ARTSPRAXIS

Emphasizing critical analysis of the arts in society.

Having recently concluded another thought-provoking dialogue at the 2022 NYU Forum on Radical Imagining: Exploring Equity in Educational Theatre, Volume Issue 2 focuses on articles under that same heading. We invited contributors to join us in an exploration of the concepts of equity, diversity, inclusion, access, and justice (EDIAJ), investigating how these notions intersect, inform, and collide with theatre in community and educational spaces. We invited members of the Educational Theatre field to submit works that would share ideas, vocabularies, strategies, and techniques, centering on varying definitions and practices. This call for papers was released in conjunction with the release of *ArtsPraxis* Volume 9, Issue 1. The submission deadline for Volume 9, Issue 2 was September 15, 2022.

Submissions fell under the category of Radical Imagining: Exploring Equity in Educational Theatre

Key questions the Issue was to address included:

- How does the discipline of educational theatre hold space for collective visioning and radical imagining?
- Where do you see educational theater serving as a tool for change, advocacy, and praxis?
- How does your identity intersect with the identities of the folks and communities with whom you collaborate?
- How are we currently defining equity, diversity, inclusion, access, and justice?
- How are we challenging white supremacy culture in our theater making and artistry?
- What patterns and trends in equity, diversity, inclusion, access, and justice research are you noticing and how might these strengthen your storytelling?

We encouraged article submissions from interdisciplinary artists, educators, and scholars. 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 4,000 words, had to be accompanied by a 200 word abstract and 100 word biographies for the author(s), and conformed to APA style manual. For this issue, articles could include traditional academic scholarship and narratives of practice.

Reviewing Procedures

Each article 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.

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

Cover image from NYU's Program in Educational Theatre production of *Socially Distant*, a short play created by Dr. Durell Cooper in 2021.

ARTSPRAXIS

Volume 9   Issue 2   December 2022

Editorial: Radical Imagining

JONATHAN P. JONES
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

At the NYU Forum on Radical Imagining in March 2022, the faculty of the Program in Educational Theatre wanted to provide our community with space to explore concepts of equity, diversity, inclusion, access, and justice through panel presentations, workshops, and structured conversations. We asked the students to consider how historical systems and our current socio-political context informs their choice to craft and submit theatrical work at this time (why now?). Additionally, students were asked to investigate the following questions:

- How does the discipline of theatre hold space for collective visioning and radical imagining?
- Where do you see theater serving as a tool for change, advocacy, and praxis?
- How does your identity intersect with the identities of the folks and communities with whom you collaborate?
- How are we currently defining equity, diversity, inclusion, access, and justice?
- How are we challenging white supremacy culture in our theater making and artistry?

- What patterns and trends in equity, diversity, inclusion, access, and justice research are you noticing and how might these strengthen your storytelling?

Reflecting on this work and what I know of the articles presented in this issue, I have been thinking about what it means to imagine. bell hooks says, "What we cannot imagine cannot come into being" (2000). We have to imagine it for it to become real. We have to see it in our minds. We have to believe in it. And if we want others to join us in our work, they have to believe in it as well. To believe. How can we get others to believe in our work when we are pushing into the unknown–into the radical imagining?

Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* introduced the Western world to the ideals of persuasive discourse in the form of ethos, logos, and pathos. Of the former—the ethical appeal—a speaker seeks to establish their good character and credibility (2009). Credibility—from the Greek root *cred-*—to believe. Aristotle focused on the speaker establishing their own credibility, but my sense is that there is a desire to attend to teaching credibility in US schools as a key facet of critical thinking and media literacy—that students must be able to ferret out the credibility of a source, determining whether or not it is reliable. By extension, the seeming breakdown in the ability of many to distinguish fact from opinion or the veracity of claims in general is grounded in the failure of the education system to achieve this aim. This bears out in the data, finding that roughly 50% of Americans consistently support at least one conspiracy theory at any given time (Oliver and Wood, 2014). This, of course, is impacted significantly by the inordinate number of charlatans who invent 'truth' on a whim. Recall Kellyanne Conway stating that she had "alternative facts" when questioned about Press Secretary Sean Spicer's exaggeration about the crowd size at Donald Trump's 2017 inauguration (Rutenberg, 2017). Note when a Fox News host was called to the carpet in a court of law for their alleged defamation, Fox News won the court case "by 'persuasively' arguing that no 'reasonable viewer' takes Tucker Carlson seriously" (Sheth, 2020). When people believe these figures to be credible, trusted sources, who can blame the listener for not knowing what's true in this 'post-truth' era (Steinmetz, 2016)?

In my public speaking classes at City University of New York, we spend a little time on source credibility—but as the class is meant to

get the students to plan and deliver presentations, I push students to follow the Aristotelian model and establish their own credibility as a speaker. Whether informing or persuading, in public speaking, you are the source; as such, I ask the students to consider:

- *Who are you?*
- *Why should we believe you?*
- *Why should we trust you?*
- *Why are you an authority on this topic?*
- *If you're not an authority, why should we listen to you?*
- *How can you establish your reliability?*

Our initial presentations focus on things the students already know and for which their lived experience provides them with credibility—their neighborhood or culture; problems they experience in their daily lives that they think we should solve. From there, we move towards their academics and chosen field of study:

- What are topics within their major/field of study that they can teach us about?
- What are the sources of information that they have come to rely upon as authoritative sources in that space?
- What are the problems in their field that they are seeking to solve?

As emerging scholars in their respective fields, I want them to come away with a sense that they have contributions to make in their area of expertise and the course is providing them with the tools they need to authoritatively express that.

REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE

In a previous editorial, [Communing with the Ancestors](), I spoke at length about overcoming imposter syndrome, advocating for practitioners to reimagine themselves as knowledge creators (Jones, 2021). Perhaps, reader, you're sensing a theme? This drive to bring others along in this project of reimagining themselves is central to much of my work, asking: *what would it be like if you reframed the*

narrative—or reframed your role in the narrative? I've always been somewhat of a wannabe, wanting desperately to believe. And when given a platform, I've been known to take an authoritative stance, whether earned or not. For instance, when I was eleven years old, the principal of my Catholic elementary school scolded me: "You're going to start a *cult* and I won't have it!" This was her narrative; here's mine.

My oldest sister received an Ouija board[1] for Christmas the year before. As she'd gone away to college and left the game at home, I inherited it for a time. Nevermind the fact that the board game was mass-produced by Parker Brothers and the plastic planchette we placed our fingers on to commune with spirits from the other side was no-doubt made in China like all our other toys in those days, I just knew it *had to be real.* The talk at the time was that you must never consult the Ouija on your own as you might become possessed by the spirit with whom you were communicating. Though this possibility terrified me, I couldn't trust anyone else—I believed they would push that planchette across the board intentionally and then deny it. So if I was going to believe that the Ouija was real, I had to summon up my courage, sit down at that board by my lonesome, and see if that planchette would move. And I sat, and sat, and sat. And that planchette never moved.

As luck would have it, Beck, my neighbor from down the street, had other ideas. Beck was visited, she said, by a ghost—and I lit up like a Christmas tree. She was my medium. She had the touch. And so I invited her to the Ouija. I told her I wanted to believe and I watched as she brought that Ouija to life. In spite of the skepticism I mentioned above, I trusted Beck. As a tried-and-true friend, she was credible. Beck's ghost conveyed harrowing tales of the abuse that she had suffered when she was our age. And she had secrets—stories she

---

[1] The Ouija began as a nineteenth century parlor game. The 'talking board' consists of a "flat board with the letters of the alphabet arrayed in two semi-circles above the numbers 0 through 9; the words 'yes' and 'no' in the uppermost corners, 'goodbye' at the bottom; accompanied by a 'planchette,' a teardrop-shaped device, usually with a small window in the body, used to maneuver about the board" (Rodriguez McRobbie, 2013). Participants place their hands on the planchette and ask the board a question. As if by magic, the planchette will move around the board responding to the question. Theoretically a ghost or spirit is thought to be moving the planchette, but nearly two centuries of scientific study have shown that "automatic muscular movements that take place without the conscious will or volition of the individual" (Rodriguez McRobbie, 2013) are what cause the planchette to move, assuming a user isn't moving it intentionally.

could not reveal. We could only get small chunks of story in any one sitting; one episode per day—and always a cliffhanger.

And it wasn't just the stories—the ghost had procedures that must be followed. The Ouija could only be used when no adults were present. Beck took the planchette home for safe keeping every night, as the ghost directed her. And I was to sleep with the Ouija board under my pillow. This was the only way that the ghost would continue to reveal her truth to us. And I was compliant!

The ghost told us about Blood Mary. Not Bloody Mary Tudor–no. This is the Bloody Mary of middle school bathrooms. Go into the bathroom and turn off the light. Spin around and say Bloody Mary three times and she will appear in the mirror. That Ouija never went to school, but Bloody Mary did. I was only friends with girls in those days, and they were studious. Like a shaman speaking to his flock, they hung on every word as I relayed the lessons that our ghost was teaching us—because to my listeners, I had credibility. On cue, they would scamper into the girls' bathroom during lunch time, turn off the light, and scream with delight in hopes that Bloody Mary would emerge.

She never did, try as we might. But we were nothing if not persistent. Beck came over for our daily séance, the next afternoon I'd report the ghost's tales at the lunch table to my riveted audience of girls, and into the bathroom they trotted in hopes of Bloody Mary's visitation.

We might have grown bored with the routine and it would have just played itself out after those two weeks, but Beck was a theatrical tale-teller. She turned up at the bus stop with painted-on blood marks on her neck. Though pale by nature, she knew just how to make herself ghost-white at the drop of a hat. She was tricky that way. By that time, the ghost was starting to reveal the truth of how she died. She was ready to tell us—but when she did, she would have to get her life back. She would climb through that mirror and take Beck's soul. This was the ghost's plan and we were READY—Beck's feigned blood marks were evidence that the ghost was coming to her at night, clawing for her release. Beck was a tear-filled mess. She couldn't eat. She wouldn't sleep. But she was willing to sacrifice herself to set our ghost free.

And so, on the fateful day, we boarded the school bus—Beck with her stigmata and me, delirious with anticipation. Lunch could not come fast enough!

Mrs. Rizzo, my homeroom teacher, and Sister Judy, the principal, could barely wait to rain on my parade. Before we made it to the lunchroom that day, I was summoned to the main office.

"A cult. That's what you're doing, Jones, and I won't have it!" Sister Judy exclaimed.

"I think…I think we need to bring this Ouija board to school," Mrs. Rizzo opined. "I mean, you just can't be trusted to have this at home anymore."

It seemed that one of my classmates was losing some sleep herself and her worried parents deployed tactics from the inquisition to get the truth out of her. Her eleven-year-old worry that dear Beck was going to lose her soul in the lunchroom was a bridge too far for the parents—all of it, perhaps, *in*credible. So they kept their young one home the next day and gave an alarming call to the school.

Beck never spoke of the ghost again. Bloody Mary never turned up. And try as I might, I never saw that planchette move again. And in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I adjusted to the reality that Beck was not as credible as I thought. I didn't intend to facilitate traumatizing my classmates. I just wanted to believe.

TEACHING & LEARNING CREDIBILITY

As I grew older, I continued to navigate credibility—the desire to believe and be believed. During the 2006/2007 school year, I took to watching the talk show *The View* every day when I got home from teaching. Rosie O'Donnell joined the panel as a co-host that year, and ever a fan, this was appointment-television for me. One afternoon, Broadway-star Christine Ebersole appeared on the show. I'm not sure what she was there to promote, but her general chit-chat caught my attention. She relayed to the co-hosts that she'd been spending a lot of time watching videos on the then-new YouTube platform. Among her favorite vlog hosts was William Sledd, a young guy from Paducah, Kentucky whose "Ask a Gay Man" series gave humorous fashion advice and cultural critique with a Southern flair. I spent many an hour watching those videos after Ebersole's recommendation—and she even made her way to Paducah to appear on that very program a short while later. However, it was her other recommendations that were far more worrying and impactful. She noted that late at night, she'd go down a rabbit hole with some really 'out there' political ideologues.

"There's a couple of political ones. The latest one I found, oh my God, I'm so crazy about this guy, it's called 'theresistancemanifesto.com'" (Ebersole, as quoted in Finkelstein, 2007).

Rosie weighed in helpfully: "Yes, this is the guy, John Conner."

Ebersole: "John Conner. It's so amazing. He's so . . . the thing that is so great about him is, people will look at him and say 'he's a nutcase.' But see, I don't think so. I don't think so. He's a non-conformist."

Rosie agreed: "He's a non-conformist."

And just what kind of non-conformist is he? Rosie explained: "He goes around the country with a bullhorn, to UCLA or wherever he wants, and he says, '9-11 was an inside job! 9-11 was an inside job!' And within five or ten minutes, the police show up, and his friends videotape him getting arrested by the police. And boy, does it annoy people. I can tell you that much." (Finkelstein, 2007)

I cannot tell you the thrill that this gave me—not that I found Conner credible, but the spectacle of it all was addictive (such was the way in those early days of online video content).

But the thing is, when you hear something again and again, it can have its desired impact. '9-11 was an inside job! 9-11 was an inside job!' And given my predisposition to suggestion—my desperation to believe, it wasn't long before I was ingesting Alex Jones' Info Wars. Looking back, in Bush-era America, these were the conspiracies of the Bildergerg Group, illuminati, and the Bohemian Grove—tales of the so-called 'new world order' that was threatening our liberal democracy. Child's play by today's standards, albeit subversively anti-Semitic—but it quickly escalated to 9-11-truthers and the 'documentary' *Loose Change*, a conspiracy theorist's take on the events of 9-11–suggesting strongly that evidence had been suppressed and that 9-11 was indeed an inside job.

With rabbit holes everywhere you turn, who among us hasn't found ourselves down one or two? The scientific method implores us to 'question everything,' but so too did the television show *The X-Files.* You tell me what's real.

I taught a unit in my tenth grade English class that year on persuasive writing and we spoke at length about credibility. And in the scope of the unit, we talked about propaganda and looked at excerpts from *Loose Change.* "Mr. Jones," a student asked, "Are you saying that 9-11 was an inside job?" "Not at all," I responded. "I'm asking you to determine whether or not the argument in this film is persuasive. What evidence do they provide in support of their claim?"

And what evidence did they present in the film? A few grainy video files. Government officials who refused to answer their questions. Little else. And though I was still susceptible to entertaining such a thought, I'd learned a thing or two about the important role evidence plays in establishing credibility. So as entertaining as it was to witness the conspiracist's folly, and no matter how much I might have liked to believe any of it, there was no there there. In fact, there was no there there in any of the content I'd been consuming in those post-Ebersole YouTube viewings. It was not credible and I stopped watching. Progress.

ON BELIEF & FAITH

For some, when they think about 'believing', their attention goes to religion and spirituality. I mentioned that I attended Catholic elementary school–but you should also know that we were a weekly church-going family. And when I came of age, I was proud to volunteer to be an altar boy (there were still only boys in those days). Church was a full theatrical affair—roles to play, lines to learn, choreography and blocking, costumes, lighting, set dressing, and microphones. In fact, our Saturday evening mass was held in the parish auditorium rather than the actual church building in order to accommodate the number of parishioners who attended that particular service—and the clergy were on a literal stage above us. Needless to say, I was hooked.

Behind the façade of vestments, I was, as always, desperate to believe. My maternal grandmother was deeply religious. Her sister, my Grand-Aunt Joyce, had been a nun for a time in the 1960s and was often my mother's confidant and spiritual advisor. I was in a long line of faithful believers, but I had questions. I remember one particular funeral that I served at when I was about ten years old. An older parishioner had passed away and I sat at the altar looking at her mourning family in the front pews as they recited the prayers and

listened to the priest's words. He spoke about life-everlasting and the resurrection—all the things the Catholics are meant to invest in and believe—and I looked to the mourners who hung on his every word, just as those lunchroom girls would hang on my every word. And I could see it in their eyes. I could feel the depth of their faith, and I distinctly recall wishing with all my heart that I too could believe as intensely as they did. But lacking any tangible evidence, I questioned the credibility of it all.

They had a youth group at our parish that met every Friday night. Some members were folks I knew from school but others were new acquaintances. We sat in a circle, said the prayers, sang the songs, and at one point, we each took a turn 'sharing'—telling each other where we had seen Jesus in the preceding week. I never saw Jesus. In fact, I had never heard someone say they had seen Jesus until I attended those meetings, but I played along. "I saw Jesus here, there, and everywhere." I still have 'Stop Abortion' bumper stickers and pins that they distributed at some of those meetings. I recall someone sharing at one meeting that they saw Jesus when they read in the paper that pro-life activists chained themselves to the doors of an abortion clinic. They hailed these activists as heroes, but I felt otherwise. I was going to those meetings in March of 1993 when one such activist murdered Dr. David Gunn as he approached the women's health clinic where he worked (Rohter, 1993) and I don't recall anyone condemning that. Where was Jesus that day, I wondered. I had many questions.

Years later at an intimate promotional concert in 2003, pop-singer Madonna was in between songs and commenting on the juxtaposition of religious and romantic themes in some of her music, when an audience member shouted at her, "Religion is love." To this, Madonna responded:

> Religion is love? No. Love has nothing to do with religion. No. Religion is an idea that someone pushes on you. Religion is judgment. Religion is suffering. Religion is conforming. Religion is establishment. Fuck all that. Love has nothing to do with religion. Love does not divide. (as stated in De la V., 2018)

Here, here. And what makes Madonna a credible source in this context? The singer has notoriously been confronted with pushback

from the Vatican over her use of Catholic iconography in her music videos and stage performances, with a Cardinal even calling for her excommunication from the Church after one such performance (Smith, 2006) and multiple attempts to have her concerts in Italy cancelled (UPI, 1990; Smith, 2006).

In spite of the judgment Madonna or I might make about religion, religious belief can be about having faith in that which has no evidence—or perhaps 'seeing' evidence in the good or evil all around you. Though I wanted to believe as a young person, I didn't then and I don't now. I questioned the credibility and the Catholic church had neither the answers nor the evidence—so it wasn't for me. Having said that, I still appreciate the core of what I learned in that environment—largely grounded in the Sermon on the Mount:

> Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
> Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
> Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
> Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
> Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
> Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
> Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
> Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2022, Matthew. 5:3-10)

If you take the first phrase of each line—the morality of being a kind, empathic person—I believe in that. The golden rule: love thy neighbor as thyself? I'm with that—but not because of God or promises of heaven and the like—just because having what Aristotle called "good moral character" is the right thing to do. The ethical thing to do. The credible thing to do. I remain skeptical of those who call themselves Christian when their behavior suggests otherwise. Earlier this year, Michigan state Senator Mallory McMorrow achieved national attention when she similarly called out a political rival and others who claimed to be Christian. Of them, McMorrow said:

> My mom taught me at a very young age that Christianity and faith

was about being part of a community—about recognizing our privilege and blessings and doing what we can to be of service to others, especially people who are marginalized, targeted, and who had less—often unfairly. I learned that service was far more important than performative nonsense like being seen in the same pew every Sunday, or writing 'Christian' in your Twitter bio, and using that as a shield to target and marginalize already marginalized people. (McMorrow, 2022)

I believe in all of that too—that these are also markers of people with good moral character. And of the credibility of religion, religious leaders who profess otherwise, and those who follow in their misguided teachings—as Sister Aloysius proclaims at the end of John Patrick Shanley's play, "I have doubts! I have such doubts!" (2005, p. 52).

CONCLUSION

So, what of radical imagining in educational theatre? Are there doubts? It requires a leap of faith. It requires credibility on the part of facilitators and teachers, and trust on the part of participants and students. It requires accountability—acknowledging when we get it wrong and doing right by those whom we might have wronged in the process. In the pages that follow, drama practitioners share their innovative works. And we invite questions, skepticism, and doubt. Returning to bell hooks, we must imagine—we must bring it into being. We document, we reflect, and we push further on into the unknown. And it is on you, the reader, to evaluate our credibility. Join us.

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue on radical imagining, our contributors document and reflect on their educational theatre practices. In the UK, **Dermot Daly** and **Shane Kinghorn** each chronicle the development of new works. Daly leverages decolonization and aims for social justice and equality as he provides students with the advocacy and critical tools needed for change. Kinghorn employs verbatim theatre to confront and explore radical shifts in the ways we consider gender, subjectivity, and language. **Kourtney King** synthesizes principles of heart-intelligence

and drama pedagogy with students in Atlanta, Georgia. **Lauren Gorelov** responds to questionable teaching practices by developing and deploying culturally responsive professional development workshops for teachers in the New York City metropolitan area. Finally, **Lindsay Kujawa** and **Ryan Howland** investigate how this work manifests in rural America. Kujawa examines the polarizing impact of equity, diversity, and inclusion in a non-metropolitan county in Wisconsin. Howland grapples with rural consciousness, outlining the process of creating a verbatim documentary theatre script, interrogating how theatre classrooms in culturally, hegemonically white rural communities can teach in more intentionally anti-racist and culturally inclusive ways.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our next issue (Volume 10, Issue 1) 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 mid-2023. Thereafter, look to the Verbatim Performance Lab for outreach and innovation from the NYU Steinhardt Program in Educational Theatre.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Jones, J. P. (2022). Editorial: Radical imagining. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (2), pp. i-xvi.

