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ARTSPRAXIS

Emphasizing critical analysis of the arts in society.

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ArtsPraxis Volume 12, Issue 1 looked to engage members of the global Educational Theatre community in dialogue around current research and practice. We welcomed traditional academic research as well as narratives of practice. The call for papers was released in concert with the publication of *ArtsPraxis* Volume 11, Issue 2. The submission deadline for Volume 12, Issue 1 was March 1, 2025.

Submissions fell under one of the following categories:

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

methodologies)

Article submissions addressed the following questions:

Drama in Education

- How and why do we teach drama and theatre in schools and community settings?
- How do the roles and responsibilities of the teaching artist differ from those of the classroom teacher (primary, secondary or higher education)?
- What is the contemporary role of drama and theatre in arts education?
- How do we prepare future theatre artists and educators in the 21st century?
- What are innovative ways of devising original works and/or teaching theatre using various aesthetic forms, media, and/or technology?
- To what extent can the study of global theatre forms impact students' learning?
- To what extent should we distinguish theatre-making from drama as a learning medium?
- How can integrated-arts curricula facilitate teaching, learning and presenting the craft of theatre?
- How do we assess students' aesthetic understanding and awareness?
- What research supports the potential of drama as a learning medium?
- How do drama and theatre make connections across curricular content areas and beyond schools?
- How do drama and theatre education contribute to lifelong learning?
- What role do drama and theatre play in community agencies?

Applied Theatre

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

Theatre for Young Audiences/Youth Theatre

- Theatre for young audiences is an international movement and the borders are breaking down so how do we present and respond to work from other countries?
- Who exactly are our new audiences—who are we talking to?
- Are we as brave as we think we are? How does what we think we should do relate to what we want to do as artists?
- Is the writer at the heart of future theatre creation? What has happened to dramaturgy in the brave new world of immersive, experiential, visual/physical theatre?
- Theatre for Young Audiences has always been in the forefront of theatrical innovation. So what is next?
- What have we learned about nurturing the artist of the future-- playwriting, theatre-making, performance?

- How do artists establish rigorous, intentional new works development processes that are innovative and sustainable?
- How does accountability serve the stakeholders in a new works development process?
- How do we define and measure success in theatre for young audiences?

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

Call for Papers
Papers were to be no longer than 6,000 words, had to be accompanied by a 200 word abstract and 100 word biographies for the author(s), and conformed to APA style manual. For this issue, articles could include traditional academic scholarship and narratives of practice.

Reviewing Procedures
Each article was sent to two peer reviewers. They provided advice on the following:

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

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Cover image from NYU Steinhardt / Program in Educational Theatre production of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' *Everybody*, directed by Nan Smithner in 2025.

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Editorial: Stay Woke

JONATHAN P. JONES
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

> Now is the spring of our discontent
> Made inglorious winter by the predilections of a dissatisfied populace and the whims of their dear leader
> And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house for two and half centuries are firmly ensconced overhead with no clearing in sight.

Not so long ago, progress seemed possible—that we could turn the proverbial page–but the past is always prologue and what is possible is never guaranteed.

Just a year ago, I shared with you the wall of shame that barricades the plaza across from my office (Jones, 2024, p. ii). And one year on, the wall remains. In his prescient, necessary text, *On Tyranny* (2017), American historian Timothy Snyder's first lesson for combating tyranny is not to obey in advance. "Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more oppressive government will want, and then

offer themselves without being asked" (p. 17). NYU's reaction to on campus protests in 2023 and 2024 was to restrict access to all public, congregate spaces. At the time, this was partly done to prevent drawing congressional ire, as experienced by other colleges and universities across the US (Saul & Hartocollis, 2023). And as the current administration has gone further in penalizing institutions of higher education in the name of combating antisemitism, these spaces have remained closed here at NYU (as seen in Figures 1-4, photographed by this author on 4 June 2025)—all in service of preventing pro-Palestinian protests from having a site where they might develop on campus (WSN Editorial Board, 2024).

Figure 1: The wall of shame has a new coat of paint and slogan. Our future is indeed taking shape--and it is a dark one; photograph by this author.

Figure 2: The arcade-like entrance to the NYU Bobst Library is barricaded to restrict access. In the past, the arcade was sometimes a protest site; photograph by this author.

Figure 3: The main entrance to the Kimmel Center for Student Life has been adjusted to detour students and staff around the closed Grand Staircase. The staircase has been closed since October 2023 due to student protest activity (Lucas and Pisoni, 2024); photograph by this author.

Figure 4: Schwartz Plaza, a pedestrian thoroughfare that used to be open to the general public, is now barricaded, with access limited. Students and staff must show ID to NYU Public Safety officers to enter; photograph by this author.

I may be wrong, but I have long understood universities to be a site for the free exchange of ideas. And yet, these actions make me question that ideal. As does NYU's decision to withhold the diploma of Logan Rozos for using his graduation ceremony speech to speak out against the "genocide currently occurring" in Gaza (Chen, 2025).

At the outset of this editorial, I reimagined the opening to Shakespeare's *Richard III*, characterizing this political and social moment as the 'spring of our discontent' —so-called spring to capture my sentiment that the worst is yet to come. And in this perilous moment for the free exchange of ideas—particularly 'woke ideas,' I wonder, should we be cowed into submission? Should we obey in advance? Or might there be another path to follow?

HUSH HARBORS

While drafting this editorial, I attended a book talk by former US Attorney Barbara McQuade in conversation with former Attorney General Loretta Lynch, speaking about the social and political implications of disinformation and misinformation. After an introduction that delineated a number of the court cases where the president's

many executive orders or budget cuts have been struck down (either temporarily or permanently), AG Lynch commented, “All of these cases are evidence of a people who are not giving up.” Of these various judicial cases, attorneys general from a variety of states brought suit to stop some of these orders from going into effect (Chen, 2025; Meko and Closson, 2025, Mar. 13; Meko and Closson, 2025, Apr. 10; Weiser and Miller, 2025, May 28; Willingham, 2025; et al). And as these officials are charged with engaging in these judicial fights, their work is always in the public sphere. But for private citizens, there are other routes to preserving political struggles—and rather than obeying in advance, a little history might illuminate a path to maintain political struggle outside of the public sphere.

Hush harbors were sacred space for enslaved African Americans in the antebellum south. The enslaved gathered initially to maintain their ancestral faith, but eventually to develop their own form of Christian worship outside of the prying eyes of their masters. A formerly enslaved man, Simon Brown, described these spaces as ones in which,

> They cherished meetings of their own where they could relax and enjoy the form of worship that pleased them and uplifted their spirits. … they would steal away into the woods and meet in what they called the invisible church, or the hush harbor, where they constructed meeting places made from the branches of trees … there was no pretending in those prayer meetings. There was a living faith in a just God Who would one day answer the cries of His poor black children and deliver them from their enemies. (cited in Erskine, 2014, p. 133)

The conversations in these hush harbors were not limited to religious practices. Nunley (2007) notes, “Hush harbor spaces enabled enslaved Africans in America to address secular as well as sacred concerns” (p. 226). And more than just conversations, these spaces provided participants with opportunities to collectively organize. Nunley continues, “Formal institutions such as the National Colored Woman’s Association, the Black Panthers, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference all emerged from sequestered or hidden Black public spheres of African American hush harbors” (p. 227). The underground railroad was underground for a reason—and in its

seclusion, it was highly effective. So who knows what might develop from obscured political discourse provided that the discourse continues.

Educational theatre often prioritizes the experience of the participants moving through a process over that of an external audience who views a product. Process is rarely public, and as such, we know well the power of what can happen in an educational and/or artistic space behind a closed door. So let us never lose sight of the power of our practice. As James Baldwin has advised, “For this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what it must become” (Baldwin, 1962, p. 294). And until we achieve that progress, let us have all hands on deck—working both in public and in private to move us ever forward.

STAYING WOKE

In my editorial two years ago, I implored our readers to “Get woke” — and in response to the question *what does it look like to be woke in the classroom*, I advised:

> It is not about espousing a political ideology. Rather, it tasks you with creating a learning community that is grounded in liberation, equity, and justice. Woke in the classroom requires self-reflection. It requires you to consider your privilege before you speak—be that due to your race, gender, ethnicity, sexual-orientation, or otherwise. It requires you to promote inquiry and critical consciousness. Woke in the classroom is where students know that you support them when the world outside seeks to oppress them. (Jones, 2023, pp. vi-vii)

Since that writing, today’s political climate insists that ‘woke’ is wrong—that the activists went too far. American business leaders found themselves up against a workforce that demanded equity and justice in the workplace—a workforce who vocally identified threads of racism, colonialism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and implicit and explicit bias in the workplace. And in retaliation, those business leaders now offer public support for the presidential administration—they say they can breathe a sigh of relief as they champion the end to diversity, equity, and inclusion—DEI (Bennet, 2024). And in our work with young

people and in community, we must reject that. Liberation must always be our goal and we must endeavor—whether in public or in private—to do what we can to achieve that.

And what will that look like today? In truth, our liberatory toolkit remains—albeit more necessary now. Recall my action steps I proposed in 2023:

> That doesn't mean you need to organize a protest (though you could). It doesn't mean you need to take to the streets (though you could[…]). It doesn't mean you have to make public comment at your local school board meeting (though you could). The teacher who keeps a drawer full of emergency snacks for students they know are missing meals when the conservatives cut funding is doing their part. And if, like me, you worry after that you didn't do enough—let that push you to do more the next time. They want you to be pacified. They want you to be cowed into silence. They want you asleep. (p. xiii)

As illustrated in the closing tableau of Beyoncé's Cowboy Carter tour (Figure 5), a silent protest can be quite effective in highlighting endangered public speech. Let us make room for all manner of activism in this moment, and let us strive for possibility. French political activist Frank Barat offers encouraging words for political struggle, "That seemingly indestructible forces can be, thanks to people's will-power, sacrifices, and actions, easily broken" (2016, xii). We will move ever forward—but let's not kid ourselves—the brutality of oppressive summer is coming. And in light of this, I implore you: stay woke!

Figure 5: At Beyoncé's Cowboy Carter World Tour, the Statue of Liberty is shown with a mask covering her mouth; photograph by this author.

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue, our contributors thoughtfully examine educational theatre practices, offering reflections and documentation of creative practices that are shaping the field. **Samantha Briggs** and **Marissa Barnathan** explore how they combined methods from participatory democracy, futures studies, and Boal's Legislative Theatre to create a multi-step audience engagement process consisting of pre-production, post-show, and post-production workshops aimed at collectively strategizing methods for preventing gun violence. **Aghogho Lucky Imiti** contends that Theatre Arts as a professional discipline in the humanities should be regarded as other disciplines, and its graduates be given equal opportunities as their counterparts from other fields in Nigeria. **Rosalind M. Flynn** analyzes embodied learning, using physical

theatre activities to support the learning of vocabulary words. Finally, **Dave Humphreys** shows how carefully structured and targeted drama games can benefit learners' experiences and support teachers in understanding a dramatic pedagogical approach.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our next issue (Volume 12, Issue 2) looks to engage members of the global Educational Theatre community in dialogue around current research and practice. We invite members of the Educational Theatre field to submit works that will share ideas, vocabularies, strategies, and techniques, centering on varying definitions and practices. That issue will publish in late-2025. Thereafter, look to the Verbatim Performance Lab for outreach and innovation from the NYU Steinhardt Program in Educational Theatre.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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

Steinhardt. He serves on the editorial board for *Applied Theatre Research* and *Youth Theatre Journal,* and on the board of directors as well as chair of Research and Scholarship for the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) where he serves as Board Chair, 2025-2027.

Jonathan has conducted drama workshops in and around New York City, London, and Los Angeles in schools and prisons. As a performer, he has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Town Hall, The Green Space, St. Patrick's Cathedral, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, The Southbank Centre in London UK, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Jonathan's directing credits include *Hamlet, Twelfth Night, Julius Caesar, Elsewhere in Elsinore, Dorothy Rides the Rainbow, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Bye Bye Birdie, The Laramie Project, Grease, Little Shop of Horrors*, and *West Side Story*. Assistant directing includes *Woyzeck* and *The Crucible*. As a performer, he has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Town Hall, The Green Space, St. Patrick's Cathedral, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, The Southbank Centre in London UK, Bord Gáis Energy Theatre in Dublin, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Production credits include co-producing a staged-reading of a new musical, *The Throwbacks*, at the New York Musical Theatre Festival and serving as assistant production manager and occasionally as stage director for the New York City Gay Men's Chorus, most recently directing *Quiet No More: A Celebration of Stonewall* at Carnegie Hall for World Pride, 2019.

At NYU, Jonathan previously served the Program in Educational Theatre as faculty member, coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor. His courses included Acting: Scene Study, American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Assessment of Student Work in Drama, Development of Theatre and Drama I, Devising Educational Drama Programs and Curricula, Directing Youth Theatre, Drama across the Curriculum and Beyond, Drama in Education I, Drama in Education II, Dramatic Activities in the Secondary Drama Classroom, Methods of Conducting Creative Drama, Theory of Creative Drama, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Elementary Drama, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Secondary Drama, Shakespeare's Theatre, and World Drama. Jonathan was awarded the Steinhardt Teaching Excellence Award in 2025.

Early in his placement at NYU, Jonathan served as teaching assistant for American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Seminar in Elementary Student Teaching, Theatre of Brecht and Beckett, and Theatre of Eugene O'Neill and worked as a course tutor and administrator for the study abroad program in London for three summers. He has supervised over 50 students in their student teaching placements in elementary and secondary schools in the New York City Area. Prior to becoming a teacher, Jonathan was an applicant services representative at NYU in the Graduate School of Arts and Science Enrollment Services Office for five years.

Recent publications include Discoveries beyond the Lesson Plan: A 'How to' (with David T. Montgomery) in Education in the North, 31 (2), "And So We Write": Reflective Practice in Ethnotheatre and Devised Theatre Projects in *LEARNing Landscapes, 14* (2), Let Them Speak: Devised Theatre as a Culturally Responsive Methodology for Secondary Students in *Routledge Companion to Theatre and Young People* (edited by Selina Busby, Charlene Rajendran, and Kelly Freebody; forthcoming), *Paradigms and Possibilities: A Festschrift in Honor of Philip Taylor* (2019), and Education at Roundabout: It's about Turning Classrooms into Theatres and the Theatre into a Classroom (with Jennifer DiBella and Mitch Mattson) in *Education and Theatres: Beyond the Four Walls* (edited by Michael Finneran and Michael Anderson; 2019). His book *Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Culturally Responsive and Student-Centered Approach* was published by Routledge in winter 2023/24.

Recent speaking engagements include Establishing Communities of Practice among Pre-Service Drama Teachers: Revisiting Learning to Teach Drama: A Case Narrative Approach, EdTA Teacher Education Conference: Building CommUNITY, Minneapolis, MN (2024) and Amplify & Ignite: Creative Practice in and With Communities, Emerson College, Boston (2025); Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Culturally Responsive and Student-Centered Approach, AATE National Conference: Rooting Change, Chicago, IL (2024), Face to Face 2024: NYC Arts In Education Roundtable Virtual Conference (2024), and EDTA Connected Arts Network (2025); Communing with the Ancestors—a keynote lecture for Amplify & Ignite: A Symposium on Research and Scholarship (AATE/NYU, 2024) and featured guest spots on Fluency with Dr. Durell Cooper Podcast, speaking about Origins, Inspirations, and Aspirations, and Conversations in Social

Justice Podcast, York St. John University, speaking about Activism and Race within University Teaching and Research (2021); panel moderation for AATE Leaders of Color Institute (We Will Not Be Erased: Combating Censorship and Book Bans in Theatre by, for, and about Youth, 2024 and Cultivating Spaces for LOC in Educational and 'Professional' Theatre Settings - Opening Keynote with Daphnie Sicre and José Casas, 2022), invited workshops for AATE Theatre in Our Schools (Reimagining Drama Curriculum: The Gradual Release of Responsibility Framework, Locating Order in the Chaos: Revisiting Assessment in the Drama Classroom and Stage to Page: Reimagining the Teacher/Practitioner Role in Scholarship) and the AATE National Conference (Classroom Justice: Culturally Responsive, Student-Centered Assessment in the Drama Classroom and Pandemic Positives: What Do We Keep? Looking Backwards to Move Forward); invited workshops for the 2024 NYC Arts in Education Roundtable (Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Student-Centered Approach), LondonDrama, 2023 Dorothy Heathcote NOW conference in Aberdeen, Scotland (Assessment in the Drama Classroom; and co-facilitation with David Montgomery: *The Bear That Wasn't*: A Process Drama Investigating Identity and *The Last Book in the Universe*: A Process Drama Unpacking the Consequences of Book-Banning); an invited lecture on Performance as Activism at the Research-Based Theater Seminar, Washington, D.C. Citizen Diplomacy Fund Rapid Response COVID-19 Research-Based Theater Project, The COVID Monologues, part of the Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund for US Alumni Rapid Response made possible by the US Department of State and Partners of the Americas (2020); a keynote lecture on Drama and Education: Why and How for the Drama and Education Conference, Shanghai, China (2020); and an invited lecture, On Creativity, for the University of Anbar, Iraq (2020). Upcoming engagements include workshops on Developing Communities of Practice among Theatre Educators for IDIERI 11 in Vancouver and the 2025 American Alliance for Theatre and Education Conference. He will also present selections from Communing with the Ancestors at the IDIERI Conference.

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

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#ENOUGH: Confronting Gun Violence through Community-Engaged Theatre Practices

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the authors' experience of developing and implementing a civic engagement process within the context of a 2022 production of #ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence*. By combining methods from participatory democracy, futures studies, and Boal's Legislative Theatre, the authors created a multi-step audience engagement process consisting of pre-production, post-show, and post-production workshops aimed at collectively strategizing methods for preventing gun violence, both locally, in Arizona, and nationally, in the United States. In this paper, the authors outline their methods, reflect on outcomes, and offer considerations for theatre practitioners and researchers engaging with a variety of socio-political issues and wishing to incorporate community-engaged advocacy into their work.*

INTRODUCTION

Gun violence is unfortunately endemic in the United States, increasing steadily each year, with 61 active shooter incidents on record in 2021 compared to only 3 in 2000 (Gramlich, 2023). Within just two weeks of initially drafting this article in May 2022, two particularly tragic mass shootings occurred: on May 14, 2022, a White gunman killed 10 Black shoppers and workers at a Tops supermarket in Buffalo, NY (Thompson, 2022), and on May 24, 2022, an 18-year-old man killed 19 children and two teachers at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, TX (Bleiberg & Murphy, 2022). In 2024, there were 515 mass shootings in the United States (Boschma, Merrill, & Murphy-Teixidor, 2025), and in 2025, firearms are the leading cause of death for children and teens (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2025). These facts illustrate the major increase in gun violence in the United States in the last several years.

