Research-based Theatre

Guest editors/Rédacteurs invités:
GRAHAM W. LEA & GEORGE BELLIVEAU

In this issue/Dans ce numéro:

McGILL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION • REVUE DES SCIENCES DE L'ÉDUCATION DE McGILL Vol 59 N° 1 Winter / Hiver 2025

MJE
RSEM

McGILL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION
REVUE DES SCIENCES DE L'ÉDUCATION DE McGILL

Volume 59 Number 1 Winter 2025
Volume 59 Numéro 1 Hiver 2025

The *McGill Journal of Education* promotes an international, multidisciplinary discussion of issues in the field of educational research, theory, and practice. We are committed to high quality scholarship in both English and French. As an open-access publication, freely available on the web (https://mje.mcgill.ca), the Journal reaches an international audience and encourages scholars and practitioners from around the world to submit manuscripts on relevant educational issues.

La *Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill* favorise les échanges internationaux et pluridisciplinaires sur les sujets relevant de la recherche, de la théorie et de la pratique de l'éducation. Nous demeurons engagés envers un savoir de haute qualité en français et en anglais. Publication libre, accessible sur le Web (à https://mje.mcgill.ca), la Revue joint un lectorat international et invite les chercheurs et les praticiens du monde entier à lui faire parvenir leurs manuscrits traitant d'un sujet relié à l'éducation.

International Standard Serial No./Numéro de série international: online ISSN 1916-0666

McGill Journal of Education / Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill
3700 rue McTavish Street • Montréal (QC) • Canada H3A 1Y2

https://mje.mcgill.ca

The *McGill Journal of Education* acknowledges the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Education, McGill University.

La *Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill* remercie le Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada et le Bureau du doyen de la Faculté des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université McGill de leur soutien financier.

MCGILL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION
REVUE DES SCIENCES DE L'ÉDUCATION DE MCGILL

McGill Journal of Education is a partner member of Érudit.
La revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill est une revue partenaire d'Érudit.
érudit

16-1546

TABLE OF CONTENTS / SOMMAIRE

WINTER 2025 VOL. 59 N°1
HIVER 2025 VOL. 59 N°1

EDITORIAL: POLYPHONY AND LANDSCAPES OF RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE

This special issue brings together seven research articles and five Notes from the Field contributions to showcase the versatility of Research-based Theatre (RbT) as a methodology for engaging in educational research.

In his article, Chris Summers examines a key tension in RbT research: navigating the balance between the artistic demands of the art form and the academic demands of scholarly work. By integrating theatre and academic research, RbT generates unique spaces to explore complex questions and facilitate knowledge exchange across diverse contexts. The contributions within this special issue highlight the broad scope of RbT practices and provide concrete examples for how they are enacted across academic disciplines. Together, these works form a collective whole that illustrates two key concepts that have shaped RbT: polyphony (Bakhtin, 1984) and landscapes (Lea & Belliveau, 2023).

POLYPHONY IN RBT

Polyphony is well suited to considering RbT projects. Emerging from the work of Bakhtin (1984), polyphony encompasses "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (p. 6) that are characterized by "independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy" (p. 63). A single RbT production may appear to merge voices of many contributors including participants, researchers, playwrights, designers, actors, and of course audiences. However, the overall creation of an RbT project remains polyphonic with many distinct voices contributing to the whole.

This polyphonic perspective informed the development of *Contact!Unload: Military Veterans, Trauma, and Research-based Theatre* (Belliveau & Lea, 2020) which provides an overview of a multi-year project using RbT to explore experiences of military veterans living with stress injuries as they transition back to civilian life. By bringing the playscript into conversation with chapters from authors representing all aspects of the production we

DOI: https://doi.org/110.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10507

(Graham and George, as co-editors) sought to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the project than we could have created on our own.

This special issue continues this polyphonic approach through articles by authors including Metz, Ganesh, and Hobbs; Kneifel, Rizzotti, and Mosher; and Shigematsu, Gōksel, Piazzoli, Belliveau, and Naud. These contributions bring together individualized voices from diverse authors including artistic creators, which provides a polyphonic understanding of the respective projects.

The concept of polyphony extends beyond individual projects to RbT as a whole. As this special issue illustrates, RbT is not defined by a single approach. Rather, each project contributes to a growing polyphony of RbT, with its own unique ways of integrating theatre and academic research. For example, some projects discussed in this special issue incorporate theatre as part of data generation (e.g., Kneifel, Rizzotti, and Mosher; Shigematsu, Gōksel, Piazzoli, Belliveau, and Naud). Others position theatre as an analytic approach, using the tools of the actor and director to provide insights into the complexities of their work (e.g., Metz, Ganesh, and Hobbs). Still others draw on RbT as an approach to sharing research results and stimulate conversations (e.g., Vanover; Wales and Sallis; and Medeiros, Stannard, and Salvatore). These approaches are not necessarily discrete; rather, RbT creates spaces for incorporating theatre throughout the research process. The diversity of approaches in this special issue serves as a contribution to the polyphony of work on RbT, providing new insights for the potential and possibilities for the incorporation of theatre and research.

LANDSCAPES OF RBT

An extension of the polyphonic nature of RbT is that it is and should remain unfinalizable (Bakhtin, 1984; Fenske, 2004). There is no single way to engage in the methodology and it is a methodology that is constantly in evolution. This posed challenges as we began to consider ways of sharing our work and the works of others: How do we avoid ossifying RbT in the approaches of past projects? To address this question, we conceptualize the possibilities of RbT as landscapes illuminated by guideposts created through the sharing of individual projects. These guideposts are not prescriptive, mapping out a singular path of navigation. Rather they seek to a) illuminate key contours of RbT landscapes that practitioners might consider and b) shed light on how others have forged paths through

similar terrain. In doing so, these guideposts seek not to dictate but inspire (Lea & Belliveau, 2023).

For example, Metz, Ganesh, and Hobbs provide guideposts to illuminate possibilities and pitfalls for evaluating RbT projects, while Cook explores the terrain of trans-informed RbT strategies that may provide insight for future projects. As a ghost light on an empty stage leaves much in shadow, no single project can illuminate an entire landscape of RbT. Thus, the continued exchange of diverse approaches remains essential to expanding the landscapes of possibilities of RbT, a goal to which this special issue provides an important contribution.

OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Highlighting the importance of the playwright in many RbT projects, Christina Cook begins this special issue with her reflections on writing her autoethnographic work-in-progress epistolary play *Postcards to My Younger Transexual Self, Ages 0-119*. Excerpts from the script are shared and used to propose a trans-informed RbT process. Three possible strategies are suggested to support playwrights seeking to centre trans ways of knowing: trans time travel, slow performance, and seeking trans joy/rage.

Chris Summers reflects on his play *Being Frank*, a play commissioned by Deaken University's Centre for Health through Action on Social Exclusion to examine experiences of trans and gender-diverse people. A key feature of the project was an advisory group of trans and gender-diverse people who provided input throughout the play's development. Summers discusses how he navigated several challenges, including accounting for the breadth of the experiences within the advisory group, creating a broadly positive and educational representation of trans people and resisting common narrative tropes. He also reflects on the ethics of representation – both in terms of the narratives shared and the people sharing them.

In their article, Prue Wales and Richard Sallis share case studies of two RbT plays dramatizing narratives of marginalized women. The first, developed by Sallis and a secondary school class shares achievements of Australian women painters whose contributions to the en plein air movement were not well recognized. Wales discusses two performance pieces (a theatre script and a film script) that she developed to bring to light the plight of foreign domestic workers in Singapore. Together, the authors reflect on possibilities of engaging in research-informed fictional histories to bring to life stories that may be largely lost to time – stories

with which there is only limited data to draw on, or which raise ethical considerations around potentially identifying participants.

Goldstein, Owis, Salisbury, Reid, and hicks outline the project *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays,* developed from archival research on activism and care that challenged cis-heteronormativity and racism the 1970s and 80s. Accompanying the plays were images and two original songs. Through script excerpts, lyrics, and images, the article demonstrates how the three artforms interwove to provide rich, layered understandings of often-hidden stories of queer and trans Black, Indigenous, and people of colour activism and care in the early LGBT movement.

Seeking to help navigate the complexity of graduate supervisory relationships, the educational resource *Rock the Boat* uses RbT to foster dialogue and enhance perspective-taking. Cox, Smithdeal, and Lee provide a narrative of the three-phase development of *Rock the Boat:* from live theatre workshops to a pivot to online workshops, and the development of an online resource. This resource includes four scenes filmed with professional actors and an accompanying facilitator's guide. The authors share key insights from the transition to an online format, including the need to reconsider the aesthetic for a filmed genre and the need to create accompanying online resources to support discussions when a facilitator would not be present.

Seeking to help develop undergraduate health science students' awareness of implicit bias, a team of researchers from Brock University collaborated with a theatre company to develop a participatory theatre experience. Metz, Ganesh, and Hobbs reflexively discuss the resulting performance, *Haunting our Bias*, from their varied perspectives as D/A/R/Tor (director, actor, researcher teacher), project assessment researcher, and curriculum developer. Together they articulate playbuilding as a sub-genre of RbT that seeks to create interactive theatrical forums for engaging with important social issues.

Charles Vanover discusses the ethnodrama *Chicago Butoh* which examines the experience of a first-year teacher from an urban school in the Chicago Public School system. Developed using an Inquiry Theatre approach, the script is created from verbatim interview text. Vanover describes how incorporating professional artists including an actor and director brought new and varied insights to the work. Through script excerpts, performance photographs, and artist interviews, the article highlights how such performances can generate a space for reflection on educational experiences.

The five Notes from the Field contributions included in this special issue provide examples of RbT works in various stages of development. Shigematsu, Göksel, Piazzoli, Belliveau, and Naud collectively reflect on an RbT-inspired retreat that sought to support the development of an RbT production examining the Acadian expulsion in Canada. In a scripted dialogue, Mosher, Rizzotti, and Kneifel examine how an undergraduate devised theatre project became a model for a decentralized and iterative pedagogy. Prendergast and Pauluth-Penner provide an overview of an arts-based study in which secondary school students were led through an analysis of three Canadian plays focused on youth mental health and then built on that analysis to devise and perform their own production expressing their perspectives on youth mental health. Also working with secondary school students, Medeiros, Stannard, and Salvatore provide discussion and video examples from of the development and performance of a verbatim performance reenacting a televised debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Finally, Kreindler discusses her research-based musical satirical performance examining and questioning complexities of Emergency Department overcrowding in Canada.

We hope that you enjoy this special issue and its contributions to the polyphony of RbT. May the pieces inspire new possibilities or shed light on challenges you might encounter in your own projects.

GRAHAM W. LEA AND GEORGE BELLIVEAU

REFERENCES

Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (C. Emerson, Ed. & Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.

Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.). (2020). *Contact!Unload: Military veterans, trauma, and research-based theatre*. UBC Press.

Fenske, M. (2004). The aesthetic of the unfinished: Ethics and performance. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, *24*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/1046293042000239447

Lea, G. W., & Belliveau, G. (2023). A landscape of ethics in research-based theater: Staging lives of family members who have passed. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *29*(2), 343-353. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221098991

ÉDITORIAL : POLYPHONIE ET PAYSAGES DANS LE THÉÂTRE BAŚ SUR LA RECHERCHE

Ce numéro spécial regroupe sept articles de recherche et cinq Notes du terrain afin de mettre en valeur la polyvalence du théâtre basé sur la recherche (RbT Research-based Theatre) comme méthode pour s'engager dans la recherche en éducation.

Dans son article, Chris Summers analyse une tension clé dans la recherche en RbT : comment concilier les exigences artistiques propres à la forme théâtrale avec celles, plus académiques, liées au travail de recherche. En intégrant théâtre et recherche universitaire, le RbT permet de créer des lieux privilégiés pour aborder des sujets complexes et favoriser le partage des connaissances dans des milieux diversifiés. Les contributions de ce numéro spécial soulignent l'étendue des pratiques en RbT et proposent des exemples concrets de leur mise en œuvre à travers différentes disciplines académiques. Ensemble, ces travaux forment un tout collectif illustrant deux concepts clés qui ont façonné le RbT : la polyphonie (Bakhtin, 1984) et les paysages (Lea & Belliveau, 2023).

LA POLYPHONIE DANS LE RBT

La polyphonie est un concept bien adapté à l'analyse des projets de théâtre basé sur la recherche (RbT). Issu des travaux de Bakhtin (1984), le concept de polyphonie renvoie à une « plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses » (p. 6), caractérisées par l'« independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy » (p. 63). Une seule production RbT peut sembler fusionner les voix de nombreux contributeur·rice·s, notamment les participant·e·s, les chercheur·e·s, les dramaturges, les concepteur·rice·s, les acteur·rice·s, ainsi que le public. Toutefois, la création globale d'un projet RbT reste polyphonique, avec de nombreuses voix distinctes qui contribuent à l'ensemble.

Cette perspective polyphonique a guidé le développement de *Contact!Unload : Military Veterans, Trauma, and Research-based Theatre* (Belliveau & Lea, 2020), qui donne un aperçu d'un projet pluriannuel utilisant le RbT pour explorer les expériences d'anciens combattant·e·s

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10508

militaires vivant avec des blessures liées au stress, alors qu'ils réintègrent la vie civile. En mettant le texte de la pièce en dialogue avec des chapitres rédigés par des auteur·e·s représentant tous les aspects de la production, nous (Graham et George, en tant que coéditeurs) avons cherché à offrir une compréhension plus approfondie du projet que nous n'aurions pas pu développer seuls.

Ce numéro spécial poursuit cette approche polyphonique à travers les articles d'auteur·e·s, tels que Metz, Ganesh et Hobbs ; Kneifel, Rizzotti et Mosher ; ainsi que Shigematsu, Gōksel, Piazzoli, Belliveau et Naud. Ces contributions rassemblent des voix individualisées d'auteur·e·s aux profils variés, y compris des créateur·rice·s artistiques, offrant ainsi une compréhension polyphonique des projets respectifs.

Le concept de polyphonie transcende les projets individuels pour s'appliquer au RbT dans son ensemble. Comme le montre ce numéro spécial, le RbT ne se définit pas par une seule approche. Chaque projet contribue plutôt à une polyphonie croissante du RbT, en intégrant de manière unique le théâtre et la recherche académique. Par exemple, certains projets abordés dans ce numéro intègrent le théâtre dans la génération de données (par exemple, Kneifel, Rizzotti et Mosher ; Shigematsu, Gōksel, Piazzoli, Belliveau et Naud). D'autres positionnent le théâtre comme une méthode d'analyse, utilisant les outils de l'acteur·rice et du metteur·e en scène pour mieux comprendre la complexité de leur œuvre (par exemple, Metz, Ganesh et Hobbs). D'autres encore utilisent le RbT comme moyen de diffusion des résultats de recherche ou pour stimuler la conversation (par exemple, Vanover ; Wales et Sallis ; ainsi que Medeiros, Stannard et Salvatore). Ces approches ne sont pas nécessairement discrètes ; le RbT crée plutôt des espaces permettant d'intégrer le théâtre tout au long du processus de recherche. La diversité des démarches présentées dans ce numéro constitue une contribution à la polyphonie des travaux sur le RbT, en offrant de nouvelles perspectives sur les potentiels et les possibilités d'intégration du théâtre et de la recherche.

PAYSAGES DU RBT

Une extension de la nature polyphonique du théâtre basé sur la recherche (RbT) est qu'il est — et doit rester — inachevable (Bakhtin, 1984 ; Fenske, 2004). Il n'existe pas une seule manière de s'engager dans cette méthodologie, qui est en constante évolution. Cela a posé des défis lorsque nous avons commencé à réfléchir à des moyens de partager notre ouvrage et celui des autres : comment éviter de figer le RbT dans les approches des projets passés ? Afin de répondre à cette question, nous conceptualisons

les possibilités du RbT comme des paysages, éclairés par des balises issues du partage de projets individuels. Ces balises ne sont pas prescriptives et ne tracent pas un chemin unique à suivre. Elles visent plutôt à : a) mettre en lumière les contours essentiels des paysages du RbT que les praticien·ne·s pourraient considérer, b) éclairer les voies que d'autres ont tracées à travers des terrains similaires. Ce faisant, ces balises ne cherchent pas à dicter, mais à inspirer (Lea & Belliveau, 2023).

Par exemple, Metz, Ganesh et Hobbs proposent des balises pour éclairer les possibilités et les pièges dans l'évaluation des projets RbT, tandis que Cook explore le terrain des stratégies RbT informées par des perspectives trans, qui pourraient fournir des pistes pour les projets futurs. Tout comme une lumière fantôme sur une scène vide abandonne beaucoup dans l'opacité de l'ombre, aucun projet ne peut à lui seul éclairer l'ensemble du paysage du RbT. Ainsi, l'échange continu d'approches variées reste essentiel afin d'élargir les paysages des possibilités du RbT — un objectif auquel ce numéro spécial contribue de manière significative.

APERÇU DES CONTRIBUTIONS

Mettant en lumière l'importance du rôle du dramaturge dans de nombreux projets de théâtre basé sur la recherche (RbT), Christina Cook ouvre ce numéro spécial avec ses réflexions sur l'écriture de sa pièce autoethnographique épistolaire en cours de création, *Postcards to My Younger Transexual Self, Ages 0–119*. Des extraits du texte sont partagés et servent à proposer un processus de RbT informé par des expériences trans. Trois stratégies possibles sont suggérées afin de soutenir les dramaturges souhaitant centrer des façons trans de connaître le monde : le voyage dans le temps trans, la performance lente, et la quête de la joie/colère trans.

Chris Summers se reflète sur sa pièce *Being Frank*, commissionnée par le «Centre for Health through Action on Social Exclusion» de l'Université Deaken, qui examine les expériences de personnes trans et de genres divers. Un élément clé du projet fut la création d'un groupe consultatif composé de personnes trans et de genres divers, et ce groupe a contribué à toutes les étapes du développement de la pièce. Summers évoque les défis qu'il a dû relever, notamment comment rendre compte de la diversité des expériences au sein du groupe consultatif, créer une représentation globalement positive et pédagogique des personnes trans, et résister aux tropes narratifs habituels. Il réfléchit également aux enjeux éthiques de la représentation — tant en ce qui concerne les récits partagés que les personnes qui les partagent.

Dans leur article, Prue Wales et Richard Sallis partagent des études de cas de deux pièces de théâtre RbT mettant en scène des récits de femmes marginalisées. La première, développée par Sallis avec une classe du secondaire, met en lumière les réalisations de peintres australiennes dont les contributions au mouvement en plein air n'ont pas été suffisamment reconnues. Wales discute de deux œuvres performatives (un script théâtral et un script de film) qu'elle a créées pour révéler la situation difficile des travailleuses domestiques étrangères au Singapour. Ensemble, les auteurs réfléchissent aux possibilités d'utiliser des histoires fictionnelles informées par la recherche pour redonner vie à des récits en grande partie oubliés — des récits pour lesquels il n'y a que peu de données disponibles, ou qui soulèvent des questions éthiques quant à l'identification potentielle des participantes.

Goldstein, Owis, Salisbury, Reid et hicks décrivent le projet *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*, développé à partir de recherches d'archives sur l'activisme et la sollicitude ayant remis en question la cishétéronormativité et le racisme dans les années 1970 et 1980. Les pièces étaient accompagnées d'images et de deux chansons originales. À travers des extraits de script, des paroles de chansons et des images, l'article démontre comment ces trois formes artistiques s'entremêlent pour offrir une compréhension riche et nuancée des récits souvent invisibilisés de l'activisme et de la sollicitude chez les personnes queer et trans Noires, Autochtones et racisées aux débuts du mouvement LGBT.

Cherchant à aider à naviguer la complexité des relations de supervision aux cycles supérieurs, la ressource pédagogique *Rock the Boat* utilise le théâtre basé sur la recherche (RbT) pour favoriser le dialogue et enrichir la prise de perspective. Cox, Smithdeal et Lee détaillent un récit du développement de Rock the Boat en trois phases : des ateliers de théâtre en présentiel à une réorientation vers des ateliers en ligne, jusqu'à la création d'une ressource numérique. Cette ressource comprend quatre scènes filmées avec des acteur·rice·s professionnel·le·s ainsi qu'un guide d'animation. Les auteur·rice·s partagent des réflexions clés issues de la transition au format en ligne, notamment la nécessité de repenser l'esthétique pour un genre filmé et celle de créer des ressources numériques complémentaires pour soutenir les discussions en l'absence de facilitateur·rice.

Dans le but de sensibiliser les étudiant·e·s de premier cycle en sciences de la santé aux préjugés implicites, une équipe de chercheur·euse·s de l'Université Brock a collaboré avec une compagnie de théâtre pour concevoir une expérience théâtrale participative. Metz, Ganesh et Hobbs

analysent de manière réflexive la performance résultante, *Haunting our Bias,* à partir de leurs perspectives diverses en tant que metteur·e en scène, acteur·rice, chercheur·e, enseignant·e, chercheur·e en évaluation de projet et concepteur·rice de programme. Ensemble, ils·elles définissent le théâtre collaboratif (playbuilding) comme un sous-genre du théâtre basé sur la recherche, visant à créer des forums théâtraux interactifs afin d'aborder des enjeux sociaux importants.

Charles Vanover discute de l'ethnodrame *Chicago Butoh*, qui explore l'expérience d'un·e enseignant·e débutant dans une école urbaine du système des écoles publiques de Chicago. Développé selon une approche de théâtre d'enquête, le script a été créé à partir d'entrevues retranscrites mot à mot. Vanover explique comment l'intégration d'artistes professionnel·le·s, notamment un·e acteur·rice et un·e metteur·e en scène, a enrichi le travail en y apportant des perspectives nouvelles et variées. À travers des extraits de script, des photographies de la performance et des entrevues avec les artistes, l'article met en lumière la manière dont de telles performances peuvent ouvrir un espace de réflexion sur les expériences éducatives.

Les cinq contributions Notes du terrain présentées dans ce numéro spécial offrent des exemples de créations RbT à divers stades de développement. Shigematsu, Göksel, Piazzoli, Belliveau et Naud réfléchissent collectivement à une retraite inspirée du RbT, conçue pour soutenir le développement d'une production RbT explorant l'expulsion des Acadiens au Canada. Dans un dialogue scénarisé, Mosher, Rizzotti et Kneifel analysent comment un projet de théâtre collectif mené au premier cycle universitaire est devenu un modèle de pédagogie décentralisée et itérative. Prendergast et Pauluth-Penner présentent une étude artistique dans laquelle des élèves du secondaire ont été amenés à analyser trois pièces canadiennes portant sur la santé mentale des jeunes, puis à créer et à jouer leur propre production exprimant leurs perspectives sur la santé mentale des jeunes. Travaillant également avec des élèves du secondaire, Medeiros, Stannard et Salvatore proposent une discussion accompagnée d'extraits vidéo illustrant la création et la performance d'une pièce verbatim rejouant un débat télévisé entre Donald Trump et Joe Biden. Enfin, Kreindler présente une comédie musicale satirique fondée sur la recherche, qui interroge les complexités liées à la surpopulation des services d'urgence au Canada.

Nous espérons que ce numéro spécial vous plaira et qu'il contribuera à enrichir la polyphonie du théâtre basé sur la recherche. Que ces œuvres

vous inspirent de nouvelles possibilités ou vous éclairent sur les obstacles que vous pourriez rencontrer dans vos propres projets.

GRAHAM W. LEA ET GEORGE BELLIVEAU

REFERENCES

Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (C. Emerson, Ed. & Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.

Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.). (2020). *Contact!Unload: Military veterans, trauma, and research-based theatre*. UBC Press.

Fenske, M. (2004). The aesthetic of the unfinished: Ethics and performance. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, *24*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/1046293042000239447

Lea, G. W., & Belliveau, G. (2023). A landscape of ethics in research-based theater: Staging lives of family members who have passed. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *29*(2), 343-353. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221098991

"WEAVING A BODY OUT OF WORDS": PLAYWRITING STRATEGIES FOR TRANS-INFORMED RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE

CHRISTINA COOK *University of British Columbia*

ABSTRACT. This article addresses the question: What are the expansive possibilities offered by a trans-informed Research-based Theatre (RbT) creation framework? Drawing on excerpts from an autoethnographic playscript which centres on my experiences as a graduate student while coming out as a nonbinary trans woman, I explore specific and adaptable strategies for trans-informed RbT playwriting. Playwriting is an essential component of the RbT creation process, and the strategies explored in this article may inform RbT practitioners' approach in the classroom and beyond.

"WEAVING A BODY OUT OF WORDS": STRATÉGIES D'ÉCRITURE DRAMATIQUE POUR UN THÉÂTRE FONDÉ SUR LA RECHERCHE ET INFORMÉ PAR LES EXPÉRIENCES TRANS

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article se demande quelles opportunités supplémentaires offre un cadre de création théâtrale axé sur la recherche (RbT en anglais) et informé par les expériences trans. En m'appuyant sur des extraits d'une pièce autoethnographique centrée sur mon expérience en tant qu'étudiante aux cycles supérieurs lors de mon coming out en tant que femme trans non binaire, j'explore des stratégies spécifiques et adaptables pour l'écriture dramatique RbT informée par les expériences trans. L'écriture dramatique est un élément central du processus de création en RbT. Les stratégies présentées ici peuvent éclairer la démarche des praticien·ne·s du RbT, que ce soit dans une salle de classe ou ailleurs.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10255

These years, weaving a body out of words,
Unravelling it again, as if my life
were just material, as if I'd get
it right sometime.

— Cat Fitzpatrick ("Six Women I'm Not," *Glamourpuss*, 2016)

The story has not one ending
Smudged into a solitary future
Nor one formal statement or admission
In principle
It is a seed

— Duriel E. Harris ("Decorus," 2015)

Research-based Theatre (RbT; Belliveau & Lea, 2016) is an arts-based methodology that has amassed considerable literature across social science, health disciplines, and education in the past 2 decades. RbT has come to be regarded as an innovative and accessible strategy for knowledge translation and exchange (Nichols et al., 2022) and a collaborative research approach for working with diverse populations, including healthcare professionals with disabilities (Jarus et al., 2022), military veterans (Balfour & Hassall, 2022; Belliveau et al., 2020; Spring, 2022), adult learners accessing drop-in education programs (Cook & Borgen, 2020), and patients with traumatic brain injury (Kontos et al., 2012). As a method of inquiry and knowledge exchange that supports the centring of communities underrepresented in research, RbT offers flexible, adaptable parameters to meet the needs of those whose narratives are being shared. For example, while RbT projects are often published in scholarly journals and presented at academic conferences, many are also intended for knowledge sharing in community spaces or for performance on local stages (Beck et al., 2011).

The following article explores playwriting strategies for creating trans[1]-informed RbT work. RbT unites various theatrical art forms to support a research-artistic offering. These art forms may include acting, direction, set design, costume design, lighting design, music and sound design, dance and choreographed movement, puppetry, playwriting, and more. RbT scholars draw on various strategies from these art forms. This article

contributes to developing RbT as a research methodology in education by considering a trans-informed approach to one aspect of RbT creation: playwriting.

The RbT playscript excerpts I share in this article are autoethnographic (Adams et al., 2022), exploring my experience beginning to publicly express my transness while completing a PhD in counselling psychology. My identities as a therapist and trans woman have informed my RbT-related practices and the strategies I explore. I strove to create this article with a humility (Mosher et al., 2017) that allowed me to centre the understanding that "there is no universal definition or experience of transness, and any activity that does not actively resist the creation of false universality runs the risk of building a new script" (Keenan, 2017, p. 551) and reinforcing a single, dominant narrative of trans experience. I offer work-in-progress playscript excerpts and suggestions for a trans-informed approach to RbT creation as one possibility among many. My work is a single contribution to a vast landscape of art and scholarship created by trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming individuals in support of trans communities (Keyes et al., 2021; Stryker, 2006), a contribution that I intend to invite continued dialogue and expansive conversations about trans lives and ways of knowing. There are countless ways to cross, live between, or move beyond the gender binary.

A TRANS-INFORMED RBT PROCESS

What might a trans-informed approach to RbT creation look like? What practices specifically belong to such an approach? Artists and educators who are queering performance (Dolan, 2005) or queering theatre pedagogies (Campbell, 2020) draw on queer theory scholarship and, in their work on stage and in the drama classroom, converse with "the public sphere from outside its enforced norms, and through the critical stories they tell, help to dislodge its assumptions" (Dolan, 2005, pp. 60–61). Similarly, I follow in the footsteps of trans scholars who have proposed "trans*" in and of itself as a methodology (Raun, 2014; Stryker et al., 2008; Weil, 2017). Weil (2017) writes:

> The critical *potential* of trans* theorizing exceeds the milieu in which [it] is often articulated. … Within trans* studies, this discussion has come to revolve around the use of the asterisk to visually indicate the potential for prefixing trans to any number of suffixes, including but not limited to gender, and to signal the possibility of expansive capacities harbored within existing assemblages of terms and concepts. (p. 12)

Trans as a methodology connects to an axiology of activism for trans communities, emphasizing two previously erased knowledges in the

generation, analysis, and representation of data: (a) a contemporary "knowledge that transgender people … have of their own embodied experience, and of their relationships to the discourses and institutions that act upon and through them"; and (b) "a historical knowledge of particular structurations of power" that allows separation from previous scholarly works that authors positioned as ahistorical or neutral while pathologizing any and all forms of gender nonconformance (Stryker, 2006, p. 13). Methodologically, trans invites a looking back and a looking again, made possible by unburying alternative ways of knowing and living from a cisnormative centre that assumes journeys beyond the gender binary are contemporary phenomena. Both knowledges and the bridge between them are essential to trans as a methodology and crucial to how we generate data and narratives related to trans lives.