REFERENCES

Aristotle. (2009). *On rhetoric*. (W. R. Roberts., Trans). classics.mit.edu. (Translation originally published 1924)

English Standard Version Bible. (2022). bible.com.

De la V., G. [Guillermo De La V Miraflores Lima Perú]. (2018, Jan. 19). *Madonna - La Cantine Du Faubourg / May 7, 2003 (full show)* [Video]. YouTube.com.

Finkelstein, M. (2007, Feb. 9). 'The View' guest host: 9-11 conspiracy

theorist 'so great'. *Newsbusers.org.*

hooks, b. (2000). *All about love.* William Morrow.

Jones, J. P. (2021). Editorial: Communing with the ancestors.
ArtsPraxis, 8 (2), pp. i-xxii.

McMorrow, M. (2022). We will not let hate win. *PBS News Hour.*

Oliver, J. E., & Wood, T. J. (2014). Conspiracy theories and the
paranoid style(s) of mass opinion. *American Journal of Political
Science, 58* (4), pp. 952-966.

Rodriguez McRobbie, L. (2013, Oct. 27). The strange and mysterious
history of the Ouija board. *Smithsonian Magazine.*

Rohter, L. (1993, Mar. 11). Doctor is slain during protest over
abortions. *The New York Times.*

Rutenberg, J. (2017, Jan. 22). 'Alternative facts' and the costs of
Trump-branded reality. *The New York Times.*

Shanley, J. P. (2005). *Doubt: A parable.* Dramatists Play Service Inc.

Sheth, S. (2020, Sept. 24). Fox News won a court case by
'persuasively' arguing that no 'reasonable viewer' takes Tucker
Carlson seriously. *Business Insider.*

Smith, P. J. (2006, Aug. 7).Cardinal calls for Madonna's
excommunication for mock crucifixion. *Catholic Exchange.*

Steihmetz, K. (2016, Nov. 15). Oxford's word of the year for 2016 is
'post-truth'. *Time.*

UPI. (1990, July 9). Madonna defies Catholic attacks on her show.
United Press International, Inc.

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 an administrator, faculty member,

coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor at NYU Steinhardt. He serves on the editorial board for *Applied Theatre Research* and *Youth Theatre Journal,* on the board of directors as well as chair of Research and Scholarship for the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE).

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, his courses have included Acting: Scene Study, American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Assessment of Student Work in Drama, Development of Theatre and Drama I, Devising Educational Drama Programs and Curricula, Directing Youth Theatre, Drama across the Curriculum and Beyond, Drama in Education I, Drama in Education II, Dramatic Activities in the Secondary Drama Classroom, Methods of Conducting Creative Drama, Theory of Creative Drama, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Elementary Drama, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Secondary Drama, Shakespeare's Theatre, and World Drama. Early in his placement at NYU, Jonathan served as teaching assistant for American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Seminar in Elementary Student Teaching, Theatre of Brecht and Beckett, and Theatre of Eugene O'Neill and worked as a course tutor and

administrator for the study abroad program in London for three summers. He has supervised over 50 students in their student teaching placements in elementary and secondary schools in the New York City Area. Prior to becoming a teacher, Jonathan was an applicant services representative at NYU in the Graduate School of Arts and Science Enrollment Services Office for five years.

Recent publications include "And So We Write": Reflective Practice in Ethnotheatre and Devised Theatre Projects in *LEARNing Landscapes, 14* (2), 2022, 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; 2022), *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).

Recent speaking engagements include workshop facilitation for the 2022 AATE National Conference (*Biblioburro*: Children around the World Access Books through Story Drama) and Theatre in Our Schools (Locating Order in the Chaos: Revisiting Assessment in the Drama Classroom--Part 1 and Part 2), 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 Theatre in Our Schools (Stage to Page: Reimagining the Teacher/Practitioner Role in Scholarship) and the AATE National Conference (Pandemic Positives: What Do We Keep? Looking Backwards to Move Forward); 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).

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.

History, Theatre and Self

DERMOT DALY

LEEDS CONSERVATOIRE

ABSTRACT

Using the creation of a new piece of narrative drama with undergraduate students inspired by the meaning of 'hero', and the achievements of Sophia Duleep Singh and Paul Stephenson, this article will look at the intersections of history, theatre, and self. Delineating how 'lost' histories—when converged with present realities, can create future thinking for, and with, the artists of that future—it will touch on how creating brave spaces in which to approach such work is rooted in relationships, both interpersonal and intertextual. It will explain how looking at, learning from, and working with, Singh and Stephenson's stories, allows for the creation of performance. In its creation, decoloniality, social justice and equality are foregrounded, providing the students with the advocacy and critical tools needed for change.

THE W's

All stories in Western Eurocentric paradigms begin with the five 'w's': what, where, when, who and why. Commonly, stories begin with the narrative voice locating itself within that framework, formally and/or subconsciously. In knowing where the centre of a story is—its genesis, its progenitor—the bias can be located.

The progenitor of *this* story—the 'me'–is Black, British and male.

My biases are very much located within the disruption and challenging of the hegemonic structures that facilitate the acceptance of the societal stories that are told.

The story upon which this article will focus began with an exploratory question—what is a hero? This question arose from my curiosity around the legitimacy of the ascribance of importance to commonly held heroes. It was also located in the fact that many of the heroes that are venerated in the UK education and societal spaces in which I was raised, are White and male; with those who are non-White often being from other countries. There were never any heroes who looked and/or identified like me.

It is very often the case that Black 'heroic' figures are located 'away' from the UK, thus giving ideological and philosophical distance between it and the excesses of its colonialism and imperialism. This is a clear attempt to dissociate an inextricable interweaving with the history of the suppressed around the world, from an island which still venerates a hereditary monarch as head of state. A monarch with a 'history of extraction, enclosure and exploitation' (Clancy, 2020), whose significant wealth can be linked to the subjugation, enslavement, and rape of people and lands across the globe (Clancy, 2022; de Wijs, 2022; Goss, 2022).

'Black History Month', which in the UK happens during the 31 days of October—three days longer than the derisory 28 days of February in the US—is a month designated to celebrate the entirety of an undefined 'Black History', which by definition, is simply 'history'—my history, *our* shared history. In separating and faux-venerating, it is made explicit that this knowledge isn't celebrated and known as much as it should. That the entire history of what is deemed to be 'Black'—or non-White—can be celebrated in a month, leaving the other 11

months—or 90+%—of the year for presumably 'White' history therefore excluding me and those whose lived identities transect with mine, underscores this point.

It was sought to discover what a hero is, where we find them, when they existed (and where) and who they were. Paul Stephenson and Sophia Duleep Singh—her first name is pronounced '*So-Fire*' (UK Parliament, 2017)—were determined as examples to explore themes—amongst others—of decolonisation, power, race, and gender. In doing so, an aim was to ascertain and make clear just how much 'knowledge has been tainted and distorted by the exclusions of class, race, gender, imperial power' (Sheehan, 2020).

These provocations formed the basis of a project with undergraduate students to create a piece of narrative theatre which would allow for the excavation of underserved history, and the stories contained within. These stories could be used as a way to 'unlock' personal history and make available and valid, personal, subjective experiences.

DECOLONISATION

Decolonisation is an essential consideration in the creation, and teaching, of artistic work in and around formal education. Knowing which lens is being looked through, whilst being open to other lenses, is paramount in being able to juxtapose the search for knowledge and the consolidation of culture. The way in which knowledge is couched and framed is a powerful tool.

The decolonisation of the academy is a multifaceted and multiagency endeavour. In addition to calls for examination of the Eurocentric nature of the taught curriculum, 'decolonisation also calls for attention to the role of cultural and racial minorities in transforming Europe through their contestations of race and empire' (Gopal, 2021), in the use of a pioneering Black-British man and an activistic Anglo-Indian princess, this project addresses this head on.

It is vitally important for considered critical engagement so as not to continue to perpetuate—however inadvertently—cultural violence (Galtung, 1990), precisely because 'decolonising of university curricula is an imperative' (le Grange et al., 2020)—the supremacy of 'White' narratives must be challenged. It is also imperative that institutions do not engage in 'decolonial washing' which gives 'the impression that […]

curricula are decolonised although this might not be the case' (le Grange, et al., 2020). Additive changes are cosmetic; sustained change comes from the motivation for that change. These facets were held very presently in my thinking and planning around the uses of heroes and these particular 'heroes' introduced as part of this project. In shedding light on areas which have been in shade, it is hoped that the links between what is known and what isn't, and the systemic and structural reasoning for that would be writ large without the need for explicit signposting. 'In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform' (Freire et al., 2000, p. 49). This method of Freire inspired pedagogy liberates space for discussion and thought, a space systemically closed by the perpetuance of a Eurocentric curriculum whose positive reference points are often White, and male.

To achieve a new society where there is a level of equality – or at the *very* least an open discussion about it—it must be remembered that 'it is a liberated individual who undertakes to build the new society' (Fanon et al., 1994, p. 102). In liberating teaching from the figures that have been taught before, we challenge the modes of thinking that have perpetuated those figures' lauding, allowing for it to be checked against another set of figures to see and test whether or not the initially propagated and 'accepted' thinking is as egalitarian as it would purport to be. Whilst it is fair to hold in mind Lorde's assertion that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (Lorde, 2018, p. 19) it is contended here that 'our personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action' (Lorde, 2018, p. 19). It is in the crucible of the act of testing and critical engagement, in which those personal visions of the next generation of academics, artists, citizens, subjects, will be forged. It may well be that once that process is started, it is realised that the tools we have are not the ones that we need, but it is only through that investigation and engagement that those claims will become irrefutable. There is liberative confusion in the UK context, which, by virtue of having a constitutional monarchy, is arguably constructed of subjects and not citizens. Citizenship connotes a fuller level of equality and autonomy, subjectship doesn't. Whilst the constitutional arguments (Government Digital Service, 2014) against this designation exist, the nomenclature is difficult to ignore. It is

against this backdrop that much curricula were created and the structure and systems in many institutions, instituted. Here we are aiming to create and empower creative *citizens* with all of the autonomy that that connotes.

STORIES AS HISTORIES

Stories are the way in which knowledge is stored, imparted and understood. Knowledge is an amalgam of experience and/or interpretation of such experience. Those experiences, by definition, are all in the past; histories. History is a collection of stories, ostensibly told by 'master' storytellers, weaving together narratives to create a view of the world subjectively, thus influencing the understanding—and therefore uses—of said history. It is often through these stories that societal mores and ills are taught. Values are imparted through stories because 'dramatic stories about […] heroes in the literature of history and fiction are likely to attract the attention of learners, to arouse their interest, and to raise questions among them that lead to discussion and reflection about values' (Sanchez, 1998) and it is in these discussions and reflections that learning is crystalised and solidified.

As an interesting aside, this approach is mirrored in the psychotherapeutic technique 'Narrative Therapy', which comes from the 'third movement of psychotherapy' in which 'the power of cultural systems in shaping people's lives' (Semmler & Williams, 2000) is addressed. In looking at stories as a repository for history, we are confronted by the question of how people's lives been shaped by cultural systems. Creating artistic work around this impulse creates a space for answers to that question to be pondered and bravely explored.

In order to create space for change there should be a compulsion to draw on knowledge and information from outside of the immediate sphere in which one is working. That is not to say that expert knowledge is to be gained before embarking, in fact it is suggested that the exact opposite may garner positive and powerful results. The idea of the 'expert' connotes that there is an end to the learning journey—in that the higher reaches of academia contain people who know more and more about less and less, creating a potential silo—or echo chamber—of knowledge and thought. Whereas, using ideas and seeing where they lead in a different sphere is an important facet of co-

creation. Artists come to their work from, and with, differing viewpoints and in exploring those actively, together, the tools of mental engagement and therefore critical engagement are sharpened.

WHO ARE PAUL STEPHENSON AND SOPHIA ALEXANDROVNA DULEEP SINGH?

Paul Stephenson (born 1937) 'helped desegregate Britain' (Andrews, 2020) but 'few know' (Yong, 2017) about him and what he was part of. In 1963, and 'seeing what was happening in the USA I [Stephenson] decided we should draw more attention to what was happening here with Black people, particularly in Bristol' (Stephenson & Morrison, 2021, pp. 82-3) and alongside the West Indian Development Council— formed by Roy Hackett, Owen Henry, Audley Evans and Prince Brown—a boycott of the Bristol Omnibus company was organised. The company, 'a nationalised company owned by the British government since 1950, and operated through the Transport Holding Company' (Black History Month, 2022) upheld a 'colour bar' where there was refusal to employ non-White drivers; 'it was a symbol of all that was wrong with Bristol because it advocated and defended racism and was the most notorious racist employer in the city' (Stephenson & Morrison, 2021, p. 83). The boycott and the subsequent highlighting of a similar 'colour bar' in public houses in the city—'Black people […] couldn't get into public houses because bar staff would say they were not welcome there' (Stephenson & Morrison, 2021, p. 104)—resulted in these discriminatory practices being changed after being directly and publicly challenged, ultimately seeding the conditions for the Race Relations Act of 1965.

His activism explores and highlights that 'being Black and British was, and to a large extent still remains, a complex matter' (Stephenson & Morrison, 2021, p. 131) and that 'when a group of people manages to induce institutional change to achieve their aims through the successful staging of a protest movement it generally convinces other groups of people to do the same' (Mansour, 2014).

Born in 1876, 'Princess Sophia Duleep Singh was as close to an international celebrity as it was possible to be in 1910' (Anand, 2015, p. xiv) but is similarly little known. Her father was the last Maharajah of the Punjab and her godmother was Queen Victoria, but as a south Asian female, her story has—mostly—been lost to the haze of time.

During her lifetime 'she had been placed under surveillance by the British government, her movements, along with those of her family diligently recorded, by spies' (Anand, 2015, p. xv); movements which have not been subsequently indelibly written into British history.

Amongst her other activistic-leaning activities across her 72 years—the establishment of the Lascars' Club in London; highlighting the contributions of Indian soldiers in World War One (WWI); nursing wounded Indian WWI soldiers at Brighton Pavilion—Singh was a prominent suffragette. She appears, although often not credited, in a widely circulated picture of the Caxton Hall meeting on 'Black Friday', November 18th 1910. Even though 'in 1914 she gave £51 of her £600 annual income to the Pankhurst war chest' (Anand, 2015, p. 299), her contributions—and sacrifices—for the movement are overshadowed by those of her racialised-as-White counterparts.

Sophia can be seen as a very interesting, and almost singular, study in the intersections of (amongst others) class, sex, gender, and racialisation, as her story challenges many of the stereotypes of those identity designations.

With both Stephenson and Singh not being racialised-as-White, using these figures as lynchpins directly challenges the orthodoxy of 'White as right' as they can be seen to 'pass through the cultural and ideological net which is supposed to screen Englishness from them' (Gilroy, 2002, p. 68). Their work directly challenges White Supremacy and both are very clear agents of change and social justice, making for great provocations for brave conversations.

BRAVE SPACES VS SAFE SPACES

In talking about potentially contentious issues, it is important to create a space where ideas and thoughts are spoken freely, engaged with magnanimously, and critiqued adroitly. There has been much spoken about creating 'safe spaces' for conversations and learning, especially in education, but – it is contended here – 'safe space', is a misnomer. If a space is designated as safe it inherently can't be. To designate something as safe connotes that there are set parameters which are agreed by all who use the space—a check list of sorts—however if all aren't privy, or contributors, to this 'check list' and the designation of safety is made by the convenor, it cannot, and will never, be truly 'safe' for all participants.

Arao and Clemens (2013) speak cogently about the difficulties of safe spaces asserting 'that authentic learning about social justice often requires the very qualities of risk, difficulty, and controversy that are defined as incompatible with safety' (Arao & Clemens 2013, p. 139) and suggest that the linguistic shift to a 'brave space' emphasises 'the need for courage rather than the illusion of safety [in order] to better position ourselves to accomplish our learning goals and more accurately reflect the nature of genuine dialogue regarding […] challenging and controversial topics' (Arao & Clemens 2013, pp. 141-142).

In using this framework, the parameters of discussion and acceptability are predicated on courageous and honest conversation, agreed and explored by all involved in the dialogue—not just the convener. This creates space for social justice, inherent inclusivity, and explicit equality, intrinsic, and essential, to conversations around figures such as Stephenson and Singh and the thematic ideas that their histories provoke.

TALKING THROUGH ISSUES

The sessions in which the narrative drama was created were envisioned as a three-part story, the first act being that of development, the second of formulation and the third as presentation. Using this structure with the undergraduate students allowed for dramaturgical and structural practice to be at the heart of the piece. The dramaturgical impulse presented as 'asking the right questions at the right time' was imperative to the ongoing project and governed by 'brave space' principles.

The developmental stage began with discussions around heroism and definitions/understanding of the concept. Pedagogically, it is important to understand and cement a common starting point to facilitate and structure useful and appropriate learning. These sessions, dramaturgically underpinned as described, focussed around a series of provocations. These provocations, posed as open questions, prompted, facilitated and, in many cases, demanded a discussion which would see ideas clash and contrast. In thinking about heroism and heroes, acts and qualities as a generic concept were sought, which were, after suggested reading around Stephenson and Singh, mapped against the acts and qualities of these two figures.

That the figures were historical but unknown to the participants allowed for investigation as to why, and a linking to heroes of their own. At this stage, the idea of creating a piece of narrative drama seemed a little distance away, but the academically probing and courageous conversations around the topics that were raised and critiqued, began to make clear the thematic underpinning of the eventual piece, as well as the links to previous learning and thinking.

Explicit questioning around why it may have been that these two figures weren't well known was had, and my reasonings for using them being used as stimulus in this project discussed. My bias in the impulse to present the figures was discussed, with factual inaccuracies challenged and researched. This facilitated a bedrock of active, curious and collegiate investigation as opposed to the passive disseminating and imbibing of pre-existing thought, enabling participants to use this process to learn and exercise the tools needed in advocacy for change. That much of the thought generated in the sessions could be linked to existing academic thought around the excision or non-inclusion of figures such as Stephenson and Singh, produced a sense of ownership and confidence leading to new discoveries.

It must be remembered that equality, diversity and inclusive practice aren't nouns, they're verbs, they are active and therefore must be actively triggered not only in what it is that is being learnt, but also in the manner in which it is taught and understood.

Moving to the 'second act' of formulation therefore came easier. The principles of dramaturgical questioning and narrative structure were in the fabric of the project, meaning that themes and characters could be focussed on, with precision.

FRAMING DEVICES AND LAYERS

At this stage framing devices were discussed and trialled.

That these two historical figures had been framed in specific ways led to dialogue around how people and ideas are framed, and more importantly who by and who for. Thoughts around these facets led to the understanding that the framing of a subject can make transparent or opaque layers of understanding and nuance. In using historical figures, it became easier to explore, almost dispassionately—taking in ideas from 'Narrative Therapy'—the contentious issues and subject matter which allowed and provoked more personal, present responses.

The ideas around framing devices seen through a theatrical prism allowed for learning about the framing of stories in general and, in that, the messages and morals contained within. Using this type of theatre practice as a 'trojan horse' for sociological exploration is vital if we are to empower the storytellers of tomorrow with the tools and courage to use the contextualised and empowered 'self' as a site of inspiration in order to tell the stories that will shape and challenge the world in which they wish to create and live in.

The final phase (or 'act') of the project looked to explicit performance technique—including voice, movement, and proxemics—as well as drawing together some of the seemingly disparate work that had been done to this point.

In using the terms 'characters', 'form', 'theme' and 'narrative' it was possible not only to see the piece as an explicit piece of theatre but also the historical constructs and societal injustice it sought to explore and make clear. This type of 'parallel teaching' is crucial in the creation of hybridised and not siloed knowledge—across disciplines—that will help to facilitate a more nuanced and irrefutable conversation around notions of social justice. In creating impenetrable citadels of siloed knowledge, the links and commonalities which allow for sustained and wide-ranging change can be lost. Linking ideas together, especially at undergraduate level, allows for more considered, detailed and 'joined up' thinking to happen, leading to suggestions and maybe even solutions along the same lines.

The search for equality is iterative and if it is remembered that 'in the tripartite function of EDI, Equality is defined and enabled by Diversity and Inclusion' (Daly, 2022), we must be striving for all forms of diversity, whilst ensuring that we are creating spaces where differences in these areas are not only accommodated, but also facilitated.

CONCLUSIONS

Brave not Safe

The dominant reason why those issues are not spoken about freely and with clarity is because the spaces in which to discuss those contentious issues is not created. Throughout the history of theatre—and art more broadly—there is evidence for its use as a site for

challenge and change. That challenge and change often coming from a collective vision leading to new ways of presenting and therefore seeing. Blake's maxim that one 'must create a system, or be enslav'd by another mans' (Blake et al., 1991, p. 144) looms large in this reimagining.

