rise to the art of acting, but it also allows us to try out and imagine different futures. When children are playing at being something or someone other than themselves they are perfectly aware of the fact that they are playing with one reality whilst being fixed in another. It is a way of gaining mastery over their worlds. As a result of the insights gained through play we seek, more than other animals, to radically alter our world for the benefit of ourselves and (hopefully) for others. Through play and imagination we have the ability to envisage change. I argue that through educational drama we gift ourselves with the ability to conceive of such changes and through theatre we present possibilities to others to consider such interpretations and changes.

JUSTIFICATIONS FOR DRAMA AS A LEARNING MEDIUM IN SCHOOLS

Let's face it, sometimes explaining the benefits of drama to colleagues or to educational administrators, can be like trying to explain string theory to an owl (or to me for that matter). Drama comes with noise, an insatiable appetite for physical and timetable space and general disruption to the smooth and sedate running of a school. Headteachers and fellow teachers see wildly enthusiastic energised pupils anxious to get to class and willing to work additional hours after class. They are clearly having fun. Ergo, they cannot possibly be learning anything, can they? Teaching is a slog. Learning takes studious application, coping with boredom and rigour. Drama, if it is a subject at all, is certainly a 'soft' subject.

From this it follows that only those deemed incapable of 'proper' study will be guided to the drama option, to 'let off steam' and to be corralled in an environment where they can cause the least disruption to others. Headteachers will tolerate drama for these reasons. Perhaps to their chagrin the drama 'lot' seem not only happy but also display confidence and often achieve unexpectedly well in wider academic assessments. In 2010 the DICE Consortium of drama specialists from across Europe researched and published two profound studies of the benefits of school drama which offer teachers a great deal of ammunition to use in the defence of their discipline. The analyses report that children are full of energy, more self-confident and open to others as well as being tolerant and cooperative (DICE, 2010a, p. 66).

They also tend to be socially aware and active in the community. Unfortunately for the drama teacher these qualities are rarely the competences that examinations measure. 'But what are they learning?' the confused wise owls wonder. 'I thought they'd be doing William Shakespeare or Tennessee Williams.' Of course, if they dropped in on some of the drama workshops they might actually see forensic insights into *King Lear* or *A Streetcar Named Desire* but judgements about drama as a learning medium are much more easily made if one deprives oneself the encumbrance of knowledge.

The problem for drama teachers is that the benefits of drama are ephemeral and attempts to explain can sound like sloppy liberalism in a world where hard facts and measurable success are paramount. As a result they fall back on arguments that they hope will resonate and make sense to those around them, not because they believe they are the central justification, but because one has to try and communicate in the language of the listener. To the headteacher they will stress that through drama the pupils develop emotionally and socially and are better able to fit into the world around them. They may or may not excel at maths and science but results in other subjects will certainly be enhanced to the good of the school's examination success rate. *Making a World of Difference* (DICE, 2010b) sets out to examine the function of drama beyond the usual 'key' educational competences. In particular they considered communication, learning to learn, interpersonal, civic and intercultural competence, entrepreneurship and cultural expression. None of these is highly regarded by the assessment regimes of education systems and thus become overlooked despite their central contribution to making us human.¹ Instead drama teachers might fall back on the argument that 'at least drama is something they can excel at' and that 'arts are an important part of society.' They (and even the school head and governors) might refer to the opinion of those few business leaders who objectively appreciate the need for creative thinking. In the National Drama's *Drama Magazine* (Spring 2019, Volume 25:1, p. 6) Zeena Rasheed quotes Eric Berridge of the global business consulting firm 'Bluewolf':

The arts teach us to challenge, persuade, and argue. They give us

¹ For a fuller list of the DICE summary of skills acquired through drama see DICE 2010b, p. 25.

our language through which we convey our emotions and thoughts. While STEM [science, technology, engineering and maths] skills are necessary, the arts reinforce human-centred thinking that empowers businesses to sympathise with their customers in order to drive growth.

This is a succinct example of the problem that those who find themselves having to defend drama face. I have no issue at all with the early part of the above statement: drama helps us challenge, persuade, argue. Yes, it helps our language development, emotional maturity and human-centred thinking. Then we get the sting in the tale, for all these worthy outcomes of drama are but nothing if they don't actually grease the wheels of commerce in order 'to drive growth.'

I find it hard to imagine the drama teacher gathering the class together and saying, 'OK, today we are going to help you develop your emotional maturity in order that you can go out there and drive growth.' Many teachers and pupils would be horrified to think that the purpose of their exploration of the human condition was to manipulate it commercially. So what *do* the young people expect from drama? It is here that we have to face an unfortunate truth, for whilst some will understand that drama is about emotional development, empathy, teamwork and creatively analysing the world and the way it works, many others will see the sessions as a chance to exercise their egos and prepare themselves for stardom and celebrity. Drama teachers find themselves under pressure to accept this misunderstanding and even to use it to recruit the cohort. Should a piece of publically performed work be successful both drama teacher and headteacher will be welcoming the local press, extolling the virtues and value of the 'talented young people who could go far.'

Justifying drama as a learning medium is like juggling with ectoplasm. The drama teachers instinctively know its value and the children and young people involved feel its value (to the extent that it often doesn't feel like 'learning' at all). Those outside educational drama struggle with their suspicion despite occasional bouts of respect and in this they reflect a confusion that is shared by policy makers at the highest level. As educational curricula become more obsessed with assessment and measurable achievement, subjects that do not fit into such a regime are more and more marginalised. In the UK there has actively been a move to diminish arts subjects, including drama, in

favour of the 'STEM' (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects that can be more easily assessed and are seen as offering a surer pathway to careers. Overlooking the fact that the world of work is changing exponentially quickly and that the most useful skill to have is the ability to think creatively and flexibly, the education system focuses on facts and ideas that may not even be relevant in ten years time. Have a look at the careers advertised on-line or in a national newspaper. How many jobs of that title existed ten or fifteen years ago? What will be the jobs in the future? I would argue that a sound preparation in drama education is more future-proof than the current trend to train for today's (or even yesterday's) careers.

Once again, even in the minds of educational experts who are think-tanking curricula, there is a dangerous conflation of learning *through* drama and learning about theatre. This can be evidenced by a brief overview of drama in the curriculum in the UK. In 1990 a National Curriculum was introduced for the first time. Drama was removed from its place in the school timetable other than as an adjunct to the study of English. In *Theatre in Education in Britain* I summarise the new place of drama:

References to drama and theatre in the Curriculum are either in terms of their ability to help with verbal and social skills or, in the case of theatre, as an opportunity to learn about production techniques, acting as a craft, and developing skills of analytical criticism to 'understand the educational, cultural and social purposes of drama'. (Department of Education and Science, 1989, p. 2; cited by Wooster, 2016, p. 84)

This was how drama was seen in the 1990s in the UK: How to speak, how to behave, how theatre was made and how to write about it. As time went on however, there were changes. Increasingly schools were required to deal with social and health issues and the PSHE [Personal, Social and Health education] curriculum was introduced as an adjunct to the National Curriculum. Later 'Citizenship' was added to the list. The requirement to deal with these areas of human activity opened the door to drama education once again and gave an impetus to what has become known as Applied Drama. Whilst giving ammunition to drama teachers to use with their colleagues and to headteachers to use with their governing boards, it is also reductive of drama. Drama could now

be seen as the prophylactic, or even the cure, for society's ills but the elephant in the room was to be left dormant. This 'elephant' is the potentially politically charged fact that through drama students tend to learn to think creatively about moral and social issues and question why things are as they are and to ask if they could be different. Schools and colleges have had to tiptoe through this political minefield. As a result many investigations by drama students into, say, drug culture, tend to come down on the 'just say no' approach and avoid the difficult road that might take them into a consideration of how and why such a culture exists and the complicity of wider societal mores and government policies in the creation of the conditions in which people wish to escape their realities.

Theatre in Education has suffered in the same way. Whereas in the 60s and 70s many projects used participation to take children and young people through an experience in which they could critically and creatively examine causes, effects and possibilities, more recent projects (under the pressures of time, funding and lack of appropriate actor/teacher training) tend to be performance-based offering a quick-fix message to a large audience who have little opportunity to engage critically.

THE PURPOSE OF LEARNING THROUGH DRAMA

I have called this article 'Exercising the Mind' and this stems from a metaphor or comparison that I am fond of using and which can be of help when trying to explain what it is that learning through drama achieves. Consider for a moment the place of sport and physical exercise within education. There is an acceptance (self-evident to governors, headteachers and colleagues) of the essential value of keeping the body healthy and that there may also be benefits as regards teamwork, concentration, determination and ambition. A good school will encourage pupils to be involved in sporting activity and if asked why, they will applaud these potential outcomes. Some of these children or young people may show an exceptional aptitude and may inspire the observation that 'she could be an Olympic medallist one day,' or, 'he will play for The Yankees/Manchester United.' But this is not why we encourage sport as part of our education system. We undertake physical endeavours because they are good for our physical

health.

In the same way drama is (or should be) part of the curriculum not because we are hoping to train the actors and directors of tomorrow, but because the processes of drama are good for our brains, our thinking mechanisms and our mental health. Certainly there will be pupils who are introduced to a love of theatre and performance through exposure to drama. And there will be those who show exceptional skill in performance and will be inspired to dedicate themselves to excelling at acting. Of these the schools may say 'she will be a household name one-day,' or, 'he will win an Oscar one of these days.' But this is not why we should have drama on the curriculum. Drama is about making healthier human beings. Learning through drama is learning empathy: learning about ourselves by walking a little way in someone else's shoes. The wise phrase from Satire X of the Roman poet Juvenal instructs us to pray for a 'healthy mind in a healthy body.' Note that that it is the health of the *mind* which is placed first.

THE PLAY'S THE THING?

I have argued above that it is the human ability to play that feeds our ability to discover ourselves and ourselves within the world, and to enable us to mould the world rather than be merely moulded by it. Among the drama practitioners that have shown us the way are the likes of Peter Slade (1954), Brian Way (1967), Dorothy Heathcote (e.g. 'Drama as a Process for Change' in Drain, 1995) and Gavin Bolton (e.g. *Towards a Theory of Drama*, 1979). Educational philosophers that have enabled us to theorise and understand the importance of creative and critical thinking are Bruner (*The Relevance of Education*, 1972), Vygotsky (*Thought and Language*, 1962) and Gardner (*Multiple Intelligences*, 1993). Through these two strands of practical and theoretical approach we are enabled to work with our students and open up an understanding of the world for them, and repeatedly, for ourselves.

This human ability to play however has also engendered an art form called theatre. Born of ritual and community reaffirmation the ability to think oneself into the mind of an 'other' became professionalised to the extent where people are now expressly trained and practised in showing us the lives of others for our entertainment and edification. The actor brings to the performance area or screen an

understanding and portrayal of another human being and, through their interaction with other actors, presents to the audience a piece of quasi-life designed to make us reflect and to think or laugh (or both).

This, of course, is what many will assume you are talking about when you say you are 'doing' or 'teaching' or 'creating' drama with your students. 'When's the performance?' they will ask. And maybe there is a performance if you are creating theatre. Let us assume that you are, on this occasion, making theatre and not 'doing' drama.

Whether the production is a Stanislavskian performance of *Death of a Salesman*, a Brechtian production of *Mother Courage* or a piece of socially inspired theatre devised by the students themselves, the audience will be learning about the themes and ideas of the play as filtered through the research, expertise and talent of the young actors. The actors will be demonstrating their understanding of their character within the frame of the play as a whole and we will be observing their understanding and have it conveyed to us by the overall concept of the production. That human ability to 'play,' to think outside ourselves and to empathise, is active within everyone present at the ritual of the performance.

In creating the theatre a myriad of skills will have been learned and exercised by the troupe and all in order to share their thoughts and ideas with an audience of 'others.' The audience receives this imaginative creation vicariously, suspending their disbelief in the artifice and using their imaginations to process the ideas emanating from the stage. In doing this they deepen their own understanding of the world by observing those who have been deeply engaged with the ideas for a period of weeks. A successful performance will encourage reflection and even a re-examination of the world and our own place within it. The actors distil this in the making of theatre: the audience in their consumption of it.

The skills employed by the actors in creating the piece will reflect some of those of the drama lessons. There will be team working, leadership, compromise, studying, researching, confidence, empathy but also memorising, vocal and physical work plus perhaps a range of technical skills. But despite the success of their production most of these young artists will not go on to careers in the theatre or media, so what was the point? In 2012 an article was published in the *Youth Theatre Journal* analysing the impact of school theatre participation based upon the responses of adults recalling their adolescent

involvement (McCammon et al, 2012). Those responding to the survey behind the report were of course self-selecting and the positivity of the result is to be expected. However, the research team felt able to assert that 'quality high school theatre and speech experiences can not only influence but even accelerate adolescent development and provide residual, positive, lifelong impacts throughout adulthood' (p. 5). Responders stressed the impact on their confidence and their understanding of social and historical issues (p. 6). Half of those contributing to the research were working in the arts and half were not and the article argues that taking part in performance-orientated projects has lifelong value whatever the career trajectory of the participants:

Any career success I've experienced is largely due to the combination of process thinking developed in engineering school and, more significantly, my theatre, speech, and debate experience in high school. I learned to communicate effectively, write well, speak clearly and distinctly, engage and hold an audience with pacing, inflection, movement, etc. (Female, Global Leader for a Major Corporation. Cited in McCammon et al 2012, p. 12)

Whilst I whole-heartedly agree it is interesting that the study ends by listing highly successful theatre, film and media personalities who are known to have taken part in school productions. It is important to remember that those with no interest in performing or in any aspects of a career in the arts still need the mind exercise of drama as much as they need to keep their bodies fit.

The classic Theatre in Education model that I have written about elsewhere is especially adept at combining the two aspects of performance and audience-ship. In such projects a group of actors, also trained in drama facilitation, would work with a group of young people who participate in the drama but who are protected by their role. As 'journalists' or 'a board of enquiry' or 'friends of the characters' in the performance elements they can open up their own critical faculties to feed and influence the drama. In doing so, and in a way that reflects Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development' (see *Mind in Society*, 1978) they are enabled to start from where they are in their own intellectual and social development and reach for the next rung on

the critical and analytical ladder safely scaffolded by the theatrical construct around them. Typically projects might be based in an historical event but, through such direct involvement, children are better enabled to relate the experience of the content of the performance elements to their own lives. Because they are not acting but merely holding for a moment the mask of role in front of themselves, the participants are safely enabled to engage with ideas and test out opinions that are both 'theirs' and 'not theirs' at the same time. I have seen such techniques be safely and profoundly explored with quite young children dealing with subjects that even adults find troubling such as abuse, death and bereavement. In classic TIE children's interventions, as participants in role, can be voiced. They can be accepted and valued. The children watch the actors and remain secure as themselves in a protected frame. That is why it is rarely advisable to allow visitors to a TIE project, for it can turn—at least some—of the children into self-conscious actors.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have tried to address how we can distinguish theatre-making from drama as a learning medium. I have noted that, whilst all mammals learn through play, humans have developed the ability to maintain play-learning into their adult lives. As sentient and social beings we continue to develop emotionally and socially through our employment of the ability to play, to imagine and to envisage the future. We have a prolonged period of protected childhood compared to other mammals and in this time—as well as beyond it—we dramatise our lives in order to develop and adapt to the world. We also are enabled to adapt the world to us—something that we perhaps have not done very well in the past few centuries. But we can envisage the future: we can analyse today and we can determine our tomorrows. Drama is especially good at enabling us to do this.

This same ability to play has enabled humans to create an analytical and critical ability to concentrate aspects of the human condition into an art form we call theatre but it is distinct from drama for learning. As sports activity exercises the body so drama exercises the mind. And just as it can be rewarding to watch highly trained athletes play and compete at their sports so audiences can learn much from

actors who excel at their craft. If however we allow the two to merge, if we allow drama lessons to become acting classes, we are limiting the ability of these play-inspired opportunities to exercise the minds of all. Rather they become primarily the playground of the prima donnas. They can overlap at times. Youth Theatre, as with school productions discussed above, is a tremendously valuable experience for young people, but it will usually only be of interest to those with an interest in performing and will exclude those who, in the privacy of a drama session, might be enabled to examine their own demons and confront the demons of others. The drama class is an extension of play: a progression through which we learn about ourselves and others. The theatre rehearsal may include these elements but will also be driven by acting technique and the needs and expectations of mounting a production to an external audience. Let us have both but let us remain aware of where they unite and where they diverge. We all need to exercise our minds.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Roger Wooster worked for many years as an actor/teacher before lecturing in further and higher education. He has contributed to a range of journals including those of National Drama, the National Association for the Teaching of Drama, *Research in Drama Education* and the *Journal of Arts and Health*. He has also presented papers to a number of international conferences. His most recent book is *Theatre in Education in Britain: Origins, Development and Influence* published by Bloomsbury Methuen in 2016. He is currently working on a book entitled *Screen Acting Skills* to be published later this year by Bloomsbury Methuen.

Importance of the Outsider: Reflections from the Facilitator of a Community-Based Playbuilding Project

[JENNIFER WONG](#)

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Facilitators entering a community to do applied theatre work often carried the identity of an outsider to the community. This identity is frequently problematic because there are several assumptions critics to the field make about the inherent privileges and imbalance in powers an outsider, in the form of a facilitator for an applied theatre programme, possesses. And it becomes a sticky argument especially when the communities applied theatre practitioners work with are often likely to be vulnerable, marginalized and/or disenfranchised. In this article, I argue that there are benefits to being an outsider to the community where the applied theatre work is happening. The applied theatre practitioner's identity as an outsider serves the function of maintaining a critical distance from the lives of the participants in a playbuilding project. The lack of knowledge and access to the culture and people within the community where the playbuilding work was

situated provided the participants an added layer of safety when they examined issues and problems which they experienced in their daily lives. The desires to connect with the applied theatre practitioner through the performance making process in the playbuilding programme motivated the participants to produce sharper pieces of theatre.

INTRODUCTION

As a doctoral student in 2015, I arrived at the office of the Voluntary Welfare Organisation (VWO) located at the fringe of the central business district in Singapore, ready to plunge myself into three months of playbuilding work. The young participants in the playbuilding workshops lived in a low-income estate under the care of the VWO. From past experiences and also through conversations with the social service worker who acted as the main liaison for the project, I learnt that the children participating in the playbuilding programme faced acute academic challenges and behavioural management issues, on top of being very poor. While it was not the main purpose of my doctoral research to examine the facilitator-participants relationship and power balance in this study, it became a pertinent angle for discussion as the reflection journal that I completed religiously recorded consistently the many thoughts I had about my identity as an outsider to the community of children from the low-income homes.

