



ARTSPRAXIS

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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.

This issue of *ARTSPRAXIS* builds upon the issues raised during *The NYU Forum on Educational Theatre* (2016). This forum was part of an ongoing series NYU is hosting on significant issues that impact on the broad field of educational and applied theatre. Previous forums have been dedicated to site-specific theatre (2015), teaching artistry (2014 and 2005), developing new work for the theatre (2013), theatre for young audiences (2012), theatre for public health (2011), citizenship and applied theatre (2010), theatre pedagogy (2009), Shakespeare (2008), drama across the curriculum and beyond (2007), ethnotheatre and theatre for social justice (2006), and assessment in arts education (2003). The NYU Forum on Educational Theatre invited the global community to propose workshops, papers, posters, narratives, and performances around one of the following topics:

- 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)

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Editorial

[JONATHAN P. JONES](#)

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

I am proud to present this new issue of *ArtsPraxis*, featuring articles in response to the guiding questions and themes established for the NYU Forum on Educational Theatre in April 2016, which included applied theatre, drama in education, and theatre for young audiences. As a number of authors submitted articles under the heading of youth theatre, I curated a stand-alone section for this topic as well as I felt it wise to highlight the breadth of research in this area at this time.

At this time. At other times, such a phrase might not warrant extra attention, but these times are different from what many of us have known before. In light of current leadership in the United States, Brexit in the United Kingdom, the unprecedented election cycle in France, the provocations of President Putin, the atrocities committed by Bashar al-Assad against his own people, Indonesia considering the expansion of sharia law beyond the Aceh Province, following the Turkish referendum under President Erdoğan, the instability of the North Korean regime, the ongoing global refugee crisis, and the devastation of global climate change—it may seem that the world is on fire. And faced with what might be perceived as insurmountable challenges, we theatre artists and educators persist. We create. We inspire. We resist.

A great asset of the 2016 Forum on Educational Theatre was the

degree to which the NYU Program in Educational Theatre was able to reconnect with our global community. In large part, this was due to the efforts of Philip Taylor following his experience at the International Drama in Education Research Institute in Singapore in 2015. Under the direction of Prue Wales, it became evident at that event, that even in this time of inescapable electronic connections, there is nothing that can take the place of face-to-face fellowship. Just this week, we are coming off of our latest international conference, the NYU Forum on Ethnodrama, looking at the intersection between theatre art and arts-based research paradigms. After many months of political duress, we communed. We shared art, research, and activism.

In the spirit of maintaining our international dialogue in these troubled times, this issue of *ArtsPraxis* continues the conversation. Our contributors present scholarship from Africa, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. I hope that you find this work as inspirational as I have and that you consider joining us next spring at the 2018 NYU Forum on Performance as Activism.

IN THIS ISSUE

In the Applied Theatre section, **Kay Hepplewhite** investigates the applied theatre artist's praxis, attending closely to their responsivity to participants. **John Somers** identifies the unique features of community theatre in the UK and the role it plays in fostering community cohesion. **Linden Wilkinson** documents her experience developing an ethnodrama about efforts to create a memorial for the Australian Aboriginal massacre at Myall Creek focusing on trauma and reconciliation. Finally, **Kaitlin O. K. Jaskolski** chronicles her experience utilizing applied theatre practices to teach life skills to adolescents and young adults in Lagos, Nigeria.

In the Drama in Education section, **Scott Welsh** reflects on his experiences teaching monologue workshops and interrogates the relationship between education and theatre.

In the Theatre for Young Audiences section, **Jessica M. Kaufman** unpacks dramaturgy-as-research, specifically looking at her work in devised theatre for young audiences. **Dennis Eluyefa** provides a brief overview of children's theatre in the UK, navigating both the educative and entertainment values of the work.

In the final section on Youth Theatre, **Clare Hammoor** employs

auto-ethnography to investigate what he calls, “the production of meaning and the possibilities of children’s theatre.” **Pamela Baer** illuminates a myriad of ways in which youth can engage in a participatory aesthetic. And finally, **Sean Mays** looks at the many challenges of adapting Broadway musicals for young performers.

LOOKING AHEAD

During the next few months, we will invite Joe Salvatore, Chair of the 2017 NYU Forum on Ethnodrama, to serve as guest editor, looking to identify highlights of the diverse offerings at the Forum for inclusion in a special edition of *ArtsPraxis* (Volume 5 Number 1). Following that issue, we will again engage members of the Educational Theatre field who may or may not have been present at the Forum yet want to contribute to the ongoing dialogue around our three areas of specialization: applied theatre, drama in education, and theatre for young audiences. The call for papers will be released concurrently with the next issue (November 2017) and the submission deadline is February 1, 2018.

Responsivity in Applied Theatre Practitioner Expertise: Introducing Identifying Patterns and Names

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ABSTRACT

This article outlines a research project investigating the expertise of applied theatre practitioners. Summarising some of the research approaches and findings, a conceptualization of 'responsivity' is proposed to encapsulate the blended expertise of those artists that work in community, participatory and applied settings. The 'practice responsive' research methodology utilizing 'reflective dialogues' with practitioners is explained and the resulting artists' commentaries are embedded throughout. I outline how reflection and response thread through a conceptualization of applied theatre in literatures, and discuss how these themes informed both the method and the findings of my research. Whilst offering namings for patterns found common to practitioners operating across diverse contexts, the article also acknowledges how naming can close down understanding of the complex operations and qualities of the practitioner. I suggest a theoretical proposition of '___' (underscore) to open up understanding of

the workers and the work of applied theatre, in order to allow further insight to their expertise. The proposal concludes by arguing how the practitioners' developmental response to the work enhances applied theatre's beneficial objectives for participants.

INTRODUCTION

The qualities demanded of a practitioner in applied theatre are notoriously difficult to describe and can appear daunting. Their expertise is made up of a combination of qualities and skills that build on a foundation of art form knowledge, blending the ability to guide creative performance activity with facilitation of positive engagement through interactive exchange, which in turn, ethically takes account of context and objectives. To manage these multiple demands, a practitioner develops holistic expertise *in response* to the work. Building on this premise, my paper will introduce a concept of 'responsivity' as a way to identify patterns within the enigmatic sensibilities, revealed through analysis of a number of applied theatre practitioners. Responsivity is a way of discussing how in-the-moment choices are made and how, whilst acknowledging a focus on the participants, the practitioners also develop within the practice.

The commentaries included in this article are drawn, with full agreement, from 'reflective dialogues' (see also Hepplewhite, 2016) undertaken with a number of senior practitioners in the UK, which contributed to the research for my PhD thesis investigating applied theatre practitioner expertise. Helen Nicholson (2005) highlights the important pattern of self-reflection within the field: 'Applied drama has a reflexive ethos, a tradition of creative and critical questioning' (p. 166). A 'reflexive ethos' was a key informant in the structure of my research methodology and has informed my proposed concept of responsivity.

This paper cites extracts from the 'reflective dialogues' with artists operating in applied, participatory and community contexts. The process used video-recordings to capture moments of workshop or rehearsal, allowing both researcher and artist to co-reflect on the detailed navigation of practice decisions. The transcribed dialogues highlighted their concerns and values about the work, aiding analysis and pointing to a set of patterns that emerged as a fundamentally

responsive expertise.

Responsivity is a route to explaining the expertise of applied theatre practitioners and thematically reflects analysis of applied theatre; Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston (2009) discuss how the 'very form itself is responsive to the circumstances in which it is used' (p. 10). My research explores how responsive-ness is evident in the expertise of the practitioners undertaking the work, investigating in-the-moment choices and what enables them to operate well. Nicholson (2005) describes a responsive approach that embraces aesthetic concerns:

Contemporary theatre practitioners who work in educational and community contexts are, at best, developing practices that are both *responsive* to the narratives and cultural memories of the participants with whom they are working and artistically imaginative. (p.152)

Although focused on the impact of arts participation, the research also revealed how the practitioners prioritised their identity as artists; how this informed their relationships with participants, the processes and practices within the work.

The researched practitioners worked across a range of sites of participatory practice within education, health, community and other social applications of theatre and drama. Informed by a pedagogic motive, the related terminologies of responsivity that I introduce in this article aim to support development of student and novice practitioners. Having worked in community and educational applications of drama and theatre, and now lecturer involved with students developing their expertise in applied theatre, I was looking for a way to supplement practice learning with research analysis and seeking a vocabulary for what is sometimes hard to name. My concern is with the practitioners' *expertise*, an embracing term that includes approaches and qualities, skills and sensibilities, understandings and ethos, all of which informs practice choices and enables a responsive way of operating.

Qualities of practitioners are highlighted elsewhere in literatures; some features are touched on here to establish a context for my own research findings. Eugene Van Erven (2013) discusses skills of 'community artists' who walk 'the fine line between mainstream arts and the world of ordinary people' including 'temperament, commitment,

stamina and courage' (p. 140). Prentki and Preston (2009) highlight humility, sensitivity and adherence to democratic principles (p. 252). James Thompson (2015) highlights the importance of 'attentiveness' and develops what he names as an 'aesthetics of care' about a 'set of values realised in a relational process' (p. 437). Thompson emphasises a care for the *whole* experience of the practice, including audience relationship, within an 'affective, sensory dynamic' (p. 439). Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton (2013) reflect on responsive qualities to consider issues of implementation and facilitation:

An applied facilitator...will be consistently responsive to all the contextual factors at play in each session: who are these people? What do they bring with them? How are they different today from yesterday? How does this space shape what we do? What is the social health of the group? (p. 7)

Prendergast and Saxton make links in particular with educational applications of drama and theatre, highlighting how facilitation is centred on immediate influences of place, space and participants.

As a result of my research and to aid understanding of the complexities of practice, I formulated a series of labels for inter-related patterns that emerged as evident across the range of practitioners. These proposed facets of responsivity (awareness, anticipation, adaptation, attunement and respond-ability) are not offered as a universal catch-all list of 'how to do it', but as a way of encapsulating common approaches and qualities within their expertise:

- anticipation and adaptation – being able both to plan and to respond well in the work
- awareness – of issues relating to the politics and ethics of the social context
- attunement – which builds on an awareness- having an empathetic and informed response to the practitioners
- respond-ability – where practitioners are able to nurture, grow and develop themselves through the work.

The feature of 'respond-ability' explains how practitioners were themselves receptive to applied theatre's ethos of change. Rather than

fixing what they do, the practitioners were open to the possibility of what their work can be. What enriched them was also that which allowed for the work to be creative for the participants. This trope of open-ness informed my way of conceptualising the work. The article returns later to illuminate some of these patterns with material from the reflective dialogues.

PRACTICE RESPONSIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Naming the Practice and the Applied Theatre Practitioner

Recognising that practitioners work across locations and with a diversity of participant groups using many difference descriptive titles, the research was seeking to discover whether there were practices common to different contexts, such as drama in schools, education, work with the elderly, in health or care contexts and with communities such as prison or those with disability. Many of those researched move between locations of practice, adopting concerns and language of the context whilst maintaining aspects of their own practices and objectives. The naming of practitioners in applied theatre can provide both a clue, but also a barrier to the understanding of their expertise. Names are partially dependant on localised use, but a widely recognised list can include many labels: teaching artist, facilitator, animateur (in community arts), community director, participatory artist, actor/teacher (in Theatre in Education), workshop leader, conductor (in Playback Theatre), Joker (in Forum Theatre). Naming puts the focus on the practitioner, centring them at the heart of the practice, but I queried whether how they name themselves and what they are called by others fully communicates what they do.

The diversity of names for practitioners reflects the eclectic nature of applied theatre itself. Acknowledging the gathering of many types of practice, Michael Balfour (2009) questions any consistency of identity, describing applied theatre as ‘an ‘umbrella’ title that contains as many contradictions as it does commonalities’ (p. 348). The proliferation of labels for practitioners can be evidence of these ‘contradictions’. However, without proposing a wholly homogenous identity, my research suggested there are intersections of activity encompassed within the range of labels. It may be significant to understanding of the nature of these practitioners to ask why no single name for the practitioner has evolved as dominant. Those I researched welcomed a

focussed debate about identity in relation to their expertise. Interestingly, few used the term applied theatre and there was no conclusive common name in their own use of labels. I recognise that concerns about naming may be of greater interest to academics and researchers. Choice of nomenclature reflects discourses and an opportunity to deconstruct ideas. Debates around applied theatre, aesthetics, objectives and politics are tied up in the use of titles for practitioners.

Reflecting the disputed and diverse identity of applied theatre, differing titles are adopted in books significant in the initial establishment and formulation of the term of applied theatre. These include the following: 'teaching artist' (Taylor, 2003), 'facilitator' (Thompson and Schechner, 2004), 'practitioner' (Nicholson, 2005). More recent studies of practice use 'facilitator' as a default name of choice (e.g. Prendergast and Saxton, 2013, and Preston, 2016), although this potentially makes the role as artist less visible, as discussed further below. The researched practitioners used a range of self-labelling; some titles were dictated by a job description, for example, 'Director of Engagement'. Other names were externally ascribed by the many contexts within which they operated as free-lancers: for example, the same youth theatre drama leader was sometimes facilitating other community groups, also worked as a clown doctor in children's hospitals, as well as being a respected director and writer for professional contexts.

Some hybrid labels attempt to name key features of the role; in 'teaching artists', for example, Philip Taylor (2003) brings together two strong influences in a term that 'highlights the pedagogical function, which should drive the leaders' artistry' (p. 53). Along with Taylor's emphasis on artistry, I propose that a graft rather than hybrid image roots the practice in the art form. This avoids any dominance of the more instrumental aspects of the practice that can illicit criticism of over-emphasis on measurable outcomes and goal-focused artistic processes. The inclusion of 'artist' allows more interpretive leeway for understanding what the practitioner actually does and reflects an enduring concern for the aesthetics of practice.

In my research dialogues, knowledge of the art form was seen as an essential foundation to their successful operation as a practitioner and, for some, applied practice with communities was only one part of their working life in theatre. Jan Cohen-Cruz (2010) outlines,

What distinguishes engaged theatre from the mainstream is not lack of technique, which many performances that fit the engaged criteria have in abundance, but rather the artists' *actively committed relationship to the people* most affected by their subject matter. (p. 9, my italics)

I argue that practitioners are operating with particular expertise to distinguish this work from, for example, an artist who chooses to use participation as a feature of their practice. The applied theatre 'artist' is doing more, *is* more than just an artist, as Cohen-Cruz suggests in her discussion of (her preferred term of) engaged theatre. These are *responsive* artists; their expertise is specifically focused around the 'actively committed relationship' they dialogically nurture with participants. The quality of responsivity can distinguish definition of this type of work.

The ability to focus on and respond to the experience of the participants clearly distinguished the projects and practitioners in my research as applied theatre, contributing to my formulation of responsivity. Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton (2013) highlight participant needs when outlining a series of desirable qualities for an applied drama facilitator, concluding the list with 'the kind of person who... is able to "de – centre"; in other words to see the work as about and coming from the participants rather than from him/herself' (p. 5). This de-centring is a phenomenon that I have been exploring with evidence from a range of practices, informing my use of the concept of the underscore: '___'.

The Practitioner Conceptualised as '___'

In conceptual terms, the signifier often fails to convey the exact meaning of what it describes. No single one of the labels outlined above can alone encapsulate all the skills and activities of the practitioners and this has led to my substitution of a double underscore ('___') to represent the names of the practitioners in writing. The underscore, or ___, is proposed as an alternative, non-label, and a replacement for the multiple nomenclature and implications associated with existing names for the role. This concept of ___ is a temporary strategy to 'underscore' and hold in one place the identity of the practitioner. In using ___, I am contesting the fixed or certain meanings

of the names used for the work of applied theatre practitioners to further explore their expertise.

Theoretically, ___ opens up a potential interrogation of the subject. Jacques Derrida, within an essay in *On The Name* (1995), questions the connection between identity and what one is called, 'you *are* not your name, nor your title' (p. 12, italics in original). I utilise this notion of naming as a substitute for the being in my research. The meanings associated with naming the practitioner are destabilised and opened up to multiple interpretations and potential features within ___ as the new site of identity. This concept does not petition for one homogenised perception of practice through the substitute signifier of ___, but encourages a fresh viewing.

My analysis seeks to find detail in the common and draw interesting observations from evidence of the differences presented by the work explored. Exploring the nature of performance, Sarah Jane Bailes (2010) discusses 'an eradicable duplicity in live art practices, evidenced through theatre's materiality and its ambition: that it can at the same time both *be* and *not be* the thing it is portraying' (p. 10). The underscore serves as a performative way to allow analysis of the practitioner; my research hopes to reveal new ways of seeing the work of the ___s through them both *being and not-being* the thing that they are named as. The theatre practitioner, when 'applied', *responds* to each of the participants, is required to answer to the demands of stakeholders and context, be more than just an artist, all of which contributes to the role's performed identity as multiple, unfixed, responsive.

Proposing the practitioner as ___ allows us to interrogate what they represent when they are practicing. I return here to the voices of researched ___s to fill out notions of responsivity. The research asked the practitioners to reflect on how they saw themselves in the work, for example:

As an energy ball, I am giving out energy. That's my style, I am a heightened version of myself, [gesture] Ta dah! The way that I move and the way that I speak, I am performing a different version of myself and that is different whatever context I am in... sometimes standing back is the right energy. (Amy Golding)

The empty space of the underscore resonates with the responsive

nature that Golding discussed. This image is multi-faceted, ever-changing and 'performed' differently, as required, often making space for the performance of others by 'standing back'. Practitioners' commentaries illustrated facets of responsivity through a theme of openness, such as this description of:

Practitioners that are very comfortable with having their feet in many, many different worlds ... playing between the boundaries of providing structure but also areas of openness and being able to facilitate and negotiate that ... you would have to come in to this work because you believe in it. (Deborah Pakar-Hull)

The theme of 'openness' was valued here alongside the ability to structure work, and the work was signalled as attracting committed practitioners: 'you believe in it'. Openness was also highlighted within practitioners' concerns about planning and responding:

I find it much easier to be in the moment if I know I've got quite a clear plan or a set of activities and sometimes it's slightly about buying myself headspace because of course you can completely re-write a plan and take a totally different direction... I am interested in sharing my skills but I'm interested in creating structures for other people to be creative, seeing what journeys they might go on. (Annie Rigby)

Rigby's comments typically outline how planning (paradoxically) enabled the practitioners to be more open and responsive, illustrating the patterns I have highlighted as anticipation, adaptation and responsibility. She expressed a responsibility to prepare and lead, but also a desire to leave space for participants as an ethic for the work. A satisfaction was gained from *not* locking down the processes, thereby allowing for the interests and creativity of the participants. Further comments reflected on qualities that the work demanded:

An openness, just a complete clean slate. An openness that when you go into that room you sort of expect the unexpected and you're willing to go with that and play with that ... I think that's – for me – the most exciting thing about my kind of work and the people I work with. I think it keeps me alive, I think it keeps me

excited. (Pady O'Connor)

The potential for the facilitator also to be enriched and sustained by the work was evident, illustrating my proposal of a feature of responsibility as a motivator for the work. In his commentary Pady O'Connor valued an ability to be open about qualities needed in the role; he was open to growth and new knowledge in himself. Tim Wheeler articulated an important ethos of being open to possibility and the 'unknown':

We're made and informed by perspectives and concerns of the work, but the projects also have an element and feeling from the unknown. Unpredictability and being open to possibility; that's maybe an important element, that's part of an ethos of choices and decisions in the work. (Tim Wheeler)

Practitioners were open to applied theatre's ethos of change and discussed how they were richly rewarded. The ability to respond was embedded within their approaches and respond-ability discusses how their own openness to growth was an essential part of the work, and also that which provided the greatest rewards:

It re-arranges your insides a little bit and you have to just negotiate your way through the rest of the world. (Laura Lindow)

Actually the reason I've been doing it is because it feeds me, I feel a bit more connected to the world. (Annie Rigby)

I am fed. (Adrian Jackson)

Respond-ability is a way to conceptualize how a practitioner is nurtured. They value the experience of art, evidencing a synthesis of their own response and their artistic concerns. This is seen to increase purpose in the work and a fruitful experience for all:

I think everyone's developing, I'm developing myself in that moment, I'm developing *them* in that moment, 'cause otherwise it's not creative is it? (Juliet Forster)

Forster's comments here encourage a view of the practitioner as a

blend of both artist and facilitator. There are useful pedagogical implications arising from my proposal of respond-ability, concerning the education and training of future applied theatre practitioners who value the role of art within the work.

Discussing an aesthetic value for applied theatre, Gareth White (2015) highlights the contribution of layers of experience and a plurality of interpretation. He concludes, 'there is art in participation that invites people to experience themselves differently, reflexively and self-consciously, and that is shaped both by facilitating artists and by participants themselves' (p. 83). Reflective discussion of practitioner views of their work forms a vital part of this paper, seeking to explore how this 'art of participation' is managed.

Acknowledging the prioritization of participant focus, I suggest, however, that a facilitator does not have to be a selfless or invisible part of the creative process. Indeed, omitting the role and motivations of the artist in the formula for practice risks losing much of the possible value to the work as a whole. This type of artist, whatever they may be named, situates their self within the work in the same way they hope the participants also engage. Respond-ability can promote valuable outcomes and ensure the practitioner's own full engagement within a responsive medium. And the rewards for the practitioner can also lead to a greater enrichment of the participant experience, which is, after all, applied theatre's primary focus.

Drawing on research conversations and reflective dialogues with:

Luke Dickson, TIE actor, Leeds
Amy Golding, Live Youth Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne
Juliet Forster, York Theatre Royal
Adrian Jackson, Cardboard Citizens, London
Catrina McHugh, Open Clasp Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne
Pady O'Connor, The Fool Ensemble, Gateshead
Deborah Pakhar-Hull, Theatre Blah Blah Blah, Leeds
Annie Rigby, Unfolding Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne
Tim Wheeler, Mind The Gap, Bradford

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Making Theatre in Communities: A Search for Identity, Coherence, and Cohesion

JOHN SOMERS

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

ABSTRACT

Traditionally, theatre was created and performed in communities to celebrate religious and other significant aspects of shared community life. Many such customs possessed a quasi-religious identity in which theatre depictions were thought to appease those spiritual forces which controlled the lives and fortunes of mere humans. In the UK and the Western world more generally, the cohesiveness of community life has lessened as families become more self-sufficient. Until relatively recently, rural communities in South West England were dominated by the farming industry. The land of many farms has been merged and the farmhouses sold to relatively well-off incomers. They often operate a self-sufficient life, sending their children to private schools outside the community and engaging in leisure pursuits which take them out of the community in which they live. Thus, community cohesion is weakened and the opportunities for cooperative and communal action lessened. Theatre has the potential to bring disparate members of a community together in common purpose, providing a forum in which new and lasting relationships can be formed. If the dramatised stories

have their roots in the identity and history of the community in which they are made, long-term residents have ways of sharing their knowledge with the 'newcomers'.

Neither human existence nor individual liberty can be sustained for long outside the interdependent and overlapping communities to which we all belong. Nor can any community long survive unless its members dedicate some of their attention, energy and resources to shared projects. (Etzioni, 1997)

WHAT IS COMMUNITY THEATRE?

Community Theatre has a variety of roots and functions related to its cultural, social and political setting and its purpose in those specific environments. In some cases, it may be that community rituals and stories, often deeply embedded in cultural and/or religious traditions,¹ are performed as an integral part of defining and celebrating a community's cultural and spiritual identity. Some of the latter date back for many centuries but continue to be performed, although the theatre content has become objects of heritage rather than contemporary life. Other forms of Community Theatre have political intent, to inform and energise a community in bringing change or in asserting human rights, Theatre for Development in Africa for example² or Purna Chandra Rao's work in Hyderabad supporting peasants' land rights against rapacious landowners.³ It can also be dangerous. Rao's fellow-countryman, theatre activist Safdar Hashmi, was beaten to death while performing a street play *Halla Bol* during municipal elections in the Jhandapur Sahibabad area on January 1, 1989 (S. Pai, University of Delhi, personal communication, April 2008).⁴

Alternatively, the exciting work of 'Z Divadlo' in the small town of Zeleneč, Slovakia, combines amateur community actors with the expertise of a professional director, Jozef Bednárík. In Brazil, the

¹ The Oberammergau Passion play, for example.

² For example, see: Salhi, K. and Thiong'o, N. W. (Eds.). (1998). *African theatre for development: Art for self-determination*. Bristol: Intellect.