UNTANGLED DEFINITIONS

I embarked on my doctoral studies in 2019. I began publicly expressing my transness during my studies. *Trans woman*, *nonbinary*, and *queer* are words I currently identify with and use to describe aspects of my experience.

I do not want to become tangled in bounded definitions of these terms. I use *trans* expansively, following Susan Stryker's (2017) definition: "movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place" (p. 1). This expansive definition encourages us to consider the possibilities of trans across boundaries of oppression towards well-being.

In the title of my autoethnographic play, I include the word "transexual." In *Transgender History*, Susan Stryker (2017) traces the origin of the word to medical literature from the first half of the 20th century, including the work of Magnus Hirschfeld, a German physician credited with creating the term "transsexualismus," and Harry Benjamin, a doctor who popularized the term in North American medical literature. Stryker writes that "transsexual" is "sometimes considered an old-fashioned word" (p. 38). In the past, "transexual" referred to individuals seeking gender-affirming surgeries, but trans community members reclaimed the term, and its definition became less perspective and less agreed upon (Stryker, 2017). Psychologists and other health professionals no longer use the term, favouring "transgender" or "trans" (American Psychological Association, 2020). I use the term *transexual* to emphasize that (a) languages (medical, community-based, or cultural) related to trans lives are fluid and changing; and (b) carrying forward words or concepts from trans history is a reminder

that trans history exists, and our relationship with auto-histories and community histories is a living one.

Finally, in verb form, *queering* is used to suggest the influence of queer theory on theatre practices or pedagogy. For example, in their Academic Liner Notes to the research-creation *Queer Sonic Cultures* (2018), Sarah E. Truman and David Ben Shannon write of activating "queer as both a noun and a verb in [their] scholarship" (p. 60). However, Andrea Long Chu and Emmit Harsin Drager (2019) argue against using "transing" in verb form. According to Chu and Harsin Drager, "transing" dilutes and fails to differentiate between trans and queer ways of knowing (Halberstam, 2018). As such, in this article, I write of "trans *as* an RbT creation practice" or a "trans-informed approach to RbT." Queer ways of knowing and trans ways of knowing may overlap and inform one another but are also distinctive and can lead to complementary and divergent creation practices.

AN ANNOTATED RBT SCRIPT

In this section, I offer monologues from my work-in-progress autoethnographic RbT script *Postcards to My Younger Transexual Self, Ages 0–119* to provide examples of three playwriting strategies that I propose to support trans-informed RbT:

- trans time travel
- slow performance
- seeking trans joy

Before I expand on these strategies, I suggest the reader consider the following questions as they read through the excerpts: What are the rules of this narrative universe? When are these rules broken?

[Postcards to My Younger Transexual Self, Ages 0–119]

PLAYWRIGHT NOTES

the actor playing SPILING is a trans woman & can be any age

as a prologue
the actor playing SPILING introduces herself to the audience while handing out blank postcards & pens

the actor encourages the audience to write postcards to their younger selves
the postcard can be to themselves at any age & is just for them – they will not have to share it

the monologues below can be performed with breaks in them for conversations with the audience
consider breaking for conversations after the 2nd [More Postcards to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 6], [Postcard to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 15] & the last monologue

the actor facilitates the discussions and allows the audience members to reflect on the monologues they are hearing with the audience members beside them (in pairs or small groups)

SPILING (she/they) with her hands full
they carry a stack of 150 postcards tied up with ribbon

SPILING sets down her load

she undoes the ribbon &
reads a postcard:

[Postcard to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 6]

O SPILING.
your outfit for kindergarten:
a beautiful white dress
but no beautiful white dresses
are in your dresser—
only pants
Tshirts—
you find your longest white Tshirt
you put it on
you decide this IS a dress
with that decision
all the anxiety
in your little 6yroldmind
disappears—at 6
y o u d e c i d e
& your dress is beautiful

* * *

The bracketed play and monologue titles are meant to be spoken aloud by the actor as part of their lines, suggesting a theatrical performance style for the text, one beyond realism.

Lines 1–16, the first monologue in the play, reflect postcard prose writing in numerous ways — for example, informal, short, clipped phrases and minimal use of end punctuation. Audience members may have nostalgic memories of writing or receiving a postcard. Personal postcards are private / public documents: a message for a specific person written on a card that anyone can read. Hearing postcard prose is meant to engage an audience and cause them to lean in as if they are being let in on a secret.

The first line is written in all capitals. The third line is indented. The second to last line is indented, and the letters are spaced out. These formatting decisions suggest possibilities to the actor, emphasizing images or thoughts that are particularly important to Spiling.

SPILING picks another postcard
but knows it from memory

[Postcard to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 39]

SPILING into the street

the Body boils roils & is read as
human & someone asks about possible medical coverage
for the lack of breast growth

Grandma Rose-Marie said:
'crying & whistling are
like mushroom soup &
cherrycola—
they don't go together—'
whistling
was my Gran's
cherrycola—

—wait did she say that?

the Body fills out
requisite paperwork:

'i SPILING solemnly declare that
i intend to maintain
the gender identity
that corresponds
with the requested change
CHECK THIS BOX'

* * *

The second monologue suggests to the audience this will not be a linear narrative — we jumped from age 6 in the first monologue to age 39 here.

Grandma Rose-Marie is mentioned by name. The grandma is a character who will re-appear in the monologues and naming her suggests to the audience that she is an important person to SPILING.

Some of the quoted text in this monologue is taken from forms required for a change of gender on government-issued identification in the province of British Columbia.

SPILING reads another card

[Postcard to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 12]

Channel 12
5pm
monday-to-friday commitment

startrek: thenextgeneration—T-N-G

your favourite character
Deanna Troi
ship's counsellor
you are going to grow up
to BE
D. Troi
therapist to a starship

your Grandma
Rose-Marie
sends a postcard
'the galaxy—
since you want to be an astronaut!'

SPILING flips the card
& looks at the picture on the front

at the centre a sun
with eyes &
fairies flying

Gran says
'it's bright Apollo'
an old god…
fairies are 'muses'

youwish:
—Gran sent a D. Troi
actionfigure

—youwish—
you were flying
with hair long as the sun

—youwishthat—

outer
space
was
closer

* * *

There are numerous elements of fiction in this autoethnographic narrative (Leavy, 2023; Chilton & Leavy, 2020). My name is not Spiling. My grandmother's name was not Rose-Marie. Fiction has a place in autoethnographic and RbT work to support the telling of narratives which might be too vulnerable or unethical to share without certain personal details changed (Ellis, 2007; Leavy, 2023; Rossiter et al., 2008). Fiction also allows the use of imagery to capture the essence of a feeling or experience and convey it to an audience. I never received a postcard like the one described from my grandma, but the image of the sun is one that will reoccur throughout the text and speaks to Spiling's relationship with her grandmother.

SPILING searches for a particular postcard—
her body is spread out on the floor
almost swimming in them
looking

finds it! & another! two!

[More Postcards to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 6]

YOU
in a beautiful white dress—heavenly
your Baby-Sitter asks
'can you get ready for school?'
you sing: 'i AM READY!'
you're wearing your dress—let's go!—
you'll remember clearly
a look of concern cross
Baby-Sitter's face
for at least 33yrs (& counting)—
her understanding
you're thinking
it's okay to wear a dress
in-that-bodythat-bodyyour-body:
'YOUTHINKYOUCANWEARTHAT OUTSIDE
MISTER?'

* * *

This postcard introduces another person in Spiling's world: a babysitter. The babysitter remains unnamed, a specific choice which keeps her at a distance from the audience compared to the grandma or to Nellie, an electrologist who appears later in the script.

A long t-shirt turned into a beautiful white dress by way of a 6-year-old's imagination is a concrete image and one of the few images offered in these age 6 monologues. We don't know anything about Spiling's childhood home or the babysitter's appearance. These details are unnecessary for the narrative, and just as postcard writing encourages concise writing, these monologues are distilled, dramatized narrative fragments.

[More Postcards to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 6]

A Baby-Sitter Ultimatum:
'CHANGECLOTHES!'—
run back to your room
refuse to leave
wear your dress
whistlewhistlewhistlewis—
Mom comes home
you hear whispering
Baby-Sitter &
Mom
you might be
d i s a p o i n t i n g h e r
in your 6yearoldmind
you whisper:
'put on pants don't turn
Tshirts into dresses againnever'

* * *

SPILING creates a circle of postcards
SPILING turns the circle of postcards
into a
pathway
stepping from card to card
adding new cards to extend the path
reading cards along the way

[Postcard to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 24]

Fears' aging at the same rate
i am—
no no that's not right—
Fears' younger than me
but i act like she's my elder—
Fears'—a little sister who
acts like a parent
a parent who knows best &
who i attempt to strike deals with
in the bathroom or after midnight
but negotiations stall
we end up repeating 'maybe one day' in chorus:
'maybe one day'—'maybe one day'—
i'll speak out
'she'

* * *

[Postcard to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 7]

i don't think
you
believe
in gender
do
you?

or don't believe it applies to you
like Santa Claus
some kids believe some didn't
can't tell who
better keep it to yourself

go underground
make a hideout
peek out when it's safe:
'Mom
am i allowed to like
Tina Turner?'
'um—Sure'
backseat of a red honda
driving home from school
radioplaying dancing—

i'm gonna be strong i'm gonna do fine/don't worry about this heart of mine

* * *

SPILING sees the postcards she wants
but can't reach them from
her postcard path
she slides her whole body
across the floor
postcard to postcard
to reach them

[Postcard to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 36]

your 2nd year of a phd
in counselling psychology
in private spaces
like the bathroom or after midnight
you form words to express—

your growing understanding of
why you flinch at 'misters' & 'sirs'
makes flinching worse—
a pain grown numb
returns with an ache

but alongside this ache—
... suddenly
learning to float—
you thought treading water was—
you thought NOT drowning was—

but
to float
on your back
& feel
the sun
on your face
water beneath you—
to float O to float!

* * *

SPILING has a stack of postcards &
the cards are attached
the stack extends out
like an accordion

[Postcard to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 37]

i'm in a long-distance relationship
with my Endocrinologist

Tom
Tommy
Tomist

i imagine

i'm meeting him
at the back of a dive bar
on Denman St. with a 7-million-dollar oceanview
Tomist-My-Endo & me
drinking house red
at the Bayside Lounge
me squinting into the sunset
trying to see fathoms
as Tomist mansplains—

[continued next postcard]

These postcards represent more autoethnographic fiction and another possibility that fiction offers RbT playwrights: the description of dreams and fantasies. Spiling eventually admits that this whole monologue is a fantasy, but her wish to connect in this way shares more of who she is and what she is experiencing with the audience.

O Tomist & his mansplaining
—think Tom Hiddleston
got the accent & everything
so i don't hate listening to him
tell me what i am—
he's waxing on about
being a trans woman
on hormones
side effects
desired effects
'your-dreaming-if-you-think-
they-'ll-give-you-bigger-hips' effects

then he bats his eyes &
i think he might put his hand on
mine—

[continued next postcard]

instead
he slides over
a giant white matchbox
of clear hormone patches for my ass
to be switched twice weekly
child-proof pill bottles with some very potent anti-testosterone effects
plus a regular bloodwork order

Dr. Tomist is the type of man
who worries about my kidney
& liver function…

we only have phone appointments

i've never seen his face
he's never seen mine

he's never slid anything across a bar
or even brushed against
me

but Tomist is ethically obligated to mansplain
estrogen—

he's read all about it—
plus he watched a few episodes of *Transparent* when it came out

Tomist is no Gatekeeper &
he says so
doesn't want to be 'a Gatekeeper'

i have said this too
as a phd-student-
psychologist-to-be:
'i don't want to be
Gatekeeper'

* * *

SPILING lets
the postcard accordion
fall to the floor

[Postcard to My Younger Transexual Self, Age 39]

i'm trying to get an A+ in electrolysis

i carefully follow my electrologist
Nellie's instructions to
lather on emla cream &
cover it with plastic wrap
to keep it airtight
the bottom half of my face
looks like leftovers
pushed to the back
of the fridge

i lie down on the hospital
bed tissue &
i know
i'm crinkling
it

there's a photo hung so
i look at it every time
i swing my legs over the bed

Céline Dion's
embracing Nellie
smiles bigger
than the photo
they'll burst the frame

'whenever Céline's
in town
i get free tickets
for me & girlfriends—
i worked on Céline
like i'm working on you'
Nellie's already on my chin
electrocuting hair follicle
by hair follicle

emla cream
feels like spreading
Greek yogurt
on my face &
might be as effective
in terms of pain relief —
SO not very

my chin's swollen
like a radish
when we finish the 1st hr
& Nellie tells me
to avoid sunexposure
after electrocution:
'Mr. Solar's NOT
your friend
pumpkin—
neither are his
UV pathways of light'

Nellie only takes cash
gives you a deal
if you buy
bulk-10hr-bundles

i should be studying
psych history
or for my
personality/pathology
exam

but Céline
watches over me
for over 80hrs
that summer &
in September
when Nellie asks me
if i notice
hair on my face is thinner?
if it's working?
i lie & say
'yes'

because
i'm trying to get an A+
in electrolysis

* * *

PLAYWRITING STRATEGIES FOR TRANS-INFORMED RBT

In *Females* (2019), trans author and critic Andrea Long Chu writes, "Gender exists, if it exists at all, only in the structural generosity of strangers" (p. 38). Transgender artists Rae Spoon and Ivan Coyote write in their 2014 book *Gender Failure*, "More and more, I have thought of my gender as a story I tell myself" (p. 239). These authors point to playwriting strategies I have chosen to highlight from the above monologues.

Several narrative rules, or patterns, are established in the first monologues. To start with, after these first monologues, the audience might begin to assume that all monologues will be written like a postcard, in the second person, directly addressing a "you." Secondly, the audience might start to assume that monologues will be short, between 60–75 words, also like a postcard. These rules are broken by monologues later in the excerpts; for example, the electrolysis monologue is written in the first person and reaches 234 words. Patterns are only established in playwriting so the playwright can break them to emphasize meaning and create emotionally evocative and surprising theatrical moments. These monologues suggest the three playwriting strategies that I propose to support trans-informed RbT:

- trans time travel
- slow performance
- seeking trans joy / rage

Next, I consider each strategy in turn.

TRANS TIME TRAVEL

The first trans-informed playwriting strategy to highlight from the excerpted monologues relates to time. Moving beyond binary classifications of a playscript's narrative time as linear or nonlinear, trans-informed RbT must consider unique experiences of time as related to trans and nonbinary identities (Keyes et al., 2021).

The excerpted monologues place different autobiographical periods in relation to one another: Postcards to a 6-year-old self are mixed in with postcards to a 30-something self. The fluidness of time travel explored in the monologues reflects a differing sense of time, which is circular rather than based on forward progression.

In a study of trans graduate students (Goldberg et al., 2022), responses indicated that transitioning impacted participants' graduate school experiences and career development by creating additional burdens,

including ongoing misgendering, unsafe learning and housing contexts, and a lack of access to trans-affirming medical and mental health care on campus. This suggests that life transitions, such as finishing a graduate degree, might be protracted for trans students, who may, in turn, achieve career goals in a different timeframe than their cisgender peers. Linear narratives of finite change may mask "the complex temporalities of [gender] transition" (p. 646), as Hil Malatino (2019) writes, and fail to contextualize a transition within an individual's broader life. Trans experiences of time offer an invitation to consider how assumptions of linearity and stability fail to represent the messiness of numerous transitions and identities in our contemporary personal (Malatino, 2019) and professional lives (Butterfield et al., 2010) over time. By messiness, I mean an authentic fluidity that allows adaptation in the face of shifting and developing identities rather than stuckness. Now that I am publicly expressing my transness, my relationships with my memories of my younger self have changed. Mixing stories from different periods of my life allows the exploration of these shifting relationships.

Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman (2018) describe activation devices for *walking* as a methodology, such as bringing a unique object, as ways to "rupture and queer the walk, they *slow* us down and change our gait, they problematize what it means to walk, they agitate and provoke" (p. 136). In some ways, placing postcards from different ages next to each other is an activation device that asks the audience to slow down and pay attention differently. It also asks: To what time will Spiling travel next?

SLOW PERFORMANCE

Hil Malatino (2020) offers insights into a trans ethics of care, which is "only ever manifested through practice — action, labor, work" (p. 41). This ethics decentres languages of care with hetero- and cis-normative metaphors to move concretely "into the intricately interconnected spaces and places where trans and queer care labor occurs: the street, the club, the bar, the clinic, the community center, the classroom, the nonprofit, and sometimes, yes, the home" (Malatino, 2020, p. 42). A trans ethics of care "is integral to our ways of doing" (Malatino, 2020, p. 41) and necessarily and actively informs "auto-ing" trans stories in RbT, or dramatizing narratives that focus on trans selves and stories of trans embodiment (Steinbock, 2021). I propose slow performance as a specific example of a trans ethic of care in RbT. Owis et al. (2023) suggest a specific framework for 2SLGBTQIA+-informed RbT includes a slow ethic of care, defined as "an intentional process in which we sit with moments of

discomfort and re/act slowly to dilemmas to make ethical decisions in our work by centring care work" (p. 3).

In trans-informed RbT, I suggest that slow performance reflects a trans ethic of care for performers and audience members. Slow performance can be written into a script, as in the excerpts from *Postcards to My Younger Transexual Self, Ages 0–119*. The postcard format introduces natural breaks into the script, and the stage directions encourage audience discussions in some of these breaks, slowing down the performance experience and allowing the audience to reflect. This break taking overturns some of our typical assumptions about performance: that audience members are to sit passively for the duration of the performance, that any breaks in performance (other than a scheduled intermission) are unwelcome interruptions that interfere with the audience receiving the play's stories, and that actors should stay in character during a performance, not speaking to the audience as themselves, outside of their role.

SEEKING TRANS JOY / RAGE

Historically, the perspectives of trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming individuals are missing from the research literature in many health and education disciplines (Hyde et al., 2019; Riggs et al., 2019). This absence has not gone unnoticed by trans scholars. Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah (2014) define the discipline of trans studies in opposition "to the medico-juridical and psychotherapeutic frameworks … [and] previously existing research agendas that facilitate the framing of transgender phenomena as appropriate targets of medical, legal, and psychotherapeutic intervention" (p. 4). In other words, it is in opposition — at least in part — to research literature that focuses solely on the symptom-based description of trans lives or the vulnerabilities faced by trans community members. Rather than focusing on symptoms or vulnerabilities, a trans-informed approach to RbT seeks trans joy / rage.

Working on this playscript has been one of the most significant experiences of my life, a leap of joy. Playwriting towards trans joy can look and feel and sound an awful lot like trans rage (Stone, 1992), and maybe it is this joyful rage that I have found so liberating. Introductory playwriting texts teach playwrights that their scripts must include conflict (Cattaneo, 2021; Smiley, 2005). Importantly, in the case of narratives that include trans expression and embodiment, conflict does not equal trauma or a focus on symptoms or vulnerabilities. The excerpted monologues include moments of conflict — the babysitter's ultimatum, a personified version of fear — but these moments are surrounded by moments of trans

joy / rage: a beautiful white dress, floating, flirting in a dive bar, Céline Dion as a guarding angel. A trans-informed approach to RbT intentionally moves beyond trauma-saturated stories and also does not assume that experiences of joy or euphoria are diminished by, or indeed different from, a generative and protective rage.

CONCLUSION

RbT practitioners can find numerous ways to explore trans experiences of time, slow performance, and seeking trans joy / rage. I offer the excerpts as inspiration or jumping-off points to further explore these and other trans-informed RbT playwriting strategies.

RbT, as an arts-based research methodology, offers possibilities for a transdisciplinary exploration that creates new space and movement for inquiry and knowledge exchange with and among trans scholars, artists, and community members. In RbT projects, trans artist-scholars can centre trans knowledge, answering back to the centuries of sexualization, fetishization, criminalization, and othering in media, medical / therapeutic, and educational spaces. Furthermore, research-based plays allow "openings through which audience members [can] co-construct understandings" (Lea et al., 2011, p. 11), creating dialogic spaces among trans researchers, clinicians, artists, and trans community members.

The monologues are from a script that is still in development. In my writing practice, I develop a full-length playscript over 10–12 different drafts and 3 to 4 years of writing. In sharing these monologues from an early draft written over 9 months, from April 2021 to January 2022, I hope to normalize the process of sharing work-in-progress scripts in RbT. By documenting an RbT script's development overtime, I hope to make the RbT playwriting process more transparent and accessible.

Trans-informed RbT cannot be reduced to a single recipe or set of strategies. The strategies and work-in-progress script excerpts I shared here are meant to propose possibilities for other RbT artist-scholars to contribute additional avenues towards trans ways of knowing and RbT, constructing a fluid and evolving dialogue on trans-informed RbT practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The playscript excerpts included in this article were developed with support from the University of British Columbia's Research-based Theatre Lab, the Canada Council for the Arts, the BC Arts Council, the Playwrights Theatre Centre, the frank theatre company, Zee Zee Theatre, and the City of Vancouver. I am grateful to Joanna Garfinkel, the play's dramaturge, and Scott Button, my partner in life and art. Numerous artists and artist-scholars contributed their talents to the development of the playscript across several workshops. I thank them all. Thank you to Dr. George Belliveau, Dr. William Borgen, and Joe Salvatore for their guidance and support of this work.

NOTES

1. In this article, I employ *trans*, *nonbinary*, and *gender nonconforming* as umbrella terms to refer to individuals whose gender identity differs from a gender designation assigned to them at birth or those whose gender identities or expressions defy binary classifications or cisnormative understandings. I use *trans* throughout the article as a shorthand for the above.

REFERENCES

Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S., & Ellis, C. (2022). Introduction: Making sense and taking action: Creating a caring community of autoethnographers. In T. E. Adams, S. Holman Jones, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of autoethnography* (2nd ed., pp. 1–19). Routledge.

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association: The official guide to APA style* (7th ed.).

Balfour, M., & Hassall, L. (2022). *The return*: Research-based theater with and for ex-military personnel experiencing posttraumatic stress. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *29*(2), 332–342. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221101587

Beck, J. L., Belliveau, G., Lea, G. W., & Wager, A. (2011). Delineating a spectrum of research-based theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*(8), 687–700. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411415498

Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.). (2016). *Research-based theatre: An artistic methodology*. Intellect.

Belliveau, G., Lea, G. W., & Westwood, M. (Eds.). (2020). Contact!Unload: *Military veterans, trauma, and research-based theatre*. UBC Press.

Butterfield, L. D., Borgen, W. A., Amundson, N. E., & Erlebach, A. C. (2010). What helps and hinders workers in managing change. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, *47*(4), 146–156. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2010.tb00099.x

Campbell, A. (2020). Queering pedagogies. *Theatre Topics*, *30*(2), 117–124. https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2020.0018

Cattaneo, A. (2021). *The art of dramaturgy*. Yale University Press.

Chu, A. L. (2019). *Females*. Verso.

Chu, A. L., & Harsin Drager, E. (2019). After trans studies. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *6*(1), 103–116. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7253524

Cook, C., & Borgen, W. (2020). *Give me your hands*: Therapeutic experiences of collective theatre creation in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, *54*(3), 324–348. https://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/article/view/69478

Dolan, J. (2005). *Utopia in performance: Finding hope at the theater*. University of Michigan Press. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.119520

Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *13*(1), 3–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406294947

Fitzpatrick, C. (2016). *Glamourpuss*. Topside Press.

Goldberg, A. E., McCormick, N., Matsuno, E., Virginia, H., & Beemyn, G. (2022). Transgender graduate students: Considerations, tensions, and decisions in choosing a graduate program. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *69*(9), 1549–1575. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.1919476

Harris, D. E. (2015). Decorus. *Boundary 2*, *42*(4), 97–103. https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-3155746

Halberstam, J. (2018). *Female masculinity*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cwb00

Hyde, J. S., Bigler, R. S., Joel, D., Tate, C. C., & van Anders, S. M. (2019). The future of sex and gender in psychology: Five challenges to the gender binary. *American Psychologist*, *74*(2), 171–193. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000307

Jarus, T., Mayer, Y., Gross, E., Cook, C., Bulk, L. Y., Hershler, L. A. D., Nichols, J., Zaman, S., & Belliveau, G. (2022). Bringing disability experiences front stage: Research-based theatre as a teaching approach to promote inclusive health education. *Nurse Education Today*, *115*, Article 105408. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2022.105408

Keenan, H. B. (2017). Unscripting curriculum: Toward a critical trans pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, *87*(4), 538–556. https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-87.4.538

Keyes, L., Mantoan, L., & Schiller, A. F. (2021). Introduction: In a trans time and space. In L. Keyes, L. Mantoan, & A. F. Schiller (Eds.), *The Methuen drama book of trans plays* (pp. 1–7). Methuen Drama.

Kontos, P. C., Miller, K. L., Gilbert, J. E., Mitchell, G. J., Colantonio, A., Keightley, M. L., & Cott, C. (2012). Improving client-centered brain injury rehabilitation through research-based theater. *Qualitative Health Research*, *22*(12), 1612–1632. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732312458370

Lea, G. W., Belliveau, G., Wager, A., & Beck, J. L. (2011). A loud silence: Working with research-based theatre and a/r/tography. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, *12*(16). http://www.ijea.org/v12n16/v12n16.pdf

Leavy, P. (2023). *Re/invention: Methods of social fiction*. Guilford Press.

Chilton, G., & Leavy, P. (2020). Arts-based research: Merging social research and the creative arts. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 601–632). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.27

Malatino, H. (2019). Future fatigue: Trans intimacies and trans presents (or how to survive the interregnum). *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *6*(4), 635–658. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7771796

Malatino, H. (2020). *Trans care*. University of Minnesota Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/book/78334

Mosher, D. K., Hook, J. N., Captari, L. E., Davis, D. E., DeBlaere, C., & Owen, J. (2017). Cultural humility: A therapeutic framework for engaging diverse clients. *Practice Innovations*, *2*(4), 221–233. https://doi.org/10.1037/pri0000055

Nichols, J., Cox, S. M., Cook, C., Lea, G. W., & Belliveau, G. (2022). Research-based theatre about veterans transitioning home: A mixed-methods evaluation of audience impacts. *Social Science & Medicine*, *292*, Article 114578. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114578

Owis, B., Baer, P., Salisbury, J., & Goldstein, T. (2023). *Out at school:* Imagining a slow ethic of care in research-based theater. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *29*(2), 323–331. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221097633

Raun, T. (2014). Trans as contested intelligibility. *Lambda Nordica*, *19*(1), 13–37. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/trans-as-contested-intelligibility/docview/2424524422/se-2

Riggs, D. W., Pearce, R., Pfeffer, C. A., Hines, S., White, F., & Ruspini, E. (2019). Transnormativity in the psy disciplines: Constructing pathology in the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* and *standards of care*. *American Psychologist*, *74*(8), 912–924. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000545

Rossiter, K., Kontos, P., Colantonio, A., Gilbert, J., Gray, J., & Keightley, M. (2008). Staging data: Theatre as a tool for analysis and knowledge transfer in health research. *Social Science & Medicine*, *66*(1), 130–146. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.07.021

Smiley, S. (2005). *Playwriting: The structure of action* (Rev. ed.). Yale University Press.

Spoon, R., & Coyote, I. (2014). *Gender failure*. Arsenal Pulp Press.

Spring, L. (2022). Ethical implications of using research-based theater to challenge hegemonic narratives about mental health. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *29*(2), 354–364. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221097638

Springgay, S., & Truman, S. E. (2018). *Walking methodologies in a more-than-human world: WalkingLab*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315231914

Steinbock, E. (2021). Embodiment. In A. E. Goldberg & G. Beemyn (Eds.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of trans studies* (pp. 229–232). SAGE Publications.

Stone, S. (1992). The empire strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto. *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, *10*(2), 150–176. https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-10-2_29-150

Stryker, S. (2006). (De)subjugated knowledges: An introduction to transgender studies. In S. Stryker & S. Whittle (Eds.), *The transgender studies reader* (pp. 1–17). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203955055

Stryker, S. (2017). *Transgender history: The roots of today's revolution* (2nd ed.). Seal Press.

Stryker, S., & Currah, P. (2014). General editors' introduction. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *1*(4), 467–468. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2815102

Stryker, S., Currah, P., & Moore, L. J. (2008). Introduction: Trans-, trans, or transgender? *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *36*(3/4), 11–22. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27649781

Truman, S. E., & Shannon, D. B. (2018). Queer sonic cultures: An affective walking-composing project. *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*, *1*(3), 58–77. https://doi.org/10.22387/CAP2018.19

Weil, A. (2017). Trans*versal animacies and the mattering of Black trans* political life. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, *22*(2), 191–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2017.1322837

CHRISTINA COOK (SHE/THEY) recently completed her PhD in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia. She is an arts-based scholar, interdisciplinary theatre artist, and therapist. Her arts-based scholarship and playwriting focus on trans, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming narratives, and her work advocates gender liberation for all. Christina's previous writing credits include the play *Quick Bright Things*, which was nominated for a Governor General's Award. In addition to her artistic work, Christina is a counselling psychologist, and she strives to foster interdisciplinary work born from passionate commitments to mental wellness, advocacy, and collaborative community care.