In 2019, as a response to the Parkland shootings that took place in February 2018, Chicago-based theatre artist Michael Cotey created *#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence,* a theatre project that aims to "harness the current generation's spirit of activism by promoting playwriting as a tool for self-expression and social change and supplying a platform for America's future playwrights to develop their voices today" (ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence, LLC, 2022). Since its inception, *#ENOUGH* has produced three nationwide reading projects, with many theatre companies, schools, and community organizations simultaneously presenting the plays—written by youth playwrights—in a staged reading format on one selected night of the year. For each project cycle, a selection committee, currently including Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright James Ijames (*Fat Ham*) and Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, chooses six to eight short plays out of over 100 submissions by youth playwrights to be featured as part of the *#ENOUGH* annual reading. The current *#ENOUGH* advisory committee for the fourth annual reading in 2025 includes applied theatre artists like Michael Rohd, founder of Sojourn Theatre Company, Bill Rauch, co-founder of Cornerstone Theater, and playwrights like Lauren Gunderson (*You and I*) and Idris Goodwin (*This is Modern Art*).

While in graduate school at Arizona State University (ASU), we,

Marissa Barnathan and Samantha Briggs, organized and directed a 2022 production of *#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence* in an ongoing effort to expand our applied theatre toolkit and inspire positive social change. As theatre artists concerned about the gun violence epidemic, we recognized *#ENOUGH*'s impact as an intervention to this pressing issue—one that offers an opportunity for youth to practice artistic activism as part of a national movement. We used the project to experiment with different modes of community engagement surrounding a theatrical production and activate audiences around the topic of gun violence prevention. With support from the *#ENOUGH* leadership, we built upon the one-night-only reading format and organized a larger production consisting of multiple performances, as well as engagement opportunities before, during, and after the production. These additional engagements were heavily inspired by the fields of participatory democracy, Legislative Theatre, and futures studies. This paper describes our engagement efforts and outcomes, with particular attention to how we drew from and integrated the aforementioned disciplines.

INSPIRATION FOR THE WORK

Throughout our graduate study, we actively developed our skills as applied theatre artists, with a particular interest in engaging audiences around important sociopolitical topics. At ASU, we were fortunate to learn from experts in the field, such as Michael Rohd and Dr. Stephani Etheridge Woodson, whose work in civic practice and community-cultural development was impactful in the development of our values and aspirations as community-engaged artists. At the same time, we looked to scholars outside of the arts to expand our understanding of democratic processes and civic participation. In the spring of 2022, we enrolled in a class with Dr. Daniel Schugurensky, a professor in the School of Public Affairs and the School of Global Transformation at ASU. In Schugerensky's "Participatory Governance and Civic Engagement" course, we were introduced to participatory democracy, which describes a model of governance in which citizens have the power to directly decide on policies, and politicians are then responsible for implementing those policy decisions (Fung, 2006). This model of democracy emphasizes broad involvement of people within politics and has been successfully utilized in many communities

around the world. Most notably, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, citizens have used participatory democracy since 1990 to effectively allocate their city's budget for needs such as road building and access to sewage (Kingsley, 2012).

Upon learning about participatory democracy, we recognized a natural connection with Augusto Boal's Legislative Theatre, which we identify as another strong influence on our work. Inspired by participatory democracy efforts in Brazil, Boal created Legislative Theatre in 1992, an offshoot of his previous method, Theatre of the Oppressed (People Powered, n.d.). Legislative Theatre invites legislators and community stakeholders to a Forum Theatre style performance where community members act out possible solutions to community issues in order to impact a change in governmental policy. The community members then work with legislators and stakeholders to transform their ideas into new laws or changes to existing laws (People Powered, n.d.). Through Dr. Schugurensky, we had the opportunity to meet with Legislative Theatre expert Katy Rubin, founder of Theatre of the Oppressed NYC. Founded in 2011, Theatre of the Oppressed NYC successfully uses Legislative Theatre methods to address houselessness and criminal justice reform, among other topics (Kelly-Golfman, 2018). Rubin offered helpful guidance in the structure of our post-production workshop, specifically in terms of how to gain information regarding the most accessible policy changes and how to strategically engage our legislative stakeholder, Arizona State Representative Jennifer Longdon.

The final inspiration for our community engagement work was the field of futures studies, introduced to us by our then-classmate Ben Gansky, a multi-faceted PhD student in the School for the Future of Innovation in Society in the College of Global Futures at ASU. Prominent futures studies scholar Sohail Inayatullah (2012) defines futures studies as "the systematic study of possible, probable and preferable futures including the worldviews and myths that underlie each future" (p. 37). Dator (1998) explains that the field of futures studies seeks to help people "invent and try to move effectively toward their preferred futures" (p. 302). We drew from futures studies because we believe that, as artists and citizens, we must first imagine the changes we want to see before we can effectively create them, and we recognized futures studies as one method for such collective imagining.

Each of these individuals, art forms, processes, and schools of thought were swirling in our minds when we began developing the community engagement components of our *#ENOUGH* production. Thus, we are not claiming to have developed an entirely new mode of audience engagement, nor are we simply replicating a pre-existing framework. Rather, we see our efforts as interdisciplinary and experimental—a conglomerate of "best practices" and hopeful "what ifs" all aimed at making positive social change via expanding and enhancing the theatrical audience experience.

THE WORKSHOPS

With the support of the *#ENOUGH* leadership, we expanded upon the one-night-only reading format and organized a larger production consisting of five performances over five days, plus a pre-production workshop, post-show debrief sessions after each performance, and a post-production workshop with a panel of expert stakeholders. Our intention with these additional components was to offer multiple opportunities for individuals to connect, reflect, and brainstorm solutions around the issue of gun violence. We hypothesized that these additional engagements would leave audience members more inclined to take action than if they simply watched the *#ENOUGH* plays in isolation. In the following sections, we outline each step in the process—the pre-production workshop, post-show debriefs, and post-production workshop—and discuss the responses and engagement from participants.

Pre-Production Workshop

The pre-production workshop took place on the Monday preceding the week of performances and was attended by over a dozen ASU graduate and undergraduate students from multiple disciplines, as well as local community members. The main goal of the pre-production workshop was to collectively consider ideas about community safety. After leading a short icebreaker to promote trust and comfort among group members, we invited participants to create "community safety murals" on chart paper hung on the walls. Inspired by futures-thinking exercises, which can help find narrative framings of issues that avoid partisan political road-blocks (Inayatullah, 2012), we encouraged

participants to think imaginatively beyond their current reality, offering the following prompt to guide their creation: “Imagine a future where all communities are safe. What does it look like? What happens there? Who is there? How does it feel? Express it on the chart paper. You can use words, pictures—whatever feels right!” Participant responses included phrases such as “no guns,” “free healthcare,” “good education,” “economic equality,” “no fences,” “exposure to difference,” “no white collars,” and “local government transparency.”

After participants shared their observations of the murals, two cast members performed a short excerpt from one of the *#ENOUGH* plays, *In My Sights* (Leonard-Peck, 2022), which depicts a young lesbian couple discussing the purchase of their first gun. We chose this excerpt because the two queer female characters explicitly voice concerns for their physical safety due to their identity, offering a clear connection to our community safety murals. Our intention in sharing this theatrical excerpt was to hold a mirror to our participants’ communities and demonstrate how audience members can make connections between a performance and their own lived experience. To this end, after the performance, we asked participants to identify the objectives and obstacles for the two characters in the scene using a dramatic analysis framework (Stanislavski, 1989; Alberti and Gister, 2012). The group then discussed obstacles and barriers to their visions of community safety, and how to address them. In the responses, participants mentioned barriers such as a distrust of law enforcement and a lack of mental health resources, with the latter being especially prevalent in education.

As a final activity, participants collectively authored potential questions to ask audience members after the *#ENOUGH* performances. Participants crafted 15 different questions, including: “How does race intersect with how we talk about gun violence and mental health?”, “Is legislative action around access to guns in Arizona possible?”, and “What assets can we tap into to promote broader support for mental health in education?” (see Figure 1). Inspired by deliberative democracy voting sessions (Cohen, 2000; Russon Gilman, 2012; Pimbert & Wakeford, 2001), a type of participatory democracy where citizens decide on government priorities through deliberation and polling, we introduced an easy-to-reproduce voting method where each participant received two stickers, which they placed next to the questions they felt were the most meaningful. The two questions that

garnered the most votes were “How would you allocate funds to create a safer community?” and “In an ideal world, what gates exist around access to firearms?” (see Figure 1).

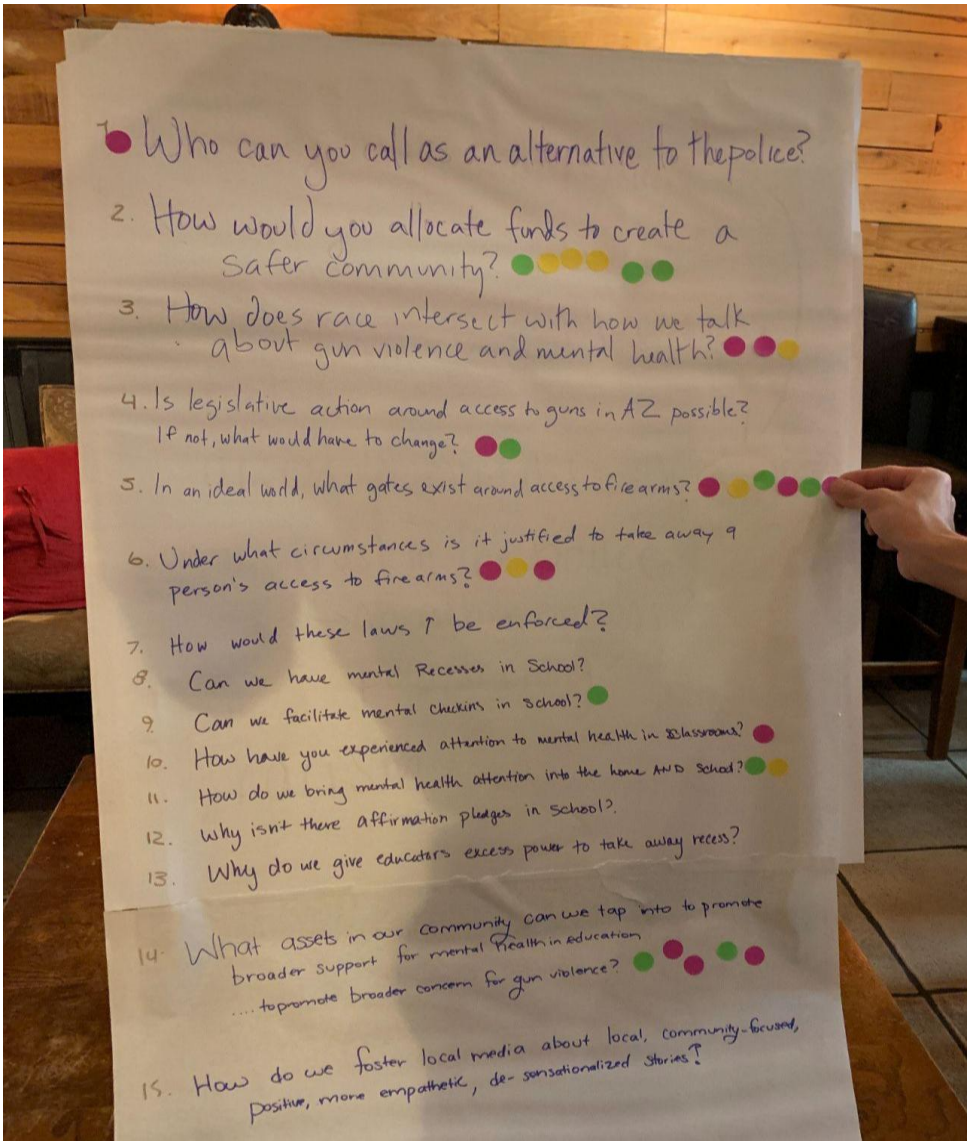

Figure 1: Questions generated at Pre-Production Workshop, 2022; Photo credit: Barnathan

By incorporating a deliberative democracy voting session into our pre-production workshop, we intended to demonstrate how deliberative

democracy can produce real actions. In this case, the actions produced were the questions for use in the post-show debriefs. By allowing participants to generate and vote on questions to ask audience members, we increased community and civic engagement across time and space, connecting workshop participants to audience members of our performances.

Performances and Post-Show Debriefs

The second phase of the process involved the performances and post-show debriefs. We intentionally used the word "debrief" in an attempt to get away from the more traditional post-show talkback, which, in our experience, can quickly digress into audience members talking at or over each other. Given our specific artistic goals and values, we were interested in exploring options for more substantive audience engagement after the performances. We wanted to foster a space where audience members could not only discuss the performance content but also take a deeper dive into the topic of gun violence prevention and generate action steps for the future.

Many theatre companies in the US have similarly pivoted from the traditional talkback format, including Cornerstone Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and Baltimore Center Stage. One notable example is Michael Rohd's Sojourn Theatre, which is now a subset of Rohd's Center for Performance and Civic Practice. Sojourn's work focuses on civic dialogue and often incorporates dialogue between actors and audience members, as well as between audience members themselves. Examples of such work include *Don't Go*, *How to End Poverty in 90 Seconds*, and *BUILT*. Through specific, thoughtful prompts and creatively facilitated opportunities to converse with others in the room, Sojourn's work promotes critical thought and interpersonal connection.

While highly inspired by Sojourn, our attempt to pivot from the traditional talkback was limited because we were working with scripted material that could not be changed. We identify this as a potential challenge for individuals who desire to merge their artistic practice with activist pursuits. To address this challenge, we created what we believed would be a step towards a more interactive experience within the confines of a show with a set structure and written text. At the beginning of the post-show debrief, instead of the audience remaining

in their seats and the performers on stage, we invited audience members to form a circle on the stage to create a more equitable and inviting atmosphere. We started with a think-pair-share activity that asked participants to consider the different ways gun violence affects our society, as depicted in the show. Pairs were instructed to share in the order of who woke up the earliest that day. We started the post-show debrief this way—with audience members talking in pairs and casually discussing their wake-up routines—because we wanted to build trust within a group made up of many strangers and we believe that "trust is built one to one" (brown, 2021, p. 138). Next, we engaged the whole group in a conversation using the questions created and voted on during the pre-production workshop. Building on the rich discussions that emerged, we concluded by providing index cards and asking the group to write down one action that needs to be taken to prevent gun violence. The index cards were collected at the end of the night and included a plethora of distinct responses, which we discuss below.

While the five performances were well-attended, with about 130 total audience members over the course of the performances, including a standing-room-only final showing, the initial 20-minute post-show debriefs were not as highly attended as we had hoped. We anticipated an organic motivation towards substantive post-show debriefing after each of the shows, especially from individuals who attended the pre-production workshop; however, only the first post-show debrief on opening night was well-attended by about twenty participants. At the second post-show debrief, the group was much smaller and comprised largely of actors and theatre colleagues. One possible explanation for this outcome is the length of the performance, which included eight 10-minute plays, plus about 10 minutes of interwoven text piecing the performance together. The full performance from start to finish ran about 1 hour and 45 minutes without an intermission, and many audience members may have been at capacity attention-wise. To address this issue in future *#ENOUGH* performances, Michael Cotey has changed the format to only six plays instead of eight.

After the second night of the production, we pivoted towards asynchronous participation in an attempt to get closer to our goal of activating audience participation in meaningful, action-oriented ways. At the end of the third performance, after the scripted performance

ended, we entered the stage and gave a short speech, elaborating on the goals of the production and inviting audience members to reflect on two key questions posed within the plays— “When are we going to wake up? When will it be enough?” (Odom, 2022, p. 10). Then, we prompted audience members to write down one action, large or small, that they would like to see taken toward community safety. To develop this new prompt while honoring the contribution of our pre-production workshop participants, we looked for commonalities between the two participant-created questions and our original post-show question about action steps (“How would you allocate funds to create a safer community?” and “In an ideal world, what gates exist around access to firearms?”). This collection of audience-generated action proposals parallels the iteration of community-driven policy change characteristic of Legislative Theatre (Kelly-Golfman, 2018).

Several actors handed out index cards and writing utensils while we prompted the audience to write down their answers and return the cards to the production team on their way out of the theatre. In this fashion, we collected over 70 individual proposals for gun violence prevention. This suggests that our adapted method of engagement was ultimately successful in eliciting more participation from the audience around the issue of gun violence prevention. We additionally displayed a QR code linking to a form letter in opposition to an Arizona campus-carry bill entitled HB 2447 (*An Act…Relating to Firearms*, 2022) and encouraged the audience to send the letter electronically, either in the moment or at a later time. Several cast members used their cell phones to do so on the spot, further encouraging the audience and modeling the ease of the action. With this pivot, we maximized the precious post-show moment, where audience members, freshly impacted by a performance, are most likely to take action before the sway of the performance wanes.

Post-Production Workshop & Final Actions

After the closing performance, we conducted the culminating post-production workshop. Over a dozen participants attended, including audience members, facilitators, and expert stakeholders Michael Rohd; ASU Professor Dr. Daniel Schugurensky, a participatory democracy scholar; and Arizona State Representative Jennifer Longdon, a

survivor of gun violence.[1] Inviting these experts to both the final performance and post-production workshop allowed us to experiment with elements of Legislative Theatre and participatory democracy on a smaller scale. In Legislative Theatre, it is common practice to invite legislators to the theatrical event, who will then be held accountable for the policy ideas voted on by the group (Boal, 1998); the person who filled this legislator role in our workshop was Rep. Longdon. In participatory democracy, it is common practice to invite experts on the subject matter to educate the citizens before they vote on an issue (Pateman, 2012); Rohd and Schugurensky filled this role. By combining these practices, we provided participants with a unique opportunity to receive expert information and individual attention from their legislator, which guided the rest of the workshop.

Before the post-production workshop, our research team organized the over 70 action proposals offered by audience members for gun violence prevention inductively into nine categories and displayed them in the workshop space (see Figures 2 and 3). The categories were:

1. legislation - access to guns
2. legislation - background checks
3. law enforcement
4. conflict resolution
5. community programming
6. mental health
7. education around guns and gun violence
8. stories: “the power of narrative”
9. miscellaneous.

Organizing the action proposals in this way allowed us to more clearly identify patterns and commonalities in audience members’ thoughts about both the causes of and solutions for gun violence.

[1] To note, in spring 2024, Longdon resigned from the Arizona House of Representatives and currently works at a healthcare non-profit.