I was keenly aware of the differences between the children and me. My middle-class, educated background from a dominant ethnic group in Singapore contrasted sharply from the children's demographics of low-income, low educational levels and most of them in the programme were from a minor ethnic group. The young people preferred to converse in their ethnic language when communicating with each other, while they struggled to speak Singlish¹ with me, and they considered my attempt at Singlish too proper for them.

In this article, I discuss the tensions of my identity as an outsider to the community I was working with, and at the same time, I highlight the space that was enabled as a result of the identity for a robust and

¹ A colloquial form of English embellished by Chinese, Malay, Tamil and various Chinese dialects.

sincere dialogic relationship to emerge between the children and me. Heap (2015) suggests that in an applied theatre programme, a positive exchange takes place between the facilitator and the participants where “participants become part of the teaching/facilitation, the facilitator learns and all the participants are affected within this continuing cycle of exchange” (p. 248-249). This suggestion is further echoed by Howell and Heap (2013) who advocate for teachers in a drama process to relinquish the power they have as teachers to enable more agency in their students. However, Snyder-Young (2013) reminds us that the authority drama educators and practitioners bring into the space they are working in makes juggling the status and power we hold a precarious balancing act. Therefore, I argue in this article for different ways to look at the (im)balance in power because the differences can serve the intentions of the community we work with.

POSITION OF THE OUTSIDER

At the beginning of the project, I was critically aware that I was facilitating and providing a drama experience for the children in the low-income neighbourhood which was an uncommon occurrence. Opportunities to engage in participatory arts programmes for these children were rare. Their infrequent school attendance also meant that they missed out on important opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities that aimed to develop their literacies outside of academic subjects. The children in the programme were excited by the prospects of making a performance together for an invited audience although at the beginning of the project, they were fairly doubtful of their capabilities as theatre makers. At the same time, they were wary of me, an outsider to their community who was introduced by the social worker as a drama teacher. The imbalance in power, privilege and status between the children and me became a confounding mess compounded by my identity as the facilitator of the programme, leading and teaching them how to make performances.

Hughes and Wilson (2004) explain that participation in out-of-school youth theatre activities provides a physical and social-emotional space for adolescents to “feel known, accepted and supported; a means of establishing positive identity and relationships with peers and adults outside of their day-to-day lives” (p. 65). As an adult outsider, I had entered the community with a task and it had made me very aware

that I could have appeared to be the coloniser coming to improve the lives of these unfortunate people. I was also careful that I did not enter the community or give the impression that I had a “privileged set of assumptions that the communities need to be changed” (Snyder-Young, 2013, p. 38) so that they could lead improved lives.

Blight (2015) expounds the importance of “the building of trust and understanding within the partnership” (p. 22) between the facilitator of a drama programme and the participants. I understood clearly from the beginning of the study that my position as an outsider to the community meant that I had to work on building trust within the playbuilding group. It was imperative that they trusted me as the facilitator of the programme to lead them in the journey to achieve the artistic objectives. It was equally crucial that they built trust with each other as they were going to be working together very closely.

There was also the element of understanding each other and respecting the perspectives offered through the process that had to be negotiated from the start of the project. Hickey-Moody (2015) explains that it “is a theatre facilitator’s role to take an audience, or participants, on a journey that pushes them to relate to new worlds, and often difficult social issues and for this to occur both sides must relate to one another” (p. 216). A constructive and trusting relationship with the children was forged quickly when we acknowledged and made use of the differences between us to advance our goal in creating performances for the audience. Throughout the playbuilding process, it was not apparent that I was the teacher in the room as the children constantly took the lead in deciding the trajectories of the stories we were building collaboratively. I had also made a deliberate effort to remind the young people and myself that I was there to facilitate the process of putting the performance together but the decision-making and ownership of the product remained in their hands.

Throughout the playbuilding process, I reflected that I needed to enable through the theatre making opportunities for the children to gain agency in determining how they wanted to shape the narratives they intended to perform. My position as an outsider to the community gave me a reason to ask the children many questions—questions about what had happened in the story, why did it happen, who were involved or affected. The children were very interested to perform stories about their neighbourhood and tried their best to answer verbally, and when language failed them, they showed through still images and

performances to help this outsider understand. The young people were empathetic that this outsider was a stranger to their community and thus did not understand the culture and workings in their neighbourhood. At the same time, I used questions extensively throughout the playbuilding process to motivate the young people to think deeper about the choices they were making and analysed the rationales behind their decisions. When I asked questions, I aimed to “bring them to a point where they think from within the framework of choices instead of talking coolly about the framework of choices” (Heathcote, 2013, p. 204).

The questions used in conjunction with specific drama conventions meant to advance the development of the performance became powerful tools in making visible the cultural discourse within the community. My identity as the outsider aided and justified the use of questions as a way to push the playbuilding process forward and the children were eager to educate me in the ways of the community as they empathised that I genuinely did not understand. The young people saw the need to make explicit the intricacies of the narratives so that I could understand the nuances which would otherwise be unnoticed by external eyes.

Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2013) suggest that “(instead) of speaking for Others, we maintain a respectful silence, and work to create the social and political conditions which might enable Others to speak (and be heard) on their own terms” (p. 86). In the project, I was given the identity of a teacher as the children either addressed me as ‘cikgu’ (pronounced ‘chek-ku’ in Malay) when they spoke with each other in Malay or they called me ‘Ms Jennifer’. The younger ones simply called me ‘Teacher’. I reflected that my position as an outsider to the low-income estate benefitted my role as the facilitator in the playbuilding programme. I had no links or history with the residents and therefore my relationship with the children was confined to the drama programme. I was an adult who was always asking them questions and being interested in the ways they viewed the world around us. I was an adult who had time to listen and was not linked to the problems they were facing in their lives. Therefore, the covert ‘Othering’ that was happening between the children and me became a means for us to be acquainted with the other’s world on our own terms.

The children’s backgrounds and their circumstances were outside of my social-economic strata although it was not completely unfamiliar

to me. Regardless of our differences in culture and backgrounds, the children and I co-created two pieces of theatre together with the same respectfulness accorded to each other. Video recordings showed the children being patient with me when I clarified my interpretations of the tableaux work they had created. They pursued the refinement of their images in order to help explain to this outsider what they really wanted to communicate through the images they had created. On the other hand, I was conscious throughout the playbuilding process that I did not suggest or direct the tableaux creation. The commitment to facilitate and not dictate the trajectory of the plots of their performances was observed even till the final rehearsals for each of the performances throughout the project. Therefore, despite the awareness that I was a drama teacher, the children were empowered throughout the playbuilding process to make decisions for the creation of their performance.

The children's heightened sense of self-efficacy and agency during the debrief at the end of the performance were evidence of this respectful relationship we shared.² Qid, an eight-year-old, explained that making performance was special to him because he performed stories that he had told, and not stories that belonged to someone else. Twelve-year-old Sha agreed with Qid and further explained that the children owned the narratives and the final performance, and they were thankful to me because I had shown them the tools to making theatre. If there had been consciousness during the theatre making process that we were other-ing each other, it was not intended to demonstrate the differences between us but instead to bridge the gap so that we were able to look into each other's worlds. I saw the children's lived experiences and aspirations through their lenses while they saw my journey as a drama practitioner through their playbuilding process. It was not an equal relationship, but it did not hinder the way we worked.

Wales (2012) explains that drama itself does not foster the positive changes in identity and agency construction. Instead she posits that it is the "facilitation of, and interactions within, the drama experience" (p. 540) that contributes to the changes in the relationships and personal identities of the participants. On the other hand, the facilitation of the playbuilding process in this project propelled me to work at a level of

² All the children's names have been replaced by pseudonyms in this article.

complexity that was unanticipated and I “develop(ed) a very distinct level of high-order thinking skills” which Heap (2015, p. 246) argues is important for workers in the applied theatre field.

TENSIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF BEING AN OUTSIDER

Hughes and Wilson (2004) assert the need for positive and proper structures to support the transition of adolescence into adulthood. The children in the playbuilding programme had been prematurely inducted into the adolescent phase of their lives because of the circumstances that formed their social and environmental fabrics. The children exhibited behaviours that were beyond their age and innocence so as to protect themselves in the rough estate. Sha and his best friend, eleven-year-old Tin’s swaggers when they walked and their propensity to engage anyone in a physical fight are just two examples of how the two pre-adolescents wanted to impress upon the other children in the community that they were more capable and much bigger beings than their peers of the same age. The children’s relationships with the adults in the neighbourhood and in their lives did not appear to support their transition into adolescence as the children told stories about the absence of positive adult figures. Their perception of me as the drama teacher in this playbuilding project filled the gap temporarily in the children’s need for an adult figure who was audience to their thoughts and perspectives and at the same time provided guidance when requested.

Maier and Monahan (2009) advocate researchers to establish “strong interpersonal connections with their subjects in order to get them to open up and share the intimate details of their lives and provide a portrait of the social reality being studied” (p. 11). In this project, my position as an outsider to the low-income estate fostered that connection between the children and me. As an outsider, I did not subscribe to the cultural rules of the community and there was no need to refrain from topics that were considered taboo. In one of the playbuilding sessions that was poorly attended, eleven-year-old Ins brought up the topic of sex and puberty for discussion. The only boy who was present that afternoon was eight-year-old Ros. The young boy had retreated to the sofa at the end of the room that afternoon and declared that he was too tired to participate in drama that day. Ins and then followed by Dana who was of the same age took the opportunity

to ask questions about the physical changes they were experiencing due to puberty. The topic changed very quickly to premarital sex and the two girls explained they felt pressured to conform to the culture established by the adolescents in the neighbourhood.

Ins and Dana explained that they knew girls who were sexually active with some of the boys in the community and amongst the adolescent group, there was covert pressure for teenage girls to use sex as an initiation ritual to grow up. According to the girls, these were not topics they could broach easily with an adult figure in the community. Ins' declaration that her mother would not address such issues further crystallised the pre-adolescents' need for an adult figure to speak with and seek guidance from. I was at that time curious why they did not speak with the social service worker managing the playbuilding project as she was a trusted figure amongst the children. The responses from the girls plainly explained that social service worker shared a very close relationship with the low-income community which included the girls' parents and caregivers.

The close connection between the social service worker and the adults in the estate meant that she was not an option with whom to discuss sex. Instead, my position as an outsider meant that I had no access to their parents or caregivers and I did not know any of the adolescents girls they were discussing making me a safe option. It is, of course, debateable if an outsider to the community should be offering advice on puberty and sex to the girls but I decided that I was comfortable approaching the topics because there was implicit trust between us. Maier and Monahan (2009) caution that "(researchers) must find a balance between closeness and detachment *that is right for them*" (p. 23, italics in original), and in that situation, my identity as an outsider to the community offered a level of detachment for the girls, but our working relationship built a connection that made them feel safe.

However, I was also keenly aware that both the drama programme and my presence in the community during the theatre making duration were not permanent supporting structures the young people could rely on indefinitely. The conversation with the girls about puberty and sex was also a "stop" (Fels, 2012) moment in the playbuilding process. I had to pause and consider my role as an outsider facilitating a process that resulted in the participants peering into their own lives and contemplating their futures. I became even more keenly aware of the

warning by Etherton and Prentki (2006) about applied theatre practitioners being visitors to the site of the participatory work in which we engage. They suggest that “the benefits of critical distance and innovative vision have to be set against the disadvantages of restricted knowledge and limited time” (p. 144). It is further suggested that one way to circumvent this stricture was to engage persons who would have continued access to the participants to move the work forward after the ‘visitor’ has left. While I was encouraged by the trust the children had in me and the drama process to raise sensitive issues for exploration and dialogue, I was deeply concerned about the lack of support they might feel when the playbuilding programme came to an end. In my mind, the children’s attitudes towards sex and the pressures they felt required more intense examination and careful facilitation on my part but I was limited by the time I had with them. My ethos as a drama practitioner were challenged when the programme came to an end: there were issues which remained unresolved; and there could have been children who expected and needed continual support.

Muris (2017) highlighted that girls who have lower self-efficacy levels are more prone to depression than boys. Brummert Lennings and Bussey (2017) further this claim to explain that when young people cope with stressful situations through self-blaming and isolation, they experience an increase in depressive symptoms. It was evident that the children, especially the girls were needing support in ways that fell beyond the scope of the playbuilding project. However, their membership in the programme had provided the space and time for them to articulate fears and concerns which might have otherwise gone unheard. I was particularly concerned with how or who would continue to support the young people in the programme after my PhD fieldwork ended, but at the same time, I was conscious that the stories told to me were in confidence and not meant to be shared with persons related to the community. When I left the community at the end of the project, my identity reverted back to that of a stranger. When I met two of the children one year later, the distance and awkwardness between us made it hard to imagine that we had spent about three months building two performances together. However, I speculated that it was also the knowledge that I would one day leave the community that made it safe for the children to share intimate personal stories with me. My induction into the rental estate and its events would have no impact

on the ecology of the community once I left.

CONCLUSION: LEAVING THE COMMUNITY

Hogett and Miller (2000) suggest that the outsider does not get an “all access pass” into the community. I reflected in this article that I was an outsider to the public rental housing community. I entered the community with my bag of tools in the form of drama processes to facilitate the making of performances with the children. In that sense, I had gifted each of the child participants an access pass into a playbuilding programme where they became theatre makers of original performances. The children reciprocated by gifting me an access pass into the personal and communal stories of their lived experiences as young residents in a tough neighbourhood. The relationship of reciprocity lasted throughout the playbuilding programme.

Throughout the playbuilding journey, the children found opportunities to delve into conflicts and issues which made up their lived experiences, and examined them from different perspectives within the dramatic contexts. The young people transited between the fiction and the real world to make sense of the events happening in their lives to re-imagine and visualise their realities. The experience of working collaboratively within the fiction facilitated multi-modal ways of learning and multiple ways of being.

The shared experience of building a play together fostered a new sense of identity in the children, both collectively and individually. The young people saw themselves as a group of young theatre makers and they were doing something other than spending time at communal spaces in the low-income estate just ‘hanging out’. The children also found that they had talents and capabilities that they had not realized before, and their identities were not limited to their perceived inadequacies and lack of academic achievements. This propelled a sense of agency in some of them as they started to see themselves as capable of making positive changes to their environments and lives. However, this newly formed group identity proved to be limiting and exclusive when they rejected the inclusion of other children into the playbuilding community. The children in the programme became protective of the shared experiences and they felt their privacy had been compromised when newcomers wanted to join the artistic

journey.

The final performance in June 2015 ended the intense playbuilding process I had shared with the children. During the debrief at the end of the second performance, the children returned the figurative access pass for the playbuilding programme to me. They thanked me for teaching them how to do drama but reminded me that the stories belonged to them. The children were ready to move on from their participation in the playbuilding programme to try other activities. The social service worker was trying to recruit the young people into a Scouts programme starting the following week, and many of the children appeared interested. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) explain that “the group may carry on without the presence of the facilitator, or perhaps with a new facilitator, so the “exiting” process may be around the dissolution of the whole group, or the departure of the facilitator from the group, or both” (p. 199). With the completion and submission of my thesis, it was also my time to return the figurative access pass back to the community.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer Wong is a Lecturer in the National Institute of Education - Nanyang Technological University (NIE-NTU), Singapore. Before joining NIE-NTU, she spent ten years in Singapore Polytechnic where she was one of the key members in designing and starting the Diploma

in Applied Drama and Psychology. Her PhD thesis examines the role of drama in enabling a positive sense of self-efficacy in children from low-income homes in Singapore. Her research interests include participatory arts and child and youth development.

Aesthetics of Truth-Telling: Intercultural Applied Theatre Praxis in an Australian Women's Prison

[SARAH WOODLAND](#)

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Our Ancestors, Our History, Our Lost Culture was a devised theatre performance that I developed with women inside Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre (BWCC) Australia in 2017. The performance was based on a memoir from the *Stolen Generations*: the thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from tribal homelands and separated from family in Australia throughout the early nineteenth century up until the 1970s. The intergenerational trauma of these forced removals continues, as do the wider structural inequalities brought about by the colonial project, including the crisis of Indigenous over-incarceration. Indigenous leaders refer to this as the "torment of powerlessness" (Referendum Council, 2017) and believe that there must first be a process of truth-telling before healing and reconciliation can occur. An example of Applied Theatre as Research (ATAR), the purpose of the project was to investigate how a group of incarcerated women would engage

aesthetically in representing a story from the Stolen Generations; and how applied theatre in this contemporary carceral context might be used as a mode of truth-telling. This paper describes how the project reflected an aesthetics of truth-telling, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous women came together to interpret and represent the complexities of this troubling history, and to gain a deeper understanding of its place in contemporary Australian culture.

BACKGROUND

At the time of the project, Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre (BWCC) was a maximum-security prison on the outskirts of the city that holds a population of up to 300, offering inmates vocational education and training, criminogenic rehabilitation, and recreational programmes that included sport, and occasionally art and music. Over the past nine years, I have run six participatory programmes at the centre, encompassing devised theatre, radio drama and immersive audio. This paper focuses on *Our Ancestors, Our History, Our Lost Culture*, a devised performance that I developed with women inside BWCC in 2017. It was based on the memoir *Is That You, Ruthie?* (1999) by Aboriginal Elder and author Ruth Hegarty, which describes her time in Barambah Aboriginal Mission after being removed there as a baby from her tribal Gunggari lands in Mitchell, Queensland in 1930. Barambah was one of many reserves and missions that were established at the turn of the nineteenth century under the government's policy of "protection and segregation" (Baldry, Carlton, & Cunneen, 2015). People from over fifty tribes from all over the state of Queensland were forcibly removed to Barambah as part of the Stolen Generations. The term Stolen Generations came out of the landmark report *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (Wilson, 1997), which detailed the extent and impacts of government policies of forced removal that were carried in Australia throughout the early nineteenth century up until the 1970s.

The idea for *Our Ancestors* evolved out of my previous work, specifically the *Daughters of the Floating Brothel* project, where I had worked with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women over 2014 and 2015 to create a radio docudrama which explored the history of

female incarceration in Australia since its establishment as a penal colony in the late eighteenth century. One of the episodes in this work had focused on Barambah Aboriginal Mission as a site of incarceration, and Auntie Ruth Hegarty had acted as a creative consultant on this part of the story. It had been clear that the Aboriginal women in the group engaged most strongly with creating the Barambah Mission episode, describing it as real and culturally relevant to them. The site of Barambah mission is now the Aboriginal community of Cherbourg, and many of the women who move through BWCC have history and ties there. In 2016, an activities officer at BWCC worked with a group of Aboriginal women to create a live theatre performance for NAIDOC Week¹ that addressed the loss of traditional culture. The project had generated some energy and enthusiasm for live performance among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who wanted to build on the themes they had started exploring in the NAIDOC piece. These previous experiences led me to propose *Is That You, Ruthie?* as the basis for our next project.