CHRISTINA COOK (ELLE/IEL) a récemment terminé son doctorat en psychologie du counselling à l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. Elle est chercheuse spécialisée dans les approches fondées sur les arts, artiste de théâtre interdisciplinaire et thérapeute. Ses recherches artistiques et son écriture dramatique mettent en lumière les récits trans, non binaires et non conformes au genre, et son travail milite pour la libération des genres pour tous. Parmi ses œuvres précédentes figure la pièce *Quick Bright Things*, qui a été finaliste pour le Prix du Gouverneur général. En plus de son travail artistique, Christina est psychologue en counselling et s'efforce de promouvoir des approches interdisciplinaires ancrées dans un engagement passionné envers le bien-être mental, la défense des droits et le soin communautaire collaboratif.

CHANGING THOROUGHLY? A PLAYWRIGHT / RESEARCHER REFLECTION ON RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE AND *BEING FRANK*

CHRIS SUMMERS *University of Melbourne*

ABSTRACT. This paper explores the educational possibilities and limitations of Deakin University's CHASE (Centre for Health through Action on Social Exclusion) trans and gender diverse Research-based Theatre project, *Being Frank,* in Victoria, Australia, 2016-2020. Adopting the perspective of the playwright / researcher, this paper documents the tensions between playwriting as artistic practice and Research-based Theatre within scholarly and educational contexts. The paper critically outlines the advisory group sessions, workshops, and presentations of the project - including within secondary school, tertiary and community-based programs - raising questions related to ethics / representation when seeking to dramatise complex issues. This paper offers Research-based Theatre practitioners, educational workers and artist / researchers insights into using theatre to advocate for inclusion and diverse perspectives.

CHANGING THOROUGHLY? RÉFLEXION D'UN DRAMATURGE / CHERCHEUR SUR LE THÉÂTRE FONDÉE SUR LA RECHERCHE ET *BEING FRANK*

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article explore les possibilités et les limites éducatives du projet de théâtre trans, de genres divers et fondé sur la recherche nommé *Being Frank*. En adoptant la perspective du dramaturge-chercheur·e, cet article met en évidence les tensions entre l'écriture dramatique comme pratique artistique et le théâtre fondé sur la recherche dans des milieux académiques et éducatifs. L'article présente de manière critique les séances du groupe consultatif, les ateliers et les présentations du projet en soulevant des questions liées à l'éthique et à la représentation lorsqu'il s'agit de dramatiser des enjeux complexes. Cet article offre aux professionnel·le·s intéressés des pistes de réflexion sur l'utilisation du théâtre comme moyen de plaidoyer en faveur de l'inclusion et de la diversité des perspectives.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10267

INTRODUCTION

> *FRANK takes a breath.*
>
> **FRANK:** But then I started Googling.
>
> I found the word. It gave me this joy, this total relief...
>
> It's in the dictionary, from Latin: "across," "beyond," "changing thoroughly."
>
> ...I'm trans. (Summers, 2019, p. 2)

A few minutes into the performance, sixteen-year-old Frank – the protagonist of Research-based Theatre play *Being Frank* – embraces and speaks his gender identity openly for the first time. In this moment, he is speaking, and represented, to multiple audiences: his parents Gita and Hutch, his best friend Marco, and his online following watching live on Facebook. The theatre audience are assembled in front of – or around – him, in whichever space the performance is taking place. A projection showing the livestream of Frank is positioned behind him, with positive comments and thumbs-up reacts flooding the frame, tempered by the occasional negative comment. This moment, with its layers of identities and characters adjusting to change, introduces the central conceit of *Being Frank*: not a singular coming out narrative, but a *be*coming story shared between Frank and those closest to him. As a piece of educational Research-based Theatre, it establishes multiple entry-points – characters, content, digital – for audiences to engage with. Frank's moment ignites and implicates us all in a bigger conversation about what it might mean to be – and to provide support and love to those who are – trans. This moment also speaks to the complex, overlapping entanglements of the artists and academics behind the project, the juggling of roles and responsibilities, navigating the shifting intersections between ethics and theatre-making – elements I explore through the playwright/researcher lens I adopt in this article.

In late 2016, I was commissioned by Professor Ann Taket at Deakin University's CHASE (Centre for Health through Action on Social Exclusion) in Melbourne to write a roughly thirty-minute educational piece of theatre responding to the lived experiences of trans and gender diverse people. The piece needed to be staged in any school hall or meeting space with minimal set up and technical requirements, and to be performed by a single actor (of any gender identity). The performance

would always be followed by a panel session directly discussing content from the play, and featuring a group of local health professionals from advocacy organisations (such as Transgender Victoria) experienced in speaking on trans issues and sourced from the community in which the work was performed. Previous works produced in Australia by CHASE using this model – *You the Man* (Plourde et al., 2016; Plourde, 2017; Crisp & Taket, 2022), and *The Thin Line* (Plourde, 2018; Taket, 2020) – dealt with gender-based violence and eating disorders respectively, and were pre-existing texts written by American health professor and playwright Cathy Plourde. This would be the first time CHASE commissioned an original script, one from an Australian playwright, and one with a much broader thematic focus, less centred on a singular issue than authentic representation of a marginalised group. An advisory group of trans and gender diverse people of varying ages and cultural backgrounds was formed by CHASE, with university ethics approval, during the initial development and workshop performance stages of the project. This group would be encouraged to maintain an ongoing relationship with the work by giving feedback at future showings.

The general parameters that I, as playwright, was given were that the play script needed to:

1. contain multiple discussion points on trans and gender diversity issues,
2. be educative for general audiences of upper-secondary school students to adults (who could become better equipped to support trans and gender diverse people), and
3. be broadly positive – without sacrificing honesty or integrity – in its representation of trans and gender diverse experiences.

In this article, I critically reflect on the process of wrestling with this brief as a playwright, and my growing awareness of my ethical responsibilities (and those of the project) as playwright / researcher. In particular, I consider my identity and positioning, how to work with / from / alongside an advisory group and their lived experiences, the development, workshopping, and casting process when working with trans and gender diverse content, and presentations of the work in different contexts.

Being Frank by CHASE was developed as an interdisciplinary undertaking of both a) health promotion educative theatre resource, and b) Research-based Theatre project. Two central questions framed the conception of the project: how can we better understand the lived experience of trans and gender diverse people in Australian society through theatre, and how

can we provide connections to resources to audiences of predominantly cisgender young people and adults to be better-informed allies to trans and gender diverse people in their communities? In this paper, I reflect on these ambitions from my perspective as playwright / researcher writing plays in a scholarly context for the first time, discussing the complex interrelationships between theatre, education, and social issues. While *Being Frank* has been briefly analysed from a health promotion perspective (Taket, 2020), I offer a playwright / researcher account of the project's methodology, outcomes, and limitations in attempting to address the extremely broad topic of the marginalization of trans and gender diverse people in Australian society. As Mackenzie and Belliveau note, the playwright's contributions to research have been underrepresented in scholarly writing (2011, p. 3); this article aims to closely investigate that perspective.

FINDING *FRANK* WITHIN / ACROSS RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE METHODOLOGIES

MARCO: I come crashing through the quadrangle.

Spot him.

Bowl him over with an enormous hug, and we hold each other tight.

(Pause) Frank!

We just got back from Cyprus three days ago.

Your video – woah – *soooooo* –

I've been proactively doing research, and I have a number of questions for you so that we can interact respectfully and I do not cause undue offence.

Firstly, what name would you – oh, I guess you've already decided?

You're Frank.

It's cool, it's still *you*, but – *different*.

Secondly: which pronouns would you like to be referred to by?

Some of the popular options include: he / xie / they / zhe / fae.

You're *he*: you're a trans – dude?

But you could also be nonbinary, or genderqueer, or –

Sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself, I've been reading literally *everything*.

Even though my brain is melting into overloaded slushie goo: I want you to know that I'm looking out for you.

> I've spoken to the Year Level Coordinators and we're going to start a LGBTQIA and Allies group.
>
> So don't worry about anything, alright? (Summers, 2019, p. 3)

Representing the intersection of a health-based initiative designed to educate and the creative work of a playwright / researcher, I now understand that *Being Frank* sits within the broad category of Research-based Theatre. But in 2016 when I was commissioned, I was a middle-class, white, cisgender, gay male playwright with a keen interest in political issues, and writing plays that explored gender, sexuality, cultural identity (all four of my grandparents were Ukrainian refugees), and marginalised communities. Though I had studied theatre and playwriting throughout my early 20s and won awards and worked with mainstage Australian theatre companies, this project would begin my engagement with the role – and responsibilities – of a playwright / researcher within scholarly paradigms focused on educational potentialities.

Through my own independent research, I discovered that Research-based Theatre is an umbrella term to describe a variety of performance-based approaches to arts-based research (Belliveau & Lea, 2016) involving collaboration – often between artists, researchers, and research – that balances ethical rigour with the aesthetic demands of theatre (Cox et al., 2022; Belliveau et al., 2010). I was intrigued to discover that there is no singular way to do Research-based Theatre; it exists on a complex spectrum (Beck et al., 2011). The models of ethics and inquiry can similarly shift between projects, participants / advisory group members, and contexts (Lea, 2012; Bishop, 2014; Sallis, 2022).

Within this broad category, I initially considered ethnodrama / ethnotheatre as the most useful approach in shaping my understanding of how I would write plays as a researcher: piecing together scripts from interviews with recruited participants, documents, statistics, and other forms of data, which are then performed back to them and for select audiences (Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008; Saldaña, 2008). These "ethno" approaches to theatre-making have for several decades been used in health, humanities, and science fields to represent and empower individuals, create engagement and empathy, and achieve positive outcomes for marginalized communities (Mienczakowski, 2001; Nimmon, 2006; Sweet & Carlson, 2018).

However, I was given the brief as playwright / researcher to independently create new characters reflecting (but not limited to) aspects of our advisory group, insert fictional circumstances, alter and add words to form new

dialogue, and use aesthetic and poetic devices. Ethnodrama / theatre traditionally possess a greater reverence toward participant interview transcripts than what was conceived here, with careful editing rather than original creation being used to guide the final performance text, particularly in relation to 'juicy stuff' (Saldana, 1998; 2008). In this instance, I realised that my methodology could be described as a "playwright-centred" (Lea, 2012, p. 63) approach to Research-based Theatre, and more closely aligned with theatre created in non-academic contexts, yet still with direct access to the main source of the research (the advisory group).

The stated purpose by CHASE of this playwright-centred brief was twofold; firstly, to protect the identities and lives of the advisory group as an ethical act, and secondly, to drive non-academic audience engagement through creative / aesthetic choices. This may be frowned upon in ethnodrama / theatre, as this can be seen as a betrayal of the ethical relationship between participants and researchers that prioritised artistic vision over data (Saldaña, 1998). Further, the goal of creating a play script which would travel to non-academic settings, and become part of larger public community conversations, might also sit in contrast to methodologies where audiences are more likely to be closed. I also began to understand that *Being Frank* may therefore align more closely with other approaches including play-building (Norris, 2000; 2009); performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003), and applied theatre (Thompson, 2009; Prendergrast & Saxton, 2016).

Perhaps further distinguishing *Being Frank* was the play script's role in briefly raising and sparking a number of issues, rather than exploring any of them in substantial aesthetic or conceptual depth. The script was not designed to reflect back, or represent, any specific individual or member of the advisory group. Nor was it designed to track a simple narrative from start to finish; artistic and aesthetic questions were secondary to the health-based issues that needed to be readily identifiable for a non-academic audience. *Being Frank* was also never designed to stand on its own: social / health issues would be dramatically signposted, then picked up in the panel discussion session afterwards, and / or in the accompanying package of resources. The re-orienting of the play as entangled and inseparable from the panel session would take pressure off the script achieving the educative outcomes, positioning it as a starting point for more substantial discussions to follow. As Taket identifies, the two would work together to create empathy, understanding and awareness of supports (2020, p. 441), similarly reflected in the empathetic power of Research-based Theatre argued by Mienczakowski & Moore (2008).

Lea argues that as the choices made that inform the script-development process ultimately influence the research, these should be discussed in detail (2012, p. 82). The understanding and theoretical justifications of theatre-based work to educate and achieve social benefits are often different in health disciplines to arts-based disciplines. Reflecting on the *After the Crash* project, which united health and theatre-based practitioners, Colantonio et al. (2008) argue that "the methodological approaches and the ultimate outcome in representing the source material were understood differently by artists and scientists" (p. 181). Now, with a PhD using Research-based Theatre methods, I understand the importance of this. I have come to question whether more discussion and codification within Research-based Theatre frameworks – both theatrical and ethical – might have more closely guided the early stages of the work's development, particularly for me as an experienced playwright, but, at that stage, an emerging arts-based researcher. Looking back, it is hard to escape the feeling that, after the initial advisory group session, I was left largely to my own still-forming creative and ethical devices; although I accept, as Research-based Theatre practitioners, these are continuously in formation. Further, greater clarity and communication around the specific Research-based Theatre brief could have afforded advisory group members – who signed informed consent statements and whose involvement was approved through university ethics – a greater understanding of exactly *how* their engagements, words, experiences might be used, theatrically. This suggests a challenge when introducing an artist into the intermingled methodological ecologies of health-based and arts-based research, trusting their creative practice alone will be enough to guide them through. A potential solution as a go-between for practitioners / researchers – a dramaturg(e) – has been floated by Belliveau and Lea (2011, p. 335) as someone versed in both the arts and research to support, critique, develop the project from multiple lenses. While many "outside eyes" were informally consulted throughout the project's development, this suggestion is worthy of further consideration for future Research-based Theatre projects, particularly at the time of their originating.

"WE ARE SUCCESSFUL *BECAUSE* WE ARE TRANS, NOT *IN SPITE* OF BEING TRANS": THE INITIAL ADVISORY GROUP MEETING

> **FRANK:** (*holds up the brochure)* "OMG – I'm Trans."
>
> Written by young trans people, it keeps blowing my mind, because what I thought I knew, I realised I didn't at all.
>
> Trans isn't just feeling trapped inside one body and wanting to be in another.

> It isn't just about accessing hormones, or having gender affirmation surgery.
>
> It can be for some people, but it doesn't have to be.
>
> There's a billion possibilities.
>
> A whole constellation – who don't fit into masculine or feminine – who are fluid and can change.
>
> I shut my eyes think about myself between these pages.
>
> What could I look like?
>
> *Frank* – he's got muscular legs.
>
> A chest with a bit of a gut, because he isn't ever going to give up pizza.
>
> And a moustache like Freddy Mercury.

An initial meeting between Professor Ann Taket, theatre director Suzanne Chaundy (who had directed previous CHASE shows), myself, and the advisory group was conducted at Deakin University in late 2016. The group, as recruited by CHASE in conjunction with advocacy groups Transgender Victoria, Y Gender (who published the OMG – *I'm Trans* resource), and Minus18, represented a cross-section of trans and gender diverse people from across Melbourne. This encompassed a diversity of ages, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, and geographical locations. The purpose of the initial meeting was to ask the group three questions, which would guide the development of the work:

1. What are the key messages that the program needs to include?
2. What are the hurtful / harmful / derogatory myths that the program needs to explode?
3. What sources/resources should be used to inform the text, as well as be available to link in for audiences afterwards?

A transcript of this meeting reveals the breadth of responses across the three questions. There is a strong desire for a work that reflects a strengths-based, positive approach towards trans representation: the unique skills, creativities, and qualities of trans individuals, each having one (or more) "seven billion gender identities." There is want for a work that will create empathy, warmth, and connection, while reflecting resilience using humour to explore pressing issues. There is concern that trans people's narratives are often depicted as overly simplistic, confusing gender and sex and rendering them as binary, and that trans people's sexualities are often not separated from their gender identity. Further, there is acknowledgement that trans and gender diverse representations in arts /

media are largely white and Western. In terms of the issues to be discussed, multiple advisory group members made reference to the challenges of interacting with the medical system, myths of chromosomes, the difficulty obtaining proper medical care as a trans person, being required to educate doctors, and the external fixation on surgery and hormones towards effectively 'passing.' As one advisory group member stated: "I'm not a curiosity, a specimen: I am a real person." Many of these medical concerns are similarly reflected in members' experiences of administrative processes, legal systems, and challenges in workplaces or with government agencies. They are also frequently raised in the media with references to bathrooms, pronoun use, and participation in sports: issues which one advisory group member deemed "institutionalised cissexism." A general theme across the advisory group is the complexity and multifaceted nature of trans and diverse gender identities –while it can be possible to not feel "trans enough," the diversity within trans and gender diverse communities is ultimately a defining strength. A strong overall message is that the diversity of trans and gender diverse identities and experiences demands recognition and celebration.

This initial meeting was illuminating and exciting, offering *so* many possibilities for how these themes could be realised theatrically. Indeed, the statements around the diversity of the trans experience – the ever-expanding constellation of identities – informed the motif of space-travel, planets, and stars that runs throughout *Being Frank*. The meeting was also confronting on two counts. Firstly, listening to the depth of the systemic challenges faced by trans people to live, access services, be employed, and express themselves authentically. Secondly, that I wasn't aware of these; that my own marginalization contained unacknowledged privilege that blindsided me from the experiences of trans and nonbinary others I lived amongst and counted as friends. Despite considering myself an aware ally, I had become, silently, part of the problem. As one advisory group member recalled of the ignorance from within, not outside, of the LGBTQIA+ community: "I was told 'you're really a gay man that can't face being gay.'"

While diversity of, and within, trans and gender diverse experiences was critical to the conception of the project, it was apparent from this first session that there were many layers of nuanced experience to educate audiences about in a single performance. Given the time-based constraints of the performance and the importance of the panel sessions, it was clear that *Being Frank* couldn't do justice to all of them. This raises challenging questions about exactly who is recruited to inform a Research-based Theatre advisory group when the parameters are so broad: Would it have been better to recruit fewer members, of less diversity in background and

lived experience, but to go deeper with them during the interviews? Surely this would dictate the direction of the play script before the research data had been generated – limiting the perspectives that could be covered. But would this necessarily be a bad thing?

From this point onwards, as playwright / researcher, I was required to make decisions to interpret, synthesise, transform, and edit the narratives and experiences of real trans and gender diverse people into a play script – ironically, given the goals of the project, rendering them visible or invisible as I went.

AESTHETIC AND FORMAL QUESTIONS: BALANCING ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

GITA: I'm driving Frank to see a new doctor.

Our bomb of a car stalls on the West Gate and almost carks it for good.[1]

I'm ashamed to say it, and I could never tell him, but I –

Hor-mones.

Jabbed and injected and, swirling around inside my –

My *child*.

"Yes, sorry – Doctor – how do we get the hormones?"

FRANK: "Psychiatrist sessions?

Paediatricians?

En-do-cron-olo-gists, Mum, what are they?

And that's just to get puberty blockers?

I want facial hair.

I want to sound like – a dude.

It's my body.

I'm not going to be told what I'm allowed to do with it.

And I'm not going to change my mind."

I don't hear Mum as we walk out of the clinic.

I don't hear the car struggling to start, or Mum trying to help Dad with dinner, or the crickets outside my window.

This was supposed to be about me being *me*, not having to prove who I am, costing so much money.

This *sucks.* (Summers, 2019, p. 6).

Being present for, and then re-reading the transcript of, the first advisory group session, my biggest challenge and undertaking as playwright / researcher was how to balance the aesthetic, poetic, and theatrical aspects of the play script, with the necessary research and raising of issues identified by the advisory group as an important part of a "reflexive drama-based process" (Belliveau, 2015, p. 6). This process was constantly evolving, requiring ongoing character experimentation (descriptions, monologues, actions), dialogue writing / rewriting, re-reading, and reflection, all with a heightened awareness of a) my responsibility to this group, and b) my responsibilities as a playwright / researcher who could engage and potentially educate audiences.

The initial meeting led to the identification of key themes and ideas: namely, the diversity of experience in being trans, the multiple and intersecting layers of challenges from individuals and systems when trying to live as trans or gender diverse, the role of technology in connecting and facilitating authentic expressions of trans and gender diverse people, and the necessity of positive trans and gender diverse narratives. These were guiding concepts when beginning to plan the characters and narratives of what quickly became titled *Being Frank*. *Frank*, the main character, as in honest, upfront, and a masculinized version of dead-name Francesca; *being* as in the lived experience of the present, the constant state of becoming yourself. Inspired by the advisory group's suggestions as detailed in the initial meeting, the dramatic underpinning of the work became: *how do you discover what kind of trans or gender diverse person you might be, and how might this journey impact the people around you, and the support that they can give?*

The constraint of having a single actor present multiple perspectives in the same piece was significant, requiring a script that was detailed enough to carry this, yet nimble enough to allow an actor to shift between distinct characters quickly. I was intimidated by the challenge of how to do all of this and not overwhelm an audience, or actor, while still providing plenty of important points for discussion afterwards.

I made the decision to have a secondary school-age protagonist, Frank, and three characters in Frank's orbit: cis male over-enthusiastic friend Milo, cis female concerned mother Gita, and trans female trailblazer Noor. These characters, speaking largely in active intersecting first-person monologues, would offer contrasting perspectives from family, friends, and another trans person / romantic interest. They would also allow different entry points for the play to speak, at least somewhat, to its various audiences. Each supporting character would explore key issues raised by the advisory group members as framed by Frank's narrative journey: Milo and school-

based bullying as Frank debates which toilet to use, Gita and Frank's father Hutch's concerns over how best to support possible medical interventions (such as puberty blockers and surgery) given financial and legal constraints, and Noor and Frank's efforts towards forming relationships and discovering community across the spectrum of trans and gender diverse people.

At the centre of all this would be Frank, who audiences would experience in two ways, adding complexity to his experiences and depth to his emerging identity as a trans man. The first would be, like the other characters, an ongoing monologue depicting roughly a year in his life as he wrestled with the social, interpersonal, and medical challenges of becoming himself. The second would be mediatised 'streamed' performances; Frank would be a social media vlogger, performing songs and sketches, documenting his experiences of transitioning to the world, dispelling myths, and sharing trans dating disasters while engaging with online fans. The importance of technology in connecting communities of trans people was a common thread in the initial meeting with advisory members and reflected in the large presence of trans and gender diverse people on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and other platforms (Horak, 2014; Byron et al., 2019). Theatrically, the aim was that these streams would offer a simple but engaging way to break up the intersecting monologues of the characters, while allowing audiences to experience a disjunct between the outer performance and inner feelings of a teenage trans or gender diverse person. Though initially this level of technology was out of the project's scope, as determined by CHASE, this issue was solved with the provision of a projector and screen that would travel with the actor to each performance, as well as workshopped pre-recorded sequences.

One of the most difficult aspects of the drafting process was deciding on what from the initial meeting could be included, and what would need to be left out. A focus on a younger trans person who had some exposure to an older generation of trans and gender diverse people meant forgoing a deeper focus on the middle-aged trans experience. Similarly, choosing to centre the performance text on a character assigned female at birth meant forgoing an opportunity to represent a trans woman protagonist. While I felt it was important for me to set the text in the culturally diverse western suburbs of Melbourne where I was living, with characters reflecting cultural and socioeconomic diversity, I knew this may not be enough to provide a counterpoint to the prevailing white, Western trans narratives (Miller, 2012) many in the advisory group were keen to see avoided. An

initial draft would, at least, allow for these choices to be tested before returning them to the advisory group for feedback.

"OUR LIVES, OUR WORDS": REDRAFTING, RESHAPING, AND FINDING FORM

> **FRANK:** I stand out the front of the Sunshine Library with a packet of peanuts and a half-eaten block of Bega cheese.
>
> Peer into the meeting room.
>
> And then a girl pops out from around the corner.
>
> "Jenny?"
>
> **NOOR:** Jenny? Jenny Derr?
>
> Oh-em-gee, you don't get it.
>
> Jen Derr.
>
> Jen-der?
>
> Jeez, I only use it on Facebook for a laugh.
>
> I'm Noor.
>
> I love your videos, Frank.
>
> I'm a filmmaker too. I've been interviewing everyone here for my University application. It's a documentary about us, trans people of all ages, colours, religions. But, mostly, it's for me.
>
> I'm so happy you're here.
>
> Everyone, this is Frank! (Summers, 2019, p. 14)

Upon completing and submitting the early first draft of *Being Frank*, the discussion between Suzanne Chaundy, Ann Taket, and myself hit at an interesting tension raised by the advisory group: *how to be positive, educative, and representative without falling into the tropes of existing narratives depicting trans people?* In being hyper-aware of avoiding pitfalls and creating a meaningful, strong representation of many aspects of trans and gender diverse experiences, I initially went too far to the opposite: avoiding all conflict where it should have been depicted, avoiding representation of perspectives that could be seen to do harm if shown and left unchecked. It was clear that in rewriting, wrestling with the thematic mess of substantial issues would need to become more important, rather than 'writing them off.' Much like Owis et al. (2022) in their *Out at School* LGBT project, balance had to be sought between honouring the vulnerability of marginalised people, and authenticity of interactions when

dramatizing challenging moments. Theatrical devices – like the characters speaking to each other within monologues (requiring the actor to jump quickly between roles) – would also need to be sacrificed for the sake of performer and audience clarity.

After a casting process where cis and gender diverse actors were encouraged to apply, Genevieve Guieffre, a professional cis female actor, was employed. She would also take on the role of script dramaturg. A week in April 2017 was spent at Deakin University workshopping the text, discussing our personal relationships to the material, experimenting with character work, staging scenes, and collaborating on clarifying strong story arcs. This process raised key issues leading to fruitful discussion about the presence of masculinity / femininity in all of the characters; honing in on Frank being a flawed, at times selfish, protagonist while on his journey of self-discoveries; and different props and performance styles that would help distinguish characters. The workshop culminated in the first reading, at Deakin University's city campus, of *Being Frank* to a group of academics, health workers, and many of the original advisory group.

I was extremely nervous about this reading, more than I normally would be as a playwright seeing my work in front of an audience. Not because I didn't ultimately trust the integrity of the process that the team and CHASE had followed and the work we had done, but because I was aware of the immense responsibility that we had to the advisory group (who I had not seen or communicated with since the first meeting). I hoped to demonstrate that we understood and wanted to broadly educate others about aspects of their experiences. Not just their experiences, but their identities – which had already been called into question, challenged, and delegitimised in so many other contexts. I knew that it was impossible to make everyone happy, which was a testament to the diversity of the advisory group and their experiences, but hopefully the work – and its educational potential – would make them feel their involvement was validated. When asked if I had anything to say to the advisory group at the end of the presentation, I anxiously but deliberately offered: "I think now is the time for me to listen."

Thankfully, for the most part, the audience were receptive. The advisory group recognised the presence of their own words and experiences in the text and did not feel like gratuitous liberties had been taken to invent dramatic or thematic tensions that weren't authentic. As one advisory group member said, "*those are our lives and our words.*" One academic was keen for the work to be performed to their pre-service Health and Physical Education teachers, believing it would be a useful resource for tertiary

students. Many other group members looked forward to seeing where the work would go and offered suggestions on how it might develop.

There were clarifications of dialogue or content, which were extremely helpful while redrafting: specific terminology around hormones and puberty blockers that required clarification, references to surgery that could better reflect the community's language, and clarifying the framing of Frank's journey to arriving at a point of possible nonbinary identity rather than binary trans man.

There were also deeper theoretical concerns raised (predominantly by one advisory group member in written feedback) about two things both of which we had already anticipated and could not easily be resolved. These pertained to the balancing of artistic and aesthetic goals in the project, while covering the necessary issues and questions of representation. The first concern was the decision to make the protagonist a trans man, when trans women were statistically more likely to be marginalised in society (and have reductive representations in film and media). Our attempt to rectify this with the depiction of a trans woman of colour character, Noor, was viewed by one advisory group member as largely cursory and not a substantial enough presence to have a place in the narrative. This was a completely fair criticism, and a difficult one to address: in discussions of this storyline with the creative team, it was thought that it would be better to include Noor – to spark thought and discussion about trans women of colour – rather than not to include her at all. At least then she could be raised by panelists, or audiences, in future presentations, and perhaps questions about representation could accompany that.

The second ethical concern was the casting of a cis woman as an actor to play all the roles. From a very early stage of the project, casting had been a topic of consideration and debate. The script itself does not denote that the actor playing all the roles should be any specific gender identity or have specific physical attributes. While CHASE wanted to support a trans actor should they choose to be involved, the organization was concerned about the impact that performing the work for audiences who may not be immediately receptive might have on the health of a trans or gender diverse performer. Additionally, it was flagged that a trans or gender diverse actor may feel the burden of the work being viewed by audiences as autobiographical or pressured to offer autobiographical content in the panel sessions following. While it was always envisaged that at least two actors would be trained to deliver *Being Frank* (so the work could travel more widely pending availabilities and demand), this was still difficult feedback to receive. Genevieve had offered so much to the workshopping

process as a thoughtful actor / dramaturg, as well as having her own experiences of trans and gender diverse people in her family to draw from. These were not necessarily things that the advisory group member would have been aware of, even though we had thought about them very closely as a creative team. In hindsight, making some of these thought processes and discussions available to the advisory group may have helped them understand the difficulty of the competing decisions at play. And although this feedback was only raised by one advisory group member, I questioned: couldn't this same criticism be levelled at me, as a cis gay male playwright? Was Genevieve only receiving this critique, and not myself, because she was the public face of *Being Frank* – what about all my biases and subjectivities that, as playwright / researcher, subconsciously shaped the text itself?

Ultimately, showing the work to the advisory group at this stage of the process was extremely beneficial, while also identifying some of the ethical and artistic challenges in creating a new Research-based Theatre work in this health promotion space. Even the advisory group members who raised the complex issues of representation were happy with the overall potential of the work to educate and connect with general audiences, which was gratifying for the team. However, as playwright / researcher, I was again reminded of the limitations – mine, the project's – and the impossibility of doing justice to all perspectives, simultaneously.