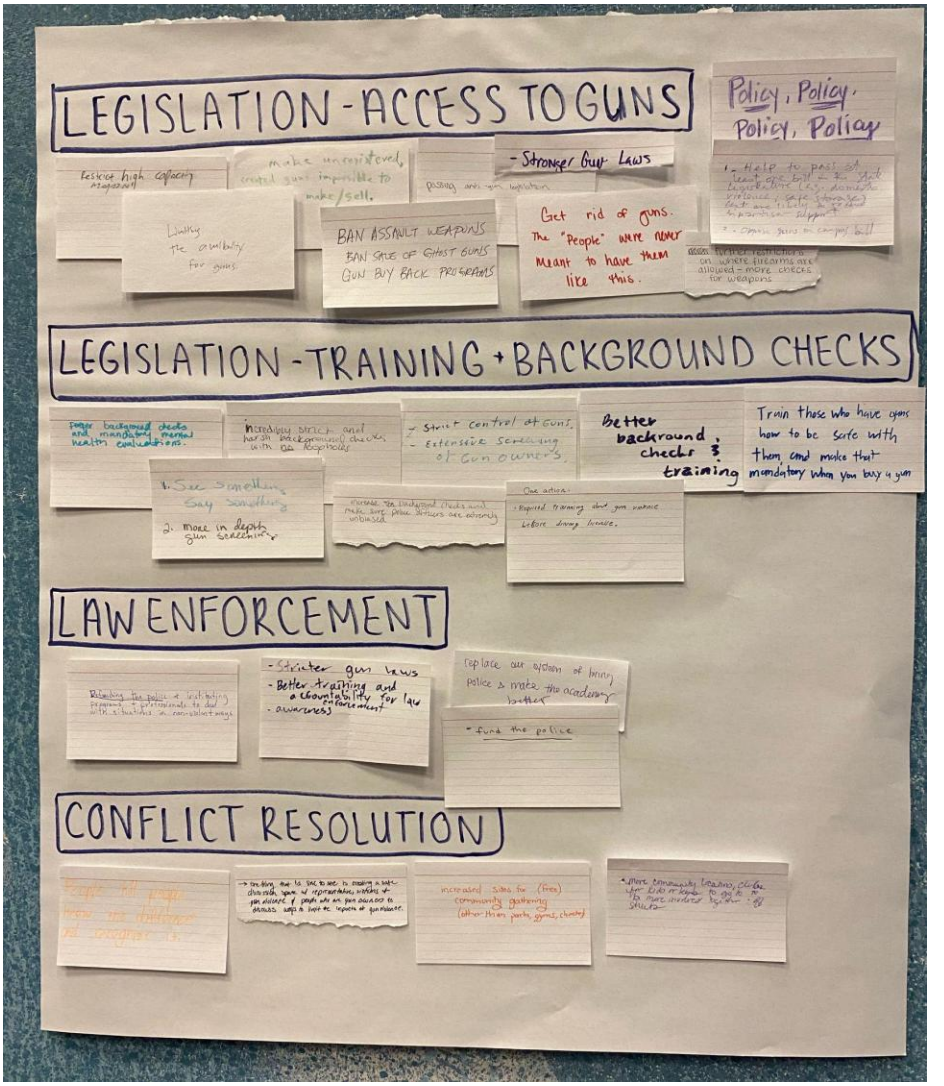

Figure 2: Audience-generated Action Proposals, 2022; Photo credit: Barnathan

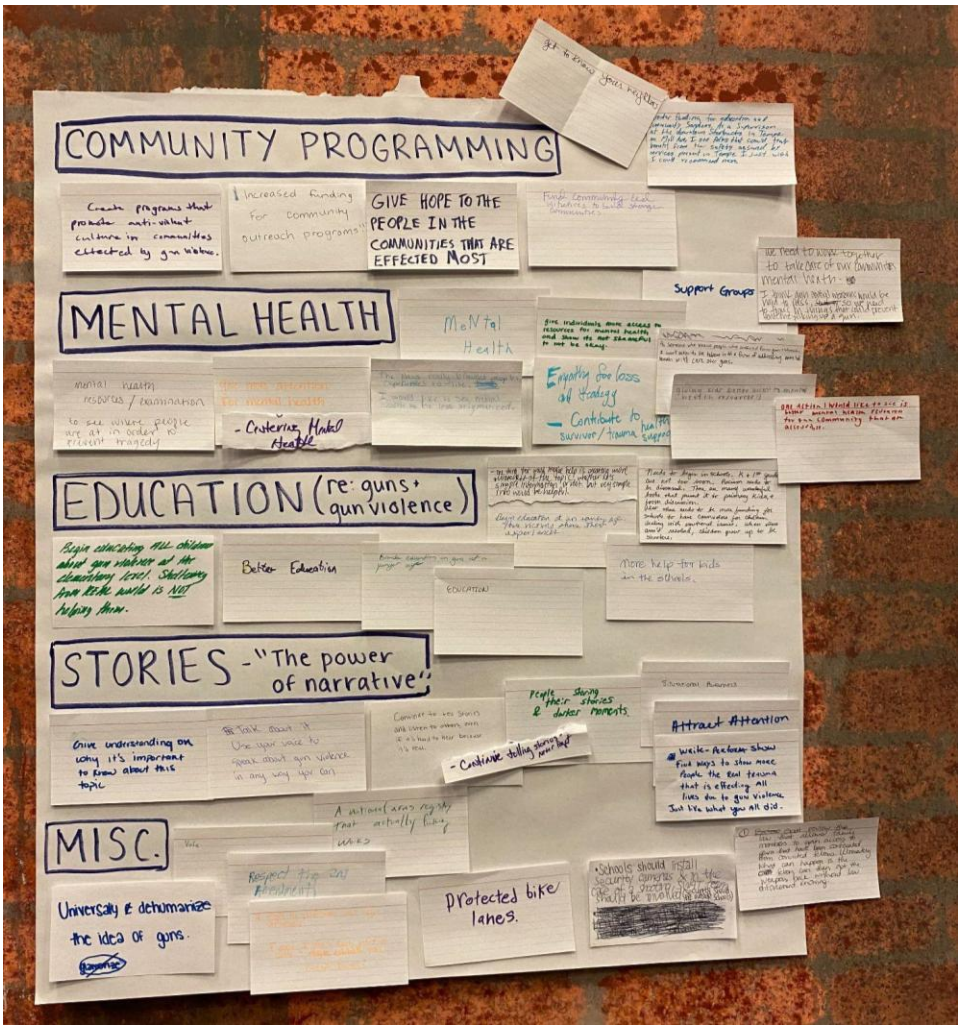

Figure 3: Audience-generated Action Proposals, 2022; Photo credit: Barnathan

The proposals served as a catalyst for a group conversation about possibilities for collective action. Similar to the pre-production workshop, the post-production workshop incorporated a futures-thinking exercise to encourage bold and imaginative solutions. After participants reviewed the action proposals, we organized the participants into small groups and asked them to imagine a "headline from the future" that described a gun violence prevention success in approximately five years. The groups were asked, in addition to writing the headline, to describe (1) how this success was accomplished, (2) who was involved, and (3) the obstacles overcome along the way.

Some headline examples from participants included:

- "Arizona Passes Bill on Digitally Encrypted Safe Storage"
- "Arizona Pilots New Bullet Tracking Program"
- "Arizona Hasn't Experienced A School Shooting in One Year"
- "Second Amendment Rights Revised to Exclude Automatic and Semi-Automatic Guns"

We were particularly impressed by the participants' creativity in generating their headlines, which fostered a rich discussion about who has the power to influence policy and the necessary resources (e.g. grants, technology, etc.) to make change.

In response to this activity and the 70+ audience-generated action proposals, Rep. Longdon spoke about realistic possibilities for gun violence prevention in Arizona. She reiterated and agreed with our opposition to the Arizona campus-carry bill, and she advocated for extreme risk orders of protection, where a person's firearms are temporarily taken away under extreme circumstances (i.e. physical or mental illness, homicidal intent, etc.). Responding to the two headlines about technological advancements in gun violence prevention, Longdon shared information about available smart gun technology and the barriers keeping this technology out of the U.S. market. Throughout the conversation, participants had the unique opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts with a state legislator.

Unlike Legislative Theatre, we did not ask Rep. Longdon to commit to any specific legislative actions as a result of our conversation. It became clear that Longdon was already fighting for many of the actions called for by our audience members. That said, providing a space for individuals to talk candidly and intimately with an elected official proved to be a unique and valuable offering afforded through our process. For example, at least three participants had never met Rep. Longdon before, despite her having represented their congressional district for three years.

We see this component as a first step in building an important coalition between citizens and their elected officials, and one way that our process deviated from Boal's Legislative Theatre. Whereas some forms of Legislative Theatre position the legislator solely as a vehicle for turning citizens' desires into law, we saw the relationship between citizen and legislator differently. From our perspective, forming

relationships with one's legislator is an important step to mobilize change by lessening the gap between those with power and those without.

Following the discussion with Longdon, the post-production workshop participants and the expert stakeholders collaborated to create a new list of possible actions to commit to, inspired by the 70+ audience-generated action proposals. Unlike some iterations of Legislative Theatre, where the proposals would indicate actions taken by the legislator only, we chose to brainstorm actions we could all commit to as individuals or as a community. Drawing again from participatory democracy, participants voted on the most impactful actions, as seen in Figure 4.

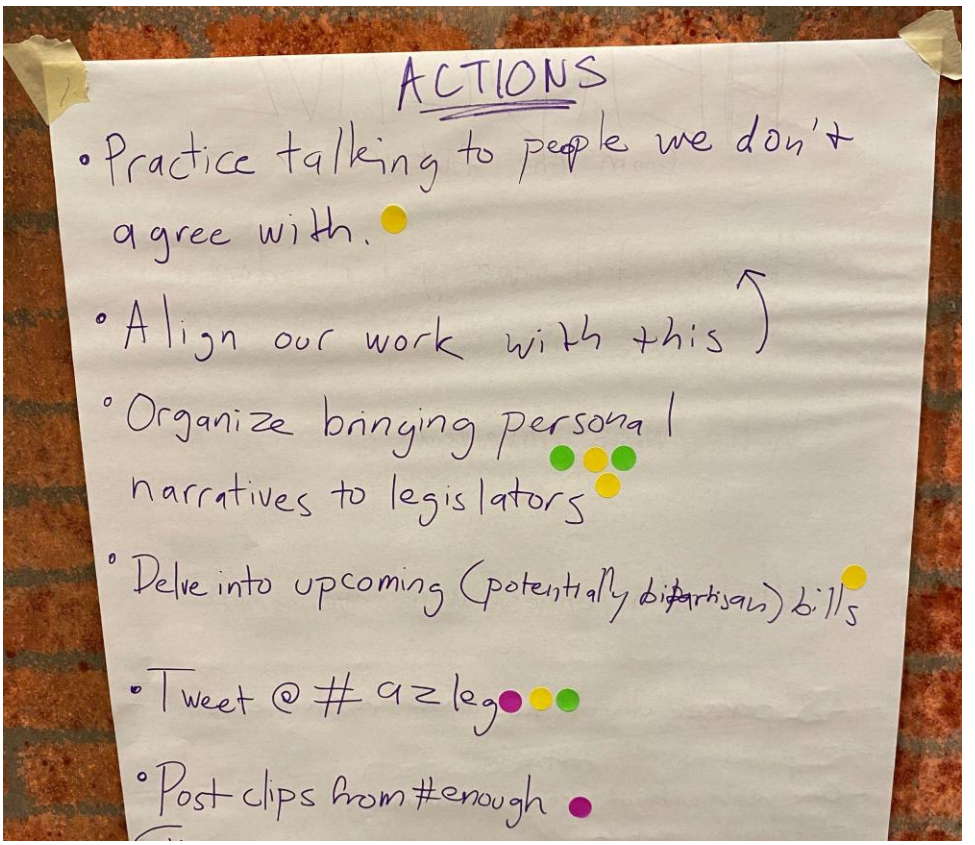

Figure 4: Action Items generated at Post-Production Workshop, 2022; Photo credit: Barnathan

The two actions with the most votes were (1) "organize bringing personal narratives to legislators" and (2) "tweeting at #AZLEG." During our conversation with Rep. Longdon, she emphasized the effectiveness of using Twitter (now called X) to get the attention of state legislators in Arizona on issues like gun violence prevention. In addition, participants were drawn to sharing personal narratives with other legislators largely because of the intimate and informative conversation with Longdon, as well as their experience watching the narratives from the youth playwrights in the *#ENOUGH* performance. This correlation between attending arts events and increased civic engagement has been proven by other scholars in recent years. For example, Rabkin (2017) highlights two NEA studies which show that U.S. Americans who attend arts events are more likely to volunteer, vote, and take part in community events. Similarly, Chitiga (2014) created and studied an impactful program called "Performing Arts for Effective Civic Engagement" (PAECE), which acknowledges an increase in civic engagement as a result of watching an issues-based performance. As a culminating gesture in the days following the post-production workshop, we emailed the list of actions to all artists involved in the project, all focus group members, and all audience members, reaching over 150 individuals.

At the end of the *#ENOUGH* process, we donated half of the proceeds from ticket sales to the Giffords organization, an organization dedicated to saving lives from gun violence and led by Congresswoman Gabby Giffords. This donation amounted to a total of $450. In this way, all audience members contributed to one collective financial action. In large part because of our additional efforts, we were chosen to be one of two flagship productions interviewed and filmed by PBS NewsHour, which shared the story of *#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence* with their approximately 882,000 nightly viewers (Brown, Jackson, & Staten, 2022; Pew Research, 2023). This further publicity vastly expanded the scale of our audience, sharing the impact of *#ENOUGH* well beyond our local community.

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

We view this project as a work-in-progress and acknowledge that turning imaginative deliberation into action is challenging and complex. Aiming to contribute to the dialogue of community-engaged theatre

artists focused on civic engagement, we offer the following reflections and ideas for practitioners interested in learning from our experience and building on this work.

Overall, we were pleased with the results and impact of this project. In particular, we recognized a correlation between the extended engagement of participants who attended all three events (pre-production workshop, post-show debrief, and post-production workshop) and more generative and thoughtful contributions during discussions and activities. This was echoed by one participant who shared that she was inspired by the pre-production workshop to do independent research on the topic of gun violence prevention policy, which she presented at the final post-production workshop. Such comments suggest that expanded engagement opportunities have the potential to spark curiosity and compel individuals to educate themselves on the issues being addressed.

We understand, however, that our process may have benefited from additional modes of engagement and follow-through. While recognizing the limitations of time, resources, and support, it is worth considering interactive elements in the lobby as another avenue for audience members to learn about the issue at hand and take action in real-time. Interactive lobby elements could include donating to a gun violence prevention organization, signing petitions for legislation that advances gun violence prevention, or signing up for a volunteer shift with an organization like March for Our Lives (MFOL). We could have additionally hosted gun violence prevention organizations to table and share resources in the lobby. It is worth noting that while we did connect with the ASU chapter of MFOL and discussed their efforts to oppose the Arizona campus carry bill (HB 2447), no MFOL volunteers were available to table during our performances. This points to the importance of coalition building; had our coalition of gun violence prevention organizations been larger, we could have recruited others for support. However, building coalitions takes time and people power. Thus, were we to repeat this process, we would attempt to recruit additional community organizers solely responsible for engaging community partners and designing lobby elements, as we were admittedly spread thin as both the directors of the theatrical production and the lead organizers of the civic engagement efforts.

Furthermore, we recommend developing methods for following through with actions in concrete ways. While we used the results of the

voting process to provide actionable steps via email, in the end, this did not feel like a satisfactory conclusion to the process. We had quite a few performers who had lived experience with gun violence, who, if approached and willing, could have played a larger part in the process as a whole. For example, we could have trained these performers on how to lobby using their personal narratives and then worked with Rep. Longdon to facilitate a meeting with one or more of her Republican colleagues in the Arizona legislature. Both of these actions would have aligned with the top action of "organize bringing personal narratives to legislators." Unfortunately, the timing of the production, which coincided with the end of the academic year, limited our capacity to plan any further events. We also admit the universal challenge of maintaining momentum after a theatrical production has culminated and are interested in exploring methods for energizing artistic participants (including ourselves) sustainably.

Upon reflection, we recognize other ways for theatre practitioners and artists to use audience-generated material for further artistic projects. For example, the action proposal cards could become fodder for a devised performance, multimedia exhibit, or other creative project. Such creative endeavors could be explored with existing ensembles or artist collectives outside of the production; we can also imagine a creative process that involves audience members, expert stakeholders, legislators, and other interested community members. Through such additional creative projects, artists can continue to raise awareness about social issues and ensure that the voices of the community continue to be heard, ultimately deepening dialogue, illuminating new perspectives, and creating more community solutions.

When contemplating the connection between theatre and social issues beyond gun violence, conversations with our participatory democracy expert Schugurensky lead us to believe that another approach to this work could be thinking about it in reverse: instead of bringing participatory democracy into theatre spaces, practitioners could bring theatre work into participatory democracy spaces. To achieve this, theatre practitioners would need to build authentic, non-transactional partnerships with community organizations already practicing participatory democracy. For example, Lieberman (2023) describes participatory budgeting as a popular form of participatory democracy happening in many high schools in the U. S. Theatre artists could build partnerships with local schools and consider bringing their

theatrical practices into the participatory budgeting process.

Lastly, we admit that this process was difficult to enact using scripted work that couldn't be changed. With this in mind, for the 2023 *#ENOUGH* annual reading, we collaborated with Cotey and the advisory committee to determine how to best scaffold audience interaction throughout the performance rather than only at the end. Rohd again served as an advisor and mentor for us in this process, given his success with scaffolding in his work with Sojourn. Scaffolding audience engagements, including at least two opportunities for interaction during the performance, trains the audience to engage with each other and hopefully builds deeper dialogue at the end of the performance (Leffler, 2018). While detailing the specifics of our 2023 process is beyond the purview of this paper, we recommend that theatre artists who attempt to incorporate civic engagement within scripted performances work with scripts and writers who are flexible and open to modifying the structure and content of the show to best serve the goal of meaningful audience engagement.

CONCLUSION

A major strength of this project was its ability to connect across time and space, creating and activating a new community of 150 individuals, including workshop participants, audience members, actors, industry experts, and legislators. By building upon the shared experience of the *#ENOUGH* performances, we maximized the possibilities of community participation and civic engagement around the topic of gun violence prevention. We believe civic engagement is like a muscle that must be exercised in order to stay strong, and through this project, we provided several unique opportunities for people to work this muscle, perhaps for the first time.

Throughout the process of working on *#ENOUGH*, we drew inspiration from the fields of participatory democracy, Legislative Theatre, and futures studies. By experimenting with a blend of theatre practices and methods from other fields, we had the opportunity to collaborate with non-artists such as Dr. Schugurensky and Arizona State Rep. Jennifer Longdon, with the shared goal of increasing civic engagement. This was an invaluable opportunity that helped us to grow as applied theatre artists and fortified our commitment to socially and civically engaged practice. We believe emerging artists and

scholars would similarly benefit from looking beyond the confines of traditional theatre practices when creating audience engagement opportunities for issues-based theatre.

While we encourage more theatre artists to confront the issue of gun violence specifically, we also encourage practitioners to apply our recommendations to creative work on other social justice issues such as racial justice, environmental justice, and reproductive rights, to name a few. Social justice issues of all kinds require artists, activists, and community members to collaborate on innovating new methods for promoting sustainable, healthy, and safe communities.