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are being incarcerated at alarming rates,² and this is seen as part of the continued legacy of the settler-colonial project (Baldry, Carlton, & Cunneen, 2015; Moreton-Robinson, 2003). Judy Atkinson (2002), an Aboriginal scholar with Yiman/Bunjalung heritage, is among many who believe that intergenerational trauma caused by colonisation and the Stolen Generations has contributed to widespread disadvantage and despair. Indigenous leaders refer to this as the “torment of powerlessness” (Referendum Council, 2017) and believe that there must be a process of truth-telling in order for healing and reconciliation to occur. Australia has avoided the process of officially sanctioned truth-telling that has occurred in countries such as Canada and South

¹ NAIDOC stands for National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and achievements being observed annually throughout Australia for a week from the first Sunday in July.

² Citing data from the 2016 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016), the Australian Law Reform Commission (2017) reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people constituted two percent of the Australian adult population, but comprised twenty-seven percent of the national adult prison population. The Commission went on to report that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *women* are the fastest growing prison population in Australia, currently being 21.2 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous women.

Africa through their Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs). And yet Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian theatre makers, filmmakers, novelists, visual artists and storytellers continuously grapple with the traumas and tensions of our nation's founding, with many Indigenous theatre and literary works drawing on personal testimony and memoir to convey the shattering effects of the Stolen Generations (see Enoch & Mailman, 2008; Harrison & Enoch, 1998). Ruth's memoir is a compelling and beautifully crafted example of this; a personal account that draws attention to the harsh, punishments, painful separation from family, and glimmers of hope and laughter that underpinned daily life in the mission. Works like these engage audiences in ways beyond the sensationalised depictions and deficit discourses around Indigenous disadvantage and dysfunction that pervade the mainstream media and debate in this country. They have the potential to achieve aesthetic impact (Robinson & Martin, 2016) beyond the witness/truth-teller binary that exists in the official performance of TRCs. In this project, I therefore wished to investigate how making theatre based on difficult historical "truths", particularly inside a prison, might enable us as a group to experience the complexity and intimacy that exists in Australia between the past and the present, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, coloniser and colonised. In this paper I will focus on two aspects of this: first, how the shared sense of responsibility we felt for truth-telling enabled us to create a space for intercultural dialogue and creative collaboration; and second, how the process and final performance exemplified an aesthetics of truth-telling, where embodiment, affect and intimacy drew us into Ruth's story, and its situation in a contemporary prison deepened this engagement.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY: APPLIED THEATRE AS RESEARCH

In a project like this, applied theatre can be seen as operating at the "cultural interface" (Nakata, 2007) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges. I conceive applied theatre as an art of living—an embodied, relational act of making of selves, worlds, and cultures in art, and in life: introduced as a Western aesthetic theory by John Dewey in the 1930s (Dewey, 1934; Shusterman, 2000), yet valued and pursued by Eastern philosophers and Indigenous peoples for millennia.

As such, aesthetics encompasses the embodied aesthetic engagement and meaning making that occurs within the process of ensemble building and creating works; the resulting works as they are experienced in a community-based event; and the radical potential of such affective encounters to embody ethical participation and social justice. This approach recognises that sometimes contradictory feelings such as care, love, hope, intimacy, tension, conflict and exclusion, might together form the affective palette that colours an applied theatre experience (see Thompson, 2015; Woodland, 2018). O'Connor and Anderson (2015) highlight the participatory, dialogic, aesthetic qualities of applied theatre as key to its potential as a research methodology. Claiming the term applied theatre as research, and its acronym ATAR, they make the case for applied theatre as a methodology that reflects the complexity of human experience and offers space for "critical hope" (p. 47). ATAR, the authors suggest, is a "politically and socially committed approach that requires research to be responsive to and driven by each unique setting" (p. 47). Over the past eight years, my work in BWCC has reflected this, with the consistent thread being to interrogate aesthetically the intersectionality between women's personal experiences of incarceration, and the wider "carceral cultures"³ in which they exist (see Woodland, 2019). The over-incarceration of Indigenous peoples in Australia, the Stolen Generations, and Ruth Hegarty's story are framed here as existing within Australia's culture of carcerality that began when it was established as a penal colony.

O'Connor and Anderson (2015) begin to discuss ATAR as a potentially decolonizing approach to research, which supports the earlier collection of work undertaken by Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008), locating critical Indigenous methodology as, "The site where theories of performance, pedagogy, and interpretive practice come together" (Denzin & Lincoln 2008, p. 6). Working interculturally at BWCC, with a predominantly Indigenous cast, this approach to methodology was at the forefront where, as I will describe below, the women themselves recognized the potential for performance as a

³ The conference Carceral Cultures was hosted in Vancouver by the Canadian Association of Cultural Studies in March 2018. This event brought together scholars, artists and activists to consider all the different ways human beings are becoming, now more than ever, subject to tyrannies and technologies of displacement, separation, surveillance and control.

critical and pedagogical tool. Also aligning with Indigenous methodologies, Nicholson (2016) describes the “relational ontology” of applied theatre, where “change happens not only through challenging institutional structures of power but also through the relationality of experience” (p. 254). Although *Our Ancestors* was situated within a critical exploration of the colonial legacy of Indigenous dispossession and incarceration, the discussion below will demonstrate that the real work was happening within and through our embodied interactions and relationships in the creative process and final performance, rather than achieving widespread structural change to the system.

Because this project dealt directly with a story from the Stolen Generations, there were ethical concerns for me as a non-Indigenous facilitator. I therefore continued to work with Aunty Ruth as a creative consultant and engaged Amber Romeril Sainsbury, a Brisbane-based Aboriginal actor, as co-facilitator. The devising process was democratic and collaborative, with the women engaged as equal partners in making the work. But although I tried to defer to Ruth and Amber’s authority, there remains a strong sense of tension for me as the leader and therefore mediator of Aboriginal history within the project; and as a researcher speaking about it now. I may never resolve this tension, but I remain mindful of Atkinson’s (2002) assertion that the traumas of colonisation are shared by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and that we must therefore all share in healing them.

STAGING IS THAT YOU, RUTHIE?

When the devising began in January 2017 the group consisted of two non-Indigenous women, eight Aboriginal women who had direct links to Barambah Mission, and three who did not have direct links but knew of ancestors who had been impacted by forced removal to other missions and communities around the country. We worked for two hours twice a week for six weeks, and then more intensively for the final two weeks developing the memoir into a live performance. The women named this project *Our Ancestors, Our History, Our Lost Culture*. Most of them had read Aunty Ruth’s book, and the devising process consisted of working through the book chapter by chapter, and selecting which scenes or moments we felt would be the most important, powerful, funny or hopeful for the audience.

The play followed Ruth’s own linear narrative, beginning with her

family's move to Barambah when she was an infant. Much of the story centres on Ruthie's separation from her mother at four years old, and subsequent life in the Mission's dormitory system, where girls and boys were segregated at age four or five, educated to fourth grade, and then sent out to work as domestic and farm labourers once they reached their early teens. The play depicted many of the day-to-day routines, punishments, joys and sorrows of the Mission, where Ruthie developed powerful and lasting bonds with the other girls, despite (or perhaps because of) their shared grief and loss. At age fourteen she was sent out to work, and the cruel work conditions led her to begin resisting and protesting in small ways against the injustices of the system. Her acts of rebellion included playing tricks on her employers, and a daring attempt to escape in the back of a mail truck. But being an avid reader and writer, Ruthie also used her talents to write letters to the Superintendent at Barambah Mission, and gain some semblance of justice in a system that is now known to have robbed tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers of their wages (Kidd, 2006). The play ended with Ruthie, decades later, beginning to research her history through official files and documents, and returning to the Mission for a reunion of the "dorm girls" (dormitory girls). The women performed in a large classroom to an invited audience of around twelve Aboriginal Elders from Cherbourg and Brisbane, eleven peers of the women performing, twelve centre staff members, and Aunty Ruth herself. Although Aunty Ruth, now eighty-six years old, had not physically been present through the devising process, the women knew that she was aware and involved in the background, and would be seeing the final work. As we were working so closely with her story, she took on an almost mythical status in the room, and was treated like a celebrity when she finally attended in person on the performance day.

TRUTH-TELLING AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN CULTURES

Throughout the devising process, there was a strong sense that the memoir represented Ruth's real life, and must be followed faithfully in performance. The Aboriginal women in the group were clear from the outset that they wished to honour Aunty Ruth's story, the other Elders who would be attending the performance, and their own ancestors who

had lived through similar experiences. The two non-Indigenous women wanted to, in their words, “Do justice to Aunty Ruth’s story,” and support the process of educating people about what had happened during the Stolen Generations. One of these young women would passionately defend her opinions about what parts of the book should be included in the play, sometimes with tears in her eyes. She told me that this was the first book she had ever read through to the end, and she wanted so much to be true to Aunty Ruth’s story that the inevitable process of editing and selecting that goes into adapting a novel for the stage became painful to her. She later recalled that the other women in the group had been impressed by her passion, and did not at all begrudge her investment in the story. Indeed, most of the women struggled with this editing process. The play therefore emulated the linear structure of the original memoir, with a scene for each chapter, linked together by narration that was delivered in direct address by a woman playing Ruth the storyteller.

Dewar and Goto (2012) suggest that art has had a critical role to play in the Canadian truth and reconciliation process, with Inuk artist and scholar Heather Igloliorte (2012) describing how works can speak across cultures in ways that are “undeniable” (p. 64). Barnes (1997) describes how a university-based intercultural theatre process during the time of the South African TRC, “Bridged the usual divide between plays that black students take part in and those that interest whites” (p. 6). Describing the decolonizing potential of ATAR, O’Connor and Anderson (2015) suggest, “The participatory, democratic processes inherent to applied theatre work can be understood as the bridge which allows for intimate conversations about things which matter to all participants” (p. 38). This approach was also reflected in Wilkinson’s (2016) verbatim theatre work, which explored intercultural perspectives of the stories surrounding an Australian Aboriginal massacre site. The process of devising *Our Ancestors* certainly created a bridge between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in the room. Not only were we learning together about our shared history and working towards a shared outcome, but we were also navigating this intercultural terrain aesthetically, collectively putting ourselves at the service of the story. At the end of the first workshop session, one of the Aboriginal women related that when she had first walked in and seen the white women in the group, she had been surprised that they had been included. She went on to add:

But then I thought about that movie with David Gulpilil [*The Tracker*] and how much I hated that character Gary Sweet played.⁴ And when I thought about it, he did a good job because he was helping to educate people about what happened back in those days.

The two non-Indigenous women in the group were cast in a similar way to the Gary Sweet character, portraying the police officers, superintendents, matrons and government officials in Ruthie's young life, often as somewhat aggressive, one-dimensional antagonists. These depictions echoed concerns that were raised by Aboriginal cultural theorist Marcia Langton (1993) twenty-five years ago in her pivotal work on representations of Aboriginality in film, television and radio. Langton suggested that many Australian filmmakers [up to the point of writing], "Want to see 'Europeans' portrayed only as oppressors and all the complexities eliminated. They fail to admit the intersubjectivity of black/white relations" (pp. 37-38). But although Ruthie had experienced small moments of kindness from one or two white people during this time, the overwhelming majority of her experiences unfortunately were the opposite. Perhaps inevitably, in the face of all the usual logistical and time constraints of mounting theatre inside a prison, priority was given to Ruthie's side of the story in terms of trying to achieve detail and subtlety in the performance. I was concerned about this dynamic, wondering whether the non-Indigenous women might feel disempowered or marginalised in the group, or somehow internalise the conflict and negativity surrounding their roles. I checked in with them regularly about this, both during and after the process, and they assured me that they felt fine about it, because it was important to convey what they saw as the truth of the story.

Despite the one participant's initial unease around non-Indigenous involvement that I have described above, and the sometimes-fraught race relations that I have observed inside BWCC, the atmosphere throughout the project remained inclusive and accepting. Co-facilitator Amber spoke about this later:

⁴ In this 2002 film by Rolf de Heer, set in 1922 outback Australia, Gary Sweet plays the role of The Fanatic, a racist white police officer who relentlessly pursues the Aboriginal man who is accused of murdering a white woman.

Generally, there was no black and white stuff that was brought up. I expected there to maybe be a bit of...you know, a bit of white-hating stuff being chucked out there, you know, or spoken about. But there was nothing. There wasn't anything.

One of the Aboriginal women spoke later about how important it had been to have the non-Indigenous women involved, not only to help tell the story, but also because she valued their support, and the opportunity to share her culture with them. Towards the end of the devising process, at one of the final sessions before the performance, there was a beautiful moment in which one of the Aboriginal actors asked the group to take off their shoes, join hands, and stand in a circle so that they could take a moment to focus and remember the ancestors—the reason why they were doing the performance. The two non-Indigenous women respectfully remained in their seats, assuming (as did I) that this was a moment for the Aboriginal women only. Soon the leader of the circle called the two women over to join them, “Come on, you’re honorary Murris⁵ today!” she said smiling, and the others all laughed and nodded in agreement.

OUR ANCESTORS AND AN AESTHETICS OF TRUTH-TELLING

The spontaneous performance described above generated a sense of care, inclusivity and warmth that formed part of the affective palette of aesthetic experience within our process, and mirrored the group’s care for the story itself. There were other elements that contributed to the aesthetics of truth-telling in the project, where we were drawn into the complexity of Ruth’s story, and its situation in a contemporary prison deepened this engagement. Living as she did within a punitive system of segregation and control, Ruth nevertheless felt strongly that the mission was her beloved home. This punishing, painful place was also a place of joy, sisterhood and love. In the performance, we were therefore focused on drawing out the moments of hope, humour and joy. We included a scene where the girls from the mission would go down to the local waterhole, nicknamed the “duck pond” and pretend to

⁵ Murri is the collective term for the diverse Aboriginal language groups of Queensland and North Western New South Wales, Australia.

be movie stars, striking poses and pretending to smoke, using twigs as cigarettes. This segued into a dance routine to the song “By a Waterfall” from the 1933 Hollywood film *Footlight Parade*, where the girls kicked their legs up in a chorus line. This scene got the biggest laughs of the performance, with Aunty Ruth shouting from the audience, “Kick higher!” Another scene showed the dormitory girls finding fun ways to do their chores, pulling each other on a blanket across the wooden floors in order to polish them. And yet we also represented some of the punishments experienced by the dorm girls—having their heads shaved or being locked in the tiny mission jail for minor transgressions against the mission’s many often-arbitrary rules. These contradictions are also present in the contemporary prison, where we know anecdotally that women often experience a level of ambivalence about their incarceration. Despite feeling the pain of separation from children, and the frustration of being denied their freedom, many women deliberately return to prison in order to retreat from violence, achieve stable housing, detox from drugs and alcohol, and re-connect to family and culture. *Our Ancestors* provided an aesthetic space to explore the parallels between the sense of home and sisterhood in Ruthie’s story, and the same feelings for the participants today.

Whitlock (2006) highlights the primacy of testimony and memoir in Australia and Canada’s truth and reconciliation processes, and suggests, “It is both the strength and weakness of reconciliation discourses that they appeal to emotion and, specifically, to that most unreliable site of remembrance, the heart” (p. 40). As such, testimonies presented as part of a legal process of truth-telling can be deemed questionable in terms of their factual reliability (Bharucha, 2001). Yet Bharucha suggests, “Seemingly ahistorical signs of subjectivity and emotion have a place in the writing of history. They do not necessarily replace facts; they complicate them” (p. 3770). Being based on a written memoir, with direct address narration, the performance itself certainly had a testimonial quality to it. But our embodied creative engagement with the story through the devising process, and certain decisions we made around staging the key scenes from her story, moved the work beyond the historical facts of Ruth’s story and into an emotional, intimate realm. An example was the scene depicting Ruthie being separated from her mother Ruby at age four, forced to leave the mother and baby dormitory and go and stay with the older girls. From

this point forward, as was the rule, Ruthie and her mother were kept separate and forbidden to associate with each other, which marked the beginning of their lifelong estrangement. We had been using white sheets to signify various different forms of control inside the mission, for example, Ruby was wrapped tightly in a white sheet when she first arrived from the bush and was being inducted into dormitory life. We continued this motif with the heartbreaking moment when Ruthie tries to find her mother in the dormitory:

SFX: Mission Bell.

School finishes. Matron and Superintendent enter with white sheet and erect a “wall” down middle of stage.

Ruthie skips in a circle and back towards the sewing table where her mother RUBY is sitting with FRIEND, trying to go around the sheet.

RUTHIE: Mum, I’m home!

FRIEND jumps up from the sewing table and blocks her way before she can reach her mother.

FRIEND: You’re not allowed on this side of the dorm any more. You’re a schoolgirl now. You can’t see your Mum any more. You’d better go. If you’re caught here you’ll get into trouble. *EXIT.*

Enter four other dorm girls. They lie down to sleep with Ruthie among them.

SFX: Maranoa Lullaby.

Ruby moves from behind the sewing table and looks over the sheet that divides the stage, but quickly steps away when she sees Ruthie stir. Ruthie then creeps up to the sheet to try and catch a glimpse of her mother, then returns to bed. She cries quietly. (Excerpt from script)

The last sequence was performed slowly and silently, with the

Maranoa Lullaby providing a mournful soundtrack. Aunty Ruth had hummed this tune to me one day at her home. A favourite of hers, it was adapted in the early twentieth century from a traditional Gunggari Aboriginal song. At this moment, the audience members appeared to be deeply moved, with both the Elders and the women from the prison welling up with tears. The moment likely achieved deeper emotional resonance, given that these particular actors and audience members would have identified strongly with being removed from family, and/or having children taken away from them. Later, the woman who played the Superintendent remembered it as a particularly emotional moment on stage as she held one end of the white sheet: "That's why I had my back to everyone. Because I felt shy in showing my emotion. That's how I composed myself, was actually by not facing everyone."

One of the participants later said that the subject matter of the play had made her instantly committed to the process. Her grandparents had been part of the Stolen Generations and although she had never known them, she wished to honour their memory:

I don't really know much about my history because I was brought up in foster care, but what I did find out in that play was enough really to know really what my grandparents went through and how hard it was and how difficult it was for them back in them days. ... It just made me connect to them in ways that I never thought I'd be connected with them in any other way.

This last statement reflects the sense of spirituality that is integral to Indigenous Australian experience and knowledge systems, and it would not be ethical or appropriate for me to interpret such matters through a non-Indigenous lens. However, I would suggest that the aesthetic engagement in a creative process of embodied storytelling may have contributed to this unique sense of closeness to her unknown ancestors. Further, this woman's deeply subjective and emotional connection to the story, which was shared by many of the other Aboriginal women in the group, and witnessed by the non-Indigenous women (myself included), lent the process an intimacy and authenticity that might not have been achieved through reading the book alone.