WHO IS BEING HEARD? POSSIBILITIES AND ETHICAL FUTURES OF RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE

> **FRANK:** I walk around the room, like an astronaut.
>
> I'm inside my spaceship, surrounded by all these bright supernovas.
>
> George, a trans man lawyer in his late 40s who had to have a hysterectomy to meet a medical definition of 'man.' That scares me a little – it scares me a lot.
>
> A nonbinary couple – Sky and Rainbow – who moved to Warrandyte in the 1980s from overseas and made their own family of kids and fur-babies.
>
> Some who have surgically transitioned, some who illegally obtained hormones from the dark-web, some who have the same bodies as always, maybe just a bit saggier.
>
> And by the end of the night, I don't feel like I'm inside my spaceship anymore.
>
> I'm part of this galaxy.

Subsequent work-in-progress presentations of *Being Frank*, including for school students and teachers in late 2017, received strong positive feedback through voluntary surveys and unsolicited follow-up emails (Taket, 2020, p. 313). However, it is important to acknowledge that comprehensive methods for evaluating educational efficacy of Research-based Theatre work remain incomplete (Lea & Belliveau, 2011). Notwithstanding the limitations of the gathered data, Taket reported that not a single piece of negative feedback pertaining to trans or gender diverse identities (as opposed to how the play could incorporate them differently) was received (Taket, 2020, p. 314). Perhaps, in such a contested political space, those with conflicting views didn't feel comfortable sharing them. Or perhaps the play and panel were able to make them feel something, to shift or challenge their minds.

I attended a showing at a low-socioeconomic high school in Western Melbourne that had students totally engaged, respectfully asking questions afterwards, and giving snippets of feedback on post-it notes. As Taket (2020) observed, students, teachers, and a health nurse connected to the importance of the content, learnt distinctions between gender / sex and related terms, and appreciated the generosity of the trans man representing Transgender Victoria who sat on the after-show panel. Another showing in 2018, where teachers and community health workers were brought into Deakin University, evoked similar responses but also some fear / hesitation about the politically sensitive nature of the content in their faith-based educational settings[2]. This was ultimately prescient, and not only for religious schools. Teachers indicated, broadly, both to members of CHASE at showings, or in private written feedback, that they felt they could not risk staging *Being Frank* in their school communities for fear of leadership and/or parent backlash. Ironically, these were environments in which the project was perhaps required the most. As playwright / researcher – and former secondary school teacher – I was acutely aware of the toxic political environment surrounding trans and gender diverse issues in Australia and the hyper-politicised nature of this within schools, particularly following the anti Safe Schools campaigns of the mid 2010s (Jones et al., 2016; Thompson, 2019). I hadn't fully considered the extent to which this could limit the ability of *Being Frank* to find younger audiences, and this remains a critical consideration when measuring the educational reach of Research-based Theatre work.

While schools were reluctant to book the work, it was able to travel for health and community-based organisations in regional Victoria across 2018-2019. *Being Frank* was featured at multiple universities both as part of formal education programs for pre-service teachers and during new

student orientation programs, as well as at a range of government and non-government organizations – many of whom wrote, unprompted, to give thanks and praise the performance. During this time, the original performer / dramaturg, Genevieve, left the project to relocate overseas, but two new performers – a woman of colour, and the first trans actor involved in the project – took over. Responses continued to be overwhelmingly positive, though my personal involvement as playwright / researcher was now limited to the occasional panel session. My last panel, scheduled to take place at Deakin University in early 2020, was ultimately cancelled due to the suspension of on-campus activity with the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the challenges of staging theatrical work over the ongoing lockdowns and COVID-19 restrictions in Melbourne in the years following meant that *Being Frank* has not been staged since. The theatre-based programs team within CHASE has been dismantled, a larger research project about *Being Frank* abandoned, and an uncertain future lies ahead for the work. While there were always limitations with the project, there had been momentum; 2020 ground this to a halt, and it has never recovered.

In the years since *Being Frank* was first commissioned, my own understanding and engagement with Research-based Theatre, and the complexities of its aesthetic and ethical entanglements, has developed substantially. Unlike a commercial theatrical work, *Being Frank* was conceived in conjunction with relevant community and advocacy groups through overlapping health and Research-based Theatre frameworks. Despite this, I have become increasingly uncertain about exactly whose voice was / is foregrounded through the project, and to what extent this could have been better addressed at multiple stages. Belliveau et al. distinguish between procedural and practical ethics in relation to Research-based Theatre, focusing on the *Contact!Unload* project enacted with returned war veterans. They establish six guiding principles from conceptualising, creating, and evaluating a Research-based Theatre project (2021, pp. 142-143), which do not prescribe but rather raise awareness around ethical considerations that may arise in doing this critical work. While *Being Frank* had formal university ethics approval at all stages, did that amount to the same ethics being realised in practice, across our roles?

I have frequently reflected on the fact that I do not identify as trans or gender diverse yet was commissioned to structure and shape the play as a playwright. Did I take this opportunity from a qualified trans person? Or should I trust that I was employed for my skills in "transmediation" of the material (Belliveau et al., 2021, p. 143)? Would a trans writer have been able to "avoid over-privileging narratives they resonate with"? (Belliveau et

al., 2021, p. 143) And did I even do this? Did we do enough to support trans and gender diverse performers, researchers, and creatives to participate meaningfully in the project? By participate I mean not just serve as the advisory group, but feel deeply embedded at all levels? Further, in terms of how audiences in a pandemic-effected world listen and engage, I wonder if we could've conceived the project to better account for "accessibility" in all definitions of the word (Belliveau et al., 2021, p. 145). Could we have created an online performance and series of video-based resources to sit alongside – in non-hierarchal arrangement – live theatrical performances? How might digital and emerging social media forms have helped us engage diverse new audiences across the country and internationally, or existing audiences in new ways? Or would this media influx have restricted our capacity to use the full potential of live performance?

Being Frank represented my first foray into Research-based Theatre. Just as for those working in this methodological space (Gallagher & Sallis, 2018), it has continued to raise questions, challenges, disconnects, and provocations for me as I interrogate the relationship between playwright / researcher, performance and education / social change in my subsequent practice. Looking back, I do not believe the project, or the play, was perfect in its design or implementation (or that it ever could have been). However, it had an impact on audiences as an educative, sometimes emotional, and genuine performance. It was supported by a well-intentioned connection to, and respect for, the advisory group, and the empowerment of trans voices in the after show panel.

Being Frank demonstrated a step towards addressing the critical lack in theatre-based work that educates and advocates for marginalized trans and gender diverse people to predominantly non-academic audiences in Australia. The question of which Research-based Theatre practitioners will fill this gap now, and how their ethics and creativity will entangle, remains.

NOTES

1. The West Gate freeway is a popular and busy highway that connects Western Melbourne with the city. "Carks it" is a colloquial way of referring to breaking down or stopping.
2. A significant proportion of Australian primary and secondary schools are non-government and faith-based).

REFERENCES

Belliveau, G., Cox, S., Nichols, J., Lea, G. W., & Cook, C. (2021). Examining the ethics of research-based theatre through *Contact!Unload*. In T. Prentki & A. Breed (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to applied performance: Volume one - Mainland Europe, North and Latin America, Southern Africa, and Australia and New Zealand*, 1 pp. 141-148). Routledge.

Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.). (2016). *Research-based theatre: An artistic methodology*. Intellect Books.

Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (2011). Research-based theatre in education. In S. Schonmann (Ed.), *Key concepts in theatre/drama education* (pp. 333-338). Brill.

Belliveau, G., (2015), Performing identity through research-based theatre: Brothers. *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, *14*(1), 5-16.

Beck, J. L., Belliveau, G., Lea, G. W., & Wager, A. (2011). Delineating a spectrum of research-based theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*(8), 687-700.

Bishop, K. (2014). Six perspectives in search of an ethical solution: Utilising a moral imperative with a multiple ethics paradigm to guide research-based theatre/applied theatre. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, *19*(1), 64-75.

Byron, P., Robards, B. J., Hanckel, B., Vivienne, S., & Churchill, B. (2019). "Hey, I'm having these experiences": Tumblr use and young people's queer (dis) connections. *International Journal of Communication*, *13*, 2239-2259.

Colantonio, A., Kontos, P. C., Gilbert, J. E., Rossiter, K., Gray, J., & Keightley, M. L. (2008). After the crash: Research-based theater for knowledge transfer. *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, *28*(3), 180-185.

Crisp, B. R., & Taket, A. (2022). Using a theatre-based programme to prevent gender-based violence: Evidence from Australia. *Health Promotion International*. *38*(3).

Cox, S., Guillemin, M., Nichols, J., & Prendergast, M. (2022). Ethics in research-based theater: Why stories matter. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *29*(2), 247-256.

Denzin, N. K. (2003). *Performance ethnography: Critical pedagogy and the politics of culture*. Sage.

Gallagher, K., & Sallis, R. (2018). Learning on the ground: How our research stories teach us about ethics. In P. Duffy, C. Hatton, & R. Sallis (Eds.), *Drama research methods: Provocations of practice* (pp. 36-54). Brill.

Horak, L. (2014). Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, visibility, temporality. *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *1*(4), 572-585.

Jones, T., Smith, E., Ward, R., Dixon, J., Hillier, L., & Mitchell, A. (2016). School experiences of transgender and gender diverse students in Australia. *Sex Education*, *16*(2), 156-171.

Lea, G. W. (2012). Approaches to developing research-based theatre. *Youth Theatre Journal*, *26*(1), 61-72.

Mackenzie, D., & Belliveau, G. (2011). The playwright in research-based theatre: Exploring the role of the playwright. *Canadian Journal of Practice-Based Research in Theatre*, *3*(1).

Miller, J. R. (2012). *Crossdressing cinema: An analysis of transgender representation in film*. Texas A&M University.

Mienczakowski, J., Morgan, S. (2001). Ethnodrama: Constructing participatory, experiential and compelling action research through performance. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research, participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 219-227). Sage.

Mienczakowski, J., & Moore, T. (2008). Performing data with notions of responsibility. In J. G. Knowles & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 451–458). SAGE Publications.

Nimmon, L. E. (2007). ESL-speaking immigrant women's disillusions: Voices of health care in Canada: An ethnodrama. *Health Care for Women International*, *28*(4), 381-396.

Norris, J. (2000). Drama as research: Realizing the potential of drama in education as a research methodology. *Youth Theatre Journal*, *14*(1), 40–51.

Norris, J. (2009). Playbuilding as qualitative research: A participatory arts-based approach. Left Coast Press.

Owis, B., Baer, P., Salisbury, J., & Goldstein, T. (2022). Out at school: Imagining a slow ethic of care in research-based theater. *Qualitative Inquiry*. *29*(2), 323-331.

Prendergast, M., & Saxton, J. (Eds.). (2016). *Applied theatre second edition: International case studies and challenges for practice*. Intellect Books.

Plourde, C. (2017) *The thin line: A play on coping with eating disorders*. Addverb Productions.

Plourde, C. (2018) *You the man: A one-man performance addressing bystanders*. Addverb Productions.

Plourde, C., Shore, N., Herrick, P., Morrill, A., Cattabriga, G., Bottino, L., ... & Stromgren, C. (2016). You the man: Theater as bystander education in dating violence. *Arts & Health*, *8*(3), 229-247.

Saldaña, J. (2008). Ethnodrama and ethnotheatre. In J. G. Knowles & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 195–207). SAGE.

Saldaña, J. (1998). Ethical issues in an ethnographic performance text: The 'dramatic impact' of 'juicy stuff.' *Research in Drama Education*, *3*(2): 181–96.

Sallis, R. J. (2022). Research-based theater in schools: Ethical challenges, conundrums, and choices. *Qualitative Inquiry*. *29*(2), 277-284.

Summers, C. (2019) *Being Frank* [Unpublished script].

Sweet, J. D., & Carlson, D. L. (2018). A story of becoming: Trans* equity as ethnodrama. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *24*(3), 183-193.

Taket, A. (2020). Theatre-based programmes: Promoting empathy and engagement. In B. Crisp & A. Taket (Eds.), *Sustaining social inclusion*, (pp. 304-317). Routledge.

Thompson, J. (2009). *Performance affects: Applied theatre and the end of effect*. Springer.

Thompson, J. D. (2019). Predatory schools and student non-lives: A discourse analysis of the Safe Schools Coalition Australia controversy. *Sex Education*, *19*(1), 41-53.

CHRIS SUMMERS is a Lecturer in Arts Education (Drama) at the University of Melbourne and Co-Director of the Research-based Theatre Lab in the Faculty of Education. christopher.summers@unimelb.edu.au

CHRIS SUMMERS est professeur en éducation artistique (théâtre/drama) à l'Université de Melbourne et codirecteur du Research-based Theatre Lab au sein de la Faculté d'éducation. christopher.summers@unimelb.edu.au

RESEARCH-INFORMED FICTIONAL HISTORIES: DRAMATIZING THE STORIES OF MARGINALIZED WOMEN

PRUE WALES, RICHARD JOHNSON SALLIS *The University of Melbourne*

ABSTRACT. This article documents the work of two Research-based Theatre practitioners. The two case studies featured were written in different cultures, for different purposes and audiences. However, both share some common elements. They feature marginalized and largely forgotten women. One tells of the plight of foreign domestic helpers in Singapore and East Asia. The second case documents the achievements of women painters whose contribution to the Australian en plein air movement has been undervalued. In both instances we included in our playwriting what we have come to refer to as *research-informed fiction*. The subject matter, the intended audience, and the real-life women on whom the plays were based necessitated including fictional elements into our respective plays.

HISTOIRES FICTIONNELLES APPUYÉES PAR LA RECHERCHE : DRAMATISER LES RÉCITS DES FEMMES MARGINALISÉES

RÉSUMÉ. Les deux études de cas ici présentées ont été écrites dans des contextes culturels différents, à des fins et pour des publics distincts. Ces études mettent en scène des femmes marginalisées et en grande partie oubliées. L'une raconte le sort des travailleuses domestiques étrangères à Singapour et en Asie de l'Est. La deuxième documente les réalisations de femmes peintres dont la contribution au mouvement australien de la peinture en plein air a été sous-évaluée. Dans les deux cas, nous avons intégré dans notre écriture dramatique ce que nous appelons désormais de la fiction appuyée par la recherche. Le sujet, le public visé, ainsi que les personnes réelles ayant inspiré les pièces ont nécessité l'intégration d'éléments fictifs dans nos créations respectives.

This article emanates from conversation we had as two experienced Research-based Theatre (RbT) practitioners who came together to discuss our work, in particular our shared interest in representing oppressed and disenfranchised women in our writing. Two case studies in which we were

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10206

personally invested are presented in this article: Prue introduces a case study set in the present day and Richard presents an historical case study. What links these two studies is an investigation of the oppression of women in two different time periods. However, as Conquergood (2013) cautions, our aim was neither to feed off the oppression nor to sensationalize it but simply to highlight it. Richard worked with his senior high school drama students to highlight the inequality early female artists in colonial Australia experienced in the art world. Prue wanted to bring to light the oppression of foreign domestic workers with whom she had worked while living in Singapore and Hong Kong, and to find ways to foster empathy and to present their voices in a way that could be heard by those in power and those who had no insight into the lives of migrant workers. Additionally, the case studies in this article discuss our reasons for fictionalizing aspects of our RbT work.

As RbT practitioners we maintain that our outputs are no less effective, affecting, or rigorous because they contain fictional elements. As Leavy (2013) asserts, "the lines between fiction and nonfiction, and writers and researchers, have long been blurred" (p. 25). She goes on to say:

> Although writers creating fiction-based research use many of the same tools as literary writers, they have, at least in part, different goals. With this said, there is always a balance to be struck between artfulness and usefulness (between aesthetics/craft and substantive contribution). It is also worth considering how literary craft or artfulness and usefulness are related to each other, inform each other, and enable each other. (Leavy, 2013, p. 90)

Supporting Leavy's (2013) contention, Paget (1990) states that while her play is based on her scientific analysis of women living with breast cancer and thus faithful to the original report, it is not the report that is being privileged in the performance but the lived experience that is documented within it. Associatively, Wolcott (2002) asserts that when a writer is "too respectful" towards the original data, they can "trap" the character and result in dialogue which sounds verbose and artificial (p. 137). Taking this further, Conrad (2002) claims that her RbT texts "are not, nor could ever claim to be, precise replications of what took place"; they are "not transcriptions [nor] works of fiction, but something in between," recreating a "spirit of, if not always the precise details of what occurred" (p. 10). Goldstein (2001, with reference to Clifford, 1986), an ethnographer who uses theatre to report on her findings, argues that ethnographers write "true fictions" because ethnography is an "interpretative, subjective, value-laden project" (p. 294).

Over the course of our work as RbT practitioners, we have at various times referred to our work as ethnodrama, ethnographic performance, and performance ethnography. However, as the field has developed and the parameters have shifted, now we refer to our work as RbT. Whilst we acknowledge that there are differences between each of those terms, our use of them reflects the language used during the periods in which we were originally writing our scripts. In his text *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre*, Saldaña (2005) asserts, perhaps provocatively, that "all playwrights are ethnodramatists" because they "employ traditional ethnographic methods to gather informative data for their plays" (p. 4) and thus the writing and staging of RbT performances is not the sole locus of the academy. Those in the profession of theatre can engage in research which forms the basis for their dramatic works. However, as Saldaña (2005) submits, playwrights who work in theatre settings are unlikely to refer to themselves as being "ethnodramatists" (or by inference RbT practitioners) but instead as writers of verbatim theatre or "reality theatre" (p. 5). Rogers et al. (2002) recount how a "dramatic presentation" entitled *Of Trailers and Trenches* by theatre director Paul Frellick, depicting the professional lives of beginning teachers, was based on their research data and an associated published research report. They foreground the dramatist's standpoint when asserting that research "can be an important resource for dramatists" (Rogers et al., 2002, p. 68). Analyzing his artistic and aesthetic choices when scripting the play, Frellick states that he drew on his "artist's instincts" as his "chief resource" whilst ensuring that the choices made by him, and his team of creatives, did not "misrepresent the data" (Rogers et al., 2002, p. 67).

The RbT works discussed below are what we refer to as *research-informed fiction*. We contend that the processes each of us undertook to create the works bore many of the characteristics associated with performances based on academic research projects even though the data were not collected through a conventional university-based inquiry. Notably, both are based on research into disempowered and unappreciated women in two different contexts.

CASE STUDY 1: EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF MARGINALIZED WOMEN VISUAL ARTISTS

In their article "Delineating a Spectrum of Research-based Theatre," Beck et al. (2011) provide a model of what they refer to as a research continuum. My (Richard) work of research-informed fiction, *The Golden Summers* (Sallis, 2003, 2019, 2022),[1] sits at various points on this RbT continuum, such as: where there are "first-hand accounts"; at a point where there are

to be found first-hand texts on which to base a performance [such as] journals, letters, or autobiographies; further to the right of the continuum where "we might find biographies, newspaper articles, or other less intimate sources of second-hand data"; and at "the far right of the research continuum, [where] the research may only consist of historical 'facts,' allowing the 'story' aspect to be imagined by the playwright" (Beck et al., 2011, pp. 690–691).

The Golden Summers (Sallis, 2022) can be included in the cannon of RbT because: (a) a team of investigators was formed to source data for the work; (b) it draws on both primary and secondary sources of data from investigations that were undertaken; (c) I analyzed the data before fashioning it into the play script; (d) with a few exceptions, the characters were based on the lived experiences of real people; (e) the content of the play was recreated from primary and secondary accounts; (f) the play was performed to stakeholders and the general public; and (g) to evaluate the play's effectiveness, I surveyed audience members to gauge their response and further refinements to the script over time were informed by those responses.

As of this writing, the script has gone through four drafts, the latest being in 2022. The main impetus for the different versions has been to suit different purposes and audience types. The first iteration of the script came into being when I was commissioned by a local council in Melbourne, Australia, to write a play about a group of internationally renowned impressionist artists whose careers started in the area. The en plein air painters that the council singled out were Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts, Charles Conder, and Louis Abrahams (all men); these painters are recognized as amongst the founders of the Heidelberg School of art dating back to the late 19th century. They began their careers painting on land that, since colonization, has been within the boundaries of the council. I was appointed by the council's arts officers given that I was known for writing and producing theatre for young people / audiences (TYP / TYA). The commission was to write a play about the artists as part of the council's Whispers From the Past festival. The secondary (all-boys) school at which I was teaching drama at the time resided within one of the wards of the council, and so it was determined that my Year 11 (aged 16–17) students would enact the play in our school theatre. The brief was to research the local history of the painters and write a play based on my investigations, which then would be performed by the drama students. Significantly, early in the research phase of the project, the co-researchers (my drama students) and I uncovered accounts of lesser-

known female painters who were contemporaries of the aforementioned artists, and we decided that their stories also needed to be told.

The council's arts officers Steve and Penny (pseudonyms) had access to an array of relevant historical documents — including minutes of council meetings, newspaper clippings, and correspondence pertaining to the Heidelberg School — which they shared with me.[2] Early in the process, my students helped me to sift through the provided resources to find, as I requested, "dramatically interesting incidents and events." Given that the work and private lives of the male painters were well documented, stories quickly began to emerge of their time painting in the bushland close to our school; one of my students was thrilled to discover that one of their painting sites became our school football oval. As tantalizing and educationally rewarding as these discoveries were, I was left feeling uninspired as an educator and as a playwright. I reasoned that stories surrounding these male painters were widespread and ours would just be yet another account. However, when one of my students found an article about the painters' female contemporaries in an early 20th century women's magazine, the project took a more dramatically and socially interesting turn.

The article published in 1938 by *The Australian Women's Weekly* identified three female en plein air artists — Clara Southern, Jane Sutherland, and Jane Price — who were painting in the same locations, and at the same time, as their well-documented male counterparts. Whilst recognizing that the women's contributions to the early days of the Heidelberg School had been largely forgotten, the article described them as "hobbyists." I remember having to explain to my students the distinction that was being made, and we agreed that this was an inaccurate and unfair label.

Inspired, my student-researchers and I turned to these female impressionist painters. However, our enthusiasm was dampened when I reported our intentions to the local council. Arts officer Steve told me that whilst he "appreciated our stance, [for the local council] the men are the drawcard, especially McCubbin … and after all most people have never heard of these [female] artists" (S. Dalton, personal communication, April 2, 2003). This I argued was the point — our play was an opportunity to let people know about their legacy. The position of the councillors was crystal clear, but I could tell the arts officers were potential allies — we eventually agreed that the work of the female painters could be included if we foregrounded that of their male contemporaries (I was aware at the time, as I am now, of this irony).

Uncovering more than cursory references to the female artists at first proved difficult, as this excerpt from an email I received from arts officer Penny illustrates:

> Most of the art books, some of which I have photocopied, only mention the women artists in passing ... when discussing the artists and their work. Sorry I couldn't be more helpful. However, I suggest you might wish to wade through newspapers on microfiche at the State Library.[3] (P. Vickers, personal communication, April 15, 2003)

A "fictionalized history"

I recently found the program for the first performance of the play and discovered that I described it at the time as a "fictionalized history." Years later, I am still comfortable with this description. Whilst we had uncovered some written documentation from which I could quote verbatim when writing the play, I was mostly unable to do so because the featured artists have all long passed. At the time, in 2003, I wrote an instruction to myself:

> Write dialogue consistent with the way you believe the character may have spoken including the recognition of social class, education, gender, and familiarisation with the [other] artists ... Consider how to physicalise the character, including how they might gesture and move.

Redressing the gender divide

Below is an excerpt from the play which illustrates how I depicted the female artists based on the available data and some research-informed guesses I needed to make. Whilst the dialogue is predominantly fictionalized, it is based on findings from the desk-based research (Bassot, 2022) where we delved into their history by accessing secondary sources. Looking back now as a more experienced RbT practitioner, I remain at ease with the writing process undertaken because the intention was to recreate what took place as accurately as possible given the data available. Fortuitously, we uncovered correspondence and diary entries from the painters (both male and female) that conveyed their personalities, views, and attitudes.

The scene that follows is largely based on the writings of Jane Sutherland. Whilst none of the dialogue is quoted verbatim, the account resonates with incidents that took place and the documented sentiments of Sutherland and her female artist contemporaries. For instance, in her diary entries from the late 1800s and early 1900s, Sutherland complains of the Methodist social attitudes of the day in which Australian female artists were afforded "no credibility" and viewed with "suspicion." As the correspondence between them reveals, this scrutiny resulted in the female artists travelling to and from Melbourne each day by train to their en plein

air painting location "lest they brought the [artists'] camp into further ill repute." Additionally, Sutherland bemoans that she "always missed out on the best light" of dusk and dawn, something that the male en plein air artists exploited and were "endlessly discussing." Her diary entries further reveal that Sutherland firmly believed that because of her gender her paintings sold at "a tenth of the price" of her male counterparts. She also asserts that her artistic output was hampered by the "constraints" society placed on female artists at the time.

Scene 6a: An Address to the Women for Justice League, 1887

As the lights come up JANE SUTHERLAND *is on a rostrum addressing an audience, of mostly female academics, writers, and artists, including* LOUISA LAWSON, *editor of the feminist publication, Dawn: A Journal for Australian Women.*

JANE: So, I say to you again women artists of Melbourne, the time has come for change. I feel I am not alone when I state unequivocally that women in Melbourne, like women in Sydney are losing out in the Australian art movement. We are currently seeing many more Australian women receiving a higher education. Why? Because they see that independence comes from having a paid profession.

ANNE (Moriarty): But what of women artists? In this society it is barely acceptable to be a woman in professions such as teaching, medicine, and even law. But art? No-one it seems has a problem with painting being a *pastime* for us [women], but if we dare suggest making a living from it, at best we are humoured at worst we are derided.

CLARA (Southern): Many of Australia's male artists give us in principal support but we don't need their benevolence, or pity! Instead, we need to take control of our own destiny.

ANNE: Have you seen the way women are depicted in many of the paintings adorning the walls of exhibitions across this city? A romanticised and inaccurate depiction of womanhood if ever there was one.

JANE: Mr Frederick McCubbin, to whom our dear Anne [Moriarty] will one day be wed, I'm sure, is a keen but all too silent supporter of our cause …

ANNE: … (*a little defensive on McCubbin's behalf*) he has publicly stated that his camp in Box Hill is available to the female sex should we wish to attend. And you've no doubt heard that Mr Arthur Streeton, one of the Box Hill artists, is talking of looking for an additional site for the impressionists at Heidelberg …

JANE: True enough Anne, but it is high time we women made a firm in-road into this movement! I propose that we choose a weekend in the very near future, and (*with a sly grin*) in the most polite and tactful of

> ways, travel out to Box Hill, storm the campsite and show these men that en plein air painting is by no means the province of the male sex alone. Are you with me sisters? (*Cheers and clapping can be heard from the women in attendance. The lights dim*).
>
> (Sallis, 2012, 1.6a.141–202)

Whilst most of the material for the script emanated from secondary data, during the playwriting process I was fortunate to interview Kathleen Mangan, the daughter of painters Frederick McCubbin and Anne Moriarty; Kathleen, who was in her 90s at the time, agreed to be interviewed at the invitation of the council's arts officers. This primary (and as it turned out vital) source of data helped to affirm and validate the depiction of the artists as they were beginning to emerge in the play script. Below is an excerpt of Kathleen's words from the interview and subsequently a scene from the play which illustrates how the information obtained was reflected in the script.

> From what I could see they [the male and female artists] got on well at the camp. However, I remember mother telling me that disagreements broke out, especially when the women had to catch the six o'clock train back to Melbourne … in Summer it is still light at that time so they could leave it that late in the day to return, but any time after six, it was considered not appropriate for unmarried women to be out in the bush with men … Even though my father [McCubbin] welcomed the women I think the men thought themselves the superior artists, or should I say my father and Bulldog [Roberts] and Smike [Streeton] thought they were more likely to earn a living from [their] art than the women — that was the feeling back then. (Sallis, 2003, Fieldnotes section)

Scene 8b: Conflict at the Camp

ROBERTS, STREETON and MCCUBBIN enter where the women have been painting all afternoon.

ROBERTS (*cheekily*): Well ladies, the sun is going down. Time you packed up your things and headed back [to the city] isn't it?

CLARA (*sighing*): We shall be on the 6.05 [train] never fear.

ROBERTS: I'm so glad you ladies were able to come here again this weekend.

JANE: Thank you, Mr Roberts. I must admit we did not meet as much opposition from you men as we expected.

The artist LOUIS ABRAHAMS enters, smoking a cigar.[4]

LOUIS: (*referring to JANE*) I like this painting of yours Miss Sutherland, it has an appropriately domesticated look to it.

JANE: The painting is called "Obstruction" Mr Abrahams. Why is it "appropriately domesticated"? Because *I* painted it and because a *woman* modelled for it?

LOUIS (*slightly apologetic*): I didn't mean that at all. What I meant was, the child in the painting is not as threatened as they seem to be in the Prof's [McCubbins'] paintings these days.

ROBERTS: I agree with the Don [Louis Abrahams], it's a very appealing painting.

JANE: Ah, "appealing" but without a statement, is that to what you are inferring? Well, the child is threatened in a way. If she goes over the fence, the bull will surely attack her, hence the title.

LOUIS (*smiling*): I concede defeat on a technicality.