³ See Columbia.edu

⁴ See Rediff.com

theatre-making of Marcia Pompêo Nogueira (2006) and Beatrice Cabral resonates in communities, some of which are in danger of losing their cultural identity through the arrival of electricity and television. I have had the pleasure of working in both places with these people. The continuum stretches, therefore, from radical activist theatre to benign celebration. In this article, I focus on Community Theatre in rural contexts as I now practise mostly in a rural environment.

THEATRE FOR CHANGE

Radical theatre for change has an extensive history in the UK. Given the significant international demise of communism, most current authoritarian governments are of the political extreme right; consequently, many such theatre initiatives are situated in confirmed socialist ideology (McDonnell, 2006). John McGrath's work with 7:84 Theatre Company⁵ in Scotland is typified by the play '*The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil*' which toured to rural locations in Scotland broadcasting its protest against the exploitation of that country, especially its off-shore oil, by the English⁶. In addition to triggering societal change, there is also an intention to transform the nature of theatre itself. Baz Kershaw believes that:

Community Theatre is potentially a radicalising and energising force for effecting, if not a transformation of society, at least a model for the transformation of the theatre into a more genuinely popular and democratic art form. (Kershaw, 1992, p. 28)

Such direct political theatre diminished in the UK with the demise of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government of the 1980s, after which radical Community Theatre seemed to lose its wellspring, focus and target.

Whatever the source and form of Community Theatre, it is generally welcomed as a positive sign that a community is prepared to

⁵ The company's name based on the statistic that 7% of the world's population own 84% of the wealth.

⁶ See 784theatre.com and McGrath, J. (1981). *A good night out*. London: Methuen.

supplement the generally passive reception of stories available in multitude from the print and broadcast media with narratives which are made and performed within, by and to a specific community. In all cases, these forms of community theatre take account of the *particular histories* and *concerns* of the communities in which they are made and performed.

COMMUNITY THEATRE IN THE UK

In the UK, 'Community Theatre' now generally refers to a specific theatre form. Since Ann Jellicoe's theatre work in the 1970s which led to the formation of the *Colway Theatre Trust* in 1979, it has meant the creation of a theatre event that has relevance for the *particular community* in which it is created and performed, predominantly, by members of that community (Jellicoe, 1987). One objective is to extend participation beyond those who would normally be expected to engage in performance events. There is also an element of celebration of what it is to be part of a community. There are many roles that community members can take up, especially in the community-based research and creation of the drama content itself. As such it can be seen to differ substantially from the USA definition of 'Community Theatre', which can be characterised as the creation of performances, often of well-known plays, by a group of amateur enthusiasts, usually in a traditional theatre building and employing long-standing styles. In the UK, this form of theatre is known as 'Amateur Theatre' or 'Amateur Drama' and it is not what is being discussed here – except that a few amateur theatre companies do have relatively radical policies in originating and staging theatre.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF COMMUNITIES

In the space of sixty years, the fabric of rural English communities, and many others throughout Europe, has changed radically. These shifts have occurred due to several influences, among them:

- the changed nature of farming, leading to fewer people being employed in agriculture;
- the migration of the working classes to urban environments;

- ease of transport from rural to urban areas, the move to the countryside by the middle classes⁷;
- the decline of many of the rituals of country living which only made sense in a community of shared experience and interdependence;
- the impact of global cultural values;
- the impact of television, consumerism and the new technologies;
- the growth of excessive individualism (Etzioni, *op cit*). Some of these influences have had positive effects – young people's increased awareness of wider educational and occupational opportunities and life styles, for example, and the freeing up of restrictive social conventions which made rural communities uncomfortable for some who failed to 'conform'.

The decline of shared work, interdependency and significant, shared celebrations and rituals has led to the social fragmentation of rural communities. Physical proximity is not enough; people living in the same place geographically will not necessarily create the circumstances which can produce a 'community'.

A recent UK report shows that the economic and social background of rural dwellers disadvantages them in comparison with urban dwellers. For example, in rural areas, wages are 5% below the national average whilst house prices are 16% higher. The resulting disadvantage is particularly acute amongst the less prosperous, indigenous, working class members of the community who tend to move to urban areas where wages are higher and social; housing more plentiful (Commission for Rural Communities, 2008, p. 28). My Community Theatre work is mostly undertaken in South West England, and the report says:

Outside some parts of London, the most unaffordable areas are nearly all rural, with the South West showing as the 'worst' area for affordability. There is a consistent pattern...that areas with poor affordability also tend to have higher levels of inward

⁷ David Orr, Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation said in a press release, "Unless we act now, we will create a rural theme park, where only the very wealthy can live" (National Housing Federation. (July 25, 2006). [Rural housing crisis forces unprecedented alliance](#).

migration and high levels of homes that are sold for cash. (*Ibid*, p. 37)

Thus, inward migration of a middle-class nature is occurring in my locality whilst the less well off migrate to the towns. Those of the latter group who remain are subject to a range of disadvantages:

Disadvantage is likely to be multi-dimensional: not just about financial resources, but also about a range of factors that prevent a person from participating fully in society. (*Ibid*, p. 40)

THE LOSS OF SHARED STORY

One significant loss in current rural communities is the knowledge of community stories. Residents without access to these, often apparently inconsequential stories therefore lack a 'sense of place', a quality which is best achieved through absorbing the layered meanings accreted through centuries of, often oral, storytelling and shared experience. Such stories have no forum for being shared unless, as Etzioni says, members of a community 'dedicate some of their attention, energy and resources to shared projects.' In writing about memory, A. C. Grayling says:

...what makes a person the same person through life is the accumulating set of memories he carries with him. When these are lost, he ceases to be that person and becomes someone else, new and as, yet, unformed. (2001)

If we substitute 'community' for 'person', the statement still holds true, for if a community's collective memory is lost, it too must be reformed. Theatre can be an important approach in building this new community identity and can, through its research and performances, ensure its development is based firmly on elements of the past. Such theatre represents a dynamic exploration and presentation of the defining narratives of a community. There is evidence that communal activity is decreasing whilst isolated, individual action increases. This is borne out by Robert Putnam's analysis of the changes in community in the USA:

... the forms of participation that have withered most noticeably reflect organised activities at the community level Conversely, the activities ... that have declined most slowly are, for the most part, actions that one can undertake as an individual In other words, the more that my activities depend on the actions of others, the greater the drop-off in my participation. (2000, p. 44 - 45)

Another metaphor for 'newcomers' lack of knowledge of a community's past is that, if we regard the long-term history of a community as a story, unless newcomers make efforts to understand the community's past, they will be in possession of pages of a book which stand alone and do not have the preceding story sections. Thus, for example, it is difficult to work out if the statements on that page are sincere or simply intended by the speaker to deceive. Long-term residents who hold knowledge of the community's past may see the incomers as 'more educated' and in other ways disconnected from them; yet the 'locals' may hold knowledge of a community which is of great value in creating Community Theatre.

THE CONCEPT OF THEATRE AS COMMUNAL WORK

As previously mentioned, sixty years' ago, rural English communities were relatively closed and interdependent. At that time, the parish was a site for *work* with perhaps 90% of people employed in the community and only a small number of professionals venturing outside it. Currently, in Payhembury Parish where I live in England, it is probable that 90% of the working section of the population of 470 work outside the Parish which is seen simply as a place to *live*. Clubs, societies and more informal meeting points in the Parish are largely stratified by age criteria, reducing inter-generational contact.

I believe that theatre-making can be a challenge; not just dramatically, but in terms of the 'labour' needed to make it happen. I use it to create a communal focus in the Parish, a shared project that brings the disparate elements of the community together and generates social capital. This was when I arrived at the concept of 'theatre as communal work', a shared activity which counters 'excessive individualism' and brings disparate people together to discover and articulate the stories of the community within vertical

rather than horizontal age-related groupings.

PERCEIVED IMPACT

I have many testimonies from participants to bear out the positive outcomes which many experience having taken part in this form of theatre. More generally, it is clear that individuals who have been preoccupied with their careers and home life, find involvement in this theatre form and its creation from scratch, invigorating and enriching. This is particularly so with women who, having dedicated important energies to their paid work, domestic life and the creation of a 'family', rediscover their largely dormant creative urge and abilities. Several women of this nature have written proposals for new projects and in several cases, complete scripts or scenarios. Over three years, one retired policewoman who had never written a script before, researched the history of a local house from the 13th Century onwards and, with assistance, created scenarios for nine site-specific scenes. In several cases, those who journeyed to Payhembury to take part in projects have established theatre companies in their own communities. Numerous men who regarded drama-making as socially 'above them' have become and remain involved as they come to realise that their local knowledge is valued in such enterprises. Some dip in and out of projects, others are regular participants in workshops, creative meetings and productions. Several teenagers have followed drama degrees and the lead boy in the WW1 production has been accepted at and will attend RADA. At many levels and ways, Community Theatre has impacted on the community and individuals and families within it. Since its inception in 2000, thousands of audience members have witnessed the outcomes of our work.

Examples of the work referred to in this article can be seen at Tvctheatre.org. For further details of the work, please contact the author at the email address above.

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The Long Game: Progressing the Work from Thesis to Practice

LINDEN WILKINSON

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the evolution of significant findings made within the context of a doctoral research project and the structures that developed to share these findings through workshops for students and teachers. As the research concerned an 1838 Australian Aboriginal massacre and the construction of a memorial to commemorate this event one hundred and sixty-two years later, the aim of the project was to locate a reconciliation narrative. The project failed to do so, because ultimately in the words of the participants the memorial was seen as a beginning and not an ending.

Nevertheless this understanding did deliver powerful insights into the complex nature of reconciliation within a dominant settler culture. And it was felt that sharing these insights was worth pursuing.

Central to the doctoral research was the creation of a verbatim theatre play, therefore the workshops relied on drama techniques to establish through affect new ways of knowing shared history. However the execution of the content proved challenging. Because of the way settler history continues to be understood, engagement with the intellect via political correctness as opposed to the imagination was

problematic. The necessity of prioritizing the imagination became as much of a learning curve for workshop facilitators as workshop participants.

INTRODUCTION

This paper begins with a discussion focusing on the development of a cross-cultural verbatim play about an Australian Aboriginal massacre at Myall Creek and the building of a memorial one hundred and sixty-two years later to commemorate the atrocity. As a non-Aboriginal playwright and researcher I assumed at the outset that the memorial signified a story about closure. However the play, a doctoral project, failed to find a reconciliation narrative, as intended, but the research that contributed to the play's developmental process revealed there did exist a reconciliation preposition: the word 'with'. This discovery, the importance of the preposition 'with', resolved the thesis and arguably advanced a more accessible and therefore more powerful bridge-builder in the decolonizing space than the investigation of an existing story (Aigner et al, 2014; Wilkinson, 2014). Reconciliation cannot be just one story.

Because this discovery occurred through performance, a collaborative arts practice, the opportunity arose to construct and deliver a series of drama workshops for drama teachers and students. The workshops were designed to explore the reconciliatory possibilities suggested by the research findings and were to be delivered by myself in partnership with Drama Educator Hannah Brown. Therefore after addressing some pivotal moments in the journey towards the recognition of 'with' in the research field, this paper then considers the content, the intent and the efficacy of the workshops.

Finally this paper concludes with a reflection on those cautionary responses to the workshop exercises, which, when they did arise, in effect inhibited collaboration. Passivity fuelled by divergent interpretations of political correctness proved challenging, particularly when cognition was allowed to dominate affect and debate diffused the workshop exercises. The cross-cultural field in the colonizer/colonized context is undeniably one of confrontation but also one of humour and hope; it is, I suggest, the very lack of safety in this space that, with trust, speeds connectivity. The question this paper therefore considers

at its conclusion is how, as workshop facilitators, might we have delivered safety and thus maximised participation and the rewards from doing so.

But first an elaboration on the possibilities offered by that singular preposition with companionable intent: the word 'with'.

ALL THAT 'WITH' REVEALS

To work with each other, to be with each other, to learn with, to imagine a shared future with, to acknowledge a shared past with each other accentuates the importance of the transformative present and simplifies the collaborative imperative inherent in undertaking movement across cultures (Smith, 1999). 'With' encapsulates sharing on all levels and holding the word in conscious regard, I suggest, creates an equal space for diverse epistemologies. In practice however experiencing the transformative potential of 'with' is elusive and no doubt because of the way our Australian settler history is taught.

Despite being the oldest living culture on the planet, despite archaeological evidence estimating Aboriginal occupation to be of approximately 50,000 years' duration (Gammage, 2013), there is still no constitutional recognition in Australia that Aboriginal people were here prior to British settlement 1788. Proclaimed 'empty land' or terra nullius in 1770, Australia became subsumed by the British Empire as a bulwark against French expansion in the South Pacific. Critical to the terra nullius doctrine is an understanding that agriculture equates to ownership; it was imperative then to support the founding terra nullius myth by destroying or ignoring what is now recognised as deeply sophisticated land and fire management practices developed over millennia by Aboriginal people (Gammage, 2013; Pascoe, 2014).

The "disappearance" of 95% of the Aboriginal population in the first one hundred years of British occupation once fuelled a belief that the remaining 5% would similarly become invisible (Milroy, 2011). The guerrilla warfare that characterized frontier settlement, that challenges its legality spuriously based on the doctrine of terra nullius, was ignored in history. There might now be attempts to recognize this century of violence but there is little political will to address the true nature of Aboriginal dispossession.

There is still no treaty and although through the judiciary there are attempts to recognise land rights, as Reynolds (1999) maintains:

It is obvious that the doctrine of terra nullius still holds sway. It may have been expelled from the courts but it still resides securely in many hearts and minds. As a nation we find it very hard to recognise our own distinctive forms of racism. They exist in ... ways of thinking which are often taken as no more than common sense (1999, p. 222).

Becoming aware of this pervasive 'common sense' embedded in colonizer history was for me the first disruption to the anticipated narrative flow for the evolving play within my doctoral thesis. I wanted to focus on the memorial; I was looking for a story about reconciliation, I assumed that the massacre would be a significant but an inciting event. What the first draft performed reading of the play, detailed below, clarified for me as a researcher and as an arts practitioner was the difference between history as data and history as drama: history as it is taught and history as it is held in the body. Seeing my six actors, three Aboriginal and three non-Aboriginal, working with each other, focusing on text but through their bodies making sense of grief and guilt, through movement shifting uncomfortably in a relational space that reflected assumed privilege and profound injustice, changed my understandings of history and the process of enculturation through the dominant Western paradigm. And, consequently, changed the play. Scholarship supports this experience.

Inherent in performance ethnography, the primary research methodology employed in this study, is precisely this offer of the body as a research site. Scholar and arts practitioner Jones (2005) confirms that performance ethnography "rests on the idea that bodies harbour knowledge about culture, and that performance allows for the exchange of that knowledge across bodies." (2005, p.339) It is the body, according to Alexander (2005), which conveys the relationship between culture and how it is experienced. It is performance-centred research, which "takes as both its subject matter and method the experiencing body situated in time, place and history." (Conquergood, 1991, p.187)

Having Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal actors together, I discovered, powerfully symbolised the history of dispossession. The drama began in the massacre but once introduced it remained omnipresent; in the play the memorial is a consequence of the

massacre but it is not a conclusion to the play's story; if anything, it is a call to consciousness.

WAKING UP TO HISTORY

My doctoral play, *Today We're Alive*, was first read publicly at Myall Creek on a Sunday morning in 2011 in an isolated tin shed situated in north-west NSW, thirty-five kilometres from the tiny township of Bingara and over six hundred kilometres from Sydney. The tin shed has great community significance: it is the memorial hall built in 1923 on the banks of Myall Creek and it is dedicated to the local men of another century, who never returned from World War 1.

Just five hundred metres away from the memorial hall, the memorial to the Myall Creek massacre of 1838 snakes its way along a ridge. The massacre, the slaughter of twenty-eight Weraeraï old men, women and children, is said to have taken place on the slopes below. It is the only Aboriginal massacre in Australian history where some but not all of the perpetrators were punished. Eleven of the twelve perpetrators were arrested and seven of those were hanged; the four who survived custody were released quietly back into society two months after the hangings, so great was the uproar caused by the unique judgement that called for white lives for black deaths.

All subsequent massacres went underground and despite the existence of court records, it took over one hundred and sixty years for this massacre site to be openly recognised. The committee of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members, who created this memorial over an eighteen-months' period from 1998 to 2000 remain passionate about its significance and its contribution to the national psyche.

The doctoral play was, and remains, verbatim text derived from interviews with twenty Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, most of whom are still committee members. The play's story, in this first draft, arced from first contact in 1788 to the first commemorative service at the memorial in 2000. The words of the play text faithfully conveyed different versions of events but through performance it became clear not all events had equal, linear, causal significance. For this first reading the performers embodied culture not characters; with occasional exceptions when documentary tracts were included, the voices of the actors were the voices of the characters. Despite being buried in the data the brutal truth of colonization emerged during this

first reading, particularly during the massacre sequence as it was told from the Aboriginal point of view and through this, the past became present in the now.

TRAUMA SITES AND LIVING HISTORY

As Edkins (2003) argues we must accept that sites where atrocities have occurred will always exist in trauma time, where stories are truly heard and the resonances from the past resound in the present. At such places there is no resolution, no closure, because the multiple narratives they evoke challenge inherited identity of both colonizer and colonized. If we are, as either the colonizers or the colonized, to see ourselves in new ways (Saul, 2008), to forge new realities, if we are to remain open to different perspectives, then, as Edkins (2003) contends, we must resist wanting to resolve the past.

At this first performed reading the actors struggled to find a rhythm within a confusingly over-written text; the nature of first contact, the wool boom, the power of the squatters, the arrests of the perpetrators, the trails of the accused threatened to overwhelm the significant content distilled from the research field – principally the on-going terror for Aboriginal people as a result colonizer violence.

And yet the performance also elicited hope. The massacre might have dominated the play's story but it was the memorial story that generated a new momentum. When two of the central players in the memorial story came together, when "Letitia"⁸, a descendant of a massacre perpetrator, met "Sally", a descendant of a massacre survivor and the Kamilaroi Elder, who initiated the memorial at Myall Creek, 'not one person didn't cry'. What was true at their first meeting in 1999, was equally true for its re-enactment at the memorial hall. Tears of grief came during the massacre sequence and tears recurred, this time of joy, during "Letitia's" and "Sally's" embrace, making this moment an epiphany for actors and audience alike. In the first draft Rhonda is reading "Sally" and Anna is reading "Letitia"; Gen, non-Aboriginal, and Lily, Aboriginal, comment on the embrace. In this first draft this moment became:

⁸ "Letitia" and "Sally" are not the research participants' real names. As an undertaking for research purposes, their privacy was protected. However in the script extracts included in this paper the actors' real names are used, as the script at this early point did not have characters.

Rhonda stands, followed by the rest of the cast. Slowly Rhonda reaches out to embrace Anna.

Gen: *When Letitia met Sally not one person didn't cry.*

Anna: *Sally and I, we became very emotional. It was very emotional.*

Rhonda: *The families of the perpetrators came and asked forgiveness.*

Anna: *Sally told me when we were alone, she said: I've never had a sister but I consider you now my blood sister. So that was special; that was really special.*

Lily: *You know, you don't expect things to be done for Aboriginal people.*

Anna: *Somebody said it must have been very cathartic for you, but not really, no. My family broke up over it. They wouldn't accept it. They didn't want people to know they were descended from a murderer...My first response was I didn't want to know, it was shameful but I knew I couldn't let it alone. There was something in me that had to do something about it. I did feel that very, very strongly.*

Rhonda: *I think there was a reconciliation there.*

Lily: *So what I thought when Sally hugged Letitia was like the occupants of the house, the descendants, the ones who we'd come in and done a home invasion on actually in that embrace was like reconnecting with the land. It's like through that embrace, it's like through that, connection and belonging to Australia is really established. And it can only be done through Aboriginal people.*

Rhonda: *And it all just come together.*

The embrace is still part of the annual commemorative service held at the memorial each massacre anniversary on or near June 10th. The embrace remained through subsequent drafts and is a cathartic moment in the final version of the play. A short promotional film clip of the play includes the embrace and can be viewed [here](#).

After a successful tour in 2013 and the play's publication in 2014 (Playlab, 2014), the idea of developing a three-stage workshop aimed at introducing workshop participants to a reconciliatory experience gained momentum.

THE EVOLVING WORKSHOP

Mapping the workshop content reflected my own post-doctorate understanding of reconciliation as a gradual process of increasing awareness. This accelerating awareness led to a capacity to adapt, to transform and could only be achieved by consciously entering the shared space knowing one's own inherited perspective, in my case non-Aboriginal, while simultaneously recognising departure points in terms of an Aboriginal perspective. Furthermore, as neither culture is static, both perspectives are subject to change; the pathways along which change occurs may not be predictable. Therefore to fully understand another's culture at any point in time, one first has to understand one's own.

Indigenous scholars identify such critical thinking as an essential requirement for those entering the cross-cultural arena, as in this space problematizing the dominance of Western epistemology is an imperative (Smith, 1999; Chilisa, 2013). But to initiate this awareness of multiple perspectives in a workshop scenario, when participants could quite easily have never met anyone, who identified as Aboriginal, was the first challenge. The cross-cultural space, it was decided, would have to be manufactured through a brief exploration of vulnerability and resilience, rather than race alone. If we could locate an empathic response at the outset using drama techniques, we, Hannah, my workshop collaborator, and I, felt we could continue to use different sections of the play, *Today We're Alive*, to enable individual responses to a reconciliatory experience through the emotional and relational opportunities offered by the performative.

The workshop we designed takes ninety minutes and has three separate modules. The aims of these modules are:

- to illuminate the divisive imperative embedded in colonization,
- to nurture a dialogue with the internal critic
- to offer an opportunity to critically pursue a cross-cultural collaboration in order to commence a shared artistic endeavour.

It is hoped that through reflection and through feedback the participants can become sensitized to on-going racism and how they might potentially create new insights into their own understandings of emergent reconciliatory initiatives.

We begin with a brief outline of the Myall Creek massacre and memorial, then referring back to Reynolds' (1999) observation that we don't necessarily recognise our own distinctive forms of racism, we introduce a personal story about racism through filmed content. The personal story belongs to a friend and colleague, Aboriginal actor, singer and songwriter Elaine Crombie, and it concerns a particular episode in her life, when at sixteen she was ridiculed at a party by an older non-Aboriginal boy she assumed was her friend. Involving betrayal, humiliation and racist slurs in regard to alcohol abuse, she still carries the emotional scars of the sudden and unmotivated attack. With her consent, we filmed her telling this story and interspersed that footage with sequences of her performing her own music at a concert. Her music manifests spirit and joy, her story about the boy demonstrates chronic pain; in entwining these two aspects of Elaine, her songs and her story, she offers insight into a universal narrative about resilience. It is Elaine's story about racism that we invite the workshop participants to interpret through a series of three freeze frames.

We ask our participants in groups to depict the origins of the young man's attitudes towards Aboriginal people. Media, family and history text books are popular choices. Participants are then asked to create a freeze-frame involving young man himself. Let's call him "Damo". The task is to redeem him; we ask: what might subvert this racist stereotype? We ask the participants to present a final freeze frame with a caption. Sporting prowess, achievement and leadership featured as redeeming agents. Participants therefore complete this exercise having expressed through the body aspects of dominant culture, marginalised culture and the possibilities offered by

instruments of inclusion.

The second exercise involves a verbatim speech from *Today We're Alive*, a story about an experience of Aboriginal spirituality from the perspective of a non-Aboriginal man. It happens to be a beautiful speech, rich in hesitation, filled with awe. Participants are grouped in pairs and are invited to re-interpret this speech, filling in the hesitations with internal dialogue. This exercise reflects those learnings from the research field, which convey new understandings about the relationship between the spoken word and silence in mapping cultural change. Articulating what is unspoken opens participants up to the possibilities of uncertainty as being a site of transformation; discoveries made in this exercise, experienced as shifts in body language, in facial expression, in breathing, flow into the workshop's conclusion.

The final exercise involves using verbatim text, interwoven as a dialogue, which has been taken from the play and adapted for the exercise. "Jayson" is an Aboriginal artist, "Peggy" a non-Aboriginal activist and both want to build a memorial but at the scene's opening neither of them are looking for partnership with each other:

Peggy: So here I am surrounded by memorials to dead white men but nothing to Aboriginal people... And I thought I can't get anywhere with this. I don't know if I have the energy, the resources, the time, I don't know if I should be doing it, I'm not Aboriginal – so I left it.