At the end of the final performance, the actors returned to the

stage for a question and answer session. Someone in the audience asked if they could each stand up and introduce themselves. In this powerful moment, each of the Indigenous women shared what they knew of their “mob”—their Aboriginal background. Two of these women said they had been “grown up” by white people, and were unsure of their origins. The two non-indigenous women embraced this spontaneous post-performance introduction in their own way. “I am not an Aboriginal woman, but I really wanted to help tell this story,” one said. The other said, “I’m from New Zealand originally, but now I’m Australian.” She added, “I know what it’s like to have my children stolen, and that’s the connection I make with this performance.” This post-performance moment echoes Cohen et al.’s (2008) description of a performance of *Stolen* (Harrison & Enoch, 1998) at Belvoir Street Theatre in 2000, where the actors introduced themselves at the end and described their own stories of forced removal. Citing Director Wesley Enoch’s reflections on this performance convention, the authors suggest, “Technical or aesthetic questions about the relation of actor to character seem to no longer to matter at this point, only the acceptance that truths are being revealed on all levels between performers and audience” (p. 84). Sharing truths in this way brings about a strong sense of intimacy in performance; and this intimacy extended beyond the performance, as later, the performers and creative team celebrated with the Elders over tea and scones, sharing time together in an atmosphere of warmth and support. A couple of the Elders approached the two women who had been unsure of their Aboriginal ancestry, and were able to help them piece together parts of their family history, drawing connections to family members that they knew from around the region. Other women with ties to Cherbourg spent the time with their Elders, sharing memories and stories. At the close of the morning, after everyone had left, Auntie Ruth drew the women performers together for a prayer and a group hug.

CONCLUSION

For all the uncertainty that surrounds the concept of truth in memory, testimony and memoir, I would suggest that the group’s shared commitment to honouring the ancestors, with the emotional heart of Ruth’s story as a vehicle, created a unique kind of embodied truth-telling. I believe that being aesthetically engaged in making a

performance such as *Our Ancestors* inside a contemporary prison, and presenting it to an audience of Elders that included Ruth Hegarty herself, enabled us to arrive at a more intimate understanding of the objective facts surrounding the Stolen Generations. This was key to the process as an example of the relational ontology of applied theatre and Indigenous methodologies, where there was an emphasis on the affective, embodied connections between participants, facilitators and audience members; and temporal boundaries between the past and the present were collapsed. As one of only three non-Indigenous women in the group, I was conscious of our role in the process: as witnesses and allies, receiving intimate knowledge, and de-centering ourselves in order to represent a story of national shame and trauma. Following Denzin and Lincoln (2008), as an example of ATAR, the project represented an integration of the pedagogical, performative and the political; with a praxis-based ethic that was, “Grounded in performative practices that embody love, hope, care and compassion” (p. 9). The process also reflected several elements that Indigenous Scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) describes as essential to decolonial Indigenous research methodologies:

- Creating formal spaces for testimony or the revealing of truths; storytelling, and the experiences of women and Elders in particular;
- Celebrating survival through “an event in which artists and storytellers come together to celebrate collectively a sense of life and diversity and connectedness”; and,
- “The remembering of a painful past, and importantly, people’s responses to that pain” (pp. 144-147).

This project, like many examples of theatre in prison, involved a complex layering of personal experiences, aesthetic qualities and contemporary and historical resonances, all operating within the wider flows of politics and culture. The performance event brought about further complexities, with the Elder audience members in many cases experiencing a story that reflected the joys and sorrows of their own life experiences, being performed in a prison, by women who were themselves subject to the colonial legacy of Indigenous dispossession, child removal, and over-incarceration in Australia.

When it came to the day of the play I was so nervous, I was really stressed you know, but just thinking about my great grandma and my great grandpa; they went through the same thing, you know. I just kept that strong in my mind and in my heart and I just kept telling myself, I can do this, I can do this. I was worrying about messing up, you know, but I went through it with a blank mind and them in my mind and, you know, I did it, I did it. (Participant)

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Sarah Woodland is a researcher, practitioner and educator in arts, theatre and performance. She has over 20 years' experience in the arts and cultural sectors in Australia and the UK. Sarah leads applied theatre projects in prisons, teaches tertiary theatre courses, and is a Research Fellow in the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre, Griffith University. Key projects include *Daughters of the Floating Brothel* (2015), a participatory radio drama exploring the history of female incarceration in Australia; and *Listening to Country* (2019), a collaboration with incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to create an immersive audio work for the purpose of stress relief and cultural connection.

Being There...in Prison

[JULIE A. RADA](#)

NAROPA UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

This paper takes a common performance training activity, “Being There,” as a case study and reflects on its efficacy and implications in a prison-based theatre workshop. A key element in this exercise is how performers are observed by other participants and this writing explores how the prison setting influences the experience of observing and being observed in ways differing from how this may be experienced in other settings, such as the undergraduate college acting class. “Being There” is considered as an example of a performance training practice that, when facilitated in a prison, takes on the potential for countering the totalizing effect of the prison on participants’ lives and provides momentary legibility to the bodies and lives of prisoners.

In “The Author as Producer,” Walter Benjamin asserts we must reconsider the range of our artistic activities to include certain

responses to culture (1970, p. 86). As an artist, I respond to culture, and perhaps uncover my responsibility to culture, through creative means. Prison abolitionists and cultural theorists have long suggested that prison is a core structure shaping society, not just for the millions caught up in the justice system, formally, but for all of us. The practices of power, domination, and surveillance, and the resistance to and navigation of such forces shape social relations, institutional structures, and intimate relations. Thus, I take prison and its corresponding carceral logics personally. I recognize that I am bound up in this culture of punishment. As a social being who recognizes incarceration as a human rights crisis, I strive to be equipped to speak about the brokenness of the prison system within the context of our bigger, often-broken world. My intervention is to make art in the face of an increasingly-draconian culture of retributive justice. It is between the rigid structures of prison and the slippery uncertainty of creative practice that this intervention takes place. “[The artist’s] mission is not to report, but to struggle; he does not play the role of the spectator, but actively intervenes” Benjamin asserts (p. 86). I am not credentialed to change policies that might abolish or reform the prison system, but I feel compelled to intervene with the tools and expertise I possess. With this motivation to intervene, I co-founded a theatre and performance workshop with Misty Saribal called Action, Change Theatre (ACT Ensemble) at a Colorado prison on a general population, mixed-custody level yard at a state prison intended for men.¹ With the recognition that such an intervention is small compared to the magnitude of the cultural crisis at hand, the creation of a collaborative arts ensemble inside prison walls is practical inasmuch as it provides a space of possibility for incarcerated members of the ACT Ensemble. It is also aspirational as one of the mandates of abolitionist practice is not to simply tear down the prison walls, but to also build up new structures of interdependence and support—new ways of being together.

I situate my work as both practice-based research and practice-led research. ACT Ensemble’s aim is to produce highly-aesthetic original theatrical performances and we have done so twice since our inception in May 2018. By leading ensemble processes that produce novel

¹ Not all people in prisons designed for men identify or express themselves as men.

performances, scripts, and artifacts, we are conducting practice-based research. I consider this work as practice-led research inasmuch as it is my intention to glean insights and report back to the field of applied theatre practice from investigating the methodologies and products emerging from the prison theatre project (Candy, 2006, pp. 2-3). Aiming to determine best practice for prison-based theatre, the questions central to this research are: What does it mean to study and create performance in a prison setting and how does the scholarship and creation of performance works affect the prison experience? What can prison artists teach the field about theatre/performance? How can the prison theatre workshop counter the forces of punishment and domination on participants' lives?

Writing within the context of Performance Studies and ethnography, Dwight Conquergood presents a "Moral Mapping of Performative Stances Towards the Other" concentrating on what Conquergood calls "Dialogical Performance" as a preferred approach to working with and alongside communities (1985, pp. 9-11). In his musings, he cites Henry Glassie at length:

Ethnography is interaction, collaboration. What it demands is not hypotheses, which may unnaturally close study down, obscuring the integrity of the other, but the ability to converse intimately. (1982, p. 14)

I do not consider the work with ACT Ensemble ethnography, but I gesture in the direction of Conquergood's "Dialogical Performance." In six years of prison-based arts practice, I have learned that prison and prison arts continually frustrate preconceived notions and trouble expectations. Thus, I have come to step into this line of inquiry about prison-based practices *sans* hypothesis, seeking instead to build authentic relationships and inspire intimate conversation. As a researcher, I facilitate exercises and generative creative activities and then ask open-ended questions and take note of what arises. In order to measure the efficacy of practices, I seek feedback from prisoner participants on the effects of a variety of performance/performing-arts-based practices, capturing the affective responses of prisoner participants to arts-based scholarship, embodied work, creative exercises, writing, movement, and ensemble collaboration. I use participant self-reporting, informal interviews, surveys, anecdotes,

written and performed work (scripts), reflective writing, and practitioner observation in gathering data. In this paper, I explore a single practice I call “Being There,” as a case study for performance explorations in a prison context.

Directors and facilitators return time and again to a handful of failsafe training activities—the ones known to work every time in producing a deeper understanding of one’s own tendencies as a performer. These exercises, reliable at producing similar results in different groups, are simultaneously organic, adaptable to each group and each context. They morph over time, and, by anchoring practice in theory and principles, these exercises can draw from other methods and be adapted to different circumstances (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p. 195). “See how interesting the simple, unadorned presence of a human being can be,” is the sentence I use to wrap up my basic instructions of an exercise I call “Being There.” My “Being There” is an adaptation of Stephen Wangh’s “Just Stand,” as described in his *An Acrobat of the Heart* (2000, pp. 118-123). In Wangh’s “Just Stand,” he prompts his students by instructing them to stand in the playing area, while observed by their peers, for about one minute. He instructs, “Don’t try to do anything,” noting “You will feel watched.” He has adapted this exercise from Viola Spolin’s (1983) “Exposure” in which, “You look at us. We’ll look at you” (p. 51). Spolin is introducing Stanislavski’s “circles of attention,” and recommends students count or otherwise engage themselves in some absorbing activity they can do in real time. Wangh describes inverting this exercise as a method of grounding students by recommending they not do anything and simply observe what impulses arise. Over iterations of facilitating this exercise, I unconsciously modified the title from “Just Stand” to “Being There,” and failed to notice the subtle shifts in the directions I give. Pedagogically, I use “Being There” much as Wangh does, as an invitation to simply be, while others observe. My instructions vary little from these precursors, but I place greater emphasis on the acknowledgement of the audience and performer relations—that interplay of being seen and watching. I ask the witnesses to attend to how they are holding presence for the solo performer and for the individual standing before us to attend to how it feels to be observed. In both title and instructions, I have made the exercise more relationship-based.

In the college theatre classroom, this proves an effective

introductory acting lesson. I find students and new actors come into training with many preconceived notions about theatre and acting, not the least of which is some sense they must always be “on” and ready to entertain. Some of these young people have taken pride in being the lifelong class clown, whilst others have navigated the world by flying under the radar, hoping not to be noticed. There is some amount of hiding in both of these tactics. Too, there is performance of self to which no one is immune, in which our roles are nearly always present in social relations. These performances of self are far from pathological, often functional and skillful; on a basic level, we perform ourselves in order to get by, please others, and achieve goals. As Robert J. Landy (1993) writes, “we often mask our real feelings and take on social personae...as an indirect approach to healing” (p. 250). This consideration of the usefulness of role is helpful in understanding human behavior overall. In Landy’s taxonomy, humans receive roles, humans take roles, and humans play roles, adapting “to the demand of one’s environment on the basis of what one has internalized, and concurrently taking in the world on the basis of one’s adaptations” (p. 39). Essentially, roles are flexible and situational. Participants in the college classroom report that it feels scary to simply stand, weight evenly distributed on both feet, in an aligned posture in an actor-neutral position, with no adornment, posturing, or language. Such moments are rare in our everyday lives and, like many acting exercises, “Being There” is contrived to produce particular results. In this case, these results aim at the murky and elusive sense of revelation of the authentic self. The conditions of stillness, silence, and space purportedly allow for an unmasking to occur. The role of “acting student” and any number of other social roles, drop away. We observe the person.

In my observation as a teacher/facilitator, the effect of this exercise is dynamic. I ask the “witnesses” hold the space respectfully, providing steady and gentle observation. We all sit and watch as each individual stands in front of us, sometimes fidgeting, sometimes shifting, sometimes stock-still, knees-locked and staring as though in a trance, sometimes giggling...in the one or two minutes of standing, we can observe waves of impulses and subtle shifts pass over each person. When I facilitate this exercise, I participate. Though I retain positional power as the facilitator of the exercise and the instructor of the class, it seems ethical to invite students to watch me. Conquergood

argues practitioners who maintain intellectual or aesthetic distance from the constituencies with whom they work may detach morally and ethically from these communities as well (1985, p. 2). My participation signals I am willing to make myself vulnerable and I want to be accountable to students and workshop participants: that which I ask of others, I will do myself. Tracking my impulses in the exercise, I sense myself trying not to smile, trying not to tune out, working with my perceived insecurities and imperfections, trying...trying so hard to simply be there as students observe. I can attest it is powerful to be observed, as well as to observe. My positional role of teacher/facilitator falls away. I am simply myself standing before a group of others and they see me.

Recently I facilitated “Being There” with ACT Ensemble at the prison. If “Being There” is powerful with undergraduate acting students, the experience of the exercise in the prison is profound. As I set up the exercise, one person joked, “That’s what we do in prison, we stare at each other,” to which we all laughed. It rang true. When I described the observers as “witnesses,” another person quipped, “Cool, I’ve never been a ‘witness,’” invoking the legal connotations of the word. As a facilitator, I am accustomed to using the word “witness” to describe spectators. I have used this word in prison settings, neglectful of the loaded implications of such a word for the folks inside. Reflexively, I felt a nervous shudder; the kind I have felt for the past six years working in prisons when I carelessly say or do something highlighting the fundamental difference between my insider colleagues and me—that I am an outsider, that I leave the prison at the end of our session. I quickly shifted my language to “observers” and “spectators,” and prompted them to “See how interesting the simple, unadorned presence of a human being can be.”

And we began, each of us taking turns, observing and being observed.

In our discussion after all of us had a turn being observed, one participant described the experience as deep. He said, “Not trying to be anything. Noticing the details. What are you really, if not all this external stuff? This is vulnerable, dangerous, intimate. The softest compassion ...” He trailed off as several people in the group nodded and agreed. I reflect on his description as “dangerous,” and how real intimacy in a prison environment very likely does feel dangerous, considering the strategic and often-transactional social relations that

take place inside. It struck me how in the next breath he described it as soft compassion, how he linked the vulnerability and danger to compassion. One person described the experience of standing in front of the group as being on an auction block, scrutinized for all of one's flaws. In light of the shameful history of the United States in which control, containment, and exploitation of the black body is evidenced, most obviously in the transatlantic slave trade, and more subtly since the abolition of slavery through various means of policing and policy up to and including mass incarceration, this observation, spoken by an incarcerated black man, took my breath away. Notably, too, as a white woman, such a thought—being on an auction block—has never occurred to me in the numerous times I have participated in “Being There.” This same person went on to say it also felt good to be seen and wondered aloud what people see in him now, having completed the exercise—as though something new about his person could be revealed from simply standing in front of his colleagues. One person observed that one cannot “always be fronting,” describing the tough guy attitude he must often “perform.” He stated it made him “feel self-conscious to drop the performance.” I wonder, too, how this may feel dangerous and vulnerable. He did not say more, but here I reflected on Landy's role system and how, in his model, roles are received, foisted at us since birth. I think about the role of “prisoner,” and of someone convicted and sentenced and then all of the roles then taken on or played by the prisoner to navigate and survive such a stigmatized received role. This “dropping” of the performance, as it were, may come at a risk I, as an outsider, am unable to calculate.

As sites of unceasing punishment and confinement, prisons are unquestionably harsh. Prisoners are “forced to adapt to an often harsh and rigid institutional routine, deprived of privacy and liberty, and subjected to a diminished, stigmatized status and extremely sparse material conditions is stressful, unpleasant, and difficult” (Haney, 2001, p. 80). Social relations shift and non-normative and transactional interpersonal dynamics emerge (Crewe, 2011, p. 457). Strikingly, several participants in “Being There” described the feeling, both of observing and being observed, of intentionally sending positive and validating “energy” back and forth in a kind of inverse of the strategic material transactions that often take place in a prison for survival.

Prisons share the features of the “total institutions” Goffman describes in *Asylums* (1961) in which prisoners are separated from the

outside world and all its corresponding social arrangements conferring self-concept. Admission into a total institution such as prison leads to a disruption in these social arrangements, “since the inmate’s separation from the wider world lasts around the clock and may continue for years. Role dispossession therefore occurs” (p. 24). No doubt, the mechanisms and locations of prisons seek to erase the individuality of those inside prison walls. Once incarcerated, a person is issued a state uniform denoting “offender,” becoming indistinguishable from others, and a person is assigned a number that will follow them throughout their incarceration. This kind of tagging, issuance of state clothing, and inability to control one’s appearance constitutes some of the features of a total institution that dehumanize and deindividualizes. The experience of being in prison can have the effect of annihilating identity on those who are incarcerated; they know they are considered “out of sight and out of mind” (Dworin, 2011, pp. 87-88).

Witnessing is an “indispensable element of revolutionary action” (Freire, 2000, p. 176). In the case of incarceration, this is undoubtedly the case, particularly considering how the survival and expansion of the prison system requires the manipulation of the public imagination, and further considering how the prison functions to isolate and silence those inside its walls. Sixty percent of prison construction occurs in rural communities which comprise less than 20% of the U.S. population, thus people who are incarcerated are geographically segregated and isolated from most of society, often over 100 miles from their homes (Alexander, 2012, p. 195). In order to travel to prison where I facilitate ACT Ensemble, I must drive 126 miles one-way from my home. The prison population is literally on the fringe of society and almost totally invisible. This makes it easy to maintain a one-dimensional perspective of the people who are incarcerated since those on the outside rarely confront the complexity of the humans inside. As Ofelia Ortiz Cuevas (2019) sums up, prisons represent “a significant population of rightless, stateless persons unseen and unheard of by those of us on the outside, existing mainly in the imagination as a dangerous, predatory people and a threat to the social fabric.” Butler and Spivak acknowledge the dispossession and statelessness of the incarcerated, but also count prisoners among those “spectral humans” who are “illegible.” Prisoners fundamentally do *not* belong, whether geographically proximal or distant. They are “contained within the polis as the interiorized outside” (2007, pp. 15-

16). Butler and Spivak's invocation of such words as "spectral," "illegible" and, earlier, "unintelligible," indicate that which is viewed, written, or uttered, but is somehow indistinct from the background, difficult to decipher, and hard to make out. Against the backdrop of the overwhelming media stereotypes of prisoners, the pervasive redemption narratives associated with public interest in prison reform, and the demonizing and pathologizing of prisoners by various state apparatuses, it is no wonder prisoners are illegible. People who are incarcerated are rarely truly seen; individual prisoners—their stories, their particular humanity—are difficult to discern.