(Sallis, 2012, 1.8b.1–22)

Reflections and revelations

Upon completing the drama education learning sequence, of which the production of the play was a part, I asked my students to write a reflection on the devising and performance processes as an assessment task in the subject. Perhaps because of the significant publicity the play received, including positive reviews in the local press, the students wrote freely about their experiences.[5] Most found the recreation of the historical events to be a highlight as well as what they learnt about the "stories behind the paintings," such as "how the artists each posed for each other, so they ended up in each other's paintings" and "that it [Box Hill artists' camp] took place where our school oval is today, which is awesome." Some however found the inclusion of the female artists to be one of the play's best achievements.

I will simply say that painters should be judged on their talent not their gender.

I do believe the men were arrogant against [*sic*] the women artists and didn't give them enough credit.

I liked how Jane [Sutherland] was a feminist and fought against sexist attitudes.

If we didn't include Jane, Clara, and Anne in the play the audience probably would have thought that we didn't think they were important enough.

At the Box Hill camp, I don't think the men artists [*sic*] really minded the women being their [*sic*], but they had their own reputations to think of because they were starting out as artists too.

Knowing that I had agreed to the council's condition that I write an assessment of the project, I decided to survey the audience members once they had seen the play. A sample of the survey questions follows:

- Why did you come to see the play?
- What did you know of the Box Hill artists' camp before seeing the play?
- Did anything surprise you when you saw the play?
- Which of the artists, if any, had you not known about before seeing the play?
- What were your favourite parts of the play and why?

As I predicted, most people had not previously known of the work of the female en air painters. A significant number of respondents also attested that their inclusion was amongst the play's highlights. A particular sequence in the play based on Image Theatre, an element of Boal's (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, was a highlight for many. Consistent with Image Theatre, the sequence began with a series of frozen images. These were subsequently dynamized, that is, brought to life. The images depicted famous en plein air paintings of the era painted by the male and female artists depicted in the play. In the dynamization sequence the people depicted in the paintings directly spoke to the audience about how the painting was conceived and their role in painting or modelling for it. On opening night when watching this scene, there was an audible gasp from Kathleen Mangan. She later told me that "my father came to life for me" when "he" stepped out of the painting *The Artist's Camp* by Tom Roberts (1886).

CASE STUDY 2: CLEANING UP THE NARRATIVES ABOUT IMPORTED MAIDS

In this case study I (Prue) discuss two performance-based pieces I developed on foreign domestic workers (FDWs) and consider their positions on Beck et al.'s (2011) RbT continuum. These two dramatic pieces, about women marginalized by the society in which they work and live, are for various reasons heavily fictionalized, yet each draws on facts sourced from primary and secondary data. This fictionalization, as discussed in Richard's case study, enabled me, as playwright, to use my imagination to construct the story (Beck et al., 2011, p. 690) where characters and situations were framed constructs but much of the subject matter was steeply based in ethnographic research. Each of these works was developed to inform and educate its intended audience as well as to

engage and entertain. As I was working through the process of researching and developing dramatic ideas for dramatic works about these women and the issues they experience in their working and personal lives, and as I reflected on them after they were completed, I began to question the boundaries of RbT and debate how they could be pushed, stretched, and broken. I contend that applying fiction in RbT has the potential to reach a broad audience, including non-theatre goers, and that it can touch, inform, and educate audiences without being overly didactic.

My RbT work on FDWs stemmed from two desires: developing my playwriting skills and providing a platform to make visible the emotional and physical hardships experienced by FDWs in Singapore and across Asia. A focus of my early RbT work was to find effective theatre aesthetics to authentically convey my research content. Drawing on fictional devices whilst striving for truthfulness, my co-researchers and I moved beyond verbatim theatre principles to include fictional conventions such as foreshadowing, flashbacks, allegory, metaphor, and symbol to represent data. This has been well discussed in our reflections of *Alice Hoy is Not a Building*, a collaborative RbT piece performed over a 9-year period (most recently in Bird et al., 2020).

Wanting to experiment further with ways theatrical devices could be employed to represent research data, I felt I would be best served by building my playwriting skills. So, whilst working as an academic in Singapore, I undertook a 2-year course in writing for stage and screen through a university in London. This involved writing multiple texts for both stage and film. During the course, I noticed that I was applying similar methods when researching material for my plays as to those I drew on for my academic research, collecting and analyzing the same types of data: interviews, focus group discussions, transcripts, historical documents, reports, policies, media articles, images, and so forth. Moreover, I applied similar writing processes. This was quite possibly because I had undertaken the course with the aim of improving my RbT practice, but nonetheless the similarities were plain to see. This was particularly evident in two of the pieces I developed, one a play, the other a film script (I propose that since film's origins can be traced to theatre, it can be considered a theatrical form, something which I build on later in this article). Both these pieces explored the lives and experiences of FDWs, and both aimed to educate their audiences.

Foreign domestic workers: Live-in maids

Foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in Asia are typically women from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Myanmar who travel to Singapore and Hong

Kong to work with families in order to create better lives for themselves and their families back home. They are essential workers for the smooth running of working Singaporean households, enabling both parents (in traditionally nuclear families) to work full time while the helpers keep the house clean and look after the children. In 2019, there were 261,800 FDWs (Ministry of Manpower, 2025), approximately 4.35% of Singapore's population, with 1 in 5 households employing a "maid" (Tseng, 2022). Having come to feel quite passionately about the ways in which FDWs were perceived and treated, I wanted to inform others of the kinds of oppression these women face on a daily basis, because their voices are marginalized in the communities they work in and back home.

A play

I realized there were multiple slippery ethical, psychological, and social considerations to be made when representing marginalized people in RbT. My "obligations" as a playwright were challenged (Beck et al., 2011, p. 688) as both an academic and a non-academic writing for a general audience. I initially approached my play *Home Truths* (Wales, 2014a) as a piece of verbatim theatre, with the screenplay intended to be a piece of fiction generated from a newspaper report. The two works were written simultaneously. *Home Truths* would be based on interviews conducted with FDWs and supported by other ethnographic data, including newspaper articles, government employment information, and human rights reports. This would make it sit close to the middle of the research continuum that "revisits first-hand experiences for the purposes of theatrical exploration" as well as further right to include "second-hand accounts" (Beck et al., 2011, pp. 690–691). Whilst the interview material richly articulated these women's experiences, drafts of the play lacked tension and a strong through-line (a clear idea, theme, or narrative arc that runs through the play, connecting scenes into a coherent whole). Furthermore, the aesthetic was, to be frank, dull. The vibrancy of these women's lives was slipping away from me.

Questioning my purpose, what I wanted to convey and to whom, I realized I had been writing for an academic audience and myself. My goal had been to tell the women's stories to wider audiences, to inform and educate people around the world about the lived experiences of FDWs, and to encourage Singapore's general public to empathize more deeply with these often invisible and oppressed women who kept their households functioning. I became nervous too that focusing on verbatim text could expose the women's identities. Some stories they had told involved illegal activities that could possibly result in prosecution, jail time, and/or later

deportation. Singapore, although a democracy, is often referred to as a police state, where civil liberties are restricted. I could not in all consciousness jeopardize these women's financial welfare and freedoms. Moreover, while I felt comfortable writing Filipino characters who were victims of power structures, and therefore most likely to be sympathetic characters, I was not comfortable depicting Singaporean employers as oppressive, abusive, or violent — behaviours often reported in the press and in reports (Human Rights Watch, 2005) — which may be construed as racist and a form of racial profiling. While authors like Anne Tyler might feel they "should be allowed" to write from the perspective of people of colour, there are clearly issues doing so (Sethi, 2022, para. 1). Journalist and author Anita Sethi (2022) contends that far too often White authors have written "misinformed, derogatory and downright racist portrayals of them" (para 3). I did not want to fall into that trap. These were issues I needed to navigate.

The Filipino characters in *Home Truths* and the screenplay were victims of some form of oppression and were created to elicit empathy from the audience. I believed that I could avoid racial profiling to a certain extent when writing them by creating vibrant lives that moved beyond the families they worked for and by differentiating the language they spoke when with their employers to that they spoke with each other. While the script is in English, the domestic helpers would converse in Tagalog when speaking amongst themselves. However, when they spoke with their employers, it was a nuanced English that I had picked up from my interviews with FDWs. My concern with writing Singaporean characters came from a number of factors, but the main one was my fear of falling into the trap of racial profiling. What ethnicity should I make the perpetrator of the abuse? Singapore has a socially engineered population that consists of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and what is categorized as "Other," commonly referred to as CMIO, with firmly set ethnic ratios for each race (Frost, 2020). Since the Chinese are the dominant race in Singapore making up 74% of the population (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2020), it is unsurprising that Chinese Singaporeans are more often the perpetrators of maid abuse. However, I did not want to demonize Chinese Singaporeans or any other Singaporean ethnicity. In my conversations with FDWs, we discussed their feelings on working for locals and expatriates from different ethnicities. They informed me of occasions when expatriates abused their FDWs. This, as an expatriate myself, was something I felt I could comfortably work with.

How could I authentically represent the lives of FDWs, capturing the imaginations of a wide audience, while ensuring their safety and wellbeing

and navigating my fears of writing flawed characters from another culture that might be perceived as racist? These were contributing factors for fictionalizing content and context in *Home Truths*. While significant verbatim extracts from interviews were included, a fictional frame bound the narrative which was filled with fictional characters that were often based on second-hand stories. Singaporean characters were conveyed as sympathetic, while the central White expatriate was exploitative and narcissistic, and the two domestic helpers were composite characters based on the numerous FDWs I had interviewed. I only included the types of illegal activities that had been reported multiple times in the media. My writing process for *Home Truths* has been discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Wales, 2016). The resulting play, I believe, captured an authentic depiction of the kind of life FDWs may experience in Singapore, from living conditions to work experience and forms of financial, physical, and emotional abuse. Ultimately, this play sat further right on Beck et al.'s (2011) continuum, beginning with first-hand accounts and drawing on rich secondary data and fictionalizing episodes in a social-historical context (pp. 290–291).

A screenplay

The screenplay (Wales, 2014b) also sought to examine the power dynamics and the experiences of FDWs, but the impetus behind it was completely different, as to a certain extent was my approach. In 2011 the body of an FDW was found in a water tank on the roof of a 15-storey block of flats in Singapore after residents reported something wrong with their water. A national outcry followed, not about the murdered woman but about the contaminated water. News outlet AsiaOne declared, "168 households may have had their drinking water supply affected by the corpse" ("Indonesian maid's body found," 2011, para. 6). Comments posted on social media were mainly discriminatory, racist, and abusive. This event became the stimulus for the screenplay, which I set around the staff accommodation area of a university campus rather than in the local community. My reflections during writing highlight some of my decision-making processes and note many similar concerns to the writing of *Home Truths*:

> I wanted to take the basis of this story and transform it into something else. This built on my initial idea of focusing on the treatment of maids living in Singapore and on campus, which has become a burning social and political issue for me while I have been here, and a theme I also incorporated in a very different way and different story into my thematic play. The news story provided me with the stimulus to develop a gripping story but the tension for me came in how to tell the story. I could have set this in an HDB (housing development board — a form of government

> housing for local Singaporeans) apartment block, I chose not to. I did not want to demonize the attitudes of Singaporeans — appearing in online blogs and in the newspapers that reported the event — positioning myself as somehow superior. As a white woman living in an Asian culture, I need to be sensitive to local feelings and values. In addition, my lack of language and cultural knowledge within the home context made this too difficult for me to navigate. (Wales, 2013)

The screenplay was not intended to be a piece of RbT but as a film for the general public. There were no reports of anyone from those 168 households being hospitalized from drinking the water, but what if there had been? After the discovery of a helper's body in the water tank, this became the premise for the screenplay. Again, I aimed to realistically depict the experiences of FDWs in Singapore and I applied research processes, one of which was closely observing the site in which the screenplay was set and people's movements within it.

These observations fed into the screenplay. In one scene Elsa, an experienced FDW who has been transferred to another expat household because her previous employers have returned to their home country, and her friend Desma, another maid, carry what will be her bed, supplied by well-intentioned neighbours, to her new accommodation.

> **EXT. UNIVERSITY STAFF HOUSING, ROAD. DAY.**
>
> *DESMA and ELSA navigate the bed they are carrying down the footpath of a steep road towards another block of flats.*
>
> *A couple with wet hair, wearing bathers and towels, slowly walk up the hill towards them.*
>
> *DESMA and ELSA manoeuvre themselves and the bed onto the grass verge to let them pass. ELSA looks up at the sky.*
>
> ELSA
>
> It's going to rain.
>
> *DESMA smiles as the couple approach.*
>
> *They ignore her as they walk past.*
>
> (Wales, 2014b, p. 3)

The action in this scene came from watching two helpers struggling to manoeuvre a heavy bed down a steep hill while giving way to expats who were climbing it. The scene demonstrates the kinds of work FDWs are expected to do and highlights their invisibility to some of those living amongst them.

Another scene conveyed the space FDWs work and sleep in as they try to fit the bed into a storage room next to the utilities room, designated to Elsa. The action includes Elsa's daily duties while complaining to Desma. Some of the text in this scene about who makes the best employers was extracted from a focus group discussion I had with three helpers. I was struck by how they viewed and stereotyped different expat nationalities, and the conditions they valued.

INT. MARSHALL APARTMENT. UTILITY ROOM. DAY.

ELSA and DESMA navigate a bed-base just in front of the door that is positioned against a set of sparking double glass doors separating the utility room from the living area.

She glances at plastic bags and packing debris scattered over the same dull terracotta tiles and starts to tidy them up.

ELSA (Tagalog)

She's scared of burglars. Thinks she's still in America. Sir was going to give me a fan but she wants it in living room. Maybe I'll call an agency on Monday and see if I can get a new family.

As ELSA goes to help, a tinny robotic little tune plays.

DESMA (Tagalog)

You might end up with a local family?

ELSA steps over towards the washing machine, pulls out some clothes and throws them into the drier next it. As she straightens her body up she gazes out onto a back path through grilled windows behind the white goods.

ELSA (Tagalog)

English or Australian only.

She looks back at DESMA who's stacking the packing debris on top of the ironing board next to a clothes-rack, hanging with ironed clothes. Next to it are flattened cardboard boxes lying flush to the wall.

ELSA starts to unpack clothes from plastic bags next to the bed-base and hang them up on a rickety clothes rack next to a washing machine.

DESMA (Tagalog)

Canada are okay.

DESMA begins to help by taking an item of clothing out of a bag and handing it to ELSA to hang.

DESMA cont'd (Tagalog)

Some Americans too. Lily's family gives her her own room. Doesn't even have to sleep with the children.

Sound of a key in a lock and a door opening.

Followed by a clap of thunder.

SAM (V/O)

For God's sake, we've been over this.

DESMA

Tssk. They're back. Still arguing.

DESMA smiles and shakes her head knowingly as they build a routine hanging the clothes.

(Wales, 2014b, pp. 5–6)

My development of the screenplay had included observations, fieldnotes, interview extracts, newspaper articles, reports, and informal stories told to me. The narrative was complete fiction but realistically captured the types of experiences FDWs face every day. Categorizing where it sits on the performance spectrum continuum, it was "further away from direct representation of research data" (Beck et al., 2011, p. 697), although it did draw on the facts and was based on informal first-hand, second-hand, and casual inquiry.

Had the screenplay, a gripping psychological drama I have been told, been made into a film, it had the potential to informally educate a broad audience about the daily lives and experiences of FDWs and the power structures that bind them. As it stands, it has only ever had readings. The cost of producing the screenplay would be prohibitive. But in my opinion film, as a form of RbT, has the potential to target a far broader category of audience who come to attend for aesthetic and entertainment reasons.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article we have discussed research-based performance projects that examine the voices of women marginalized by the societies in which they work and live. One of those projects investigated women artists from the Heidelberg School in Victoria, Australia, which operated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries; the other examined experiences of servitude by foreign domestic helpers in Singapore and East Asia. While the women represented in our scripts come from different periods in time, different social classes, different races, and different countries, we contend that their experiences had been sidelined, disregarded, and silenced. Our reasons for developing these specific projects stemmed from a need to speak up, to provide visibility and opportunities for these women to have their voices heard (Ladegaard, 2017) by our chosen audiences. Yet, the voices we gave them were not their own verbatim; they were fiction even though they were grounded in authenticity.

We chose to use research-informed fiction in the RbT pieces discussed here for different reasons. There were important research reasons for us to apply these fictions, both practical and ethical. However, we do not deny that there were also aesthetic reasons for our choices. Richard drew on historical fiction that was based on his and his students' rigorous research of newspaper articles, journals, and other secondary data. He could only imagine and construct the voices from the data he had available to him. Prue drew on some verbatim speech from interviews as well as policy documents and significant secondary data; however, she chose to apply fictional dialogue, characters, and frames to (a) ensure the safety of the women with whom she spoke, (b) avoid appearances of exoticism or racism, (c) create scripts that would engage and entertain what she hoped would be an audience beyond academia, and (d) avoid these works appearing to be didactic.

With gaps of knowledge for both of us, we could only write what we knew and what we thought we knew. Coming from privileged White backgrounds, we could only imagine ourselves as minorities, marginalized or otherwise. But had we not imagined these realities, would the stories of these women have ever come to light? There are limited stories told by FDWs, and most of those are told through the newspapers or agencies like Human Rights Watch (2005). Many of the FDWs Prue met only had primary school education and little opportunity to share their stories. Very little has been published or performed about the female painters Richard investigated. Richard saw an opportunity to tell a unique and untold story about these female artists when commissioned by a local council to develop a piece about the Heidelberg School en plein air painters. Had he and his co-researchers focused on the male painters only, the stories of these women might have remained hidden for years.

Richard could only try to envisage and capture what life was like for women painters living in Australia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Even the form of 19th century language was different to the language Australians speak today. In writing for a modern-day audience, he needed to capture a sense of the time period without alienating his viewers with his characters speaking a somewhat antiquated form of English. He chose to create contemporary sounding speech patterns in his characters while dramatically capturing the historical period using fiction. Prue may have been in the "minority" as a White woman living in Singapore, but being a member of a colonizing, dominant race, she was highly conscious of the fact that she had no notion or experience of being a minority, either as a fairly privileged person of colour who employed an FDW or as a female foreigner employed as a domestic helper who was

perceived to be in the lower echelons of society. Nervous of perpetuating stereotypical images of Singaporean employers, which would have called on using the local Singlish dialect, Prue, in an attempt to avoid being seen as racist or exoticizing characters, chose to create problematic White employers. This was done with the knowledge that while there are fewer White employers than locals, it cannot be assumed that White employers are not problematic, even if the characters of Elsa and Desma believed that to be so. Foreign domestic helpers are not limited to Asia but also work and live in the Middle East and European countries (Lagergaard, 2017). Recent events in Texas where educators called for slavery to be called "involuntary relocation" in the history books has shown dominant discourses of White privilege are alive and sadly flourishing (Suliman, 2022, para. 1). So, the character constructs of the employers are perhaps not far-fetched.

Our works, discussed here, sit between the slightly right to the far right of Beck et al.'s (2011) RbT continuum. When writing *Golden Summers*, Richard not only had to fictionalize the dialogue but also consider his audience of mainly young people, their families, and those not familiar with RbT processes and intentions. He employed first- and second-hand accounts and historical facts to guide him. In writing about the domestic helpers, Prue utilized first- and second-hand accounts as well as sourcing informal stories, yet her works all heavily relied on fictional frameworks and characters that weave facts through the pieces. One of her goals was to find wider audiences to consume the work and gain an understanding of and empathy towards a particular marginalized group of women. We do not claim that using fiction is better or lesser than just drawing on systematic research for RbT. However, we do believe that there is a place for greater fiction in RbT work and that fictionalized forms of RbT that seek to entertain and engage people from different cultural, economic, and social backgrounds could have the potential to reach wider audiences. Unlike verbatim theatre forms, fictionalized RbT gives the playwright greater freedom with both the aesthetic and the narrative whilst still being based on the original data. For us, as playwrights and researchers, who have worked in both forms, we find that research-informed fiction enables us to present the voices of those who could not have been captured in a conventional verbatim play for the political and practical reasons discussed in this article.

NOTES

1. Also known by the longer title of *The Golden Summers: A Tribute to the Early Painters of the Heidelberg School at the Box Hill Artists' Camp*.
2. This was when Internet search engines were in their infancy and were not the natural go-to for sourcing such information.
3. The reference to use of "microfiche" here reminds me how much times have changed when conducting such research these days.
4. This is an oblique reference to Abrahams' cigar business and the 1890 9by5s exhibition where the art works were painted on wooden cigar box lids supplied by the Abrahams family.
5. The students gave permission for me to use their reflections when reporting on their experiences.

WORKS CITED

Bassot, B. (2022). *Doing qualitative desk-based research: A practical guide to writing an excellent dissertation*. Bristol University Press.

Beck, J. L., Belliveau, G., Lea, G. W., & Wager, A. (2011). Delineating a spectrum of research-based theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*(8), 687–700. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411415498

Bird, J., Donelan, K., Sinclair, C., & Wales, P. (2020). *Alice Hoy is not a building*: An ethnographic performance about women in academia. Drama Australia.

Boal, A. (1979). *Theatre of the oppressed*. Pluto Press.

Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. E. (1986). *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. University of California Press.

Conquergood, D., & Johnson, E. P. (2013). *Cultural struggles: Performance, ethnography, praxis*. University of Michigan Press.

Conrad, D. (2002). Drama, media advertising, and inner-city youth. *Youth Theatre Journal*, *16*(1), 71–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/08929092.2002.10012542

Frost, M. R. (2020). An unsettled majority: Immigration and the racial 'balance' in multicultural Singapore. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *47*(16), 3729–3751. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1774112

Goldstein, T. (2001). *Hong Kong, Canada*: Playwriting as critical ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *7*(3), 279–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040100700303

Human Rights Watch. (2005). *Maid to order: Ending abuses against migrant domestic workers in Singapore*. https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/12/06/maid-order/ending-abuses-against-migrant-domestic-workers-singapore

Indonesian maid's body found in Woodlands rooftop water tank. (2011, May 16). AsiaOne. https://web.archive.org/web/20181002141607/http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110516-279169.html

Ladegaard, H. J. (2017). *The discourse of powerlessness and repression: Life stories of domestic migrant workers in Hong Kong*. Routledge.

Leavy, P. (2013). *Fiction as research practice: Short stories, novellas, and novels*. Routledge.

Ministry of Manpower. (2025, March 19). *Foreign workforce numbers*. https://www.mom.gov.sg/foreign-workforce-numbers

Paget, M. A. (1990). Performing the text. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *19*(1), 136–155. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124190019001007

Rogers, D., Frellick, P., & Babinski, L. (2002). Staging a study: Performing the personal and professional struggles of beginning teachers. In C. Bagley & M. B. Cancienne (Eds.), *Dancing the data* (pp. 53–72). Peter Lang.

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

Sallis, R. (2003). *The golden summers: A tribute to the early painters of the Heidelberg School at the Box Hill artists' camp* (2nd draft) [Unpublished script].

Sallis, R. (2012). *The golden summers: A tribute to the early painters of the Heidelberg School at the Box Hill artists' Camp* [Unpublished script].

Sallis, R. (2019). *The golden summers: A tribute to the early painters of the Heidelberg School at the Box Hill artists' camp* (Version 2) [Unpublished script].

Sallis, R. (2022). *The golden summers: A tribute to the early painters of the Heidelberg School at the Box Hill artists' camp* (Version 4) [Unpublished script].

Sethi, A. (2022, March 22). Should Anne Tyler be allowed to write from the viewpoint of a Black man? *The New Statesman*. https://www.newstatesman.com/comment/2022/03/should-anne-tyler-be-allowed-to-write-from-the-viewpoint-of-a-black-man

Singapore Department of Statistics. (2020). *Key findings*. https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/findings.pdf

Suliman, A. (2022, July 1). Texas education board rejects proposal to call slavery 'involuntary relocation.' *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/07/01/texas-board-education-slavery-involuntary-relocation/

The Australian Women's Weekly. (1938, January). Are Media.

Tseng, C. (2022, September 19). Commentary: Is it time for us to explore live-out arrangements for maids? *CNA*. https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/maid-domestic-work-part-time-salary-leave-mom-employer-2942781

Wales, P. (2013). *Reflective notes* [Unpublished reflective journal].

Wales, P. (2014a). *Home truths* [Unpublished script].

Wales, P. (2014b). *Untitled thematic screenplay* [Unpublished script].

Wales, P. (2016). Temporarily yours: Foreign domestic workers in Singapore. In G. Belliveau & G. W. Lea (Eds.), *Research-based theatre: An artistic methodology* (pp. 147–161). Intellect.

Wolcott, H. F. (2002). *Sneaky kid and its aftermath: Ethics and intimacy in fieldwork*. AltaMira Press.

PRUE WALES is senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne. She is a co-director of its Research-based Theatre Lab. prue.wales@unimelb.edu.au

RICHARD JOHNSON SALLIS is leader of drama / theatre education in the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne and a co-director of its Research-based Theatre Lab. sallis@unimelb.edu.au

PRUE WALES est professeure à la Faculté d'éducation de l'Université de Melbourne. Elle est également codirectrice du Laboratoire de théâtre fondé sur la recherche de l'université. prue.wales@unimelb.edu.au

RICHARD JOHNSON SALLIS est responsable de l'enseignement du théâtre/drame à la Faculté d'éducation de l'Université de Melbourne, et codirecteur du Laboratoire de théâtre fondé sur la recherche de l'université. sallis@unimelb.edu.au

THE LOVE BOOTH AND SIX COMPANION PLAYS

TARA GOLDSTEIN, JENNY SALISBURY, BENJAMIN LEE HICKS *University of Toronto*

BISHOP OWIS *Saint Mary's University*

KAEL REID *York University*

ABSTRACT. This article describes and reports on findings from a project called *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (2021–2023). The overall goal of the project was to conduct archival research on moments of activism and care that have challenged cis-heteronormativity and racism and then share these moments through verbatim theatre scripts and performances. Working with an ethic of community care, and a lens that examines the intersections of cis-heteronormativity with other forms of structural discrimination (such as anti-Asian racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and settler colonialism), the project asked and answered the following research question: What kinds of activism and care in the 1970s and 1980s challenged cis-heteronormativity and racism in North America?

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article décrit les résultats du projet intitulé : *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (2021–2023). L'objectif global du projet était de mener une recherche archivistique sur des moments d'activisme et de soins ayant remis en question la cishétéronormativité et le racisme, puis de partager ces moments à travers des scripts et des performances de théâtre verbatim. En adoptant une éthique de soin communautaire et un regard porté sur les intersections entre la cishétéronormativité et d'autres formes de discrimination structurelle, le projet a posé et répondu à la question de recherche suivante : quels types d'activisme et de soins, dans les années 1970 et 1980, ont remis en question la cishétéronormativité et le racisme en Amérique du Nord?

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10237

This article describes and reports on findings from a Research-based Theatre in education project called *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (2021–2023). The research project, led by Goldstein in the spring and summer of 2021, explored several moments of 2SLGBTQI+[1] (two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, plus) activism and care in the 1970s and early 1980s and then shared these moments through verbatim theatre scripts, visual images, and music. To carry out our analysis and to create *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*, we worked with an ethic of community care (Malatino, 2020; Owis, 2024; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018) and utilized a lens that examines the intersections of cis-heteronormativity[2] with other forms of structural discrimination. The following research question framed our analysis and creative work: What kinds of 2SLGBTQI+ activism and care in the 1970s and 1980s challenged cis-heteronormativity and racism in North America?

The research team worked with a variety of data sources — archival databases, books, academic articles, and documentary films. Research team member Bishop Owis found that activism in the early LGBT liberation movement was supported by practices of caring for the community. Owis also found that while there was an abundance of information about white middle-class activists, deeper exploration was required to uncover histories of QTBIPOC (queer and trans Black, Indigenous, people of colour) activism. This is important to note because the LGBT movements of the 1960s were also fueled by queer, trans, and racialized people, specifically by transgender women of colour, and this activism led to the accomplishments of white LGBT communities in the 1970s and 1980s.

Working with the team's research findings, Goldstein created a set of seven short verbatim plays that feature moments of activism undertaken by Black, Latinx, queer, straight, cisgender, transgender, and working-class activists, as well as white, middle-class gay and lesbian activists. The seven plays have been gathered under the title of *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (Goldstein, 2023; see Appendix A for a brief description of each play).

The opening play *The Love Booth* tells the story of how white, middle-class, cisgender lesbian and gay activists mobilized to delist homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1973. The DSM is the handbook used by health care professionals in the United States and much of the world as the authoritative guide to the diagnosis of mental disorders. It contains descriptions, symptoms, and other criteria for diagnosing mental

disorders. Prior to 1973, homosexuality was labelled a mental illness in the DSM, which led to a variety of oppressive practices against people who identified as lesbian and gay. As activist Barbara Gittings says in Scene 6 of *The Love Booth*:

> BARBARA
>
> The lives of gay people were under the thumb of psychiatry. The sickness label was an albatross around our neck — it infected all of our work on other issues. Anything we said on our behalf could be dismissed as "That's just your sickness talking." Sickness was used to justify discrimination in all kinds of places, but especially in employment. Brilliant people like [physicist and astronomer] Frank [Kameny] lost their jobs when their bosses found out they were gay. (Goldstein, 2023, p. 32)

Goldstein decided to make *The Love Booth* the opening play because she wanted to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the DSM delisting with a performance of the play at the 2023 Toronto Pride Festival. Moreover, the activism that led to this delisting marked the beginning of the depathologization of same-sex desire and relationships in the field of psychiatry. Goldstein felt it was important to perform and share the story of a moment of activism that successfully challenged the idea that people who identified as lesbian and gay were living with a mental illness.