Jayson: You walk away. Close the door. But in their absence you're glad to get away from those eyes. Eh? Those eyes – watching.

Peggy: It's not my place to be doing this.

Jayson: I think a memorial would be great. It's great. To think that it might be there to recognize the fact that those people were massacred, right? But it doesn't take away the fact that they were.

Peggy: A rock. A boulder. As simple as possible.

Jayson: As simple as possible – with maximum impact.

Peggy: With maximum impact.

Jayson: I want the privilege and honour of doing it.

Peggy: And it all just took off from there.

We ask that the participants determine prior to performing the scene exactly when and why, as characters, they each decide to work with each other. We then invite the workshop 'audience' to comment on the transformative changes they noticed.

It is with the first and third exercises that we have occasionally met resistance in the workshop environment. In the first exercise involving freeze-frames there can be an unwillingness to portray stereotypes in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. In the third exercise, reconciliatory outcomes can be too easily demonstrated rather than experienced and participants are unable to articulate when the idea of working together becomes a possibility. A return to respecting the drama aesthetic and its integral contribution to the transformative potential of performance, I suggest, could solve both these difficulties.

Theatre-makers in zones of conflict, Cohen, Varea and Walker (2011), refer to their aesthetic as the resonant interplay between the expressive forms of culture and those who participate in them. White (2015) concludes in his discussion of applied theatre aesthetics that there is an art in participation itself, "which invites people to experience themselves differently, reflexively and self-consciously." (2015, p. 83)

If we had introduced Elaine's antagonist, "Damo", into all the freeze-frames, rather than just the fourth one, we would have enabled workshop participants to create stereotypes through assumed knowledge of "Damo's" world and not directly reveal anything of themselves. And we would have prioritised the collective imagination through the invention of character.

Similarly, in the third exercise, we did not allow our workshop participants to actually imagine the world 'Peggy' and 'Jayson' might have inhabited. Where did these two disparate characters, both artists, overlap? What would their memorial have been like? If we had allowed time for our two characters to physically design their own memorial, we would have, through their shared imagination, given all workshop participants greater insight into both the nature of resistance and the steps they took, as characters, towards acceptance of self and of

other.

Eager to pursue an outcome, we forgot that in trauma time there is no closure; that reconciliation is a process. And it is through time, through relationship and through the shared imagination in the cross-cultural space that we find new ways of knowing.

CONCLUSION

What the workshops reveal is the challenge embedded in initiatives that have a reconciliatory intent, where judgement, unexpressed anger, unexamined arrogance and determined detachment can co-exist with an expressed awareness of injustice and inequality. In terms of attitudes and behaviours there could well be examined and unexamined aspects of ourselves operating simultaneously. “Letitia” might say: ‘There was something in me that had to do something about it’ but in practice not everyone responds to the call in the same way.

What we discovered in the workshops is that creating a sense of safety, where participants were free to express themselves through a commitment to the tasks, does not reside in words. Our instructions as facilitators, our reassurances, our shared dialogue with participants did not always guarantee commitment. Safety, like trust, it seems, stems from being given the freedom to imagine interior and exterior worlds and the time to create them. On reflection, we recognise that there are multiple possibilities influencing reconciliatory initiatives; part of the reconciliatory process might well be a simultaneous reconciliation with our divided selves. Because no-one starts as neutral.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

After a three decade-long career as a performer and television writer and editor, Linden Wilkinson returned to Sydney University in 2003 to attain a Drama teaching diploma. She completed her Master's degree in 2008 using verbatim theatre as a research modality to investigate long term trauma and commenced her doctoral study in that same year. Now published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2016), her doctoral thesis again uses verbatim theatre to explore cross-cultural content in the Australian context. She is an independent arts practitioner and teacher and is currently developing a performance project about military personnel transitioning out of the Australian Army.

Discovering a Planet of Inclusion: Drama for Life-Skills in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the on-going development of a Drama for Life-Skills project in Lagos, Nigeria, which embraces aspects of applied & educational theatre practices. Using neurodevelopmental disability assessments and standards, the project creates a simultaneous balance of teaching and learning life skills in the disability community. It focuses on work currently being done with students of the Children's Development Centre Lagos, incorporating theatre practices into the daily living activities of adolescents with disabilities with the goal of gaining increased life skills. In developing their most recent production, Discovering a Planet of Inclusion, members of the Centre team up with teaching artists, therapists and community members to teach, learn, practice and incorporate life skills with theatrical performances designed for schools and community centers throughout Nigeria. Company members with disabilities (including autism, cerebral palsy, and various genetic disorders) perform with the hope of showcasing their abilities, ending stigma, and inspiring opportunities for the disability community throughout the nation. The paper will include

anecdotes and analyzation from the performance praxis, development of advocacy and vocationally-based theatre performances, and ways to incorporate disability therapies (occupational, physical, multisensory, communication) into theatrical performances. The paper also discusses the importance of inclusion in destigmatizing disability and the cognitive benefits of applied theatre within communities.

The sun stabs through the open windows of a large community center; the air is stale, humid and filled with scents of petrol, exhaust and the sweat of the 300 or so people crammed inside its doors. Outside, the Islamic *Call to Prayer* beacons from the patch of concrete being used as a makeshift mosque, while sounds of a sermon are garbled deafeningly through the amplifier of a Pentecostal church across the street. The community center is surrounded by traffic “go-slows” (traffic jams), with buses stuffed to capacity by people and goods to sell at the nearby market. Hundreds, if not thousands of drivers, honking horns or yelling out of the windows mix with the sounds of street vendors hawking their wares in a multitude of languages: English, Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa and a mix of Pidgin. Children in wheelchairs or homemade scooters tap on the car windows, begging for food or money; they are patently ignored or worse, berated. There are people everywhere. This is Lagos. This is Nigeria.

The crowd inside the community center sweats patiently as a father pontificates on the stigma of disability and lists all the things his son cannot do. Suddenly, a blur of cell phones are raised and aimed at 5 Nigerian astronauts, donned in green and white papier-mâché helmets, as they take the stage. The crowd goes wild: cheering and yelling as the astronauts begin to train using physical therapy exercises. The audience stands and sings along with the national anthem before the astronauts ready for their first countdown to blast-off. Three galaxies, dressed in black capes decked with stars, dance and parade planet-lanterns as the astronauts leave earth and discover a new planet: the Planet of Inclusion. The crowd cheers as the Nigerian flag is wedged into the sand, and screams with laughter as mysterious space creatures surprise the brave astronauts. The space creatures are familiar, dressed in colorful Nigerian *ankara* fabric but have a surplus of extra arms, legs, mouths and eyes. The astronauts are afraid at first, but show compassion to the space creatures and

soon the whole group is drumming, dancing, teaching each other to cook, paint, clean or make beads. The audience is shocked; not because of the extraterrestrial experience in front of them, but because they have not seen an astronaut with Autism Spectrum Disorder teach someone how to cook. Nor has a space creature with Down Syndrome graced the stage with such incredible dance moves while an astronaut, whose family believes she cannot speak, sings with heart and soul over the cacophony of noise surrounding the community center. The first performance of the Children's Developmental Centre's *Planet of Inclusion* ends with a standing ovation.

The response of families, teachers and advocates after the first performance is not typical in Nigeria. People with disabilities are stigmatized, feared, and often kept separate from mainstream society. The stigma of disability in Nigeria creates fear and misunderstanding due to cultural and religious beliefs of sin, witchcraft and shame. Therapist Maureen Chubamachie explains Nigerian stigma surrounding disability: "To the elite, it is biological, genetic, but to the common Nigerians, the masses, it is a curse, it is evil, it is punishment for the sins of the parents or ancestors. It is believed that they bring bad luck" (2016). In the commotion following the first performance, a mother asks, "what juju [witchcraft] have you used to cure my child?"

WHAT IS DRAMA FOR LIFE-SKILLS?

Drama for Life-Skills is an arts-based program that uses task-assessment and drama to teach and reinforce life skills while promoting advocacy, vocational training and independent living for adolescents and young adults with neurodevelopmental disabilities. It began with a focus on how to teach specific skills for living (such as cooking a meal, brushing your teeth, or asking for help), and follows Boal concepts of solidary multiplication, or "one only learns when one teaches" (Boal, 2006, p. 51). Students first learn life skills tasks structured around cognitive assessment tools; upon mastery of each task, the student then uses drama to model and teach other students the task. The company of performers with disabilities then works through the *dramatic process* to create a *theatre performance* around the set of skills being learned, and creates a drama incorporating each task. The performance of such a task-guided theatre performance is then used to teach peers, families, and communities about the abilities

of the performance company.

Drama for Life-Skills overlaps methods of teaching life skills to special needs populations, including applied and educational theatre praxis and disability arts performance, without specifically fitting into any precise category. Though the foundation of Drama for Life-Skills is heavily weighted in Boal, there are many influences from Applied Theatre and the Disability Arts Movement. It is important to acknowledge areas of resonance and divergence within each method. With this in mind, it is essential to stipulate three critical aspects of Drama for Life-Skills: neurodevelopmental disorders, a definition of life skills, and task analysis.

ASTRONAUT TRAINING: SPECIAL EDUCATION, LIFE-SKILLS, AND TASK ANALYSIS

The five brave Nigerian astronauts are members of the adolescent and adult unit at the Children's Development Centre (CDC), founded by Dr. Yinka Akindadayomi. It is one of just a handful of Nigerian institutions where children and young people with neurodevelopmental disabilities have a sense of belonging, as the Nigerian culture often shuns those with disabilities. The adult and adolescent unit of the CDC currently consists of 35 members between the ages of 16-48, all with varying degrees and spectrums of disabilities, most falling within the realm of neurodevelopmental disorders. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition* (DSM-5) groups neurodevelopmental disorders as those that "manifest early in development...characterized by developmental deficits that produce impairments of personal, social, academic or occupational functioning." Disabilities that fall into this category include but are not limited to: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Attention Deficit Disorder, genetic disorders, intellectual disabilities and motor disorders (Porter 2016). Neurodevelopmental disorders are spectrum disorders, wherein what applies to one learner, may (but usually will not) apply to another with the same diagnosis. For the purpose of this paper, the term neurodevelopmental disorders/disabilities and special needs are used interchangeably. The CDC, as one of few special education centers, has a vision focused on the creation of centers in more local government areas and other states within Nigeria. Due to the huge gaps identified in providing appropriate services to children and young

people with neurodevelopmental disabilities in Nigerian communities, the CDC also trains teachers and therapists in special education methodology and assessments (Akindayomi, 2016).

The CDC uses a life skills curriculum, in addition to a variety of physical and occupational therapies to train and teach learners at the center. Life skills evaluation is used to benchmark and determine skills needed to live inclusively, ideally independently, in mainstream society. Skills include the activities of daily living such as eating, grooming, community engagement, vocational skills, social skills, self-advocacy and communication. Life skills curriculums have proven successful in developing positive skills proficiencies for learners with neurodevelopmental disorders (Meyers, 2011; Benz & Linstrom, 2003). In order to structure educational outcomes, the CDC engages with theories of task-analysis, as defined by Szidon (2010), and Partington and Muller (2012) as the process of breaking a skill down into smaller, more manageable components. Task-analysis has been shown to effectively aid learners with neurodevelopmental disorders in acquiring life skills (Szidon, 2010; Autism Speaks, 2013). In order to track progress, guide and document the mastery of life skills through task analysis for learners with neurodevelopmental disabilities, the CDC uses the *Assessment for Functional Life Skills* created by Partington and Muller (2012).

The *Assessment for Functional Living Skills*, referred as *AFLS*, is an “assessment tool based on a criterion-referenced set of skills that can demonstrate a learner’s current functional skill repertoire and provide tracking information for the progressive development of these skills” (Partington & Muller, 2012). It was developed by psychologists and applied behavior analysts in order to efficiently document and streamline life skills development. Each learner works individually with a teacher or therapist to master these tasks using physical, imitative, and verbal prompts with the goal of independent comprehension. Task-Analysis is used to break each skill into a series of steps and behaviors tracked by the teacher/therapist. Therapists and/or teachers use task analysis checklists to breakdown and document each skill, and how they are prompted or achieved. To clarify, the *AFLS* below is an example of a task analysis of taking a bath from the *AFLS* (Partington & Muller, 2012, p. 20):

Task Analysis of Taking a Bath

Student: _____ Task Analysis Skill: _____

Objective: Able to independently take a bath

+= independent

V=verbal prompt

I=Imitative prompt

G= Gesture

PP= Partial physical prompt

FP= Full physical prompt

Step	Behavior	Date:						
1	Take pajamas to bathroom							
2	Close the drain							
3	Turn on water							
4	Adjust water to reasonable temperature							
5	Fill water to appropriate height							
6	Remove clothing							
7	Get into tub							
8	Wet entire body							
9	Pour shampoo into hand							
10	Apply shampoo to hair							
11	Rinse shampoo from hair							
12	Apply soap to washcloth							
13	Rub body with soapy washcloth							
14	Rinse soap off entire body							
15	Open drain							
16	Get out of tub							
17	Dry entire body with towel							
18	Hang up towel							
19	Put on pajamas							
20	Put dirty clothes in hamper							
SUM of Independent responses								
% Independent								

Assessment for Functional Living Skills (Partington & Muller, pg. 50, 2012)

Training teachers and therapists at the CDC in life skills curriculums, task analysis and implementing documentation and assessments through *AFLS* led to the creation of a drama intervention process: Drama for Life-Skills.

COUNTDOWN TO BLAST OFF: ASSESSMENTS AND THEORY LEAD TO DRAMA FOR LIFE-SKILLS

With great anticipation, the brave Nigerian astronauts build a space craft to support their adventure, then *countdown to blast off* into a world of the unknown. This metaphor could also be applied to the CDC's implementation of the *AFLS* curriculum with the Adult and Adolescent unit: teachers and therapists *count down* steps of a task analysis, with hopes of *blasting off* into the unknown world of independence and life skill mastery. Unfortunately, unlike the success of the astronauts, the repetition of behaviors and steps during task analysis soon proved to be frustrating for both learners and facilitators. Learners were bored, teachers were bored and instead of *blasting off*, the repetitive process of learning led to burnout. Therapists and teachers continued to slog through task analysis, documenting by using Partington & Muller's prompting guidelines with physical, imitative and verbal prompts and gestures. The burnout and the repetitive scenes of prompting students through skills development sparked the idea of incorporating drama process into the educational praxis.

Educational drama researchers and theorists have observed ways to teach through drama with special needs learners that align with Drama for Life-Skills task assessment approach. Ann Cattanach describes a drama process with special needs learners as a "tasks and skills model" (1996, p. 76) for general social skills and particular tasks. McCurrach & Darnley discuss how drama games and activities used in repetition can be used to develop a performance. They also observe that some actors with learning or neurodevelopmental disabilities "find focusing on a task much easier than others, so clear explanations, patience and repetition are always of paramount importance in tackling any game, or indeed rehearsal" (1999, p. 37). Sheratt & Peter encourage teachers to use drama with special needs students by incorporating existing knowledge and drawing upon practical skills in tasks that are directly within their experience and capabilities (2002).

To keep each task analysis fresh, we began to incorporate imagination and play into our repetitive practice. A student completing vocational task analysis of baking a cake might complete the steps alone with some prompting. Then repeat the task, guided by teachers and therapists, pretending to be on a boat with friends, or baking a cake for her sister's wedding. The idea of incorporating play and role-play into learning is critical in educational drama-in-education praxis for learners with special needs (Kempe, 1996; Cattanach, 1996; Jennings, 1990; Ramamoorthi & Nelson, 2011; Sherrat & Peter, 2002; Peter, 1995). We began to "differentiate instruction," as described by Carol Ann Tomlinson (2014), modifying the ways we taught task steps and behaviors and teaching each chore in a variety of ways. We wrote songs about each step of a task; we created dance moves for each step; we drew or took pictures of each step; we made each task into game. Ideologies of educational drama (such as the work of Heathcote, O'Neill, and Neelands) outline a variety of exercises and techniques to enhance learning through dramatic process, but for the sake of brevity, this paper will focus on theorists that specifically focus on disability and special needs. It is with the differentiated instruction—the addition of roles, games, songs, and movement—students and facilitators began enjoying the lessons more when the focus wasn't only on checking the boxes but on applying the experience to real or imagined scenarios.

Individuals began collaborating on their task analysis: once mastery of a task was completed individually, groups would form to complete the task together. Students who required additional assistance worked within their group to find success. This peer-mentoring allowed for all students to be independent of teachers and therapists (Kempe & Tissot, 2012). Additional support systems were included to allow all students access to the dramatic process including modifications, visual cues, side-coaching, prompting, group work, imitation, multisensory exercises and addition of props and costumes (Kempe, 1996; Cattanach, 1996; McCurrach & Darnley, 1999; Bailey, 2010; Sheratt & Peter, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2016; Peter, 1995; Ramamoorthi & Nelson, 2011). Each groups' task analysis performance became more complex; they began to reflect the strengths and abilities of each individual.

Eventually, for positive reinforcement, we began to take groups into the school and preschool units of the Centre to perform their task

analysis scenes. In these instances, we were able to establish our interpretation of Boal's concept of *solidary multiplication*, "each group will have to organize other small groups to which they can transmit the learning, following the notion that *one only learns when one teaches*, in the quest of the *Multiplicatory Effect*" (Boal, 2006, p. 51). A group of adolescents combined their task analysis of baking a cake; they learned a song of the steps, created a dance, a pantomime of selling and eating the cake and developed a storyline around the birthday celebration of a favored cartoon character. This scene was then performed for the school unit; post-performance, the school age children were excitedly included in the imaginary cake baking process. Each member of the adolescent group then began teaching a school child, one-on-one, the steps and behaviors in the task analysis of baking a cake, just as their teachers and therapists had done for them.

LANDING ON THE *PLANET OF INCLUSION* AND THE ON-GOING WORK IN DRAMA FOR LIFE-SKILLS

Task analysis scenes became more and more performance-based, and with the rehearsal of the dramatic interpretation of each *AFLS* task, members of the adult unit became encouraged to complete more tasks. The first opportunity to share our learning and teaching abilities with the community culminated with the creation and performance of *The Planet of Inclusion*. Educational drama theorists emphasize repetition of exercises and building performances slowly, broken into small achievable steps, to structure and reinforce skill mastery (Cattanach, 1996; McCurrach & Darnley, 1999; Bailey, 2010; Sheratt & Peter, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2016; Peter, 1995; Ramamoorthi & Nelson, 2011).

The task-based theatre performance, devised through the drama process, focuses on the talents and abilities of each individual performer (see Tomlinson, 1982; Kempe, 2010; Bailey, 2010; McCurrach & Darnley, 1999) and emphasizes "possibilities, rather than limitations" (Lipkin & Fox, 2001, p. 129). This subsequently creates a "multidisciplinary piece" (Lipkin & Fox, 2001, p. 124) served by a "rich eclecticism" (Hargraves, 2015, p. 229). The "episodic nature of the piece, and its reliance on movement, music, and constant shifts between the types of dialogue and teamwork occurring has Brechtian underpinnings, with a similar bow towards the audience" (Lipkin & Fox,

2001, p. 131). The performance is created to involve the community at large (McCurrach & Darnley, 1999; Lipkin & Fox, 2001) and with each performance and post-performance student-teaching-student experience, confidence and task mastery began to increase in all units of the CDC.

SPACE CREATURES & ASTRONAUTS: DIFFERING CONTEXTS WORKING TOGETHER

The brave Nigerian astronauts first were afraid of the space creatures because they came from *different contexts*; they looked and acted differently from them. When they began to work together, teaching each other, they realized they enjoyed many of the same things. The skills the space creatures and astronauts teach each other in the performance are indicative of Drama for Life-Skills focus on tangible tasks for vocational and independent living. An increasing number of studies are examining theatre intervention for the development of social-emotional skills for autism and neurodevelopmental disorders (Lipkin & Fox, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2016; Corbett et. al., 2010; Ramamoorthi & Nelson, 2011; Jindal-Snape & Vertraino, 2007). These studies correlate similar findings in the increased development of intangible life skills such as communication, confidence, and social interaction. Specific studies also detail enhanced social skills, such as vocational training (Ramamorrthi & Nelson, 2001), problem-solving, risk taking (O'Sullivan, 2016). The findings and theories, generated by drama intervention, are based in western perspectives; the theorists and researchers only conducting work in North America and western Europe. In these cultures, schools and programs based on theory are conducted in inclusive settings, combining mainstream students with students with disabilities, and supported by government mandated laws and special needs curriculums. Play is the instigating force for western drama in education processes (Cattanach, 1996; Kempe, 1996; Jennings, 1990), but in the Nigerian context, the tangible life skills tasks initiate the drama process and the ability to play. The context for Drama for Life-Skills differs due to stigma, non-inclusive education practices (students are isolated in special needs only schools), and underdeveloped disability laws and protections. Though skills are developed in both areas (tangible & intangible), it is the task development that teaches drama as opposed to the drama that

teaches tasks for Drama for Life-Skills.

Another set of contexts Drama for Life-Skills negotiates is between the arts-based drama process and the clinical implementation and documentation of the *AFLS*. The assessment allows structure and goalsetting to guide the drama process, and elicits the scientific data to substantiate claims of increased life skill mastery. Jindial-Snape & Verttraino recognize a number of studies in drama process for social-emotional development with special needs, but find that though most studies “add to the body of knowledge around this and the strategies that can be used, most author/s have not provided enough evidence to substantiate their claims” (2007, p. 115). Using *AFLS assessment*, Drama for Life-Skills is navigating ways to document evidence to support these claims, as well as the success and challenges for each individual participant.

A third set of contexts negotiated by Drama for Life-Skills is the drama-based process versus the culminating theatre performance. Currently, the work focuses on the process of drama as a combination of applied theatre, educational theatre and special education teaching methodology. But we are on the cusp of developing full-fledge theatre performance productions. The future work of Drama for Life-Skills will need to investigate how the drama process could lead to the creation of disability theatre, described by Johnson as “artists with disabilities who pursue an activist perspective, dismantling stereotypes, challenging stigma, and reimagining disability as a valued human condition” (2012, p. 5).

DISCOVERING A PLANET OF INCLUSION: CONCLUSIONS AND NEED FOR CONTINUED RESEARCH

In the commotion following the first community performance, a mother asks, “what juju [witchcraft] have you used to cure my child?” Teachers and therapists respond with attempts to explain how the passions and interests of each student creates the performance. They explain how her daughter is one of the best teachers in the class, an amazingly passionate performer, and how grateful they are that she shares her talents and abilities. “Ah-ah, no, my daughter has no speech,” her mother replies. Her daughter, one of the astronauts, sang proud and passionately and was the only astronaut to articulate each of the narration lines; she truly shined on stage. A teacher looks to her

student standing next to her mother, and asks her to tell her mom about how the drama was practiced. There is only silence and nodding of her head. It appears that the brave, beautiful astronaut is no longer verbal and obviously uncomfortable with the present conversation. Our work is not complete; the successful life skills demonstrated on the stage must transfer to improving the quality of everyday life.

The significance of the Drama for Life-Skills process is its contribution to establishing a basis for cross-cultural applications of the drama process with special needs outside of the western context. The nature of the work being done furthers the field by adding to the almost nonexistent dramatic work with disabilities being done in West Africa. The use of *AFLS* allows a standardized structure of tangible life-skills, the ability to track and document what works and does not work with each person, and a way to substantiate evidence for drama intervention. We are still collecting qualitative and quantitative data, receiving feedback from parents and the community, and analyzing the *AFLS* data sheets in order to gain a full understanding of the outcomes of Drama for Life-Skills interventions. Though the research is ongoing, there are some outcomes that are already becoming apparent. Life skills task mastery has risen exponentially at the CDC. The amount of teacher and therapist turnover has decreased, and staff are more engaged in lesson planning and assessments. Teachers and therapists have confessed to increased levels of excitement in planning tasks and lessons, in order to challenge students and add more scenes to the performances. The school and preschool students are forming bonds and relationships with their peer-mentors in the adult unit. Parents have expressed their pride and support for the program, some asking for the intervention performances to spread to the younger units. And perhaps most notably, adults and adolescents involved in the performances show increased signs of confidence, community and self-advocacy throughout the school and curriculum.