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Pains and Gains of Studying Theatre Arts in Nigeria: Ambivalent Voices of Theatre Arts Graduates

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ABSTRACT

This study contends that Theatre Arts as a professional discipline in the humanities should be regarded as other disciplines, and its graduates be given equal opportunities as their counterparts from other fields in Nigeria. The study dispels the numerous misconceptions about the discipline. Although the study of Theatre Arts might be quite enjoyable, it has received a lot of scorn in Nigeria. While prior studies have exposed society's misconceptions about the field, this study presents a nuanced perspective of Theatre Arts graduates on the discipline in Nigeria. The data for this study were collected using mixed research methods. Primary data were derived from a group discussion on a WhatsApp group of Theatre Arts graduates in 2022. Out of the 202 members in the group, 22 participated. The result indicates ambivalence. It is recommended that individuals, companies, and the government optimise the potentials of Theatre Arts graduates in

Nigeria by giving them equal opportunities as others.

INTRODUCTION

One of the academic disciplines, if there are others, that has generated much ridicule in Nigeria, is the Theatre Arts discipline. While studying Theatre Arts could be a rewarding experience in other climes, (de Bernard, Comunian, Jewell, Salvador, & O'Brien, 2024; Higdon & Chapman, 2020; Listengarten & Di Benedetto, 2021; Reinelt, 2014), the reverse seems to be the case in Nigeria. Just as actors were seen as nonentities, vagabonds, clowns, or jesters, no-serious entities and their activities banned in the ancient period (Brockett, 1974), so they appear to be in Nigerian society. Often times they are derided and described as "good-for-nothings," "social misfits and mad men," "those people who make plays and jokes on television, radio, and such." (Anyanwu, 2018a, p. 20). In his study, Imiti (2021) reveals that Nigerian parents and relatives rebuke their wards who seek to choose Theatre Arts as a choice course at the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, JAMB, examination. Uche (1991) corroborates Imiti when he maintains that there was a time when it was inconceivable to consider Theatre Arts as a career option. He maintains that about ten years before him, one would probably have been rebuked, if not slapped in the face, by one's family member for mentioning Performing Arts (some institutions refer to Theatre Arts as Performing Arts) as a career one wanted to pursue.

To some, Theatre Arts is a "play-play" department meant for jokers, unintelligent people, and non-do-wells. To others, it is an acting and dancing discipline, and those who study it are never taken seriously. They are sometimes referred to as "*Theatre Rats*," a corruption of Theatre Arts. Such was the case when this author visited a high-class monarch, the late Owhorode of Olomu, HRM Richard Layieguen Ogbon, in his palace for a reference letter. When the latter sought to know the discipline of the former and was told it was Theatre Arts, he then remarked, "*Oya, act for me*" (do a performance). Such is the misconception about the discipline. Though acting is a core area of Theatre Arts study, there are other areas of specialty where a Theatre Arts graduate may excel without being a "good" actor. Society is oblivious to the nuances the discipline offers. Besides acting, Theatre

Arts as a field of study provides students with the opportunity to learn about the culture and history of their society and offers them the chance to hone their craft as well as generate income from independent production/performances (Idogho, 2013; Kisida, Goodwin, & Bowen, 2020; Thakur, 2022). In the past, at the University of Ibadan, taking a course in Acting in Theatre Arts was compulsory for law students. It helped them gain confidence in public speaking, overcoming stage fright, and learning articulation and pronunciation, among others. Thakur (2022) supports this assertion by stating that Theatre Arts enhance communication skills by enabling practitioners to utilise appropriate vocal pitch in speechmaking.

Another common inquiry from members of society is, "What are the chances of employability of Theatre Arts graduates?" This question stems from the fact that, whereas other disciplines such as Law, Medicine, Accounting, Pharmacy, Nursing, Mass Communication, Political Science, to name a few, are given preferences in some recruitment exercises, Theatre Arts is, most times, not listed (Imiti, 2021). Recently, in a 2023 Delta State Bursary application portal for indigenous students, Theatre Arts was conspicuously omitted. There was no explanation for the oversight, if it was one.

The foregoing necessitated this study. Also, it was undertaken in response to a mortifying statement tossed at a job-seeking Theatre Arts graduate who, like the author, sought assistance in a recruitment exercise and was asked, “Why Theatre Arts instead of Mass Communication?” This question and a response from another alumnus on a WhatsApp group triggered the debate that birthed the data for this study. The former colleague who was confronted with the above question emphatically maintained and concluded that none of her offspring would ever repeat such a gaffe. Hence, this study presents the ambivalent voices of Theatre Arts graduates on the gains and pains of studying Theatre Arts in Nigeria. The question then arises: what is the place of the Theatre Arts graduate in Nigerian society?

This study argues that, as a professional discipline in the humanities, Theatre Arts deserves the same respect and opportunities accorded other disciplines, given its obvious connections to other disciplines. In addition, it aims to enlighten Nigerians on the tapestry of the Theatre Arts discipline. Above acting, it refines and prepares those who study it for a complex task ahead. Scholars have confirmed the self-reliability of the discipline, where the artist carves a living for

himself or herself and becomes an employer rather than an employee (W. Adedeji, Akinsipe, & Afe, 2014; Ogbonna & Mohammed-Kabir, 2022). While this is true, this should not be a yardstick to deny Theatre Artists the right and opportunity to be engaged in government institutions on the unfounded claim of being a “lousy” discipline. After all, other disciplines could as well be self-reliant. The Theatre Arts graduate, like every other graduate, can fit into any organisation. Therefore, what is good for the goose should equally be good for the gander!

THEATRE ARTS AS A DISCIPLINE

Theatre beginnings cannot be categorically ascribed to a particular period. Several arguments about its origin abound. The most common of these is evolution theory. This theory holds that theatre evolved from ritual and festival ceremonies. At first, man considered the natural forces of the world, even the seasonal changes, to be unpredictable and sought, in various ways, to control these unknown and fearsome forces. Measures that seemed to yield the desired results were kept and repeated until they translated into permanent rituals. Storytelling was introduced, and sacrificial rituals involving human sacrifice were eliminated as humans progressed in knowledge (Uzoma, 1991). There was also the use of dance, costumes, music, and masks in primitive ritual, and there was a performance area or venue for the ritual.

Another theory points to the origin of theatre for humans' penchant for storytelling. These stories were derived from man's activities, such as hunting, war, or other feats, and were usually told after the day’s job. This is done by one person narrating while others (actors) assume responsibility for each role through impersonation, action, and dialogue. A foremost philosopher, Aristotle, in Dukore (1974), affirms that humans are instinctive imitators. According to him, imitation is the main method by which humans learn about their world, such as when children learn to speak and behave by imitating adults.

In modern theatre scholarship, the Greeks hold the credit of the first creators of drama and theatre because they were the first to develop the shape as it was known in the Western world (Brockett, 1974, 1979). The first record of drama in Greece was found in 534 BC, when the city of Dionysus was recognised and a contest for the best tragedy was held. The only surviving playwright of this period was

Thespis, the first, unarguably, actor to win the first prize for drama. Records have it that he disengaged himself from the chorus, single-handedly changed his identity, and played different characters with the aid of a mask (Brockett & Hildy, 2010).

Based on the evolution theory, theatre practice is believed to have evolved and developed along various trajectories—from the Greeks to the Mediaeval to the Renaissance, which saw the transformation of theatre. The Renaissance introduced several conventions of theatrical performance and architecture that have dominated Europe and other continents to date. Not even the birth of the avant-garde movement has eroded these hallmarks. It is imperative to note that the study of Drama and Theatre in school started with the Elizabethans. The stimulation of interest in classical learning that had begun in the Italian Renaissance crept into England in the sixteenth century. As a result, drama was taught in schools, and plays (drama texts) were studied and produced in institutions of learning (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2023; Gurr & Karim-Cooper, 2014; Howard, 2019; Leach, 2008). It could be argued that it was after the institutions of learning produced such dramatists as John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, and Christopher Marlowe that English drama flourished.

In Nigeria, the teaching and learning of drama in institutions of higher learning started in 1962/63 at the University College Ibadan, Nigeria's foremost university (J. A. Adedeji, 1998; Adelugba, 1984; Ogunbiyi, 1981; Duro Oni, 2008). Since then, the discipline has been re-emerging in new forms at many of the country's universities, both public and private. These institutions take on different nomenclatures such as Theatre Arts, Dramatic Arts, Performing Arts, and Creative Arts, or name combinations such as Theatre and Film Studies and Theatre and Cultural Studies, among others, all geared towards the training of Theatre Artists (Duro Oni, 2008).

Among the universities that offer the programme is Delta State University (DELSU), Abraka, whose graduates make up the population of this study. Immediately after the take-off of the State University in 1992, when it ceased to be a campus of the defunct Bendel State University, Ekpoma, Theatre Arts became one of its foremost programmes. It was formally known as the Department of Performing Arts, made up of Theatre Arts and Music units, but was later unbundled. The programme started in the 1992/1993 academic session just as the university took off.

Since it took off, the department has produced prominent graduates in all walks of life—academics, entertainment, banking, and business, to mention a few. Ayodeji Makun (AY), Bovi Ugboma (Bovi), Justice Nuagbe (Usher), Harrison Ijeenwere (actor), Ann Isioma Ekwusama (actress), Jerry Kekeghe (film director, Secretary Association of Movie Producers, Delta State Chapter), Drs. Emily Jitokun (Academic), Mudiaga Akpughe (Academic), Chijioke Iyamah (Academic), Josephine Odunze (Academic), and the author, to name a few, are products of the DELSU Theatre Arts. Like elsewhere, theatre study/teaching is not different at DELSU in terms of curriculum, presentation, discipline, and ethics, as the National University Commission (NUC) provides the framework that guides the universities. Its study has, however, generated mixed feelings amongst its graduates; hence, the study on the ambivalent voices of DELSU Theatre Arts graduates on the gains and pains of studying Theatre Arts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used mixed research methods. This approach enabled the researcher to investigate the numerous intricacies of the subject. This is justified by the fact that the data for the study were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. While the secondary data were garnered from existing published research, the primary data were gotten through direct participant observation by the author in a WhatsApp group chat of DELSU Theatre Arts graduates. The chat/conversation took place in February 2022. These unplanned chats predated and actually motivated this study. These chats were exported from the WhatsApp application to a Notepad on the researcher's personal computer and are available on request. The resort to collecting data through this method arose from the fact that, at the turn of the twenty-first century, social media have become a formidable source of information, both for research and other purposes, as it exposes so much, knowingly and unknowingly (Anyanwu, Anyanwu, & Imiti, 2023; Shem, Gambo, & Abel, 2023).

The WhatsApp platform, created on July 7, 2016, by Dr. C.Y. Iyamah, has a total of 202 active and inactive members. 22 out of the 202 members participated in this discourse. For anonymity purposes, participants are coded as Discussant 1—Discussant 22. The study did

not consider the demography of participants. However, a common factor is that all participants are Theatre Arts graduates. The data, in the form of opinions, in favour of and against the study of Theatre Arts were critically analysed and yielded the discussed results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On a tranquil evening of February 16, 2022, a member of Theatre Arts graduate WhatsApp group quizzed, “What is your greatest mistake in life?” Like a time bomb, responses erupted. The resonated debate reveals the relevance and irrelevance of the Theatre Arts discipline to its graduates. The first response was, “I regret studying Theatre Arts....” This set the pace for further discourse as discussants either agreed or disagreed. 13 discussants, representing 59.1%, maintain the view that Theatre Arts is not worth a discipline of study. In contrast, 5 of the discussants, representing 22.7%, believe Theatre Arts is worthy of a discipline, while 4 others, representing 18.2%, were neither for nor against, as they expressed opinions for and against the discipline.

When asked if Theatre Arts was a dream career and a choice course while they took the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination, most discussants indicated it was not a choice course but was only an afterthought when they could not beat the cut-off for their desired course, which includes Law, Mass Communication, Political Science and English and Literary studies. Only 4 of the discussants affirmed that they chose Theatre Arts and that it was Theatre Arts and nothing else. This buttresses the cliché that when the purpose of a thing is not known, abuse is inevitable. Hence, those who did not primarily choose the course only later did to satisfy their curiosity of attaining a university degree. Thus, they passed through the discipline without being dedicated.

A further interrogation as to whether they would allow their ward(s) and sibling(s) to study Theatre Arts, the majority of the discussants vehemently said no. Discussants 1 and 3, who could not contain their emotions, responded with a deafening “God forbid!" However, discussants 8, 9, 19, and 20 responded in the affirmative, stating that if their wards desired to study Theatre Arts, they would encourage them. They, however, noted that “Theatre Arts in Nigeria should be improved on to catch up with the trend of the time. What they simply mean is that emphasis should be placed on filmmaking with a view to producing

Nollywood divas since theatre/stage performances are waning due to economic, security and sundry challenges. In the same vein, Discussant 5 agreed with a proviso of, “None of my children will study Theatre Arts in Naija, *Nigeria* (emphasis added), because I will discourage them." Towing the same line, Discussant 6 states, “I would love my child if he or she so desires, but not in Nigeria because it is not about the course of study but the relevance of the course in Nigeria.” Discussant 10, who detests the Theatre Arts discipline, says it was a juvenile mistake to have studied it, and he was quick to quote Paulo Coelho that, “A mistake repeated more than once is a decision."

When asked if given the opportunity to study another course, what would that be? The most anticipated choice courses were Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, Law, Political Science, Accounting, Mass Communication, English and Literary Studies, etcetera. These responses are indicative of how Theatre as a discipline has been painted in bad light, even by those who studied it. These vociferous but ambivalent views were borne out of a lack of prospects for the Theatre Arts graduate in Nigeria. According to some of the discussants, opportunities are slim for graduates of the discipline. Narrating their ordeal, Discussants 1 and 3 recall how they lost employment opportunities due to their course of study. “I have lost some opportunities because it's Theatre Arts. They said, "Why don't I go and act?" They prefer Mass Communication graduates (Discussant 1). Lamenting his frustration, Discussant 3 states:

> Most times, when you tell people you read Theatre Arts as a course of study, they will look at you with disdain and query, "Theatre Arts?" It sounds funny to them. Sometime ago, my mum approached a certain politician in my village to help me secure a job. The man put a call through to me, and we discussed. I told him my discipline after he demanded to know. When he dropped the call, he told my mum that he does not know that course and that I was not suitable for the job I sought.
>
> The discipline should be scrapped, or better still, there should be a change of nomenclature. My reason is simple: if employment opportunities exist and Theatre Arts is not recognised, why study it?

The above unedited view confirms earlier studies and findings made by Anyanwu (2018a), Imiti (2021), and Uche (1991), where they present how society views and treats the Theatre Arts and its practitioners. Parents and relatives, as earlier noted, rebuke their wards who seek to choose the discipline as a choice course at the JAMB examination, coupled with the prospects of securing a good job. At job openings and calls for applications, where other disciplines in the Arts and Humanities would be specifically advertised for, Theatre Arts is, most times, never mentioned and often times grouped as "others."

Discussants 12, 13, 15, 17, and 18 agree with Discussants 1, 3, and 4, as they maintain that their study of Theatre Arts was a mistake never to be repeated. Discussant 4 vehemently states:

> Ask yourself: how many of any DELSU Theatre Arts graduates act in movies, dance, or do music and are renowned in the entertainment industry? Apart from a few of us who furthered their education and are in the academic field, how many of us here are employed?

He went further to reel out names of course mates who went on to pursue careers in fashion and design, makeup, photography/ videography, and businesses, among others, after school to eke out a living.

In difference to Discussant 3, Discussants 6 and 8 insist that the university attended has nothing to do with the plight of Theatre Arts graduates. Discussant 6 interjects:

> No, not the school. Yeah, the schools have their own big problems, but I blame it on the nation and the leadership. I want to completely disagree with most of what has been said. The fact is that Nigeria is the problem. In many nations, every course you studied is relevant. They practice what they studied, but in Nigeria, a medical student ends up as a banker, and so on. What has an engineer got to do with being a Teller in a bank? We put the square pegs in the round holes.

Interestingly, both Discussants 4 and 6, who hold divergent views on the subject of discourse, are domiciled abroad (Canada and U.S), employed and not practicing their discipline. However, the salient point

to note from the above assertion is that the Nigerian government has failed to provide a conducive environment for theatre practice to thrive. Theatre artists create jobs and wealth by themselves (Haunschild & Eikhof, 2009). All they needed was just an enabling environment.

Similarly, in their arguments, Discussants 9, 19, 20, and 21 agree with Discussant 6's view shared above, as they believe that studying Theatre Arts is not a guarantee to secure a job but a means to prepare one for the labour market, and that whatever one studied does not matter. This buttresses Akinwale's (2007) view that the most important aim of education is to lift man to a higher level of understanding and awareness, a development of intellectual ability, and a method of making him grow effectively within society. Thus, the growth advocated by Akinwale could enable man to be economically emancipated or self-reliant. Discussant 9, corroborating the above view, states:

> I have said it before here that some of us are too complacent, "Waiting for Godot." Whereas, the Strong Breeds are making waves. I tell you, everyone who has put in the extra effort is yielding results, no matter how small. What we studied is not what makes us, as it is evidenced by most of us.

In the same vein, Discussant 19 adds, "A Theatre Arts graduate should be leaving the school with something to do even when there is no ready employment like their counterparts in some other fields."

When Discussant 4 was reminded of the likes of Ayodeji Makun (AY), Bovi Ugboma (Bovi), Justice Nuagbe (Ushbebe), and other Theatre Arts graduates making waves in the entertainment industry, he swiftly countered that these were exceptions and that they were not contributing to the growth of the discipline by grooming or honing students of the department but rather scouting for talents outside their field and alma mater. This brought another dimension to the debate about which data could generate another study.

Nonetheless, most discussants agree that the plight of the Theatre Arts graduate, which is not peculiar to them, is a result of bad leadership, wrong economic policies, and an un-conducive environment, which make theatre practice not to thrive in the country. First, they noted that there is no legislation guiding the profession, as every talented Dick and Harry can just leap on the entertainment industry, especially Nollywood, and begin to perform, thereby denying

its professionals (Theatre Arts graduate) opportunities. Discussants are of the opinion that, just as Lawyers are the only ones legally allowed to practice in court, which is their domain, Theatre Artists should be given the leverage of the entertainment industry—their domain. This point is also noted by Anyanwu when he contends that, “Just as lawyers or engineers specialises in his (sic) discipline of law or engineering, even so, a theatre artist specialises in playwriting, acting, scene-designing lighting...and so on” (2018b, p. 5). The point to note here is that the Theatre Artist is never allowed to practice in the aforementioned professions. Why then is the field of theatre open to all and sundry?

Also noted is the lack of passion by those who studied the course in “error.” These categories of persons studied the course for the sake of merely acquiring a degree. In this regard, efforts were not expended on self-development. Hence, Discussant 20 notes:

> When the purpose of a thing is not known, abuse is inevitable. That's the problem with theatre arts Education and Practice. Another question we should all bear in mind is: how many of us had a passion for theatre arts and its allied industries before we paid acceptance fee to study it?

The discussion so far has revealed differing opinions about the value and efficacy of the Theatre Arts discipline in Nigeria. A minority of the discussants disagree with the majority, who think the discipline in Nigeria is not sellable because it is not accorded proper recognition like other professional disciplines in the country. Furthermore, while a few of the discussants chose the course out of passion, others "stumbled" on it when they could not beat the cut-off for their desired course. One could argue that those making waves in the field are those passionate about it. The majority of the discussants are likewise pessimistic about the discipline; nevertheless, others are hopeful that prejudice against the discipline will soon be a thing of the past. They maintain that no knowledge is lost. “One day, it will be put to good use” (Discussant 8).