Seen through this prism it becomes clear that 'difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. […] Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate' (Lorde, 2018, p. 18). Safe spaces create a 'conflation of safety with comfort' (Arao & Clemens 2013, p. 135) which is counterproductive; 'we do not make transformative changes in the way we learn as long as what we learn fits comfortably in our existing frames of reference' (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7), this is especially true when a position of comfort doesn't include all in the conversation. More often than not, spaces are convened and configured by figures who, through discomfort, stand to learn the most. In all of our work, especially around social justice issues, it's imperative that bravery is prioritised over comfort.

Looking Back to Look Forward

The use of historical figures allows for issues to be raised and spoken about, initially, without personal investment. The distance of time opens a space for discussion and the understanding of context. As is seen, many social justice issues, especially those of racial, class, and gendered justice are ever present, it often seeming as though the same battles are being fought in perpetuity. Speaking specifically about racial justice, but extrapolatable to other social justice fights, it is the case that 'the function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being' (Morrison, 1975). Using historical figures allows for that explanation to happen in the temporal gap between when it occurred and the contemporary encountering of it. Using this as energy—a sort of intellectual, and in this case, theatrical, fuel—facing forward and into the future, new ways of being can be posited with the hope that the argument is moving forward; away from explanation, toward solution. Anecdotally, in the creation of this project, one participant was thankful that they could talk about their personal experiences through the prism of the project, thus allowing for

a level of 'Narrative Therapy' to be enacted. Stories are powerful—they can unlock doors that were hitherto unseen or hidden.

Relationships

All theatre work is predicated on relationships. Good, solid, honest relationships can be predicated on the removal and flattening of hierarchy and preconceptions. If the text, (the source material or the matter in hand), is positioned as 'the arbiter between yourself [as the director or lead artist] and the actor [or participant or student] if there is any disagreement' (Mitchell, 2009, p. 120) the relationship will be built and maintained on professional, work focussed principles. Looking to restorative practices can give a useful framework through which to see and enact relationships, 'the fundamental premise in Restorative Practices is that people are happier, more cooperative and more likely to make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things *with* them rather than to them or *for* them' (emphasis added) (Wachtel and McCold, 2004). The social justice window as posited by Wachtel and McCold (2004), suggests that this 'working *with*' space is created by combining high support (enacted through encouragement and nurturing) with high control (enacted through limit setting and discipline). The principles around brave spaces work in tandem with these aims and should therefore be fervently strived toward. Building relationships is vital for building collectives, and therefore theatrical work.

Use of Theatre to Talk through Issues

This project was initially predicated on the idea of heroes and heroism and the exploration of those themes. That theatre was used to talk through, and to, these themes, allowed and called for active engagement in the topics and ideas studied. In creating spaces in which the necessary discussions and critique could happen, a layered and nuanced piece of theatre was created. That is not to say that the theatre making was secondary, but, as has been elucidated here, was used as a method of structuring learning and challenge, hopefully empowering the participants with the tools needed to challenge injustice and build a more equal, diverse, inclusive and equitable world. Indeed, the sharing of the work, prompted an audience member to comment that it was 'a clever way to open discourse', and in the

pursuit of justice, open discourse is certainly key. It is hoped that the final piece can be shared on professional stages, using the power of storytelling—and theatre—to prompt conversation around history, theatre and self.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Daly, D. (2022). History, theatre and self. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (2), pp. 1-15.

REFERENCES

Anand, A. (2016). *Sophia* (Reprint ed.). Bloomsbury Paperbacks.

Andrews, K. (2020, October 1). Paul Stephenson: The hero who refused to leave a pub—and helped desegregate Britain. *The Guardian.*

Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From safe spaces to brave places: A new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice. In L. M. Landreman (Ed.), *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections From Social Justice Educators* (An ACPA Co-Publication) (pp. 135–150). Stylus Publishing.

Black History Month. (2022, March 3). The Bristol bus boycott of 1963. Black History Month 2022.

Blake, W., Paley, M. D., & Bindman, D. (1991). *Jerusalem* (*The illuminated books of William Blake, Volume 1*). Princeton University Press.

Clancy, L. (2020). The corporate power of the British monarchy: Capital(ism), wealth and power in contemporary Britain. *The Sociological Review, 69* (2), pp. 330–347.

Clancy, L. (2022, March 24). Five ways the monarchy has benefited from colonialism and slavery. *The Conversation.*

Daly, D. (2022). Using stories to tell curriculum or using curriculum to tell stories. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 24* (1), pp. 187–197.

de Wijs, R. M. (2022, June 1). This Platinum Jubilee, don't pardon the Royal Family's past. *The New Arab.*

Fanon, F., Chevalier, H., & Maspero, F. (1994). *Toward the African revolution* (Fanon, Frantz) (New ed.). Grove Press.

Freire, P., Ramos, M. B., & Macedo, D. (2000). *Pedagogy of the*

oppressed, 30th Anniversary Edition. Continuum.

Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural violence. *Journal of Peace Research, 27* (3), pp. 291–305.

Gilroy, P. (2002). *There ain't no Black in the Union Jack* (Routledge Classics) (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Gopal, P. (2021). On decolonisation and the university. *Textual Practice, 35* (6), pp. 873–899.

Goss, D. (2022, June 1). Royal finances. Institute For Government.

Government Digital Service. (2014, December 22). Types of British nationality. GOV.UK.

le Grange, L., du Preez, P., Ramrathan, L., & Blignaut, S. (2020). Decolonising the university curriculum or decolonial-washing? A multiple case study. *Journal of Education, 80*.

Lorde, A. (2018). *The masters tools will never dismantle the master's house*. Penguin Books.

Mansour, C. (2014). The cross-national diffusion of the American civil rights movement: The example of the Bristol bus boycott of 1963. *Miranda, 10*.

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 1997* (74), pp. 5–12.

Mitchell, K. (2009). *The director's craft*. Routledge.

Morrison, T. (1975, May 30). 'A humanist view.' Black Studies Center Public Dialogue, part 2. Retrieved July 30, 2022.

Sanchez, T. R. (1998, November). Using stories about heroes to teach values. (ERIC Number: ED424190). ERIC Publications.

Semmler, P. L., & Williams, C. B. (2000). Narrative therapy: A storied context for multicultural counseling. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 28* (1), pp. 51–62.

Sheehan, H. (2020). Class, race, gender and the production of knowledge: considerations on the decolonisation of knowledge. *Transform*, (7), pp. 13-30.

Stephenson, P., & Morrison, L. (2021). *Memoirs of a black Englishman* (2nd ed.). Tangent Books.

UK Parliament. (2017, August 21). 'Sophia: Suffragette Princess' by Anita Anand [Video]. YouTube.

Wachtel, T., & McCold, P. (2004, August). From restorative justice to restorative practices: Expanding the paradigm. Building a Global Alliance for Restorative Practices and Family Empowerment,

Part 2, Vancouver, Canada.

Yong, M. (2017, November 7). [Bristol's Paul Stephenson who changed the course of history set to be honoured, 54 years later](). BristolLive.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dermot Daly is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Performance and member of the EDI Committee at Leeds Conservatoire as well as a part time lecturer at Leeds School of Arts, Leeds Beckett University. His research interests include equality, diversity and inclusion; curriculum reform and implementation; widening participation; and practical drama/acting teaching methodology and practice.

Conversation Piece: Gender Trouble in Devised Performance

SHANE KINGHORN

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

This article explores the making of Conversation Piece*, produced in spring 2022 with first-year students of the Drama and Contemporary Performance programme at Manchester Metropolitan University, a devised performance directed by the author. The piece, initiated by the group's passionate engagement with identity politics, blended original verbatim texts, generated by the students from a series of interviews, with extracts of extant plays. My intention was to confront and explore radical shifts in the ways we consider gender, subjectivity, and language, and present our findings to a contemporary audience. The chapter examines the ways we navigated this complex territory, the dramaturgical shape and structure we devised for the material—and—and the insights we gained into our ability to think, act, speak and feel in 2022.*

The first year of Manchester Metropolitan University's undergraduate programme, Drama and Contemporary Performance (DCP), culminates in a public-facing, assessed performance project. As its director in the spring of 2022, I had the choice of working with a published play—always a tricky proposition when the group size (in this case, eighteen) outnumbers a typical cast—or making a devised piece. Going for the latter option, I saw an opportunity to explore issues some of the group had raised, outside of this context, in the DCP forum dedicated to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). My decision to put identity politics at the heart of their performance practice was due, in part, to the make-up of the group: the proportion of students within it identifying as gay, genderqueer, transgender or nonbinary far exceeded UK statistics (see Morgenroth and Ryan, 2022, p. 1113). Could their subjective experience somehow generate material for devised performance?

THE CONTEXT

The central theme spoke to my own interest, as a white, middle-aged, cis gay male, in shifting views of gender, traditionally perceived as binary and oppositional, and as allied to biological sex. Change is apparent now in 'the growing visibility of, and support for, transgender and nonbinary individuals […], discussion and implementation of gender-inclusive language […], and related changes to policy and practice' (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2022, p. 1114). Of course, theatre and performance practice has frequently set out to expose gender bias; I wanted to acknowledge and assimilate practitioners whose work has, both directly and tangentially, activated the interrogation of deeply imbedded, and increasingly unstable, binaries. Today, divergences of opinion among the various factions invested in the debate imply both reluctance and determination to find a satisfactory consensus. Discussions within my own, putatively liberal, society, have for instance expressed 'confusion' and/or disinclination to use the terms 'imposed' by gender-inclusive language. Reactionary attitudes, consciously or not, have sustained a gap that cannot be excused as merely 'generational': I have seen, on both sides, stubborn foreclosure of

instructive, inclusive discourse. What I sought to promote, more than anything else, was *dialogue*. This article sets out to discuss the project by dividing the making process, from conception to completion, into three sections. These explain my intentions and chief strategies for the project as conveyed to the students, detail the issues we negotiated through rehearsal, and explain the dramaturgical structure conceived for the material.

THE PROPOSAL

The interpretation of performance practice as apposite territory for academic inquiry is nothing new: the project was conceived as a means of looking at the challenges to normative classification proposed by Judith Butler (1990), specifically 'concepts of *gender performativity* (i.e., that gender is created through its own performance) and *gender trouble* (i.e., ways to challenge the performative, reinforcing cycle of the gender/sex binary)' (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2022, p. 1113). I had in mind the development of devising practice that broke open the metaphorical conception of 'performance' proposed by Butler and Goffman (1959), wherein:

> binary views of gender/sex are created and reinforced through the performance of gender/sex in which there is an alignment between character (man vs. woman), costume (body and appearance), and script (gendered behavior, traits, and preferences); this performance is highlighted by a stage set up to facilitate performance in line with the gender/sex binary and obfuscate performance that does not fit.(Morgenroth and Ryan, 2022, p. 1114)

Employing the analogic terms above (character, costume, script, and performance) in a literal sense, with a view to 'facilitate performance that does not fit'—i.e., that seeks to warp the 'alignments' listed—I proposed two principal strategies: the project would blend original verbatim texts, generated by the students, with extracts of extant plays. Taken from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, the plays would be canonical, and lesser-known contemporary works that explore gender and identity; some that deal with concomitant issues head-on, such as Caryl Churchill's seminal *Top Girls* (1982); others that have been

reappraised through a feminist lens, as evidenced in recent adaptations of *Medea* (see Bartlett, 2012). The selection, and sequence of these extracts was not fixed at the outset or intended to be chronological or hierarchical; the disharmony of juxtaposition would compel the students, and their audience, to recognise thematic resonances in the texts, potentially granting spectators some agency in connecting disparate fragments (or not). This dramaturgical strategy would ask: What happens, what can we take from the collision, when, for instance, the landmark moment of Nora's departure in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) is placed alongside, say, Clare Dowie's gender-queer monologue *Drag Act* (1993)?

The pre-existing texts would be threaded through verbatim material generated by the students through discussions arising from the project. This element concerned the status of *their* identity, *their* subject-position in response to historical and current debates. The inclusion of published material meant to reveal precedents—and limitations—in the ways the (western) dramatic canon could be seen to anticipate or represent the status-quo (or, specifically, the students' lived experience of it). Approaching this hazardous terrain, I was guided by Iain Mackenzie, reader in politics at the University of Kent, UK, whose pedagogic practice has explored the nexus of issues at the heart of contemporary debates about identity politics. The name of Mackenzie's 2022 elective module became the project's working title:

Who do you think you are?

According to Mackenzie, the question can be read in two ways: as an appeal to examine the conditions of our subjectivity, and/or a judgement upon a subject's ability to act/speak/feel etc. Put another way, there are two strands to the inquiry: 'what are the conditions of our identity, and how do these relate to differences between us?', and 'what is the nature of judgement and when, if ever, is it legitimate to judge others?' While the coexistence of dramatic material might address or contradict them, students' responses to those questions would become the core texts within the piece. There would be a place for everyone within this conversation, regardless of their position within, and extent of their connection to the debates it may spark; *all* voices were to be welcomed and valued.

The students were given an introductory seminar outlining the core

critical issues surrounding verbatim theatre and the various strategies used in its production (see Taylor, 2011; Martin, 2008). In common with playwrights such as Alecky Blythe (see, for example, *Our Generation* (2022), *Little Revolution* (2014)), we would generate material by recording, editing, and transcribing a series of interviews. Therefore, we required suitable *questions*. At the outset, I envisaged producing a set of around ten of these to be used as a basis for conversation. The process seems simple enough when summarised as a list of instructions: (a) find the questions as a group; (b) set up one-on-one interviews, using those questions; (c) record interview; (d) reverse roles, record again; (e) edit and transcribe the material, thus creating a script.

The practice would ignite when transcribed interviews were passed to other pairs of students to perform, thus replacing the originators of the text. The transition of verbatim text into its new status as 'script' is dependent on such an exchange: I explained the crux of verbatim practice as being the act of *performing others' words*. While actors' fidelity to the source, i.e., the utterances of the original speaker(s), is essential, authenticity functions in tension with the degree of performative interpretation involved that potentially undermines the 'truth-claims' made of the form. The troubling paradox implied here—the uneasy tryst between accuracy and artifice—and the ethical dilemmas that inevitably ensue are central themes in critical discourses surrounding the genre. The students, then, would be placed in an environment asking them to manage both verbatim *and* dramatic text, seeking perceptible contrasts in their interpretation of heightened, fictional material, versus the hyper-realistic delivery typically required of verbatim performance.

There was a third element to the research phase: I thought it essential that contemporary discourse intersected with the broader cultural landscape, and that we acknowledged its socio-historical context. A strand of verbatim practice combines several, divergent voices, finding that dialectical opposition problematises whatever subject is in hand, reveals its complexities and negates the predominance of any one point of view (see, for example, Robin Soans' *Talking to Terrorists* (2005)). To this end, I had gathered a selection of recorded interviews with prominent figures in culture and entertainment whose protestations correspond with the core themes of the project, including, for example, academic and broadcaster

Germaine Greer. At the planning stage, before I knew what the piece needed to be, it seemed important to acknowledge the currency of fame, in the sense that it bestows disproportionate power and influence on a relatively small number of individuals whose opinions will likely set the agenda and tone of the zeitgeist. I invited students to offer alternatives: there would be, perhaps, high-profile influencers on social media platforms I knew nothing about. We would develop our own practice with reference to archival sources, assessing the ways more recent (and, by implication, enlightened) discourse is redefining the terms and concepts, such as 'cancel culture', encountered therein. I envisaged that students would select and perform useful extracts, adding another layer to the multidimensional conversation.

THE PROCESS

The students requested that we prepare for rehearsal by stating our pronouns, and inviting discussion about them, an exercise I would recommend using in any appropriate teaching environment (see Olliff, 2001) as it signals the accumulative harm of mis-gendering individuals and, as in this case, can reveal the complexities involved in making the transition from cis to nonbinary or transgender identities, a process some referred to as 'coming out'. My understanding of coming out has (or had?) different connotations—the significant shift being that the phrase no longer pertains exclusively to one's sexuality—but I found affinities in students' articulation of their experience. The cis students, too, recognised the pressures of conforming—or choosing *not* to conform—to gender-inscribed parameters, conditions exacerbated, inevitably, by their fidelity to social media. Seeming to demonstrate the group's trust in each other, and the project, the session gradually admitted a generous measure of reciprocal candour, extended to more than two hours, and evinced so many fascinating stories that, as a verbatim practitioner, I wanted to kick myself for not having recorded it. Yet the impulse to turn subjective experience into potential material has an exploitative edge—and who can say how the presence of a recording device might have swayed or inhibited the discussion?

The session was useful in establishing a safe working space, not only in a general sense but in developing the level of trust and frankness evident in the many exchanges that became raw material for verbatim text. I gave students autonomy in coming up with interview

questions that would invite subjective responses and acknowledge both the theatrical context and wider social framework of the conversation. The illustrative script included later in this article lists the final selection of questions, and examples of answers, filtered from the recordings made in and outside rehearsals over a two-week period. Participants gave prior consent to using their interviews on the proviso that none of the material used would be ascribed to any individual and could be withdrawn at their behest, at any time.

On this basis, a few of the students voluntarily took their search for subjects outside of the group, speaking to friends in the transgender community; I was encouraged by their enterprise and keen to use parts of these recordings, but although the group had conceded to performing each other's words (and knew speakers' anonymity would be preserved), they seriously doubted the ethical integrity of, as they put it, 'speaking for' transgender individuals. One member of the group felt 'sick with worry' at the notion of representing experience they had not lived or expressing a subject-position they did not feel qualified to inhabit. Although their introductory seminar had made explicit reference to ethical concerns concomitant with verbatim practice, there is a significant difference, of course, between theoretical understanding of, and personal encounter with such a quandary. It seemed to me they'd inadvertently hierarchised the sanctity of veracity as applied to certain *kinds* of identity: to 'play straight' is safer, after all. Their concern released a sense of unease that began to permeate the group and cast doubt upon the themes and methodologies of the entire project.

Alarm bells pealing at the mid-way stage were amplified by an episode involving a notorious television news interview with Germaine Greer (2015). In it, Greer repeats unequivocal refusal to accept 'postoperative transgender men' as 'women', a hugely controversial stance that led to one of the first high-profile instances, in the UK, of 'cancelation'. I wanted this significant precedent included in the piece somehow, but my decision to broadcast Greer in rehearsal was so incendiary that it almost derailed the project. As had been the case with transgender interviewees, the students could not accept that in *performing* those words they didn't need to concur with them (they would be *quoting* Germaine Greer), any more than an actor playing Medea should consider infanticide an expedient means of revenge. Yet I had been careless in showing the material without fully preparing

them for its capacity to offend and underestimated their reluctance to give any kind of platform to views that have been judged as transphobic. As previously stated, I had started out with the aim of setting their self-generated material within or against globally influential voices, holding the view that to include only 'enlightened' and inclusive perspectives would be to imply that the battle had already been won; arguably, if there were no resistance to any aspect of identity politics, there would be no further need for protest. We don't yet live in that world. It could have been that the piece revealed not only how far we have come, but how much is still left to be achieved.

On the other hand, the dramatic material already offered us striking divergences from the students' material. Perhaps because they were so personally invested in the verbatim work, secondary sources seemed invasive; they weren't about to admit gatecrashers. In any case I was disinclined to wade against a tide of resistance; the archival interview material was no longer so essential to the process that it needed to be included. That Greer had been 'cancelled' again seemed at best an ironic outcome to me (her widely acknowledged contribution to progressive gender politics notwithstanding) but the confrontation proved to be a galvanizing moment. I saw that much of the group's agitation (and mine?) stemmed from uncertainty about the direction of the project. One of the pitfalls—or advantages, depending on your situation—of devising practice is that it takes time for a tangible structure to emerge. We were back on track as soon as I came up with a robust framework and plan for staging the work, and the title of the performance: *Conversation Piece*.

THE PERFORMANCE

Conversation Piece functioned as a mechanism through which pairs of performers, placed either end of tables large enough to seat four spectators, took the roles of interviewer/interviewee, switching between those tasks through the course of the show. The space was set up to accommodate nine tables around which the action revolved, generating an intimate relationship between performer and spectator. While the audience retained a fixed position, performers moved at timed intervals (imagine a version of musical chairs), so that any one table encountered up to four different pairings and heard alternative responses to the same questions.

Each performer had prepared a full interview comprised of extracts they'd selected from transcripts made by every member of the group; so, while it appeared to the audience that individuals were coming up with their own answers to each question, they were in fact quoting several of the students' original statements. The trick, in performance, was to create the illusion of spontaneity. The script below reveals the full list of questions we selected and illustrates, for the purpose of this article, the way some answers were recorded, retaining the authentic, informal rhythms and hesitations of everyday speech:

What are your pronouns?
Where is 'home'?
What's your first memory as a boy/girl?

> Just, like, playing 'dress up'. I went round my mate's house and, like, trying on those little shitty kiddy heels that would break, and you'd break your little ankles, and then try and trot along… and um, I had an Aurora Sleeping Beauty princess dress, and my mate probably had Belle or Cinderella, and we wore tiaras in our hair, and then whenever I'd go to Spain I'd get one of those, um, you know, the polka dot dresses, I just had a lot of .dresses and that was my first, like, stereotypical memory as a girl, playing dress up with barbie dolls and princess dolls and stuff.