As Drama for Life-Skills continues to develop and the performances created from the process expand, the following questions arise, guiding the next steps of research: Once these skills are acquired, how do we break the barriers of stigma in Nigeria society to allow these skills to flourish? How do we educate and inspire the families and the communities? Nigeria has gained a passionate disability inclusive theatre company full of potential. We are creating opportunities for Nigerians with neurodevelopmental disabilities, and

as they take a bow following a performance, in the words of Augusto Boal, “The end is the beginning!” (Boal, 2006, 4)

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The Evolution of Monologue as an Education

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ABSTRACT

*Performance is social theory, or it can become so, when we use it as a means to understand social phenomena rather than merely viewing it as a spectacle or for entertainment (Brook, 1972). Theatre that explores domestic violence (Welsh, 2014), homelessness (Welsh, 2014) or the plight of refugees (Robinson, 2015) are all examples of dramatic processes becoming social theory. There are many more examples such as the work of Lloyd Jones or Pina Bausch, both of whom use experimental theatre as a means of educating, understanding and criticising society (Marshall, 2002; Pendergast, 2001). This article explores the relationship between theatre and education in three somewhat diverse contexts. Firstly, the autobiographical monologue, *The Outcaste Weakly Poet Stage Show*, describes experience in a conversational style. Experience and conversation are inevitably educational, that is, being is learning and listening is learning. Secondly, I explore the practice of monologue writing with a sample group of Australian school students on the subject of social labelling, reinforcing the idea that theatre practice is*

education by applying it to a classroom setting. Finally, I examine a monologue writing workshop conducted with a group of teachers-in-training, revealing the potential of monologues to foster empathy among teachers and their most difficult students. Theatre then becomes a source of learning and philosophical reflection for audiences, a way of practising social learning in a school setting and increasing emotional intelligence, empathy and communication between teachers in training and their students.

The world of performance and the life-force, or our experience of the world, from which theatre emerges is all conceived around learning. The playwright and the actor are inspired to perform because they want to articulate something about their surroundings, some knowledge. One may very well pose the question, how is it possible *not* to learn? For experience, by its very nature, is pedagogical. When we do, we either know what we do or we come to know what we do by doing it. The tennis player hits the ball as it comes to her using either an established method she knows from prior experience or comes to know through reacting to the movement of the ball. How we perceive the practice of theatre is largely dependent on our understanding of what the medium is in terms of its creation, performance and reception. I have always felt that my work as a theatre practitioner and researcher was more philosophical than entertaining (Willett, 1978, Brook, 1972), and there are numerous examples from my practice that illustrate this, such as *Barcode 30!!7 307: an exploration into domestic violence and criminal behaviour* (Welsh, 2009) or the recently performed *Outcaste Weakly Poet Stage Show* (Welsh, 2014), perceived by many critics as an expose on the troubles of people experiencing homelessness and drug addiction. This was curious to me because the work merely described my experiences with homelessness and drug addiction, but this phenomenological fact was reinterpreted through the process of developing and presenting a theatrical performance. Thus, the performance of theatre becomes a sociological issue, as I melded the presentation of the self on stage and in social reality (Goffman, 1993). This ought to be obvious but theatre is still often viewed as escape or fantasy, with no direct relationship to other aspects of our social lives, despite examples of performance such as *The Laramie Project*, which

are specifically directed toward influencing community and social attitudes (Kaufman, 2001).

I will now refer to two recent examples from my creative practice that epitomise the performance concept I label 'real fiction'. The first is an online clip taken from my days as a homeless street poet. The intention of the clip was to capture a moment in time, of a group of strange characters, all friends, sitting around on the street, chatting about life, issues and street poetry to each other and passers-by (Welsh, 2016). This footage of actual experience was used as the foundation for the creation of a personal myth contained in the play, 'The Outcaste Weakly Poet Stage Show'. What the footage reveals is the relationship between experience and art, the way in which artistic practice, in this case begging with poetry, is received in social reality. The practice becomes the impetus for conversation and inspires the foundations for the creation of a performance, *The Outcaste Weakly Poet Stage Show*, in which the chaotic life of the street is recognised and celebrated as the source of the work (Welsh, 2016). The conversational tone is apparent both in the first clip of the real experience and then the fictional or represented performance. The atmosphere of the street is mirrored in the stage performance, where the performers directly communicate in conversation with the audience, encouraging a loose, relaxed and somewhat random or chaotic form where the performers' job is both to encourage the audience to distract performers and then to subtly bring the conversation back to performance in much the same way a stand-up comedian does.

SOCIAL THEATRE & EDUCATION

My PhD research involved applying my play-writing method to a group of secondary drama students to explore the idea of social labelling in education. Most of my work with secondary drama students creating theatrical monologues involved making them appropriate for a stage setting, enhancing the voice I heard in the monologue for the sake of an imaginary audience. The foundations existed for some compelling material. Like the process of selling poetry on the street, the monologue workshops and the outcomes in the form of student monologues constituted significant reflection on conversation and human existence in the social situation. This not only allows a context

for student learning in the drama classroom but also expands the potential of drama to act as education, building on the work of McKenna (2003) and Haseman (2006) and the tradition of Brecht.

McKenna, for example, claims that 'the embodiment of being and performance' ought to be viewed as 'ways of being and knowing' perhaps implying performance can be ontological and epistemological (McKenna, 2003, p.2). He describes his methodology as performance, that is, an action method or practice-based research. I claim, however, throughout this article and in other aspects of my practice, sitting and writing real fiction in fact involves reflecting on our personal experience and our engagement with the world. It could be considered mere journal writing, were it not for our attempt to hear the voice of an 'other' in the writing process and document this 'hearing' in a performance context, whether that be a theatre or a drama classroom.

The importance of lucid, vibrant and meaningful Arts practice in education is broadly recognised in contemporary drama education literature (Ewing, 2010). In his article exploring the potential of practice-led research, Haseman makes this assessment regarding 'reflexive research':

The situations of practice – the complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflicts...are increasingly perceived as central to the world of professional practice. These are practice-based research strategies and include: the reflective practitioner (embracing reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action); participant research; participatory research collaborative inquiry, and action research. (Haseman, 2006, p.3)

Haseman claims that theatrical '...strategies re-interpret what is meant by 'an original contribution to knowledge.' They may not 'contribute to the intellectual or conceptual architecture of a discipline', however, according to Haseman, 'they are concerned with the improvement of practice, and new epistemologies of practice distilled from the insider's understandings of action in context' (Haseman, 2006, p.3). What Haseman and others identify is the place of arts-based and practice-based research, the distinguishing features of these practices and how they fit into the rest of the research landscape.

I view any work that takes place in the theatre primarily as 'education' (Willet, 1974). As a playwright, I have argued with many

colleagues about what theatre ought to be doing and that, rather than merely entertaining, it can also seek to invite a community contemplation of the issues a play explores. This echoes the concerns of many other practitioners, including Kaufman, referred to above (Kaufman, 2001). To this end, Peter Brook's argument against the form of theatre and what he perceives as an over-emphasis on production concerns (Brook, 1972), in favour of the literary tradition of 'drama', plays with and shifts inherent power structures in contemporary theatre practice. Like Brecht, I claim that the purpose of theatre performance should be to educate 'consciously', 'suggestively' and 'descriptively' (cited in Willett, 1974, p.26).

I THINK THEREFORE I AM...AN EDUCATOR

One of the outcomes of my PhD research was that the practice described therein categorized me as an 'educator' and I reacted with a little discomfort, wondering about this identity and what it meant to be classified an educator when I had never formally filled the position of teacher in a formal classroom setting. And yet, here I was, being called an educator. I should not feel insulted by this. I have nothing against educators and, like Brecht, I have often called my theatre work education (Brecht as cited by Willett, 1978).

It's just to have that identity pinned to me or have the question raised 'Why do you say you're not an educator?', it was something I couldn't move past and I could never not be an educator after that, even if I found an answer to the question. The question itself proposes its own answer. Posed in a conversational response to my thesis by a world renowned Drama Education expert, it is suggesting that theatre *is* education and therefore anyone who practises theatre is an educator. It links drama and education in the same way that Brecht did when he said his theatre sought 'to educate' but it does it with a modernist twist. It is somewhat dramatic, 'Why do YOU not call yourself an educator? You are an educator, whether you like it or not!! After-all, you have argued that theatre IS education and now you argue that you are a theatre maker. If theatre is education and you are a theatre maker, how can you not be an educator?'

The potential of monologues to educate was considered and, with an experienced education academic, applied to a teacher training setting. This involved inviting a sample group of teachers in training to

write monologues with a view to fostering empathy for those students from whom they perhaps felt disconnected or troubled by. The idea was to bring oneself into the uncomfortable space of an identified 'other', one who is 'other' to you, not you. For the participating teachers, they were asked to imagine and inhabit the narrative and physical voices of their least favourite students or those students with whom they felt a disconnect. This not only serves the function of expanding the uses of the form of writing theatrical monologues, it can also play the important social function of understanding 'others'.

In this monologue, the student teacher here explores the problems of English as a second language and the barrier to education it tends to create. Through the use of monologue, the teacher fosters an empathetic position for her student, imagining the social situation and reality for an adolescent studying English when it is not their primary language spoken at home. Considering the task, one could interpret the language barrier as symbolic of any problem that makes one feel 'different', like an 'outsider' (No Outsiders Project).

Monologue

People, people, they think I'm stupid, not smart they think. He's dumb, they say. But they don't know man. They have no idea. I just can't say what I want to say the words they hard not easy to understand. In my own language, I could be a smart person, very famous. But in English not much makes sense. In my own language I could write anything I want to or I could say things to make them make sense to you.

(It is so frustrating) It makes me angry. I know what I want to speak, but nothing comes out good. My teachers, they correct me all the time.

I cannot speak good yet, Miss, give me time.

No one speaks this language at home. I have to teach my big brother but he is always busy, always tired. He gets angry too. But he is angry at all the people he goes to work with. They don't talk to him. They don't try. It is not fair, you know? We learn a whole new language and they don't even try. And they think I am stupid.

The character of the student, constructed by a teacher in training, struggles with the sense that others perceive him/her as 'stupid' but the narrative quickly turns its attention to the perceptions of the student, who declares him/herself misunderstood, 'They have no idea'. The problem is then identified as belonging to language, or the 'words' of others. Finally, as an audience, we find ourselves becoming more and more distant and alien, as the student explains an unfulfilled desire to be understood and how the familiar world of home becomes a symbol of one's own alienation, 'No-one speaks this language at home.' This denotes the student experiencing social alienation like two ends of a burning candle. He/she simultaneously identifies the world of school as foreign and, through this sense of social distance comes to know that his/her familiar world at home is in fact foreign, at least in the eyes of others and indeed in the world in which he must now survive.

This raises several questions: How is the playwright's practice in the theatre educational? How can monologue-writing, for example, be used in educational settings not just to learn about theatre and drama but to learn about the world, ourselves and others? I believe there is certainly educational value in the form of documentary theatre referred to above, where we used the street poet example, but this becomes quite another process when we contemplate the formal transformation of the theatre-making/monologue-writing process from an arts-context, that appears to educate in the manner that is referred to by Brecht and others when they explicitly state that the purpose of theatre is to consciously educate (Willett, 1978), to an educational context where artistic processes are used to educate.

The process of collecting material from the drama educational setting of the classroom and transforming it into a play can be conceived in the same way as the poet example, where material is collected from experience on the street and then written into a theatrical presentation. In the drama classroom, the context is one of learning. From the perspective of the classroom teacher or the students, the goal of participating in the activity of monologue writing is not in fact to create a monologue. The educational process is paramount and one of the selling points of the process in terms of pedagogy was how it facilitated learning about the self, in a space where participants were free to express themselves with minimal consequences. We had created a space where the distinction between what was real and what was fictional had been blurred. When

participants spoke, it may have been their own voice or it may have been one they created. In what follows, the student participant speaks of an adolescent girl and her own relationship with her body:

Student Monologue 7

Student 7: My brother calls me fat. He's a li'l shit. I get in trouble for calling him a li'l shit but how much damage is done by that compared to him calling me fat?!?! It's not his fault. He's nine. He probably doesn't even know what 'fat' is. Do I really know? Why does it hurt so much, being called 'fat'? I mean do I feel fat? Sometimes. Am I really fat, though? I look in the mirror at myself sometimes and I can hear a little voice in my head saying 'Fat, fat, fat...' and then I've got him in the background right behind me and just as the imaginary voice fades out, I hear the little shit and see him smirking behind me in the mirror. So I'm not even looking at myself in the mirror. I'm looking at him! And maybe I'm seeing what he thinks!! He says I'm ugly but it doesn't matter because he's nine! He calls me lazy because I sleep til midday. But one day he will grow and so will I and I will shed my puppy fat and see myself as beautiful. He will want to know me because I'll be very cool and I'll want to know him because I'll need my brother. But what if he's gone too far for me to love him anymore? What if I just can't trust him? I get in trouble for sleeping so late. Nobody would even notice if he didn't bring it up! He knows this. He thinks it's funny. Because he's nine.

He's young, a child. But then so am I. Who isn't, anyway? When do we stop being children? Being called fat makes me feel so lonely, so lonely. I'm THE LONLIEST PERSON ON THE PLANET, WHEN HE CALLS ME FAT! He laughs. He thinks it's funny. What's funny about my loneliness?(starts squealing louder and louder and louder)Ha Ha! She's alone! HaHa! She's a monster, growing outward like an oil leak...FAT! FAT! FAT! How is that funny? I'm shouting but can anybody hear me. Does he know how much it hurts? It's only because I'm a girl that it matters . I'm already seeing myself as fatter than I'm s'posed to be. The last thing I need is the word being bleated by a nine year old sheep. But that's just it, who's he imitating?

My brother calls me stupid, old but it doesn't matter because he's nine. It can't matter. If it did matter, my brother would be more damaged than me. He's the one who's cruel. One day he will look in the mirror and he won't like what he sees. But he thinks it's a joke so it's a joke. His names don't hurt because he's nine.

It's me that does the hurting in my own thoughts about myself, not his names or labels. I remember being nine. I remember seeing my mother look at herself in the mirror, back when I was a child and she was a woman. Before I entered this, this age of uncertainty. Anyhow, she'd stare at herself and describe herself as fat, grab tiny handfuls of skin and call them flab, call herself ten-tonne Tessy when she was all skin and bones!! What I can't work out is when I turned from being nine and knowing the objective truth of what the image in the mirror looked like!

CONCLUSION

The relationship between education and theatre in my practice appears to exist at its very foundations. This is apparent in the example from direct practice, explored at the opening of this article. That is, the practice is educational a long time before it enters educational contexts. However, the processes involved in collecting primary materials, whether they be from experience on the street or from educational encounters in a drama classroom, are remarkably similar and support Brecht's claim that theatre 'educates; consciously, suggestively descriptively' (Willett, 1978). To this we could add that it also educates practically or in practice.

Particular performance types are, by their nature, social theory. The practice of some forms of theatre such as social or documentary theatre, embodiment or 'real fiction' is about making an impact in a social and conversational context rather than creating an artifice or 'entertainment' (Brook, 1972). Education occurs in these contexts because theatre is educational. Therefore, it seems a natural part of theatre's evolution from the stage to education for performance to be incorporated into social learning in secondary school classrooms and a teacher-training context.

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Noise as Queer Dramaturgy: Towards a Reflexive Dramaturgy-as-Research Praxis in Devised Theatre for Young Audiences

[JESSICA M. KAUFMAN](#)

ABSTRACT

Dramaturgy is often considered the work of the 'neutral outside eye', but in devised theatre, the dramaturg is embedded within. This requires creative solutions for how a devising dramaturg might navigate engagement with the totality of their work—the piece, the devising process, and the context—from their own position within all three. In this article, I will recount and re-examine my work as dramaturg-researcher devising Martha and the Event Horizon. The research inquiry suggests a praxis of dramaturgy-as-research inspired by Home-Cook's model of noise as a function of attention and Sullivan's (2003) poststructuralist analysis of queerness as both being and doing, wherein the devising dramaturg embodies the queer doing to take an external perspective on their work via the critical context. Examinations of the devisor's relationship to spectators by practitioner-researchers Goode (2011) and Reason (2010) respond to the research question and suggest a non-linear model within which the audience

experiences meaning through Boenisch's (2010) reflexive parallax. Placing these research outcomes within Bryon's (2014) 'active aesthetic' and Nelson's (2013) practice as research model, I propose the dramaturgy-as-research praxis as the key to a rigorous, flexible framework for constructing diverse avenues for meaning-making in devised theatre, particularly applicable to audience-driven work.

I am a dramaturg, which means nobody ever seems to know exactly what it is that I do. Historically, dramaturgy is often considered the work of the 'neutral outside eye': an external practice of observing and critiquing structures of meaning in text-based performance. In devised theatre, where artists with or without formal roles create the (non)textual material as an ensemble, dramaturgs are embedded within the creative process, not outside of it. In devising, structures of meaning include performance, production and reception dramaturgy (and textual dramaturgy when text is present)⁹ but the dramaturg's role also includes crafting and analyzing structures of meaning in the creative process *itself*. How then might a devising dramaturg find the perspective to do this work without turning to endless navel-gazing? In the foreword to *New Dramaturgy*, Katalin Trencsenyi argues that dramaturgy has become 'process-conscious', "synonymous with the totality of the performance-making process [...] the inner flow of a dynamic system" (2014, p. xi). This process-consciousness extends throughout the work's development, requiring creative solutions for how a devising dramaturg might navigate engagement with the totality of their work—the piece, the process, and the context—from their own position within all three.

It becomes useful to break down the devising dramaturg's work into three phases: first, construction of process: did that exercise work for us? If the theme is noise, how can we use noise as a devising tool? Next, dramaturgy of the material and production: is our narrative

⁹ This breakdown of dramaturgical tasks comes from White (1995). This breakdown is not well-suited to the dramaturgy practiced by dramaturgs in today's (often non-textual) performance contexts. It is, however, useful here as this article focuses on the relationship between audience reception and the creative process. It is worth noting that in the United States in particular, dramaturgy is fused with textual theatre to the point that, even in the thorough *What is Dramaturgy?* (Cardullo, 2000), not once does an American dramaturg discuss their work outside the context of plays and text.

carrying tension the way we want? Does the lighting support the theme in this moment? Then, there is a third phase: a reflective practice of deconstructing the relationship between the first two phases and how they create meaning together within the context of the wider field. It is this third phase, which I am calling dramaturgy-as-research, that will be the focus of this paper. I propose dramaturgy-as-research as a solution to the problem of navel-gazing since it uses critical context as a means to shift the dramaturg's perspective so they can observe the work from within and without. First, I will outline how this process of shifting perspectives was derived from Nikki Sullivan's (2003) analysis of queer studies as a poststructuralist *doing*, exemplified by George Home-Cook's (2011) model of noise as a function of attention. Then, to illuminate how this process might work, I will re-examine the dramaturgy-as-research phase of my MA thesis work as devising dramaturg of *Martha and the Event Horizon*¹⁰ at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Deconstructing the interplay of queer/noise structures in one key moment of practice answered an initial research question of how a particular shift in intended audience came about. Further, addressing that discovery suggests a reframing of the dramaturgy-as-research praxis within Bryon's (2014) 'active aesthetic' and Nelson's (2013) model of practice as research to include and prioritize the practitioner-researcher's experience of meaning-making as a key part of the praxis.

THE QUEER 'DOING' OF DRAMATURGICAL NOISE

I began my dramaturgy-as-research phase just after *Martha*'s final performance, looking back at how the work's relationship to audiences shifted over time. *Martha*'s instigating question was "Can we make a single, queer, noise-based performance that is engaging and challenging for adults, teens, and children together?"¹¹ (Kaufman, 2015). However, *Martha* developed to reflect an earlier proposal, a single performance 'not for children' and a separate performance for

¹⁰ *Martha and the Event Horizon* was devised by [Alter] (brackets are part of company name) at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and performed at the Camden People's Theatre in August 2015 as part of the Camden Fringe Festival. *Martha* was directed by Roxana Haines and performed by Jess Kaufman and Griffyn Gilligan, devised by all three.

¹¹ For this project, I defined children as under age 12, teens as 12-19, and adults as 20+.

children which was never realized (Kaufman, 2015). For this posthumous research investigation, my key question was: why did that happen? What key decisions contributed to our shift in audience? Chris Goode, a theatre maker and researcher based in London, states that while creating “we are constantly aware of [the audience] as a present body” (2011, p. 464). In devised theatre, it is the dramaturg’s job to maintain this awareness, listening to the various structures in place and how they interact with the audience and the makers. Having just closed the show, I was still feeling very much inside it, so I selected a critical context to offer myself a different perspective from which to listen.

Drawing from our themes—noise and queerness—I turned to Goode’s (2011) noise-based devising practice and George Home-Cook’s (2011) theory of noise as a structure of attention. Home-Cook considers sound/noise as structures of attention, arguing that “rather than understanding theatre ‘noise’ as unwanted or unintended sound,” noise is best understood by focusing on the signal/noise *relationship*, as “phenomenologically speaking, listening is an act of *attention*”, of foregrounding and backgrounding to capture meaning (2011, pp. 107, 103). Thus, noise is defined as sounds that are un-attended and outside the structures of meaning, or meaning-less, and defining noise becomes an act of meaning-making. The meaningful sound and the not-meaningful noise become interdependent structures, reframing noise as a poststructuralist dramaturgical act. Goode applies this theory in devising with “make a mark, make a mess, make amends” (Kaufman, 2014), which I learned in a workshop with him prior to creating *Martha*¹². Mark-mess-amends uncovers ‘meaningful’ material by separating it out from ‘noisy’ material: the ‘mess’ (a series of tasks), separates the ‘mark’ (an initial invitation) from the devisor’s intentions, generating a large body of material Goode calls noise. The ‘amends’ filters that material through the artist’s ‘why axis’ to discover and select moments that align with their values, distilling the material down into a ‘meaningful’ performance (Kaufman, 2014). In the initial devising phase for *Martha*, I interwove mark-mess-amends with my own ‘banking’ exercise to uncover our instigating question: we

¹² I attended Goode’s “Make a mark, make a mess, make amends” workshop at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in October 2014. Citations referring to mark-mess-amends are taken from my personal notes on the workshop (Kaufman, 2014) including direct quotes from Goode which are marked as such.

generated a bank of values and ideas from each individual artist based on prompts I had prepared such as, “My work is ____”, “My audience is ____”, and “____ is crucial in devising”. We then isolated what was meaningful to us as a group from the bank, our field of noise. Words like “challenge” and “questioning” led us to “queerness”, and “access” and “self-sufficiency” led us to young audiences; after lengthy discussion, “collage”, “constellation”, and “post-dramatic theatre” were left off our final list (Kaufman, 2015). We learned what was going to be *part of* our process and work by actively attending what was *outside* it: the noise. Whether aural, linguistic, or dramaturgical, noise reflects and clarifies structures of meaning, as it did for [Alter] when we discovered our initial intersection of noise, queerness and young audiences.

A brief foray into queer studies via Sullivan’s (2003) poststructuralist analysis reveals how one might take this approach—defining a structure by examining what was excluded—as a model for meaning-making in the dramaturgy-as-research process. Queer theory, as analyzed by Sullivan, offers a further consideration of noise as not just a dramaturgical *being* but a dramaturgical *doing*, as reflected in Goode’s practice and mine. Sullivan analyses queer theory in the context of Foucauldian poststructuralism, arguing that because power and resistance (in queer theory, normalization and queerness) cannot exist except in *relation* to each other, the “queer” is both that which is excluded from a structure (a *being*) and a positionality that can be taken with regard to a structure (a *doing*) (Sullivan, 2003, p. 56). Thus, noise is not just that which is outside the dramaturgical structure, but a queer dramaturgical *action*. For example, in mark-mess-amends, Goode generates ‘noise’ (a *being*) and then tries on the ‘noise’ material in order to clarify his values in the work (a *doing*). In my earlier example from my devising process with *Martha*, I noted that “post-dramatic theatre” was intentionally left out: *Martha* was driven by narrative, a decision I was not consciously aware we had made until several weeks after that initial meeting (Kaufman, 2015). The bank of rejected values (i.e. post-dramatic theatre) is noise, *being*. My act of examining that noise and noting how that clarifies our group dramaturgical structures (i.e. practicing dramaturgy-as-research) is a queer *doing* that allows me to challenge and clarify the structures of meaning at hand. Naming the noise and then taking a queer positionality to attend to it deconstructs and clarifies my practice with [Alter] as a dramaturg of devised TYA.