FACTORS CONFRONTING THEATRE STUDY/PRACTICE AND THE WAY FORWARD

Theatre practice in Nigeria has weathered the storm and still is. So many aspersions have been cast on its practitioners. Although Theatre Arts is one of the most sought-after disciplines in the Faculty of Arts or Humanities (Ayakoroma, 2012), results have shown that it is condescendingly looked at by members of society. As noted earlier, in Nigeria, Theatre Artists are derided and described as unserious people, "good-for-nothings", "social misfits and mad men", "those people who make plays and jokes on television, radio, and such" (Anyanwu, 2018a, p. 20), Based on these descriptions, parents and guardians deprive their wards the right to choose such a discipline, as noted by Uche (1991). The unedited screenshot in Figure 1 on the following page shows a comment by a social media user about Kenneth Okonkwo, a Theatre Artist and a renowned Nollywood actor, buttressing the afore-shared views.

Figure 6: A screenshot of a derogatory comment on the character of Kenneth Okonkwo.

Aside from such ridicules, which dampen the artist's enthusiasm, there is a high rate of unemployment and the deliberate or unintentional omission of the discipline from job recruitment advertisements. As noted by one of the discussants, “if employment opportunities exist and Theatre Arts is not recognised, why study it?

While the above are basic factors militating against the discipline, there is also a lack of interest in live theatre or stage practice (Bamigbola, 2024), the primary constituency of the trained Theatre Artist due to its relegation by modern technology and taste derived from radio, television, film, and other modern media of entertainment, as noted by Bakare et al. (2017), Imiti (2022), Eni (2012), and Ayakoroma (2012). This is in addition to the high level of insecurity, bad roads, and soaring cost of transportation that hinder movement to watch live performances. In theatre history, theatre going in ancient Greek, according to Brockett (1974), was a matter of civic obligation. Public holidays were declared so that every healthy Athenian citizen of any gender and status was expected to attend the theatre. Corroborating Brockett, Vargas notes:

> A theatregoer in those days would be prepared to spend the whole day in the theatre. If he were wise, he would bring some food and wine with him, and join the hurrying crowd of fellow Athenians and visitors at dawn, anxious to secure the best seat possible (1960, p. 26).

In the situation above, actors were venerated and regarded as figures to behold and reckon with. The same scenario cannot be replicated in our current Nigerian society, where citizens are battling to surmount the aforementioned challenges in addition to economic depression and austerity. Thus, the screen and modern media have become better alternatives (Imiti, 2022).

To this end, pragmatic changes are needed to meet up with what is in vogue. It is imperative to design the Theatre curriculum to incorporate courses and dynamic elements associated with dealing with social and economic realities as they emerge in society. Emphasis should be on acquiring skills and knowledge in the use of modern-day technology. This could be in filmmaking and the new media to make Theatre Arts graduates relevant in the entertainment business (Bakare et al., 2017; Imiti, 2022). Universities’ Theatres should make changes

to reflect new trends in the industry. Even in the face of a tough economic meltdown, members of society still clamour for entertainment to take them away from their everyday boredom and worries. Thus, in the view of Oni decades ago, there is a need for theatrical repackaging (2005). It must be reemphasised here that the theatre has to leverage the opportunities Nollywood and other digital platforms offer in the contemporary epoch. Unfortunately, the newly introduced National University Commission Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standard (CCMAS) is overtly fraught with inadequacies, as the screen medium is still de-emphasised over the stage.

Nonetheless, the Theatre Arts graduate should be optimistic. A popular cliché states that when the desired is not available, the available becomes the desirable. This should be a watchword for those who find themselves in the discipline in “error” to make judicious use of the opportunity to allow the discipline to pass through them just as they pass through the discipline. It should be a case of liking what you do. In light of this, Österlind (2011) affirms that theatre does more for one than s/he believes

It is interesting to note that a bill on the Theatre Arts Professional Regulatory Council, which prohibits non-adherents from usurping the place of the theatre artist in the industry, has scaled through a third reading at the National House of Assembly. When passed into law, it would address the imbalance in the entertainment industry where the untrained outnumber the trained and the concept that anyone can act without any form of training. This would be a thing of history. According to Effiong (2001)**,** in this communicative age, the dramatic arts, like other professions, require professional training through formal education and, in this regard, theatre study.

The Theatre Artist is a jack of all trades and master of all. When given a job opportunity, he or she is likely to do better than his or her counterpart. Theatre education and training equip the graduates with vast knowledge (Abramson, 2017). The Theatre graduate is all-round: an actor, administrator, manager, technician, singer, dancer, communicator/broadcaster, etcetera. Thus, their place in society should be recognised and accorded due respect just as other professions; for what is good for the goose is equally good for the gander.

CONCLUSION

The relevance of theatre in society cannot be overemphasised. It plays a critical role and deserves its place in society. However, it is often marginalised. While most studies highlight societal misconceptions about the Theatre Arts discipline, this study focused on the misunderstandings held by Theatre Arts graduates through their ambivalent opinions. The survey conducted on a WhatsApp group chat indicated a sense of despair, pains, and gains. The majority of the participants expressed regret and maintained that Theatre Arts is not worth a discipline of study due to limited career opportunities and also a subject of mockery. The study argued that while studying Theatre Arts in Nigeria may be both gratifying and demanding, students must be aware of these nuances to make informed decisions regarding their studies. It was further stressed that Theatre Arts alumni and prospective ones can make the most of their experience and achieve success. This could be attained through dedication, hard work, and passion, as demonstrated by the likes of AY and Bovi. It is noted that the discipline has enriched many who are passionate, and it is possible that this will continue. However, the discipline has to evolve to keep up with modernity—deemphasise stage production and encourage screen productions. Today, most parents encourage and look up to their children and wards to be screen divas, but they do not want them to opt for Theatre Arts. Little did they know that theatre was and still is its precursor. Theatre has been misconstrued and endured over the years, and it will most likely continue to if it does not evolve to redeem its battered image and to also meet the yawning taste of the Nigerian audiences, who have jettisoned the theatre in favour of homebound entertainment. This study therefore calls on individuals, companies, and the government to maximise the full potential of the Theatre Arts graduates by giving them the same rights as other graduates.

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Drama as Embodied Learning: Moving from Theory into Action

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ABSTRACT

The arts, especially Drama, are among the strongest ways to engage secondary school students in classroom activities that support and leverage embodied cognition—the concept that the whole body plays a part in grasping and communicating understandings of information and ideas. For a wide variety of reasons, however, many teachers, are reluctant to use drama as a learning modality. Because drama methods were not included in the pre-service training of most teachers, they are not aware of how drama can support the topics they teach. Teachers also fear that drama takes too much time to implement and can collapse into unproductive chaos in the classroom. After presenting the theoretical precepts of embodied cognition and its relationship to the educational uses of drama, this article shares detailed directions for an effective classroom drama activity that supports the learning of vocabulary words and guides teachers towards successfully implementing it in their work with students.

Embodied Cognition—the term for the concept that understandings are shaped by the physical experiences of the body—has received a lot of recent attention in the education world. The arts, especially Drama, are among the strongest ways to engage secondary school students in classroom activities that get them up, moving, and showing what they know with body, voice, and imagination. Teachers who lack confidence in how to do Drama—and who have concerns about the amount of time involved and fears of unproductive classroom chaos—frequently decline to mobilize this arts-based method in their work with young people. Such is often the case despite repeated evidence that dramatizing offers opportunities to embrace and engage the embodied mind (Varelas et al. 2022, p. 497).

Drama is a powerful teaching and learning tool, especially when it is merged with the achievement of objectives in other school subjects, but if teachers are reluctant to use it, this art form stands little chance of being able to empower pedagogy and increase student engagement. Following a discussion of the theoretical precepts of embodied cognition, its educational antecedents, and its relationship to the classroom uses of drama, this article provides educators with directions for an effective, time-efficient classroom drama activity and tips for successful implementation.

EMBODIED COGNITION—A NEW WAY TO SAY WHAT'S BEEN AROUND FOR DECADES?

It is hard to find a contemporary teacher who is unfamiliar with Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which he debuted and explained in *Frames of Mind* in 1983. His descriptions of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence strongly align with ideas about embodied cognition: the close link between the use of the body and the deployment of other cognitive powers (Gardner, 1983, p. 208). Gardner emphasizes that what we do with our bodies is not less privileged or special than those problem-solving routines carried out chiefly through language or logic (Gardner, 1983, pp. 208-209).

Years before Gardner made the scene, Edgar Swift James called

embodied cognition simply “learning by doing,” as evidenced by the title that he gave his 1914 book—*Learning By Doing.* “Why should children be expected to understand the importance of knowledge when the need for it has not yet arisen?” he complains. “One of the problems of the teacher is to produce situations in which this need will be a recurring factor, and the conditions that meet this educational requirement are those in which the children are the planners and the workers. In short, they are situations of action” (James, 1914, p. 32). E.P. Torrance in 1965 echoed this same belief, which was also a precept of Progressive Education: “We learn best by doing and by having a vital interest in what we are doing” (Torrance, 1965, p. 676).

Other terms include active learning—student activity and engagement in the learning process (Prince, 2004, p. 223), multimodalities, and multiliteracies. Multimodal perspectives on literacy, writes Jewitt in 2008, assume that meanings are made in many ways and language is but one of them; image, gesture, gaze, body posture, sound, writing, music, and speech also contribute to meaning-making (Jewitt, 2008, p. 246). There have been and likely will be many more terms for essentially the same set of ideas, but at present, it’s embodied cognition.

EMBODIED COGNITION

Embodied cognition or “embodied learning” suggests that actions, emotions, sensations, and environment influence what is learned (Macrine and Fugate, 2022, p. 3). The body’s interactions with the environment contribute to cognition; mental processes are not solely computational processes because the brain is not a computer (Shapiro and Spaulding 2021). Human embodiment plays a crucial role in understanding and reasoning (Johnson, 1989, p. 321). “The brain is not disconnected from the rest of the body and solely responsible for cognition, but an organ occupied with processing perceptions experienced in the body,” writes Branscombe (2019, p. 3). The term “embodied learning,” she continues, “comprises two strands—showing understanding through the body and strengthening cognition as a result of using the body in learning” (Branscombe, 2019, p. 5).

FAILURE TO CAST THE BODY IN A ROLE IN LEARNING

Schools overwhelmingly still value instruction that separates the mind from the body, promoting rote memorization, mindless drills, and skills in preparation for standardized testing (Macrine and Fugate, 2022, p. 15). Katz (2013) argues that the freedom to participate in embodied experiences is critical to facilitate engaged, effective learning and make the body a purposeful part of our educative processes. “We need schools that honor our simultaneous need for physical, emotional, and intellectual engagement" (Katz, 2013, p. 9).

Again and again, the call for making the body integral to pedagogical practices is sounded. The body should “be utilized as a powerful vehicle through which educators can reach students and embed content” (Blatt-Gross, 2015, p. 138). The case for embracing the body as an active and meaningful part of the learning process (Blatt-Gross, 2015, p. 138) is solid and there are many learning activities that achieve this goal, but only one is the star of this article!

ENTER CLASSROOM DRAMA

It’s not drama as a subject—reading and studying plays, for example—it’s drama as an activity that engages students in thinking, collaborating, speaking, and moving to explore an aspect of the class’s curriculum. It’s drama that exists for the benefit of the student participants and observers, not a rehearsed presentation meant for an audience. It’s drama that merges purposes with curriculum objectives, not irrelevant games.

The NCTE Position Statement on Drama-Based Literacies (2020) identifies the tools of drama as gesture, movement, proximity, gaze, levels of body heights and positions, sound, intensity, and inflection. This statement affirms the legitimacy of drama in literacy classrooms: “Given its multimodal nature, drama-based literacies engage all students’ bodies and emotions in composing, reading, and interrogating texts.” Citing research that shows that “learners’ emotions and bodies (particularly in movement) are primary vehicles for meaning making in literacy classrooms,” NCTE provides firm support by stating that “teachers should provide learners with opportunities to dramatize meanings in conjunction with literature and other texts.”

Informational texts and topics studied in science, social studies,

math, and other disciplines also provide material for use in dramatic meaning-making. Braund (2015) encourages science educators to vary book and board work and employ strategies like drama to involve more collaborative learning and leverage its "potential for explaining concepts or understanding the scientific basis of different positions and views" (Braund, 2015, p. 112). In social studies, drama not only motivates students but also helps them learn content by introducing, reinforcing, and extending major concepts (Miller et al*.,* 1989). "Through drama, students increase their engagement with social studies and often exceed teachers' dramatic and assessment expectations. Students' enthusiasm can spark interest in their collaborating peers so that the members of the group become more involved" (Morris, 2002, p. 44). There is even a place for drama in math class, according to Coleman and Lind (2020). "Drama provided a potentially braver space for tackling mathematics, as students experimented with equipment and concepts as a means of processing rather than demonstrating knowledge. Students asked genuine mathematics questions and invited contributions from students and teachers" (Coleman and Lind, 2020, p. 96).

In her book *Teaching Through Embodied Learning: Dramatizing Key Concepts from Informational Texts,* Branscombe (2019) elaborates on the significant benefits of drama for learning that were also the focus of her 2015 article, "Showing, not Telling: Tableau as an Embodied Text." She wrote the book "to further the cause of embodied teaching practices that make learning more varied, interesting, and memorable" (Branscombe, 2019, p. xii). Drama, she believes, provides embodied evidence of understanding and has the potential to both represent and record deep knowledge (Branscombe, 2019, p. 6).

A multitude of practitioners and authors agree. As far back as 1903, American educator Anna Buckbee argued that school needed to be "a place of activity instead of a place where the children sit still and receive passively what is given to them" (Buckbee, 1903, p. 110). The following three authors say, essentially, what hundreds of others have said in their own ways: "In drama, people use themselves as media, in a reality located between subjectivity and objectivity, improvising to find meaning. They become media for learning…. [Drama] is an embodied, tacit way of learning and knowing such as people use in their daily lives" (Henry, 2000, p. 57 and p. 59)." Improvisational drama in middle school English classes builds confidence, community, and

competence. “It affords students the opportunity to work with others, creates interactions with the text in different and active ways, and promotes participation, regardless of ability levels” (Maples, 2007, p. 276). Researchers who used drama with elementary and middle school students found that it could expediate understanding of abstract phenomena (Varelas et al. 2022, 518) and lead to opportunities for collective meaning making as student-performers collaborated on various movements and modes to represent ideas (Varelas et al., 2022, p. 512).

DRAMA REMAINS BACKSTAGE

With all this excellent evidence and chronicles of classroom victories, why then is Drama so rarely a part of a teacher’s repertoire? In my work presenting arts integration professional development for teachers, I repeatedly heard versions of these four concerns, abbreviated here: Too little training, too off-topic, too much time, and too likely to cause trouble.

Too Little Training

Even though in 1973, Koziol wrote that many teachers of English seemed to realize drama as a powerful activity, he found relatively few who used dramatization regularly in their classrooms. “One possibility is, of course, that teachers have had little opportunity to explore dramatization in detail, either as part of their pre-service training programs, or as part of their in-service programs and workshops” (Koziol, 1973, p. 1167). Lack of experience and training appears frequently as a reason why many classroom teachers feel insecure in teaching the arts, especially when they are asked to include them in their basic curriculum (National Endowment for the Arts, 1988, p. 101). “The arts overall have little priority in our university teacher-training systems. Drama is often near the bottom of that limited attention” (Furman, 2000, p. 177). Catterall (2002) notes that while teachers may voice support for drama as a learning method, many do not use it because they do not know what to do, how to do it effectively, or even where to begin.

Too Off-Topic

Catterall continues explaining that Drama is missing in action because "teachers may be much less inclined in middle and high school to involve drama in their academic teaching repertoires because of their concentrations on academic specialties regarded as having little to do with play (Catterall, 2002, p. 61). "Dramatic activities tend to be placed at the 'edge' of the official curriculum; they seem to be time-consuming and unnecessary" (Sun, 2003, p. 2).

Too Much Time

Buckbee (1903) voiced what continues to be a concern of teachers over 100 years later: "The objection is sometimes made to dramatic work in school that it takes too much time. It does take time, but it is time well spent" (Buckbee, 1903, p. 111). Others neglect drama, writes Hagaa in 1951, because they envision hours spend in the preparation of materials, hours which they cannot afford in a crowded schedule (Hagaa, 1951, p. 77).

Too Likely to Cause Trouble

Then—perhaps the biggest fear—is unproductive chaos in the classroom. "Dramatic activities are so playful that teachers might be afraid that children will not take learning seriously" (Sun, 2003, p. 2) Students who are up, moving, talking, gesturing, and possibly even laughing might become classroom management problems or they might respond negatively. "Although teachers may be turned on to dramatization, and try to use it constructively in their classrooms, many have initial experiences as a leader of the activity which failed to provide that teacher with the anticipated activity, energy, and enthusiasm from students. The resulting disappointment all too often leads to skepticism…. When inexperienced leaders fail to achieve recognizable success in their initial efforts, I think there is a definite tendency to disregard that activity in the future or to use it sparingly" (Koziol, 1973, p. 1167).

STAGE DIRECTIONS

One solution to helping teachers leverage the benefits of embodied cognition via classroom drama is to provide detailed instructions for an

activity that has strong curriculum connections, classroom management guidelines, and does not take a lot of time. Educational drama books and articles are full of activities that fit that bill, but for this article, the chosen strategy is Vocabulary Improvisations. Improvisations—unscripted scenes—that incorporate select vocabulary words help students internalize and communicate the words' meanings with their minds and bodies. "Embodied cognition proposes that meaning comes from grounding symbols in sensorimotor simulations. Thus, learning vocabulary requires linking the word with relevant sensorimotor experiences" (Gómez and Glenberg, 2022, p. 89). If you need additional convincing, try this: Pause in your reading of this article and see if you can state a good definition of the word "smug." [Pause] Now, strike a silent pose that shows your understanding of the word with your face and body. Add a sound as well if you like. Some of you may have been able to provide a dictionary-worthy definition, but I bet the meaning of "smug" was stored in every reader's mind and body.

A Drama Warm-up

Use a similar activity to have your students provide embodied evidence of their understandings of words. Explain that you will read some short sentences aloud. Their goal is to communicate the meaning of the boldfaced word in the sentence with their bodies—faces, arms, and hands. You may do this warm-up with students seated or standing. Read the following with minimal vocal expression; add vocal expression if students need a bit of a hint.

"That is **outrageous**."

"I feel so **inept** at this."

"The invitation made me **ecstatic**."

"He looks **suspicious**."

"You seem a bit **jittery**."

"That score made me feel **defeated**."

"I'm **skeptical** about that story."

If time allows, you can let students add a sound that also communicates the word's meaning (a sigh for the word "defeated," for example). You can also allow the students to repeat each sentence with expression, gestures, movements, and sounds. And, of course, you can create your own sentences with vocabulary words that suit your students and subject.