When did you become self-aware?

> 11 or 12, I think. I sort of realised how I was perceived. I think puberty is like a big part of that, going to high school; like, before that I just kind of did what I want, cos I was a kid, and kids do whatever they want, but in high school I sort of realised: 'Oh, I haven't been acting socially acceptable, I need to change that.'

Are the mind and body separate?
Do you think gender identity is influenced by the way you're raised?

> Yes. I don't know if it's possible to have an 'un-gendered'

experience of the world. I think every single one of our experiences are coloured by our gender ... and the way we've been treated will never be detached from ... the gender we were assigned at birth. So ... yeah.

Are 'labels' important/useful?

I don't know. Um… I don't think there's a need to label everything… I don't know. I don't feel like anybody needs a label… I think they're useful if you understand it, it's when you don't understand it creates—not a *problem*, it creates uncertainty in the person that doesn't understand it, and then you struggle to find the right words or whatever so—I don't know, if it makes somebody feel happy that's fine, but I wouldn't like to feel as though I'd insulted somebody by unintentionally not knowing I'd done that.

Do you show who you are on the inside through what you wear on the outside?

I think I try my best but, on the inside, in terms of like, in my mind, I don't even think I'm like, human? Like, when I was little, I thought I was a vampire or an alien or something, I think I'm like, just a *being*. I think it fluctuates a lot, so I don't think it's one of those things that I can properly express in the body that I'm in. I like to say I want to be as close to a haunted Victorian doll as I can, and I think that's like the closest I can get to it.

Will the terms 'male' and 'female' become obsolete?
What gives you purpose?
What is love (to you)?

I think the fact that people say stuff like family love is unconditional, as in, like, your family is meant to love you no matter what, it's absolute bullshit, cos that's not how all families work, like whatever, it's like, half the time that's not the case, and it's a hard thing to describe 'love' because it's a thing that's different for every individual; you will have a

different concept or definition of love than I will.

Are we defined by our relationships with others?
What's your personal utopia?
How do you think people should lead their lives?
Do we carry the weight of history on our shoulders?

(*Sighs*) I don't know, you're bogged down with it, aren't you? You get into conversations with people, and they say 'well, in my day', and you're like… 'well you're *not* in your day—this is a *new* day.' I get frustrated with that, so, yeah, I think some people try—whether they do it intentionally, I don't know—but they try to justify things by it being 'in their day', and they're not moving with the times, and yet they move with the times with everything else.

What is 'cancel culture' and how does it work?

I despise it, I think it's *horrific*, it's like, it's from, it's come from social media, um, and it's when you don't allow any room for growth and once somebody does one bad thing and if it gains enough traction, if enough people jump on this bandwagon then they're just done, *gone*, but I don't really agree with it, I don't really think it's very healthy… surely what we should be doing is, these people that fuck up and say the wrong thing, they're hurting people, that needs to be acknowledged, that needs to be corrected, we should be implementing *education*, and finding out why they're apologising and why they've been cancelled, and education is *so* important in terms of that, yeah.

Are we able to have this conversation because we're privileged?
Is this a suitable conversation for performance in a theatre?

I think so, I think if it's handled delicately and done well. I think it has the potential to *not* be done well.

One of the appreciable outcomes of this approach was its aptitude for causing 'gender trouble' when, for instance, a cis male performer,

quoting the utterances of a cis female, is obliged to adopt her pronoun during his interview, without so much as a flicker of acknowledgment that his identity has changed—and back again, when he answers the next question. In such moments, we severed the alliance between character (man vs. woman), costume (body and appearance), and script, since his delivery is consistent regardless of the gender apparently assigned to him by the text. The spectator is prompted to adjust their gaze, to look more quizzically at the speaker, at his outward allegiance to 'male' signification, and see it as constructed: as enshrined within, and expressed through coded signifying systems.

The play texts were integrated in such a way that they sprang, apparently randomly, from conversations happening at the tables. Cued by an action, or question, the performers involved, in pairs or small groups, initiated a seamless transition from one species of text to another by keeping the same register in their delivery, progressively drawing attention to the moment as distinct from the verbatim material through *gradual* transformation into character. The point here was to instigate a ripple effect whereby dramatic action spread from an isolated table (and its audience of four) into the spaces between the tables allocated to 'dramatic' sequences. By then, the scene was fully inhabited, and the entire audience turned their gaze to this new point of focus. The other performers feigned a similar course, in their response, from surprise into gradual awareness, pausing their conversations to become observers.

We had time, within the hour-long duration of the show, for six of these interventions, using *Medea*, *A Doll's House*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Hampton, 1985), *Drag Act* and *Confirmation* (Thorpe, 2014). The strategy steered the piece into 'gender trouble' in two ways. Firstly, through the text itself: for example, emerging as it did from the contemporary (verbatim) dialogues happening around the scene, Torvald's belittlement of Nora in Simon Stephens' adaptation of *A Doll's House* (2012) was thrown into harsh relief, seeming even more absurdly patriarchal. Secondly, by making disruptive casting decisions: Ibsen's well-known work was defamiliarized by distributing the final scene among four performers, Torvald played by a cis man and cis female, Nora by a gay man and cis female. Marquise de Merteuil's speech in 1:4 of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* was performed by a bewigged gay man, in full period costume, using his first language, Spanish while a cis woman simultaneously translated the text into its

original English stage adaptation. These examples demonstrate:

> the potential for disruption and subversion through what Butler (1990) calls "repeated reconfiguration." If gender/sex is repeatedly performed in ways that make the alignment of character, costume, and script impossible—or at least more difficult—the gender/sex binary should, over time, become less and less convincing and lose its regulatory power. (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2022, p. 1124)

I would not be so glib as to suggest that *Conversation Piece*, as a piece of devised undergraduate theatre, brought about the radical societal shift suggested above, but would argue that it dislodged the fixity of 'regulations' in performance, since neither the verbatim nor dramatic material exhibited consistent faithfulness to the gender identities prescribed by the texts. Through a converse realisation of Butler and Goffman's analogy, the piece asked its audience to consider the gender/sex binary in operation outside the theatre by inviting them into an intimate encounter with contrary performative strategies at play through the duration of the piece.

If audience responses, gathered from informal post-show discussion with parents, colleagues, students and guests, can be taken as a measure of success, the strategies worked. For instance, spectators within my age-group reported having gained awareness and appreciation of the problematic assimilation of gender-inclusive language. If the insights gained meant they'd hesitate before defaulting to habitual apprehension, or dismissal of unfamiliar terms, then we had gone some way towards instigating intergenerational dialogue. As it transpired, I took for granted the group's agreement that, espousing the verbatim practice outlined earlier, the project called for intervention of contradictory, often controversial opinions, holding fast—until the group's objections loosened my grip—to the belief that articulation of your own position is augmented by confrontation with oppositional perspectives. While I maintain the view that the complexity of *Conversation Piece* could have been deepened by inclusion of voices from outside the student community, I have to concede that the rehearsal process was congested with ideas, and the group's strident dismissal of archival material stemmed, at least in part, from insecurity about the direction and format of the project at a certain stage of its development. The reward for such a compromise was ultimately given

in the students' confident ownership of the performance. I came to realise that in order to adapt to change, it can be necessary to listen, at least, to the calls of those most invested making the changes. *Conversation Piece* stands, I think, as a valid contribution to the promotion of ongoing dialogue within contemporary identity politics.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Kinghorn, S. (2022). Conversation piece: Gender trouble in devised performance. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (2), pp. 16-30.

REFERENCES

Bartlett, N. (2012). *Medea*. Bloomsbury.

Blythe, A. (2022). *Our generation*. Nick Hern.

Blythe, A. (2014). *Little revolution*. Nick Hern.

Churchill, C. (1982). *Top girls*. Bloomsbury.

Dowie, C. (1993). *Drag act.* Bloomsbury.

Greer, G. (2015). BBC Newsnight interview.

Hampton, C. (1985). *Les liaisons dangereuses*. Faber and Faber.

Martin, C. (2012). Bodies of evidence. In Martin, C. (ed.) *Dramaturgy of the real on the world stage*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 17-26.

Morgenroth, T. and Ryan, M.K. (2022). The effects of gender trouble: An integrative theoretical framework of the perpetuation and disruption of the gender/sex binary. *Perspectives on Psychological Science 2021, Vol. 16* (6), pp. 1113-1142.

Olliff, S. (2001). Differentiating for gender in the drama classroom. *Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, *6* (2), pp. 223-229.

Stephens, S. (2012). *A doll's house.* Oberon.

Soans, R. (2005). *Talking to terrorists*. Oberon.

Taylor, L. (2011). The experience of immediacy: Emotion and enlistment in fact-based theatre. *Studies in Theatre and Performance, 31* (2), pp. 223-237.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Shane Kinghorn is a Senior Lecturer in Drama and Contemporary Performance at Manchester Metropolitan University, having previously

worked in London as a dramaturg and director. His research and teaching focus is the practice and application of dramaturgy, exploring relationships between the performance text and its applications in theatre. He specializes in the study of documentary or verbatim theatre practices, the subject of several performances and publications in the UK and Europe.

Exploring Theatre from the Principles of Heart-Intelligence

KOURTNEY KING

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Both children and adults are wrestling with mental health problems in the United States. Workshops were held to introduce basic principles of Heart-Intelligence for improving mental health. In a five-week workshop, eight students aged 8-12 were selected from an elementary school in South Atlanta. The following article documents this practitioner's experience facilitating this work in order to address the students' perspectives, providing them with the framework they need to reduce mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress.

There has been an unprecedented union of science, philosophy, and spirituality through the understanding that Heart-Based Living, or Heart Intelligence, can improve mental health and the world at large. Therefore, teaching and performing artists can experience profound changes in their mental health, emotions, and overall well-being in the applied theatre world by interfacing with these principles. I have explored the intersectionality between theatre and Heart Intelligence as I developed Heart-Based Theatre praxis and pedagogy while studying at New York University in the Program in Educational Theatre. Though there are a few schools of thought regarding Heart-Based Living or Heart Intelligence, I will use definitions from the International Institute of Pneumatology, where I practice as a pneumatologist and master coach to center my discussion.

HEART-BASED LIVING AND HEART INTELLIGENCE

First, to live from the heart is to use the intelligence of one's energetic system (interchangeable with spirit or heart) as a primary source of value, worth, and self-validation, and uninfluenced by external influences. According to Zane Pierre (2022), the Head Master Mentor of the International Institute of Pneumatology,

> Within the context of human beings, life or energy takes the form of the expression of consciousness. Consciousness is in simple terms what is referred to as awareness. In human beings this awareness is characterized by intelligence that expresses itself through sentience.
>
> Intelligence, in this case, is the ability to create, establish and develop a process of rationalization, or a system of logic. That is, the priority that one chooses to be responsible to which is used to define:
>
> 1. An identity
> 2. An understanding of the potential of the identity
> 3. An understanding of limitations of the identity

> This creation or assimilation is commonly assumed to be the self or what one commonly refers to as "I".

A system of logic has a *priority* or *reference point* that determines one's limitations, potential, value, and worth. It serves as one's compass, inspiration, and comparison for logic and gives direction to make decisions. The priority, in turn, develops a *mental framework* that determines how to do something and feel about something. A *reference point* determines whether or not one is functioning correctly; one feels validated and approved when these reference points are functioning properly.

Conversely, one that uses their energetic system as a priority lives what the Institute calls a *Self-Existent Identity or Self-Determined Identity,* in which you are solely validated by the heart. Pierre (2022) says, "The Self-Existent or Self-Determined Dynamics of Human Consciousness is simply the identification of the substance or the source of one's very own consciousness as the priority of existence." In other words, when one's spirit is their sole identity, there are no limitations to the consciousness, and therefore, there are no limitations. One's potential is infinite and emotions experienced are positive. Additionally, one takes full responsibility for their energy.

Unfortunately, today, our definition of self comes from *external frames of reference*, which leads to powerlessness and victim-like mentalities, resulting in a rise of mental health issues and many navigating negative emotions. Like a *reference point*, an *external frame of reference* or *reference point* is what one uses as a compass and inspires decisions in life; it is simply outside of the heart. When an *external reference point* functions as one desires, one experiences positive emotions. However, when it is not functioning properly, one experiences continual negative emotions. These negative emotions are indications that one is no longer being validated or approved by the priority. This occurs because the heart is thought to be expressed as a feeling. Where there is thought, a feeling is attached. One may experience a thought that brings feelings of depression, anxiety, fear, insecurity, condemnation, inadequacy, or stress. Or one may experience thoughts that bring joy, peace, gratitude, and hope. A thought is never separate from emotions and feelings. There are two types of thoughts; thoughts generated from the heart and thoughts

influenced by external factors such as social norms, sex, money, culture, family influence, race, and the like.

Though numerous people, places, or ideologies can be used as *external reference points*, money is a primary example. Suppose money is a reference point and serves as a priority over one's energy or spirit for rationalizing, making judgments, and expressing value in how one views life. When money is dependable, one feels inspired and secure in life. However, one suffers from negative emotions and poor mental health without money. This occurs when one uses an external factor to determine potential, limitations, and value. When an *external frame of reference* is unavailable or not functioning correctly, emotions serve as signs or responses to how a reference point is functioning.

While functioning from one's energetic system is called *Self-Existent Identity or Self-Determined Identity.* In a *Self-Determined Identity,* we live internally and view every opinion, moment of praise, moment of rejection, societal norm, situation, and circumstance as independent of oneself. Contrarily, functioning from external reference points, such as money, romantic relationships, and degrees in effect becomes *Identity Codependency*. Those with *Identity Codependency* have neglected their innate or natural full potential, their nature, and their inherent character. By rejecting the physics of our spirits, in this context, we are the only species that does not adhere to the functionality of our own nature.

HEART-INTELLIGENCE AND THEATRE

By facilitating discussions and improvisations with a small group of third to fifth grade students in southwest Atlanta, I have begun to break down the complexities of living from the heart. After a few rehearsals of teaching stage directions and terminology, allowing them to direct, participate in improvisation, and engage in ensemble-building exercises, I began a rehearsal by asking them, "What are some negative emotions you have felt?" Negative emotions were not well-understood by the students, so I provided them with a list of negative emotions. Having explained the emotions, I asked, "What has happened at school that has made you feel negative emotions?" One child expressed he experienced frustration and anger after losing table points because her group wasn't on task. Another student recalled accidently hitting another student while stretching, which resulted in

them repeatedly hitting one another. In the end, both students were written-up and lost their recess. Subsequently, he became frustrated and angry about the other student not understanding it was an accident and also the teacher writing him up and taking his recess. We recorded others' emotions and situations as they shared their stories.

Afterward, I placed them into two mini ensembles and gave them five minutes to recreate the two moments mentioned above. Before they played, we addressed the need for a beginning, middle, and an end, as well as a set, props, and stage directions.

When they performed, they expressed the anger and frustration they had experienced when the events occurred. For instance, in one scene, two third grade boys played the roles of the boys who were hitting one another. Frustration was conveyed when the first child said, "it was an accident" and returned the hits from the other third-grader (which they did quite softly). This frustration increased as the student received punishment from the teacher, as portrayed by another student in the group.

After their performances, I explained that living from your heart differs from not living from your heart. People experience negative emotions when they do not live from their hearts. Taking center stage—which is just the front of my classroom that we call the stage—I pointed to my heart and said that when you are experiencing negative emotions, you are not living from your heart, you are living from something happening outside of you. Their just-performed scenes gave me an opportunity to ask them what they lived by in those moments—external factors or the heart? It was good to hear their responses and I assured them that those situations were unfair (I will discuss the handling of injustices in a later rehearsal), but we wanted to avoid negative emotions so that we could remain at peace. In other words, if it wasn't within their heart, it was external; if it was inside, it was internal.

I explained that when something happens to them in life, they should view situations as they would view a leaf falling from a tree. I asked them how a leaf falling from a tree made them feel. One said, "Sad," then I shared that that was not true. When a leaf falls from a tree, they keep playing or chatting with friends; they do not start to cry. The young actors agreed that they felt no negative emotions when a leaf fell from a tree. I then shared that they needed to view everything everyone else does as a leaf falling from a tree or a dog barking down

the street. I also took a moment to express that this is not to say it is okay to be bullied or mistreated.

Due to time restraints, it was not possible to explain how one manages mistreatment when functioning from heart-intelligence during this particular rehearsal, but I will provide a brief explanation here. When living from the heart, you hold your energetic system in the highest regard, but you also have great respect for the energy of others. In other words, if you are functioning from the law of self-determination, you also identify self-determination in others. However, the law of self-determination becomes oppressive when the self-existence of others is disregarded. All oppression is a sign of self-importance, valuing one's own life and rights above others. Therefore, you must recognize and steward yourself in the atmosphere of injustice or oppression, whilst highlighting the wrong and without violating the law of the environment. In addition, if a group is held higher in esteem by environmental laws, then that law is unjust, and one must act against it using the system of the environment. This approach should be utilized in order to avoid being viewed as a naughty child throwing a tantrum. Because this perspective is often not considered, many groups working outside their environment's legal system to bring equity to oppressed groups, often suffer. This is because every environment, whether it functions within the confines of equity and integrity or not, is in itself self-determining. At this school, children are advised to inform their teachers if another student hits them. Therefore, the student in the first scenario should have immediately informed his teacher when the other student hit him, instead of hitting him back.

Next, we discussed positive emotions. I then gave them four minutes to rework and rehearse the same scenes, but this time the characters that were frustrated and angry would respond to what was happening as they would a leaf falling from a tree, giving it little attention. I reminded them that the first time, they performed the scenes as someone who was not living from their heart, and now they would perform the scenes as one who lives from their hearts.

As each group rehearsed, I asked them about their changes, tweaked some misconceptions, and quickly checked for understanding. One mini-ensemble struggled with how their scene would look from the heart, and I explained that you never want to leave your heart or allow anyone to move you from it because that would give them control over you. I was also asked to join the scene and play

the teacher.

During the second performances, there had been some changes made in the scenes that conveyed they were understanding the concepts of heart-intelligence. When the boy accidentally hit the other young man, he raised his hand and immediately informed the teacher what was happening. After both groups performed, I asked them to compare the first scenes with the second scenes. They noted that in the first scene the boy retaliated and in turn had consequences. In the second scene, the boy communicated the situation to his teacher and both boys apologized to one another, but he did not lose his recess.

I then communicated that living from the heart is something that they had to practice and that over time as they do so they would start to feel happier which means they would be well in their minds. When their mind is healthy, they live a more extended life. On the other hand, the more worry, anger, rage, and strife you experience, the shorter your life.

In the next activity, we drew pictures on the ground with labeled boxes representing emotions or aspects of a character, similar to Rasaboxes.[1]

---

[1] Rasaboxes are a techniques developed by Richard Schechner and others at East Coast Artists, especially Michele Minnick and Paula Murray Cole. The exercised "is based on the assumption that emotions are socially constructed while feelings are individually experienced" (Schechner, 2001, p. 39).

Image 1: A modified version of rasaboxes students drew for an exercise. The center was where one lived from the heart, while the other areas were negative emotions.

The center stage was 'peace,' where one who lived from their heart would stand, while the remaining boxes were labelled with negative emotions. If someone gave them a positive emotion, they would stand center stage and act it out. If they received a negative emotion, they would stand in its relative box and act it out. As students acted out each emotion, I asked them how they felt and which of the two emotions they would rather experience. Sometimes, I threw out a scenario to help them bring out their emotions. I told them that there are always consequences to responding from the heart and outside of the heart. When you live from your heart, you have good emotions going through your body, your body is healthier, and you live longer. Many realized that their responses outside of their heart would have

resulted in them getting into trouble, but if they had responded positively, they would have had a better outcome. Eventually, as they performed, they included others in the ensemble.
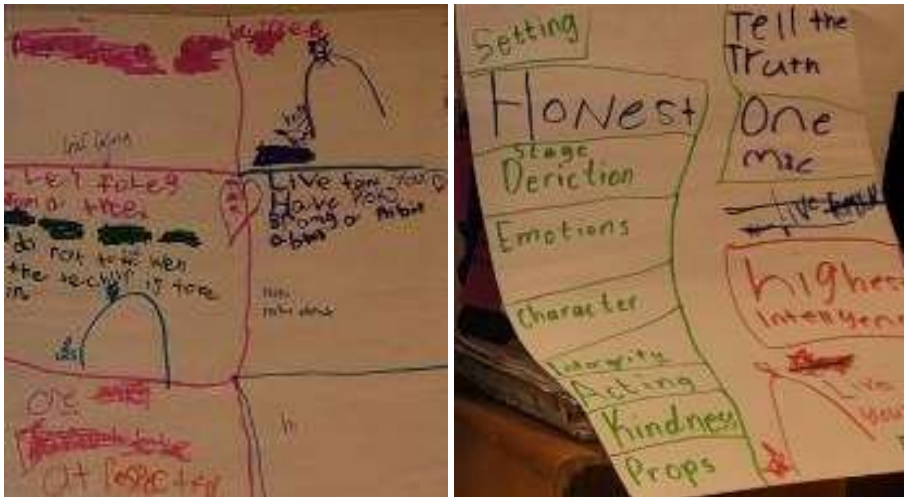

Image 2: In a rehearsal, children wrote what they had learned so far.