UNCOVERING NOISE IN THE PROJECTED (YOUNG) AUDIENCE

Matthew Reason's (2010) writing on young audiences offered another vantage point from which I could observe and critique the interplay of my process and production structures, revealing a framework I unknowingly built into [Alter]'s dramaturgy. Around two-thirds of the way through development, I decided that, while I felt it was in some ways a failure, we needed to change the age range of our piece from 8+ to 11+, effectively excluding children. My reasoning: "this show demands a high level of theatrical competence. The form and semiotics are just too complex" (Kaufman, 2015). Reason lightly deconstructs theatrical competence, broadly defining it as the ability to recognize and decode the constructs of theatre and their interplay with the text or material (pp. 11-12). Assuming that my imagined audience (children under age 11) would not have sufficient theatrical competence placed them as noise outside *Martha's* audience structure. My focus on dramaturgical clarity and synthesis echoes through most of my documentation, as I wrestled with what Goode (2011) describes as the 'projected audience'. Goode states that while devising, we rarely

[give] ourselves the freedom to enter into a genuinely responsive, transformative dialogue with [the audience]; when we talk about 'the audience', we're talking in a kind of generality that precisely matches the generality of our own makings (p. 467).

Rather than entering into a responsive relationship with my audience, I generalized them, accidentally defining a structure (theatrical competence) to support my generalization. This reveals that my concern was less with the audience themselves than with their ability to receive my predetermined synthesis. Had I engaged responsively, as Goode suggests, by inviting children to see *Martha*, I might have tested my structure as I did just now, enabling myself to make more deliberate decisions about form and audience. But I did not see it from within the devising process: it was only by taking the different perspectives on my process offered via Goode's and Reason's (2010) theoretical framework that I was able to observe and critique my attachment to synthesis as part of [Alter]'s dramaturgical structures.

But engagement with one's critical context does not stop outside the library: my experience as an audience member at Goode's

Longwave offered a significant contribution to my research. After learning mark-mess-amends, I saw *Longwave* at Shoreditch Town Hall. While I could not figure out the story or ‘point’ of the show, which appeared to be a series of vignettes about two male scientists in an arctic shack, I had an acute, abstract experience of loneliness, joy, beauty, and loss reminiscent of the ‘constellation’ and ‘collage’ that [Alter] set aside early on (Kaufman, 2014). Months later, speaking with a mutual friend of Goode’s and mine, I was surprised to discover the play is a narrative love story and there had been technical challenges at the performance which concealed key elements of the dramaturgy. Yet, I still found the work moving. Goode ended his mark-mess-amends workshop arguing that the work does not have to “make sense”: if it is meaningful to the artist, it will be meaningful to the audience (Kaufman, 2014). Significantly, Goode separates meaning from synthesis, leaving space for noise in not only how he makes his work, but in how the audience receives it. In the case of *Longwave*, I did not receive Goode’s intended synthesis of the text, but experienced a loose constellation of meaning reflecting it. This highlights synthesis as a normalized structure of understanding in dramatic dramaturgical practice; meaning can derive from synthesis, but is clearly not dependent on it, even in dramatic work. Thus, in dramatic theatre, ‘noisy’ meaning takes the queer position in opposition to the synthesis structure. Looking more closely at experiences of meaning outside that structure makes space for audience diversity, particularly applicable to TYA.

AUDIENCE RECEPTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR REFLEXIVE DRAMATURGICAL PRAXIS

While this article has, thus far, presented dramaturgy-as-research as the reflective/analytical phase of a more traditional research process, further examination of audience reception structures in TYA not only answered my research inquiry for *Martha*, but suggests further refinement to the reflexive dramaturgy-as-research model. First, to address my initial question. TYA offers a particularly clear example of the audience reception structure Goode references with ‘meaning’: when a child acknowledges materiality (the people on stage can hear me) via an audible outburst mid-show, adults usually intervene, despite the fact that applause acknowledges the same materiality in the same

way. Even when it makes perfect sense as an expression of sophisticated theatrical competence, we label children's experiences as (literally and figuratively) noisy when they do not match the behavior of adults. Often, this noisiness is "the very behavior which shows that the individual spectators are engaged" (Maguire, 2013, p. 19). In "There Is No Audience", Maguire argues that children's experiences of theatre frequently involve adults forcing them to behave as an audience, despite their inclination to behave as individuals (2013, p. 11). When I excluded children from *Martha's* audience, I based my idea of engagement on the reception structures of synthesis for not-young audiences—namely adult audiences who are used to seeing theatre. This normalized and privileged one construct of reception (quiet audience) over another (vocal spectators). This supports Goode's (2011) assertion that the constructs of theatre, (in this case, unified, quiet attention) enforce and amplify the structures that hold them in place (behaving as an audience), which keeps us from "truly meeting" the audience: in my case, my young spectators. When I put an age rating on *Martha*, I reinforced a structure of reception dramaturgy that excluded children as queer/noise. Attending both the 'normalized' structure of quiet attention *and* the noise of children's meaning-making experiences might have better executed our all-ages proposal with a noisy, audience-responsive dramaturgy.

This suggests that not only can a spectator's experience include dramaturgical noise, but it is *enhanced* by it. Peter Boenisch (2010), using Goode's (2011) work as an example, suggests a 'parallax' between traditional deconstructed representation/presentation and the loose 'symbolic cosmos' and focus on materiality from performance studies. Reflexive dramaturgy does not necessarily promise a 'solution' that synthesizes the text, its materiality, and the act of spectating *for* the audience; rather, it trusts that meaning-making occurs in the ricochet among their encounters of each, as it did for me at *Longwave* (Boenisch, 2010, pp. 170-172). Matthew Reason's qualitative research on theatrical competence in children aged 5-9 shows that they do in fact engage with the form—what Reason calls "material reality"—and the content— "theatrical illusion"—and further, children delight in examining their experiences and the way these dramaturgies interplay (2010, pp. 59-84). This suggests that young children have the "fairly sophisticated theatrical competence" needed to engage in reflexive dramaturgy (Reason, 2010, p. 75). Oily Cart exemplifies this with what

Webb calls “jazz structure”, where lengthy periods of improvisation (“riffs”) that directly respond to the audience’s reactions are buffered by scripted, structured passages (2012, p. 22). This approach includes reflexive dramaturgy (simultaneous, responsive production and reception) through improvisation, supporting individual spectators’ meaning-making via dedicated space to play with emerging dramaturgical noise. When I wrote that my younger audience members might not be able to synthesize *Martha*’s semiotics, I reinforced *synthesis* as the essential dramaturgical structure, but the age-diverse audience intended in [Alter]’s final proposal implies a diverse experience of meaning.

This reflects a fundamental division in the way I considered what makes dramaturgy ‘for’ or ‘not for’ young spectators, and suggests a reflexive inclusion of dramaturgical noise as the key to a dramaturgy-for-all-ages. Reflexivity unlocks the dramaturgy for a more diverse set of spectators, challenging habitual ideas of audience, engagement, and dramaturgy. It moves towards Pavis’ (2012) post-dramaturgy: “dramaturgy of the signifier, not of the signified” (p. 41). Post-dramaturgy shifts the focus firmly away from carefully constructed systems of meaning and towards the myriad symbolic potential of each individual element as experienced by each individual spectator, resisting or re-setting traditional links between dramaturgy and semiology (Pavis, 2012). As an artist making audience-driven work, my dramaturgy-as-research praxis is no longer centered on ‘Will the audience get it?’, but ‘What might the audience (or spectators) get?’ The goal is no longer to craft a clear synthesis, but to carry out a thorough praxis around the heart of the work, constructing avenues for meaning-making through a constellation of signs and structures.

Most significantly, answering my initial research question and discovering how I might address it through reflexive dramaturgy suggests a further evolution of the praxis of dramaturgy-as-research. I suggest this parallax—diverse experiences of meaning through reflexive dramaturgy—as the key to the devised dramaturgy-as-research model. Using critical context to shift perspective makes space to step in and out of the process to observe the complex interweaving axes of process, product, and critical context through the lens of a key question in every phase of the work, not just postmortem. Via Boenisch’s (2010) model, the researcher’s meaning-making rests not in clear synthesis discovered in any one perspective, but in the center

of a space among the perspectives of theory, practice, and the dramaturg-researcher's experience of them. Significantly, as Goode (2011) suggests, this occurs not after, but *throughout* the process, adding another layer of reflexivity that feeds back into the company's development. This model places the dramaturg-researcher's experience at the center of the dramaturgy-as-research model, evoking Bryon's (2014) 'active aesthetic'. Distilled from phenomenology, the 'active aesthetic' takes the practitioner-researcher away from the "discipline(s) as abstract schematization and toward practice as a lived experience" (p. 24); asking "not what we do, but what our way of doing might be, the doing of our doing, the practice of our practice" (p. 25). While my original model of dramaturgy-as-research was more aligned with traditional research models, a focus on reflexivity moves towards the practice-as-research method as described in detail by Nelson (2013). Nelson's "multi-mode research inquiry" (p. 9) places the praxis – "theory imbricated within practice" (p. 37) – at the center of an epistemological model including 'know how' (experiential knowledge, for example embodied cognition), 'know what' (the outcome of mid-process periods of critical reflection), and 'know-that' (critical and theoretical context) (pp. 37-47)¹³. The devising dramaturg's position within becomes a crucial part of the research methodology. While there is much to address regarding this emerging methodology (a thorough conversation is begun in the collection of chapters comprising Part 2 of Nelson's book), it appears that when placed within Nelson's reflexive practice-as-research model, dramaturgy-as-research thus becomes both a viable method for academic enquiry and the key to rigorous new works development in audience-driven devising.

CONCLUSION

When beginning the analytical phase of my research into the dramaturgy of *Martha and the Event Horizon's* devising process, I turned to the themes of our piece, noise and queerness, for inspiration. Following Home-Cook's (2011) model where noise and sound are interdependent structures defined by attention, I began to re-examine the structures in *Martha's* devising process. Then, turning to Sullivan's

¹³ See diagram on p. 37, followed by in-depth discussion of the key terms on pp. 40-47.

(2003) analysis of queerness as a poststructuralist *being* and *doing*, I began to deconstruct key moments in that devising process by *doing* the queer work of attending to the things we excluded, and analyzing what reflection those queer *beings* had to offer. Contextualizing this analysis in the writing and practice of current practitioner-researchers Goode (2011), Reason (2010), and Webb (2012), I uncovered an attachment to synthesis that separated me from my audience, moving towards a reflexive model of reception dramaturgy that includes diverse experiences of meaning. Finally, reflection on this process suggests a dramaturgy-as-research praxis where the dramaturg uses research and critical context as vantage points to examine the work and their experience of it. This allows the dramaturg to remain inside the devising process while maintaining a critical outside eye, feeding back into the work in real time and engaging the entire process and their experience of it reflexively (not just postmortem). Nelson's model of practice as research and Bryon's phenomenological 'active aesthetic' offer opportunities for further exploration and development.

If dramaturgy is the practice of critiquing structures of meaning, dramaturgy as research becomes a practice of simultaneous construction and deconstruction which, when placed *within* the devising process, allows one to construct, deconstruct, experience, and critique frameworks in a dynamic, reflexive cycle. The practice of dramaturgy and the practice of research become interdependent structures, and space around one's experience of the two—that reflexive space—offers an elastic model for dramaturgical praxis that can adapt and contribute to the process and product in question, even when they are not yet fully developed. Practicing dramaturgy-as-research awakens new possibilities for how one might approach the creative process with both rigorous dramaturgical intention and an open-mindedness that welcomes individual spectators' diverse experiences of meaning-making. There are, of course, challenges to navigating this developing praxis, but for a dramaturg-as-researcher, devised theatre offers the perfect staging ground for deep investigations into how our creative processes, intentions, and assumptions work together to craft structures of meaning on stage and in the audience. For audience-driven devising, which demands reflexivity in the creative process, dramaturgy-as-research has exciting implications for the development of new forms and processes and welcomes emerging applications of poststructuralist theory as we

investigate the complex, dynamic relationships among audience, artist and art.

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Children's Theatre: A Brief Pedagogical Approach

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ABSTRACT

There are several theories as to what constitutes children's theatre. This diversity exists because the term is used as a literal description of theatre that involves children in one way or the other – theatre for children, theatre with children, and theatre by children. This complexity means there is a need to specify the sense in which the term is being used. There is no universal agreement within academic discourse on the parameters in which the term should be defined. While some scholars suggest age as a defining factor, others think it should be decided by the performers who design a piece of theatre based on their knowledge of the children audience. What is children's theatre? What should be the level of involvement for children? This paper is not a systematic review of the discipline and it is not an attempt to re/define children's theatre. Rather, it is about a pedagogical approach to creating a piece of theatre for children between the age of 4 and 10 that can enable them to learn and be morally developed while being entertained at the same time. In this paper children's theatre is the term that will be used throughout.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHILDREN'S THEATRE IN THE UK

Theatre has always been part of every culture from time immemorial. It is therefore almost impossible to suggest a particular date that children's theatre began. However, in terms of a scripted play Bennett believes that *theatre for children* started in the late nineteenth century in Europe and took the form of 'touring companies with dramatisations of folk and fairy tales (2005, p. 12) and the first widely recognized was Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904) in the UK. Other successful theatre for children is Milne's *Toad of Toad Hall* (1929). There was a surge in the formation of several children's theatre companies shortly after the Second World War including John Allen's Glyndebourne Children's Theatre, John English's Midland Arts Centre in Birmingham, and George Devine's Young Vic Players (Wood & Grant, 1997, p. 9). During this time, writers began to write for a specific child based audience.

Polka Theatre is another popular children's theatre that started in 1967 as a touring company in the UK. However, following their successful application to the Arts Council England, Polka theatre has opened a theatre exclusively dedicated to children in their permanent theatre space in Wimbledon since 1979, employing various art forms to create new work for children. Polka's mission is 'to spark imagination and fuel a sense of discovery in children from every background...learning and participation is at the heart of Polka's work, encouraging children to explore and develop creatively' (Polka, 2017). In 1994, Polka Theatre won the Vivien Duffield Theatre Award, leading to a scheme called 'Curtain-Up', offering free tickets to disadvantaged schools. It is believed that over 90,000 children visit Polka every year to experience engaging, fun and exciting theatre, often for the first time.

Originally a touring company, Unicorn Theatre, founded by Caryl Jenner in London in 1947, is another professional children's theatre that is famous in the UK, performing to approximately 60,000 children a year through various extensive programmes of work, on and off stage. Unicorn is a family oriented theatre company that welcomes parents, schools and young people of all ages, believing that their performances can "expand horizons, change perspectives, and challenge how we all see and understand each other" (Unicorn, 2017). It is therefore imperative to take into account the aesthetic values of performance that includes adults as audience, having the same quality

as adult theatre. This is reflected in their philosophy: “the best theatre for children should be judged on the same high standards of writing, directing, acting and design as the best of adult theatre” (Unicorn, 2017).

Beside the aesthetic experience, education is also part of the ethos of these companies. This could be a way to meet with the Arts Council England’s policies that emphasises education or learning as one of the criteria for securing grants. This has made many children’s theatre companies to include education and/or learning as part of their philosophy and an important element of children’s theatre. This philosophy is supported by Reason who suggests that; Children’s theatre “inevitably operates within contexts of education and learning” (Reason, 2010, p. 5). The Prince’s Foundation for Children and the Arts in Britain also posits that taking children to the theatre can support their learning:

A visit to the theatre has the potential to be a life-changing experience, as well as an opportunity for a unique kind of learning. It can touch the imagination, arouse curiosity, or fire an artistic impulse. Theatre can also be an exceptional resource, linking as it does to so many areas of knowledge: history, geography, language, citizenship, and much more. Learning in theatres has its own skills-set – theatrical literacy and the understanding of dramatic conventions, a specialised vocabulary, and the ability to sit and watch a performance without distraction. (The Prince Foundation, 2017)

Education or moral learning is also the main argument in this paper. However, many directors, such as Purni Morell at the Unicorn and Tim Webb’s at Oily Cart reject the idea that education and learning should be an important part of children’s theatre but suggest that aesthetic experiences should be the main focus. This paper seeks to combine the two – education/moral learning and entertainment.

WHAT IS CHILDREN’S THEATRE?

Children’s theatre has been researched by many scholars (Maguire and Schuitema, 2012; Schonmann, 2006; Wood and Grant, 1997) and the definition of the term varies. When we say children’s theatre what

do we actually mean? Children's theatre is classified as an art form (Maguire and Schuitema, 2012) and consists of a performance of largely predetermined theatrical artwork by actors in the presence of an audience of young people (Rosenberg and Predergast, 1983). Goldberg's definition of children theatre is a "formal theatrical experience in which a play is presented for an audience of children. The goal of children's theatre is to provide the best possible theatrical experience for the audience" (1974, p. 5). Succinctly, children's theatre is a piece of performance that involves children as actors and/or as audience. Children's theatre is specifically created and performed for children audience either by children actors or professional adult actors or a combination of both. It is important to distinguish between various forms of children's theatre so as to advance the practice, artistic form and aesthetic merits.

There are various terms that are being used within academics but only three – (1) *theatre with children* (2) *Theatre by children* (3) *Theatre for children* – will be discussed here. In *theatre with children*, children and adult are actors, working collaboratively to create a stimulating piece of performance. However, in *theatre by children*, children are the actors even though the devising and directing process might be done by adults. Adults, who are often professionals, are the actors in *theatre for children*, "although a child may be used in a child's role" (Goldberg, 1974, p, 5). In recent years, university students do devise and perform for school children as part of their study in UK. The primary audience for all forms of children's theatre is children. Nonetheless, accompany members of the family can be part of the audience. This could be one of the reasons why Goldberg argues that "children's theatre" is basically the same as the 'adult theatre'.

Goldberg does not mean that there are no differences between children's theatre and adult theatre. There are many differences. One of these is that children's theatre tends to stress the perspective and thinking of the children and dig deep into their world. Children's theatre tries to trigger and hold the imaginations of its audience for it is through this that they can be taken on a wonderful adventure. Children do not need to force themselves into a story like adults. They can get *emotionally* involved. There is no need for a suspension of disbelief because children believe everything they see is real – flying dragon, speaking bears, etc. Although adult theatre also stresses the importance of its audience's perspective and the life around them, it

also allows them to make judgement, and thus enables them to contribute to any debate about the performance. The creative process for adult and children theatre is also different as practitioners may employ techniques, tools and methods appropriate to the understanding of their audience. As a result, actors for both may go through special and different training. The acting style for children's theatre is different. A melodramatic acting style in which everything, including emotions, actions, movements, storyline, etc. can be over-the-top is important in children's theatre but this may not be good in adult theatre.

Goldberg's claim that 'children's theatre' is basically the same as the 'adult theatre' is about the aesthetic merits and the level of professionalism in children's theatre. Professionalism and perfection, even if it is difficult to attain, is considered important in adult theatre possibly because of the ability of its audience to make critical judgement. Children may not be able to but accompany parents in children's theatre may make the same critical judgement. Therefore, children's theatre should be as good as adult's theatre. Stanislavsky pushes this further and suggests that the only important difference between theatre for children and theatre for adult is that theatre for children should be better. However, this view is vehemently contested by Schonmann (2006) who fails to understand the underline philosophy in Goldberg and Stanislavsky's views. While a distinction may be necessary, children's theatre is not to be considered a form of art that needs no substances that can be found in adult's theatre. Wood and Grant (1997) succinctly put this in a context:

If we are to trigger their imaginations, emotionally involve them and give them an exciting, memorable new experiences; if we are going to encourage them to enjoy theatre-going in their adult years; if we believe that theatre can be educative as well as entertaining, then we must endeavour to give them the best. (1997, p. 7)

Wood and Grant charge the children's theatre practitioners to give their audience the best experience possible. Children's theatre needs to be seen as a discipline itself, and as a result, a high level of professionalism must be part of its creation by employing all the techniques and principles in theatre generally. There is a generally

accepted view that children will not tolerate 'poor' production (Klein & Schonmann, 2009). Children are open-minded. They do not sit, listen and decode the performance as adults do. They can release their feelings openly by reacting to a change in anything that interests them. Children do not pretend. They will react if they are bored. An awareness of this is therefore important for children's theatre practitioners. If we think that children's theatre is not as challenging as adult's theatre, this does not only suggest that we do not value that particular area of theatre, but that we do not value children and their experience of their world (Gardner, 2013). If we spend too much time and money in creating, writing and putting an adult theatre together, the same must be done for children's theatre.

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S WORLD

One of the ways to provide children the best experience in theatre is to understand their world. Regardless of its form, children's theatre is based mainly around the interests of children, even though it also takes into consideration the interests of the parents. The important point is that it does not ignore the interests of children and does not only take the interests of their parents or adult actors into account. Children and adult audience may have different interests. Thus an understanding of the children's world is vital to producing children's theatre that engages their audience. If we consider children's interest as paramount in children's theatre, we must delve deeper into children's world, to consider how they think, react to things in different situations and circumstances. It may be difficult to sustain the interest of children audience with a performance that does not interest them. Children cannot be forced to engage with something they do not like. The interests of children of the same age group who live in the same area or study together in the same school may still be different. In the same vein, children of the same parents may have different interests.

There are many factors that can contribute to the interests of children audience, but the following two will be discussed briefly – social and ethical factors. Social factors are facts and experiences that can influence individuals' personality, attitudes and lifestyle, and this may include religion, family or wealth. The social circle of parents – who they meet, where they work and live, the club they belong to – can influence the lifestyle of the children. Parents with a high social status

may end up sending their children to schools that reflect their lifestyle. Children who frequently travel abroad with their parents on vacation may be exposed to a new way of thinking. There are some communities that are more multicultural, made up of different races, ethnics and religions, often with their own cultural values, belief systems, myths and fairytales. In some family, religion is a sensitive and serious issue and children are brought up within a strict religious practice, which cannot be compromised. The religious and global views of parents are likely to shape the life of the children, and thus play a key part in the things that interest them.

Ethical factors are things that can be seen as morally right. Ethics simply means doing the right thing. However, what is morally right for one family may not be necessarily morally right for another. Furthermore, our understanding of rightness varies. Consequently, there is no clear-cut blueprint of ethics that can cater for all children audience and their behaviour. Some ethical issues are religiously, spiritually, culturally, and socially constructed, and this varies from one family to another. How children talk and react to one another is guided by the ethical factors that surround their upbringing. All these are likely to contribute to children's interests, and as a result, should reinforce the purpose of a children's theatre. Therefore, it is vital for professional adult actors and practitioners to be aware of the social and ethical factors of a group of children so as to produce a piece of theatre that interest them. To this end, they must see themselves as researchers and not just as entertainers so that they can learn more about their audience and also improve their own practice.

CHILDREN'S THEATRE PRACTITIONERS AS RESEARCHERS

In order to gain their interest and encourage an enthusiasm for theatre, children need a performance that appeals directly to their world, their pleasures, their fears and their experiences. This is certainly not an exercise in a textbook. It is a 'real' task, which Tambling (1990) defines as something that has a purpose, a deadline and a natural outcome. The starting point for a professional group of actors performing for children is to identify the purpose of their children's theatre. What do we want the children to gain from the piece? How do we communicate this to them? A project is more likely to succeed and yield a positive outcome if its purpose is clearly identified, stated and outlined. The

other task is to identify the target group – children that will benefit from that project, including their age range. With this level of differences, what is the strategy for creating a piece of theatre for a children audience? A piece of research may be necessary as to understand what interests a particular children audience. Children's theatre practitioners need to be skilled researchers. This can help them to plan the best performances and experiences for their audience.

The research methodology can be decided by the group, but an interview with the children, however stressful, is likely to lead to an honest opinion. Practitioners decide on the number of research questions but these should be comprehensive. Children are usually honest, and if given the opportunity, they will speak their mind freely. They need to approach this from the perspective of a researcher. Therefore, they should be mindful of the research ethics, thus the consent of the parents must be sought. Though children are the primary focus, a piece of research can also be conducted among the parents and teachers. Practitioners can gain a deeper understanding of the children and their current thinking by watching, listening and talking to them and their families. The nursery rhyme or fairytale books they enjoy reading or listening to can be useful in gathering the information. Practitioners also need to be skilled observers and listeners. A visit to the playground to watch how children behave in a free environment can also be helpful.