Arguably almost everyone wants to feel seen; few people enjoy being watched. This is an important distinction as surveillance is intrinsic to the carceral state, both inside and outside prison walls. Both feeling seen and being watched are intrinsic to acting. The simplicity of the "Being There" exercise highlights this fundamental relationship between audience and performer, between observer and observed. While the exercise remains the same in facilitation whether in the academic sphere or the prison environment, the experience transforms in the prison-based theatre workshop. Meaningfully, one participant in the "Being Seen" exercises said it gave him "food for thought" as to "what it means to be seen, really seen." He said he is "not often looked at," with the exception of in a courtroom, in which he described being the center of attention, but not seen positively or even neutrally in that context. In his musing, I consider if by being "really seen," he might mean to become "legible," clear and distinct.

Prison theatre practice varies widely in scope and intention, but one theme surfaces repeatedly in such work: the prison theatre workshop makes space for the incarcerated theatre artist to be seen in a way countering the forces and totalizing effect of the prison experience, as though a crack appears in the wall of the institution. The crack in the wall allows for a glimpse into the full complexity of the humans within the institution's walls and perhaps provides marginal respite from the totalizing effects of incarceration for those inside. For example, Amie Dowling, one of the creators of *59 Places* at the Hampshire County Jail in Northampton, Massachusetts, puts this aspect of the prison theatre workshop in her own words, noting, "The Performance Project responded to the vital human need for voice and self-representation" (2011, p. 79). Dowling's work with The Performance Project, in which she used devised theatre methods to

develop autoethnographic original physical theatre performance, has been a template for my prison practice. Like Dowling, I am ethically compelled by Angela Davis' observation of the "prisonization of the landscape," (as cited in Dowling, 2011, p. 68) and, I similarly see the need for people outside of prison walls to better "see" and discern those inside prison walls and for the work and voices of incarcerated artists to made visible to the public (Dowling, 2011, p. 80).

One of my aims as a prison-based theatre practitioner is to create a space in which participants may become distinct, particularized, and have access to opportunities to cultivate and express their unique voices. It goes without saying people who are incarcerated retain their individuality and their voice, theatre workshop or not, in spite of their material conditions and the totalizing effect of the prison. I propose simply the theatre workshop adds *more* space and a *collaborative* space in which participants may flex their creative muscles. They hold the audience's attention; they are fundamentally witnessed; they communicate and express themselves. In *The Necessity of Theatre*, Paul Woodruff (2008) writes:

There is an art to watching and being watched, and that is one of the few arts on which all human living depends. If we are unwatched, we diminish and we cannot be entirely as we wish to be. If we never stop to watch, we know only how it feels to be us, never how it feels to be another. Watched too much or in the wrong way, we become frightened. Watching too much, we lose the capacity for action in our own lives. Watching well, together, and being watched well, with limits on both sides, we grow, and grow together. (p. 10)

People who are incarcerated are unwatched by society, and report feeling alienated and diminished. They are watched too much and in the wrong way by the prison apparatus. Given this and the dangers of the environment, they may become hypervigilant, isolated, untrusting, or begin to lose the capacity for action (Haney, 2001). Theatre provides a space for supportive watching, or witnessing, because, as an aesthetic form, the space is not too intimate and not too distant. According to Cohen-Cruz (2010), "Too much intimacy can feel intrusive; too much distance can feel like nothing at all and can easily be disregarded" (p. 11). The theatre workshop, perhaps, provides to

participants a Goldilocks sweet spot of being not-too-much-and-not-too-little of the intimacy of seeing and being seen. The prison-theatre workshop, and “Being There” specifically makes the body of the performer—in this case, the body of the incarcerated participant—legible. It is as though the image comes into focus and, as the individual stands in front of the group, it is like the outline of their body becomes more distinct and the idiosyncrasies and unique expressions that particularize them become more clear.

I reflect sometimes on what folks who are incarcerated can teach the rest of us about what it means to be free. People in my various prison theatre workshops commonly bring up freedom. After “Being There,” one person described accessing his “happy place,” an internal place he has cultivated and upon which he can conjure to comfort himself in prison and where he feels free to be himself. Another participant stated, simply, by standing in front of us, being beheld, he felt like himself. He said he felt free.

I consider freedom—what it means to the participants, and what it means to me—as I drive several hours to the prison to “be there” inside with these incarcerated artists. I do not imagine the work I do inside prison walls possesses the power to achieve liberation for prisoners, but I believe offering participants the opportunity to be seen and to really see others does have an impact on alleviating the harms of the prison experience. I wonder how participants hold one another in supportive witnessing, as the “Being There” exercise encourages, and how this introduces a tiny gap into the encompassing experience of incarceration, slightly shifting the relations among ensemble members. I wonder how these simple moments, experienced in this fundamental relationship between observer and observed—between audience and performer—holds the capacity to counter the forces that seek to erase individuality and humanity.

Is it possible these small moments are microcosms for larger potential shifts in the social order? Can moments between individuals rehearse collective moments of understanding? In her book on Cornerstone Theatre Company, Sonja Kuftinec writes:

These examples [from Cornerstone performances] remain instants of potential enacted between individuals rather than institutional

shifts. As such, they might conceal the very real constraints of power and privilege that can divide people. But when recognized as the beginnings of social exchange, rather than metonymic embodiments of social change, these lived occurrences possess real power. (2003, p. 82)

This line of thinking is reminiscent of Jill Dolan's statement regarding utopia. Utopia, in actuality would necessarily result from a series of transformations "we can only imagine [...] that we'll never achieve it in our lifetimes" (2001, p. 457). Dolan's words have an aspirational quality which she grounds in the now. In the tension between the acceptance of the present moment and the vision for a transformed future, Dolan writes, "The utopia for which I yearn takes place now, in the interstices of present interactions, in glancing moments of possibly better ways to be together as human beings" (2001, p. 457). This idea of the "glancing moments of possibility" between human beings, existing together in time and space resurfaced in one of the guiding values of the most recent *Imagining America* conference, focused solely on incarceration and the carceral state, in which the conveners describe creative culture as a "site of liberation" and creative practice used to "to imagine a different way of being" (Kohl-Arenas, 2019). We must prefigure that which we hope to manifest—more authentic interpersonal ways of being, utopia, or prison abolition. We must imagine it first.

"Prison has neither exterior nor gap; it cannot be interrupted," writes Foucault. "Its action on the individual must be uninterrupted; an unceasing punishment" (1977, p. 236). Simply the concept of space—gaps, interruptions—spaces for possibility in places steeped in dominant ideologies and designed for physical and psychological confinement may be enough to counter, in minute ways the encompassing authority of the penitentiary on an incarcerated person's life. In the theatre-making project, the infinite possibilities of human activities with which to fill the space—play, expression, exchange with others, celebration of the human experience—is defined by those in the room, not the dominating forces that structure culture. How can the prison theatre workshop counter the forces of punishment and domination on participants' lives? I may never fully answer this question, but I sense it is in the imagining of world without prisons and, practically, in brief moments, like those experienced in the hour or so

of “Being There” with ACT Ensemble, in which we—outsider and insiders—can practice being together and being there for each other, with radical acceptance and generosity, really *seeing* one another.

I take prisons personally. I recognize mass incarceration is happening on my watch and the carceral logic of the prison infects all of our institutions, from the academy to our personal lives and disproportionately affects already-marginalized populations. I consider myself implicated by these systems of domination and oppression and am called to intervene, “in this broken world” (Snyder-Young, 2013, p. 15).” I do so as a theatre artist and offer up the practices of my field to create cracks in the walls of structures that, had I the tools, I would dismantle entirely.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Julie Rada is a theatremaker, educator, and scholar. She has done theatre for about 30 years and has worked on over 80 performance projects, with a focus on original work and new plays. As a performer and researcher, she has toured nationally and internationally. Her work has been reviewed in *Backstage*, *The Denver Post*, *The Arizona Republic*, *The Rocky Mountain News*, *Westword*, *The New Times*, and others. Julie has worked in the prison system for over six years, facilitating new works of theatre with incarcerated artists at 7+ facilities and was selected as an artist-in-residence by the National Endowment for the Arts at the Phoenix Federal Corrections Institution. Additionally she has created theatre with refugees, people with disabilities, youth experiencing homelessness, professional actors, and people dying in hospice. Julie has worked on faculty at the University of Utah, Community College of Aurora, and Naropa University. She holds an MFA from Arizona State University. She recently founded a multimedia performance collective exploring community-embedded art and performance called Grapefruit Lab.

Breaking the Cultural Hierarchy: Using Drama to Teach English in Samoa

[RIVKA ROCCHIO](#)

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK POTSDAM COLLEGE

ABSTRACT

Teaching English is connected to teaching culture and ways of being and thinking. U.S. American ideals are interwoven into language itself. Based on Rivka Rocchio's experience teaching in local schools in Western Samoa with the Peace Corps, this article shares how using drama-based pedagogy offered chances to level teaching missteps and misunderstandings that had previously exacerbated the power structures involved with teaching English in a foreign country. The article ends with an example of a lesson that demonstrates pedagogy in action. By exploring a case study and the challenges of practicing culturally responsive pedagogies, Rocchio advocates for the power of drama to address sites of contact between cultures.

By the year 2020, almost one third of the school-age population in the United States will be non-White, while teachers are almost entirely educated from middle class White communities (Carignan, Sanders and Pourdavood, 2005). In order to navigate with nuance the sites of power, culture, and social mores, more teachers need to accept intercultural pedagogies, and teach with an awareness of the cultural realities of their students. After five years as a high school drama and English educator within the U.S. public school system, I joined the Peace Corps and was sent to Samoa for 27 months. As I learned to navigate my role as an English as a Second Language teacher in rural schools in Leulumoega, Samoa, I saw the necessity for reshaping my pedagogy using drama¹ with a focus on intercultural competence. The use of drama practices that center on physical embodiment, allow for the creation of scenic environments, and embrace risk-taking serve to navigate power imbalances between teachers and students, *and* the power dynamics of opposing cultures. Grounded in classroom observation and teaching reflection, this article articulates mislearnings from pre-service teacher training and provides a framework for the use of drama as an intercultural pedagogy for teaching English as a Second Language.

The experience of being unprepared to teach within culturally specific settings is common for pre-service teachers. Hollins and Guzman (2005) note that prospective teachers' negative attitudes and beliefs about different cultures led to an unwillingness to teach in schools that did not match their own cultural backgrounds. It takes a true cross-cultural experience, like teaching in a foreign country, to understand not only the theoretical framing of culture, but to also, as L.M. Walters et al (2009) posit, "recognize the importance of culture, its connection to the community and the relationships among language, culture and practice" (p. S152).

¹ A note on the term *drama*: For the purposes of this article, when I use the term *drama* I am speaking towards creative dramatics employed within an educational context. Creative drama, defined in 1977 by the Children's Theatre Association of America, "is an improvisational non-exhibitional, process-oriented form of drama, where participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experiences, real or imagined" (Davis and Behm). Within this definition, the drama pedagogy I describe utilizes the direct experience of learning through dramatic play.

It only took teaching a few lessons in Leulumoega² to recognize that my pre-service teaching training did little to prepare me to teach beyond a White, middle-class, monolingual environment.³ I was reproducing power and cultural systems that did not translate to the Samoan population with whom I was working. Even more than that, I was devaluing the cultural attitudes and beliefs of my new home. For example, some of the books I brought with me to teach vocabulary described culturally inappropriate concepts and terms. One book, which asked students to write about their summer vacation, described sunbathing on a beach, and visiting Disneyland. Samoans avoid the sun, often carrying umbrellas and blaming the sun for sickness or weakness. Obviously, Disneyland was a foreign concept, but the very idea of vacation, a time away from work in order to rest, is a Western concept. Teaching vacation as a concept reproduces a system of values that are not universal. Since there is no way to make education a one-size-fits-all process, I needed to adapt my methodologies to become more flexible to the target culture.

USING INTERCULTURALISM TO UNPACK MISLEARNINGS AND ASSUMPTIONS

As an English teacher in a community where English was not spoken, I wondered how I might teach the language without pushing the cultural values and ideas that are wrapped up therein. Interculturalism seeks to negotiate and honor the relationship created by the spaces between cultures, a space often dominated by troublesome power dynamics. Interculturalism scholar Knowles (2010) advises that to create interculturality, one must ask how to approach “from below” instead of reopening the inequities of cultural mix (p. 6). In her attempts to create a sociosemiotic mapping of culture and theatre, Pavis (1992) articulates the contact between target culture and source culture. Particularly important to note within a conversation around

² Leulumoega, in A'ana district, is a rural village on the northwest coast of the island of Upolu in Western Samoa.

³ Roxanne Schroeder-Arce (2017) writes compellingly about the inability of white pre-service teachers to move beyond “an acknowledgement of privilege and ... toward racial justice” (p. 106). I fell into her designation of seeing race and ethnicity from a framework that whitewashed diverse perspectives in class by stopping at the recognition of the privilege of whiteness.

interculturalism and theatre is her hourglass model, which places source culture at one end and target culture at the other. Hourglasses only maintain movement by shifting from one end to the other. Between each cultural end lies the elements of theatre-making (preparatory work of actors, choice of theatrical form, perspective of the adaptors, etc) (Pavis, 1992, p. 4), and the shape begs for a disruption of the hierarchy. While applied specifically to theatre, the same theory pertains to the use of creative drama.

As an outsider in Samoan culture, I felt the hourglass pinch between my Western perspective and the Fa'asamoa, Samoan way of life. My culture, language and skin color were immediately obvious distinctions from the rest of the school's population, community, and teachers. As the dominant cultural ideologies that I felt had indoctrinated me during teaching preparation emerged as problematic towards teaching in a foreign country, I came to pursue how to teach without a complete understanding of the context and the environment of my students. In other words, I gathered data from my teaching observations, speaking with other Peace Corps Volunteers, and testing assumptions in the classroom around approaching the intersections of Samoan and U.S. American cultures in my classroom that rejected favoritism and promoted understanding.

In unpacking my assumptions, I found the following attitudes that needed shifting in order for me to develop a more responsible pedagogy:

1. The United States represents a First World country. Every other country falls in relationship to that framing.
2. Bilingualism meant biculturalism.
3. Cross cultural teaching is the goal. The key to success is in finding cultural commonalities.
4. Teacher-centered classrooms have little value.

By explaining my journey through these mislearnings, I will reveal a more communicative, clear, and intercultural pedagogical approach.

Assumption #1: USA First⁴

In addressing my assumptions, I started with the consideration of the terms First and Third World. Categorizing countries as First or Third World implies that one lies numerically above the other. This ranking, rebranded in terms like ‘distance to frontier’ and ‘developing economies’ by the economic frameworks of the IMF and World Bank, values Western and industrialized cultures as inherently better than the rest of the world. The equation of First World countries as better than Third World countries is false, but as a representative of a First World country, I found myself in an undeserved position of privilege. Recognizing what Villegas and Lucas (2002) term sociocultural consciousness (p. 21), the position of power afforded to me as a U.S. American, meant that many within Samoan culture saw me as having assets I did not necessarily possess, like wealth or connections. Although my position of power was overstated by many within the community, and often undeserved, I recognized that my beliefs were given more validity and credence.

There are many examples of my privilege and undeserved position of power or the unmerited assumption of my knowledge, but one of my favorite examples was a man who constantly asked me to get him a prosthetic leg. He had lost his leg from gout and assumed that “since I knew Obama, I could get him a fake leg.” He would introduce me to people as “the woman who would get him a new leg,” and always demanded I eat first, a sign of respect. Even after two years of insisting that I could not provide what he wanted, he continued to afford me respect and kindness.

Once I recognized that my sociocultural perspective as a “minority” white person in the Samoan village was given attention and privileges that would not otherwise be granted to a person of my gender or age, I sought to use the attention to advocate for those who are often powerless in Samoan culture: children. For example, I did this by advocating for classes to be held when teachers wanted to cancel and

⁴ Writing this in 2019, I feel compelled to make mention of Trump, who won the presidency by championing ideas around asserting the primacy of white America. His isolationist slogan “America First,” borrowed from various past politicians, accompanies a number of political policies meant to maintain (or assert) America as first, best, and remarkable. Rooting out the underpinning mentalities that created my initial perception that the USA was a First world country meant going back to the national and jingoistic framing of the U.S. as “the leader of the free world.”

dismiss, and by pushing for a rotating system of student helpers instead of what had been used previously—the lowest performing student (usually a student who couldn't afford school fees) being pulled out of classes to act as an errand-runner. Using a position of privilege to carry messages from the minority group is what Bartolomé (2002) calls “border-crossing,” a critical step towards balancing power (p. 179). While the structure or valuing of First and Third World rankings seems, in many ways unchangeable, by using my position of privilege to advocate for the voices within the cultural framework that most needed them, I try to equalize power dynamics.

Assumption #2: Bilingualism / Biculturalism

Another of my incorrect generalizations was the belief that bilingualism was the same as biculturalism. In Leulumoega, there were a handful of students who were fluent in English. These students were great assets to me, often helping me translate complicated directions from English to Samoan. But through them, I was able to see that there were simply some concepts that did not translate. For example, while studying emotions, a fluent student named Siu was participating in a role-play that required him to apologize for breaking a picture frame. Siu smiled as he went through the scene. By the time he finished his apology, he was laughing. Perhaps he felt pride with his fluency and thus his emotional portrayal did not match the text. I asked him to try it again, but to use his body to show contrition. As he went through the dialogue again, I saw him assume a posture that I had often seen in Samoa when youth asked for forgiveness: a child furiously scratching the space behind the ear, avoiding eye contact, and bent at the knees. He was using Samoan body language and English words. Language has more behind it than word-to-word processing, and, even at its best, translation is an approximation.

When students learn another language, especially if they are learning it as a foreign language, at first they can only use it in the cultural context they are most familiar with. For example, Siu may never need to apologize with U.S. American body language and English language. Because of this, linguistic researchers Ronowicz and Yallop (1999) write, no one knows the “whole” of any language, they can only adapt it appropriately within their own culture (p. 4). It

becomes near impossible to separate language from culture, or vice versa. Even with fluent students, cross-cultural understanding cannot be assumed.

The idea of mistranslation seems particularly adept for the relationship between English and Samoan. Psychological anthropologist Mageo (2001) draws a distinction between *gagana* (language) and *nanu* (to speak a foreign language) points out that an alternative translation of the word *nanu* means “to mispronounce badly” (p. 69). The word itself is loaded, as if speaking a foreign language meant you were already culturally bound for failure. Not only did I experience this through observations of my students, but also through my own attempts to communicate. My Samoan mispronunciations converted to my frequent ridicule, the most embarrassing being when speaking to a high chief in the village and losing the definition between *come here* (*susū mai*) and *suck it* (*susu mai*). My privilege meant that these missteps were laughed off, not punished.