The six companion plays that accompany *The Love Booth* respond to the story of this moment of activism. However, by making *The Love Booth* the opening — and longest — play, Goldstein understood that she had privileged and centred white middle-class stories and voices in the project.[3] Still, Goldstein also chose to end the set of plays with an equally powerful, if lesser known, story of trans activism and care. *STAR House* tells the story of several transgender women of colour activists who discuss their experiences of caring and providing for one another with very little resources and limited, if any, recognition and support from the larger LGBT movement. The placement of *STAR House* at the end of the set of plays is a deliberate acknowledgement of the vital labour that trans women of colour did for their community that impacted generations of trans communities to come. In this way, trans women of colour have the last word in the set of plays.

Furthermore, Goldstein's intent in having the six companion plays follow the opening play was to portray the ways Black, Latinx, queer, trans, and working-class activists in the 1970s and 1980s responded to the work of white, middle class, cisgender gay and lesbian activists. For example, as discussed below, in the fifth play of the project, *A Press of Our Own,* Black

activist and writer Audre Lorde talks about how the poetry she sent to *The Ladder* — a lesbian magazine edited by Barbara Gittings, one of the activists featured in *The Love Booth* — was rejected:

> AUDRE LORDE
>
> When I started looking for a place to publish my poems I sent them to *The Ladder*, a magazine for lesbians published by the Daughters of Bilitis.
>
> I was a loyal reader of both *The Ladder* and the Daughters of Bilitis newsletter, as I tried to figure out where to meet other gay-girls in New York. In 1955, meeting other lesbians was very difficult unless you went to the bars, which I didn't go to because I didn't drink.
>
> All of my poems were returned to me — immediately. I was crushed.
>
> A few years later, a few Black literary magazines began to publish my poems. And several poems were also published in anthologies. But finding my way into the anthologies of Black poetry wasn't easy either. Most of the poets the editors published were men and liked to read work by other men.
>
> When I started writing feminist lesbian poetry, it got even harder.
>
> So, one day, when I was on the phone with Barbara Smith [Black scholar, writer, and activist], I said, "We really need to do something about publishing."
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 68)

What Audre Lorde and her colleague Barbara Smith decided to do was create Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, which is the story told in *A Press of Our Own*. Further discussion of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press appears later in this article.

Returning to our introductory remarks about the history of the project, after Goldstein completed a strong draft of each of the seven plays, she asked arts-based researcher and theatre artist Jenny Salisbury to do some dramaturgical work with the research team to give voice to each play. With Salisbury's skills in dramaturgy, she and the research team worked through the scripts and listened for tone, emphasis, humour, irony, and vulnerability in their performances of the words of different characters using inflection and intonation, pauses and pacing, breath, and emotional expression. Moving the words of the activists off the page and coaching the team to embody the voices of the characters in each play brought the scripts of the seven plays to life. Through these embodied readings of the plays, the activists and their work began to feel more human, which allowed the team to better understand the activists as actual people and their experiences as lived. After Salisbury's dramaturgical work with us, the

team knew the plays would be able to offer audiences a powerful way into the archival material, and an engaging way to imagine and learn about the activism and care that had gone before us and brought us to the current moment.

While Salisbury began doing dramaturgical work with the plays, artist-researcher, composer, and musician Kael Reid began to compose music using ethnographic songwriting (Reid, 2024), a method they developed and have used in a range of ways in other arts-based research projects (e.g., Reid, 2022a, 2022b). In addition, artist-researcher and visual artist benjamin lee hicks[4] began to create illustrations to accompany the play. The music and illustrations offered additional paths into the research findings represented in the plays, which were performed at the Toronto Pride Festival in June 2023.

In what follows, we provide a description of our theoretical frame of centring queer and trans concepts of community care, situate the project within current discussions in Research-based Theatre and verbatim theatre, and provide examples of how hicks' visual images and Reid's song lyrics deepen the ways audiences engage with the plays.

CENTRING QUEER AND TRANS CONCEPTS OF COMMUNITY CARE

Early in our archival research work, Owis introduced an important set of ideas. They noted that while care is often conceptualized as a feminine practice with roots in cis-heteronormative understandings of the nuclear family (Malatino, 2020; Chatzidakis et al., 2020), queer and trans activism has often featured practices of care that are community based (Malatino, 2020; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Our preliminary research also showed that queer and trans activism in the 1970s and 1980s was characterized and fueled by "care webs" (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 27) by queer and trans people of colour.

Care webs — which provide people with a way to find care without shame or judgement — are a response to the realities of gendered, raced, and classed dynamics that are embedded within 2SLGBTQI+ communities (Owis, 2024; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). They operate in lieu of systemic and institutional support for queer and trans people of colour (Fink, 2021) and provide queer and trans people of colour a network of interlocking communities of care that positions them as the experts in the care they need (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). The theoretical model of care webs is rooted in the care work from women of colour writers and BIPOC communities (e.g., hooks, 2000; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Lorde, 1988),

whose activist work has always sought to restore the care often systemically withheld from QTBIPOC people (Rose, 2021).

Owis' connection of activism with care provided the research team with a key focus: The team needed to work to uncover historical moments of queer and trans activism that were rooted in an ethic of community care. In doing so, the team could demonstrate the importance and power of care in creating moments of resistance and mobilization throughout 2SLGBTQI+ history.

SITUATING *THE LOVE BOOTH AND SIX COMPANION PLAYS* IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE LITERARY TURN IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHICS IN RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE

Goldstein's work with performance ethnography has been a deliberate attempt to engage with the "literary turn" in American anthropology that had begun in the mid 1980s. This turn was set off by discussions about the predicaments of cultural representation in ethnography raised in the 1986 anthology *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. The anthology was edited by James Clifford, a historian of anthropology, and George Marcus, an anthropologist and critic of "realist" traditions in ethnographic writing. As explained by feminist anthropologist Ruth Behar (1995), the book's purpose was to make an obvious point: Anthropologists write. And the ethnographies they write — "a strange cross between the realist novel, the travel account, the memoir, and the scientific report" (p. 3) — had to be understood in terms of poetics and politics.

At the heart of the literary turn in American anthropology was the understanding that ethnographers invent rather than represent ethnographic truths (Clifford, 1983). Ethnographies were not transparent mirrors of culture that traditionally trained realist ethnographers presumed them to be. The contributors of *Writing Culture* also questioned the politics of a poetics, that is, a system of writing, which relied on the words and stories of (frequently less privileged) others for its existence without providing any of the benefits of authorship to the research participants who assisted the anthropologist in the writing of their culture.

In response to these predicaments of cultural representation, James Clifford set out a new agenda for American anthropology in his introduction to *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986): Anthropology needed to encourage more innovative, dialogic, and experimental writing that highlighted the ways ethnographies are invented by the ethnographers who write them. At the same time, the "new ethnography" needed to reflect a more profound self-consciousness of the workings of power and

the partialness of all truth, both in the text and in the world. As summarized by Ruth Behar (1995), while the new ethnography would not resolve the profoundly troubling issues of inequality in a world fueled by global capitalism, "it could at least attempt to decolonize the power relations inherent in the presentation of the Other" (p. 4).

The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays project responds to the still relevant call for writing that highlights the ways ethnographies are invented by the ethnographers who write them.

Turning now to recent conversations in Research-based Theatre about ethics (Cox et al., 2023), our arts-based research team has been contributing to these conversations through a principle we call a "slow ethics of care." We adopted this principle in our 2019–2021 verbatim theatre project *Out at School* (Owis, 2024). A slow ethics of care draws on several theoretical frameworks to ground stories from the field: ethical principles of working with 2SLGBTQI+ families, care work, and slow scholarship (Hartman & Darab, 2012; Mountz et al., 2015).

In *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*, we extended the principle of an ongoing slow ethics of care to include the idea of communal feedback and dialogue. To illustrate, during rehearsals of *STAR*[5] *House* the trans and non-binary actors who were performing the roles of Sylvia Rivera and Chelsea Goodwin had questions about the original ending of the play. Both actors argued that the end of the play disregarded the complicated relationship of medicalization that trans people currently live with in North America. In response, Goldstein re-wrote the ending and performed the final new words of the play in her role as playwright.

> TARA GOLDSTEIN (Playwright)
>
> While the American Psychiatric Association agreed to delist homosexuality from the DSM in 1973, gender dysphoria became a psychiatric diagnosis in the fifth edition of the DSM 40 years later in 2013.
>
> The term gender incongruence appeared in the World Health Organization's 11th edition of International Classification of Diseases in 2019.
>
> The medical naming of gender dysphoria and gender incongruence has been hailed as progress because it helps people access hormonal therapy, surgeries, and medical coverage that affirm their gender. But some folks believe that gender dysphoria is a response to society's limiting options around understanding and defining gender. It shouldn't be subject to an individual diagnosis. Other folks don't believe that medical

> authorities should have the power to sanction people's decisions around their gender. Or not sanction them. There is still work to be done.[6]
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 85)

What was important in creating a new ending to *STAR House* was signaling the tension around the usefulness of the diagnosis of gender dysphoria within trans communities. The team wanted to end the play with the idea that there is still work to be done around the power medical authorities hold over trans lives. The new ending provided a bookend to the opening play *The Love Booth*, which described the activism needed to delist homosexuality from the DSM in 1973.

SITUATING *THE LOVE BOOTH AND SIX COMPANION PLAYS* IN CURRENT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT VERBATIM THEATRE

Verbatim theatre has been described as theatre that is created by interviewing people about their everyday lives or about an event that has happened in their community (Brown & Wake, 2010). In verbatim plays, the words of real people are recorded and transcribed by a playwright during an interview or are appropriated from existing records, such as the transcripts of a court hearing. Approaches to working with these words vary from those with a very strict adherence to the source material, such as the work of Anna Deavere Smith (1993, 1994), to those in which the words are edited, arranged, and/or recontextualized to form a dramatic script that can be performed on stage by actors who take on the characters of the real individuals whose words are being used (Hammond & Stewart, 2008).

The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays project falls close to Deavere Smith's (1993, 1994) strict adherence to source material. We very lightly edited the source material for clarity by omitting words or phrases that were unnecessary to the story or message the activist was sharing. Our master script contains a record of where these omissions were made.

The sources the research team worked with to create the seven verbatim plays included a biography about Barbara Gittings (Baim, 2015); an autobiography by Shirley Chisholm (1973); a scholarly book about the history of HIV/AIDS drawn from HIV archival material (Fink, 2021); a collection of newspaper columns written by Iris De La Cruz (1989); a journal article about the Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press written by Barbara Smith (1989); a poem by Chrystos (2021) included in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*; and a collection of historical documents, speeches, interviews and analyses about STAR House and Transy House (Untorelli Press, 2013).

SHARING RESEARCH FINDINGS THROUGH VERBATIM THEATRE, MUSIC, AND VISUAL ART

As discussed earlier, the opening play of *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* dramatizes the story of Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen who started attending and disrupting meetings at the American Psychiatric Association (APA) where psychiatrists were promoting brutal methods for "curing" people who identified as lesbian and gay. This is predominantly a story of white cisgender activists working in spaces of power and privilege. The six companion plays tell additional stories of activism and care taking place in the 1970s and early 1980s by QTBIPOC activists and their allies. They include stories of the gay activists that supported Shirley Chisholm, the first Black women to run for president in the United States in 1973; the work done by Iris De La Cruz and her mother Beverley Rotter who used Jewish community rituals to challenge the stigma and shame of living with HIV; the creation of Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press by Black lesbian poet Audre Lorde and Black scholar and writer Barbara Smith; the poetry writing of two-spirit artist and activist Chrystos; and the activism of trans activists Marcia P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and Chelsea Goodwin to support homeless young drag queens, gay youth, and trans women living in New York.

In the 2023 performance of the plays at the Toronto Pride Festival, the overall theme of activism and care in each of the plays was layered by Reid's music and hicks' visual illustrations. Reid composed and performed original music and lyrics for each play and hicks' visual illustrations were projected onto a large screen at the back of the stage during the performance.

In composing two original songs for *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*, Reid wanted to demonstrate the way "songs [can] make life experiences audibly tangible" and "*document* life histories" (Reid, 2015, p. 43). Reid suggests composing songs from theatre scripts breathes another layer of affective life into them: Songs intensify the lived experiences of a script's characters through lyric, vocal work, and music. By infusing the stories in the play with emotionality and musical narrative, songs embellish the script and provide another access point for audiences to enter the story of the play. Expressed through singing, lyric, rhythm, tone, and feeling, songs animate the experiences of the characters musically, making them emotionally resonant. As Reid (2022b) argues, "We encounter one another through song. This is music's power" (para. 1).

Reid (2024) developed a three-step coding process when composing songs for research-informed theatre projects that enables them to analyze and synthesize scripts with care. This coding process enables Reid to turn the stories into theatre scripts and qualitative interviews into lyrics and melody with accompanying guitar. The process is similar in some ways to how researchers code a qualitative interview.

In the first step, "macro coding," Reid examines the theatre script in its entirety, surveying the script to understand the arc of the story being told. At this level of analysis, Reid notices the tone and feel of the script while documenting predominant themes, ideas, and concepts.

In the second step, "narrative coding," Reid codes for specific anecdotes or stories. Here, they focus on particular "through-lines" of lived experiences that are narrated in the play. In other words, in this second layer of coding, they look for subplots that provide a foundation for the overall narrative of the script. In this read-through, they highlight these narrative subplots.

At the third step of "verbatim coding," Reid re-reads the script again and pinpoints key phrases, metaphors, similes, idioms, descriptive phrases, and words that specific characters say that stand out as thought provoking, compelling, and evocative. These codes are connected in some way to the overarching themes that Reid makes note of in the first macro-layer of analysis. These verbatim codes are set aside to be used as potential verbatim lyrics in the song.

Reid composed two songs for *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*. The first song, named "The Theme for The Love Booth," contains verses which tell stories from individual scenes in the first play *The Love Booth*, as well as narrating the stories from each of the companion plays. Individual verses were performed at the end of each corresponding *Love Booth* scene and at the end of the six companion plays. The second song, "Bridge These Differences," was performed in its entirety at the end of the play as a summary for the whole production, addressing the themes of activism and care that appeared throughout each of the plays.[7]

Next, we provide three examples of how hicks' images and Reid's first song layered the performances of the verbatim plays to ground the actors and audience in multiple, affective representations of the past.

Example 1: Scene 1 from The Love Booth

The image hicks created for the first scene of *The Love Booth*, called "Mystery," consists of a drawing of Barbara Gittings talking to two visitors

at the display she and her partner Kay Lahusen created for the 1972 APA Convention (see Figure 1). To this drawing, hicks added images from the lesbian magazine *The Ladder*, which was published by the lesbian organization Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) between 1956 and 1972 (Baim, 2015). Barbara Gittings was the editor of *The Ladder* for many years. The magazine included book reviews, news, poetry, short stories, a running bibliography of lesbian literature, letters from readers, and updates from DOB meetings. This image provided the audience with an opportunity to see how the display of photos of proud, healthy, well-adjusted lesbians on the covers of *The Ladder* challenged contemporary psychiatric understanding of homosexuality as an illness.

FIGURE 1. *"Mystery," Scene 1 from* The Love Booth. *Activist Barbara Gittings talks to conference goers at The Love Booth exhibit.*

In the verse that accompanied Scene 1 of *The Love Booth*, Reid focused on Barbara Gittings' coming out story. In the scene, Gittings describes her confusion about her relational experiences and identity, and how she sought the help of a psychiatrist to find some answers. Gittings is relieved when a psychiatrist she visits confirms that she is indeed homosexual. With this new-found knowledge and validation, Gittings is able to move into her life in a transformed way. She leaves the appointment with the psychiatrist and begins searching for a community of women and ways to build a new life. The year is 1949.

Verse 1 from "The Theme for The Love Booth"

There's a mystery to be solved
She was trying to understand
How something that felt so right
Could be so wrong in their eyes and

Their whispers mystified her
Gossip can be a slow-moving floodtide
Exposing the truth people already see
She went searching for clarity

She said, I don't need you to cure me or fix me
This label is enough for me
You see, you've done me a favour, doc
And it feels fine by me

Because there's a word for women like me
It's funny how language can help us feel free
But now if you'll excuse me, I'm
Going looking for my people

(Reid, 2023a, in Goldstein, 2023, p. 11)

Gesturing towards the overarching themes of activism and care in this verse, derived from the process of narrative coding, Reid highlights a moment of self-discovery that Gittings experiences in her session with the psychiatrist. This moment gives Gittings an opportunity to enact a form of self-care. After acknowledging that she does not need to be cured and that "this label is enough for me … and it feels fine by me," Gittings decides it is time to go looking for her people. This moment of recognizing that she is a lesbian also sets Gittings off on a road of personal activism that sets the stage for her life as an activist. Even though Gittings does not fully comprehend what it means to be a lesbian, she understands she is different from most people around her. She also understands that to thrive, she must begin a quest to go looking for her "people." The phrase "looking for my people" is taken verbatim from the play and is an example of verbatim coding in Reid's process of songwriting.

Example 2: A Press of Our Own

When the research team began uncovering stories of QTBIPOC activists working in the same era as Gittings and Lahusen, we learned that the community created by the DOB was not always inclusive of racialized and working-class writers. As discussed earlier, in the play *A Press of Our Own,* Black activist and writer Audre Lorde talks about how the poetry she sent to *The Ladder* was rejected, and how this and other rejections led to the creation of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. The name of the press immediately evokes an image of community and care: women of colour gathering around a kitchen table, talking and writing together.

> AUDRE LORDE
>
> We chose our name because the kitchen is the centre of our homes, a place where women work and talk to each other.
>
> BARBARA SMITH
>
> And the fact we were a kitchen table let folks know that we were a grass roots operation, begun and kept alive by women who couldn't rely on inheritances or other benefits of class privilege to do the work we needed to do.
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 69)

In their image for *A Press of Our Own* (see Figure 2), hicks portrays Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith sitting at a kitchen table, working one of the press' publications by Combahee River Collective. On the table are several other books published by the press, including the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Colour,* edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Originally published in 1981, a fortieth anniversary edition of the anthology was reissued by SUNY Press in 2021 with a new preface by Moraga who reflects on the book's living legacy and how important the words and ideas from the writers in *This Bridge Called My Back* are to new generations of activists.

> I was 27 years old when Gloria Anzaldúa and I entered upon the project of *This Bridge Called My Back*. I am now 62. As I age, I watch the divide between generations widen with time and technology. I watch how desperately we need political memory so that we are not always imagining ourselves the ever inventors of our revolution; so that we are humbled by the valiant efforts of our foremothers; and so, with humility and a firm foothold in history we can enter upon an informed and re-envisioned strategy for social political change in decades ahead. (Moraga, 2021, p. xxix)

The image that hicks created captures the living legacy Moraga discusses.

FIGURE 2. *Image for the play* A Press of Our Own. *Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith in an editorial meeting.*

Reid's verse for *A Press of Our Own* tells and layers the story of how Audre Lorde responded to the rejection of her poetry by *The Ladder* — and other publications edited by "straight men and white feminists" — by creating Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press. Reid layers hicks' illustration of the kitchen table with lyrics when they share the story of how women of colour writers "united" and "gathered" around a kitchen table to bring their words to the written page. Reid's first line of the verse for *A Press of Our Own* comes verbatim from the character description for Audre Lorde in the play script. The character description itself comes verbatim from Lorde's own description of herself.

Verse for *A Press of Our Own*

She was a Black, lesbian, mother, warrior poet
Informing those straight men and white feminists
She wouldn't settle for the occasional letter of acceptance
Or being "special" or separate

She resisted claims to "sisterhood" saying
"There's no such thing as a single-issue struggle

Because we don't lead single-issue lives," you see

Today, we call this "intersectionality"

So, women of colour writers united

They gathered at a kitchen table one night

They brought their words of survival, renewal, and rage

And wove their knowledge onto the written page

This was more than move of resistance

It was a ground-breaking alliance, a disruptive insistence

Writing their lives to defy white hegemony

They built a press of their own

(Reid, 2023a, in Goldstein, 2023, p. 71)

Example 3 from STAR House

The final play in the project, *STAR House*, features two trans activists who discuss being rejected by the early LGBT liberation movement in the 1970s. The play begins with trans activist Chelsea Goodwin critiquing the kind of activism taken on by middle-class white activists like Barbara Gittings, Kay Lahusen, and Frank Kameny in *The Love Booth*.

CHELSEA GOODWIN

Lesbian and gay activism in conference hotel rooms in the 1970s did nothing to help us.

We were homeless gay youth and young drag queens living on the streets of New York. People called us runaways, but we were actually throwaways. Throwaway children whose families tossed them out when they refused to live with who we were. When we found ourselves homeless on the streets of New York we became sex workers to survive.

Marsha and Sylvia looked out for us. When they were able to rent a hotel room or an apartment, they would sneak up us into their rooms. Sometimes 50 people slept in their two rooms.

In 1970 they founded Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries — STAR.

The first STAR House was a parked trailer truck in an outdoor parking lot in Greenwich Village. One day, very early in the morning, Sylvia and Marsha came by the trailer with food for us and saw that the trailer moving! We were still sleeping as the trucker was driving it away! Most

> of us got out in time, but one of us didn't get up and found herself driving to California.
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 78)

The racialized trans activists Chelsea talks about — Marcia and Sylvia — are Marcia Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. As Chelsea tells us, Sylvia was the co-founder of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), a group formed in 1970 to help homeless young drag queens, gay youth, and trans women living in New York. When STAR House moved from its trailer to an apartment it became a place of community and care:

> CHELSEA GOODWIN
>
> The apartment didn't have any electricity and didn't have any heat. But we all started working to repair it. Some of us also helped out by liberating food from the A&P. In those days, they used to leave everything out in front of the store before it opened. It was a revolutionary thing.
>
> Everyone in the neighbourhood loved STAR House. They left their kids with us, and we'd baby-sit them. If they were hungry, we fed them. We fed half the neighbourhood!
>
> Marsha and Sylvia kept STAR House going for a while. They had all kinds of plans. Like to start a school on the third floor. Some of us left home so early we couldn't read and write.
>
> SYLVIA RIVERA
>
> We had a lot of fun. Until we couldn't pay the rent and were evicted. First STAR House died, then on the fourth anniversary of Stonewall[8] in 1973, STAR itself died.
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 79)

The death of STAR was directly connected to the rejection Sylvia experienced by the white, middle-class, mainstream early LGBT liberation movement.

> ***Content warning: The next excerpt contains stories of violence against trans women and thoughts of suicide.***
>
> SYLVIA RIVERA
>
> Bette Midler came to sing "Happy Birthday" for us. It was happy day for lots of people, but not for us. The organizers stopped the drag queens from performing. They said drag queens were a threat and an embarrassment to women …
>
> … After that day, I left the movement — the movement I helped to create. Who do you think was there at Stonewall that night in 1969, the night of the rebellion? We were the ones who were there — the street queens.

> I was really hurt. So hurt I tried to kill myself and landed in the hospital. They had to put 60 stitches into this arm.
>
> At the time, my boss in New Jersey told me, "Ray, the oppressed always becomes the oppressor. Be careful. Watch it."
>
> You know, I'm still so angry with this fucking community that sometimes I wish 1969 (the year of Stonewall) had never happened.
>
> But it did happen, and now I have a whole lot of children. And I got to see them last year at the World Pride in Italy. The Italian transsexual organization in Bologna asked me to come and speak at their celebration. It was one of the most beautiful moments of my life. After all those years I was asked to speak in front of 500,000 people. Lots of them were mainstream gay people who had oppressed our community.
>
> I reminded all those 500,000 children out there that day that if it wasn't for us, they would not be where they're at today. They wouldn't have anything, none of them, from one corner of the world to the other. Because it was our community, the street kids, the street queens of that era, who fought for what they have today.
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 80)

STAR House ends on an activist note. A year after Sylvia Rivera speaks at World Pride in Italy, she resurrects STAR, changing the "T" from transvestite to transgender, and begins running it from her home at Transy House, a trans collective begun by Chelsea Goodwin and Rusty Mae Moore in Brooklyn, New York. Chelsea, as Sylvia tells us, was one of her original children at STAR House, "one of the children who made it. One of the children who survived" (p. 55). Transy House was a loving home for the trans people and activists who lived there. Sylvia Rivera died at Transy House in 2002, still fighting for trans rights and the respect trans people deserve, surrounded by a community of activists and chosen family.

The image that hicks created for the play *STAR House* features the front door and stairs of Transy House (see Figure 3). The image is full of colour, celebrating the care and activism that emanated from the home.

In the verse they composed for *STAR House*, Reid begins by telling a story about the Stonewall rebellion, and reminds the audience, as Sylvia Rivera does in the play, "who was there at Stonewall that night in 1969." The people who "lit up Christopher Street" were "pissed off butch dykes, trans folx, and drag queens." Reid then layers the story Sylvia Rivera told the audience about New York Pride 1973 when organizers prevented the drag queens from performing.

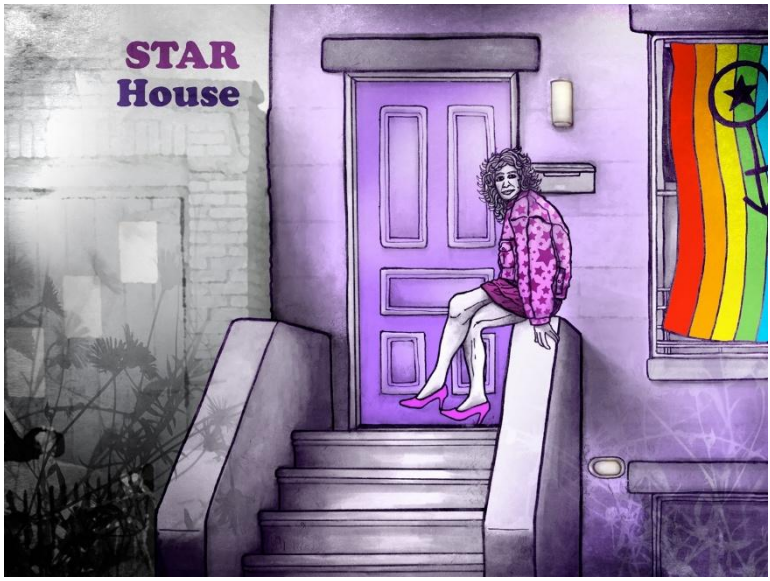

FIGURE 3. *Image for the play* STAR House. *Sylvia Rivera sits on the stairway of Transy House.*

The last stanza of Reid's verse layers Sylvia Rivera's last lines in the play: "Transy House was a loving home for the trans people and activists who lived there." The last line of the stanza, "May you rest in power," both salutes and honours the work of STAR and points to a legacy of powerful activism and care that STAR has left future generations of transgender young people.

Verse for *STAR House*

The year was 1969
During the height of the fight for human rights
Pissed off butch dykes, trans folx, and drag queens
Lit up Christopher Street

Enraged with ongoing police violence
They launched a defiant civil uprising
This was no boozy bar room brawl
This was the infamous Stonewall

Then, at Liberation Day in '73

Sylvia screamed, "Y'all better quiet down,

I've been trying to get up here all day

For your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail"

Our families turned their backs on us,

And now you white, middle-class gays are just the same

We got queer teens and young queens clinging to the streets

And y'all don't do a goddamn thing"

She said, come and see us at STAR house sometime Apartment 14 at 640

East Twelfth

We hustle the streets to feed all our kids

And give them a safe place to sleep

Chosen, intentional, intergenerational

This was family at its most radical

Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries

May you rest in power

(Reid, 2023b, in Goldstein, 2023, p. 84)

THINKING ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *THE LOVE BOOTH AND SIX COMPANION PLAYS*

Our public performance of *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* at the 2023 Toronto Pride Festival provided an audience of activists, artists, and community members with an opportunity to learn about a variety of hidden histories of QTBIPOC care and activism within the early LGBT liberation movement.

By pairing archival research that shares a story of activism from the early white LGBT movement alongside the grassroots activism by queer and trans racialized communities often ignored by white activists, we hoped to move towards a better, clearer, more accurate depiction of the era. Pride events are often co-opted by funding partners and organizations who do not provide ongoing sustainable financial support to 2SLGBTQI+ communities, or care for BIPOC communities. Contemporary Pride

celebrations often erase the ways queer and trans communities of colour have always been grassroots leaders at the forefront of equity and justice. Without continuous research into, and dissemination of, the realities of our shared past and present, it is easy to forget that greater awareness, legal rights, and visibility (Feder, 2020) for some queer and trans people have not meant greater thriving, joy, or justice, especially for racialized, Indigenous, and disabled communities of colour. Our research into the histories of QTBIPOC community care and activism ultimately aimed to help educators, researchers, and audiences better understand the realities of ongoing oppression and violence against QTBIPOC people. Our project sought to unseat the embedded whiteness and cis-heteronormativity found within popular representations of the early LGBT liberation movement.

When art is shared in its many forms — theatre scripts, songs, illustration — it can also be understood as a form of care and activism. *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* not only focuses on the theme of activism and care, the plays are also an example of the work of activist care. Working together on this project, our research team embodied an activist stance of care in documenting and archiving the lives and work of the activists that came before us in theatre script, song, and illustration. In researching, writing, and performing stories which are often erased and forgotten, we worked to honour the legacy of QTBIPOC communities whose activism and care continue to pave the way towards justice.

NOTES

1. "2SLGBTQI+" stands for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex in the Canadian context and includes a plus sign to encompass additional identities. The inclusion of "two-spirit" acknowledges the unique experiences of Indigenous peoples who embody both masculine and feminine spirits, while the addition of "intersex" and "queer" reflects a broader and more inclusive understanding of gender and sexual diversity. This modern acronym recognizes and respects a wider range of identities and experiences within the community. We use this acronym in our research question and throughout our article to acknowledge the people whose identities are not included in the LGBT acronym and to recognize their important contributions to the liberation movement.