The outcome of such research can prove invaluable. A piece of theatre can then be devised based on their findings. Another aspect of the research is script development. Both the practitioners and the children can work in close collaboration on the script. This is particularly vital in *theatre with children* and the outcome, from experience, has always produced an outstanding performance. Theatre itself is a collaborative form of art work. Children can be exceptionally active when they are involved in the planning and developmental process of a programme that interests them. Clinton also shares this view:

Where young people have been fully consulted and are involved in developing a programme of arts activity their interest spans the range of art forms and their commitment is high. (1993: 12)

Generally, children like to be involved in everything, especially when it

speaks to their world. They can feel empowered when they know that they are valued. They can be exceptionally active, jumping up and down, making noise, turning chairs and tables to drums, willing to go at any length, showing interest in various arts form, singing and dancing. They do so with great enthusiasm, inspiration and talent. Children are impressionable. With their minds already set at the theatre they co-developed, any moral lesson can be embedded in the piece. Moreover, almost every fairytale teaches some form of morality one way or the other.

CHILDREN'S THEATRE AS EDUCATION AND ENTERTAINMENT EXPERIENCE

There has been a lengthy debate about the claim that children learn through play, and many scholars, have contributed to this comprehensively (See Dockett, 1999; Evans, 2000; Hamilton and McFarlane, 2005; Roussou, 2004). The conclusion of these scholars is that children learn more through fun. Theatre, beside schools, can be another medium through which children can develop morally. Theatre can stimulate children to learning as music does; "music learnt at childhood is a foundation for learning social practices" (Okafor, 1989a:291). This is because children generally give their full attention to everything that entertains them. Theatre can serve as a motivator and become another medium for teaching, instructing and transmitting information to children. Theatre can teach them morality and shape their behavioural patterns and also entertain them. Therefore, if we focus on aesthetics experience only, and if we fail to realise the educational potential in children's theatre, "we may be overlooking the rich opportunities that play provides for children to make choices, develop new skills, solve problems, and make sense of the world they live in" (McFarlane and Hamilton, 2005, p. 10). However, Schonmann's argument is that children's theatre "has to stop struggling to define its legitimacy as an educational endeavor" (2006, p. 10). This is not about legitimising children's theatre as an educational endeavor but rather it is about accepting the fact that theatre can be a medium for moral development. Though a theatre can be created solely for entertainment experience, children may be able to learn new things about life since they often get absorbed in whatever they do or watch. This paper proposes to divide children's theatre into three categories; children's

theatre as aesthetic experience and entertainment, children's theatre as education or learning, and children's theatre as both. The last category will be developed in this paper.

Children's theatre can be educational (moral learning) and entertaining (fun) at the same time with consideration of the needs and desires of the audience. Education here should not be confused with a formal classroom teaching. Rather, it relates to informal learning where morals – standards for good and bad character and behaviour – are taught within the medium of entertainment. Twain posits that “the children's theatre is the only teacher of morals and conduct and high ideals that never bores the pupil, but always leaves him sorry when the lesson is over” (Twain, 2014). The context in which the children's theatre is grounded can afford the children the opportunity to learn faster than the classroom. Twain further discusses the significance of this in children's theatre:

It is much the most effective teacher of morals and promoter of good conduct that the ingenuity of man has yet devised, for the reason that its lessons are not taught wearily by book and by dreary homily, but by visible and enthusing action; and they go straight to the heart, which is the rightest of right places for them. Good morals often get no further than the intellect, if they even get that far on their spectral and shadowy pilgrimage: but when they travel from a Children's Theatre they do not stop permanently at the halfway, but go on home. (Twain, 2014)

The morality in children's theatre can be more effective than the one learnt in the book. For example, the moral in a children's theatre could be that it is always good to be honest with one another. The children should be able to connect with the performance to be able to learn from it, hence the need for the entertainment value. Morality can be taught within the context of entertainment by embedding it in the conventions. Therefore, some conventions, which are vital to capturing children's attention and that, are necessary for children's theatre as both entertainment and education or in the 21st century should be employed. Some of the conventions will be discussed briefly. They can be embedded in the piece of theatre whether they are part of the storyline or not. Though some practitioners may or may not include all of them for their own reasons. They are important and must be studied

and mastered by adult performing with or for children's audience.

One of these conventions is 'suddenlies'. They are any actions or speech, which, helps to hold the attention of the children (Wood & Grant, 1997, p. 38). This can include awkward and unexpected entrances of a character on to the stage. The suddenlies are important and are vital to sustaining the interest of the children and keeping them focused. Suddenlies can change constantly so that children will always have something to focus on. There is no limit to the number of suddenlies in children's theatre and they can be anywhere within the piece. Once children's attention is captured, moral lesson can be taught. Furthermore, morality can be part of suddenlies. Suddenlies, like other elements of children's theatre, must be part of the narration because they can get the audience involved.

Narration or storyline is also vital to creating an intrigue piece of children's theatre, and moral lesson can be part of this. A good story could turn out to be a bad performance if the process of telling or narrating it is not properly and carefully planned and done. Narration encompasses a style and a set of techniques through which the performance is conveyed to the children. This may include the narrative point of view or perspective of the narrators, the presentational format and the story's timeframe in which the story is set. Narration also encompasses not only the characters – visible and invisible – who tell the story but also how the story is narrated or told. Therefore, whoever that is involved in the realisation of a story is a narrator, including the playwrights and directors. Narration advances the plot of a story. In children's theatre, plots with simple structures can be effective and easy to follow. Furthermore, a little extra help such as giving extra detail is vital in children's theatre. Although children may be able to follow a complex story, however, avoiding it can help to break the 'fourth wall'. Succinctly, the reception of a performance will partly depend on how the story is narrated.

Character is another important element that children can connect to. Wood and Grant (1997) suggest that characters should be larger than life. Children react to conspicuous objects, and this can cause them to engage with the performance. The character establishes a relationship with the children, and this enables them to follow its actions, which can enable them to learn moral lesson the character wants to teach. Children are likely to respond to any questions that their favourite character asks them. In this vein, many moral lessons

can be learnt in a piece of theatre where there are multiple characters. Slapstick, a type of humorous acting, is another important convention that is specific to children's theatre. Actors act and/or behave in a 'silly' way in order to amuse the children. This can include falling down or throwing things over funnily and dramatically, tripping, slipping and big reactions. Children love to laugh. Slapstick sets a scene for this through humour. Humour shows the enjoyment of the audience and enjoyment is one of the core purposes in every piece of theatre be it children or adult. Within the plot of a piece of theatre, humorous jokes can be embedded, and larger than life characters can act 'silly' to create humorous situations. By using humour, the laughter of the children can create a more vibrant environment, which the actors can then build upon to carry out the morality they intend to teach.

Magic is another important ingredient of children's theatre. Magic is used in the form of fairies, wizards' witches, and spells. It is important to show that the magic is working as this is a symbol for achieving the impossible things (Grant and Wood, 1997). Achieving the impossible is particularly important in children's theatre because it has the potential to inspire the imagination of the children. Gardner (2013) posits that children's theatre is capable of firing the imagination of the children as it gives them the skills and creativity to face the world, to understand it, and in some cases change it. The use of imagination in children's theatre helps map out children's thoughts and feelings for them to be able to create stories on how they see the world. It can also nurture creativity. Furthermore, it can encourage a debate, leading to a series of questions, and deepening their understanding of the world around them.

Audience participation is another convention that can get children involved. Nonetheless, some children's theatre practitioners may decide not to use it. Furthermore, some interactive or immersive theatres in adult theatre also use audience participation. In children's theatre, it will need to be properly managed as it can easily get out of hand. This could be one of the reasons why some practitioners do not use it. It is important that the characters are in complete control. One of the ways to do this is by using a well-known song with a refrain and a simple movement with/or a clapping routine. Practitioners can identify songs that the children are familiar with through research. When children enter into the spirit of entertainment they get excited, shout and sing and this can help boost the energy level of the actors and

thus improve the performance. Another method is by using questions that have precise answers. These can create a sense of intrigue, and most children are likely to answer a direct question thrown at them by the actors. The questions must be short and simple to enable children to grasp them quickly. The simple yes or no to questions can be effective and easily managed. For example, 'Children, is it good to be greedy'? The children will relate the question to an immoral behaviour of a character in the piece and give a precise answer. In this way, the lesson on greediness is taught by the actors and learnt by the children.

CONCLUSION

The pedagogical approach to creating theatre for children between the age of 4 and 10 has been briefly discussed. The argument is not that children's theatre has to be always educational. Practitioners can create theatre that entertains only. The overarching argument is that children's theatre can be educational and entertaining at the same time. Children can learn about social and ethical issues and develop some social skills through the medium of theatre, either by watching or taking part in it. Moreover, moral lessons are often part of almost every fairytale. In the same vein, moral lessons can be embedded in children's theatre in the context of entertainment. The paper also suggests that practitioners start to see themselves as educators and researchers and not just as entertainers. Through research – working, observing and talking with the target children – they will be able to have an understanding of what interests the children and plan and devise a piece of theatre accordingly. Both the practitioners and the children can learn from each other in the process. The practitioners can learn more about how children think and speak in different situations. Children also can begin to learn to develop their communication skills during the interview session. By working collaboratively, it is possible that some of the children might develop their interest in theatre and take it up as a future profession. An opportunity for children to discuss the morals at the end of the performance, talking to their favourite characters can also be part of a children's theatre. It is high time that children's theatre is taken seriously and seen as another medium through which children can be entertained and educated.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Dr. Dennis Eluyefa is a performing artist from Nigeria. He worked for many years with Dr. Hubert Ogunde, the acclaimed father and founder of Nigerian contemporary theatre, and had in-depth training in acting, voice and movement with him. He also performed, danced and choreographed for many top musicians in Nigeria. He played the Yoruba talking drums professionally with the Nigerian Navy band 3, Sir Oladiran and His Best Organisation and Sir Akin Erifeyiwa and His Juju Dance Band. Dr. Eluyefa lived in Hungary for many years before moving to the United Kingdom in pursuance of his academic career. He is currently a Senior Lecturer in Drama at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln in the United Kingdom.

Feeling Blue: An Investigative Apparatus

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ABSTRACT

This auto-ethnographic inquiry explores found and constructed apparatuses in the production of a devised clown show with 3rd-6th grade children at Blue School in New York City. Through a playful negotiation between artifacts, theory, and memory, this essay works to untangle the production of meaning and the possibilities of children's theatre. Drawing from Agamben's theorizations of apparatus, Hammoor writes into knowing and understanding the frameworks he built and discovered in directing a sad clown show with children.

DISPOSITIF

Clowning, circus, magic, side shows and variety acts make up forms of populist theatre that are incredibly exciting to me. When they are combined with children's interpretations of New York City's downtown aesthetics, I have discovered explosive possibilities. It is with this in mind that I proposed creating a sad clown show at Blue School, an independent school in Manhattan founded in collaboration with the

Blue Man Group. I had been working at Blue School as a Drama Specialist for a year before proposing a major, multi-grade production — it was important for me to understand the culture and values of an institution before proposing a major next step. The mission of the school, which I found to be blossoming, is “To develop and share an inquiry-based approach to education that fosters creativity, promotes academic excellence, nurtures human relationships and inspires a growing passion for learning” (Blue, 2016). After many preliminary discussions centered on budget, parental expectations and school values, I developed the following project description that was shared in the school newsletter as an advertisement for students to join the afterschool project.

Collaborate with a capricious cavalcade of clever, crestfallen clowns!

We are incredibly excited to announce auditions for Blue School's first multi-grade, full length performance opening this next semester! Students in grades 3-6 (in the 2015-16 school year) are invited to join an ensemble-driven cast and crew as we collaborate to devise a new, old-school clown show featuring classically inspired and original bits, dances, characters, and acts. With empathy and physicality at the heart of this project, we will employ a professional standard of care and commitment to build a new performance from the hearts and minds of Blue School students. Directed by Clare Hammoor, this devising process will be joined by Blue School faculty as well as professional clowns, circus makers, musicians, and theatre folks. (Collaborate, 2016)

Over the course of 5 months, a group of 14 3rd-6th grade students along with a team of professional artists and educators developed a clown show that we decided to call *Feeling Blue*. Throughout the devising process ensemble members developed clown characters and dozens of act possibilities. In the end, we landed on 27 short acts and an aesthetic marked by black smudges, teased hair, silver sparkles, and the perspiration of challenging work. Simultaneously, our adult process mirrored the explorations of the children through nearly a dozen collaborative design meetings that worked to negotiate possibilities given our population, budget, location and time.

Composed of a choreographer, costume designer, two musicians, a lighting designer, stage manager and myself as director, this team became interlocutors with our clowns throughout our months of process.



Figure 1. *Feeling Blue* Overture. Photo by Oskar Landi.

Before the production opened, I was asked by the Head of School to develop a curtain speech outlining our process of inquiry and development. Hoping for something to ground the work, she asked me to “contextualize” (Gaines-Pell, 2016) what the audience would be seeing. I have an aversion to curtain speeches not only because they can limit ways of seeing the work but also because they interrupt the production of theatre magic (in this case, the ensemble had a number of small pre-show acts they wanted their audiences to notice as they took their seats). In lieu of this speech, I developed the following statement which we mounted to the doors of the theatre for folks to pause and read or pass straight into our sad clown world.

Devising theatre is messy. It’s an artform that does not draw on a text or a score. It’s a world of play- and meaning- making that demands outrageous ideas and specific encounters. It’s the

process we used to create the piece of theatre you'll see tonight. Beginning with just the germ of the idea 'clown' and the possibility of growing empathy, the children you will see performing this piece of theatre have imagined all of its scenes, rehearsed with an experienced theatre team in professional studios, and committed to the work of an artmaking process that is sophisticated and caring. Inspired by their preconceived notions of 'clown' we have challenged their assumptions through every step of this process as they used the tropes of silent clowning to share their loud ideas about the world around them and how they see their own lives within it. These clowns would never survive under the big top. They're lenses for theatrical meaning-making. The idea of clowning has given the ensemble the freedom to imagine the selves they dream of (both in daydreams and nightmares) onstage for you tonight. The scenes they feature in are short bursts of energy, contained moments of exploration, that we wove together to create a score of delight, sadness and strangeness. It's all them. It's all the clowns. It's all the kids. We just wrapped them in a glittery bow. Welcome to their theatrical playground — a space they built for themselves, their friends, their families, and our Blue School community. (Hammoor, 2016)

I wrote this dispositif within a larger conversation between what contemporary clowning might look like with these children and the school's lineage from the Blue Man Group's 80s antics. In looking behind, at and ahead of our production, I found myself searching for ways of defining what I came to know as sad clowns downtown. Sad, because of their imminent failure despite the most absurd attempts at success, clowns in their uncanny ability to reflect deep understandings of the human condition through simple acts, and downtown because of their surreal, glamorized, nostalgic aesthetic that sprung from the clubs, queers and performances of New York City three decades ago. Altogether, these inspirations became qualifications for contemplating the possibilities of the production.

After the sold-out run, Matt Goldman, a founder of Blue School, described *Feeling Blue* as ambitious "in scope and scale . . . simply incredible" (2016). While the production was greeted with enthusiasm by our community at Blue School, I was left wondering just what it was we did that made it work? What frames did we put intentionally

introduce and what ways of thinking did we discover haphazardly? What rules and obligations were already present that opened doors while nailing others shut?

Inspired by these questions, this essay works to unpack the production of meaning. It unties that glittery bow we wrapped around our clowns and puts it in under a microscope. It is a close reading of artifacts and memories in conversation with theorizations, in search of new interpretations. It is a search for fingerprints, nascent energies and discarded ideas. In excavating these moments, I am interested in developing a vocabulary of experience and reflexivity. It is my hope that this lexicon finds application beyond the framework of this paper and into contemporary practice.

At the heart of this excavation is the journey to understanding the structures of power that rendered the clowns of *Feeling Blue* visible. I am looking forward to sharing my engagement with a variety of theoretical sources in conversation with artifacts and ultimately my own memories. This positioning is also critical to my own understanding of the development of this framework because it supports my own understandings of responsibilities to certain inherent structures of power. Most importantly, however, this essay works to develop a methodology of reflection on my production of an apparatus with which I hoped to capture the dramatic possibilities of these child clowns.

WHAT IS AN APPARATUS?

Perhaps it is first important to describe the ideation of the word apparatus before attempting to dismantle and examine this one in particular. I am drawn to the profundity of Agamben's definition of the term because it pulls from a Foucauldian genealogy while opening up new possibilities for exploration and playfulness. In doing so, he proposes "[N]othing less than a general and massive partitioning of beings into two large groups or classes: on the one hand, living beings (or substances), and on the other, apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured" (2009, p. 13). Agamben goes on to prescribe the characteristics of an apparatus as "[L]iterally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions or discourses of living beings" (2009, p. 14). The breadth and potential depth of this definition opens possibilities for its direct application into work in

practice, as well as that which appears to be more traditionally understood as theoretical. Meanwhile, its delineation between groups is important because it leaves room between partitions for the act of capture and, ultimately, the subjectivity that it produces. Agamben situates a “subject [as] that which results from the relation and, so to speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses” (2009, p. 14). This perpetual battle of subjectification is critical to understanding the implications and inexorability of the production of apparatuses. In the particular realization of the ideas this paper is focused on, such interstices are exploited as tools of meaning-making.

SUBJECTIVITIES OF CHILD CLOWNS

As I am interested in developing a framework of understanding grounded in Agamben’s characterizations of apparatus, I am simultaneously engaged with an understanding of clowning which relates explicitly to children. While much has been written recently (Bouissac, 2015 & Peacock, 2009) concerning the intellectual, historical and theoretical origins of the art of modern clowning, I am specifically interested in uncovering thinking that grounds such an art in the embodiments of children. To this end, Adorno’s realization of the role of the clown as somehow primal, in connection with the possibilities of art itself, well suits my investigation.

In its clownishness, art consolingly recollects prehistory in the primordial world of animals. Apes in the zoo together perform what resembles clown routines. The collusion of children with clowns is a collusion with art which adults drive out of them just as they drive out their collusion with animals. (2004, p. 159)

For Adorno, the clown functions on the “meaninglessness of meaning” concurrent with and drawn from the “primordial world of animals”(Coulson, 2009, p. 127). Here the conspiracy of children creating dramatic work as clowns must somehow be even bolder than the support of one subjectivity to another. If it is possible to distill their subjectivity to ‘clown’ for both outsiders and the clowns themselves, these moments of interaction are sparked by experiences of “collusion” (Adorno, 2004, p. 159) while moving into a deeper understanding of

the self. And while no one subject position defines a being, certain rich potentialities are surely rehearsed by the “stubbornly purposeless expertise . . . of clowns” (Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 114, found in Simon, n.d.). Meanwhile, Adorno also nods to a problem of sensibilities that results in adults pushing away possibilities of complicity with clowns and animals imaginably in favor of a force that is somehow more modern, refined and civilized. Adults’ work to “drive out” (Adorno, 2004, p. 159) these potentialities is wrapped up in the production and re-production of their own assessments of meaning, learning and ideas of what is appropriate for children. The implications of fears motivating such forces will be teased out in the upcoming sections.

CONSTRUCTING AN APPARATUS

Examining the plethora of factors that influenced our production could not be contained in the scope of this paper. Instead of gathering motivations, inspirations, and restrictions broadly, I will attempt to examine a few of them that involve my own positioning, institutional and community expectations, and collaboration/collusion. Intertwined, these headings represent elements of a “para-choreographic apparatus” (Marquié, 2007, p. 36) which I consciously and unconsciously deployed from *Feeling Blue*’s initial description to its closing night. In this way, not only did the frames, rules and obligations of my community foreclose certain choices while supporting others, written and verbal expectations and descriptions of the work equally influenced the possibilities of *Feeling Blue*’s reception.

Positioning

As noted earlier, I am passionate about making work with children that springs from clowning. The joy of this work is life-giving to me. It invigorates my notions of what art is, what an artistic practice does and how art-making lives in the greater world. My glamorization of downtown theatre devices and designs draws energies from decades of queers, outsiders and weirdos before me. It’s inspired by current clowns including Jennifer Miller and her raucous troupe, Circus Amok!. It is both present in the messiness of theatre today and connected through genealogies of storytelling, live performance, film, photographs, scripts and artifacts. While that may sound sexy, it is not

a set of tastes often welcomed in the world of education, especially not outside of university settings. My own aesthetic sensibilities have undoubtedly been supported by my subject-position as an educated, middle-class, queer, white man making theatre with children at an institution that charges a hefty sum for its education. Imagining this work within my own public primary school, for instance, in the rolling cornfields of a conservative state tightens my stomach. It reminds me of the immense privilege I have in creating work with children whose families and support structures are excited about their ideas and my own predilections. It also reminds me of the frustrations many teachers have in being forced to churn out work with children that is both safe and sterile. I know these realities prove to be great constraints on the application of my work broadly but I am more interested to see them as provocations for children's theatre, especially in the United States. *Feeling Blue* felt like a step toward the horizon. But we never reach the horizon, do we?

In briefly unpacking my own subject-position here I am working to discover myself both as a collaborator, caught in the incessant machinations of the apparatuses working throughout this process, and as a director, im- and ex-plicitly utilizing systems of power to determine our ensemble members' subjectivity and visibility. I am working to bring a sense of discernibility to my own thinking while holding myself accountable for it.

Institutional and Community Expectations of Aesthetics

At the heart of the germ of an idea for this project lay the necessity of its interaction with Blue School's culture. While the culture of some institutions may be difficult to pin down, Blue School takes pride in the development and disbursement of its ideas. Its mission statement begins with the phrase "To develop" (Blue, 2016). Not to have, hold or be. But to be in process. In progress. The lead of this word allows for prospects in education and I was excited to realize what that might start to mean for theatre and drama. The school's mission goes on to support an "inquiry-based approach", "creativity", and the nurturing of "human relationships" (Blue, 2016). I capitalized on these sites for meaning-making by describing a process of theatre that was devised and collaborative "with empathy and physicality at the heart" (Collaborate, 2016). The process of deciding the most attractive

language loaded in possibility for families was not an easy task. It required a number of proposals and discussions before its evolution into the copy used in family communications and advertisements. In looking to describe the possibilities and provocations of the work, I found myself grappling with the tensions between academic and pop-psychology lingo as well as the chore of translating the process of devising into accessible, bite-sized phrases that could be quickly grasped.

With the motivations for this project clearly aligned with the school's principles, the families, faculty members and supporters of Blue School eagerly supported the few words I shared as the basis for something that their children would bring into existence. Folks were quick to sign their children up for the project and generously enthusiastic throughout its process. This community was not looking for another modern children's musical. They expressed little desire for another production of *Annie, Jr.* Instead, they spent energy pining for a production that understood itself as postmodern; somehow contemporary and primordial. Parents were interested in providing a performance context that resembled their own backgrounds in New York City's theatre, performance art, film and dance scenes. They shared anecdotes about their children's discussions of rehearsal room antics. Given sneak peeks into the rehearsal through photo and video documentation as well as a brief trailer the students created, families' energies supported their children throughout our 5 months together. Tickets sold out days before opening night. I felt a true sense of delight from parents and ensemble members as the production neared — what an incredible space to hold as a teacher.

Collaboration and Collusion

Our “commitment to build a new performance from the hearts and minds of Blue School students” (Collaborate, 2016) led directly to “beginning [the process] with just the germ of the idea ‘clown’” (Hammor, 2016). By inviting students into an artform they had only cursory, pop-culture knowledge of, I was accountable for a certain amount of knowledge/skill sharing before we could get into the work of creating together. Questions of character development, physical life, scene structure and movement analysis became ways of discussing ideas the ensemble shared with its own members and their adult

collaborators. This framework cast me and the team of professional artists and educators as experts and undoubtedly initiated a practice of collusion rather than collaboration between our students and our adult selves. In reflecting on the previous sentence in relation to the enthusiasm the child clowns showed at this juncture in our process left me feeling as though their energies and ideations were somehow secondary to the ones that the adults brought into the room. But perhaps this is always the case with an inquiry-based approach. Exemplified in a process drama, there is usually some seed of an idea that begins a process of germination before collaborators can take care of it on their own. In this way, my responsibility to create an apparatus to capture the students' work also functioned as a point of departure, an inspiration, even. As students became more comfortable within the context of our work together, their subjectivities seemed to shift from outsiders to colluders to, ultimately, collaborators as clowns. Simultaneously, the apparatus viewing and creating them also shifted to support their new realizations of self as clowns. I can remember moments of watching this understanding unfold in the rehearsal room, beginning with their first experiences of wearing their individual, sparkly clown noses.