Assumption #3: Finding Commonalities

I first understood the limitations of finding commonalities as I came across concepts in Samoan culture that I couldn't translate to a U.S. American context. For example, there appear to be no Samoan words to adequately describe the Western concepts of inner self, personality, or character. The popular saying *teu le va*, “take care of the relationship” offers clues to the Samoan sense of identity found in dynamic with the community. Contrast this statement with the Greek dictum “know thyself,” these sayings suggest something of the difference between Western and Samoan traditions (Poasa, Mallinckrodt & Suzuki, 2001. p. 38). These concepts link to cultural values—the importance placed on individual over community—and are not simple matters of translating words.

Entering the Samoan culture meant that I had to adapt much of my individualistic identity and adjust to the cultural norms of Samoa, the *fa'asamoa*. *Fa'asamoa*, which translates to “the ways of Samoa,” is a way of being in the world which places a strong emphasis on external public features like status, role and relationships. This ties to concepts that are difficult for Westerners to understand, like the *Matai* (chief)

system, the importance of aiga (extended family), and the role of the church. It is a Samoan's duty to be in service to these three pillars of society throughout their life. These power systems are rooted in inherent ideas of culture and nationhood.

Perhaps because of this collectivist cultural attitude, power flows through villages and in classrooms in rigidly defined ways closely linked to ideas of nationhood. A 2000 study published in *The Counseling Psychologist* compared how students from Western Samoa, American Samoa and the United States responded to a number of scenarios involving blame and responsibility, and found that students responses were greatly linked to cultural beliefs and attributions. The study found that both Western and American Samoans were much more likely to rely on hierarchical systems of power to assign blame, which supports the conclusion that Samoan society is organized vertically, and hierarchically. Because of this, challenging power relationships within a classroom environment means questioning some of the founding principles of Samoan culture and ideas of nation.

While a 2013 Samoan law banned corporal punishment from all schools, corporal punishment is still prevalent and pervasive in the school system. As an educator, I had a difficult time accepting teaching in an environment in which corporal punishment was a constant means of correcting student behaviors. The types of punishments I saw, like students being hit with switches, slapped, or having their ears twisted, created violent learning environments. Many of my students were traumatized, afraid to speak in the classroom for fear of being hit if they were wrong. This fear meant that there were few classroom opportunities for students to explore alternative exchanges of power with their teachers. While I knew that I was imposing my cultural attitudes in doing it, I made it very clear to my students that our classroom was a safe space in which they would never be physically punished. I chose to frame this non-violent stance as an opportunity to advocate for the safety of the children in my school, but I know that some teachers and some parents felt like I did not have a strict enough classroom and was teaching U.S. American values, not the fa'asamoa. In fact, some students struggled to control their behavior and focus, as they found my classroom a space in which they could act out without threat or act of violence.

There are significant limits to finding commonalities, or attempting

border-crossing as a “meet in the middle” pattern. I could not remove my U.S. American beliefs from some of my teaching pedagogy, ie in regards to corporal punishment, and I came to respect that my Samoan counterparts had their own immovable beliefs and values which fit their cultural context and I allowed for our differences. Perhaps at best, a conversation and small moments of traction and change can happen between powerbrokers at the places of immovability in ways that begin to change each culture.

Assumption #4: The Condemnation of Teacher-Centered Classrooms

Finding a respect for difference is not limited to culture, but also to teaching styles. Teacher-centered classrooms are vilified in the U.S., particularly with young students, but commonplace in Samoa. Teacher-centered classrooms have the danger of falling into the trap of what Friere (1972) calls a banking model of education, in which the typical teacher/student relationship follows a “subject/object” model, wherein the teacher has agency and knowledge, and students are “lifeless and petrified,” waiting to have knowledge bestowed upon them (p. 71). This banking model of education, in which “teachers know everything and students know nothing...the teachers talk and the students listen meekly, the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it,” runs counter to the equivocating power structure of a classroom in which drama is used (Freire, p. 71). Much of the teaching I observed while overseas involved Friere’s “banking education” as a popular method of teaching. Teachers often did little more than drill content through rote memorization and repetition.

Given the fa’asamoa power hierarchy which is in the fabric of all of Samoan culture, it makes sense that this top down approach functioned well with Samoan learners. While I knew I could not fully adopt this teaching practice, through observing my counterparts I came to respect that the vertically aligned power structure of Samoan culture was a primary influence on why that dynamic functioned. Not only that, there were benefits to teacher-centered moments in lessons, especially within a language-learning environment.

A PEDAGOGICAL SHIFT TOWARDS DRAMA

Because of the collision of my assumptions and the realities of teaching English language learners in non-English speaking contexts and my background in theatre and drama, I recognized the necessity of adopting a pedagogical approach and leaned heavily into creative dramatics. While the components of the pedagogy themselves are useful separately in considering ethical intercultural teaching practices, I will describe how each of these stances manifested together within the context of one English lesson taught in Samoa.

The tenets of an interculturally informed approach for language teaching are as follows:

1. The achievement of authentic communication is not limited to the ability to speak another language, as it must also include **non-verbal forms of communication** that can be culturally specific. One of the best ways of developing this ease with communication is **the incorporation of the physical body in classroom activities**. Physicality can be a way of engaging learners at their individual levels.
2. In exploring language within stimuli-rich environments, students can very tangibly understand **the multiplicity of paths that conversations can take**. These inevitably create situations where students feel a compulsion to learn more in order to express themselves fully. Students are not pressured to find the single correct answer or word, but **can use language to express the subtleties** and multiple “correct” answers that are present in communication.
3. Accuracy and pronunciation are secondary to learning language patterns, and **feeling comfortable taking risks and making mistakes**.⁵ While there needs to be a period of time for receiving language passively (listening and reading), early

⁵ While this facet of the pedagogy appears to center on language acquisition over the application of drama, I am leaning on a broader understanding of the nature of drama, rooted in the teachings of Geraldine Siks. Siks insistence that drama’s incorporation within language arts learning acknowledged that the same drama-making skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are at the root of “exploring language and gaining competence in oral comprehension, oral interpretation, and oral communication” (Rosenburg, 45). Because of this skill reciprocity, an emphasis on communication is not unique to language learning, but works as a tenet of a new dramatic pedagogy.

communicative production should be encouraged to promote **confidence**. This communicative approach can appropriate techniques from other methodologies (Total Physical Response, Audio-lingualism, Suggestopedia), but maintains the principle that **authentic and meaningful communication** should be the goal of all activities.

These pedagogical approaches in action can take a lot of paths, but in describing one lesson for Year 6 students which focused on community mapping, action verbs, and dialogue, and these principles come to focus. This lesson used what I knew of students' lives, and their community, to design instruction that moved from the familiar into spaces of learning—named by Villegas and Lucas (2002) as a key quality of building culturally responsible curriculum. After a class brainstorming session around important places in the village (plantation, market, church, school, home, etc.), students worked together to create a list of verbs that could happen in each place. In the first portion of the lesson, we designated sections of the classroom to represent specific locations, and students went to those spaces to perform embodied actions, creating a slide-show of tableau⁶ of what could happen there. Observing students verbally described what they saw, then wrote or drew pictures of the action. In small groups, students created short open-ended dialogues that could happen within each location. These two portions of the lesson combined the first two pedagogical tenets: culturally specific non-verbal communication and allowing for the multi-pronged directionality of authentic conversations. The lesson's final assessment asked students to both establish the community spaces inside the classroom, replete with props and realia and to move through their day in miniature.

In order to authentically assess each student, in the final assessment, I stepped in as teacher-in-role.⁷ I played shopkeeper and plantation worker in the mini-village. I asked questions like: What are you doing? What are you holding? These open-ended questions

⁶ Tableau, also called stage pictures, function to freeze actor bodies within a moment. This technique is useful in large group role-plays as they are silent ways of communicating story and information.

⁷ Teacher-in-role is a dramatic form popularized by Dorothy Heathcote. She believed that "leaders not always be themselves, but must assume attitudes or even full-fledged characters to direct the flow of the drama" (Rosenberg 37).

allowed for authentic communication in a co-created space. Wagner (2002) writes about drama's ability to construct a world, and create the pressure to communicate within that world, as being pivotal to student agency: "pressured to find answers on their own, they are actively learning" (p. 9). Within the context of the Samoan lesson, students determined their roles and were key creators in the action of the lesson. Because of this buy-in, students found the emotion at the heart of language communication, and were able to, as Wagner (2002) describes, "express themselves in a more mature manner and language than they could otherwise" (p. 10). They were free to speak without knowing the scripted answer.

CONCLUSION

Language is driven by the desire to communicate. Dramatic play creates spaces for authentic communication, although these are not neutral spaces. As Lazarus (2012) writes, "learning in theatre is best served when we foster in students a desire to inquire, experience, define, and reflect on the world fully and from multiple perspectives" (p. 223). Drama has the ability to equalize the power dynamic between students and teachers, and give agency to students. Drama is not *the answer*, but it is and can be part of the multi-pronged approach to inviting intercultural competency into all classrooms.

Not all teachers will have the desire or privilege to teach in Samoa or even to teach abroad, but the need for culturally responsive teaching is critical in every classroom. Using drama-based pedagogy allows for teachers to negotiate the dynamics of intercultural interaction with mindful attention toward points of cultural contact. The pedagogy outlined in this article is not only an effective way to teach English Language Learners but can instill a love of learning. Within this culturally-responsive pedagogy, I sought to work in ways that, as pedagogues Latta and Chan (2011) advocate, "validate students' cultural identit[ies] in classroom practices and instructional materials" (p. 29). In validating and legitimizing, I resist the temptation of telling my own story, or putting my cultural language in my students' mouths.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

[Rivka Rocchio](#), Assistant Professor of Theatre at SUNY Potsdam, is a community cultural development theatre-maker using the arts as a means of cross-cultural communication. Rocchio has taught Theatre and English in prisons, high schools, and middle schools and worked as a TESL and Community Development Specialist with the Peace Corps in Samoa and Liberia. In 2013, Rocchio founded Theatre Across Prison Walls, which offers theatre programming, classes and workshops in prisons in Arizona and New York State. She received her M.F.A in Theatre for Youth from Arizona State University and her B.A. in Theatre Education and Writing, Literature and Publishing from Emerson College.

Getting Serious about Playful Play: Identifying Characteristics of Successful Theatre for Very Young Audiences

[MARK BRANNER](#)

[MIKE POBLETE](#)

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I

ABSTRACT

In their research to develop a piece of theatre for very young audiences at the University of Hawai'i, Mark Branner and Mike Poblete noticed patterns in productions that are well received by critics, parents, and the young audience members themselves. This article addresses prevailing skepticism, and makes the case for "theatre for babies" as an established and worthy artistic pursuit. It then touches on a few varied approaches to this form, and references a set of criteria for evaluating "success" within this discipline. Finally, this article outlines a list of characteristics that seem to consistently apply to theatre for very young audiences that, by the referenced criteria, are deemed "successful."

There has been some debate about whether Theatre for Very Young Audiences (TVYA), or “baby theatre” as it is sometimes called, is needed or effective. If an infant is entertained by dangling car keys, why go through the trouble of mounting a play for them? What is the point if they are incapable of following narrative or theme? Recently these criticisms have largely been answered by practitioners and scholars, such as Suzanne Osten and Ann-Sofie Bárány from Swedish troupe Unga Klara. They note that, “if you can speak to a three-month-old baby and get laughter from them, you must be able to write an interesting play for them” (Goldfinger, p. 296). They insist that babies “do follow dramaturgy—they respond to the same scenes in the same way. They follow changes in mood, themes” (Weinert-Kendt). Anna Richter offers that in TVYA, “Linear narratives are absent, but not dramaturgical elements such as tension, turning-points and dénouements” (Richter, p. 3). It is difficult to scientifically justify the necessity of this form as there has been, unfortunately, woefully little research undertaken on the neurological, cognitive and overall developmental effects of theatre on children of this age. However, there is certainly an ethical necessity: very young children have very little control over their lives, and are often not afforded the same privileges of emotional and intellectual stimulation as a result. In other words, we believe that, quite simply, very young children deserve theatre tailored to them. Some have even argued that to deny them theatre because of their age is a violation of their human rights (Fletcher-Watson, pp. 15-16).

We can tell you from our own experiences watching performances such as Amanda Pintore’s *Color Play* and Cubbin Theatre Company’s *Up and Away*, these young people are watching with rapt attention. A first exposure to TVYA with Mark’s nearly two-year-old daughter in 2013, Oily Cart’s *Tube*, still remains seared in his memory as a vital theatrical experience:

Seeing the show with her—almost literally through her eyes as I engaged in the immersive show alongside her for the duration of the performance—opened the possibilities of the form experientially. While the production certainly did not possess a linear narrative, the show did contain the aforementioned dramaturgical elements of “tension, turning points and

dénouements.” Lighting and sound changes, for example, accompanied a suggestion of “stomping elephants” outside the circular tube-like structure where the audience sat on a cushioned floor. Later in the performance, another shift in lighting and sound accompanied the arrival of translucent balls rolling in clear plastic tubes, creating an ethereal atmosphere. The cacophonous arrival of large sausage-shaped balloons rocketing into the playing space provided a joyous dénouement. We had entered a large tube, played with various types of tubes, explored the ways that things can appear and disappear within tubes, heard many types of music from tubes, and were now celebrating the fun of tubes with the arrival of the balloons. Collectively, these dramaturgical elements created a truly aesthetic experience, enthralling both my daughter and myself. Any parent of a two-year-old can sympathize with the simple and daily challenges of life at this age—getting dressed, traveling in a vehicle or public transport, eating regular meals, preparing for bed, etc. Attending *Tube* allowed for me as a parent to enjoy the reality of my daughter’s life at age two, bonding us in a way that few other experiences in my life have been able to do.

The U.K.’s Oily Cart, founded by Tim Webb, Max Reinhardt and Claire de Loon, is one of the most pioneering and, in our opinion, effective, TVYA companies in the world today, and as such we will be referencing their work multiple times throughout this article.

There are many different ways to devise a TVYA performance. Evelyn Goldfinger notes that some methodologies include, “recalling the actors’ personal experiences (as infants or with babies), watching baby videos, observing babies in relationship with their parents and/or conducting workshops with baby and caregiver audiences that are filmed and adults are asked for feedback” (p. 296). Moving past the psychology of professional theatre practitioners, artists such as Pintore work with children using dance, music, and imaginative play; incorporating their movements and ideas of the children themselves into her pieces to create theatre by children, for children. Supporting this approach, Belarussian Psychologist Lev Vygotsky wrote that, “plays written by the children themselves or created and improvised by them as they are played are vastly more compatible with children’s understanding” (p. 72). And yet there are also companies like Chile’s

La Negra Maria Teatro that do the opposite, bringing the celebrated works of their culture's literary titans from the realm of adults onto the stage for very young audiences.

With these varying approaches in mind, as well as the limited analytical and communicative tools available to the target audience, how does one gauge what constitutes "successful" TVYA theatre? Such evaluation processes have been proposed. Tony Mack, an Australia Council Fellow, believes these include such components as whether the children are watching closely, how the children and their caregivers interact after the performance, and, of course, just our generally accepted standards for judging theatre. Children are just smaller humans, after all (Mack, qtd. in Goldfinger, p. 298).

So then, working with the assumptions that Theatre For Very Young Audiences is a worthy pursuit, that there are varied approaches to this form, and that there are, in fact, ways to evaluate the success of this form of theatre, in our research at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa to create our own piece for zero to three year olds, we have identified six characteristics that we believe to be prevalent in successful TVYA productions. This list is not exhaustive, it is simply a set of guiding principles that have helped us in our own work, and we hope it will lead to further research in the emerging TVYA academic field.

1. INTERACTION

There are, of course, TVYA shows that are performed in proscenium, particularly in the United States that require large audiences to justify costs (more on that below). Spellbound's *Wink*, for example, is a show that employs enchanting scenic design to bring children into a whimsical world oriented around the concept of going to sleep. And yet these shows do seem more geared for children older than three years of age. Babies, of course, are restless explorers, and allowing them to interact with the world they are immersed in seems to be necessary. Spellbound has another show, *Babywild*, which not only features furry and glowing props to play with and explore, but interactive sets meant to recreate rooms of a home: a kitchen, a bedroom and a bathroom. The babies, at least the ones who attended the performance we observed, may not have understood the full functions of each of these rooms, but it seemed to us that they recognized that they were given

agency to interact with areas that are usually denied to them; the glee on their faces was apparent and contagious.

2. MULTI-SENSORY STIMULI

In that vein, babies comprehend the world through their five senses. As the American Occupational Therapy Association notes, “Well-regulated and appropriately functioning sensory systems contribute to important outcomes in social-emotional, physical and motor, communication, self-care, cognitive, and adaptive skills development and maintenance” (AOTA). If babies engage with the world through multi-sensory experiences, so too must their theatre engage them in this way. In Oily Cart’s *Tube*, for example, music plays and soft, welcoming aesthetics stimulate the eyes and ears, but tactile consideration is given to glowing balls and tubes that the babies play with. Thought is even given to taste as these objects will inevitably end up in the spectators’ mouths.

One particularly delightful moment in London’s Unicorn Theatre’s production of *The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark* centered around the stimuli of taste. Midway through the action, as the main characters (owls, played by humans without any masks, puppets or costumes) searched for food, audience members were suddenly invited to come and eat. The performers placed small buckets of boiled potatoes around the immersive playing area, encouraging young audiences and their companions to partake.

Oily Cart and others have also used taste and smell to engage young audiences. Their *Christmas Baking Time* presentation centers around the baking of bread, allowing audience members to enjoy a freshly baked “Christmas bun” to take home with them. Their *In a Pickle*, a production based loosely on Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, introduces audiences to characters with distinctive smells and feel. Costumes have textures of quilting, corduroy, velvet and satin, allowing babies to distinguish between various “sheep” through the use of touch, while blends of essential oils gives each performer a distinctive smell as well. These experiences are carefully cultivated, with weeks allocated for observation, refinement and reflection to ensure that the sensory stimuli are balanced to create a holistic engagement that does not overwhelm or distract the young audience

members (Waldron).