(Science) "I suspect there's **bias** in your argument."

(Social Studies) "It's like I'm experiencing a **famine**."

(Math) "Please cut it on the **diagonal**."

VOCABULARY IMPROVISATIONS

Here is a compact set of directions for one way that teachers can use drama in vocabulary instruction, followed by a more detailed explanation of the process and some examples of student participation.

Vocabulary Improvisations

1. Create vocabulary word cards.
2. Explain the dramatic process:
3. Groups of 2 or 3 students will:
    a.) Pick 2 vocabulary word cards.
    b.) Discuss the words and their meanings.
    c.) Take 5 minutes to plan a short, improvised scene.
        i. Decide on the characters and context of the scene.
        ii. Decide who will speak which words.
    d.) Post word cards on the board.
    e.) Present a one-minute scene.
4. Reflect on the scene's effectiveness with audience and actors.

EXPLANATION OF THE DIRECTIONS

Create vocabulary word cards—one word per notecard/half sheet of paper, printed so that it can be read from a distance (approximately 2 inches tall). On the opposite side of each card, provide the word's definition or require students to look up and write out or draw a visual representation of the definition.

smirk	Smirk—To smile in an irritating or self-satisfied way 

Figure 1: Here is an example of the front and back of a vocabulary card

Explain the dramatic process to the student actors:

> You will work in groups of two or three people. Each group picks two vocabulary word cards at random, meets to discuss the words and their meanings, and then decides on the characters and context of a scene that will incorporate your two words. Remember that some kind of conflict within a scene generally makes it more interesting to watch. Think about a problem that the two words suggest and then plan how your characters might work to solve the problem. Whether or not the characters succeed is what keeps audiences watching dramas.

If your students need it, share the list below with them:

Characters in conflict may:

- argue for or against something
- ask for help/need information
- need to make a decision
- devise a plan
- give advice
- persuade
- convince
- protest
- scold
- accuse

Each vocabulary word must be spoken at least twice within the dialogue of a scene, so be sure to decide who will speak which words. (Note: Any form of the word, i.e., smirk, smirking, smirked…) Every member of the group must play a role in the improvised scene, but not every actor needs to have a speaking role. You may incorporate non-speakers who play roles like waiters, bus drivers, bystanders, customers, students, etc.

You will have five minutes to plan and then present a one-minute scene that has a beginning, middle, and end. There is no need (or time) to write a script. You will improvise the dialogue. Remember in your planning to consider how to use your face and body as well as your voice to communicate the meaning of a vocabulary word. When it's your group's turn to present, post your vocabulary words on the board so that the audience knows to listen for them.

The visual element of the posted words focuses the observing students on the words and their spellings. They see the words that they are listening for. The posted words also serve as a visual cue for the student actors as they present their improvisation.

Example Vocabulary Improvisations

The following examples are from transcripts of portions of the dialogue in Vocabulary Improvisations work with 7th graders:

Vocabulary Words: SMIRK, PROPOSITION

Improvised Dialogue Using the Vocabulary Words:

1: Where were you, son?
2: Oh…nowhere…
1: Don't give me that weird smirk.
2: Okay, I have a proposition. I'll get you whatever you want from Target to not tell mom.
1: I don't like that proposition.
2: I'll give you another proposition.
1: Stop smirking at me like that!

Vocabulary Words: PARASITE, DECOMPOSER

Improvised Dialogue Using the Vocabulary Words:

1: Professor, I firmly believe that this worm is clearly a parasite.
2: I disagree. The worm is a decomposer.
1: I know a decomposer when I see one. This particular worm is not chewing on anything that's already dead.
2: Are you saying that my office plant is alive?!
1: That's the good news. The bad news is that it has a parasite!
2: Oh no! Then my plant might be dead soon!

Vocabulary Words: BISECT, CIRCUMFERENCE

Improvised Dialogue Using the Vocabulary Words:

1: Let's dig the circle for the garden right here.
2: What's the circumference measurement our customers want?
1: They said a circumference of 16 feet. Let's measure it out.
2: Easy. Then we plant a half circle of daisies.
1: And a half circle of daffodils.
2: Right. We bisect the circle and then plant.
1: Dig. Bisect. Plant. Done!

Vocabulary Words: VASSAL, PILGRIMAGE

Improvised Dialogue Using the Vocabulary Words:

1: Sir, I beg of you! I want to go on the pilgrimage with my friends
2: The pilgrimage! No! You will be gone too long!
1: Please sir, it means a lot to me and my religion.
2: You are my vassal and that means you have to stay and work on my land.
1: Doesn't a vassal get any free choices?
2: No! Not as long as I am your lord!

Vocabulary Words: ASSUMPTION, RECIPIENT

Improvised Dialogue Using the Vocabulary Words:

1: Guess who is the recipient of the $10,000 prize?
2: You?
1: Yeah.
2: Well, my assumption is that you're going to share the money with me.
1: Well, your assumption is wrong.
2: Oh! I wish I was the recipient!

Model the Planning and Presenting. Choose a willing student or two to model the process with you. To reinforce the written and oral directions for this activity, let the other students observe the planning discussion followed by the short, improvised scene. For example, I modeled how a student and I could plan to use the words "captivate" and "presumptuous." We decided that she would be a waiter and I would be a singer in a restaurant. She would introduce me and my captivating voice, but I would fail to be good. I would insist that I was captivating and presume that the audience loved me. She would call me presumptuous and I would storm out of the restaurant and she would apologize to the audience. We then posted our words and improvised the scene that we planned.

Reflect on the effectiveness of the scene after each presentation. With the students—both the actors and the audience—reflect on the scene and the incorporation of vocabulary words. First, ask the audience to compliment the strong aspects of the improvisation: What worked? What effective choices did the student actors make? How did the scene increase your understanding of the vocabulary words? How did the student actors use their bodies (faces, arms, hands, gestures) to help communicate the meanings of the words? Since actor improvement is not the goal of this activity, it's best to ask observers for only their positive comments. Then ask the student actors to critique their own work: What went well? What would you change if you were to present the scene again? (If you have the time, it's great to send the same groups of student actors back to rehearse and enhance the same improvised scene.)

Some Classroom Management Suggestions

- Before you begin the scene presentations, remind the audience that they are welcome to laugh appropriately if they enjoy what they see and hear, but they are not to make comments.
- Cue student actors to begin their scene with a simple word like "Action" and ask one member of the group to indicate that the scene is done by saying, "Scene."
- Videoing the scenes may increase students' willingness to participate productively. Allowing students to be videographers is another way to involve reluctant or resistant students.
- If some students are particularly resistant to participate as actors, it is fine to allow them to be cooperative audience members because they will still benefit from observing the dramatic work of others.
- See Figure 2: Improvisation Guidelines for helpful requirements of classroom dramatic behavior.

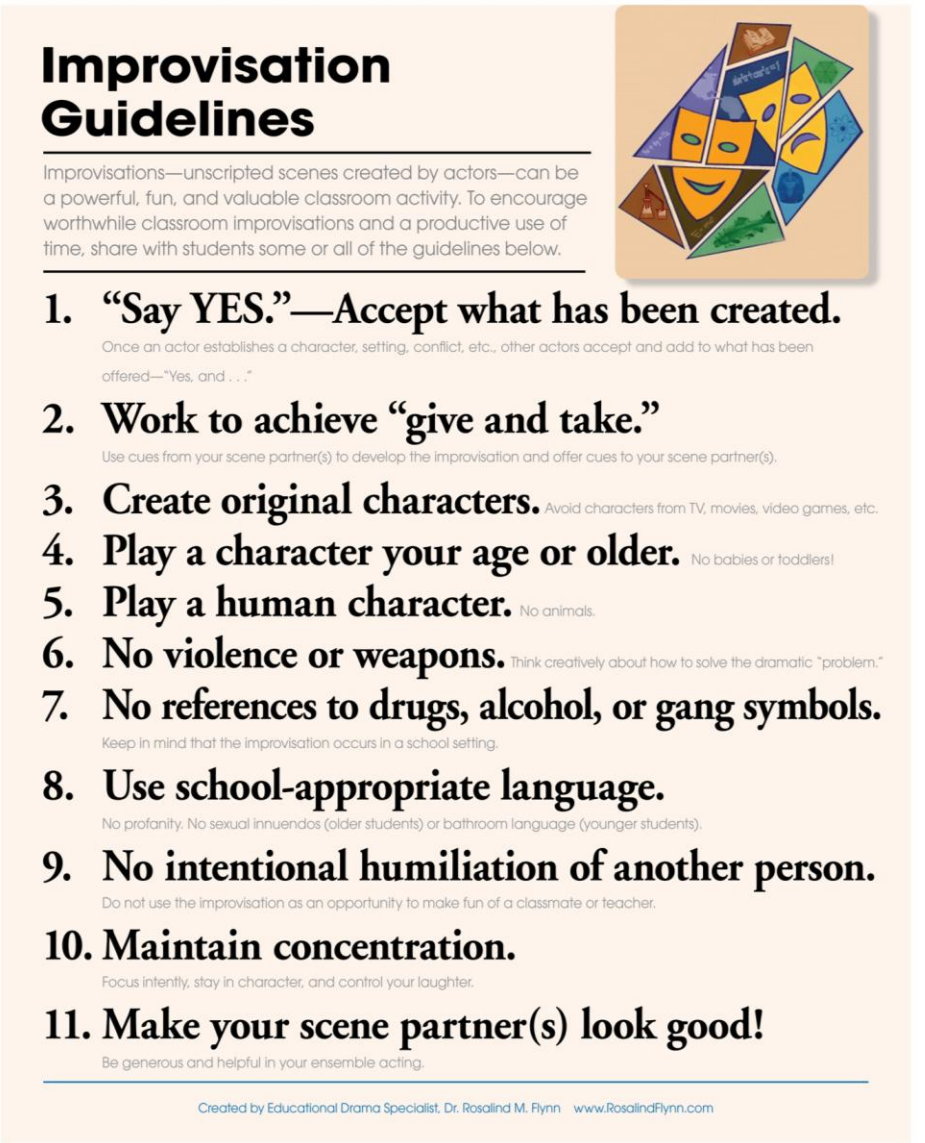

Figure 2: A chart of improvisation guidelines, created by Rosalind M. Flynn

EPILOGUE

Without specific, time-efficient, worthwhile drama activity instructions, the use of drama as an embodied cognition strategy in classrooms will rarely be realized. If this article inspires teachers to leverage the power of drama, one positive effect would be increased classroom dramatic experiences for students. Anecdotally, I can report that this dramatic

approach has the potential to motivate students to think more deeply and creatively, to participate actively in communicating words and their meanings, and to enjoy the challenge of the drama task. If embodied learning matters and drama works to foster it, research that answers questions like the following would strengthen the case for the use of the arts to support learning across disciplines: When students are provided with a dramatic purpose for using and speaking vocabulary words, do they remember the meanings of the words and use them correctly in the future? When teachers experience success in leading one type of drama activity, does that give them confidence to try other uses of drama? Does repeated participation in drama activities increase the quality of students' dramatic abilities and their willingness to show embodied evidence of their understandings? The stage is set for future acts.

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Drama Games: Establishing Equilibrium in Education

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ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses on the usefulness of drama games in educational settings and how they can be utilised for learning purposes. Despite the prescribed manner of the National Curriculum in England, the findings of this paper show how carefully structured and targeted drama games can benefit learners' experiences and support teachers in understanding a dramatic pedagogical approach that can work for them. Discussions around learning agency and creative ownership are crucial to understand how the practice contributes to both. Through an autoethnographic lens, the research model carefully documents with plans of the conducted workshops and reflections from the author of how the games have affected learning and engagement. Employing the use of Chris Johnston's (2005) Six Polarities, the research is narrowed to prove how drama games offer an equal opportunity for students to engage in learning material whilst developing skills such as teamwork, confidence in communication and

problem solving.

INTRODUCTION

> I often get into a rut of playing the same games and am guilty of not utilising the full potential of the games in the wider context of my lesson… instead of tacking them on to the start or end of a lesson. (Holcombe, 2023)

At the time of writing, there is an astronomical shift taking place in the UK within the National Curricula of England and Wales. As the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) established a National Curriculum that squeezed out so many of the arts within the ten core subjects of the time. Recent critiques highlight that, "Internationally the PISA (Programme for International Teacher Assessment) introduction of a creative thinking framework from 2022 has suggested to some UK observers that England is out of step in its approach to its National Curriculum" (Tambling & Bacon, 2022, p. 20). In 2022, Wales took the final step of their educational reformation and introduced a curriculum of their own, where for the first time since 1988, the Area of Learning and Experience for the Expressive Arts was created, including dance and drama as subjects. So, between the two nations, there is a slow, but positive recognition of how drama and theatre can be incorporated as a tool for teaching. But in England, this requires the formal recognition of it rather than as subservient to the subject, English. But for those without an arts background, what is drama? The notions of the West End, of scripts, a rehearsed performance perhaps come to mind of those teachers. For those of us from a theatrical background, it is worth reminding it is difficult to define:

> Too often, teachers have been given only very vague definitions, such as 'Drama is Life!' or 'Drama is as intangible as personality itself…' Alternatively there have been disarmingly simple statements, such as this one; 'Drama is action, movement, a form of physical, including vocal, expression. Therefore it has a near relationship with physical education…'… The rigidity of these

> positions not merely divided drama teachers from each other, but also cut them off from a recognition of the real needs of their pupils. (Watkins, 1981, p. 16)

As drama practitioners, it is worth reminding ourselves what a privileged position we are in, finding our own connection and meaning of what an art form is. This understanding allows us to translate for people of all ages and all backgrounds through our unique perspectives. But, as *The Arts in Schools Report* by Tambling & Bacon (2022) demonstrates, the implementation of arts-based approaches must not be limited to external practitioners (which then ultimately becomes a question of which schools' finances and affordability), but that teachers and their training must incorporate awareness of the arts. One of the key findings of the report is as follows:

> The Report claims that to see education mainly as preparation for work would be to assume that the arts within education are unimportant unless children intend to make a career in them; this would be a mistake – they provide many benefits for children in terms of their creativity, empathy, understanding, achievement and capacity to innovate, and provide a natural and important means of exploring emotions, feelings, and values. (Tambling & Bacon, 2022, p. 8)

Recent research by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and the Oracy Education Committee (OEC) have both now published findings that push forward the placement of drama as a tool for improving reading, writing and speaking skills. However, whilst both publications create a robust case for the implementation of dramatic approaches, I am more concerned how the repetitive nature of drama games can be a consistent, accessible and simpler way for non-specialist teachers to integrate the arts, therefore acknowledging how "Using drama in the classroom can be a challenging teaching strategy because teachers may not have the proper methods of managing the students" (Kasbary & Novak, 2024, p. 317).

Therefore, in this paper, using the writings of practitioners who place an importance in drama games, this paper aims to highlight how these approaches can actually make huge differences to the classroom environment to ensure inclusivity, promotes agency and can

work towards emboldening students; once these three foundations are laid, then perhaps empowerment and ownership of learning will be more likely. Whilst Samantha Marsden's *Teach Drama; How to make a living as a freelance drama teacher* (2016) suggests that whilst "drama games are great do be careful not to play drama games for your whole lesson" (2016, p. 43), I am going to argue that it is possible to do this and by doing so, creates a much more succinct approach for teachers to use, that becomes accessible and simple to facilitate.

For this paper, I will be using the reading of Chris Johnston, Jessica Swale, Geese Theatre and Brian Watkins. Many theatre practitioners' practice will be more advanced than games-based approaches, but complexity does not necessarily mean better. For teachers, promoting play through the game of drama might just offer a simpler approach that allows educational settings to begin to scratch the surface of implementing arts education. I will be referring to my own experiences as a facilitator for Liverpool based company, Altru Drama, and the readings of the above to pull together a critical reflection of how drama games can establish an equilibrium in educational spaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From my practice and theoretical framework, one of the key readings used in this paper will be Chris Johnston's *House of Games; Making theatre from everyday life* (2005). A biblical publication that demonstrates the beauty of games that evoke the nature of human beings connecting and bouncing off each other. His work of the *Six Polarities* (which inspires the analytical approach) gives rise to an approach that encourages practitioners to carefully think about how the chosen game impacts the workshop and questions the purpose of a game at a given time. This particular book "deals with the drama workshop experience, how a group works together privately behind closed doors, rather than how it meets an audience" (Johnston, 2005, p. xiii) and offers both theoretical and practical solutions to how a drama facilitator can manage a room of individuals and to bring a communal experience. Within classrooms, just as there are in community groups, there must be an awareness for how conflict can disrupt the space and flow of a lesson. From Johnston's time working with prisoners, young people at risk and those on the edges of society,

his theory can inform classroom practice. Drama can be used “to improve their social and communication skills, express themselves and perhaps learn better how to managed emotions” (2005, p. 10). This aspect of drama goes hand in hand nicely with the idea of celebration. Even the smaller successes require celebration to achieve the larger aims. In my experience, games enable the opportunities for young people to play and create in imagined worlds. Whilst as a facilitator I can bring my own stories, the magic happens “When the group makes up its own stories, they begin to celebrate what is culturally distinctive and unique about their world” (2005, p. 11). Influence of Johnston’s other significant work, *The Improvisation* Game (2006), will offer further clarity to Johnston’s philosophy that can influence the workshop leader and the importance of sacrificing control to offer agency in the creative room. Therefore, Johnston’s understanding of how to curate invested, and meaningful drama workshop sessions is incredibly important to underline the practice of others.

Whilst many of the drama games I use may be common practice for many theatre practitioners, for those who are unfamiliar, Jessica Swale’s *Drama Games for Classrooms and Workshops* (2009) is an excellent source of games appropriate for educational settings. The book is introduced with a clear justification for why drama games are so useful in the classroom. This publication, like Johnston’s and Watkins’s, can also contribute to justifying the difference between drama and theatre, which from my professional experience in the field is still not completely understood. Other views of Swale’s publication suggest she “has written an extraordinarily helpful compendium and guide to drama games that will be a valuable help to directors, teachers and workshop leaders” (Swale, 2009, p. vii), showing a wider acknowledgment of the use of games within the industry. Swale has divided her games “into sections that enable you to see the specific focus of each game easily, allowing you to plan where it might be best suited in a workshop” (Swale, 2009, p. xviii) which demonstrates the potency and power these games possess, challenging the perceptions they are simply a nicety or add-on. Finally, the inclusion of the publication will offer readers a pinpointed source for the games I refer to throughout this paper.