Process and Possibilities

I developed a nose-ritual for each rehearsal that began with children resting on the floor, focused on breathing, preparing for the tiniest of transformations. Walking through the room with silver body paint, I dabbed a small dot on each child's nose, inviting them to begin their journey into character. This tiny mask marked the identity of ensemble members as clowns from my perspective on the outside, as well as the one inhabited within each child. As their bodies rose from the floor, the children stepped away from some parts of themselves and into "a world of play- and meaning- making" (Hammoor, 2016). In placing a nose on each child, I performed a function of the framework of acquisition while also inviting the children to graduate from colluders to collaborators — all equal behind the mask.

This process of masking opened the young clowns up to the possibilities of their own imaginations in performative ways. Freed from their restricted selves often performed during school hours, these tiny masks were big enough to hide the performed self of school and

highlight the performed self of the stage. I could see and feel the young performers' transubstantiation each week (even if it only lasted for a moment or two). Philosophically and practically seen dialectically rather than as pupils, our ensemble of clowns uncovered and developed deeper shades of themselves throughout their contributions to our collective devising process.

Memories have a tendency to produce a sheen over imperfections and my recollections of these clowns and this process is no different. Of course issues of attendance, chitchatting, memorization, focus, and continuous character commitment were manifest throughout this process. They provided sites of struggle we ultimately overcame and incorporated into the process of learning, thinking and making together. What ultimately kept us moving forward was the sheer thrill the ensemble members brought to the room each week that emanated from the simplest of ideas.

From the beginning of our process, the only pre-designated material in the room was the phrase "sad clowns." These two words proved to provoke and inspire an endless stream of situations that would be whittled down and curated into the final show we shared with the Blue School community. Ensemble members were challenged to develop their own "10-second acts" that interacted somehow with the idea of "sad clowns" and, collectively, we brought these ideas to life. Some of these short bursts of energy turned into scenes with mini-narratives, and others evolved into strange transitions, still others became whole-group numbers that were spaced throughout the final piece. From a hobo clown in the subway leaning too far over the platform edge to 14 clowns dramatically failing at their first ballet class to sirens and screams as a happy circus turned out to be a family of butchers, the show developed over our twice-weekly rehearsals to encompass a world of weirdness and wonder. Altogether, we cut and pasted these acts and ideas into a pastiche of performances somehow affixed to our theme. Without a narrative through-line we deployed a clear delineation of what would be visible in the world of our performances; the ensemble and design team together developed a very controlled palette based on deep blues, silver, black and touches of white for each *mise-en-scène*. Visually, these restrictions created a world that constantly referred to itself through what Rancière identifies as "sensory presence and ethical immediacy" as "opposed to representational mediation" (2008, p. 8-9). Every prop, light, costume

and headpiece was painted, stained, dyed and tinted by these colors. They were real materials vibrating in playful actuality rather than the attempts at realism that so often plague our young people's stages. Everything felt as though it was part of the dissociated, disparate, and contradictory worlds we had created. In its production, we learned how to create a structure that both supported children's impulses and glee while also making their rehearsed and spontaneous play visible.

The acts that composed *Feeling Blue* were less experiments in precision than endeavors in explosive energy. By lowering the demands of perfect repetition within the pieces of this show, we were able to raise the possibilities of improvisation and presence within a guiding frame. In reflecting on this distinction, I can see the literal appearance and application of the apparatus of assessment through which the work was constantly interpreted. If "the aesthetic regime of art begins with that upheaval of the very idea of perfection" (Rancière, 2008, p. 8), then the outlandish and spontaneous acts the children developed became the basis for new ways of being. Such investigations into the "meaninglessness of meaning" (Coulson, 2009, p. 127) as a solo clown stuttering across the stage with a "Welcome Home" sign for someone who never arrived, speak to the state of the ensemble members' imaginations and the possibilities that their friends, families, school and community craved.

Ultimately, what worked in *Feeling Blue* was the collaboration of apparatuses and subjectivities that rendered it visible. It was a manifestation of surrealist aesthetics and absurd practices that reached into the school's genealogy, reflected on its current children, and hopefully developed a challenging framework for future productions. *Feeling Blue* was powerful, meaningful and beautiful because it existed in a specific temporality with all of its restrictions and enthusiasms. The production shimmered because it knew more than its audience — it somehow knew itself.

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Participatory Aesthetics: Youth Performance as Encounter

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the notion of a participatory aesthetic is developed by exploring how a collaborative and creative process provides opportunities for young people to engage in an act of becoming in relation to one another, building powerful and affective art work that is not bound by the conventions of traditional forms of theatre and art making. The paper begins with a discussion on the role of affect and participation in applied theatre, offering a theoretical framework that is used to analyze two case studies. The first is a project in Accra, Ghana that resulted in a youth-led documentary film about HIV/AIDS and gender relationships. The second is a YouTube based applied theatre project with LGBTQ youth in Toronto, Canada. In both case studies the paper demonstrates the power of dialogue in building a participant driven aesthetic rendering of theatre for social change. The paper concludes stating that a participatory aesthetic is a deeply visceral and vulnerable encounter that builds important pedagogy through affective artistic engagement.

INTRODUCTION

I had a meeting recently to discuss the implementation of a digital storytelling project in a classroom setting. I was there as a consultant to share my experience in digital storytelling and help work through the pedagogical shaping of such an undertaking. I began by asking a number of questions about the goals of the project and one of the first responses was, 'I want it to be good, I don't want the videos to be bad.' This surprised me and I wanted to respond by saying 'Can it be bad?' but I bit my tongue, because I understood what was meant; the goal was student-led, but also achieving certain aesthetic standards, even if this meant taking some authorship away from the students. We would be 'setting them up for success.' This conversation was brief, but it brought up a number of questions I have been sitting with for years. What constitutes good and bad art in student-led or participatory creative work? Are participation and aesthetics at odds with one another? Must we judge creative beauty solely on the product that is created? How can we reimagine the notion of aesthetics through the power of participation?

In my experience as an applied theatre artist and scholar, common project goals such as anti-oppression education, social engagement, social change, youth participation, and youth empowerment often sit in tension with the goals of aesthetic quality and authorship (Gray, Baer, & Goldstein, 2015; Goldstein et al. 2014; Snell, 2013). This requires artist-educators to navigate competing interests throughout the creative play-building process and work to understand how important outcomes are negotiated. The field of applied theatre has begun to explore these tensions (Collins, 2015; Gallagher, 2014; Goldstein, 2012; Prentki & Preston, 2009; Thompson, 2009; White, 2015), however a great deal of the literature still focuses on the possibilities for applied theatre as a form of anti-oppression education rather than exploring the tensions that arise when drama is used as a form of anti-oppression education (Anderson & O'Connor, 2013; Boal, 2000; Cohen-Cruz, 2006; Neelands, 2009; Nicholson, 2005; Prendergast & Saxton, 2009; Woodland, 2012). Affect has also been taken up by applied theatre scholars in recent years building the argument that the affective realm of theatrical encounter is as important to the political work of applied theatre as any other component, and that the political, aesthetic, and affective cannot sit at odds with one another because

they are tangled together in performative moments (Gallagher, 2016; Nicholson, 2016; Thompson, 2009).

My focus within this field of study is in the belief that affective encounters govern the creative production of the work as much as the final performance event. Theatre artists are trained to attend to “the dramatic structure of the play..., the performers presence and physicality..., the staging..., as well as the language and words used in the script” (Gray, Baer, & Goldstein, 2015, p. 8). The focus on these elements of theatricality constitutes a dominant aesthetic of what theatre is and should be within traditional and applied theatre spaces. As artists engage this dominant aesthetic sensibility in order to build affective performances for audiences, the participatory possibilities of the form are potentially limited - authorship becomes a site of contention to be negotiated by those leading the project, rather than as a collaborative emergence from participants. It is from this understanding that I build and explore the notion of a participatory aesthetic, wherein the encounter between participants becomes the gage for understanding the aesthetic quality of the work rather than a valuation based on a cultural standard of theatricality.

PARTICIPATORY AESTHETICS

As mentioned above, there is widespread belief within the field of applied theatre that projects must produce work that meets prevailing notions of artistic merit, based on cultural and professionalized norms of the theatrical form (Prendergast & Saxton, 2010; Neelands, 2008; Thompson, 2009). This belief creates an opening for tensions to emerge around anti-oppression education, because ethical commitments to authorship and participation sometimes waver in response to the need for a specific aesthetic standard – that is governed by socio-cultural-political ideas of theatricality. This takes away power from the people whose stories, ideas, and representations are informing the theatrical performance, grooming their work to be taken over by a professional artist in the final stages of presentation. Most often the work that unfolds in this way is unaware of it's own limitations. As an alternative, a participatory aesthetic builds a deeply visceral encounter through affective artistic engagement. A participatory aesthetic does not occur solely in a completed performance event, but rather is a collaborative process-based

concept that has the potential to provide opportunities for people to engage in acts of becoming in relation to one another and to build affective art work that is not bound by the conventions of traditional forms of theatre and art making. A participatory aesthetic situates the body as a site of knowing by creating an emerging entanglement of process and performance that lacks clear boundaries. This creates an opportunity to make the familiar strange as participants and audiences attune to the way that affect shifts, pulls, and pushes bodies by isolating the moment of ephemeral encounter and escalating it through aesthetic and creative means. This process opens up space for what Sara Ahmed (2015) calls “wonder”.

What is ordinary, familiar or usual often resists being perceived by consciousness. It becomes taken for granted, as the background that we do not even notice, and which allows objects to stand out or stand apart. Wonder is an encounter with an object that one does not recognize; or wonder works to transform the ordinary, which is already recognized, into the extraordinary. As such wonder expands our field of vision and touch. (p. 179)

An affective encounter through artistic engagement with everyday experiences provides opportunities to critically examine the ordinary through wonder (Boal, 2000; Freire, 2009). This enables participants and audiences to notice how bodies move, touch, and see in relation to one another. As a form of applied theatre, this figurative distancing through aesthetic renderings (Snell, 2014; Snell, 2013) opens up possibilities to understand how affect impacts our bodies’ ability to ‘be’ and ‘do’. Applied theatre aesthetics than are not only an artistic “standard of excellence” as defined by euro-centric cultural norms (Neelands, 2008) whereby power asserts its legitimacy as it is buried beneath our assessment of theatricality (Rancière, 2009); instead aesthetics create an opportunity for encounter with the material, an embodied moment of becoming that emerges as bodies respond and react to one another (Collins, 2015). A participatory aesthetic moves away from an artist-led process of rendering stories through traditional notions of theatre and towards a participant-led approach where people can think and feel and respond in ways that are unexpected by attuning to the in-between-ness that facilitates learning.

To implement applied theatre projects from this stance there must be a shift towards understanding aesthetics as a relational intensity that is always in a state of becoming, but never completed, while also working to reveal the normative cultural ideals that are tied up in valuations of theatricality. Engaging a fluid becoming as an aesthetic rendering inhabits the space between art as teacher and viewer as learner by bringing an unknowability into the site of creation and shifts our understanding of applied theatre to a more embodied, relational, and affective approach to social change (Kumashiro, 2000; Nicholson, 2016). This emergent process works to reveal the unthinkable by attuning to what bodies do in relation to one another. In other words applied theatre has the potential to be a site of affective encounters that create openings for unknowable ways of being to emerge. The following case studies provide further insight into this understanding of a participatory aesthetic.

CASE STUDY #1: UNWRAPPING THE SWEETS

Unwrapping the Sweets was a project that I designed and facilitated with youth participants from the organization 'Theatre for a Change'. We explored topics such as HIV/AIDS, gender relationships, and teen pregnancy in the community of a densely populated urban area of Accra, Ghana called James Town. The project unfolded over 4 months with the group meeting 2-3 times a week for about 4 hours each time. Together the youth and I explored questions and experiences around the topics by engaging Theatre for Development (TfD) and Participatory Video (PV) activities. As a final outcome the youth decided they wanted to make a documentary film about the things they had learned from one another and use it as an advocacy tool throughout their community. The documentary was written, filmed, and edited entirely by the youth participants. While I was there as a guide, to offer suggestions and technical support, I maintained that the creative and narrative decisions belonged to the youth; this opened up space for an original aesthetic quality to emerge. The film uses process clips, original dramas, interviews with one another and community members, and ends with the questions that are still left unanswered. The film was screened throughout the community and broached subjects such as money expectations in relationships, safe sex practices, and the stigma of people living with HIV/AIDS.

The journey that was undertaken by the youth was one of personal exploration. They learned about themselves and their community through creative conversations. As an example there were a number of sessions where the young men and young women created separate performance work that addressed all the things they felt they could not say in front of members of the opposite sex. They filmed these performances, shared them with one another, and then created video responses. This dialogue continued for a number of weeks and opened up conversations that the youth had never had before. What does it mean to negotiate sex and relationships within the constraints of their cultural context? What are the expectations put on people of different genders? How do you begin to have conversations across these differences? These questions were asked not as a direct address, but rather through music, performance, poetry, and dance.

The pedagogy that emerged in and through this exchange was intense, and the pieces that were created (and included in the final documentary) offer an interesting social critique. In moments such as this the aesthetic qualities of the artwork are embedded in their pedagogical importance. What developed is a dialogic aesthetic, where the process of dialogue is in itself the work of art, and an understanding of that aesthetic lives in the space between the creative works where the performers bodies speak to one another through movement (Collins, 2015). Participants were affecting and being affected by one another while simultaneously interfering with shared assumptions about gender relationships through acts of spontaneity. This spontaneity as it emerges, entangles, and intra-acts with other bodies in movement creates a relational aesthetic that is always in process (Dewey, 2005; Rotas & Springgay, 2013). Movement in this sense is not about bodies on a trajectory from point A to point B, but rather bodies that exist in relational movement with other people and things. Here, aesthetic qualities emerge through embodiment, coming to know through the body as it moves in relation to the wider world (Manning & Massumi, 2014). This aesthetic act is an embedded and relational emergence of power and knowledge, where movement creates unpredictable compositions. When understood in this way, audience members are invited into the dance of dialogic aesthetics, and provided the opportunity to continue to (un)tangle what is known through the creative work while simultaneously continuing to create ephemeral moments of encounters through the act of witnessing. This

relational movement is a participatory aesthetic that implicates each person (creator and audience) as an active participant in creating meaning through the dialogue of the artwork.

In this case the aesthetic qualities of the film were not those of a professional Western filmmaker, the call to mosque is ever present throughout the footage, the vignettes mirror Nigerian television, and the arc of the film is episodic rather than narrative based. Instead the dialogic and relational aesthetic presents a group of youth pouring their stories and their own learning journey into an exploratory piece that shares their vulnerable souls with an audience and draws on additional aesthetic qualities that are culturally familiar. This culturally recognizable aesthetic rendering has created an encounter, an opportunity to be recognized, witnessed and validated and is a dialogic provocation for Ghanaian audiences because when screened in James Town the film facilitated heated and important debates. Yet, when screened for a British audience whose understanding of aesthetic excellence is defined by notions of colonialism and built through ideas of class and politics, they had trouble finding an entry point through which they could access the deeper visceral encounter proposed by the film. This resulted in stalled discussion and lack of intercultural understanding. In this case the aesthetic boundaries of euro-centric cinema worked to limit both the affective and effective potential of the film beyond its local context suggesting that aesthetic creation and reception are culturally and temporally bound. *Unwrapping the Sweets* challenged dominant western aesthetics in form, content, and purpose building a participatory aesthetic that presented a challenge to traditional ideas of applied theatre presentations by engaging instead with a youth-led exploratory, experimental, relational encounter. If understood in this way perhaps the British audience could have received this film as the dialogic and processual provocation it was meant to be rather than as a transmission of a completed artistic artifact.

CASE STUDY #2: QUEER CONNECTIONS

In 2011 I worked with three groups of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer) youth in the west, east, and north quadrants of Toronto, Canada on a project entitled *Queer Connections*. This project used YouTube to create weekly online conversations between the

three groups. At the beginning of the project each group of youth made a video exploring the theme of identity. The videos were then posted online and viewed by one of the other groups who in turn created a video response based on their reaction to the content and ideas proposed by their peers. The videos document the dialogue and an exploration of queer identities through drawings, acting, puppetry, dance, history, music, storytelling, playfulness, and personal narrative. Each video is not only a response to the video before it, but also a catalyst to the video that comes after it. Twenty-one short videos were created during the project each with their own artistic story, yet what I want to discuss here is the process of creation and dialogue between the videos as aesthetic quality.

In this project there was an ongoing process of making the private public. The youth found different ways to share their experiences and stories, some directly and others through metaphor and imagery. Applied theatre often draws on personal stories to build some form of public engagement. This engagement is political in nature, and interested in a social change agenda (Cohen-Cruz, 2006). The very act of making the private public is a political act as our personal experiences impact the public sphere, but in a discussion of aesthetics the act of making the private public is also a sensory act of vulnerability. To engage the senses in a political becoming in this way is an act of interference and disruption to the status quo. It is an emergent politic that attunes to the ephemeral and sensational, creating openings for affect. To lump the twenty-one videos of this project together in this discussion is difficult because they each engage their own aesthetic qualities, but through those qualities every single one of the videos engages with affection through personal narrative (real and imagined). Therefore, the embodiment of the private made public through vulnerability, wherein our bodies enfold their context onto themselves (Alvarez, 2014), makes personal story, told and performed by its creator a powerful aesthetic of its own. As an example, one of the videos created for the *Queer Connections* project uses stop motion animation to explore queer identities post-coming out. The group described the video as follows:

This week we responded to videos of coming out stories. They had very [i]ntimate stories that were shared by the other groups. We were inspired to continue the conversation by asking the

questions: what happens after one comes out? Where would you take yourself next? This video is part exploration and part celebration of the various queer narratives and its different roles and dynamics. Be fierce! (TaKe Out, 2012)

The video itself has no dialogue, the youth participants move around the frame in a jolted manner, due to the stop motion animation, their bodies playfully engage with one another as they try on wigs, make-up, and fitted baseball caps. The youth embody different identities as they spontaneously respond and react to their peers. This unscripted performance is an embodied and relational site of becoming, where the youth shift from fixed coming out narratives to queer possibilities, all the time only ever existing in the moment (Mazzei, 2013). It is this moment, the moment of engagement that brings forth the private to an affective place of encounter. It is through the relational aesthetic of the performers with one another that we as viewer are invited into the narrative. John Dewey (2005) believes that we cannot discuss an artwork without discussing what that art work does. In this case the art that was created is a contested site of political becoming, where groups of people engage with one another in an exchange of vulnerable self and exploration. This 'doing' in relation to others, becomes the aesthetics of the work of art, the stop-motion video is not a piece of art on its own but rather a sampling of a larger piece that can only be understood through the way it engages the videos that came before and after it. The participatory aesthetic emerges in the space between the twenty-one videos, providing each piece of the dialogue an opportunity to find its own unique portrayal of encounter as the youth navigate making the private public, vulnerability, personal narrative, and becoming in relation to the other groups across the city.

DISCUSSION

Thompson (2009) argues that applied theatre practice is focused on effective social outcomes and that we need to reimagine the aesthetic and affective engagement of our efforts. The concept of participatory aesthetics, as proposed here, is a site of affective encounter that enables us to reimagine how applied theatre work can be effective pedagogically, ethically, socially, and artistically.

Pedagogy

As a pedagogical engagement a participatory aesthetic provides participants with ownership and agency over their own learning. Rather than a prescribed outcome that is required to engage with a dominant aesthetic frame or even a specific goal-oriented outcome, a participant driven process focuses on the emergences in the spaces between the participants and the art. This unknown space presents a site of inquiry for participants to work through on their own terms and in their own ways – challenging, exploring, and creating movement together as their bodies entwine and entangle, push and pull, and emerge a new. This is evidenced in both case studies with the Ghanaian participants decision to turn the camera lens on themselves and their own learning journey as a culturally specific site of vulnerability and change, and with the challenge Toronto participants faced in artistic interpretation of difficult topics with peers they have never met. Both projects required a re-thinking of pedagogy, not as a pre-determined approach to a specific learning outcome, but rather as a journey through which participants would learn about themselves through their encounters with others. This dialogic artistic rendering is the very essence of a participatory aesthetic – where the encounter is the artistic artifact in and of itself.

Ethics

A participant-driven project that enables communities and individuals to express, examine, and explore within their own cultural context works to undermine the status quo by subverting and reimagining euro-centric, colonial, and even oppressive frames of knowing. While acknowledging that a facilitator or professional artist will undoubtedly hold power within the context of an applied theatre project, the choice to engage in dialogic art-making from the hearts and minds of participants is a step towards acknowledging and diffusing this power differential. A participatory aesthetic demands that ownership of both the process and product remains entirely in the hands of participants and that in doing so a new aesthetic quality emerges that can be recognized, valued and assessed through a matrix of affective encounter. For both case studies this emerges through the process of

encounter – with one another, with me as facilitator, and with audiences; wherein the artistic product and aesthetic judgment shifts to a site of becoming in relation to those around us.

Social Change

Art for social change is often cited as a way to bridge empathetic understanding, to see the world from another's point of view (Mitchell, 2001; Rivers, 2013; Shapiro & Hunt, 2003; Wang, 2010). However, this has the potential to reproduce a Self/Other binary, which can contribute to the repetition and circulation of harmful and oppressive discourses, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia (Kumashiro, 2000). It is therefore necessary to use the theatrical form not only as a site of empathy, but also one in which we can complicate ideas, feel with and through one another, attune to the way that affect is circulating through bodies, and respond with a willingness to explore the unthinkable (Gallagher, 2016). In applied theatre the artist is not a sole muse - rather the artist is a community of learners who work together to reflect on their own experiences and knowledges, to transform harmful practices by engaging with what is silenced, hidden, or unsaid. This reflexivity provides space for artists to engage with an audience in a raw and gritty approach to artistic creation. Complicating theatre in this way means that at times seemingly different approaches to theatrical presentation are potentially intertwined and overlapping: participants may subvert the dominant through the traditional and vice versa. This emerges in both case studies as participants draw on their own knowledges, contexts, and bodies to create and explore ideas through an artistic process. This collaborative art making is not polished and complete, but rather a process of performance, creation, and presentation that is designed to ask questions, to open up dialogue, and to reveal what is often unspoken or unknown.

Building on Helen Nicolson's (2005) idea of transportation (in contrast to transformation) as a momentary and often fleeting state of change, a participatory aesthetic relies on the ephemeral encounters of bodies in motion as a site of social change. When bodies are impacted by one another, even if just momentarily, a shift occurs - the trajectory of that body has been altered. Within the *Queer Connections* project this is seen when the videos respond in unexpected ways – shifting the dialogue to challenge the preconceived ideas of the group as the

conversation spirals in intricate new directions. Within *Unwrapping the Sweets* this movement is altered through a block of affective energy when the artistic artefact is denied within a different cultural context. In both cases the aesthetic encounter has elicited a moment of transportation – what comes next is unknown.

Artistry

Conroy (2015) states “Aesthetics enables us to activate analysis of the experience itself, to think in terms of our visceral and sensory responses and to extrapolate these into understandings of human agency and experience” (p. 2). This suggests that aesthetics are the very thing through which we are able to encounter one another, they are an ephemeral and embodied affection that emerges in and through our experiences. In discussing a dialogic aesthetic, Collins (2015) believes that one of the biggest challenges is “accepting the risk and vulnerability that come with dialogue” (p. 123). This risk and vulnerability provide the heart of a participatory aesthetic because they position the sensory self as the site of artistic creation. In sharing ourselves through others, by making the private public, a relational aesthetic emerges and invites people into dialogue with one another. This dialogical process is a site of aesthetic becoming. Dewey (2005) offers an interesting metaphor to describe a processual aesthetic when he says, “But if one sets out to *understand* the flowering of plants he is committed to finding out something about the interactions of soil, air, water, and sunlight that condition the growth of plants” (p. 2). In this sense, we should not be evaluating art as a completed object (film, performance, video), rather it is an experience through which many components (story, politic, and experience) encounter one another creating a new emergence that redefines our understanding of aesthetics as something that can be understood through feeling and is situated within a dialogic process of becoming.