3. A WELCOMING SPACE

As adults, we are so used to the etiquette of sitting down in a dark space and quietly taking in a performance for several hours that we almost consider it intuitive. It is, of course, not, and for our youngest audience members, to move into a space full of strange people, sights and sounds can be frightening. An effective tactic that most TVYA shows employ is to create a transitional space between the outside world and inside the theatre to welcome their audience members. For Oily Cart's *Ring a Ding Ding*, children are introduced to photos of the puppets and characters they will encounter, and are then greeted by the performers in full costume, with their parents safely close by. They are then walked through a series of hula hoops, encouraged to ring bells along the way, all in an attempt to slowly introduce the elements of the show. *Conference of the Birds*, also by Oily Cart, is a show designed for children on the autism spectrum who are particularly sensitive to changes in routine. For that show, the welcoming space is extended to several weeks before the show starts in the form of photographic and video materials being sent to the classrooms in preparation.

This ritual of liminality, that is, embracing the transition between spaces, has been a focus of performance studies for decades. According to Richard Schechner, "During the liminal phase of a ritual two things are accomplished: First, those undergoing the ritual temporarily become 'nothing,' put into a state of extreme vulnerability where they are open to change...Second, during the liminal phase, persons are inscribed with their new identities and initiated into their new powers" (Schechner, p. 66). There is a disarming egalitarianism in liminality, in a place of being nowhere and everywhere simultaneously, that extends to all humans. From what we have observed it is entirely possible that, for a moment, infants do not feel powerless beneath their caregivers in terms of autonomy and class; and parents, if for only an instant, are disarmed from their normal role as protector and instructor, for they too are at the whim of the performance to come. Everyone is equal in liminal spaces.

4. INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION FROM PERFORMERS

In his article “Baby Theatre Comes of Age,” Rob Weinert-Kendt describes *My House*, a TVYA performance by British TVYA practitioner Andy Manley. “He stares bluntly at his audience, singling them out one by one until they’re intrigued into curious silence, and only when they’re all with him does he start to explore his cardboard abode with the assistance of a piece of string, a stethoscope and a friendly melon. Manley “resets” the show like this a few times, checking in with each child before moving forward to a new section of his wordless, not-quite-narrative journey” (Weinert-Kendt, p. 46). In this instance, Manley is commanding the focus of his young audience simply through eye contact. Babies are stimulated by the attention of individuals, trained from birth to formulate the constraints of their world through the approval and disapproval of their parents’ gaze. Oily Cart performances can be for audiences as small as twelve spectators, but even for larger crowds, the sense of individual attention through eye contact and sensory adjustments is critical.

5. A TRANSFORMATIVE, CONTROLLED AND WHIMSICAL ATMOSPHERE

Weinert-Kendt goes on to describe successful TVYA by mentioning that there, “are no sudden lighting changes, if there’s any traditional lighting at all, and the pacing and sound volume throughout tend to be a lot gentler than you might think; nothing can grab a child’s attention, even well past this tender age, like an intent silence. Music tends to relax them or take them out of the moment, while dialogue typically makes them lean forward” (p. 45). This attention to individual detail is critical, and effective in the hands of a master performer. *Up and Away* is specifically for babies that have not yet learned to walk. The show features a very simple white tent structure, a soft floor for crawling, live singing and ukulele playing, all around the theme of lightness and elevation. Great TVYA practitioners know that their audiences are making sense of the world around them, and use that understanding to meld stimuli into an atmosphere that is safe, fun, soft, welcoming and inspiring.

6. FUNDING

All of this individual attention, unfortunately, comes at a price. While Anu Productions in Ireland can make theatre for one audience member at a time and charge a mere €20 per ticket, the smallest audience either of us have been a part of in the United States for a professional theatre production is Third Rail Project's *Then She Fell* for fifteen audience members, which went for \$125 per ticket. As Manon van de Water notes, "In countries with a vast welfare system, including supported daycare centers and/or parental leave, and subsidized art and education, theatre for the very young is both more accessible and more accepted. In countries that rely on box office income, on the other hand, this theatre is financially harder to generate and inaccessible except for the middle class" (van de Water, p. 140). With the National Endowment for the Arts under attack by the current administration (Deb), it seems unlikely that American TVYA will be a viable option for most theatre companies in the near future.

The cliché of a young child writhing out of their seat and crying during a performance comes from the simple truth that any audience member will only engage with a show if they feel it speaks to them. For our youngest audience members, that is literally true: interaction, multi-sensory engagement, a truly welcoming space, individual attention and a fully immersive atmosphere are only possible in small numbers. According to Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, every young person has the right, "to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (United Nations). Without appropriate funding, we in the United States will continue to fall short of that mandate, and treat the youngest and most vulnerable of our population as second class citizens unworthy of the wonder and transformation that theatre has to offer. Still, the form continues to grow, and as the benefits of engaging the very young through the medium become more widely studied, we believe necessary increased institutional and governmental support is inevitable.

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Associate Professor Mark Branner

Born in Los Angeles but raised primarily in Taiwan, Mark returned to the U.S. to attend college, whereupon he quickly dropped a scholarship from UCLA to work as a clown with the Ringling Brothers

and Barnum & Bailey Circus. He teaches courses in theatre for young audiences, puppetry, mask, and physical comedy. He has toured nationally with various groups, including Diavolo, and performed extensively in Asia, most notably in chuanju (Sichuan Opera), a regional Chinese theatre form. He and his family operate CiRCO Redempto, a community outreach program designed to benefit children from the Nosu Yi minority nationality of central China.

Mike Poblete, MFA

Originally from New York City, Mike's background is in playwriting and theatre production, having had seven full length plays and numerous one acts performed in six countries. He has a Playwriting MFA from Trinity College Dublin, and is currently pursuing a Theatre Studies Ph.D. at the University of Hawai'i. His research focuses on developing contemporary theatre methodologies as youth praxis.

Drama for Democracy: Material Theatre

[MANJIMA CHATTERJEE](#)

SHIV NADAR SCHOOL, NOIDA

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the importance of drama in establishing the principles of democracy in the classroom. It introduces Material Theatre as a form of theatre in education that celebrates materials—both natural and constructed—and the idea of democracy in the performance space. By way of a close look at the rationale behind Material Theatre and the ways in which it comes to be, it raises questions about the gaps that exist in the educational space under the traditional school system, and even in some of the progressive schools in India. It queries the negative attitudes that we hold against some forms of sensorial engagement while upholding others. By way of a case study, it enters a classroom which has introduced Material Theatre as a part of its curricular transactions, and documents the events that follow. It suggests that the introduction of Material Theatre in the classroom opens up possibilities of challenging the power structures in the classroom and engaging deeply with the universal ideas that sustain democracy.

Teaching and learning must be linked to the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world which is “not yet”—in order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived.

- Roger I. Simon, Empowerment as a pedagogy of possibility, p. 375

The very first thing that students learn when they enter a classroom for the first time is how to negotiate with power. The structure of the classroom, with the teacher as ‘the one who knows’ and the environment that is ‘designed to teach’, places the child firmly in the position of ‘the one who must learn’. Entry into the classroom is also about entry into, what Lisa Delpit calls a culture of power: ways of talking, writing, dressing, and interacting that are handed out with an aura of ‘respectability’ (Delpit, 1988, p. 283). When a child enters the classroom, s/he faces a double-whammy of power structures—the power of the teachers over students as well as the power of shadowy authority figures who determine what is worth teaching and what one must know. Consequently, the classroom becomes, by its very design, a space to inherit power structures, not to challenge them.

Curiously, the traditional theatre space has quite a similar design, wherein the audience occupies a similar space as the student, as ‘the one who must watch and be educated’. As Augusto Boal points out in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, the theatre is meant, by design, to help the audience to accept social realities, and not to challenge them. Irrespective of the content of the play or the arrangement of seats, in traditional dramatic forms, the power structure or status quo between performer/director and audience is allowed to remain constant. In both scenarios, the thoughts and perceptions that learners bring can only be voiced outside of the dramatic space, and not within.

Drama-in-education (DiE) contests this power structure in a radical way, by placing the learner at the centre of learning, and gently pushing the teacher to the sidelines, allowing her to contain, constrain and guide the process, but have no further say than that. The great aspect of applied drama as defined by Heathcote and her peers is that

it can be practised by a regular academic teacher exploring a regular academic subject, or an NGO worker working with victims of domestic abuse. It is a technique that uses tools and methods of drama to enrich the exploration, to enable mining into the topic and to find an emotional connect with it. It is strongly oriented towards analysis and reflection, which Heathcote sees as “the only thing that, in the long run, changes anybody” (Wagner, 1976, p.77). Drama is the only medium that allows the explorer to step in and out of the created fantasy world at will and to retain both emotional connect and detachment at the same time. Heathcote explains it in the following way: “I am the tree. I see the tree. I am inside the tree” (*Pieces of Dorothy*, 1993). Drama enables the participant to see the possibilities that lie within any situation—from emotional stress to mathematics—to go with the investigation of ‘what happens when...?’, rather than the limiting TV series format question: ‘what happens next?’ To sum up, in the words of Pamela Bowell and Brian Heap, “Drama is empowering...Drama provides opportunities for investigation and reflection, for celebration and challenge” (Bowell and Heap, 2013, p. 3).

EXPORING DRAMA FOR EARLY YEARS

Having for some years practised DiE with children 6 years of age and older, I had wondered whether this kind of exploration would work with children of the 2-5 age group. At this stage, children make huge strides in the areas of cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic and motor skills development (Lesar, 2015). Tagore recognised early childhood as the most critical time for developing empathy and the ability to connect with one’s surroundings. Unfortunately, this is also the time when they have their first encounter with the culture of power, which constantly seeks to mould the child into a ‘socially appropriate person’, curbing the development of imagination and creativity. What kind of drama might aid their negotiation into the world of social interactions while providing enough outlets for creativity? A response to this question came in 2015 while watching Helios Theatre’s *H₂O* as a parent of a child who was not-yet-5. After the show, we tried to deconstruct it, and failed miserably. Water was the ‘hero’ of the piece, of that we were sure. All it had was water—flowing, dripping, still, rippling—and nothing else. There were no words, very little music—most of it was the sounds

and actions of water, curated (I cannot think of a better word) by 3 performers. And yet, for 30 minutes the adults, along with children ranging from 1.5 to 7 years of age, were utterly engrossed. There was comedy in it, and drama, as well as moments of deep reflection. This was our introduction to Material Theatre.

Two years later, by invitation of the puppeteer Anurupa Roy, I was privileged to observe Material Theatre close up at a workshop for practitioners. The mentor was Barbara Kölling, one of the founder members of Helios Theatre, and the director of the fascinating *H₂O*. The learners were practitioners of drama and puppetry who were trying to find the right language with which to approach younger audiences. While this particular workshop was intended to initiate drama professionals into theatre for young children, an extension of the work, curated by Roy, catered to the needs of teachers who work with 4-7 year olds. The intent of this extension was to explore the possibility of kinesthetic, learner-led learning as an element of the curriculum, and to look at the possibility of introducing DiE to the Early Years learner in this way. As someone who watched the entire process as a fly on the wall, I was amazed by the potential of Material Theatre to set aside power structures entirely and create a drama space both democratic and creative in a way I had not experienced before.

INTRODUCING MATERIAL THEATRE

While I'm yet to come across a comprehensive definition of the term, I will try to put together one which fulfils the basic requirements of the form. Material Theatre is a form of theatre in which the primary performer is the material in focus – which may be natural or constructed – without its essential character manipulated or altered in any way. It is created by conducting 'research' with material—by playing with it, engaging with it, watching it and listening to it, until moments emerge that speak to the director/actor. Out of several possibilities that may emerge out of this playful research, selected moments are chosen and recreated to weave a narrative (preferably non-verbal, though minimal verbal interventions do occur). The resulting performance, when done well, is meaningful, entertaining and potentially transformative for children as young as 18 months (occasionally younger) and adults alike. It is also, by its very nature, democratic, as it is capable of speaking to human beings irrespective

of not only age, but socio-economic, linguistic, cultural and national allegiances.

The fundamental principle to which Material Theatre must adhere is, in the words of Anurupa Roy, founder of Katkatha, which hosted the workshop, that it has to be “performance created with a chosen material at the centre, wherein the materiality, or intrinsic identity of the material, is kept intact” (personal interviews, December 2017-January 2018). Of the nine performances created in the above-mentioned workshop, three worked with natural materials (clay, sand and stone), while the others worked with constructed materials (wool, paper and plastic). Each performance took the lead from the nature of the material at the heart of it. The ones with sand and stones talked about the fluidity of borders and the challenges of coexistence for those with different identities, while clay coated and clung, melted and matted to create the nature of relationships. The paper show took the shape of a city with windows opening out towards a different existence. The plastic shows explored power and transformations. There were sounds, but hardly any words. There were actors, but they were hardly seen in most of the shows, and where they were, they were entirely upstaged. The children who sat through these 30-minute shows had stories to share as they came out, multiple stories, arguments about what really happened, yet each one convinced that they had witnessed a clear narrative that catered to their imagination.

It was interesting to see their momentary response to the shows, as the children emerged from the performance area eager to touch and feel the materials left outside for them to play with. It seemed to work as a reminder to them to engage with the world body and mind, a kind of engagement that traditional education tends to deny rather than support.

TRAINING THE SENSES

While some teachers were simply accompanying the children to the performances, some others were a part of the Material Theatre training group. This latter set were asked to watch the performances twice—the first time to watch as adult viewers, and the second time to watch the children as they watched the performances. They were given observation forms to fill and reflect upon their observations. After the

shows got over, they sat around at debriefing circles and shared and discussed their observations. Questions and doubts remained: how would the language of the show translate into usable educational material?

Intensive hands-on workshops followed, where the teachers were encouraged to let go of what they knew about the materials given to them and to explore them as though they were meeting the materials for the first time. It was interesting to note how difficult it was for pre-primary teachers, who constantly work with a sensory curriculum, to let go of their assumptions and make discoveries. The process involved multiple reminders to ‘only observe’ and to suspend interpretation temporarily, to feel the material and to engage with its materiality—to push and feel it yield and also the resistance it offered, to recognise its texture and weight by way of touch and sound – in short, to engage with it in sensory and kinesthetic ways by consciously suspending cognitive knowledge. It required recognition in deep, primeval ways, and abrogation of the ‘knowing’ superiority of the human mind, in order, to rephrase Kölling’s words, to find “the moment when the light comes in” (personal interviews, December 2017-January 2018). Once the breakthrough did come, however, it was time to take children along on the path to exploring the possibilities of learning about materials. This was the moment at which they discovered the problem of power.

SHIFTING THE POWER DYNAMIC

Material Theatre requires the actor to move behind the material in order to make the material the ‘hero’ of the show. It is, in effect, an abdication of power on the part of the actor. It demands that the audience co-create the narrative as the show moves on, pulling its imagination into the performance space. This is a radical shift in the traditional power dynamic that exists between performers and audience in the theatre, and a huge reason for the creative potential of Material Theatre. Barbara Kölling speaks of adult audiences crying at a performance of her show, *Traces*, where she works with sand and paper. The response is subliminal, and draws attention to Material Theatre’s links with ritual and the earliest forms of drama. In the words of Helios member Erpho Bell, “Forming and fading is inherent to all materials. By observing the material, we encounter one of the theatre’s most fundamental theme duos: life and death. In dramaturgical terms,

this duo is essential for developing scenes for the play” (*Forming and Fading*, 2013). Over the course of the performance, by developing a rhythm and through respectful handling of the material, which requires both tranquillity and time, the performers are able to generate meditative moments again and again. During the play, everyone, performers and spectators alike, has the time to focus and meditate upon the material’s properties and capabilities. This creates a certain sense of slowing down of time, allowing viewers to participate in the making of meaning while, at the same time, engaging peacefully with the ideas as a community.

Rosenow and Bailie point to the decreasing significance of nature in early childhood education, particularly, and the loss of connect not only with nature, but with culture and with themselves, as a result. As the human response to material has moved more and more towards manipulation, we have stopped responding to the inherent drama of all materials, which is why, one imagines, an occasional glance such as the plastic bag scene in *American Beauty* (1999) becomes a matter of critical discourse. So, when our gaze is drawn firmly into the curated drama of Material Theatre, ancient memories and associations flow, drawing an invisible ‘lasso’ around the community of watchers, binding them together. The cumulative energy in the space at the end of a performance has to be experienced to be believed. This same energy can be found, albeit in a different form, in the classroom after a session with materials. However, this, too, requires a power shift from the teacher to the student and material.

Teachers in the Early Years are often called ‘mother-teachers’, with reference to the nurturing role they need to play. The pre-Primary teacher is always well-prepared with her routine and learning materials, and the ‘magic’ in the classroom is very well choreographed and coordinated by her. In this area, the learning process is well-planned, never left to chance, and often involves manipulation of materials. So, to ask a teacher to step back and let the material lead was to ask her, in effect, take one of the biggest risks of her career. I would not be over-stating it when I say that this was the most difficult and challenging moment for all the teachers participating in the process.

Preparation for this moment involved choosing the material to introduce to the classroom and researching it thoroughly, sometimes asking a colleague to be the outside eye that watches both directly and

records on a video camera, in order to enable critical conversations on process and emerging narratives. One pair of teachers, working together, opted to take it to the children even before they felt that their own research was done, aiming to attempt a co-created narrative, and enhancing the risks manifold in the process. As a result, they encountered interesting outcomes. At a moment in the performance, which teachers found emotionally powerful, children laughed; and at other moments, in which they were, in their own words, 'passing the time', children were absorbed and quiet. Later, when questioned about their responses, the children indicated that they saw similar things and had similar associations as the adults, but their responses to the same stimuli were different from adult responses. This gave the adults pause to think, and raised many queries about the teachers' own understanding of regular classroom transactions. Later, when children were given the material to play with, some began by imitating their favourite moments from the teachers' performance, while others tried to find their own pathways. The teachers were initially disappointed by the imitation, but conversation with the children revealed a desire to understand how the moments spoke to them, and to experience it for themselves.

Another important discovery was made with regard to outcomes. As an inclusive school, our school reserves 25 per cent of seats for underprivileged children from the neighbourhood, who often struggle with classwork, since the school's target language is English, a language that is not spoken at their homes. This experience gave these children a way to speak about their explorations and feelings, with the teachers helping the entire class to find the words to articulate the same. Bringing the entire class at par, even if it was for a moment, was perhaps one of the most important outcomes of the introduction of Material Theatre into the classrooms, as it opened up, in that moment, the possibility to question the culture of power operating until then.

This was also an outcome that, I found, was not restricted to our corner of the world. Kölling, in her interview with me, talked about working with children who have stopped speaking for a completely different reason.