The final author that will prove crucial to this paper is Brian Watkins (1981) with his views on the relationship between *Drama and Education* which will offer some context as to the potential strains in

the relationship between the two elements. Whilst the publication is 44 years old, I encourage to remind readers that with the 1988 ERA putting the brakes on compulsory drama education for ages 3-16, I would argue that many of Watkins' observations are reflective of the opposing stances and prejudices seen back in the 1980's. The aim of this publication is quite simple:

> … an attempt to turn this tide of indifference by advocating that Drama is an indispensably powerful learning experience. Its unique balance of thought and feeling makes learning enjoyable, rigorous and obviously relevant to the whole realm of social life from which it takes its model. (1981, p. 11)

Watkins clearly sets out a path of definition and clarity within his publication and it is the lack of clarity that still exists within the education system of how drama, and I should say the wider arts practices, are more than a mere nicety. I have started to see some drama games used by teachers or teachers recognising the activities I am using; this paper aims to push those teachers further. In Wales, the shift to a "child-centred approach is a rarity, for the norm is reflects training that stresses for the need for the teacher to always be in control of everything that happens in the classroom" (Watkins, 1981, p. 28). The latter still happens in England; the fear of children's noise and demands for silence are aspects for some teachers where control is grasped too much, resulting in control being misplaced. This means, that within the room, there is not an equilibrium between everyone, for those who are silenced may actually be co-operating. But noise is perceived as defiance. Later, I will example a very simple game that explores this complexity. But for there to be equilibrium, there must be a democratic model, of which drama can deliver on. Before introducing some key considerations for the reader, let us take forward Watkins' last point on how "drama serves truly as a democratic model, for it is above all else consensual. It both celebrates social values and challenges them, thereby assisting the process of social change" (1981, pp. 30-31). This can only happen when the prescription of the current curriculum in England explicitly emphasises "the lesson plans are teacher-centres, authoritarian models posing as open-ended lessons" that focuses more so on "what should be done but not how to do it" (Watkins, 1981, p. 31).

DEFINING DEFINITIONS

Before divulging my findings, briefly, a discussion around key words should be considered when discussing what drama can do for young people's learning experiences. The two key areas explored for contextual purposes are *Agency to Occupation* and *Emboldenment before Empowerment.* For readers, this will just frame where my thinking behind the use of games stems from.

Agency to Occupation

Tim Prentki & Nicola Abraham (2021) offer a succinct and clear definition of agency.

> To be in a position of agency means to be able to act to alter the circumstances of one's life, rather than being dependent upon the actions of others. One of the benefits of applied theatre is that it can confer agency upon participants by opening a space where the individual can rehearse an action to test whether it does, indeed, lead to change. (2021, p. 43)

However, *how* we reach the position where young people can choose to take agency within creative practices is this paper's focus. As Chris Johnston (2005) suggests, if a workshop leader simply sacrifices the space to their participants without any structure, the risk that "Some in the group may feel upset or taken advantage of" (2005, p. 25) increases. The latter half of Prentki & Abraham's definition is often forgot, in that agency is only fulfilled when that freedom to participate leads to a change. This could be in understanding, in knowledge, of awareness, of attitudes and in empathy. This fulfilment of meaning making derives from "the successful implementation of an idea or project that has achieved its end-goals" (Prentki & Abraham, 2021, p. 45).

But is agency a result or is there more? Fixed boundaries ensure that the opportunity is fair but, more importantly, rules can contribute to the creation of a collective as the facilitator and other members of the groups continuously challenge them. What must then evolve from agency is occupation. Johnston (2017) argues how drama in theatrical spaces could be seen as "'theatreing it all down'…[whereby] Visitors to the theatre expect to be surprised and are happy to be so" (2017, p.

115) potentially suggesting a sense, upon entering a venue, of complicity and causality. But for drama to work effectively, where questions are posed and challenges are presented, agency must in some sense feel like a protest. The presence of drama within a school classroom works against what is currently there, which is a curated lump of sameness, as Watkins (1981) observes:

> ‘Crowds, praise and power’ make the environment in which learning takes place and are themselves a major part of what is learned. They represent areas of social control to which we learn to respond and comply, and in the process we lose our individuality and the significance of the individual experience. (p. 27)

Watkins eloquently argues how the broad approach to ensure productiveness is achieved results in “an-all pervasive lethargy” (1981, p. 27) which creates a sense of apathy towards learning. However, taking Johnston’s approach, the encouragement of occupation – of the classroom, of their learning, of useful knowledge – will “rightfully return an emphasis on the agency dimension of performance, provoking reflection, conversation and a celebration of dissident thought” (2017, p. 117).

But this transition from agency to occupation must be nurtured and facilitated very carefully. If the teacher attempts this from a dictatorial position, then “a profound and affective learning experience can be experienced as ‘bad’ or troublesome to children not familiar with learning paradigms other than cognitive absorption and consumption of factual information” (Rasmussen, 2000). The global outlook, suggested by Benjamin Bolden, Sean Corcoran, Tiina Kukkonen, Jeffrey Newberry, Nathan Rickey (2024), wishes to reflect “UNESCO’s concept of transformative education unites education initiatives that advance peace, support human rights and promote sustainable development” (2024, p. 11). This aim is best achieved through an “arts education [that] can invite humanistic approaches to being, contributing and flourishing as transformed citizens of the future” (2024, p. 13). Therefore, the arts are the way forward, but how can teachers use the arts using simple methods? First, we must consider the pedagogy of a facilitator versus a teacher.

Pedagogical Shifts: Facilitator vs Teacher

Blair (2020) identifies pedagogical approaches, highlighting that in most educational establishments is 'Leading from the Front' is most common practice. In this approach, "students are shown the 'right' way to do something and then asked to follow this process in their own learning" and to this end, a predictable outcome means that "the teacher, who knows what the end point looks like, provides them with the necessary skills in order for them to be successful" (Blair, 2020, p. 51). However, this approach restricts agency and potential choice. If the teacher, instead, is 'Directing from the rear', then potentially this shift of role can allow for more fruitful arts-based education. To many teachers, this sacrifice may be difficult, but that is where drama games come into their own. The rules of a drama game are similar to the establishing of parameters of an assessment. In both instances, the role of teacher must evolve into "a shepherding role – keeping an overview and nudging the students back on track when they stray too far. This is often best done through questioning individuals" (Blair, 2020, p. 52). This way, students can individually explore and try to solve problems whilst their focus is maintained within a workable boundary. Analysis of the facilitator's pedagogy will return later in discussions.

Emboldenment before Empowerment

The next comparative definition I want to establish is this idea of *Emboldenment before Empowerment.* This aim *to empower* children, I believe, has in some sense lost its meaning. Repetition of the word has relegated it to a passive verb in informal discussions and thrown around in policies. For example, embedding the word in a list of jargon for policy on transformative education from UNESCO:

> …involves co-created teaching and learning that recognizes and valorises the dignity and diversity of learners in educational settings, eliminates all barriers to their learning and motivates and **empowers** them to reflect critically, become agents of change and protagonists of their own future, enabling informed decision-making and actions at the individual, community, local, national, regional and global levels, including through approaches such as global citizenship education, education for sustainable

> development and human rights education, among others, that support the building of peaceful, just, inclusive, equal, equitable, healthy and sustainable societies. (Bolden et al, 2024, p. 11)

Whilst ‘empowers’ can mean to give the ability, I often wonder whether there are steps prior to this aim of empowerment. In terms of language, perhaps the Welsh Government have used enable:

> The Curriculum for Wales guidance promotes collaboration and cross-disciplinary planning, learning and teaching, both within and across Areas. This will enable learners to build connections across their learning and combine different experiences, knowledge and skills. (Welsh Government, 2024)

The teachers’ role, in Wales, is now about allowing freedom for learners to construct relationships with subjects in their own subjective way. However, this leniency has brought some criticism, which the then Welsh Education Minister, Mr Jeremy Miles responded:

> What it does is provide a way for teachers to be able to provide a curriculum which works for the group of young people in front of them in the classroom and is much more bespoke and puts trust in the hands of teachers and what we do know from the OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] is the key difference is excellent teaching. (Williams, 2023)

So, whilst in one part of the UK, the curriculum has opened up for opportunities of enabling, there is not yet the realisation in how to transition from enablement to empowerment. To feel empowered is to take risks. Artistic practices can encourage risks, helping participants to learn and become familiar with the mantra that “‘In order to be a creative artist you must risk failure’, and ‘Go out and fail, not succeed. Efficiency is the death of theatre’” (Barker, 2010, p. 3).

METHODOLOGY

For this small-scale research paper, I will be using my own personal reflections in the field, working in mainstream primary school settings where I have been conducting workshops using drama games-based

approaches to explore a variety of topics with young people. For the reader, the workshop plans can be seen in the appendices:

- 17.01.2025 - Shang Dynasty workshops delivered for pupils in year 4 in Quinton, West Midlands (Duration: 130 minutes, 2 sessions) – Appendix A.
- 16.01.2025 - Poetry workshop delivered for pupils in years 1-2 in Hoylake, Wirral (Duration: 75 minutes, 3 sessions) – Appendix B.

By selecting these two examples, readers will see the strengths of drama games in various settings for different participants: varying ages, geographical locations and social contexts in both cases. Whilst data from children and/or staff is absent, the autoethnographical approach incorporates my practice, impact of activities and reflections. Therefore, readers will be able to see how the use of:

> … “storytelling, showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice to produce accessible texts that describe [...] patterns, with the aim to reach a more diverse mass audience than the traditional research readership.” [49:766]. Attention to detail in the writing and a focus on the authorial voice are central to conveying the meaning of what is uncovered during a first-person method study. (Desjardins et al, 2021, p. 4)

As the paper disseminates how teachers can use this approach, then I believe the storytelling nature will support the dissection of the workshops into digestible chunks. There will be sceptical views of this approach, but it is important that more researchers’ experiences and other practices are heard and encourage readers “to acknowledge the value of subjectivity and diversity of practices that first-person research entails” (Desjardins et al, 2021, p. 7).

The methodology will aim to highlight the strengths of this approach, but I am also aware of the bias that could arise. But the aim of the research is to prove how this methodological approach shows how “the line between the personal and the professional gets blurred. Our opinion, point of view, decisions, and mistakes can be seen as a valuable starting point for learning” (Desjardins et al, 2021, p. 8).

ANALYSIS

For this analysis, the application of three of Chris Johnston's (2005) *Six Polarities* will be applied:

- The Fixed and the Free
- The Centre and the Edge
- The Individual and the Collective

Firstly, by shifting rules and boundaries, new freedoms can be found within the activities. Both sessions comprise of a combination games and exercises that constantly keeps participants engaged and challenged. These aspects of a workshop may fall in the Fixed and the Free polarity. Johnston's warning of approaching the commencement of a workshop rings with my practice since I began my academic journey:

> At the beginning of a project, there is an apparent freedom. Nothing has been set. We can do what we like… But this freedom has no meaning… It's probably quite good fun but after the initial excitement has worn off we may to start to feel bored… So, we need to introduce some fixed elements to regulate the activities. (Johnston, 2005, pp. 24-25)

As a drama practitioner, I am extremely aware how children have the right "to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (United Nations, 1990) and to do so freely. But for children to engage in meaningful play, "Maintaining structures enables the group to dive, and safely return" (Johnston, 2005, p. 28). To introduce these structures, a behaviour management tool is extremely useful.

Curating Playful Spaces; Agreeing to Rules

A behaviour management tool is not simply about bringing about silence so that my voice can be heard. It is instead bringing the temperatures down to a manageable level. As the workshop plans in the appendices highlight, my main two are *Frogs in the Pond* and *Don't clap this one back!* Both are drama games that encourage listening. *Frogs in the Pond*, once explained, often has one or two children

making the connection to the classic, *Simon Says…* but the familiarity with the structure is crucial. But what is established is a dramatic dialogue, which this becomes a part of. Similarly, with *Don't Clap this one back*, I have seen the group become cohesive to my individual rhythm. When the rhythm of the game's namesake is clapped out, the most remarkable reactions take place. There are those moments when the whole class respond at once, recognising the rhythm. This results in a communal coming together that they were not caught out by the stranger. However, on other occasions, this game results in a long and slow realisation when the forbidden rhythm is repeated. Those who have realised, as they did in Quinton, notice my wry smile, heightening their awareness beyond their self. Those oblivious soon begin to realise and become attentive to their peers. This occurrence is better than achievement of the exercise, providing laughter at mistakes. This latter scenario is an example of "an act of emotional generosity. It can't be done without warmth, affection and good feeling" (Johnston, 2005, p. 72) whereby failure is laughed at early on. What emerges "from *within* the group rather than from the leadership" signifies "they may be more powerful in building a group identity" (Johnston, 2005, p. 75). Some group members are keen to ensure their peers are not made a fool of.

Creative Collectives Formed, Play Begins

A sense of collectivity is ignited, and the first part of the methodology is established. As Johnston suggests, "Without an appropriate methodology, there is always the danger of the workshop being hijacked" (2005, p. 68) and these tools become agreements moving forward. The next step, pending on time, is the Name Game/Ice Breaker. Whilst Name Games are incredibly useful, they do not always contribute to the workshop in prompt manner. As you can see from Appendix A, for the year 4's, I have adapted the game, *Name Tag* to ensure that the game "demands quick thinking and excellent awareness skills" (Swale, 2009, p. 36). However, taking from Clark Baim, Sally Brookes and Alun Mountford (2002), this game places focus upon an individual. As Geese Theatre allude, "In general, groups work best starting with a low focus, gradually moving toward higher focus work in moderate stages" (Baim et al, 2002, p. 31). But in this year 4 class, there was a clear sense of excitement, so what was needed was a game where someone was 'it', harnessing that energy

from the off. That first volunteer sparks something amazing… foolery. They have modelled how to step away from the circle, from the herd. As Johnston argues, the "vision of the fool is that individual who is emotionally committed to the process of play within theatre… an individual cannot progress without abandoning the critical ego" (2005, p. 33). This is supported by the fact that the children are aware that the role of Di Xin can be passed. Baim et al note how it is important "to consider whether the focus is Passing, meaning that it briefly passes from one person to the next" (2002, p. 31). Even that small commitment from the start already suggests that by "coming into the centre always involves some element of emotional risk. It's. About saying 'Yes, I will make myself vulnerable'" (Johnston, 2005, p. 35). This also welcomed the idea of losing not being a catastrophe, and that sometimes failing was good. A simple adaptation of *The Egg Game* (Johnston, 2010, p. 37) allows for knowledge to be shared—the myth of Jiandi—which demonstrates how as a group, we are now beginning to dig deeper into the theme, but once more, challenges the "meritocratic social system" (Johnston, 2010, p. 37) as the idea of power coming from merit is reduced to insignificance. This again helps students to move on from failure quickly.

In contrast, with the Poetry participants, the approach still aims to access foolery. However, using low focus activities "means that the whole group is not looking at any particular group member for longer than a brief moment" (Baim et al, 2002, p. 31). Instead, the Ice breakers are more focused on physical exercises. The use of games to warm up creates a collective focal and committal point: me. With much younger participants (5–7-year-olds), the facilitator must show their foolery.

Games like *Rubber Chicken* (Swale, 2009, p. 4), a version of *Ooey, Gooey, Chewy Gum* (Swale, 2009, p. 18) and *Boom Chick-a Boom* (Swale, 20009, p. 22), encourage the facilitator to teach by modelling, "In other words, acting yourself, joining in as an equal but relying on students to watch you and to learn by watching" (Johnston, 2006, p. 288). One of the key advantages is that it "lessens the sense of fearfulness and anxiety in the room through embodying the playful spirit in their own contributions" (Johnston, 2006, p. 290) which then unlocks a collective acceptance of playfulness.

Play Pushes the Boundaries

In both workshops, the shift of focus returns to the facilitator. In those first 30 minutes, behavioural parameters are agreed and play is sparked. *Commands*—which will have varying names such as Johnston's *Walk, Clap, Freeze* (2005, p. 119) —is about now freeing that built up energy. Freedom is offered when the exercise "involves the facilitator giving instructions to the group to move freely about the room" (Johnston, 2005, p. 118). The introduction of actions as listed in both workshop plans, then introduce those fixed elements and re-establishes the role of THE COACH (Johnston, 2006, p. 290). The game then seeks to up the stakes by reversing the orders, like Geese Theatre's *Walk means Run* (Baim et al, 2002, p. 85). Whilst simple, the aims of these games are to heighten awareness of thinking processes and of others in the room. Participants may start questioning their self-control; "How easy or difficult is it to control automatic thinking or automatic actions?" (Baim et al, 2002, p. 85). For participants of all ages, this is necessary because when the time comes for activities with more lenient boundaries, where they are creating as a team, we need our participants to be aware of how their actions affect others.

The workshop now progresses to develop Knowledge and introduce Performative activities that begin the handover of agency. Participants are now buzzing, have shown commitment and taken direction; now be generous and offer that enthusiasm back. In the Shang Dynasty workshop (Appendix A), you will see how *Shaky Shaky High Five*, *3,2,1, Character* (both of which are Altru Drama inspired games) and *Tableaux* (Swale, 2009, pp. 80-81) offer some freedoms in choices and suggestions. Both Altru Drama games shift the facilitator to the sidelines now, and teaching is conducted "By explanation—by using words to outline the hypotheses, instructions and critiques. It could involve 'side-coaching' —advising while the [game] is in progress" (Johnston, 2006, p. 288). As such, as a facilitator, I have shifted from the centre and now respond "to signals from the edge [which] is part of holistic awareness. In a way, peripheral vision is emblematic of awareness itself" (Johnston, 2005, p. 36). Structures remain and competition against countdowns or each other still spur the participants to commit. But the participants are now occupying the centre of the workshop, it is from them that the workshop moves forward. This is where we see how the Centre and the Edge speak to one another; one cannot exist without the other. In Figure 1, readers

can see how the use of games effects the idea of the Centre and the Edge.

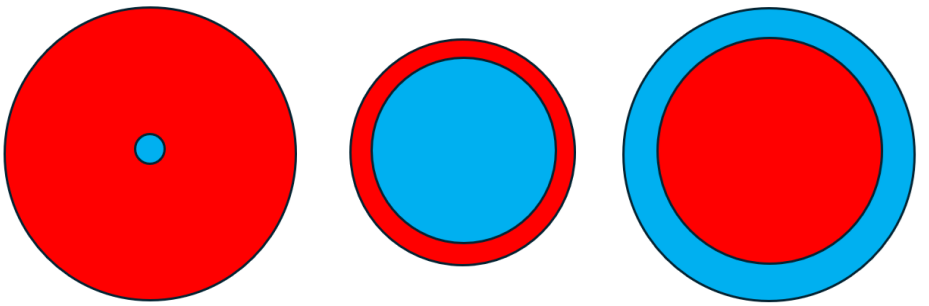

Figure 7: Image represents the three stages of how the Centre and the Edge works in my practice. Red indicates the participants, blue indicates the facilitator.

The facilitator, marked in blue, begins by occupying the centre, knowing the plan and working with suppositions of how the games will provoke participants.

After the ice breakers, children are moving towards the centre, as games free up their minds to the idea of drama. This can encourage them to take greater, creative risks. As the workshop progresses, the facilitator can allow the rules to take effect, meaning they are slowly moving to the edge, rather than gripping to the role of leader. By the time the workshop has reached Knowledge or Performance stages, the workshop is now far more occupied by the participants, without them, there is no substance. But structure of the workshop is continuously supported by the facilitator on the edge, who is now in that coach-like role.