In future rehearsals, I would like to explain that heart intelligence is to function from a higher-intelligence and frequency, share characteristics of living from their heart, communicate facing injustices and doing what is best for all, and dive into how heart-intelligence eliminates the need for external validation. There will also be a culminating piece, in which students will take what they learned and produce a storyline. If time permits they will rehearse and perform the piece. View the ideas students brainstormed for these pieces in Image 3.
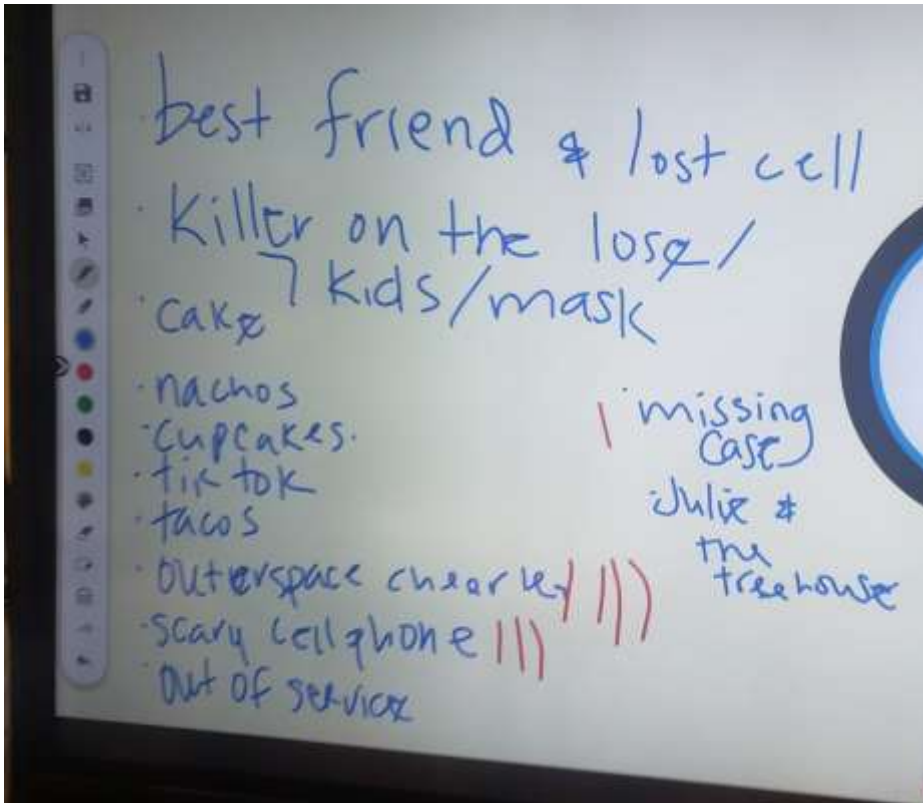
Image 3: I wrote down students' ideas for the short play they will perform as a culminating activity.

CLOSING

Heart-Intelligence is a logic that encompasses using one's energetic system as its sole reference point. *Identity Codependency*, however, is to use norms, people, circumstances, or situations as a compass for decisions for life. By intersecting theatre with the principles of Heart-Based Living, theatre practitioners and our students can experience profound changes in their mental health, emotions, and overall well-being.

SUGGESTED CITATION

King, K. (2022). Exploring theatre from the principles of heart-intelligence. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (2), pp. 31-41.

REFERENCES

Pierre, Z. (2022, September 17). Be who you choose to be!: The mechanics of character. Tunapuna, Trinidad W.I.; ZKI Authors and Master Coaches of Pneumatology.

Schechner, R. (2001). Rasaesthetics. *TDR/The Drama Review, 45* (3), pp. 27–50.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Kourtney King will graduate with her Master's degree in Educational Theater for Colleges and Communities at New York University in Fall 2022. King desires to open a design and performing arts center to encourage youth, young adults, and teaching artists to embrace various art forms through the practice of Heart-Intelligence. Since beginning her studies at NYU, she has been acting, assistant producing and directing on the NYU Steinhardt Main Stage. King is Master Mentor and Pneumatologist at the ZKI International Institute of Pneumatology, a non-profit dedicated to practical and experimental research and education on the mechanics and physics of Spirit. She is the co-host of *Reboot Your Biblical Perspective* Radio Show and the host of the *Live From Your Heart* podcast. She recently relocated from NYC to Atlanta, Georgia. You may connect with Kourtney King at: info@coachkourtney.com or on social media @CoachKourtneyKing.

Culturally Responsive Drama

LAUREN GORELOV

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

What does culturally responsive teaching look like in the drama classroom? As a former NYC public high school teacher and current arts practitioner and educator, I've learned that implementing lessons where students feel valued and empowered, focusing on empathy and ensemble in the classroom, removing the teacher from a central classroom role, and actively listening are all facets of both theatre education and culturally responsive teaching. The following article details lists of dramatic activities that provide pathways into students' points-of-view and voices. They are specifically formulated to help create empathy among students and promote risk-taking and perseverance. It is my hope that this article, along with its coordinating website, will serve as a toolkit for educators wanting to incorporate cultural responsiveness in their drama classrooms but are struggling with the "how."

INTRODUCTION

It was November 2020. The pandemic was in full force. My family and I had moved temporarily out of New York City and were living in a small suburban town in Central New Jersey. I was listening in on a Zoom class that my son, an intelligent first grader, was taking. It was art class and the teacher was explaining Thanksgiving and the origins of the holiday. Naturally, my ears perked up; I was curious to hear how she would tackle this complicated moment in history. I was immediately disappointed. Her assignment was to have the students draw the "Pilgrims and the Indians." Sigh.

Incorrectly using the word "Indian" was not only problematic in general, but it was also specifically fostering and teaching inaccurate history to my child. I knew the importance of properly labeling a particular group of people to prevent stereotypes and encourage cultural understanding and sensitivity. As a drama teacher and social justice advocate, this was important to me on many levels, and I was eager to use this as a teachable moment. I emailed the teacher and sent along articles and information about the plight of Native Americans and the danger of mislabeling communities from less dominant cultures. She responded politely, thanked me, and said simply, "I wasn't aware of this." That got me thinking: is it possible that some teachers don't have the language or educational background to truly respect and understand how the dominant culture and worldview were shaping their curriculum and their teaching?

Because of this formative moment as a parent, I shifted focus to my identity as an educator and theatre teacher. I wanted to take action. For nine years prior to this moment, I was a drama teacher in an urban high school in New York City. I worked with hundreds of diverse students and planned my units with that diversity in mind. I saw how tweaking my lessons to celebrate student uniqueness and valuing other voices and perspectives made an incredible difference in how the students navigated their time through school. My drama lessons—with cultural consciousness in the foreground—established a sense of safety and belonging, and built empathy among my students.

It was time to put my knowledge and experience into action. I often heard of teachers having interest and excitement for culturally responsive teaching (CRT) but they simply didn't know where to begin.

I decided to create a formula for teachers who wanted to expand their knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy, specifically in the drama classroom. I created a workshop and a website to serve as a toolkit for teachers to incorporate cultural responsiveness in their classrooms. It was specially designed for those who were struggling with the "how." The website (www.culturallyresponsivedrama.com) is packed with lesson plans, charts, and checklists that will help even non-drama teachers find a way into this important aspect of teaching. In this article, I examine (through a reflective narration) culturally responsive pedagogy in the drama context and document several examples of how to engage in this process with young people. These sample lessons, detailed later, show teachers how to bring rich cultural content into their curriculum in a way that expands students' knowledge, interest, and respect for the group being featured.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Teachers have a key role to play in creating culturally inclusive classrooms that involve all members, whatever their identity. Quality culturally responsive teaching enhances students' achievement and well-being and helps create environments, curricula, and instructional methods that validate and reflect the diversity, identities, and experiences of all students. Culturally responsive teaching stresses the importance of:

- students finding their own voices in classrooms;
- students being encouraged to bring who they are into schools; and, finally
- respect for the family background, culture, and prior experiences of everyone concerned, both students and teachers (Berry and Candis, 2013).

What exactly is culturally responsive teaching and how does it connect to drama education? As defined by teacher-educator Zaretta Hammond, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a research-based approach that makes meaningful connections between what students learn in school and their cultures, languages, and life experiences. These connections help students feel valued and empowered, enable them to access rigorous curriculum, and encourage the development

of higher-level academic skills (Hammond, 2015). Most teachers can recognize the obvious cultural differences such as foods, holidays, arts, and clothing—differences that, much like the tip of the iceberg, are clearly visible above the water. Less visible are the different ways in which we interact with others and the ways our cultures influence our understanding of the world. These more nuanced differences might include how we understand and define concepts like responsibility, education, family, and success. These hidden aspects of culture can cause misunderstandings and cross-group conflicts, impact teacher-student and student-student relationships, and create hard-to-identify barriers to academic content matter.

There are countless ways that this teaching framework can greatly benefit students of all ages. The following are a few reasons to begin this type of instruction immediately. CRT can benefit students because it:

1. builds cultural competence and strengthens students' ethnic identities;
2. promotes a sense of safety and belonging;
3. helps validate and reflect the diversity, identities, and experiences of all students; and
4. maximizes students' academic achievement by integrating their cultural references in the classroom (Milner et al., 2019).

Now, back to the school in New Jersey. When I approached this teacher, and later the principal, they told me: "We are culturally responsive! We teach the students about Martin Luther King, Jr.!" As I swallowed back a laugh, I told them that cultural responsiveness is more than teachers celebrating differences by integrating information about famous people and cultural artifacts of various marginalized groups. This is bigger than a Native American bulletin board to celebrate Thanksgiving or Black History Month. With these, it's like saying once the month is over, we'll get back to our regular scheduled programming of the dominant culture.

Thus, a *meaningful* multicultural education must go beyond saying that we're a "melting pot," having an ethnic food celebration several times a year, and acknowledging a few well-known historical figures. It's important to get beyond heroes and holidays and to expand past the anecdotal mentioning of non-dominant groups. As Jones (2022)

states, this:

> environment unequivocally asks students to leave their home culture outside so that it can be erased and replaced with an idealized Black culture that will remain subservient to the dominant, colonial framework of white supremacy. Cultural critique and true self- actualization do not exist in these spaces. (p.7)

Therefore, schools must actually integrate these voices into the everyday curriculum itself. If this is implemented properly, students will begin to value other voices and perspectives that will help them rethink assumptions, stereotypes, and the way things "should be."

And drama teachers have the unique ability to do just that.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS IN THE DRAMA CLASSROOM

For much of my time teaching and learning in NYC, administrators and universities were constantly talking about teaching in a "culturally responsive" manner. I made it my goal to truly unpack and understand what that means for drama teachers, specifically. The advantages of drama education, in general, include not only academic achievement but also increased cultural understanding, better self-esteem, and a healthier cultural identity (Cannon, 2007). The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) position paper on developmentally appropriate practice states that "dramatic play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence" (2007, p. 14). Drama is also a useful energizer in the classroom where students become active, have fun, and enjoy their learning experiences. A shy student is more easily able to take on an alter ego or persona, different from their reserved self, in order to speak and act. Drama is a valuable tool in text studies to identify literary devices, study the language more carefully, and meaningfully enact words. It also benefits oral skills development (e.g., pronunciation and intonation) and emotional intelligence development (Cannon, 2007).

So imagine the magic that happens when you combine the principles of both drama education and CRT. It seems that implementing lessons where students feel valued and empowered, focusing on empathy and ensemble in the classroom, removing the

teacher from a central classroom role, minimizing teacher-led and whole group lessons, and actively listening are all facets of *both* theatre education and culturally responsive teaching. Dramatic activities are a 'way in' to your students' points of view and voices. They are specifically formulated to help create empathy among students and promote risk-taking and perseverance. Additionally, cultural similarities and differences may become more obvious and more understandable through drama activities (Belliveau, 2006). Thus, **culturally responsive drama** encourages students to gain an understanding of other perspectives, have the experience of being human, and attach appropriate feelings to expressions. It also can help establish rituals and routines to produce a space where students contribute authentically to all aspects of learning and creating. By combining drama and cultural responsiveness, a teacher can benefit from the diversity and strengths of their students and can infuse classroom tasks with new energy and creativity.

I, much like other successful drama teachers, often liken my drama classroom to a 'safe space.' I find it essential to create a learning environment where students feel that taking risks will not result in any type of ridicule or shame. They can take these risks, both interpersonally and skill-based, thus enabling them to engage, connect, change, and learn with their peers. Hammond (2015) provides a detailed understanding of how important safe spaces are for students' brain functioning. If students determine a space they are in to be unsafe in any way, their body receives a distress signal from their brains. That signal then cues the body to create stress hormones, which render learning to be practically impossible. Therefore, it is critical for student learning that teachers build trusting and caring relationships with them "that signal to the brain a sense of physical, psychological, and social safety so that learning is possible" (Hammond, 2015, p. 45).

Drama lessons also help students feel safe, and drama teachers who build relationships to foster this safety are more attuned to their students' needs and requirements. According to Wanless (2016), when students feel safe in the classroom, "they are more likely to enact self-regulated strategies such as offering ideas, admitting and learning from mistakes, asking for help, engaging in learning opportunities, providing feedback to others, and speaking up" (p. 8).

I write this article drawing heavily on the work of theorist and

teacher educator, Gloria Ladson-Billings. In all of her groundbreaking writings, and specifically in her seminal text, *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, she posits that the three aims of culturally responsive pedagogy are **academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness** (1995, p. 469). These three aims have stuck with me as I have navigated through my tenure as a drama teacher who values a teaching practice that explicitly engages with questions of equity and justice. I have witnessed the individual and collective importance of these specific categories and have created lesson plans and workshops that work in tandem with each of these aims. I draw not only from Gloria Ladson-Billings and other leaders in the field, but also from my own knowledge and research that culturally sustaining pedagogy allows for a fluid understanding of the culture of my students.

In the following sections, I will lay out the significance of each of these three objectives, followed by a specific drama lesson plan geared toward the intended goal.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Academic achievement goes beyond simply receiving high grades. It requires the teacher to create a culture and backbone for students to achieve despite possible obstacles. This type of education empowers and enables students to maximize their potential and to work toward excellence personally and with a community. It pushes students to excel, and in many ways, this approach "grants" students permission to succeed (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Additionally, students are more likely to stick with challenging tasks and assignments when they believe their effort is a determining factor in their growth. Studies have shown that "grit"-- the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long- term goals-- contributes significantly to successful outcomes. In short, grit is a better predictor of high school graduation and grade point average than IQ (Laursen, 2015). As the great Thomas Edison said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work" (Steele, 2016, p. 1). For students to become successful citizens of their local and global communities, classrooms must be transformed to provide intentional experiences for them to learn the knowledge and skills required for career and community participation such as collaboration, problem-solving, grit,

perseverance, and tenacity.

Throughout my time as a high school teacher, I created and implemented many lessons geared specifically toward building students' capacity for perseverance and grit. Teenagers are very likely to encounter obstacles in their learning journey, and if they do, what tools do they have to keep on 'keepin' on'? What can we do as teachers to prepare students to persevere if things go wrong and to sustain interest and effort in long-term goals? Drawing from the book, *Fostering Grit,* teachers should support their students by providing them with "clear tasks, strategies, care, and encouragement" (Hoerr, 2013, p. 6). All of which are outlined and implemented in my original lessons.

The lesson below is one example (of many) that is designed to encourage students to learn to take on a growth mindset—that is, even though mistakes may not be pleasant they help us learn (Hoerr, 2013). If a student were to receive a poor grade or simply forget to do an assignment, this drama activity can guide them to get back on track. The trick of culturally relevant teaching is to get students to "choose" academic excellence and to want to persevere in times of setback. For most students, learning how to respond positively to hindrances is essential. These lessons-- including writing a letter to their future selves-- encourage students to persevere in times of stress, can offer agency over their own accomplishments, and**,** therefore**,** promote academic achievement.

Sample Lesson: Perseverance and Grit—Academic Achievement

Sequence of activities:
Large pieces of brightly colored paper should be hanging around the space

1. Sleepwalker: Ensemble task activity
   Seats will be scattered throughout the space. One seat will be empty. One student is a designated "sleepwalker" whose objective is to sit on an empty seat. The group's objective is to prevent the "sleepwalker" from sitting down by moving from one seat to another. The goal is to prevent the sleepwalker from sitting down for 1 minute.

   Discussion Questions:

- How do we work together to accomplish this goal?
- How do we actively listen to each other's ideas?
- When something goes wrong, how do we respond? (This illustrates how we communicate and what we rely on to communicate—language, movement, eye contact—what happens when those are limited or manipulated?)

2. Walk around the space
    When you encounter someone, make eye contact. Facilitator gives prompts: on a scale of 1-10: 1=slow, 10=fast, and 5=walk. Then 7, then 9, then 3, then 1. Stop.

3. Walk the colors
    Notice the colors hanging around the room. Walk toward the color that you connect to when you hear the following words:
    - Love (Ask a few to share why.)
    - Sadness
    - Anger
    - Boredom
    - Stress (Ask a few to share why.)
    - Passion
    - Art
    - Success (Ask: What is success to you? What does it look like/feel like? Get a few responses.)
    - Failure (Ask: What are some words to describe how you feel when you fail at something?)
    - Perseverance

    Reflection in Pairs:
    Discuss: What is perseverance? What does it look like? What does it sound like? Feel like?

    If helpful, give this definition: perseverance is continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition.

4. Small group work
    - Writing exercise: Share a story of a time when something

went wrong. How did you respond to this setback? Did you persevere and move forward? If so, how?
- Share in small groups of 3 or 4
- (ESL adaptation: Meditate. Share out loud with a partner. One partner listens while the other tells their story; then they reverse roles.)

5. Graffiti board (a large, shared writing space used for students to record their experiences and responses)
   - What did you hear your partner say?
   - How does it feel to move through adversity?
   - What does it mean to not give up?
   - (Teacher can add any relevant discussion questions here.)

6. Large group discussion
   What skills or tactics do you use to help you get past difficult moments? How can we develop a "growth mindset?"

7. Letter writing
   Write a letter of encouragement and choose a color from the color wall that makes you remember to persevere.

   This will be a free writing session. The letter is for the student's eyes only. It will not be shared. When a time is challenging, feel things are going wrong, or need words of encouragement, they will read this letter that they address to themselves.

   Prompt: You are to write a letter of encouragement to yourself; it is a motivational letter, a compassionate letter, and a love letter that no one will see but you. Then put it in an envelope, self-address it, and I will mail it out to you. You'll receive your letter in a few months when you aren't expecting it. (*ESL adaptation: Write the letter in your home language.)

8. Optional Performance
   Turn the letter of encouragement into a monologue or a series of tableaux.

9. Closing Circle: Reflection time

Discussion Questions:
- What were some of the topics we explored in this lesson?
- How do we actively listen to each other's ideas?
- In what ways can we apply these topics to our daily lives?

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Cultural competence is defined as "the ability to interact effectively with people of diverse backgrounds and different identity groups by being sensitive, appreciative, respectful, and responsive to beliefs, practices, and cultural needs that are different from your own" (Garran, 2013). Making a genuine commitment to cultural competence requires that teachers seek to promote the understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of cultural differences. This can play out in numerous ways in the classroom, yet I tend to believe that the first and foremost is to help students develop their own identities and then guide them to learn who *they* are as individuals. According to Steele and Cohn-Vargas (2013), "students have a sense of identity safety when they believe that their social identity is an asset, rather than a barrier to success in the classroom and that they are welcomed, supported, and valued, whatever their background" (p. 5).

Culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture and identity as a vehicle for learning. A pioneer in drama education, Dorothy Heathcote asserts that 'living through' a drama experience in real time can change the participants' understanding of their identity (Sayers, 2011), and therefore is paramount in creating cultural competence and community in the classroom. Inspired by these foundational artists and teachers, I believe that identity work is particularly effective for breaking down subject and cultural boundaries. My lesson plans that focus on the importance of identity, encourage students to demonstrate curiosity and articulate personal meaning and significance of their own original work.

It is particularly exciting when we can see this pride for culture and openness of sharing identities manifest in the classroom. I've included a few anecdotes from a recent workshop with seventh graders:

- A student referenced being known as the "quiet Asian girl" in school but with her family and cousins she "doesn't shut up." This sparked the attention of her classmates who began to ask

her questions around her identity and culture.
- Another student used this "I am" monologue as a way of sharing with the class that English wasn't his first language—something that they (nor I) didn't know prior to this.
- In the below example, another student wrote and performed the words, "People might think I am toxic, but really I'm trying my best." I recorded in my personal notes that this student not only had the guts to share deep feelings, but was also met with encouragement and support from her classmates that continued throughout the remainder of the semester.

Culture is steeply embedded within and around each of us and is especially shaped by the social context of drama education. Through these lessons and the vulnerable moments of identity sharing, I witnessed the class become a community who not only supports and lifts each other up, but respects and admires differences.