2. The term "cis-heteronormativity" describes socio-cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs / practices which assume a cisgender identity is the only natural, normal, and acceptable gender identity and heterosexuality is the only natural, normal, and acceptable sexual orientation. A person who identifies as cisgender is a person whose gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth. A person who identifies as transgender is a person whose gender identity is not the same as their sex assigned at birth. In a cis-normative culture, everyone is assumed to be cisgender until they "come out" as being otherwise. Similarly, in a heteronormative culture, most people are assumed to be heterosexual until they come out as otherwise.

3. Tara Goldstein, the lead author of the article and the principal investigator of the project, changed the name of the project from its original title of *The Love Booth and Other Plays* to *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*. In making this change Goldstein hoped to signal that the six companion plays were as important as the opening play. She made the change in response to feedback that the original title could lead some readers and audience members to view the six companion plays as less important.

   The authors of the article would like to thank one of the reviewers for suggesting that they were privileging white, middle-class, cisgender lesbian and gay voices in the examples of the plays they discussed in an earlier draft. The authors addressed this issue by diversifying the examples of plays discussed in the final draft of the article.

4. The author benjamin lee hicks intentionally does not capitalize their name.

5. STAR is an acronym for Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries. The name later changed to Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries.

6. For more information on the history of the term "gender dysphoria," see Marc-Antoine Crocq's 2022 article "How gender dysphoria and incongruence became medical diagnoses — A historical review."

7. The songs, along with the audio play, can be found at: https://gaileyroad.com or https://kaelreid.com/love-booth-and-other-plays/.

8. The Stonewall riots (also known as the Stonewall uprising and the Stonewall rebellion) were a series of spontaneous demonstrations by members of the gay, lesbian, and trans communities in response to a police raid that began in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighbourhood in New York City.

REFERENCES

Baim, T. (2015). *Barbara Gittings: Gay pioneer*. CreateSpace.

Behar, R. (1995). Introduction: Out of exile. In R. Behar & D. A. Gordon (Eds.), *Women writing culture* (pp. 1–32). University of California Press.

Brown, P., & Wake, C. (2010). Towards a working definition of verbatim theatre. In P. Brown (Ed.), *Verbatim: Staging memory and community* (pp. 2–5). Currency Press.

Chatzidakis, A., Hakim, J., Littler, J., Rottenberg, C., & Segal, L. (2020). *The care manifesto: The politics of interdependence*. Verso Books.

Chisholm, S. (1973). *The good fight*. Harper and Row.

Chrystos. (2021). I walk in the history of my people. In C. Moraga & G. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (40th anniversary ed., pp. 53–58). SUNY Press.

Clifford, J. (1983). On ethnographic authority. *Representations*, *2*, 118–146. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928386

Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. E. (Eds.). (1986). *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. University of California Press.

Cox, S., Guillemin, M., Nichols, J., & Prendergast, M. (2023). Ethics in research-based theater: Why stories matter. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *29*(2), 247–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221097641

Crocq, M.-A. (2022). How gender dysphoria and incongruence became medical diagnoses — A historical review. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, *23*(1), 44–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/19585969.2022.2042166

De La Cruz, I. (1989). *Kool AIDS on ice*. Iris House. https://www.irishouse.org/uploads/2/5/1/8/25189002/koolaidsonicebyirisdelacruz.pdf

Feder, S. (Director). (2020). *Disclosure* [Film]. Netflix.

Fink, M. (2021). *Forget burial: HIV kinship, disability, and queer/trans narratives of care*. Rutgers University Press.

Goldstein, T. (2023). *The love booth and six companion plays* (with contributions by Alec Butler and Jenny Salisbury, illustrations by benjamin lee hicks, and song lyrics by Kael Reid). Gailey Road Productions. https://gaileyroad.com/the-love-booth-companion-plays/

Hammond, W., & Stewart, D. (Eds.). (2008). *Verbatim, verbatim: Contemporary documentary theatre*. Oberon Books.

Hartman, Y., & Darab, S. (2012). A call for slow scholarship: A case study on the intensification of academic life and its implications for pedagogy. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, *34*(1–2), 49–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2012.643740

hooks, b. (2000). *All about love: New visions*. Harper Perennial.

Lorde, A. (1988). *A burst of light: And other essays*. Sheba Feminist Press.

Malatino, H. (2020). *Trans care*. University of Minnesota Press.

Moraga, C. (2021). Preface. In C. Moraga & G. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (40th anniversary ed., pp. ix–xii). SUNY Press.

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

Mountz, A., Bonds, A., Mansfield, B., Loyd, J., Hyndman, J., Walton-Roberts, M., Basu, R., Whitson, R., Hawkins, R., Hamilton, T., & Curran, W. (2015). For slow scholarship: A feminist politics of resistance through collective action in the neoliberal university. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, *14*(4), 1235–1259. https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v14i4.1058

Owis, B. (2024). *Towards a queer and trans ethic of care in education: Beyond the limitations of white, cisheteropatriarchal, colonial care*. Routledge.

Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2018). *Care work: Dreaming disability justice*. Arsenal Pulp Press.

Reid, K. (2024). Using a three-step coding process to co-compose song lyrics from qualitative interviews: A lesson for intermediate-level researchers. In M. Cahnmann-Taylor & K. Jacobsen (Eds.), *The creative ethnographer's notebook* (pp. 169–177). Routledge.

Reid, K. (2015). *Singing queer: Archiving and constructing a lineage through song* [Master's thesis, The University of British Columbia]. UBC Theses and Dissertations. https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0223045

Reid, K. (2022a). "The Children's Creative Voices Project:" Using collaborative ethnographic songwriting to express musical agency and imagine new worlds. *The Recorder: The Journal of the Ontario Music Educators' Association*, *LXIV*(3), 10–18.

Reid, K. (2022b, September 25). "Risk Hope:" Using songwriting methods to compose music for research-informed multi-media theatre. *LGBTQ+ Music Study Group*, https://www.lgbtqmusicstudygroup.com/post/risk-hope-by-kael-reid-phd

Reid, K. (2023a). The theme for the love booth [Song]. Gailey Road Productions.

Reid, K. (2023b). Bridge these differences [Song]. Gailey Road Productions.

Rose, S. (2021). *Our work is everywhere: An illustrated oral history of queer and trans resistance*. Arsenal Pulp Press.

Deavere Smith, A. (1993). *Fires in the mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and other identities*. Anchor Books/Doubleday.

Deavere Smith, A. (1994). *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. Anchor Books/Doubleday.

Smith, B. (1989). A press of our own — Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, *10*(3), 11–13.

Untorelli Press. (2013). *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, revolt, and queer antagonist struggle*. Untorelli Press.

APPENDIX A

Full List of Plays from *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*

The Love Booth

Set in 1972, white lesbian and gay activists mobilize to remove homosexuality from the DSM.

Chisholm and the Advance Men

Set in 1972, Shirley Chisholm becomes the first Black woman to run for president of the United States with the support of a group of gay activists.

The Sero-Positive Seder

Set in the mid 1980s, Iris De La Cruz mobilizes both straight and queer people living with HIV to challenge the stigma and shame of living with HIV and fight for resources.

Lies at the Library

Set in 1973, white lesbian and gay activists mobilize to put queer books on public library shelves.

A Press of Our Own

Set in 1981, Black lesbian poet Audre Lorde and Black scholar and writer Barbara Smith co-found Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press.

I Walk in the History of My People

Set in 1981, two-spirit writer, artist, and activist Chrystos recites her poem "I Walk in the History of My People."

STAR House

Set in 1970 and 1971, trans activists Marcia P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and Chelsea Goodwin form STAR to support homeless young drag queens, gay youth, and trans women living in New York.

TARA GOLDSTEIN (SHE/HER) is a professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching & Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto. Her current teaching and research program focuses on gender, sexuality and schooling, and verbatim theatre research. The findings from Tara's research project "The Experiences of LGBTQ Families in Ontario Schools," funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council from 2016 to 2020, are shared in her books *Teaching Gender and Sexuality at School: Letters to Teachers* and *Our Children Are Your Students: LGBTQ Students Speak Out*. *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* is Tara's latest verbatim theatre project. tara.goldstein@utoronto.ca

BISHOP OWIS (THEY/THEM) is a writer, interdisciplinary scholar, and assistant professor of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Saint Mary's University. Bishop's research critically examines a praxis of care at the intersections of disability, gender, sexuality, race, and settler colonialism in educational institutions. Bishop's work is interdisciplinary in nature, blending and expanding academic disciplines to explore the nuances of care through art-making and storytelling. Their work is informed by a sense of collective imagination by disabled, queer, trans Black, Indigenous, and/or people of colour (QTBIPOC), one that strives for world-building, futurity, and justice. bishop.owis@smu.ca

JENNY SALISBURY is a co-founder and associate director of the Centre for Spectatorship and Audience Research with a PhD from the Centre for Drama, Theatre & Performance Studies at the University of Toronto. Jenny is currently teaching in the Child Study & Education Master of Arts Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto. jenny.salisbury@utoronto.ca

KAEL REID (THEY/THEM) is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies at York University, where they teach core and elective courses in the Children, Childhood and Youth program. Kael weaves together their backgrounds in music, performance, research, and teaching by conducting research with system-affected young people and adults using collaborative songwriting, storytelling, singing, and recording. kaelreid@yorku.ca

BENJAMIN LEE HICKS (THEY/THEM) is a visual artist, elementary school teacher, and teacher educator. In recent years, they have been a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Health and Society at the University of Toronto Scarborough and a sessional lecturer for P/J/I Art Education in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto. Having received their PhD in Curriculum & Pedagogy from OISE in June 2022, benjamin can currently be found in their preferred habitat: teaching Grade 4 in a Toronto District School Board (TDSB) classroom. blh@benjaminleehicks.com

TARA GOLDSTEIN (ELLE) est professeure au Département du Curriculum, Teaching & Learning à l'Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) de l'Université de Toronto. Son programme d'enseignement et de recherche actuel porte sur le genre, la sexualité et la scolarisation, ainsi que sur la recherche en théâtre verbatim. Les résultats du projet de recherche de Tara intitulé « The Experiences of LGBTQ Families in Ontario Schools », financé par le Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines de 2016 à 2020, sont présentés dans ses ouvrages *Teaching Gender and Sexuality at School: Letters to Teachers et Our Children Are Your Students: LGBTQ Students Speak Out*. *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* est le plus récent projet de théâtre verbatim de Tara. tara.goldstein@utoronto.ca

BISHOP OWIS (IEL) est auteurice, chercheur·e interdisciplinaire et professeur·e adjoint·e en Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies à l'Université Saint Mary's. La recherche de Bishop interroge de manière critique une praxis du soin à l'intersection du handicap, du genre, de la sexualité, de la race et du colonialisme de peuplement dans les institutions éducatives. Son travail est de nature interdisciplinaire, mêlant et élargissant les cadres académiques pour explorer les nuances de la sollicitude à travers la création artistique et le récit. Ce travail s'inscrit dans une imagination collective portée par des personnes en situation de handicap, queer, trans, noires, autochtones et/ou racisées (QTBIPOC), une imagination tournée vers la création de mondes, la futurité et la justice. bishop.owis@smu.ca

JENNY SALISBURY est cofondatrice et directrice associée du Centre for Spectatorship and Audience Research et détient un doctorat du Centre for Drama, Theatre & Performance Studies de l'Université de Toronto. Jenny enseigne actuellement dans le programme de maîtrise en arts Child Study & Education à l'Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) de l'Université de Toronto. jenny.salisbury@utoronto.ca

KAEL REID (IEL) est professeur·e adjoint·e à la Faculté of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies de l'Université York, où iel enseigne des cours obligatoires et optionnels dans le programme Children, Childhood and Youth. Kael articule ses parcours en musique, en performance, en recherche et en enseignement en menant des recherches auprès de jeunes et d'adultes affecté·e·s par les systèmes institutionnels, en utilisant la composition collaborative de chansons, le récit, le chant et l'enregistrement. kaelreid@yorku.ca

BENJAMIN LEE HICKS (IEL) est artiste visuel·le, enseignant·e au primaire et formateurice d'enseignant·e·s. Ces dernières années, iel a été boursier·ère postdoctoral·e au département Health and Society de l'Université de Toronto Scarborough, ainsi que chargé·e de cours en P/J/I Art Education dans le programme de maîtrise en enseignement à l'Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) de l'Université de Toronto. Après avoir obtenu son doctorat en Curriculum & Pedagogy à l'OISE en juin 2022, benjamin se trouve actuellement dans son habitat de prédilection : une classe de 4e année au sein du Toronto District School Board (TDSB). blh@benjaminleehicks.com

A SCRIPT FOR CHANGE: USING THEATRE TO FACILITATE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GRADUATE SUPERVISION

SUSAN M. COX, MATTHEW SMITHDEAL, MICHAEL LEE *University of British Columbia*

ABSTRACT. Graduate supervision profoundly impacts graduate student, faculty, and staff wellbeing. Tensions within supervisory relationships are further complicated by equity and inclusion related barriers facing marginalized communities within academia. To address this situation, we created *Rock the Boat*, an open access educational resource that uses Research-based Theatre to provoke dialogue about supervisory relationships. *Rock the Boat* includes four professionally acted scenes plus a facilitator's guide and supplementary resources. Our online piloting process supports the effectiveness of *Rock the Boat* in generating dialogue and enhancing perspective-taking, empathy, and reflective practice among participants. This paper offers a narrative review of the process of creating *Rock the Boat*, detailing many decisions made during the transition from live theatre workshops to film and online discussion.

UN SCRIPT TRANSFORMATEUR : UTILISER LE THÉÂTRE POUR FACILITER LES CONVERSATIONS DIFFICILES SUR LA SUPERVISION DES ÉTUDIANTS AUX CYCLES SUPÉRIEURS

RÉSUMÉ. Les tensions au sein des relations de supervision sont complexifiées par les obstacles liés à l'équité et à l'inclusion et ont une influence profonde sur le bien-être de tous. Pour répondre à cette situation, nous avons créé *Rock the Boat*, une ressource éducative en libre accès qui utilise le théâtre basé sur la recherche pour susciter le dialogue autour des relations de supervision. Notre processus de mise à l'essai en ligne soutient l'efficacité de cette ressource pour générer des dialogues et favoriser la prise de perspective, l'empathie et la réflexion critique chez les participant·e·s. Cet article détaille les nombreuses décisions prises lors de la transition des ateliers de théâtre en présentiel vers le format filmé et la discussion en ligne.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10277

GRADUATE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIPS

Despite considerable evidence that supervisory relationships play a pivotal role in the success of graduate students, graduate student supervision is one of the most under-researched forms of teaching and pedagogy in higher education. While supervisory relationships may take on a myriad of different forms, they are often characterized by an "apprenticeship model" which is "typically conducted *intuitively* by professors" (emphasis added; Maor et al., 2016). As such, it is often assumed that junior faculty will simply pick up the necessary skills, and that more senior faculty will master them sufficiently by the time their first doctoral student completes a dissertation. The lack of training and support for cultivating effective supervisory skills is pronounced and has become all the more evident since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many new supervisory relationships are now formed online and many existing relationships have had to adapt to a novel, online context.

The need for greater attention to graduate student supervisory relationships is made all the more pressing by the increasing recognition that post-secondary universities are experiencing a mental health crisis among graduate students. A recent meta-analysis (Satinksy et al., 2021) estimates the rate of depression in PhD students as 24%, compared to recent data that suggests there is a 5-6% rate of depression in the general population and 13-15% for young adults specifically (18-29 years old). Likewise, the rate of anxiety disorders in young adults generally is estimated at roughly 4%, while the rate for PhD students is roughly 17% (Satinksy et al., 2021).

The mental health crisis in post-secondary universities is certainly not limited to students. There is also increasing recognition of the mental health and wellbeing challenges faced by faculty and staff. While much of the research on the impacts of graduate student supervisory relationships has focused on students' success and wellbeing, there is also considerable evidence that these relationships impact faculty wellbeing, professional identity, and development. Problematic relationships and poor student progress have been associated with increased levels of stress and decreased levels of wellbeing amongst supervisors, especially when they are junior faculty. Likewise, difficulties with balancing supervisory responsibilities and the demands of an active research program may result in feelings of stress, guilt, and a chronic sense of underachievement (Wisker & Robinson, 2016).

The challenges and tensions that arise within supervisory relationships are further complicated by equity and inclusion related barriers perpetuated

within academia which marginalize and oppress particular groups of graduate students, faculty, and staff. As dire as the previously mentioned rates of mental health conditions among graduate students are, analogous rates for marginalized faculty and graduate students are even more alarming. A 2019 study of undergraduate and graduate students across 71 U.S. campuses found that transgender and non-binary students were over four times more likely to have at least one mental health condition compared to their cisgender peers (Lipson et al., 2019).

Another recent study of graduate and professional students found that 98.9% of racial minority participants had recently experienced race-related microaggressions (Lilly et al., 2018). Crucially, this exposure was associated with 2.46-fold increase in the odds of experiencing depression. Similarly, the degree of distress caused by microaggressions was significantly associated with 2.14 times higher odds of depression, even after controlling for subjective social status (Lilly et al., 2018). Finally, on a more intersectional note, a 2021 study of students in graduate and law school found that 46% of law students and 36% of doctoral students had experienced a hostile environment (Boyle and McKinzie, 2021). Multiracial students had the highest rates of depression (22%) and LGTQA+ women had the highest rates of anxiety and depression (Boyle and McKinzie, 2021).

While there has been a general increase in efforts made by post-secondary institutions to address these and other salient issues, current attempts to create respectful, equitable, and inclusive working and learning environments have thus far been inadequate. One component of the problem relates to the lack of appreciation for the ways in which mental health and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues often overlap or intersect in unique ways. Consequentially, mental health and EDI concerns are nearly always examined in isolation from one another. Likewise, discussions of the pressures faced by faculty and staff are isolated from discussions of key challenges faced by graduate students when, in reality, the two are often deeply intertwined. Failure to see the whole picture may drive a wedge between the two sets of interests, thus obscuring common goals and strategies that might make universities more equitable and hospitable for everyone.

A related concern with existing EDI initiatives stems from the lack of significant consultation with and inclusion of representatives from oppressed communities during the process of developing and implementing these initiatives. Further, when members of relevant communities are included, an unfortunate yet persistent trend is that the

labor of addressing these barriers tends to fall majorly on those individuals most heavily impacted by inequity. This then exacerbates barriers and deepen negative impacts on wellbeing. For instance, there is an emotional and psychological toll endured in the incessant recounting of personal experiences with inequality and marginalization. This may be intensified when such experiences are challenged, minimalized, or ignored.

As co-authors, each of us has in various ways recognized an urgent need to prompt awareness of, and create meaningful dialogue about, the challenges inherent to graduate supervisory relationships and their complex entanglements in EDI and mental health related issues. As a Professor and Graduate Program Director, Cox has supervised – or overseen the supervision of – many graduate students and has become acutely aware of the need to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions and biases that shape how faculty and graduate students relate to one another. She is also attuned to the need to further support junior faculty through mentorship and guidance in acquiring necessary supervisory skills.

As a queer, nonbinary, multiply neurodivergent PhD candidate in Philosophy, Smithdeal has witnessed and experienced firsthand the ways in which inequitable and oppressive systems within academia impact mental health. Likewise, they have become starkly aware of the scope and prevalence of related issues across departments through their work co-coordinating the Graduate Student Wellbeing Network, a grassroots organization that advocates for structural changes to address these issues.

As a Professor of Teaching, Associate Head of Educational Affairs of a graduate program, and a BIPOC who has firsthand experience with race-related microaggressions, Lee has worked with many students and colleagues experiencing mental health concerns arising from the academic environment. This experience has reinforced the fact that wellbeing is intimately entwined with issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

It is often challenging to have an open dialogue about commonplace but sensitive issues arising in graduate supervision. The stark power differences between participants – and high stakes for graduate students, particularly the risk of being seen as ungrateful or difficult – mean that much of importance may go unsaid.

Drawing on our collective experience of graduate supervisory relationships, and shared commitments to creating respectful working and learning environments, we worked with a playwright, Scott Button, and professional actors to research and produce an open educational resource

called *Rock the Boat*. This resource is freely available through Pressbooks and includes four dramatized scenes (available on video), scripts for each scene, and a facilitation guide designed to provoke discussion through in-person or online workshops with graduate students, faculty, and/or staff.

In what follows, we describe the process of using Research-based Theatre (RbT) to create *Rock the Boat* and, in particular, some of the key decisions informing how we adapted the initial live theatre workshops (associated with its precursor *Don't Rock the Boat)* to become an online resource that can be deployed in various ways to support and sustain respectful graduate supervisory relationships. Even before the constraints that were suddenly imposed on live theatre by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020, it was a part of our plan to make the move from live theatre to a sustainable open access digital resource. We realize, however, that our journey is not unique and that many theatre productions had no choice but to move online. This has in many cases led to highly creative adaptations. It is our hope that our work will further contribute to the growing appreciation of the new possibilities that such a transition entails, as well as acknowledge the forced constraints.

RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE: A CREATIVE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The origins of our project arose from a general concern with how pedagogy affects student wellbeing and, in particular, the growing recognition of graduate supervision as a centrally important but neglected form of pedagogy. Because supervisory relationships are a highly sensitive topic for many students and faculty, we adopted an innovative approach to creating space for difficult conversations. Building upon the methods of Research-based Theatre (RbT), we collaborated with multiple stakeholders (including the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS), Graduate Student Society (GSS), Ombuds Office, Equity and Inclusion Office, Health Promotion and Education office, as well as graduate students, faculty, and graduate program support staff) to research and develop *Don't Rock the Boat*. The resulting live theatre piece consisted of a series of six short dramatized scenes about the challenges inherent to graduate supervisory relationships.

> RbT is an innovative methodology that brings research to life as a mode of inquiry and/or knowledge mobilization. As a mode of inquiry, the approach supports researchers in finding creative ways to collect and analyze data. For knowledge mobilization, RbT uses dramatic performances to translate research findings. Both pathways aim to provide deep analysis and stimulate dialogue to foster new

> understandings about the social experiences explored. (https://rbtlab.ubc.ca/about-us)

One benefit of RbT is its propensity for "enhancing understanding of lived experience in different groups and communities" (Mitchell et al., 2006, p.198). Another is the unique opportunity it affords to create dialogue around sensitive topics (Belliveau, 2015). Our project employed a workshop style setting, where participants viewed a live theatre scene together and then engaged in a facilitated, small group discussion lasting about 10 minutes. Having experienced the scene together, participants were able to discuss sensitive issues in light of the shared experience, commenting on the characters and situations rather than needing to divulge possibly traumatic aspects of their own experiences. This may lessen the psychological toll of participation and leads to in-depth unpacking of important aspects of supervisory relationships that might otherwise be difficult to articulate (Belliveau, 2015). A further benefit is that participants can experience the situation from both first and third-person perspectives, allowing them to witness challenges faced by other parties that they would not typically be aware of (Bird et al., 2019).

FIGURE 1. *Creative collaborative process for Rock the Boat*

(DON'T) ROCK THE BOAT: EVOLUTION OF OUR APPROACH

Rock the Boat evolved through a three-phase process (see Figure 1). During the initial phase of background research to inform script writing and development, we conducted an extensive literature review (including over 150 documents published since 2000), held 4 peer facilitated story sharing sessions with graduate students and faculty, and consulted widely with a range of campus stakeholders (see Figure 1). Rich in detailed first-person narratives, the story sharing sessions offered the most evocative material yet also presented the greatest challenges in terms of how to use the material without risking identifying those who shared their stories. This was of particular concern for graduate students, so we worked with playwright Scott Button to ensure that any identifying details from the stories informing script development were significantly altered.

During this time, we also created a diverse project Advisory Board who worked alongside Scott Button to identify and prioritize script ideas, decide which issues to highlight in various scenes, and balance the emphasis given to the perspectives of faculty, students, and staff so that the resulting production would be both provocative and inclusive. We wanted the characters and situations in *Don't Rock the Boat* to be realistic enough to resonate yet retain the aesthetics of a live theatre experience. We also wanted the scenes to generate nuanced discussion and avoid any semblance of preachiness. One thing that helped enormously in accomplishing this was developing a list of "must haves" that provided our playwright with a concrete set of parameters for script development (see Table 1). These parameters reflected our commitment to linking wellbeing with EDI, ensuring that the resulting resource resonates with multiple audiences without privileging the voices or perspectives of any one group, while also balancing artistry with content that raises awareness of collective strategies for addressing challenges in supervisory relationships. They also reflect pragmatic considerations related to budget, available resources, and time constraints.

TABLE 1

Parameters guiding script development for *Don't Rock the Boat* (live theatre)
Must maintain a focus of wellbeing in supervisory relationships
Must create an awareness of existing resources at the University of British Columbia
Must present issues from multiple perspectives (i.e., faculty, staff, students)
Must have an emphasis on the wellbeing of students, faculty, and staff (which can be presented in multiple ways)
Must open up questions and discussion, allow for ambiguity, embrace multiple perspectives
Must include humour
Must resonate in a way that feels real
Must consider different intersectionalities
Must not run more than 30 minutes
Must be able to stop dialogue (3-5 times)
Must include reference to informative literature
Must be able to be performed in the centre of a room with minimal props/equipment/lighting
Must adopt an appreciative inquiry lens, that will uphold what is working well in addition to identifying challenges

We also held several script development workshops where graduate students, faculty, and staff participated in arts-based and embodied activities that elicited role play evocative of the tensions we sought to unpack. The collaborative nature of this work required our team of researchers, writers, directors, actors, and others to work closely together, exploring the nuances of the topic and developing a production that would integrate varied perspectives (Lea, 2012). The collective creation (Barton, 2008; Filewod, 1987) consisted of six scenes with a loose narrative structure that emphasized the tenuous feeling of being in an uncomfortable situation while not wanting to cause trouble by rocking the

boat. Three professional actors played the central roles on a simple elevated stage with a minimum of props and, at the end of each scene, one of the actors (who also had extensive experience as a professional radio host) stepped out of character to pose provocative questions that would initiate discussion.

Although this use of theatre to address systemic forms of oppression derives much from Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre (1995), we elected to have professional actors rather than community members perform *Don't Rock the* Boat and to invite audience members to respond to each of the scenes in small group discussion. While we recognize there can be considerable benefit to adopting a conflict theatre approach such as Forum Theatre wherein audience members are invited on stage to stop the action and step into the role of a character to enact a possible resolution, we diverged from this approach, in part, due to our commitment to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the participants. We recognized that having audience members intervene in the scene may require them to relive negative and/or traumatic past experiences on display for an audience. Their own deeply personal experiences may then be discussed at length or debated by other audience members, further alienating and negatively impacting the original audience member. Our approach allowed a playwright and trained actors to convey realistic scenarios without disclosing the specific experience of a participant, while also allowing participants to discuss relevant issues through the lens of the scene and characters rather than their own personal experiences. This emphasis on dialogue was a somewhat novel element in our use of the RbT methodology and required that each of the 6 scenes be interspersed with short periods (approximately 10 minutes) of small group discussion. In order to pilot this approach, evaluate the impact of the production for different audiences, and surface ideas about how to enhance the effectiveness of *Don't Rock the Boat* as a means of prompting dialogue, we held 2 live performances for graduate students, 2 for faculty and staff, and 2 mixed groups in which graduate students, faculty, and staff could participate together. During the small group discussions, our trained facilitators encouraged non-judgmental listening and stressed the importance of confidentiality. Participants chose the tablemates they would like to sit with to maximize interactivity and safety during discussion. In particular, graduate students were always given the option to join graduate student only groups or mixed groups. To signal the end of the time allotted for discussion, a gentle bell sounded, and viewers were invited to focus on the next scene. Each scene was 6 to 8 minutes long and the entire workshop ran for about 90 minutes. Performances attracted

anywhere from 4 to 26 audience members and light refreshments were provided at each table to enhance the social dimensions of the interaction. A short documentary was produced to introduce the project to a wider audience and illustrate the use of Research-based Theatre.

EVALUATION OF THE LIVE THEATRE WORKSHOPS AND DECISION TO CREATE NEW FILM SCRIPT

Debriefing with the facilitators of the small groups and analyzing survey data from audience members about each scene provided valuable input for the identification of any points of confusion, clarification of scene content, and the assessment of the levels of faculty, students, and staff engagement. This enabled us to adjust time allowed for discussion and other production decisions made during each live theatre workshop. Overall, the input we received was remarkably consistent and emphasized the relevance of the content and appreciation for the format.

> I definitely felt engaged throughout. I thought the scenes were a fantastic entry point into conversation with my group – they were clearly resonant with us all and much more fun than "case studies." (Faculty)

> Made me think about 'where' to get help. Yes there are lots of help being offered to students but as a graduate student I don't feel comfortable sharing my experiences with these 'official programs.' (Student)

> I have never attended or participated in this type of format before. I enjoyed each performance and getting a chance to chat about each scene. (Staff)

Specific suggestions from viewers about the content and delivery of each scene directed our attention to points of confusion or neglected issues and provided us with ideas for how the script could be modified in subsequent iterations.