CONCLUSION

Our cultural relationship to polished and professional aesthetics is shifting through the emergence of participatory media. Cell phone videos uploaded to YouTube have the potential to change the world by eliciting debate and rendering powerful stories. Although not a

facilitated applied theatre process, this reimagining of the public sphere, where the masses have shifted from cultural consumers to cultural producers is engaging with a participatory aesthetic (Snell, 2014). Through our encounters, our becomings, and our narratives people are capable of creating provoking and engaging artwork on their own terms and for their own purposes. Applied theatre facilitators and academics can use the concept of a participatory aesthetic to navigate the tensions that riddle the field; questions of aesthetics, participation, ethics, and assessment (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016) can all be examined through a dialogic and relational lens of knowing and becoming. Although the case studies discussed in this paper are both youth projects, the ability to engage with a participatory aesthetic is not limited to youth. Youth are perhaps more willing to take risks with the unknown and this riskiness opens up possibilities for creative encounters. Each and every one of us can engage with a pedagogy of vulnerability as a site of becoming and it is this that defines a participatory aesthetic.

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From *Les Mis* to *Annie, Jr.*: A Discussion of Dramaturgical Adaptation for Musical Theatre in Education and Accessibility of Musical Theatre to Youth

SEAN MAYES

ABSTRACT

As an arts educator, it is inspiring to have access to the spoils of the art of musical theatre to engage and captivate young minds and artistic hearts. In providing an artistic output, one affords both the satisfaction of involvement in a collaborative art coupled with the lasting gift of community and artistic inspiration. Regrettably, the endeavour towards providing an accessible dramatic medium can prove challenging for the best of theatre & music pedagogues and artists alike. Musical theatre becomes increasingly more difficult as both musical and dramatic requirements needed for its execution modify.

With these constraints, youth face obstacles in exploring many works of the genre they love faithfully. As educators, the responsibility in maintaining accessibility is tremendous. Improper attention to the usage of the vocal instrument without regard of these developments can cause irreparable damage. Limited access to works for youth and negligible adaptation risk staleness and disinterest.

How might the educating artist continually provide an accessible medium of musical theatre to the young performer? From a dramatic & musical lens, this paper discusses the responsibility of the educator in identifying and addressing the unique challenges confronting young performers via the art of musical theatre.

Working as an arts educator with youth provides both parties with a privileged world of opportunity, exploration and discovery. Today, the genre of musical theatre provides youth with a dynamic outlet in which drama, music and dance are explored through an interdisciplinary world, constantly building on the pulse of the social world in which we exist. Musical theatre provides a relatable channel that youth identify with. This is a breath of fresh air to the artist tasked with finding material to satisfy their 21st century mindset. However, the educating artist has an increasing responsibility within this craft of sharing and exploring musical theatre with youth. Musical theatre offers a unique collaborative form, which requires the arts educator to teach a genre of drama that grounds itself symbiotically in music. With this, the arts educator must encourage the conscious usage of drama in execution of *music as drama*; otherwise risking dramatic staleness and disregard of the form.

The educator is also confronted with both an absence of research and support in musical theatre as dramaturgy, as well as in the vocal training of youth in this area. Despite research and data in adult vocal pedagogy towards the newly developed styles embraced by musical theatre (MT), there is an overwhelming lack of research and deliberation on the requirements for youth with regard to this new methodology of singing. Texts on singing instruction for youth largely model a classical framework inappropriate for full consideration of the ever-changing requirements of MT, and scientific and performative research have focused on the adult performer, largely ignoring the unique needs of the youth performer. Additionally, MT is becoming increasingly more demanding musically and inaccessible for younger voices as both stylistic and technical requirements needed for its execution modify. Inattention to the needs of youth in training can cause negligent damage.

How does the arts educator provide a continually accessible medium of musical theatre to youth? In this paper, I will undertake an

exploration of the obstacles facing the youth performer in executing musical theatre in consideration of the educator and their role. A cursory appraisal of the genre with attention on dramaturgical adaptation and youth focused works will be undertaken in providing insight to musical accessibility alongside dramatic integrity. A proposition towards additional research into the scientific support of vocal pedagogy and dramaturgy for youth in MT is supplemented by a manifesto supported through recent professional practice by which arts educators may craft their own work.

IDENTIFYING YOUTH INTEREST IN MUSICAL THEATRE

As a practitioner, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the recognition that the musical has earned amongst youth. Commercially, the Broadway market has successfully made the appeal to younger audiences who are arguably exposed to the Great White Way via family & adult influence. Numerically, it is evident that a strong market of youth access to commercial MT exists. Considering American statistics, the Broadway League published that in the 2014-2015 Broadway season, an impressive 1.14 million admissions of New York shows were of youth 18 or younger (Broadway League, 2016). This access to theatre is encouraging for youth and arts educators alike, as the importance of theatre education both within and outside of the school continues to be affirmed through research (Richardson, 2015; Rajan, 2017). Graduation rates of at-risk youth with access to drama double, and youth find higher levels in achievement and attendance in school (Catterall, Dumais, Hampden-Thompson, 2012).

With exposure, youth are enticed towards MT with pieces that encourage social development, expression and temporal awakening of their surroundings and existence through stories and characters, which explore themes not limited to childhood, discovery, love and friendship. In her book *Theatre & Feeling*, Canadian professor of drama Erin Hurley affirms the innate connections between feeling and our investment in the theatre. She maintains that “feeling draws us into the symbolic universe of theatrical performance by connecting us emotionally with its characters [...]; via emotional labour, theatre intervenes in how we as a society come to understand ourselves, our values, and our social world.” (Hurley, 2010, pg. 10) It is no question why youth of all ages identify so strongly with these vicarious

experiences. With discussion of this evidence for theatre, it is worth considering the current landscape and how musical theatre is (or is not) supporting youth access.

TRENDS, EXISTING REPERTOIRE, AND CONSIDERATION OF SUITABILITY

An effective method of further analysis is in consideration of the repertoire, and existent material that youth access, geared for both youth and adult productions. Dramatically, in discussion with professionals, the suitability of content for usage with youth is one of the overruling stipulations for selection of material. Interviewed practitioners with experience facilitating material for youth affirm that suitability of content is a vital consideration in selection (M. Johnson, personal communication, February 17, 2016; A. Merriam, personal communication, March 30, 2016).

The consideration of the developmental maturity of a character is a valuable one in choosing material. What journey does a character take through a piece of musical theatre? Would this be a journey suitable for the *youth* performer to endure as well? In application, it is of course unavoidable that many youth performers act the roles of adult characters. Inevitably, this may present youth with adult themes. A performer who is able to convincingly bring the audience on board in delivering the lines and story of an adult should be allowed to do so, provided the experience will not prove damaging to the youth. Careful consideration may be needed for characters whose storytelling journey encompasses mature themes that may be less believable for the audience, and more importantly emotionally problematic for the youth. Consider the tremendous difference in dramatic journey through two musicals adapted for youth in *Annie* (Kids, Jr.) & *Sweeney Todd* (School Version). This is not to say that it cannot be done without careful consideration; compare the content of some classic plays given to youth for study by none other than Shakespeare! (M. Johnson, personal communication, February 17, 2016).

In equal importance, role breakdown and consideration of adult versus youth parts is crucial. A brief consideration again at the role breakdown in *Annie, Jr.* helps illustrate this point. The overwhelming lean towards adult over youth characters shows that only an average of 24% to 30% of the characters in the production are under adult age,

dependent on the number of additional orphans added. This statistic, from a musical with a strong basis of youth characters & performers, gives a glance as to how even musicals featuring youth often overlook employment of a primarily youth cast.

One can see how in employment of a musical, it becomes nonviable to produce a show with only youth if one is concerned with placing youth in roles originally characterized and written with the intention of being realized vocally & dramatically by adults. In their consideration of this dilemma, *iTheatrics*, the company tasked with creation of youth accessible shows through Music Theatre International, has acknowledged this in their professional editing and consideration of each piece revised for youth performance. Respectfully, it is similarly requisite the educator consider this when placing youth into their roles. Who was the role originally intended for, and would the original content of the role (vocal tessitura, dramatic maturity, technical ability i.e. dance, et cetera) fit the capability of the individual?

ABSENCE OF ACADEMIC AND PRACTICAL SUPPORT IN VOCAL TRAINING

As a musical discipline, it is unavoidable to view the training of youth in part via the musical lens. As a genre heavily correlated with popular music, musical theatre has often turned to the style of its age to captivate its audience – arguably progressively so in the 21st century drawing on numerous mainstream styles and contemporary styles of production to convey its story.

Numerous texts and practitioners from New York, London and other hubs of MT have yielded texts and methodologies by which adult singers may be supported in undertaking a professional career as an actor or actress in MT. There is also encouragingly a great deal of evidence to validate the work of educators who support the craft, whether at the conservatory level, or in the working field. It is commendable to see the work of practitioners such as Jeannette LoVetri, as well as Jo Estill, Mary Saunders Barton & Edrie Means Weekly to name a few who have worked to both articulate the specific vocal needs of MT through both profession and text (LoVetri, Saunders-Barton & Weekly, 2014; Estill, 1988). Albeit not a closed chapter, the gap in comprehension has slowly closed as the craft

develops and the educational need to support gains momentum.

Despite this, however, this has not disseminated to the youth community. The evidence and support for youth is negligible and worrisome. Academic and practical evidence supports an industry that is largely operated through the guise of the professional adult scene. The boundaries of vocal scope in MT have expanded with the maturation of the art, and present unique considerations for youth execution. New shows draw heavily on influences of varying stylistic forms, with strong emphasis on pop & rock in conjunction with the traditional Broadway show sound. The average range of male and female voices can span immensely in all three main foundational styles of MT vocal work. A specific approach to these styles of music in MT is recognized by vocal pedagogue Jeannette LoVetri, and identified through the term, Contemporary Commercial Music, or CCM (LoVetri, 2014). This turn to mainstream sound is characteristic of the plurality of musicals today, not only limited to those more accessible to youth.

The aforementioned expectations of the youth vocal mechanism in full adult range are not fully attainable and should not be expected in executing a vocal role that was originally intended for an adult apparatus. It is obvious that this differentiation must be acknowledged through work; neglect to do so in pushing beyond these boundaries could cause reckless harm of the youth instrument. These considerations are made in professional adaptation; a useful factor for the artist educator tempted to mount a musical without considering range or vocal style in execution. Improper imitation by youth of adult voices more equipped to sing difficult material is problematic. I maintain there is rationale behind the lack of practice-based and academic support, which I propose is not executed through malice, but rather in part through unawareness, both scientifically and professionally. Consider the following:

1. *Vocal health and production of youth singers has been academically explored; however, is still inconclusive in some areas due to biological limitations.*

In drawing on evidence (Skelton, 2007), there are many variables biologically in the youth instrument which present problematic obstacles for exploring its training.

2. *Youth in the profession are auditioned and recruited with different expectations than their adult counterparts.*

A durable voice seemed well suited stylistically holds potential to rule out over one trained professionally. A professional company will be mindful that a youth performer may not have previous access to training. This is particularly the case as professional companies may often provide an on-site practitioner who is considerate of the youth voice.

3. *Musical theatre as a still budding practice-based art has evaded some academic parameters, as practitioners who deal with its execution are less concerned with notating findings.*

Practitioners with an innate understanding of these difficulties are more frequently submersed in the practical world, with less attention to journaling their approach to working with youth voices.

A DRAMATURGICAL METHODOLOGY AS A FRAMEWORK FOR ACCESS

I would like to briefly discuss the implications in the *drama* of musical theatre for the arts educator. In consideration of musical theatre as a total collaborative art, the potential dilemma of crossing disciplines is evident. The arts educator with an aptitude towards music may be less adept at looking at the same material through a dramatic lens in combination with music. This is problematic as the collaborative art of MT requires all pieces of the artistic puzzle complement each other; music serves as a dramatic device in depicting the story. In seeking to provide a dramaturgical approach to musical theatre that may be accessible to the arts educator, I would like to provide a framework in the realm of musical theatre dramaturgy. With this, an accessible method of approach can be determined through the lens of dramaturgy with the intention of serving all MT practitioners.

In approaching musical theatre as drama, one may consider its mature cousin in the realms of music as drama, which utilizes music in depiction of dramatic storytelling. One need look no further than opera for this example, and more specifically, the Wagnerian approach to total synthesis through the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, designed at telling all

action and character through musical ideals associated with character and theme through the *leitmotif* (Dawson-Bowling, 2013). Further from this start point, we can see from opera and into musical theatre that there is substantial work published on the usage of song and song as drama (considering *Acting the Song*, Bergman & Moore, Allowrth, 2008; *Acting in Musical Theatre*, Dal Vera & Deer, Routledge, 2015).

Despite establishment, there is an absence in academia on musical theatre dramaturgy specifically, likely due to the cross-disciplinary work required of its executors. Recent publication has shown that there is a desire for the development of this area. In the recently published *Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*, American musical director Brian Valencia reveals a comprehensive and itemized account of the work of the musical director, and how this work relates to the dramatic curve of a musical.

In his exploration, Valencia touches on the difficulty in approaching the musical through one single biased lens as a practitioner, claiming that if a dramaturg on a project is not a trained musician, “components of musical theatre can seem arcane or intimidating” (Valencia, 2015, pg. 342). This can lead to mistreatment of content integrated with music, risking dramatic neglect. Consider his thoughts in the following statement:

Limiting musical functionality to these two narrative-based alternatives (forwarding plot or illuminating character) ignores the fundamental polymodal fabric of musical theatre, stuns the theatrical imagination, and results in replicative productions in which putative realism often exists uncomfortably alongside the musical’s inherently non-realistic conventions. (Valencia, 2014, pg. 373)

In opposition to this staleness, Valencia prevents a series of questions, which through character intention and development allow the arts educator to consider MT from a truly collaborative approach. He proposes that the streamline effect and combination of elements [of a musical] create a dramaturgy of sorts, where all parts are effectively dramatically linked to one another and serve each other (Valencia, 2015, pg. 373). In considering questions such as these, the arts educator opens up channels for sensitive dialogue amongst youth in considering the full dramatic scope of musical theatre, alleviating the

likelihood of replicating musical theatre in a two-dimensional fashion with minimal investment and passion.

SCHOOL VERSION AS MODEL & PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH

With a view to the MT song as music as drama by means of the arts educator, I return once again to the School Version to endorse its suitability in the art as an accessible, artistically satisfying model through which to motivate and train youth. In examination of the suitable genres, I will gear comparison and discourse through consideration of the professionally published School Versions (Kids, Junior & School Editions) available for licence through Music Theatre International to support discussion. In discussion with *iTheatrics*, responsible for the creation of the commercially produced licensable School Version, there were numerous guidelines that were expressed as being paramount in converting the average musical into an accessible form – all being of use to the arts educator.

Dramatically, one of the largest themes that emerged out of discussion was the necessity in allowing an adapted form to act as a credible device for storytelling. This was stressed not only for the necessity of the piece itself dramatically, but also in consideration of the original artists' intention and artistic integrity. An emphasis on conveying storytelling may help ensure that a piece does not try to replicate lines artificially without depth. Consider thoughts from *iTheatrics*, which concisely approach this in mindfulness of the audience and reception.

It is all about telling a story – we stress that with students and teachers; your job is to be a story teller. [...] If you have the right environment, the kids can learn and get something out of it in a different way. [...] I can honestly believe [...] what I am going to see [...] as long as they are a good storyteller. (M. Johnson, personal communication, February 17, 2016)

It was also important to emphasize that content suitable for youth was a key proponent of the need for the School Version; however, artistic license still requires that adapted or non-adapted musicals with what may still be considered unsuitable requirements such as number of cast and inappropriate material must be left unchanged in recognition

of the original artist's work and wishes. This may be a dilemma for the arts educator faced with wanting to produce a full work that may be considered questionable material. A proposal to this is indicated towards the paper's end.

Professionally, *iTheatrics* is in consideration of differences in the abilities between adult & youth performers. Musically, *iTheatrics* outlined that youth friendly considerations are undertaken with regard to keys, difficulty of all songs (regarding range, tessitura, et cetera), and show length (for vocal, physical & dramatic endurance). Specific considerations of these guidelines are additionally offered at paper's end.

A MANIFESTO FOR RESPONSIBLE PRACTICE

Deliberation on these approaches provides a method by which the arts educator must consider the delicate art of bringing youth musical theatre to the stage. I would like to propose a manifesto supplemented by personal practice by which the arts educator may consider all work suitable (or not) for youth. Keeping in the mindset of education, all of the suggestions listed here are done with the intention of best practices in mind, and highest consideration for the young performer and their unique needs.

1. Knowledge and passion of and for the genre

As an arts educator, knowledge of the genre is imperative. With a deeper comprehension of the craft, we are able to make further informed decisions that will enable youth to have access to sustainable, healthy repertoire which will maintain interest and peak inspiration. Inspiration in the arts comes through mastery; the more that we know, the better our students learn.

2. Capabilities of our youth

It is crucial that the arts educator be well aware of the capabilities of the youth they are working with, both musically and dramatically. Inattention to specific inabilities can cause youth to become disinterested with material, or worse and more vitally, may cause impairment. Focus towards ability will provide momentum and focus

towards success.

3. Appreciation of musical theatre dramaturgy and music as drama

A practitioner more familiar in music must have a broad comprehension of dramatic cohesion and function within form. Attention to items such as character, plot, setting and form via all lenses reinforce the paramount importance of the Aristotelian fundamentals! The educating arts educator must approach musical theatre as both a musical and dramatic form, and treat all elements of music within as storytelling. Grounded approach in teaching drama through the musical theatre song will ensure good practice.

In personal practice in development of the School Edition musical, this proved crucial. In reducing original material, it was crucial to allow material left to focus on telling the intention of the story, and to ensure material removed was secondary and not crucial to the dramatic arch and foundation of the storytelling. This enabled a more focused effort at direct communication of the main concepts.

4. Vocal qualities and stylistic requirements

With comprehension of musical theatre comes knowledge of the unique vocal requirements. As a genre, the reliance on the popular sound and employment of vocal qualities is large; this must be considered in selecting repertoire and determining range. It is suggested that music in undesirable keys undergo transposition in order to make this process more accessible for youth. As previously discussed, one of the main justifications behind creating abbreviated versions of the musical is to decrease the length of time youth are singing. This should be considered even in the interim during practice as youth rehearse.

Our consideration of this was also crucial in practical application. With music composed in a rock idiom, much consideration was made in creating pieces with optional keys for a lower range to prevent youth voices from reaching too high in a belt-focused sound that could be damaging. Changes were also made in inverting vocal parts to help alleviate this.

5. *Content and suitability*

Ethically, the discussion of content and suitability for youth is particularly important. We know the arts educator is ethically and professionally responsible for the well-being of their students in all facets when dealing with material. Some shows without School Editions may still be completely suitable for youth, or alternatively, may offer one or two musical numbers that may be suitable to be performed without the full show. It is up to the arts educator to decide what will be deemed appropriate or too sensitive on access based upon knowledge of the youth at their responsibility. The MTI school accessible repertoire is a useful tool for helping to guide these decisions as experts have appraised these pieces for their suitability. The final decision, ultimately, must still rest with the ethical judgment of the adult.

In revision of material in the original piece, it was necessary to consider the suitability of some pieces with their content and whether this would be suitable for a youth performer to speak or sing. Resultantly, select material was adjusted in sensitive consideration.

6. *Respecting creative license*

Perhaps the one of the most difficult and vital aspects of selecting and crafting material for youth is the aforementioned dilemma of copyright and artistic license. Educators may seek to alter material in order to increase accessibility. Regrettably, this creates issues as the material being edited is under copyright, and artistic license remains with the authors. It is worth considering that a simple change to a verse or an edit of material is still copyright infringement and unlawful, despite unlikely being done out of malice and only in best interest of the performer.

What may the arts educator do about this, and what are some tangible solutions for practice? In discussion on the issue with copyright with *iTheatrics*, I have provided an optimistically advantageous list for guiding principle.

The arts educator may...

- Make edits to a score with chorus parts harmonically; i.e.

remove parts to make a four-part harmonically more accessible to a smaller or less capable chorus

- Use a free standing score of an existing piece from a musical (i.e. in a choral partition) through an independent music publisher that will specifically meet the aforementioned requirements
- Use instrumental parts to supplement a youth production

The arts educator may not...

- Remove verses in a song in order to condense time
- Edit or remove text from a scene in order to condense time
- Make transpositions in a published theatre score to suit the performer

With limitations, it can be creatively disheartening in preparation for younger performers. However, it is worth consideration that all limitations are set in best interest towards preservation of the form, and that other accessible options help to protect copyright, which ultimately protects all artists in maintaining integrity.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF MAINTAINING ACCESSIBILITY

This article seeks to demonstrate the vast amount of evidence in support of having musical theatre within school communities and readily accessible to youth. There is, however, a great amount of research left to be done on restricted youth access to music theatre due to financial or demographic limitation. Consider the following in pursuance of theatre:

Musical theatre as a live performance medium is often frequently restricted to cities and regions where live theatre is abundant, accessible and financially supported in production. This can cause issues for many youth in external areas where theatre is not a cultural staple. Youth in urban areas potentially have an advantage in proximity over those in rural areas without access to theatre. Optimistically, MT is embracing new forms of production and replication, which may be of interest in exposure to the arts educator. One popular version of this are the live TV movie productions of musicals (*Grease Live!*, *Hairspray Live!*, et cetera), which are recorded in video in an attempt to share the

form with as many as possible in being far reaching. Although enabling accessibility to the form through the screen, it is far from a replacement for the live theatre experience.

Despite being in an urban setting, however, youth may also be limited due to financial access to the theatre itself. As mentioned before, youth access theatre primarily through adult attendance. Respectively, youth attendance is limited to the financial abilities of the adults who would take them. In the 2015/16 Broadway season, the average cost of a ticket was \$103.11 US (Broadway League, 2016). Quite the financial undertaking for providing a young audience member with a theatrical experience! Resultantly, youth may find themselves at the theatre on rare occasion.

Lastly, for the young theatre enthusiasts who do not access theatre as live performance, the issue of school or community access comes into play. The range of a licensing cost of a MTI Kids show is between \$395 and \$495, and a Junior title may cost between \$550 and \$645 ("Broadway Junior," March 30, 2017.). This does not begin to factor in the costly undertaking of all aspects of production (costuming, props, set design, music, et cetera). This is an important consideration as many schools may be unable to afford such a cost. Potential cursory alternatives for access may include one of the options in the manifesto such as a free standing piece, or ambitiously, an original musical from the capable arts educator. However, it is evident that the financial and demographic consideration is an important study to be considered and undertaken.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is discernible that there is much work left to do in this arena. Musical theatre continues to be an art by which young performers appreciate, develop and grow. Musical adaptation has helped in ensuring youth are able to access many pieces that may not have been accessible prior. However, there is still work left towards creating a foundational framework in providing access to the repertoire and genre. Musically, scientific evidence is needed to supplement vocal training, and further exploration into practice-as-research may help to provide a clearer view into the minds of those working with youth for specific technique. Further work is needed in analyzing the process, training and development of the youth voice in application of

musical theatre to devise and develop a CCM training that is sound in practice. Dramatically, a further exploration into the field of musical theatre dramaturgy is crucial, arguably so from the lens of the arts educator. Professionals in the field need to acknowledge the need for additional entry into their craft as research.

It is up to the arts educator in application to determine whether material, designated for youth or not, is responsibly educating and guiding youth on the route of developmental performance. The educator must continue to perfect and provide a means by which musical theatre may be enjoyed. It is up to the expertise and passion of those working with youth to ensure that youth everywhere are able to fully explore the magical world of musical theatre.

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An active musical director, educator, teaching artist and organist from Canada, [Sean Mayes](#) has professionally musically directed numerous shows in varying venues throughout Canada and the United Kingdom. Past work includes time with the UK Tour of Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, as well as work on the one-hour adaptation of a recent West End musical.

From *Les Mis* to *Annie, Jr.*

In academia, Sean enjoys a busy career in both teaching and writing, and holds degrees in Music & Education, as well as an MA in Music Direction. Select work has been featured at recent & upcoming engagements including the International “Putting it Together” UK Conference -Investigating Sources in Musical Theatre, the NYU Forum on Educational Theatre, and the Annual Conference for the Association for Theatre in Higher Education.