Sample Lesson: Identity—Cultural Competence

Sequence of activities:

1. Tossing the ball
   Ask the students to stand in a circle. Pass one ball around and ask students to say their names when they receive the ball. Once the ball gets back to you, explain that you are going to begin tossing the ball to someone across the circle. Before they toss it, they must say the name of the person they are tossing it to. Remind students to remember who they threw it to and who threw it to them, as they will need to repeat the pattern. Once the ball gets back to you, practice the pattern at least two more times.

   Once the group seems comfortable, pause to add another level. Pass another ball around (in some way, it should appear different from the first). This time, ask students to say their favorite food when they throw it. Once the ball has made it around, toss it again, maintaining the new pattern.
   - Ball 1—Name
   - Ball 2—Favorite food

You can modify and add other prompts for balls such as "something you are good at" or "add an adjective that describes you."

2. Blindfolded self-portrait
   - Students will each receive a piece of paper, a colored pencil, and a blindfold. They will have to draw their self-portrait with the blindfold on.
   - Give students one minute to draw their self-portrait with blindfold on. Then take off blindfold and look at drawing.
   - Discuss: How did you see yourself in your head? Did it translate on paper?

3. Role on wall
   Now we will use these self-portraits to learn about ourselves (what's on the inside and what's on the outside).
   - On the outside of your face, write words or descriptions that are obvious to those around you. How do you think people see you? (Teacher model an example—i.e. blue eyes, female, 29, confident, smiling, etc.)
   - On the inside of your face, write words that describe you which are not so obvious to others— things that make you who you are. (Teacher model example—shy, nervous, scared of heights, loves pasta, etc.)

4. "I AM" monologues
   - Students will take the discoveries learned about themselves from the ball game and the role on wall (self-portrait) and turn them into a monologue about themselves.
   - Teacher will hand out the format for "I AM" monologues (see below). Teacher will model their own and then give students ten minutes to work on theirs.
   - Students will break into pairs to share their monologues with each other.
   - Pairs will then volunteer to stand in front of the class and perform their "I AM" monologues.

5. Reflection/Debrief/Close of Class
   - As each student performs, give them specific positive feedback about something you learned about them and/or something you enjoyed about their monologue.
   - Ask students how it felt to share these thoughts with their classmates.
   - What did you learn about a classmate that you did not know before?

Figure 1: Sample "I AM" monologue from Identity Workshop, 2022. Anonymous student, grade 7.

SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

I believe that the most important section to focus on here is sociopolitical consciousness—an individual's ability to critically analyze the political, social, and economic forces shaping society and one's status in it (Seider et al, 2019). How can students identify their status in the world without investigating what truly matters to them and their culture? For a teacher, fostering sociopolitical consciousness means giving students the space, time, and permission to explore what is going on inside them. This type of teaching is validating for students in that it affirms and acknowledges the cultural backgrounds, experiences, worldviews, ideals, and values of students and their families. When teachers draw directly from the assets and strengths of the communities of students, they send a real message to students about who (and what) matters in the space (Milner et al, 2019).

In this final lesson plan, I have paid special attention to scaffolding a process where students are able to articulate, in a dramatic way, what the factors are in their lives that matter to them, and which factors cause pain or trouble. Being truly culturally responsive and being aware of all students' needs and desires are very important, vital skills for a teacher to have. A final anecdote to bring this paper to a close: I recently had a female student of color coming in late to class almost every day. She would enter the class, talk loudly to her friend, and disrupt the lesson already in progress. Naturally, I was annoyed. However, as I took a closer look and got to know the student (using the drama lesson outlined below), I learned that she was responsible for feeding her little sister breakfast each morning, getting her dressed, and bringing her to kindergarten before coming to school herself via a 60 minute train ride. She used these details of her life to write a powerful and moving solo play. Instead of anger and annoyance, what this student needed was care and compassion. I would have never known about her circumstances if it weren't for the culturally responsive dramatic activities. Even though she was resistant at first, she opened up to the prompt "what pisses you off" in such a profound way. She trusted me, her classmates, and her own creative voice to tell the story of her life and that of her sister. By the end of the year, our relationship blossomed, and she would come to me with questions, solicit advice, and even spend some lunch periods in my classroom. I learned from this experience that these students who are often marginalized need care. They need attention, and they need

community. If they are constantly punished and labeled, they will not succeed.

This lesson plan (featured below) gives students the power and space to articulate what is important and meaningful for them.

Sample Lesson: Sociopolitical Consciousness — Personal Values

Sequence of activities:

1. Safety exercise
   - Give everyone post-it notes as they enter the room.
   - Prompt them to each complete the following sentence: "I feel safe when…" by writing one thing that makes them feel safe.
   - As a full group (standing to increase energy), have 5-8 participants volunteer to share out one of their sentences.
   - Reference that this can be the beginning of a group contract or to establish rules for the group to create a safe and creative space.

2. Rant game!
   Stand in a circle and go around, each sharing (ranting) about one thing that pisses you off!! It can be large social issue or a small pet peeve.
   - Round 1: 10 seconds
   - Round 2: 20 seconds
   - Round 3: 30 seconds

3. Writing exercise
   In a few words, make a list of:
   - 4 things that piss you off
   - 3 things that inspire you
   - 3 things that break your heart
   - 3 social issues that are on your mind
   - 3 things you love about your culture

4. Circle your topic
   Look over your list and identify one thing that you feel strongly about, right now, that you cannot shake, and about which you

would want to write.

Note: This gives students the space, time, and permission to investigate what is going on inside.

5. Writing exercise
   - On chart paper, write your topic/issue in the middle of the page.
   - Next, write down everything that comes to mind around the topic you chose. It could be a word, person, lyric to a song, drawn picture, a color, thought, or ANYTHING that feels connected to your topic. (This is brainstorming and should not be judged. The purpose of this activity is to get the artist out of self-judgment and use other parts of the senses like impressions, sound, sensations, images, etc.)
   - Think of a specific character that would be struggling and/or in conflict with your chosen topic. It could be you, a neighbor, someone from your imagination, the news, etc. Give the character the topic about which you just spoke. This character gets to express whatever they have been withholding around this topic.
   - Briefly answer the basic W's: Who? What? Where? Why? When?
   - Create a monologue or a story that incorporates the basic W's you noted.
   - After the group has finished writing their individual monologues, volunteers will be asked to share out or perform their draft. Volunteers can also share the type of character they envisioned.

6. Reflection
   - Express in a few words what it was like to generate a monologue around a topic that you feel strongly about.
   - Share in a few words why it matters that students embrace what matters to them.
   - SHARE NOTE: Our outcome for the day was to have a start to a monologue and know the basic outline of your story—these working drafts are not expected to be polished.

CONCLUSION

I believe that these culturally responsive dramatic lesson plans will help both students and teachers understand and relate to histories and cultures of people different from themselves. This type of work has the power to be transformative; "that is, encourage academic excellence that embraces critical skills for progressive social change" (Lee et al., 1997, p. 9). It is my hope that these lessons will convey politics of possibility and will help marginalized students feel empowered and valued within an environment that is safe and welcoming. The below quotes were taken from a recent workshop I conducted using these lesson plans (personal notes).

"I didn't know my teacher actually cared about what I care about."

"I loved the self-portrait because no one else knew that I sometimes feel shy when I usually seem so loud and confident."

"Now I feel a little less stressed for my math test next period."

"This kinda feels like therapy. In a good way."

This work isn't easy. But, it's important. If all teachers take action to create conditions that bring key components of culturally responsive pedagogy to life, they will inevitably establish classroom environments that reflect diversity, equity, and justice. And of course, drama.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Gorelov, L. (2022). Culturally responsive drama. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (2), pp. 42-61.

REFERENCES

Belliveau, G. (2006). Engaging in drama: Using arts-based research to explore a social justice project in teacher education. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, *7* (5), pp. 1- 17.

Berry, T., & Candis, M. (2013). Cultural identity and education: A critical race perspective. *Educational Foundations*, *27* (3-4), p.

43.

Cannon, A. N. (2007). *Incorporating drama across the curriculum into the intermediate elementary classroom.* Routledge*.*

Copple, C., Jerlean, D., & Tomlinson, H. B. (2007). Revisiting the NAEYC Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice. *YC Young Children*, *62* (4), p. 74.

Garran, A. M., & Werkmeister Rozas, L. (2013). Cultural competence revisited. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, *22* (2), pp. 97-111.

Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching & the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin.

Hoerr, T. R. (2013). *Fostering Grit: How do I prepare my students for the real world? (ASCD arias)*. ASCD.

Jones, Jonathan. (2022*). "*Let Them Speak: Devised Theatre as a Culturally Responsive Methodology for Secondary Students." *The Routledge companion to theatre and young people (1st ed.).* Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32* (3), pp. 465-491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the remix. *Harvard Educational Review, 84* (1), pp. 74-84.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). *Culturally relevant pedagogy: Asking a different question*. Teachers College Press.

Laursen, Erik K. (2015). "The Power of Grit, Perseverance, and Tenacity." *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 19-24*. ProQuest*.

Lee, E., Menkart, D., & Okazawa-Rey, M. (1997). *Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development*. Network of Educators on the Americas.

Milner H. R. Cunningham H. B. Delale-O'Connor L. & Kestenberg E. G. (2019). *These kids are out of control : why we must reimagine "classroom management" for equity*. Corwin.

Reif, N., & Grant, L. (2010). Culturally responsive classrooms through art integration. *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education*, *5* (1), p. 11.

Scott Seider, Daren Graves, Aaliyah El-Amin, Madora Soutter, Jalene

Tamerat, Pauline Jennett, Shelby Clark, Saira Malhotra & Jamie Johannsen (2018). Developing sociopolitical consciousness of race and social class inequality in adolescents attending progressive and no excuses urban secondary schools. *Applied Developmental Science*, *22* (3), pp. 169-187, DOI: 10.1080/10888691.2016.1254557

Sayers, R. (2011). The implications of introducing Heathcote's mantle of the expert. *English in Education*, *45* (1), pp. 20-35.

Schroeder-Arce, R. (2017). Beyond acknowledgement of whiteness: Teaching white theatre teachers to examine their racial identity. *Youth Theatre Journal*, *31* (2), pp. 105-113.

Steele, D and Cohen-Vargas, B (2013) *Identity safe classrooms: Places to belong and learn.* Corwin.

Steele, M. L. (2016). The great failure of the ipxi experiment: Why commoditization of intellectual property failed. *Cornell L. Rev.*, *102*, p. 1115.

Wanless, S. B. (2016). The role of psychological safety in human development. *Research in Human Development*, *13* (1), pp. 6-14.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

As an educator, director, and actor with 15 years' professional experience in the arts, Lauren Gorelov believes that the key to successful drama education is maintaining a positive mindset, promoting community and teamwork, and building self-confidence and self- esteem in young people. Lauren holds an M.A. from New York University and a B.A. from Tufts University in Theatre and Communications. She is currently a Doctoral Candidate at NYU Steinhardt in Educational Theatre with a focus on socially conscious and verbatim theatre.

Fostering Creativity and Community in Politically Polarized Environments: A Reintegration of Community-Engaged Practices to Develop Community-Framed Definitions of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

LINDSAY KUJAWA

RE:THEATRE

ABSTRACT

On May 18, 2021, I awoke to a New York Times *article about my small town in the middle of Wisconsin entitled: "A "Community For All"? Not So Fast, This Wisconsin County Says." (Epstein, 2021). Marathon County was attempting to pass a resolution stating that it was a place that celebrated and embraced equity, inclusion, and diversity. Crafted using standard national talking points around this topic, these three words created a firestorm that divided the community.*

This aesthetic Inter-subjective, auto/ethnographic case study examines the polarizing impact of "equity, diversity, and inclusion" in a non-metropolitan county. Emergent data suggests that broad definitions of these words minimize the unique and fractal nature of the

issues specific to a locality. Analyzing the data through the theories of rural consciousness (Cramer, 2016) and the anti-critical race theory movement (Rufo, 2021), the study demonstrates the need for nuanced community-framed definitions of equity, diversity, and inclusion. This article explores ways a re-evaluation of arts-based community-engaged practices could utilize concepts of community consciousness to create and dismantle contentious, politicized ideology through artistic interventions.

INTRODUCTION

When I was 12, I sprinted home from the school bus, determined to intercept my mid-quarter progress report before my parents got home. I knew the grades posted would be a groundable offense and had devised a plot to stealthy place it in the trash and blame its absence on the postal system. Unsurprisingly, my plan did not work, and I wound up grounded for two weeks from the two things I loved most: rehearsal and C-SPAN.[1] Though at the time I thought my life was over, my love of the arts and politics continued to thrive and intertwine.

When entering college, I left my rural, conservative, Christian community for the slightly larger and slightly more liberal city of Green Bay, Wisconsin. I waffled between education, politics, and theatre until a student teaching assignment. Growing up in my community, there was an extensive list of demonized issues never to be spoken of, including my bipolar disorder. However, in the school where I was working, these issues were addressed publicly within the curriculum and broader learning community. Inspired by this approach, I officially solidified my education major. More importantly, it inspired me to found a company in my hometown that created a space where young people could address the issues adults in the community wanted to ignore, Introspect Arts.

Introspect Arts was an artist collective of more than 300 artists under 25 who wrote, produced, and performed original works meant to inspire community dialogue that would lead to social change. Our process was three-pronged: art-making, knowledge-making, and

---

[1] C-SPAN is a US-based cable network that broadcasts proceedings of the United States federal government, as well as other public affairs programming.

community-making. While most of our rehearsal time was spent traditionally, a quarter was dedicated to researching and exploring topics within the show. Rather than structuring our productions as performances, we approached them as community events. From pre-show talks, lobby displays developed by the cast, art exhibits, post-show talkback, and receptions, our goal was to cultivate an audience experience that had the opportunity to be more transformational than transactional.

At first, we received significant pushback from the community. People did not think teenagers should be discussing topics such as suicide, sexual assault, drug abuse, and depression. However, when the company sunsetted in 2015, we created a framework that led to significant community support, over $20,000 in grant funding, and recognition statewide by the Autism Society of Central Wisconsin and The Drug Endangered Children's Alliance of Wisconsin for our community initiatives.

Shortly after Introspect Arts closed, I was contacted by organizations and artists about our community-engagement practices. Over time, I developed the following codified show selection and community-engagement framework and have since taught it in various forms ranging from state Thespian conferences[2] to school districts to professional development workshops for the American Alliance for Theatre (AATE) and Education and the Educational Theatre Association (EDTA).

MAKING ART THAT MATTERS: A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY-ENGAGED THEATRE

Step One: Survey of Community and Needs

To make art that matters to your community, you must first understand who lives there. Essentially an informal census, consider the following:

1. Race/Ethnicity
2. Age
3. Religion
4. Socio-economic status

---

[2] Local theatre-educator conferences for teachers whose students participate in theatre competitions, run by the Educational Theatre Association (EDTA).

Next, consider what issues/topics are relevant to your community. While, at times, these might require more complex interrogation, that is not always the case. When schools began to re-open in 2021 as pandemic-related closures abated, I worked with numerous educators who identified the predominant needs of their community as laughter and joy after months of isolation and mounting tensions. This pursuit is just as valid as addressing any social issue if it is genuinely a community need.

Step Two: Identifying Audience

Before you begin identifying possible shows to produce, you must identify your audience. A lack of nuance when approaching understanding your audience is a common pitfall in the show-selection process. To explore these complexities, we can reframe the term 'audience' as the summation of six sub-groups that can be configured in several models:

1. Central Community (also-known-as the cast)
2. Creative Team
3. Producing Team
4. Related Community (broader community of the central community)
5. Immediate Audience (subscribers, family, friends)
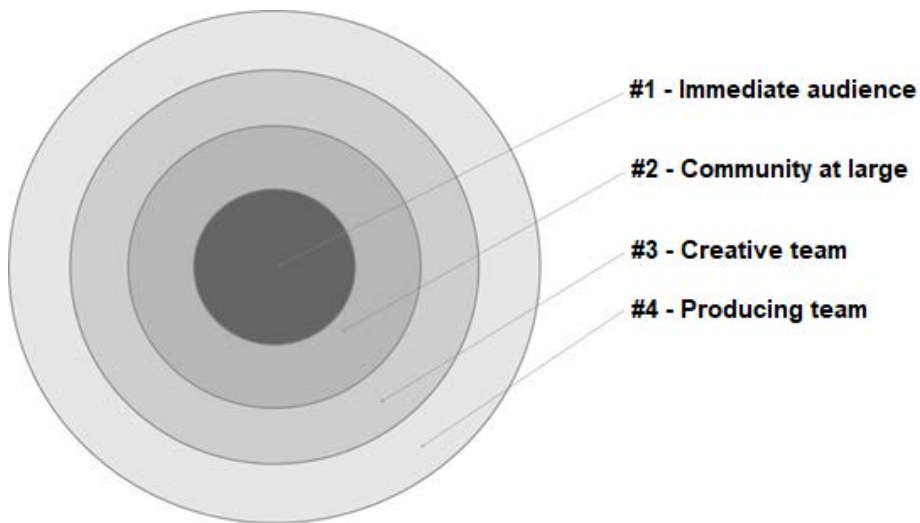6. Community-At-Large

Commercial Model

Figure 1: Breakdown of how the most-commonly used commercial model prioritizes selecting material.

The most-commonly used commercial model prioritizes selecting material that will draw the largest audience and generate the most revenue to ensure longevity. Therefore, the most important sub-group you must consider is the immediate audience, narrowly followed by the community-at-large.

Frequently, when financial and structural fractures occur in non-profits, regardless of size/notoriety, it is because the producing team and/or creative team center themselves in the show-selection process. Rather than the organization creating art for the wider community, it becomes an outlet for those in leadership to live out their artistic desires. A finely tuned equilibrium is required; as art cannot be created without passion, it cannot survive without an interested audience.
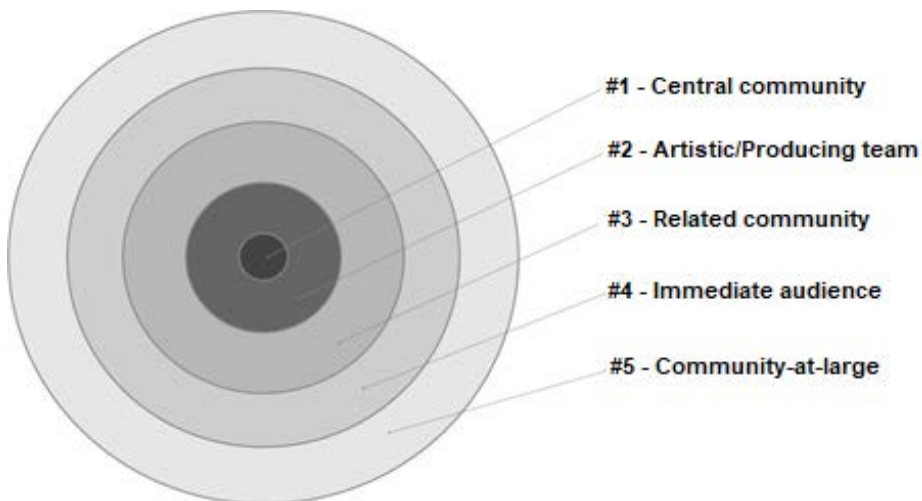
Educational/Community-Engaged Model

Figure 2: Applying an educational/community-engaged model to the selection of material.

When creating art to cultivate change-inspiring conversation, we must decenter, yet not disregard, financial goals. In this model, one assumption must be established: art is an interactive educational experience, regardless of who or where it is performed. From this positioning, we can use Howard Sherman's education model (Strauss et al., 2017). Since the people who intimately engage in the world of the show will have a more significant opportunity to be affected by the material, the central community (also-known-as 'cast') must be centered.

This model is more challenging to achieve in many ways as you must maintain equilibrium between the artistic/production teams, the broader community, and the central community. Since this model's goal is not just to entertain but to engage, you may encounter tensions as the material your central community and/or artistic/production team want to explore may be seen as polarizing or "inappropriate" by the frequently overly-vocal community-at-large. Increased budget cuts to arts education add a second complicating factor, as you need community support for financial viability. Therefore, as educators and theatre-makers, we are frequently put in a position where we must choose "safer" material than our central community wants or would benefit most. Over time, with vigilant messaging and demonstration that our mission is to engage the community in educational

opportunities, it is possible to achieve this model.

Step Three: Solidifying Intent and Implementation

You can now begin identifying potential titles by combining information from parts one and two. Once you have narrowed your search to two or three shows, use the following questions to determine which has the potential to make the most impact within your community:

The Why
- Why are you selecting this show?
- Why must it be done at this moment?
- Why should your organization/program tell this story (and why are you the one to lead this effort)?

The How
Often, we try to engage our audience in too many different ways. Instead, consider one specific way your piece will interact with your audience.
- **Invite** specific communities who may or may not generally attend your shows.
- **Entertain** by celebrating and bringing joy to your community.
- **Connect** communities who traditionally may not often interact.
- **Challenge** community members to engage in discourse that lends to transformative.