Relaxed Performative Outputs

The class now have occupied the creative space, they understand it is up to them to perform. The workshop can shift into the final performance activities, where a test of their emboldenment arrives. Over the course of the workshop, through competition, through risk taking, through teamwork, they have built their confidence to engage and make small choices. In these workshops, the last section often thinks about how a stimulus can provoke creation. Once more returning to Johnston, the final stage of teaching is now “By provocation—this means joining in sporadically around the edge of the

[activity]… to motor the action in the way you want it to go" (2006, p. 288). Both workshops used texts for participants to respond to. Both developed on the practice of *Tableaux*; repetition of the exercise increases its value as a useful dramatic tool. The only difference were the texts they responded to; Year 4's responded to the events leading to the Downfall of the Shang Dynasty, Year 1's & 2's responded to the poem, *A Dark Dark House.* Here, I conclude on the Fixed and the Free. The stories are the rules of the dramatic world that the participants respond to. The continued focus on *Tableaux* (whether as a *Whoosh* in-the-round or in the guise of *Illustration Station* (Swale, 2009, p. 132)), what can be seen is how "The imposition of rules has meant the group can stop worrying about certain tasks. If words are banned – now I can have fun with movement. If planning is disallowed, now I can be spontaneous" (Johnston, 2005, p. 26). These boundaries do not restrict but can tear back the onus on performance, which may trigger unnecessary anxiety. In the Shang Dynasty workshop, that extra layer of the *Soundscape* (Swale, 2009, pp. 28-29) is introduced to show how performance is made up of layers and it is carefully constructed. The final aspect of this "encourages the group to create a composition as a group, and often results in impressive work. It can also be a creative starting point for building improvisation scenes, and a useful tool for devising" (Swale, 2009, p. 29). Here, I use it towards the end because I want the children to achieve a sense of performance but want them to achieve something simple well. This avoids:

> Disappointment and confusion [that] can arise when objectives are set beyond the abilities of the group. You run out of time trying to achieve them. Similar disappointment happens when dramatic styles are adopted which the group are unfamiliar with and cannot quickly learn. (Johnston, 2005, p. 69)

These are the implications when drama is used 'behind close doors' —starting from where the participants are, the construction of a creative group produces learners who want to attend schools and want to learn in their learning environment. These games-based approaches deliver for the individuals and the collective as "there are rewards. They lie in complicity which is achieved in teamwork. And the paradox is, if teamwork is put first participants discover a new, stronger individuality for themselves" (Johnston, 2005, p. 37).

CONCLUSION

Reflective analysis shows the use of games, carefully chosen and slightly adapted, can make for a strong cross-curricular design that deliver on the subject and on student development. Of course, I have had the experience of using these tools and have seen how other theatre practitioners use games to engage and embolden children in community and theatrical spaces. But the games must constantly shift; in my experience, 'out' games or a series of competitive games simply stir up that meritocratic society once more. If teachers are not familiar with arts, then perhaps with the idea of games with rules they may find familiarity. As you can see, games on average last for 10-20 minutes each. A games-based workshop allows a practitioner to keep changing the boundaries for which participants can bounce from. As a facilitator, different games require different roles from us as leaders; be it the 'participant who knows', the director or the coach. But by being able to shift our position pedagogically, we can first spark the commitment to take risks and shed any fear or anxiety, thus removing egos and eventually, find ourselves on the sidelines as the players play. I shall leave you with Watkins' definition of drama games and what they do. My experience and reflections should show how drama games are far more than an attachment at top or tale of a lesson; they are meaningful and offer development:

> … the operation of individual skills and the unity of group purpose. In the drama game, as perhaps in any game, the skills are exercised within the sanction of the group's agreement to play that game. This is because the game is essentially a social experience, and the drama, relying as it does upon 'the willing suspension of disbelief', is perhaps the most social of games. And though we may talk of the individual and his development through drama, we have to bear in mind that the social context of the experience will affect the freedom of that individuality. (Watkins, 1981, p. 22)

Appendices

Appendix A – Shang Dynasty Workshop Plan

(Plans represent what was conducted, not initially planned)

EXPLORE WORKSHOP PLAN			
Year group / class: **Year 4**		Workshop length: **130 minutes x 2**	
Theme or topic: **Shang Dynasty**		Beginning / Middle / End of topic: **Beginning**	
Type of activity	**Title of activity / Name of game:**	**Description (if required)**	**Time**
Introduction ***(Please include behaviour management info here)***	Hi, I'm Dave. I'm a director from Altru Drama… Today we're going to look at the history and important events of the Shang Dynasty, which began in 1600 BC and lasted for over 500 years, coming to an end in 1046 BC.	Introducing of Behaviour Management Tool: Don't clap this one back!	5 mins
Name Game	Name x3	Say your name 3 times, nice and loud.	2 mins
	Name Tag	Instead of the zombie, it is Di Xin, the	10 mins

		evil emperor looking for his next slaves to build his tower. If Di Xin tags you, you're in. The only way to save yourself is to nominate someone else, Di Xin will begin walking towards them. If they are tagged, then they become the new Di Xin.	
	The Egg Game	Players will find a random partner. They will then play a game of rock, papers, scissors, shoot! Each time they win, they are promoted. Losing results in relegation. To reflect the myth of Jiandi who: 1. Egg – the lowest level, she swallowed an egg. 2. Blackbird – the egg was of a blackbird. 3. Baby – Jiandi had a baby, called Xie. 4. Emperor – Xie would be the first ancestor of the Shang.	10 mins

		5. Shan Di – the winners, the supreme god in the Shang Belief system.	
Scene Setter	Commands	Go, Stop, Reach High, Reach Low, Clap, Jump. Reverse orders.	5 mins
	Stage Directions and Actions	Introducing Stage Directions, ensuring theatre skills are learnt as well as subject focus. Having established the stage directions, they must create images representing: Centre Stage – Dynasty – powerful family pose Upstage – Yellow River Downstage – Tomb of Fu Hao Stage Left – Soldiers at the Battle of Mingtao Stage Right – Festivals for the gods	10 mins
Knowledge	Shaky Shaky High Five	Learning a sequence to remember	10 – 15

Games		the different gods, the sequence always begins Shaky Shaky (2 handshakes) and High Five. Suggestions of movements from children incorporated into sequence.	mins
	3,2,1 Character	Participants stood in a circle facing away from the practitioner. The practitioner describes a character, physically and emotionally, and the participant take on this role. When the practitioner counts down from 3 to 1, they reveal their characters to everyone else and the practitioner. For the Shang dynasty topic: 1. Emperor 2. Wealthy Powerful Ruling classes 3. Soldiers 4. Priests 5. Traders 6. Craftsman 7. Farmers	10 – 15 mins

		8. Slaves 9. Prisoners	
	Tableaux	After participants have found their groups using huggy bear, in groups of 4/5, they must demonstrate the 4 key aspects of tableaux/freeze frames: 1. Facial Expressions 2. Use of body 3. Levels 4. Stillness Initially starting with shapes, modern objects and settings before delving into Shang dynasty settings: royal palace, farmers, blacksmiths, marketplaces, prisons, battlefield.	10-15 mins
Performance Activity 1	Whoosh	Participants sit in a circle. In the circle, they are audience. In the centre, is our stage. I will invite actors up on stage to create freeze frames of the scenes I am describing. When	15-20 mins

		I say whoosh, clear the stage.	
Performance Activity 2	Archaeologists' scene – soundscape	Brush, brush, brush, brush. Dig, dig. (Long blow) Ooooooooooo! (On clap, everyone together:) FOUND IT!	20 – 30 mins

Appendix B – Poetry Workshop Plan

(Plans represent what was conducted, not initially planned)

EXPLORE WORKSHOP PLAN			
Year group / class: **Year 1/2**		Workshop length: **75 mins x 3 sessions**	
Theme or topic: **Poetry**		Beginning / Middle / End of topic: **N/A**	
Type of activity	**Title of activity / Name of game:**	**Description (if required)**	**Time**
Introduction ***(Please include behaviour management info here)***	Good morning/afternoon, my name is Dave, and I'm a theatre director from Altru Drama, who are based over in Liverpool. At Altru, we use drama games, exercises and techniques to explore many topics: 1. History 2. Plays 3. Us and the World around us	Introduction of Behaviour management tool: Frogs in the Pond (Hands on the floor) Frogs on lily pads (Hands on laps) Frogs on the Rocks (Hands on shoulders) Frogs in Space (Hands in the air)	5 mins

	But today, we are looking at Poetry and how to perform poetry.		
Ice Breaker	Warm Up	As actors, we have to warm up three very important tools: 1. Face – Stretch/Scrunch, Ooey Chewy Gum, Jaw Shake 2. Voice – BDG/GDB, Unique New York, New York Unique, Irish wristwatch. 3. Body – Rubber Chicken, Penguin Race	5 mins
Ice Breaker	Warm up songs	I like the flowers, I like the daffodils. I like the mountains, I love the rolling hills. I like the fireside when the lights are low, Singing a doo-wop, a doo-wop, a doo-wop, a doo doo doo doo.	5 mins

Scene Setter	Commands	Go, Stop, Reach High, Reach Low, Clap, Jump. Reverse orders.	5 mins
	The Bears Are Coming	Happy lumberjacks, chop, chop, chop. When the bears enter, they must freeze.	10 mins
Performance Activity 1	Tiffy, taffy, toffee by Michael Rosen	Use a poem with repeated structures and add actions which we performed together in a circle.	15 mins
Performance Activity 2	Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat with Makaton Actions	This time introducing how poetry can be told using different languages	10 mins
Performance Activity 3	Illustration Station to A Dark Dark House	By using 10 seconds to make…, introduce the rules of Freeze Frames and what is expected. Then begin to shift from silly freezes (shapes, toasters, on the beach) into images seen within the poem. Once they have created these, ask them to create them when they hear them in the poem	15 mins

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Based in North Wales, Dave Humphreys is currently carrying out research for his PhD at Edge Hill University. The focus of that current research is into the relationship between Theatre-in-Education (TiE) and the Welsh Curriculum. The research involves up to eight theatre companies in Wales whose work will create a series of sturdy case studies in order create blueprint for England and the UK Labour Government and to persuade Arts Council of Wales to reconsider funding for this artform. Having studied BA (Hons) Drama and Theatre Studies and MA Drama at the University of Chester, he has since narrowed his focus on Applied Theatre practices and TiE in Wales. Humphreys has worked with companies such as Theatr Clwyd, Altru Drama and Hijinx Theatre as a facilitator and tutor.

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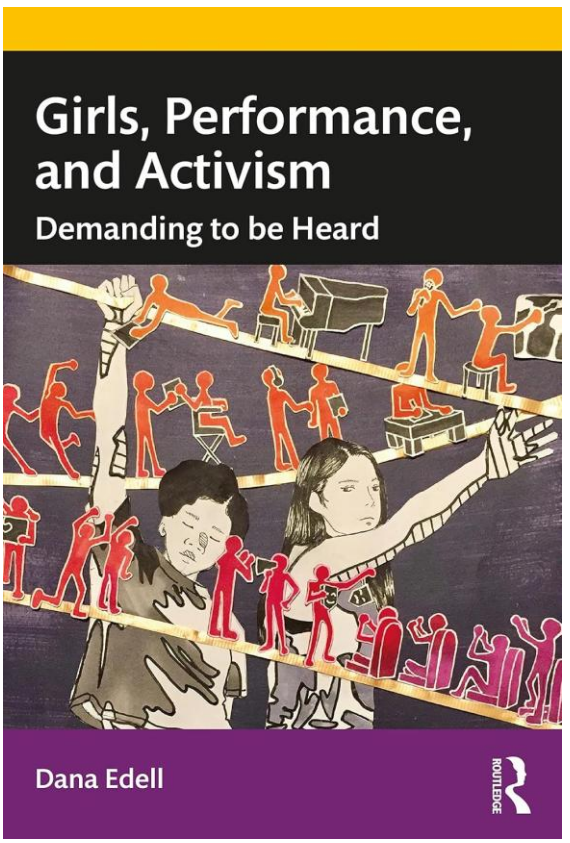
Book Review: *Girls, Performance, and Activism: Demanding to be Heard* by Dana Edell



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In ***Girls, Performance, and Activism: Demanding to be Heard***, Dana Edell takes us on a journey of reflection, revelations, and discoveries charting a course through her more than two decades of work with girls and activist theatre. Recounting personal stories, interviews, pieces of the girls' theatrical writing that Edell has facilitated in the past, as well as voices from the fields of both *girl studies* and *theatre*, the author weaves theory and practice to illuminate the past, present, and future of her work.

In the book, Edell employs case study embedded in an autoethnographic methodology. Of this mixed-methods approach, she writes:

> In addition to case studies of activist theatre projects I have co-created, historical and theoretical analysis, and in-depth qualitative interviews, I use an autoethnographic framework as part of my methodology… My own path winds through girlhood studies, theatre and performance, and activism and I situate this book in all three. I grab onto different branches of the fields, rip off buds and land finally in the messy fiery heat at the intersection of all three: girl-driven activist performance. (2022, p. 2)

Rather than making any one definitive case for how or why this work is important, Edell takes us on a personal journey that illuminates the power and failure of theatre programs that lift up the voices of girls as a central and important part of social justice work. We get to understand not only what this work entails, but its short- and long-term effects on the participants and the pitfalls of engaging in work with youth around social justice issues. In Edell's description,

> This book invites you into not just the details of the work I did and refer to here, but also to meet other artists and activists and see

> the scope and scale of this growing and urgent field. (2022, p. 12)

In the sections that follow, I provide overviews and analysis of each chapter in the book.

Introduction

Edell takes an honest and vulnerable look at how working with girls (primarily Black and Latina) has become her focus and passion. She begins with her own girlhood (age 14) and takes us on an evolutionary timeline through her own background, educational, creative and social justice journey and the various shifts she has taken along the way. She concludes this chapter by providing a roadmap that outlines the insights offered in each of the six subsequent chapters.

Chapter 1: "Under Construction": Girls, Performance, and Activism

This chapter situates Edell's work with girl-driven activist theatre in the larger contexts of social justice and feminist movements. She introduces the fields of *girl studies* and *black girl studies* as well as scholars and practitioners within these fields. Additionally, Edell emphasizes the importance of creative collaboration (adult-girl), narrative performance (successes and harms), and the transformative potential of the work.

Chapter 2: "This Is not a Safe Space": Principles of Theatermaking with Girls

In one of the most substantial chapters of the book, Edell outlines the seven core principles that inform her activist work with girls and details how she uses each of these principles. She also makes a significant argument around the term "safe space" throughout the chapter stating:

> We need to acknowledge the impossibility of enduring everyone's physical and emotional safety at all moments while also making every effort to do just that. (2022, pp. 13-14)

The seven core principles include:

- Negotiating intergenerational power

- Operating with antiracist, intersectional and feminist lenses
- Creating the highest quality, culturally responsive theater
- Educating through critical thinking and liberatory pedagogy practices
- Facilitating with a trauma-informed practice
- Cultivating uncensored, unadulterated storytelling
- Choosing an abundance of joy, play, and love whenever possible

Chapter 3: "Real Im(PERFECT)ions": Performing Confidence, Expressing Agency

Edell begins to break down the ideals of confidence and perfectionism as the overwhelming issues that face adolescents. Through examples from her own work, interviews with practitioners and past participants of the work), as well as scholarship (studies on the topic), she guides us through why and how society has made this an issue for girls and how using theatre as a source of agency to bolster confidence has both "complicated benefits and drawbacks" (2022, p. 14). This chapter further offers a discussion on girls with disabilities within the performance space.

Chapter 4: "Held Momentarily": For an Audience of One … Plus

The relationship between audience and performer is deeply explored here. Specifically, Edell draws from detailed storytelling of girls' experiences in performing with the intent to speak to or reach a specific audience (person within the audience) and the ripple effect that a directed message can have on an overall audience. This chapter is full of personal examples taken from Edell's work over the years. We get to hear the girls' voices through their writings as most of the chapter is divided into individual girl's stories.

Chapter 5: "Shut up and Listen!" Performance in Public Spaces

The creation of work that is meant for public performance and its subsequent impact is examined here. Edell defines public spaces which include not only physical spaces (parks, streets, other site-specific spaces), but also cyber spaces (TikTok) as well. On the impact of public performance, Edell offers two "rings" of impact: one being impact on the girls themselves and the other the public audience (both

intentional and unintentional). Again, she draws from detailed stories of actual experiences she has had with girls utilizing this creative methodology, painting a picture through the girls' words and actions

Chapter 6: "Finally Someone Hears Us": Considering Our Audiences

The role of the audience and the shifting impact of performance is detailed here. Through an analysis of specific performances with specific audiences, Edell outlines the ways in which both the audience and performance is shifted depending on the audience demographics.

Conclusion: Ripples of Change

Instead of a traditional wrap-up of the entire book or a cohesive synthesis, Edell uses this chapter to discuss the larger concept of change. She gives a very honest account of both the pitfalls and uplifting aspects of change and how change works within an activist theatre space. She cites the danger of expectation of change for both audience and performer while also leaving room for the powerful moments where change might be tracked. Again, using both personal reflections and scholarship in the field, Edell engages us in a critical analysis of change concluding that change is incremental and not necessarily trackable.

EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Girls, Performance, and Activism: Demanding to be Heard is a guidebook for anyone wanting to create meaningful work specifically with girl identified youth, however it is not a handbook of activities and specific "how tos." Both novice and experienced practitioners engaged in theatre activist work have much to gain from this book as Edell gives a critical analysis and pathway into work with girl identifying youth. The way in which Edell draws on scholarly studies and writings, as well as the girls' own words is skillfully woven within colorful threads of poetic writing that engages the reader and keeps our attention as if we are an audience experiencing a "performance."

As a self-identified white woman, Edell has insightfully and critically analyzed her specific work within multiple organizations and the shifts her journey has undertaken the more she's grown with the

work. She does not shy away from issues of race, class, and culture but embraces them through deep and honest reflections, looking within herself as well as upon the impact the work has had in real time and space. Beyond her own examination and reflection, this book makes a case for self-reflection, member checking, constant and consistent research, deep listening, and self-analysis as tools for developing one's own work in this field. She also makes a case for the importance of activist performance work with girls.

I highly recommend this book—not only for those specifically seeking to better their understanding of the theoretical and practical work with “girls” —but anyone who works with youth. As Edell herself might say, this book is a reflection of her very specific journey, providing an examination into a place to start rather than a destination as Edell continues to expand her own work. Practitioners can use this book as a roadmap that suggests destinations worth visiting as well as detours we might take in our own work.

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Tammie L Swopes is an intersectional artist, educator, storyteller, meaning maker, and disrupter of oppressive structures in and outside of theatre spaces. She is currently an adjunct professor at NYU (Steinhardt and Tish), Marymount Manhattan College, and CUNY (Applied Theatre). She is also Artistic Director of the Seeing Ourselves Onstage program (New Plays for Young Audiences) and Artistic Associate of the NYU Verbatim Performance Lab, as well as a part time career coach and program associate for the Creative Career Hub at NYU’s Wasserman Center. As a doctoral candidate in the Educational Theatre program with 20 plus years of experience in theatre and education, Tammie’s work largely centers on issues of art, activism, and amplifying youth voices.