In Germany, sometimes you will find such children, who have stopped speaking, because nobody speaks at home anymore, and it is only the television that speaks. By the time they are 10, they

are divided into Primary School, Secondary School and Gymnasium. So, by the time they are 11, those who get sent to Primary School know that they are not smart enough, and they will never get a job. It changes everything—it changes their possibilities in life, their relationships. ...So, at a very young age, children get to feel that they are stupid and not valued, and so they stop speaking. We like to work with these children to bring them back to learning, and expressing themselves. (personal interviews, December 2017-January 2018)

What is it about Material Theatre that encourages children to speak? The moments of recognition and empathy that are created in the shared experience of it seem to demand articulation in a language not regularly used in the classroom space. It seems to transform the transactional space into, first, a space for inquiry, and then, a space to build a community based on shared experience. The moment, in drama, that holds the entire room in an embrace of shared empathy, the moment that comes closest to ritual in its deep-rooted, non-verbal acceptance of humanity, the moment at which, as Heathcote might say, we ‘drop to the universal’—is the moment that is mined in Material Theatre.

THE ECOLOGICAL SPACE

One very important, and perhaps expected, outcome of the Material Theatre process is the role it fulfils in encouraging students to experience the world with their entire bodies. As our classrooms and homes get increasingly ‘sanitized’, children are by and large encouraged to approach everything in the world with shoes, masks and gloves. Children discover the world through smell and touch far before they learn to trust their instincts of seeing and hearing, and by emphasising the latter two senses over the first two, our educational system creates an unnecessary cognitive hierarchy, and reduces our ability to trust in ourselves as complete beings. When we urge a child playing in the garden to put on their shoes, we often end up doing more harm than good. “The feet are not just one part of your body, they are a very important part and they give you a lot of sensory stimulation, and if you don’t have that any more, you are losing a whole

aspect of yourself,” says Kölling (personal interviews, December 2017-January 2018). What this also does is distance us further from the planet we live on, making it harder to care about it.

The introduction of Material Theatre in the classroom enables children to once again look at their environment as a space that demands engagement from their entire beings. As they touch, hear, smell and observe the way natural and created materials behave, they will learn more about their natures: a knowledge that is not derived from second-hand information, but based on their own deep understanding. This, we hope, will help them to grow into more ecologically sensitive individuals—people who care about the earth because they are in touch with the earth, in a literal as well as metaphorical sense. Research bears out that this will also help them to connect with other cultures and with themselves, and to think and talk about peace in active ways.

This will also help them to examine the false hierarchies that exist between people who work with their eyes and ears only, and the others who employ all six senses to get by in the world. The problem of caste is one that has plagued India for millennia, and one of the ways it has visibly continued to make its presence felt in an urbanised, modern India, is by maintaining the hierarchy of mind over body, and reading/knowning over touching/knowning. This is not the space to discuss it, so I will say only this: there is much about the ideas of purity and pollution that needs to be challenged in India, and much of taught behaviour in Indian homes and classrooms serves to propagate ideas about what is to be considered ‘dirty’ or ‘low’ work. Children below five years of age have not yet been taught these hierarchies and stigmas, and the freedom to indulge all senses may keep a corner of their minds open to questioning and to challenging them.

MAKING MEANING AS A DRAMATIC ACT

While Material Theatre may seem, in terms of the traditional definition, closer to aesthetics than to art, audiences are aware of a sense of carefully curated moments put together in a strongly performative way. How far, then, can it be called a democratic form?

Bell speaks of ‘that orchestrated shift between suspense and relief for the player and the spectator within the play—from action-packed performance to absolute peace’ while describing how the drama in

Material Theatre is created. Yet, one thing is certain—there will be no explanations. “Children need something to sink their teeth into,” says Kölling (personal interviews, December 2017-January 2018). The performers dig deep while researching materials, unearthing deep questions which then find their way into the performance. This creates a performance that is abstract in essence with moments that are poignant and layered. It is now clear that the moments at which audiences take a pause are identifiable, but their reasons for taking a pause may not be clearly identifiable. At one of our improvised sessions, some of the participants, from Europe, read what was an identifiable Indian school shoe as a working man’s shoe. As this shoe interacted with a high heeled sandal, the dynamics of the interaction were read entirely differently. Where the Indian viewers saw an aggressive mother-and-child interaction, the Europeans saw a sexual encounter! In another performance, where the performer sprinkled sand to signify loss of habitat, child audiences read aridity and loss. This seems to indicate that cultural specificities, as well as age-related sensibilities as indicated above, can potentially impact the way the performance is read, and that it is possible to go away with having received a narrative that is at variance with what was conceived by the performers. While this enables democratic meaning-making, the Material Theatre show runs the risk of lacking a clear narrative.

Having said that, the combination of research into material behaviour, dramaturgy, use of music and actor behaviour provides a potent form of political theatre that rarely fails to convey the larger questions, even though they may come through disparate images, rather than by way of an overarching narrative. Handing over the material to students in the classroom then enables them to engage with the same questioning, albeit through contexts of their own.

FOR DEMOCRACY

We are at present living in a world characterised by extreme inequality. In his seminal essay, “The Dramatic Child” (1992), the playwright Edward Bond talks about the kind of systems that exist in a post-globalisation world as one that “depends on markets and prisons,” where more and more institutions are turning into kinds of prisons. A new kind of prison is the one presented by the digital environment,

which is also creating havoc with our attention spans and ability to engage with the world. I firmly believe that in this world, more than ever, we need drama to push us to connect our learning with our emotions and empower us to find ways of ‘knowing’ beyond what is Google-able. The Indian National Curriculum Framework of 2005 urges schools “to nurture and build on [children’s] active and creative capabilities—their inherent interest in making meaning, in relating to the world in ‘real’ ways through acting on it and creating, and in relating to other humans.” We need to find ways of working together to overcome the inequalities that exist both within and outside of the school space—inequalities that are propagated through means of transaction such as money, social networks and language. Drama in education pushes the boundaries of school learning transactions to bring inequalities to the forefront and find ways of facing it and dealing with it. Material Theatre removes the inequalities of age, background, language, ethnicity, gender, and power, and pushes the shared common experience to the forefront to emphasise the possibilities of coexistence.

I conclude, with Edward Bond’s words:

Education for the market’s needs could be a prison. We must educate children for democracy. The psyche and society are a theatre or they are a prison. At the heart of all democracy is drama. (Bond, 1992)

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Manjima Chatterjee is a drama explorer, teacher and occasional writer. She began writing for the theatre after being accepted to the Writers' Bloc Workshops organised by Rage and supported by Royal Court Theatre. She has been shortlisted for the BBC's International Radio Playwriting Competition and she won The Hindu Metro Plus Playwright Award in 2013. Her book, *Two Plays on Hunger*, was published by

Dhauri Books in 2018. Trained in process drama under Maya Krishna Rao, Manjima has worked with children in drama for most of her life. She works at Shiv Nadar School, Noida, as the Coordinator of the school's Arts programme.

Co-operative Make-Believe as Practice in Children's Interactive Dance Theatre

[JENNIFER ESSEX](#)

TEESSIDE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Interactive dance theatre for young children will often rely upon a successful willing suspension of disbelief for both participating and non-participating audience members (commonly 'interactors' and 'non-interactors'). This is through a combination of "user freedom and system design" (Ryan, 1997 pp. 677-707). In my research, led by the instructions from performers, audiences are able to enter into a co-operatively constructed make-believe world. These co-constructed physical movement and physical actions are contained by a pre-prescribed narrative arc. In other words, the closed narrative form contains an open dramatic form. This offers audiences a satisfying story whereby the narrative arc is coherent to both interactors and non-interactors, giving rise to two distinct experiences—an active, make-believe experience for interactors and a more passive, spectator experience for non-interactors.

This paper explores how this dual narrative might be achieved; what autonomy and what limitations might exist for interactors and non-interactors in contemporary children's theatre practice. This paper also discusses some possible solutions—the role of children's creative input and the extension of collaborative practice to include co-operation between children and professional artist-makers in research and practice.

Contextually, local and national funding for the arts in England has been in steady decline for the last eleven years. These cuts currently total 37% locally and 28% nationally (*Arts Index 2007—2016*, 2017). The response amongst both Arts Council England and the artistic community at-large is to find new ways to engage with audiences that permits “iterative development and engagement [and] allows a more porous approach to decision making and helps others feel ownership” (*Cultural Democracy in Practice*, 2018). The impetus behind a culturally democratic approach to the arts is to have public input throughout the conceptual draft, design, delivery and evaluation of artistic works, “facilitating the ideas of your stakeholders and co-creating together” (*Cultural Democracy in Practice*, 2018, p.4) placing artist and patron on an equal creative footing. I believe that the most important stakeholder in any piece of children's theatre is the child, however, as Jeanne Klein and Shifra Schonmann state, “Child spectators and adult theatre critics often hold opposite views on what makes the ‘best’ theatre for young people” (2009, p. 6). “Children are being taught that self-expression is eccentric and conformity leads to success. Every effort must be made to reverse this pattern: school is where children learn to sing their own song” (*Cultural Democracy in Practice*, 2018). Against this background, I formed a children's theatre company, Fully Booked Theatre, working as a choreographer and performer and in long-term collaboration with my partner, the English poet, Harry Man who served as dramaturg.

Our latest work, *Once Upon a Wall*, is a dance theatrical adaptation of the nursery rhyme of ‘Humpty Dumpty’—a nursery rhyme like many whose precise historical origin has yet to be identified. Working from a position of informal creative input, more so than formal

co-production, with Special Education Needs (SEN) pupils at Priory Woods School & Arts College, we were able to learn from them about their expectations in terms of an audience experience—how they wanted the story to be reinvented and communicated through movement, text and sound as well as through texture, colour and environment. Over a series of eight workshops with pupils aged 9-14, we discussed creative ideas and devised movement in blocks. Our process followed from similar art-making processes such as that experienced by Liam Berriman, Kate Howland and Fiona Courage, though we were not aware of it at the time. Berriman et al. described their process as having moments where they were very aware of the fact that the “knowledge and skills gap resulted in an uneven sense of responsibility and ownership for the installation, with the young people’s participation largely limited to observing and providing occasional feedback on the design and development” (2017, pp. 139–162). We were keen to avoid a discrepancy between our own knowledge and creative ideas and what would be considered valuable input from both groups.

We asked for pupils’ help in coming up with ideas about where the character of Humpty Dumpty came from. We had a small sketch of an idea for a place called Lost Sandwiches comprised of breakfast-themed landmarks such as runny-egg rivers and baked bean canyons, but we needed their input. Offering a large canvas on which pupils could describe and draw their ideas proved to be too broad a brief, with a general disagreement in terms of the likely dimensions, role and scale of objects. It would be no different to asking two pianists in separate rooms to play something from memory and both to independently start to play Chuck Berry’s “Johnny B. Goode.” As a starting point, drawing can be part of “a symbolic transition into play, conversation, and artwork... through such articulations, they construct their make-believe worlds” (Gotz, 2005). And with some necessary facilitator intervention, the pupils began their collaborative art-making.

While the images they had drawn from an abstract brief resulted in an abstract outcome, what became evident in the surrounding discussion and descriptions of what they had drawn was the demand to participate in the make-believe process. A tunnel entirely comprised of bacon, down which a giant orange might roll seemed a perfectly normal combination that we were urged, non-subversively, by pupils in

our group, to imagine. "Because they create make-believe worlds to suit their needs, interests, and desires, it allows them therefore to imagine possibilities that are beyond the realm of their real worlds," (Gotz, 2005) and indeed, that imagined world is just what our pupils created.

Unencumbered by the continual demands to memorise and make causal connections between events and ideas within the context of a classroom, our pupils were offered a chance to discuss what they had drawn and wanted to draw next gave them a sandbox for unlimited make-believe imagining. Simultaneously there was the obvious requirement for us to provide a structured way in which we could incorporate make-believe on the stage that would allow both children and their parents to be part of the same make-believe world. Even if the child's parent was not strictly in the same make-believe world, similarly to the two pianists imagining "Johnny B. Goode," they would at least have the opportunity to invent meaning for themselves. As Wartemann (2009) says, "Participation at the theatre is not merely something one demands (a right), but it is also a challenge (a duty). Audience members not only can but must work out the meaning for themselves" (p. 8). In this sense, as soon as participation is invoked within a piece of theatre, the audience must play along, whether collaboratively to help tell the story (the closed narrative form), or merely co-opted by performers for the sake of make-believe (the open dramatic form; helping to enact a given scenario). Parents tend to be more cooperative rather than strictly collaborative performers when it comes to bridging the safe space in which their children play. They must navigate between the states of being a spectator in the audience (as above, a non-interactor) and a participant on stage (interactor).

New questions, evidently arose too, such as making sure that invitations to participate, to listen to the narration, or watch the movement were indicated clearly and that we were not at risk of dividing the audience's attention. Ultimately, as Berriman et al. (2017) made the conclusion, "It requires us to be flexible in our expectations and to be open to a model of research where the majority of insights will emerge through the process of collaboration, rather than at the final destination."

Ashford describes a similar approach in devising The Last Great Hunt's *Pollyanna*, "The development tacked between, on one hand, a

bottom-up approach, devising specific, more or less self-contained interactions, and, on the other, a top-down approach, creating an overarching narrative, and then back to a bottom-up approach” (2018, p. 150). He describes the process further as “a series of tasks, puzzles, and discussion settings for each audience group, which performers would devise and then present for the rest of the ensemble to road test. Discussion would ensue, and any feedback would be incorporated into future iterations of each exercise” (2018, p. 150). This iterative approach has been very important for us in integrating the input of our child audiences. Creating tasks, puzzles, and discussions makes space for the children we work with to have an impact on our performances, while also maintaining a scaffolding that supports play.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PERFORMANCE

The performance was designed to be interactive so that the audience would have opportunities to take part within the show. Interactive theatre makes sense in delivering a story to children as it uses a device they are uniquely familiar with: make believe. As Ryan states: “In the fictional world of make-believe, participants achieve the same fusion of dramatic functions as the users of Interactive Drama: the players play for their own enjoyment, and as they improvise a role, they both ‘write’ and play their character” (p. 681). Ryan describes “Interactive Drama” as an ideal combination of “user freedom and system design” (1997, p. 681) while Fuller (2018) identifies one of the challenges of creating interactive theatre as “the need to navigate between the position of the ‘Architect’, designing and structuring an audience’s experience, and that of the ‘Clown’, sustaining a performance state which is present and responsive to the particularities of individual interactions” (p. 234).

I perform in *Once Upon a Wall* with the writer who I co-created the piece with. This means that we act as both the ‘Architects’ and ‘Clowns’ of the work, giving us the opportunity to hold the scaffolding of the interactive experiences we’ve designed and the shape of the show in our minds as we perform and engage in the ‘Clown’ state of responding in the moment to suggestions from our child audience. Being adaptive to the audience in the moment has allowed us not only to change aspects of the show in the middle of a performance to create

a better experience for the audience and ourselves as performers, but also, over time, we have allowed the scaffolding (the structure of the work itself) to develop and change in response to our growing understanding of our audiences' experience. The piece then transforms through contact with its audience, they participate directly and indirectly in the work's iterative development process.

We recently returned to Priory Woods to perform *Once Upon a Wall*, the show into which they'd had creative input. In performance, the children again had a role in shaping the production. At this juncture the scaffolding of the narrative framework remained fixed, and we responded in 'clown' state to the suggestions of our child audience in improvised moments within the confines of a fixed score. In The Last Great Hunt's *Pollyanna*, "group leaders had specific narrative goals to achieve: 'locate Pollyanna's diary' or 'interrogate bartender'; the means by which those goals were reached, however, were ultimately reliant on the input of the audience" (Ashford, 2018, p. 150). We have found this framework of devising goals for our audiences which leave space for them to develop their own methodologies to be impactful on the sense of achievement our audiences experience from participating in our productions. As Ryan states, "The script limits the freedom of the user, but it also maximizes the chances of a pleasurable performance. Its primary function is to convey a sense of purpose and to awaken in the user a desire to interact" (1997, p. 679). In this way we are balancing how much autonomy the interactors have with the sense of purpose they get from a strong sense of narrative.

There are many challenges in creating an interactive outdoor production for young audiences. As Watermann notes:

Children in the theatre do not focus their attention on specific events on stage—in general, on the actors' performance—because of pre-established conventions for audience members. Children, and especially these very small children, are not polite. They are attentive and focused on certain events on stage for only as long as those events are able to capture their interest. Their reactions, whether vocal, verbal, or physical, show this clearly." (2009, p. 13)

An adult audience will more often than not, out of an understanding for

theatrical convention, watch the action on stage. With a child audience in an outdoor production, attention becomes much more tricky to direct. At one point in our story, Hum-T ‘disappears’ behind the wall. However, outdoors, in an interactive production where they have been actively encouraged to join us on stage, children routinely come behind the wall, immediately destroying the theatrical magic of the disappearance. Part of our strategy for this is an acceptance that each child will experience the show in their own way, will have their own curiosities and if we can respond in ‘clown’ state to these, ie. playfully say ‘yes’ to child action which run counter to our desired narrative, then we open ourselves up to the possibilities of what Lisa Nagel and Lise Hovik call “risk of chaos and playful experience” (2016, p. 159).

Ultimately we felt that creating the interactive elements did have an impact in enhancing the sense of ownership the children we worked with had over the production. In post-show discussions they asked detailed questions about the design of the costume and set, the methodology for the creation of the work, and expressed thoughts about the meaning of the work.

One of the reasons for making an interactive show is to build in opportunities for children to be able to take an active part in the performance. Among the 10 aspects of life covered in *The Good Childhood Report 2012* (2012), children’s happiness with the amount of choice they have in life tends to be the most strongly associated with their overall well-being. Due to their legal status, children’s choice and autonomy are much more dependent on the willingness of others to grant them these things. Building in opportunities for them to feel that they are making meaningful contributions during the live performance therefore is something that is very important to us. At moments in *Once Upon a Wall* we become co-players, inviting children to play with us. As co-players we can take turns with the children leading and following. We listen for their ‘offers’ and build on them. Their choices enrich our show. The children interviewed for *The Good Child Report 2012* identified being “trusted to make your own choices” as important in feeling happy. How can we make theatre which grants children genuine autonomy and is also a great piece of theatre to watch? Our role as artist-makers has shifted dramatically from one of writing great dialogue and choreographing movement sequences to creating opportunities for children to create their own dialogue and movement.

We look at creating structures and scaffolding which supports our child (and sometimes adult) participant's play.

CONCLUSION

We are continually developing our creation processes in response to an ongoing dialogue with the children we work co-operatively with. This co-operative play allows us to iteratively develop our shows to include moments in performances in which we hope to give children genuine autonomy over their decisions and actions. This process is complex and imperfect; balancing the need for a cohesive narrative for non-participants with the desire for genuine autonomy for participants is delicate. We hope that through an ongoing dialogue with participants and non-participants—adults and children—we can continue to drive these sometimes competing goals forwards.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer Essex is a choreographer, performer, and Senior Lecturer at Teesside University. She specialises in the creation of interactive, interdisciplinary dance theatre works for outdoor spaces. Born in Toronto, she is currently living and working in the UK.