Implementation

The final step is to devise your community-engagement strategy. Some considerations:

1. How will you [invite/entertain/connect/challenge] and engage your audiences?
2. What partnerships can you establish? How are they aligned with the work, and how will they contribute to the engagement process, both internally and externally?
3. What opportunities will you create internally for engagement outside the standard rehearsal structure?
4. In what ways will your audience be able to interact with the world of the show? Will there be lobby displays or activations,

pre or post-show talks, digital resources, etc.?

Step Four: Ethical Considerations

The final step is to check for any overlooked ethical concerns.

1. In the show-selection process, it must be acknowledged and remembered that all Golden Age Musicals were written before the conclusion of the civil rights, gender rights, and LGBTQIA+ rights movements and, therefore, inherently have dated and problematic material. You may still be able to do work from this era; however, additional scrutiny is required.
2. Race/Ethnicity/Gender/Ability/Orientation are not a role you can play or costume you can put on. Therefore, if a character's identity includes any of these, it must be played by someone with the same identity. Consider whether you have the correct population to achieve these casting requirements without tokenization.

Rising Tensions within the Framework

Interest in the framework grew, and in 2016, I opened my consulting company, RE:THEATRE, to help more organizations implement this work. Initially, when clients would ask how equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) fit into the framework, I would focus on the importance of representation. Slowly these questions morphed into frustration and desperation, reaching its peak in 2020. Regardless of demographic or location, nearly all my clients expressed that they understood the need for EDI; however, their community, especially rural communities, did not have the same diversity to meet the standards established mainly by those in metropolitan areas.

The disconnect between artistic leaders and educators in metropolitan vs. non-metropolitan areas has only escalated. As I worked with educators in rural communities while living in New York and Seattle, I identified a lack of practical application of EDI within the framework; however, I could not pinpoint the exact issue. My frustration only grew as I began feeling trapped by the rising tension around EDI from all sides.

Frankly, I became burnt out. Deciding to make a career change, I entered the Master's in Educational Theatre in Colleges and

Community at NYU in the Summer of 2021, intending to change career paths away from consulting towards dramaturgy. This intention was further solidified a few weeks before classes began when my hometown showed up in a *New York Times* article, "A "Community For All"? Not So Fast, This Wisconsin County Says." (Epstein, 2021), for the community outcry over essentially an innocuous EDI statement. If the place Introspect Arts thrived for years, where I developed the community-engaged practice I was teaching across the country, had changed this drastically, I felt at a loss.

When selecting topics for our Methods and Materials of Research course, I conducted a case study surrounding this article, hoping it could give me some sociological insight into the perceived drastic change in my community. I did not realize that this case study would turn into much more than my Master's Capstone; it would illuminate significant gaps in the literature regarding the implementation of EDI in rural communities and insight into the missing piece of the framework.

OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDY

In 2020, the Marathon County Board of Supervisors tasked the Diversity Affairs Commission (DAC) to address rising racism, mainly directed at the Hmong community. The DAC created "The Community For All" (CFA) resolution, which broadly defined diversity, stated that equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) were necessary for a healthy community, and recognized that systemic inequities prevent this. The county board meetings turned into a toxic proxy war for political ideologies and grammar lessons focused on EDI and critical race theory (CRT), so much so that *The New York Times* covered the CFA in May 2021 (Epstein, 2021).

This aesthetic intersubjective, ethnographic case study aimed to investigate the evolving polarization in small communities across the country and its impact on embracing equity, inclusion, and diversity through analysis of the Marathon County "A Community For All" resolution. Specifically, to what extent did tension around the words "equity," "inclusion," and "diversity" prevent the passing of Marathon County's "A Community For All" resolution? The following questions additionally guided the research:

- To what extent did national and state politics influence the

outcome of the county-based resolution?

- To what extent have concerns around the issues of equity, inclusion, and diversity increased over the years, and can we discern their origins?
- To what extent have community members seen Marathon County change, specifically over the last 33 years?

History & Context

Wisconsin has always been at the forefront of political movements. It is the birthplace of the Progressive Party,[3] a pioneer in workers' rights, and was the first state in the US to ratify women's suffrage in 1919. It is also the home of Senator Joe McCarthy[4] and the Tea Party movement's rise with Governor Scott Walker's election.[5] In many ways, Wisconsin has been the testing ground for national political and social trends, making it a critical bellwether state politically in the US.

There are eight key bellwether counties within the state, one being Marathon County, where I was raised. The largest county by land and 10th in population density (Wisconsin Demographics by Cubit, n.d.), it was initially settled by German protestants and Polish Catholics. Then in the 1980s, it became home to Laoation refugees from the Vietnam War. Today, the county seat of Wausau is home to the highest Hmong community per capita (12%) of any city in the country (Wausau Area Hmong Mutual Association, n.d.).

---

[3] The Progressive Party was a US political party formed in Wisconsin in 1934 and lasting for 12 years. In it's time, it "served as one of the most important voices of radical farmer-labor sentiment in the nation" (McCoy, 1951, p. 70).

[4] Senator Joe McCarthy infamously served as chairman of the Government Operations Committee and its Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the US Senate and is widely associated with blacklisting in the 1950s, dedicated to rooting out suspected Communists and homosexuals in the US (Herman, 1999). This movement is known today as McCarthyism, a period allegorized in the witch-hunts of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible.*

[5] Scott Walker served as governor of Wisconsin from 2011-2019, during which time he faced controversy for (among other things) limiting the collective bargaining rights of public employees and subsequently establishing Wisconsin as a right-to-work state, prohibiting union security agreements which require employees who are not members of a union (but benefit from the union) to contribute to the cost of union representation. These actions were inflammatory given the strong history of labor unions in the state (Cramer, 2016).
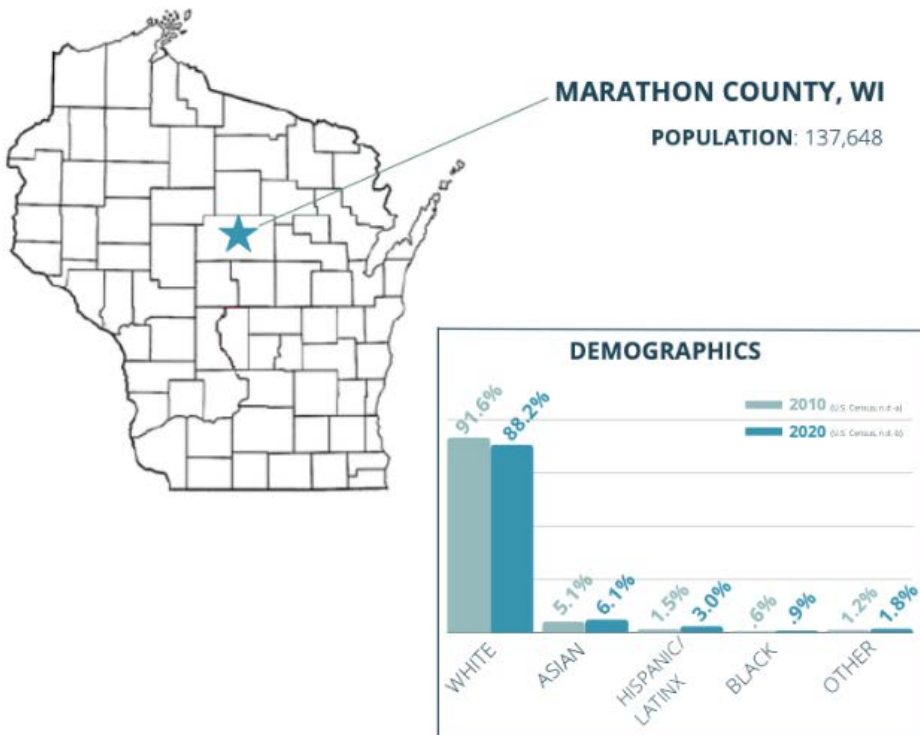
Figure 3: Marathon County, Wisconsin population and demographics

A Community For All Resolution

Due to a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes fueled by the onset of COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd, the Marathon County Board of Supervisors appointed the Diversity Affairs Commission (DAC) to craft a resolution affirming their commitment to creating a safe, healthy, inclusive community. The resolution defined what the board classified as diversity and recognized that inclusion was essential for a healthy community, but systemic inequalities prevent this from happening.

Once the DAC's draft of the "Community For All" resolution was made public, community backlash exploded. Opponents and proponents engaged in an ideological war over the merits of "equity," "diversity," and "inclusion," which would eventually make its way to *The New York Times (*Epstein, 2021).

Methods

To interrogate the study, the following are some of the methods that were used:

- More than 100 individual comments taken from county board meetings, social media posts, talk radio commentary, and news reports were transcribed and coded to meet criteria informed by the study's central question.
- Interviews with four local leaders (two proponents and two opponents) directly involved and two focus groups with community members passively engaged in the conversation.

Findings

Emergent data suggests the fractal nature of the tensions surrounding "equity," "diversity," and "inclusion" fueled by the national political climate was the critical factor in the failure of the CFA. Marathon County's experience navigating issues of EDI both mirrored and diverged from the national conversation. Rather than use language to specifically address the anti-Asian hate happening within the community, the DAC opted for broad language most often associated with Black Lives Matter and other national talking points. Additionally, it rested on platitudes rather than providing concrete, actionable solutions. By failing to address hyper-localized concerns, an opportunity for the community to engage in meaningful, transformative dialogue was lost in the noise of national rhetoric in two key ways.

(Anti-) Critical Race Theory and Inclusion

The most frequently debated topic was the word "equity" and its association with critical race theory (CRT). While there are many factions and interpretations, the core tenants of CRT are:

- Racism is an integral part of the social fabric and, as a result, is challenging to eradicate through targeted policy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8).
- Racism creates a coalition of economic benefits between the white elite and the white working class, allowing the rich to maintain the status quo while ensuring the working class priority to jobs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8).
- The biological differences used to codify race and ethnicity have little bearing on the societal factors often used to define race; therefore, race is a social construct (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2012, p. 9).

Brought to prominence by Christopher Rufo, Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, Anti-CRT is central to the ideology of the modern Republican Party in the US. While Rufo links the Marxist theory of class conflict to the theory of systemic racism (Rufo, 2021, para. 5), he identifies the use of the word 'equity' rather than 'equality' as the greatest threat. He argues that equality, the basis of the American Constitution, ensures equal protection under the law, but equity is the guarantee of equal outcomes (Rufo, 2021, para. 12). Capitalism cannot function in an equity-based society; therefore, CRT undermines America's economic and belief systems (Rufo, 2021, para. 11)

Opponents of the CFA frequently pointed to the use of the word equity and the lack of conservative voices included in the DAC, which was overwhelmingly, if not entirely, liberal. To address this issue, the County Board of Supervisors created a work session that included those who disagreed with the resolution's language. The work session proposed a new version of the draft that, among other things, replaced the word equity with equality. Rather than engage in dialogue, the DAC swiftly dismissed the proposed resolution entirely.

As one county supervisor astutely pointed out before voting against the resolution, the task was to craft a statement entitled "Community For All" therefore, all voices within a community must be included. In 2020, 58% of Marathon County residents voted for Donald Trump. The complete exclusion of any conservative thought or considerations when drafting the CFA only intensified tension. It fueled fears that a nefarious, woke, liberal takeover of the county was happening and would result in the silencing of any who held different beliefs.

Diversity

While the CFA contained a broad, intersectional definition of diversity, religion was initially omitted. On a national scale, the acknowledgment of religious diversity among different factions of Christianity may not seem significant; however, on a local level, this may still be crucial. Less than 50 years ago, Marathon county was deeply divided ideologically, socially, and geographically by religious affiliation. Throughout the data, community members drew attention to the county's ability to move past these fractures as proof that this

resolution was not needed; however, the absence of religion in the definition was discriminatory. Because the DCA contained politicized terminology, opponents saw this as a direct attack and stoked fears of a more significant culture shift.

A Vocabulary of Fear

Throughout the research, fear constantly emerged with a hyper-politicized vocabulary where the words 'equity,' 'diversity,' and 'inclusion' were sharpened into weapons used to fight an ideological proxy war. Rather than working together to address issues within the community, both sides turned against each other, favoring broad fear over community dialogue. Ultimately, the only option, I believe, is to temporarily provide a place for this fear to be frozen in time, so it can be disarmed to reveal the crux. As theatre-makers and educators, we are given the gift of freezing time and creating art that provides space for the audience to engage in meaningful community conversations. We must only discover how to wield this power.

COMMUNITY-FRAMED DEFINITIONS OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

When revisiting the framework, it is clear that while space was made for identifying who lived in the community, there needed to be a process for identifying how micro-communities interactions within our community inform how equity, diversity, and inclusion look. In a less politicized world, a causal understanding may have been acceptable. However, our praxis today requires us to more diligently understand the complexities of the multitudes of identities within our community. Therefore, the first step of the framework must prompt the user to go beyond just assessing needs and towards teasing out local complexities to understand how equity, diversity, and inclusion differ from that of national standards utilizing the following questions:

1. What micro-communities make up your community at large?
2. How does this make your community uniquely diverse?
3. Because of this, what disparities and tensions exist in your community?
4. How do these mirror national issues?

    5.   How do they differ, and why?

Once we have spent time interrogating these questions, we have the data to accurately define what equity, diversity, and inclusion mean within our community.

IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY CONSCIOUSNESS

When directly addressing an issue within our community, we must understand the epistemologies of the micro-communities represented within our work. In the book, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness and the rise of Scott Walker* (Cramer, 2016), Dr. Katherine Cramer distills political polarization in rural, non-metropolitan communities epistemologically through Rural Consciousness.

> **Rural Consciousness** – a perspective established through the lens of place and class, specific to distributive injustice in rural communities. It is rooted in a belief that policymakers, state, and national governments do not represent rural communities, that rural communities do not receive an equal share of resources, and that their values and lifestyle are disrespected by those in urban areas. (Cramer, 2016, pp. 11-12)

As educators, theatre-makers, and even policymakers, attempting to cultivate spaces for transformative dialogue, I posit an even further distillation. As demonstrated in the case study, relying on platitudes rarely yields results. As artists attempting to use our work as a vehicle for change, we must understand the epistemology behind the various viewpoints within our community and how they interact with each other to create a space for productive discourse.

> **Community Consciousness** – a perspective established through the lens of identity in relationship to place and specific to distributive injustice (perceived or factual). It is rooted in a belief that local, state, and/or national policymakers do not represent their community, that locally, their community does not receive an equal share of resources or representation, and that their values and lifestyle are disrespected nationally and locally, especially by those perceived to be in power.

This allows us to more objectively enter into the material selection process and crafting community engagement tactics. In particular, it allows us to navigate the required equilibriums discussed in step two of the original framework so that artist(s) and communities can support and serve each other symbiotically.

FUTURE STEPS

The impact political polarization will have on our education system and sociological structures on a local level have yet to be seen. This community engagement framework remains nebulous as we enter this uncharted territory, and as such, I leave the reader with three key questions to ruminate on throughout that journey.

1. Many opponents of the Community For All resolution (CFA), and conservatives nationally, frequently stated they felt marginalized based on their Christian faith. One could easily dismiss this; however, in 2010, 61% of Americans belonged to a religious congregation, compared to just 47% in 2020 (Jones, 2021).
   a. How will this perceived marginalization of Christians impact society and inform our understanding of diversity?
2. With the rise of tensions at school boards mirroring those of the CFA, how do teacher training programs prepare educators to address EDI in classrooms that respond to and reflect communities in non-metropolitan areas? Perhaps one way to do this is to interrogate current pedagogical frameworks and explore how EDI approaches could benefit from considering a Rural Consciousness framework.
3. How do we include various perspectives when discussing potential EDI solutions yet not disregard the core principles of these tenants? This is the most perplexing of all.

Today, local news makes national headlines, and we look to national dialogues to address local concerns. More than ever, we need spaces to make meaning of the mass amount of information rather than tailspin further apart. Theatre provides an excellent vehicle for

communities to have these critical conversations in a way that is (ideally) more productive and (hopefully) more engaging than the county and school board meetings, where they are often relegated. To do this, we must meet the moment and make art that matters. We can only do this by leaning into the uncomfortable, centering our community, identifying a clear goal, and building an intentional framework that can cultivate transformative conversations.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Kujawa, L. (2022). Fostering creativity and community in politically polarized environments: A reintegration of community-engaged practices to develop community-framed definitions of equity, diversity, and inclusion. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (2), pp. 62-79.

REFERENCES

Cramer, K. J. (2016). *The politics of resentment: Rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*. University of Chicago Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). Second edition: An introduction. *Critical race theory*, second edition. NYU Press.

Epstein, R. J. (2021, May 18). A 'community for all'? Not so fast, this Wisconsin county says. *The New York Times*.

Herman, A. (1999). *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the life and legacy of America's most hated senator*. Free Press.

Jones, J. M. (2021, March 29). US church membership falls below majority for first time. Gallup poll. Retrieved December 13, 2021.

McCoy, D. R. (1951). The formation of the Wisconsin Progressive Party in 1934. *The Historian, 14* (1), pp. 70-90, DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-6563.1951.tb00127.x

Rufo, C. F. (2021, March 15). Critical race theory: What it is and how to fight it. Imprimis, Hillsdale College.

Strauss, V., Idle, E., Prez, J. d., & Maraniss, S. (2017, December 7). Analysis: The school play is about WHAT!? Controversy on stage and why it matters. *The Washington Post.*

Wausau Area Hmong Mutual Association. (n.d.). Frequently asked questions. Wausau Area Hmong Mutual Association.

Wisconsin Demographics by Cubit. (n.d.). [Wisconsin counties by population](#). Wisconsin Demographics by Cubit.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Lindsay Kujawa is a researcher and creator passionate about creating artistic opportunities that cultivate change-inspiring dialogue. For the past decade, Lindsay has worked in non-metropolitan areas supporting schools and community arts groups to navigate the intersections of show selection, community needs, and student-centered practice. Seeing a need for equitable access to professional development, in 2016, she began creating digital opportunities that challenge theatre-makers to re:imagine the intention and impact of theatre through her consulting company, RE:THEATRE. Lindsay is frequently a guest artist and facilitator at national and local conferences, notably the AATE, EdTA, and International Thespian Festival.

"Yet through such connection…"

Building Anti-Racist and Culturally Responsive Drama Programs in Rural Communities

RYAN HOWLAND

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

With the rise of white supremacist ideologies in the United States in recent years, the need for more place-based anti-racist teaching practices has become increasingly apparent, especially in rural areas where resentment towards 'liberal,' urbanized society is often embedded within the identity of rural folks. Educational theatre practices can help students in these places practice empathy and learn about the experiences of others outside of their own bubble of understanding. How can theatre classrooms, specifically in culturally hegemonically white, rural communities, teach in more intentionally anti-racist and culturally inclusive ways? In this article, the author outlines the process of creating a verbatim documentary theatre script, or ethnodrama, entitled Yet through such connection… *based on interviews with teachers, parents, former students, community*

members, and artists who were or are currently involved in high school theatre programs in rural Vermont that seeks to answer this question. Conversations with the community following the creation of the piece highlight the need to release the internalized shame some folks have living in a homogenous community, recognize student and community experiences, and create place-based, student story led performance opportunities that can open the door to anti-racist and inclusive dialogues.

BACKGROUND: RETURNING HOME

I grew up in rural, northern Vermont, in an area called the Northeast Kingdom. Usually the first images that are conjured when I mention Vermont are of a progressive utopia filled with Bernie-bro democratic socialists, Ben & Jerry's, and idyllic agricultural communities. While those things definitely exist, those images do not always line up with my own experiences growing up in a primarily working class, almost entirely white, rural community. Where I'm from is entrenched in ideals and ways of life that are noticeably different from what a more mainstream version of the U.S. believes is the norm. For instance, in my hometown the first day of deer hunting season is a good reason for an excused absence from school, it's not surprising to find hunting rifles and handguns in almost every home, there are more cows and covered bridges than people, and when civil unions for same sex couples was passed in Vermont in 2000, folks put up "Take Back Vermont" signs on the sides of farmhouses, barns, and tractors to protest it. I was in the fourth grade at that time, and deeply closeted.

Growing up in the Northeast Kingdom was an insular experience. Growing up as a queer kid in the Northeast Kingdom was especially isolating. There were not a lot of opportunities to learn about cultures or experiences outside of the hegemonic culture of the community. I experienced examples of blatant racism, xenophobia, and homophobia from family members, friends, teachers, and other members of the community daily in the form of slurs, jokes, and wildly offensive ideologies being stated as fact. These ideologies were considered the norm in this community, and were never questioned.

Rural Consciousness

At the same time, people who live in areas like the Northeast Kingdom know the perceptions that folks from outside of those communities (most of the time well-meaning, well-educated, and rich, white Democrats) have of them: ignorant, hicks, rednecks. To this day a lot of the folks I grew up with and around hold deep resentments towards a more urbanized and 'liberal' society, which they view as elitist and not caring of the issues that are important to their community. Wuthnow (2018) writes that these same factors have contributed to a hollowing-out of these communities which at one time saw themselves as the hard-working, moral backbone of this country, and that this has led to a feeling of being "forgotten" in mainstream society. Cramer (2016) in her book *The Politics of Resentment* refers to this feeling as an identity in itself that she calls rural consciousness. She goes on to describe rural consciousness as:

> an identity as a rural person that includes much more than an attachment to place. It includes a sense that decision makers routinely ignore rural places and fail to give rural communities their fair share of resources, as well as a sense that rural folks are fundamentally different from urbanites in terms of lifestyles, values, and work ethic. Rural consciousness signals an identification with rural people and rural places and denotes a multifaceted resentment against cities (pp. 5-6).

It is this embedded identity of resentment in rural communities that causes folks in these areas to alienate and 'other' the rest of suburban and urbanized society, making hate, racism, and prejudice more accepted as the norm in these areas.

Rural consciousness also has its roots in racism. Silva (2019), in her ethnography *We're Still Here: Pain and Politics in the Heart of America* explains that workers unions in mid-twentieth century industrial America won protections for their workers by purposefully discriminating and excluding Black and Latino workers (p. 32). When an attempt to correct some of these discriminations came in the form of Democrat-led policies such as the New Deal Order, working-class white workers "felt that the party was protecting new groups at the expense of their constituents who built it" (Silva, 2019, p. 32). These workers saw BIPOC folks in their community earning rights they

"hadn't worked for," and saw the American government as protecting the interests of people who were "less deserving." Silva (2019) goes on to explain that "this resentment sparked a reimagining of society's fault lines: the 'real Americans' pitted against undeserving immigrants, racial minorities, and flag-burning, politically correct liberals" (p. 32). This attitude has been passed through generations of rural folks, and continues to contribute to the rural and urban divide in today's politics with rural communities not being able to keep up with modern economies and growing rates of diversity in their communities due to immigration (Brown et al., 2021, p. 374).

Anti-Racism and Progressive Politicking in a Rural Community

So how can anti-racist practices disrupt rural consciousness and resentment? In his book *How to Be an Antiracist*, Kendi (2019) writes that "the opposite of 'racist' isn't 'not racist.' It is 'antiracist'" (p. 12). He goes on to say that an antiracist lens does not subscribe to a racial hierarchy and does not seek out problems among groups of people, but rather in systems of power and policies that uphold racist ideas. This lens suggests moving away from a neoliberal frame of viewing racism on an individual level, but rather viewing individualized outbursts of racist rage as a symptom of racist socio-economic decision making (Bouvier & Machin, 2021, p. 311).

This idea of collectively dismantling racism and systems of oppression on a power and policy level sounds like something rural folks could get behind, but in practice it does not always translate. On social media, studies have shown that heated discussions of racism and "call out culture" on platforms like Twitter further the blame of racism on individuals, making racism an issue of "flawed character" and generalize those lacking in the cultural capital, stoking polarization (Bouvier & Machin, 2021, pp. 316-317). In addition, as Baldwin (2007) writes, anti-racist work in hegemonically white, rural areas has often been seen as a "no-go" because it is often seen as not necessary or because there aren't enough BIPOC people in the community to help do it, so inaction becomes the status quo. Indeed, I even felt trepidation as a white person to undertake a project with these themes, but as Baldwin (2007) highlights, it is a responsibility of white practitioners to employ anti-racist practices into their teaching and to do this work within our own communities. This communal approach aligns with what Hines (2021) argues, which is that in order for anti-

racism to work in rural towns, it cannot be a "one size fits all" approach.

Indeed, it is important to note that rural America is not a monolith. According to Junod, Salerno, and Scally (2020), there is a growing diverse population in rural communities, as more BIPOC folks migrate into rural areas of the country. We have also seen the rise of progressive organization and mobilization in these areas, such as the work of George Goehl and the People's Action, an organization that does deep canvassing campaigns in rural areas to build bridges between those seeking progressive policies and rural, typically conservative, voters (Van Ness, 2020). In a New York Times op-ed, Goehl (2019) writes that the most common thing he hears in his discussions with rural folks over issues of poverty and racism is "'Nobody ever asked me what I think.'" This sentiment not only illustrates rural consciousness, but as Goehl (2019) warns, in many areas, that gap is being filled by white supremacist ideologies. What I want to know is, how can my own work as a theatre teacher, and the work of my colleagues in educational theatre, advance anti-racist efforts in these communities?

Educational Theatre in Rural Communities

One example we might look at is in the field of applied theatre. Kontolefa and Cannon (2020) describe a forum theatre workshop they designed and facilitated in communities in rural Wyoming entitled *Don't Poke the Bear*. The performance centered around a white woman in a fictional rural town coming up against racial microaggressions from her community members towards her friend, a queer single mother and member of the Crow tribe, who has just moved to town. Kontolefa and Cannon (2020) explain that the use of forum theatre allowed enough aesthetic distance for participants to be able to identify with the characters in the piece, but also talk about issues of discrimination, power, and privilege without the defensiveness that sometimes arises when talking with white folks about race. Teaching with theatre can be a radical act, and can help build empathy in students by allowing them to explore stories and be confronted with experiences that are different from their own (Liao, 2018). At the same time, Kontolefa and Cannon's (2020) approach is place-based by drawing from actual stories of hate and discrimination from the community, and by setting the play realistically in the community they were working in. Rearden and Bertling (2019) write that place-based educational practices (PBE), like

Don't Poke the Bear, allow for educators to be responsive to the needs of students' lived experiences and "provide an opportunity for critical reflection" (p. 50) that is so needed for anti-racist work to be done in rural areas.

Despite these efforts, a limited access to arts education persists, especially in rural communities (Donovan & Brown, 2015). While it was small and subsisted on minimal funding, my high school theatre program created a space where I was allowed to practice empathy and develop an understanding for the rest of the world. With the challenges these programs face, how can rural educators make anti-racism and inclusivity more intentional in their small town theatre classrooms? Do these ideas even matter to the stakeholders involved in these programs?

METHODOLOGY

In the summer of 2021 I decided to embark on an arts-based study that would help answer some of these questions. I followed the methodological framework of ethnodramatist and artist-researcher Joe Salvatore and his work in the Verbatim Performance Lab at NYU. My rationale for using ethnodrama and verbatim interview theatre was for audiences to hear directly from the voices of this community that has long felt forgotten and overlooked in the mainstream discourse, and to push through the resentment of rural consciousness by providing participants with a space to tell their stories and get across the needs of their community in their own words. Saldaña (2005) writes in *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre:* "the artistic project is not only aesthetic, it possesses 'emancipatory potential' for motivating social change within participants and audiences. Ethnotheatre is a manifesto that exposes oppression and challenges the existing social order through an artistic rendering of moral and political discourse" (p. 3). My intention with this project was to unleash this emancipatory potential for rural communities by hearing directly from their voices and experiences. In addition, I set out to use a professionally directed and filmed performance of the ethnodrama as a portable, place-based educational tool that I am able to bring back to these rural Vermont communities and use to facilitate a dialogue with teachers, students, parents, administrators, and community artists. Salvatore (2020) writes that his ethnodramas serve as more of a "meditation on my findings

than as an authoritative statement or a positivist truth" (p. 1045). By bringing the piece back to those communities, those folks then have the opportunity to collectively contribute to this meditation to form meaning and collectively generate answers to these questions.

Interview and Scripting Process

I began this inquiry with two guiding questions: *Based on the experiences of teachers, parents, former students, and community members, what are the successes and challenges of high school theatre programs in rural, working class Vermont?* and *In what ways do these educators and advocates report that their programs work to teach social empathy and combat white supremacist ideologies within their communities?* In this methodology, the research questions serve to guide every aspect of the process from the creation of interview prompts to the selection and scripting of material. In this way, the researcher can allow for nuanced answers to those questions to emerge. Salvatore (2020) writes that "the ethnodramatist must resist the urge to force the data to say something that they want it to say because this can lead to a myopic view of the subject being explored" (p.1050). This allowing of a myriad of perspectives and responses guided every aspect of my process in creating this work.

I interviewed 24 drama teachers, parents, former students, and community artists from rural Vermont both over Zoom and in person using a structured interview protocol. I interviewed each participant only once. Below is the interview protocol I curated for this project:

1) How would you describe your community?
2) Describe the curriculum of your theatre program.
3) Describe a moment of success you've experienced in your theatre program.
4) Describe a moment of challenge in your theatre program.
5) Describe an experience of racism or xenophobia that you have witnessed in your community.
6) Describe a time when your theatre program worked against the norms of your community.
7) Describe your understanding of what it means to be anti-racist.
8) Describe aspects of your theatre program that you would call anti-racist.
9) What would you need in order to make your program more anti-

racist?

10) Is there anything else we haven't talked about that you think I should know?

11) Do you have any questions for me?

These open-ended prompts were chosen for this project to provide an engaging and compelling dialogue with the participant, encourage the participant to tell specific stories related to their experiences, and to encourage responses that answered my research questions. I did not stray from this structured protocol. According to Salvatore (2020), "a structured protocol also allows for the researcher to focus on listening and observing rather than being distracted by the added process of assessing where to guide the interview next" (p. 1050). In order to allow the participant to answer each prompt genuinely and as they saw fit, and in order to maintain uninterrupted transcripts of each participant's response, I informed participants at the top of the interview that I would ask them a question and sit back to allow them to respond. Finally, once an interview was completed, I took detailed field notes based on my observations of noticeable gestures or movement, what the participant looked like, and their physical surroundings.

I recorded each of the interviews, and selected three 2- to 3-minute sections of each interview to transcribe. I chose these sections based on which best contributed to the answer to my research questions and which stories told by the participants were most dramatically compelling. I then created scored transcripts of these sections. According to Salvatore (2020), a scored transcript indicates where a participant paused or had a break in their speech pattern, and includes all filler words like ums and uhs. In this way, the ethnodrama would not only depict WHAT rural folks had to say, but also HOW they said it. I then coded these scored transcripts based on themes that stood out. Then, as Salvatore (2020) explains, "the script began to emerge as a series of sections directly related to those bins" (p. 1053). As I began structuring the script in this way, the voices of participants that would become characters in the ethnodrama began to come forward by eliminating transcripts that repeated similar ideas and bringing forward ones that illustrated those ideas in dramatically compelling ways (Salvatore, 2020, p. 1053).

Ethical Considerations

Because of the sensitive nature of the material, and the vulnerability required from the performative nature of verbatim documentary theatre, I put much thought into the ethics of creating this piece. The project and the context for which their interview would be used was thoroughly explained to the participants during the recruitment process and throughout the interview. This included explaining what verbatim performance is and the process by which their interview could be worked into the final script. Participants also signed a release form ahead of the interview, and were given multiple "outs" throughout the process, including having the option to not respond to any particular prompt and having the option to end our interview at any time. Participants were also encouraged to choose their own identifier, either their actual name or a pseudonym, and to change the names of specific places, people, or organizations mentioned in the interview (Salvatore, 2020, p. 1048).

Part way through the interviewing phase of the project, it became apparent that some of these ethical considerations did not go far enough. Rural Vermont is small in terms of population, and the community of drama teachers and theatre artists there is even smaller. It became evident that even if participants used a pseudonym, they could still be easily identified based on some of the content of their interviews, or even how their gestures and speech patterns were presented in performance. In order to protect the identities of the participants, I decided to create composite characters that combine multiple participant voices into one speaker based on similar codes, ideas, or stories. Saldaña (2011) writes that "the composite character is a fictional creation that nevertheless represents and speaks the collective realities of its original sources" (p. 17). The composite voices that emerged ended up in the creation of four characters: The Teacher, The Artist, and two student voices based on specific stories that were told in the interviews: The Student in the Locker Room and The Unfortunately Cast Student.

Casting and Performance

These ethical considerations were carried through into aesthetic choices for performance. I cast four actors, all of who were trained or had experience with verbatim performance, to each play one of the

composite characters. In casting actors to portray these composite characters, I purposefully cast actors who did not align with the identities disclosed by the characters in the stories they tell in the script. For instance, in a story told by The Student in the Locker Room they self-identify as a cis-het, white man, but I cast a female-presenting Taiwanese actor to portray him. Salvatore refers to this choice as "casting across identity," and go on to say "its purpose is to heighten an audience's awareness and understanding of the content of a participant's spoken words and to allow an actor to investigate and empathize with the lived experience of another" (Vachon and Salvatore, 2022, p. 6). This method forces audiences to experience a form of cognitive dissonance and question their own biases when listening to stories coming from a book with an unlikely cover, and to find meaning in the difference.

In rehearsal with the actors on these composite characters, I followed Burch's (2019) lead in that we would "not physically represent an individual interviewee but instead create an easily identifiable but unique character profile" (p. 33). I coached actors into creating this character profile by providing them with the field notes I had written of the participants that made up each of their composite characters, and encouraged them to pull gestures, costume possibilities, and ideas for vocal qualities to bring into the performance. The final performances were then a comprehensive mix of those participants' interviews, and representative of their voices without disclosing their identities.

DISCUSSION

The result of this process is an ethnodrama entitled *Yet through such connection…* which you can view for free [here](). In this section I will briefly discuss some of the findings that have emerged from taking this work back to the participants in Vermont and sharing it with them, some excerpts from the script, and some suggestions that have arisen from those conversations towards a more intentionally place-based, anti-racist rural drama pedagogy.

As they watched the performance, I asked participants to consider what pieces made them "lean in," and what made them "lean back." An overwhelming sentiment that was expressed, especially for those who had moved away from the area, was a need to distance themselves from the people they had grown up around, and from rural

consciousness itself. One participant went so far as to say, "I can't go back there." Others recognized that themselves, the folks they grew up with, and their students are products of the environment they are raised in.

> THE TEACHER (4:04)
> And even so I think about um
> an African American student that I had who said to me
> that um
> that black people scare her
> and and I paused and I went
> now I don't know that I'm breaking news to you, but
> I I think you should know that you
> happen to be black.
> And she said, oh yeah yeah I know but
> think about where I grow up
> think about where I am
> I don't know
> people who are black or black culture
> really in
> in a real way
> in a real relationship
> and I that floored me.

In this excerpt we can see that the customs, traditions, norms, and ways of life in a community like those in rural Vermont are a part of an individual's identity and inform the way they see and move through the world, like any cultural background. A lot of those norms are entrenched in whiteness, and for many of the young people in these communities, even for a young Black student, it is the only reality they know. In order to build a culture of anti-racism in rural communities, we must have the humility to meet folks in our shared humanities, and be responsive to their local knowledge.

In rehearsals, the actors talked about feelings of internalized shame that crept in when they performed some of the stories folks told about their students, or about moments of racism they experienced in rural Vermont. This is evident in many excerpts where interviewees' speech patterns break:

THE STUDENT IN THE LOCKER ROOM (5:50)
Um
And
I don't even remember what the hell,
the the the specific thing that he said was, but
we were in the locker room one time, just after gym class and
he just
out of the blue
fired off
some
Um
It was like the I mean
I'm sure you've heard
this
before, but like the um
uh
It was some variation on the
um what can a park bench do that a Black man can't
kind of thing.

THE TEACHER (12:26)
But it's also really tough because
a lot of kids when we raised the Black Lives Matter flag they felt
um
they felt like personally attacked,
you know
they felt
and they felt that they weren't
listened to
and they were told like this is how you have to feel about this,
and if you don't feel this way you're racist
um
and so
it was a difficult process.

The participants expressed that same trepidation about being honest with where their students or where they themselves are in their thinking about race, and about the very real experiences that they've had with race relations in their community. It is a truth to accept,

however, that many folks in rural communities don't have the foundation, the language, or the access to even begin this work. Because of that, participants also spoke about fear of judgment from those outside of their communities. Many of the participants leaned back from this excerpt:

THE UNFORTUNATELY CAST STUDENT (7:58)
I I usually when people are like oh, but people are just ignorant I'm like
no
because saying that they're ignorant is sort of like a shield
to not say that they're racist
and I just
hated that
because I was like no they're being racist
and
I think that people need to know that,
yes, racist is an insult in itself, but
if you're just going to focus about who called you racist rather than what you said
then that's like the conversation is not going to be
Like
advancing at all.

In addition to the fear of judgment from the outside, participants also expressed fear of pushback they would receive from the dominant culture they were teaching in. Indeed, by laying the policy-based issue of systemic racism onto a small community we are opening the door for defensiveness and mistrust by enforcing a neoliberal idea of racism as an individualized issue. The resentment of the rural consciousness becomes activated in these moments. Participants expressed this fear by leaning back from this excerpt:

THE TEACHER (13:41)
It's really tough because,
because we need to do so much to help
these
kids
you know

because they're indoctrinated
from their families
at a young age,
and it is very much along the lines of poverty
um
and sort of
and then it's a lot of the kids who
like school is the enemy,
and so then you
you um
you push up against their beliefs
and then school is even more the enemy
so it's really hard to think like,
how do you win
you know
I mean, how do you win with these kids?

Participants responded here to the perception that teachers are attempting to "force views" on students and their families. For many arts teachers in rural areas, they set the tone for what the arts look like for their students and families, and for the community. Much like Goehl (2019) suggests, what happens when we ask students and their families what they think? One participant, a parent of a former drama student, suggested that drama programs create more ethnodramas or devised pieces with students and members of the community around issues of inequity they face. Projects such as this could open the door to talking about wider systemic issues, and create anti-racist theatre that is maybe not as direct, but is a responsive, place-based model for how to have those conversations. One participant in our conversation referred to this method of teaching as "calling out so folks will listen." I am inclined to think that this student story-led approach is the right direction to move in.

Finally, participants expressed in our conversations that drama teachers in rural areas are in survival mode, and that a big part of making rural drama programs more intentionally anti-racist will include administrative and systemic support in terms of providing training opportunities, funding, better access to material for them to work with, and making art class curriculums a well-funded and integral part of the school day so that they can actually provide a scaffolded, anti-racist,

and place-based curriculum to their students. *Yet through such connection…* is only the beginning of this conversation and work. I specifically chose an arts-based method for this inquiry because performance provides an inherent democratization and portability of data. I encourage you to watch the performance, and to join us in this meditation.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Howland, R. (2022). "Yet through such connection…" Building anti-racist and culturally responsive drama programs in rural communities. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (2), pp. 80-95.

REFERENCES

Baldwin, M. (2007). White anti-racism: Is it really 'no go' in rural areas? *Social Work Education, 15* (1), pp. 18-33.

Brown, T., Mettler, S., Puzzi, S. (2021). When rural and urban become "us" versus "them": How a growing divide is reshaping American politics. *The Forum, 19* (3), pp. 365-393.

Bouvier, G. & Machin, D. (2021). What gets lost in Twitter 'cancel culture' hashtags? Calling out racists reveals some limitations of social justice campaigns. *Discourse & Society. 32* (3), pp. 307-327.

Burch, D. (2019). The ethno-actor: Encompassing the intricacies and challenges of character creation in ethnotheatre. *ArtsPraxis, 5* (1), pp. 24-37.

Cramer, K. J. (2016). *The politics of resentment: Rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*. The University of Chicago Press.

Donovan, L., & Brown, M. (2015). *Leveraging change: Increasing access to arts education in rural areas*. Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

Goehl, G. (2019, October 30). If progressives don't try to win over rural areas, guess who will. *The New York Times*.

Hines, D. (2021, February 12). Why anti-racism doesn't work in rural towns. *Medium*.

Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. Penguin Random House.

Kontolefa, N. & Cannon, G. (2020). Don't poke the bear—A project report. *Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal, 5* (1), pp. 1-12.

Liao, En-Shu Robin. (2018). The forgotten land: (Im)Possibilities of multicultural teacher education in rural settings. *Midwest Quarterly*, *59* (4), pp. 353–371.

Rearden, K. T., & Bertling, J. G. (2019). From sharks to "The Big Ugly": A rural art teacher's transition to place-based education. *The Rural Educator*, *40* (3), pp. 49-61.

Saldaña, J. (Ed.). (2005). *Ethnodrama: An anthology of reality theatre*. Altamira Press.

Saldaña, J. (2011). *Ethnotheatre: Research from page to stage*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Salvatore, J. (2020). Scripting the ethnodrama. In P. Leavy (Ed), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research*. Oxford University Press.

Silva, J. (2019). *We're still here: Pain and politics in the heart of America*. Oxford University Press.

Vachon, W. & Salvatore, J. (2022). Wading the quagmire: Aesthetics and ethics in verbatim theater act 1. *Qualitative Inquiry, 00* (0), pp. 1-10.

Van Ness, J. (Host). (2020, October 27). Is Deep Canvassing the Serum America Needs? with George Goehl [Audio podcast episode]. In *Getting Curious*. Earwolf.

Wuthnow, Robert. (2018). *The left behind: Decline and rage in rural America*. Princeton University Press.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Ryan Howland (he/him) is a doctoral candidate (EdD) in Educational Theatre at New York University with an MA in Theatre Education from Emerson College. Ryan is a classroom teacher, teaching artist, director, performer, and artist-researcher with a basis in devised and verbatim documentary theatre. In 2022, Ryan served on the research team and as an acting coach for *Whatever you are, be a good one: A Portraits US Town Hall*, a project of the Verbatim Performance Lab through the program in Educational Theatre at NYU.