> I wish we could have touched on issues of harassment, discrimination etc. a great format for provoking discussion...some of the scenarios felt a bit repetitive. (Faculty)

> Would have loved to see a positive relationship on stage. (Faculty)

Piloting the live theatre process also provided new insights into how best to develop the facilitator guide for the next phase of the project, which was initially intended to involve producing a high-quality digital recording of the performance for archival and to be used in future workshops or shared more widely. As we learned, facilitators relied heavily on the questions and scripted advice supplied in the facilitator guide to ensure that participants in the small group discussions were prompted to identify and consider

their cognitive and emotional responses to key moments in each scene. Feedback from facilitators included advice on optimal size of group, choice of language (e.g., disability terms), and the point at which participants tend to get fatigued. Around the time we were evaluating responses to the live theatre workshops, we were fortunate in securing additional funding for the project and this enabled us to rethink the project and entertain the more ambitious idea of creating an entirely new script that would make prominent the important but often overlooked intersections between wellbeing and equity, diversity, and inclusivity. Drawing upon the expertise of our playwright Scott Button (who has also worked in film) and guidance from the staff at our on-campus production studio, we began formulating an approach that would translate effectively to both online and in-person audiences. The full significance of the decision to shift to creating an entirely online theatre-based resource was not, at the time, entirely foreseeable, as the first outline for the new script emerged about a month before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

FROM LIVE TO ONLINE: SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION

Having learned the value of piloting our approach with the live theatre workshops, we elected to produce one new scene for film and trial it with an online audience before committing to creation of additional scenes. Given that everything had moved online by this time, it was fortuitous that we had already ramped up for this possibility. Operating with the knowledge that the first scene would have to be filmed in studio according to strict COVID-19 public health measures, Scott Button created the script for Zoom Fatigue a scene in which Erika (a woman of colour), meets Sandra (her new graduate supervisor, also a woman of colour) online to assess how they will work together. Erika is nervous but determined, and Sandra, like many female faculty, sometimes underestimates herself due to imposter syndrome. The scene is both awkward and humorous, using texting and other techniques to capture the essence of the 'new normal' as so many experienced it once in-person meetings were curtailed. The scene also highlights how EDI issues affect wellbeing through the interactions between Erika and her more senior white, cis male colleague Markus.

Zoom Fatigue was extensively piloted with online synchronous discussion groups that were facilitated by members of our project team. Groups were either homogeneous (i.e., graduate students or faculty/staff) or mixed, and typically lasted about an hour. During this phase of the project, we learned a great deal about creating a comfortable, safe, and dynamic online environment and integrating the shared experience of watching the live-streamed scene with the same emphasis on provoking dialogue that we had

in the live theatre workshops. Following the online workshop, participants were invited to complete a short online survey to solicit their experience and comments. This feedback affirmed our intuitive sense that it was ethically important to allow participants to choose whether they wished to be part of a mixed or homogeneous group and moreover, that the facilitator be adept at managing subtle power dynamics in mixed groups. We also learned that it was important to check in about what resonated most strongly with participants after viewing the scene so that ensuing dialogue would focus on the most salient issues for each group.

Applying insights from the piloting phase of Zoom Fatigue, we invited our playwright to create three additional scenes that would work well with the online workshop format and support virtual, synchronous discussions. We sought input on this plan from the on campus Ombuds Office and the Equity and Inclusion Office and asked for advice in identifying and prioritizing the related EDI issues. As we did with in the live theatre phase, we also drafted a set of parameters to guide in script development and production (see Table 2). These parameters specified the scope and tighter focus of the work, and reflected our emerging insights on what would or would not translate well from the original script.

TABLE 2

Parameters guiding script development for *Rock the Boat* (filmed scenes)
Must integrate a focus on wellbeing and EDI related topics in supervisory relationships
Must present issues from multiple perspectives (i.e., faculty, staff, students) and enable new awareness of experiences of others.
Must open up questions and create ambiguity about possible resolution of situation
Must balance gravity of issues with some moments of humor
Must resonate in a way that feels real yet still employs a theatrical experience
Must consider different intersectionality and build script around actors who identify with the role
Must have similar look and feel to *Zoom Fatigue* so that the collected scenes would have an overall coherence

Must not run more than 8 minutes for each scene and scenes must not have to be chronological
Must adopt an appreciative inquiry lens, that will uphold what is working well as well as identify challenges

The resulting three scenes were filmed in studio in 2020 and all COVID protocols were followed carefully. This meant that we had to observe social distancing and masking precautions. The actors who played Erika and Markus, and Sandra and Paul were, however, in the same respective household bubbles so we were able to shoot some scenes without the otherwise strictly adhered to distancing requirements. In other cases, strategic placement of the actors and use of creative camera angles meant that we could create the illusion of the actors being closer to one another than they were.

Below is an excerpt from the scene *Contentious Authorship*. In this scene, the same two graduate students featured in *Zoom Fatigue* (Markus and Erica) discuss co-authorship on a paper involving their supervisor (Sandra) and another graduate student. Their hidden assumptions quickly become a source of tension, and it is up to Sandra to step in and resolve things.

MARKUS	Hey, before we get back to work on the grant, awesome work on the intro to the article. It looks great, and I know Sandra's pleased, too.
ERIKA	Thanks a lot! I spent quite a bit of time on it, so that's good to hear.
MARKUS	Oh, really? Not too much, I hope.
ERIKA	Why? It was worth it. I've only got two authorship credits in journals,

and both were excerpts from my thesis and, frankly, (*playful*) I'm a different person now.

Some sort of SHIFT within MARKUS... He goes quiet.

MARKUS … Did Sandra say you'd get authorship on it?

ERIKA No, but, I assumed that-

MARKUS Because I think it will just be Jaspreet, Sandra, and me.

ERIKA You're getting authorship?

MARKUS The data was from a conference presentation that I helped Jaspreet on last Fall.

ERIKA Okay but did you actually *write* any of the article?

MARKUS I did a lot of the data collection and analysis.
(*pointed*)
Do you want a word count or something?

ERIKA No, I'm just saying. Sorry, I

didn't mean to be blunt, I just
didn't know you worked on it.

MARKUS Well, I did.

Two additional scenes round out the resource. *No Other Choice* features an exchange between an international graduate student (Ingrid) and her supervisor (Judith), centering on the student's request to take leave from her studies so she can return home to be with her ill mother. Things do not go smoothly, and Ingrid feels threatened by Judith's veiled suggestion that a leave may negatively impact future reference letters.

Disclosures portrays the fallout from the actions of a graduate supervisor (Terry) who shares personal information about the mental health condition of another student to Terry's student Daniel. Daniel is uncomfortable with this and turns to Paul, a staff member in their institution's accessibility and diversity unit, to discuss how he feels and to explore possible resolutions. In this scene, Daniel articulates his wish to ensure that "this sort of thing stops happening."

Highlighting the need to address EDI issues at both systemic and individual levels, we slightly altered the title of the original script for *Don't Rock the Boat* and titled the completed resource *Rock the Boat*. Coupled with an extensive facilitator's guide, scripts for each of the scenes and suggestions for supplementary readings, the scenarios in *Rock the Boat* are intended to make waves and foster dialogue that will bring about greater awareness of the challenges inherent to graduate supervisory relationships, as well as generate concrete behavioural shifts. This is necessary at all levels and the resource is therefore designed to be used in many different ways.

As the scenes moved from the script into production, we sought to add additional elements that would enhance and support flexible use of the resource. One feature that enables this is the loose narrative structure of the four scenes. They can be shown individually or in any sequence since the characters and situations do not follow a linear plot line. Two scenes also feature alternative endings. *Contentious Authorship* has a long and short version with the former including an extended monologue by Ingrid that makes a number of subtle issues more explicit to those who may be new to graduate supervision. The monologue can be very powerful and elicit strong emotional responses in participants, and this must be factored into the selection of which version to use. *No Other Choice* also offers two alternate endings which present different strategies taken by the supervisor

Sandra to manage the conflict about co-authorship. Depending on the goals of the workshop, this scene could be used with one or both endings.

Our process of piloting continued with the full roster of all four scenes, and participants in the online workshops offered valuable feedback that enabled us to hone questions for discussion and ensure that the final version of the facilitator's guide reflected our best advice on how to use the resource with homogeneous or mixed groups of graduate students, faculty, and staff.

CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING AN OPEN ACCESS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

From the beginning, we knew that we wanted the final resource to be as broadly available as possible. Positioning the resource as an open educational resource (OER) allowed us to ensure open access, while also supporting our goal of making the resource sustainable. Hosting the resource on Pressbooks enabled us to avoid on-going financial costs, such as hosting fees and domain registration, while also ensuring we didn't rely on a service with questionable stability and longevity. We were able to access invaluable assistance in the creation and maintenance of the resource, as well as financial support, from UBC's open education community. This method of hosting ensures that the resource is accessible in perpetuity and does not require that members of the team be available to respond to requests for access beyond the completion of project funding.

While the decision to create *Rock the Boat* as an OER was straightforward, many of the resulting logistics and questions were far less straightforward. One of the most complex and pressing questions was determining the most appropriate licensing of the resource. While we wanted the resource to be available freely and for users to feel free to adapt the facilitator's guide to their context, it was also crucial to us to preserve the artistic integrity of the filmed scenes and scripts. Though Creative Commons licensing offers a significant range of flexibility for different circumstances, we ultimately decided to register the videos and scripts under a more traditional All Rights Reserved license to ensure that the videos and scripts could not be altered or reshared. However, for everything other than the videos and scripts, we concluded that a Creative Commons Attribution, NonCommercial, ShareAlike (CC-BY-NC-SA) license would be ideal. This allows users to freely use and modify the resource, as well as redistribute the resulting modified resource. However, users are required to attribute

the resource to the original authors, retain the original license on modified resources, and restrict the use of the resource to non-commercial contexts.

INSIGHTS

In hindsight, we recognize several key decisions that we made both in developing our unique approach to using of RbT to create a live theatre workshop and later transitioning it to the online environment with the open educational resource *Rock the Boat.* The first is that dialogue amongst the audience can be just as crucial as the theatre performance itself. Hence, the transition from live to online emphasized throughout that the resource is not simply a video to be watched alone; there needs to be a synchronous discussion to create a feeling of community and peer support, hear about other perspectives, and collectively imagine solutions to challenges (Belliveau, 2015). This commitment to using the resource to create dialogue had implications for script writing and production that were not always immediately apparent. Questions had to remain unanswered, and conflicts had to invite multiple understandings.

Second, with the transition from live to online, we also had to think carefully about the contrast between our expectations of the artistry involved in live theatre versus video. In the live theatre workshops, there was an intensity and sense of drama that could be imparted by live actors on stage. This enabled a different aesthetic wherein the use of metaphor or a chorus of voices seemed natural and effective (Rossiter et al., 2008). With the move to filmed scenes that were shown online, it was necessary to adopt a more realist approach which emphasized the kind of dialogue that workshop participants could readily imagine themselves having. However, this shift also necessitated greater explicit emphasis on the theatrical nature of the scenes. The increased realism may lead to the mistaken perception that the scenes are intended as demonstrations of how to or how not to engage, rather than as theatrical scenes to elicit discussions and behavioural shifts. The shift to online also affected the way that humour could be deployed, as it had to be made more explicit and less reliant on subtleties than in a live theatre experience.

Third, the creation of a resource such as *Rock the Boat* requires the collective commitments of a great many artists, technicians, community members, and researchers. It was, therefore, essential to recognize at the outset that we did not have the creative skills and expertise to pull off a project such as this on our own. The inclusion of an acclaimed playwright, professional actors, and a production studio, as well as the support of our colleagues in the Research-based Theatre lab was integral. Together we

were able to conceptualize and execute the work in a way that was inclusive of everyone's talents and that did not privilege the norms of research over those of the arts (Beck et al., 2011). We are aware that this is not always the case when academics seek to include artists and yet do not budget appropriately or enable truly meaningful collaborations. We were also extremely fortunate in obtaining several grants that supported the work from its inception through to the current implementation of the resource. It probably cannot be overstated that the work of creating a resource such as *Rock the Boat* is only half-way completed when the video is ready for release. There are still a myriad of decisions to be made about online platforms, licensing, and publicity. Though somewhat less glamorous, these are all essential aspects of production that must be followed through.

REFERENCES

Barton, B. (2008). *Collective creation, collaboration and devising.* Playwrights Canada Press. https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=6Ul7NwAACAAJ

Beck, J. L., Belliveau, G., Lea, G. W., & Wager, A. (2011). Delineating a spectrum of research-based theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry, 17*(8), 687-700. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411415498

Belliveau, G. (2015). Performing identity through research-based theatre: Brothers. *The Journal of Educational Enquiry, 14*(1), 5-16,

Bird, J., McConville, K., & Sallis, R. (2019). 'The Greatest Love of All': An ethnodrama celebrating the continuing and evolving culture of the drama teacher. *NJ: Drama Australia Journal, 43*(2), 69-82. https://doi.org/10.1080/14452294.2019.1704975

Boal, A. (1995). The rainbow of desire: The Boal method of theatre and therapy. Routledge.

Boyle, K. M., & McKinzie, A. E. (2021). The prevalence and psychological cot of interpersonal violence in graduate and law school. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 36*(13-14), 6319–6350. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518816329

Filewod, A. (1987). Collective encounters: Documentary theatre in English Canada. University of Toronto Press. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442673106

Knutson, D., Matsuno, E., Goldbach, C., Hashtpari, H., & Smith, N. G. (2022). Advocating for Transgender and Non-Binary Affirmative Spaces in Graduate Education. *Higher Education, 83*, 461–479. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00673-5

Lilly, F. R. W., Owens, J., Bailey, T. C., Ramirez, A., Brown, W., Clawson, C., & Vidal, C. (2018). The influence of racial microaggressions and social rank on risk for depression among minority graduate and professional students. *College Student Journal, 52*(1), 86–104.

Lipson, S. K., Raifman, J., Abelson, S., & Reisner, S. L. (2019). Gender minority mental health in the U.S.: Results of a national survey on college campuses. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 57*(3), 293–301. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2019.04.025

Maor, D., Ensor, J. D., & Fraser, B. J. (2016). Doctoral supervision in virtual spaces: A review of research of web-based tools to develop collaborative supervision. *Higher Education Research & Development, 35*(1), 172–188. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1121206

Mitchell, G. J., Jonas-Simpson, C., & Ivonoffski, V. (2006). Research-based theatre: The making of I'm Still Here! *Nursing Science Quarterly, 19(3)* 198–206. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894318406289878

Rossiter, K., Kontos, P., Colantonio, A., Gilbert, J., Gray, J., & Keightley, M. (2008). Staging data: Theatre as a tool for analysis and knowledge transfer in health research. *Social Science & Medicine, 66(*1), 130-146. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.07.021

Satinsky, E. N., Kimura, T., Kiang, M. V., Abebe, R., Cunningham, S., Lee, H., Lin, X., Liu, C. H., Rudan, I., Sen, S., Tomlinson, M. Yaver, M., & Tsai, A. C. (2021) Systematic review and meta-analysis of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among Ph.D. students. Scientific Reports, 11(1), 14370. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-93687-7

Wisker, G., & Robinson, G. (2016). Supervisor wellbeing and identity: challenges and strategies. *International Journal for Researcher Development, 2(7)* 123–140. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRD-03-2016-0006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the many graduate students, faculty, and staff who gave generously of their time to share their experiences of graduate supervisory relationships and offer feedback at critical junctures in the development of *Don't Rock the Boat* and *Rock the Boat*. We are also extremely grateful for the collaboration of playwright Scott Button, our cast of professional actors, directors, studio camera persons and producers and the support of colleagues in the Research-based Theatre Lab at the University of British Columbia. Finally, the financial support that made this project possible includes grants from the UBC Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund, the Equity Enhancement Fund, the Inclusive Initiatives Fund, the Open Educational Rapid Innovation and Open Educational Implementation Fund.

SUSAN M. COX is Chair in Biomedical Ethics and Director of the W. Maurice Young Centre for Applied Ethics in the School of Population and Public Health, University of British Columbia. susan.cox@ubc.ca.

MATTHEW SMITHDEAL is a PhD candidate in the Department of Philosophy at the University of British Columbia. matthew.smithdeal@gmail.com.

MICHAEL LEE is a Professor of Teaching and the Associate Head of Educational Affairs at the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University of British Columbia. michael.lee@ubc.ca.

SUSAN M. COX est titulaire de la chaire en éthique biomédicale et directrice du « W. Maurice Young Centre for Applied Ethics » à l'École de « Population and Public Health » de l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. susan.cox@ubc.ca

MATTHEW SMITHDEAL est candidat au doctorat au Département de philosophie de l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. matthew.smithdeal@gmail.com

MICHAEL LEE est professeur d'enseignement et directeur adjoint de « Educational Affairs » au Département de « Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy » de l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. michael.lee@ubc.ca

PLAYBUILDING AS REFLEXIVE PRACTICE: EXPLORING IMPLICIT BIAS THROUGH PARTICIPATORY THEATRE

MICHAEL M. METZ, NADIA GANESH *Brock University*

KEVIN HOBBS *Western University*

ABSTRACT. Implicit bias education in the health sciences is crucial for disrupting the individual and systemic oppressive values that contribute to inequitable access to healthcare. In short, implicit bias can kill. Through a Playbuilding approach, dramatic vignettes on implicit bias were shown to undergraduate health science students in a performance workshop entitled *Haunting our Biases: Using Participatory Theatre to Interrupt Implicit Bias*. Through Forum Theatre, the vignettes were explored, discussed, and re-made. Three project members reflect on their roles, discussing Playbuilding, pedagogical potential, and the process of developing assessments of the project's efficacy. Conclusions are offered on the reflexive impact of the Playbuilding process and the potential for growth, for both researchers and participants, that can emanate from such work.

LE THÉÂTRE COLLABORATIF COMME PRATIQUE RÉFLEXIVE : EXPLORER LES PRÉJUGÉS IMPLICITES À TRAVERS LE THÉÂTRE PARTICIPATIF

RÉSUMÉ. Il est crucial d'éduquer sur les préjugés implicites dans les études de la santé pour contrer les valeurs oppressives qui entravent l'égalité d'accès aux soins de santé. À l'aide d'une méthode de théâtre collaboratif, des saynètes dramatiques sur les préjugés implicites ont été présentées à des étudiants de premier cycle en sciences de la santé lors d'un atelier de performance. Grâce au Théâtre-Forum, les saynètes ont été explorées, discutées et réinventées. Trois membres du projet réfléchissent à leurs rôles, en abordant le théâtre collaboratif, le potentiel pédagogique et le processus d'élaboration des évaluations de l'efficacité du projet. Ils en concluent que le processus de théâtre collaboratif peut être réflexif et que des possibilités de croissance, peuvent émerger de ce travail.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10201

In 2020, a group of faculty members from the fields of dramatic arts, applied health sciences, nursing, and experiential education, along with three graduate students, began discussing how they could explore concepts of *implicit bias* (IB) with undergraduate health science students. IB refers to assumptions and attitudes that shape how we perceive and behave in the world, often subconsciously (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Regardless of intention (FitzGerald & Hurst, 2017), unconscious and unexamined biases can have damaging social impacts, particularly towards people from marginalized groups in settings where biases may contribute to inequitable healthcare and medical decision-making (Edgoose et al., 2019). Despite a growing field of theatre-based health research and education (Rossiter et al., 2008), our team recognized a gap in the literature on how Research-based Theatre (RbT) can be utilized to explore IB. In 2021, we developed an RbT project that endeavoured to expand conversations on IB with health sciences students and promote critical reflexivity before they enter the health field. This project was called *Haunting our Biases: Using Participatory Theatre to Interrupt Implicit Bias*.

We use "reflexive," as opposed to "reflective," intentionally. *Reflective* practice refers to when we think back on our actions at suitable times, determining what was successful or not about an action or event, and then adjusting for the future (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). *Reflexive* practice goes much deeper. Sometimes referred to as critically reflective practice, Carol Thompson (2022) describes reflexivity as "the relationship between cause and effect, especially when linked to our belief structures, so it involves an examination of our beliefs, judgements and subsequent actions" (p. 32). This distinction is important, as we challenge our audiences to become reflexive practitioners — to examine their own biases such that they can disrupt them to intentionally provide ethical and equitable care.

The research team collaborated with Mirror Theatre (MT), a participatory research and arts-based theatre group that uses Playbuilding and Forum Theatre to create dialogic educational performance workshops to discuss social issues. *Playbuilding* (Leavy, 2020; Norris, 2009) is a research methodology wherein the MT cast, referred to as "actors / researchers / teachers" (A/R/Tors), collaborate to create a series of evocative theatrical vignettes centered around a social issue. MT's process has three phases: research / data generation, vignette creation, and participatory dissemination (Norris, Ganesh, et al., 2022). The third phase involves MT utilizing a *Forum Theatre* (Boal, 1974/1979) approach, wherein audiences are shown the scenes and invited to deconstruct them through dialogue or by acting in the scenes to reshape the outcome. This process is led by a facilitator, referred to as the "Joker," who guides the audience through the

vignettes, allows for dialogue, and encourages (but does not demand) participation.

Playbuilding, a methodology that dramatizes data, falls under the umbrella of *RbT*. Beck et al. (2011) describe RbT as a spectrum, encompassing a variety of methods in which theatre is used "as a way to conduct and represent scholarly research" (p. 687). Using their two continua (performance and research) as categories for this spectrum, MT's use of Playbuilding falls near the "closed/conference performances based on more informal, first-hand research" (Beck et al., 2011, p. 694). *Haunting our Biases* has been performed for mainly health sciences students but also at conferences. Our data generation emerged from both our own stories (first-hand) and existing research (second-hand).

MT rehearsals for *Haunting our Biases* began during the summer of 2021 and took place online. The final module consists of nine scenes and are open access: https://mirrortheatre.ca/performance/haunting-our-biases/. As of this writing, *Haunting our Biases* has been performed live for 16 audiences (six online, 10 in person). We also administered a mixed-methods questionnaire, which was research ethics approved, to determine audience responses to the performance workshop. Questions related to experiences in the workshop and how the scenes informed their understandings of the topic and themselves. Furthermore, a free facilitator's guide was created to enable others to use the scenes and theatre-based facilitation techniques in their own context, assisting instructors with potentially limited knowledge on Playbuilding and/or Forum Theatre: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/implicitbiastraining/. Our project was funded by the Government of Ontario through eCampus Ontario's support of the Virtual Learning Strategy.

In this article, three of the research team members reflect on their experiences and roles in the creation of *Haunting our Biases*, exploring how Playbuilding has expanded the much-needed discussion on IB in the health science field. First, Kevin Hobbs will discuss his role as "director / actor / researcher / teacher" (D/A/R/Tor) of *Haunting our Biases*, reflecting on online rehearsals and the process of unlearning for the MT cast. Michael M. Metz will focus on his role as curriculum developer, discussing construction of the facilitator's guide as well as the pedagogical underpinnings that have come out of this project. Finally, Nadia Ganesh will reflect on her role as impact research lead, discussing how engaging with multiple research forms through this project aided in her growth as a researcher. In using this polyvocal approach, we hope to offer practical insights that contribute to the use of RbT in the health field.

A D/A/R/TOR'S PRACTICE: THE POWER OF DISAGREEMENT

I entered this project as grant co-writer, project manager, and D/A/R/Tor. I had as much understanding as anyone as to the purpose of the module, and yet I soon found I had little understanding about what might emerge from this research with IB, and that my state of ignorance was for the best. It may be a strange thing to acknowledge, but *not knowing* in research can be the strongest path to reach a destination. It was this admission to myself that allowed / encouraged / inspired me to design a humility-based approach to this work, sidestepping to some degree the reaffirming preconceptions of confirmation bias (Allahverdyan & Galstyan, 2014), a psychological tendency that no "research method is immune from" (McSweeney, 2021, p. 850). I shall use this section to provide a specific example of my methodological process as a D/A/R/Tor to support the celebration of dissonance in research inquiry.

When beginning a project as D/A/R/Tor, I seek ways to "find myself in the middle of a whirlpool" (Norris, Hobbs, et al., 2022, p. 167), intentionally putting myself off-centre to challenge my notions on the research topic. Take for example my definition of IB. I align with De Houwer's (2019) definition of IB as a behavioural phenomenon, "something that people do rather than something that people possess" (p. 836). It is a notion with which I entered the research. Yet, if my role as director is to set a tone that encourages the A/R/Tors to "question everything, even our current positions" (Norris, 2009, p. 23), then I must try to do so through example. In other words, I must publicly admit my uncertainty. Anyone familiar with staging a mainstream theatre production might expect a director who demands that "the creativity of the designers and actors lies in fulfilling the desires and vision of the director" (Schraft, 2018, p. 6). I have directed these kinds of shows, with cast members who need to know and emulate my overarching concept. Such is not the case in a Playbuilding context. I am a co-discoverer and co-learner. I construct alongside the A/R/Tors. In saying that, I do not take a laissez-faire attitude in which anything goes. There is planning, research, and structure to my rehearsals, something critical to my process. In Figure 1, you will find a partial record of my rehearsal logbook; I have shared the pre-planning of the first four of our seventeen 2-hour online rehearsals.

June 9, 2021, MT rehearsal

- Exercise to bring us together: "I assume…"
    - Take 8 minutes to choose three personal items you are okay sharing with each other online
    - One item represents a music style, another a reading form, the third a film or TV genre.
    - Be imaginative. Find a metaphoric or symbolic object to represent your interest rather than something literal.
    - We go around and try to guess based on an item the preference of *one* art form.
- Discuss the meaning of IB
    - Val and Nadia discuss their work *(note: Dr. Val Michaelson was the Principal Investigator on this project)*
    - Implicit vs. unconscious bias

June 16, 2021, MT rehearsal

- Check-in
- Warm-up:
    - Create a story with given words
- Share context of MT
- Share context of grant
- Discussion on IB – put notes in Zoom Chat

June 23, 2021, MT rehearsal

- Warm-up:
    - Create a story with given words from group
- Share recipe cards. [a process to record ideas and insights from the sharing of stories and cast dialogue]
- Share stories of bias. I start out with my Pride Flag story.

June 30, 2021, MT rehearsal

- Check-in
- Exercise: Fortunately/Unfortunately
- What we talked about last week- recap
- Chat burst – whom do you trust the most? Whom do you trust the least? (picture of young mom and family)
- Chat Blast- 3 things that stand out the most in picture of graffiti – rank them
- Story-sharing- where does your unconscious bias come from?
- Bracketing out and bracketing in
- Underlying assumptions-
- Exercises on looking at own privilege?????
- History of the word "bias"
- "Thinking Fast and Slow" – the book – see the summarizing document I wrote up about it

FIGURE 1. *Rehearsal logbook excerpt*

Each rehearsal was planned to scaffold our cast members into the devising work on IB. For example, in the first session (June 9, 2021) I constructed a three-task opening for the first few rehearsals to move the A/R/Tors into a place of sharing (i.e., choose three personal items), creativity (i.e., find a metaphoric or symbolic object to represent your interest rather than something literal), and conceptualization (i.e., discuss the meaning of IB). As it turned out, this online rehearsal pattern suited the company. It was not long before the tasks involving sharing, creativity, and conceptualization interlocked and harmonized as we moved into creating the theatrical vignettes, and I found that I did not have to "prime the pump," so to speak, for the later rehearsals. Eventually, cast members arrived already thinking about the work, yearning to get into the devising.

Early in the devising process I thought it would be wise to build with the A/R/Tors a shared definition of IB. This became contentious. Some A/R/Tors believed that IB was a set of behaviours found in us all (De Houwer, 2019), while others argued it was an extremity of prejudice (Holroyd et al., 2017). A/R/Tors also disagreed on the moral responsibility a person must accept for the bias they hold. The following observation has been pulled from my post-session notes about one rehearsal's discussion:

> A very difficult rehearsal. [Name anonymized] took centre stage and made numerous statements about how we should approach this work. Much of it was repetition from another rehearsal. The comments are valid but repetitive. It took up all our time and we did not get to devising. Very little "Yes and …" and mostly "Yes but …"

It was a challenge to simultaneously hold competing views on the definition of IB, and yet it became clear that prescribing one definition meant negating a set of voices. We held discourse over several rehearsals and, ultimately, we did not agree on a single definition or the degree of moral responsibility in holding IB (Madva, 2018). We did not need to agree, however. Once we dove into the devising work, the creative impulse took hold, resulting in a set of vignettes with a variety of perspectives, sometimes paradoxical in nature, providing ample choices for directions of dialogue with audience members.

I would like to share two examples of vignettes that approach IB differently. In "What's in a Title?" (https://youtu.be/QQ7WD8x-NI0) MT A/R/Tors created a series of short interactions demonstrating microaggressions committed by individuals of various backgrounds. This example demonstrates various ways in which people, both from non-marginalized and marginalized groups, can express bias. In "Missed

Interpretation" (https://youtu.be/zZUPdV1qHH8) we addressed the more blatant racial divide in which a white-skinned person acts on an assumption about a darker-skinned person that cannot be dismissed as a momentary lapse of reason. This example demonstrates the embedded power of the White perspective and its social harm.

Conrad (2006) speaks of ethical entanglements in her popular theatre participatory research project *Life in the Sticks*, finding guidance through the words of predecessors such as Denzin (2003), Conquergood (1985), and Boal (1974/1979). I have my own signpost predecessors, pointing me in directions I can choose to take. Norris (2009, 2020), Kandil (2016), and Carter (2010) are a few colleagues I can look to for reassurance that chaos leads to creativity. As Sajnani (2012) says, the "practice of improvisation embraces uncertainty" (p. 81). I suggest that in the whirlpool of uncertainty, we can collectively find a creative path to understanding.

Self-reflection is part of the understanding process. Conrad (2006) emphasizes the critical need for self-reflection "in hopes of accounting for the circumstances under which knowledge was produced, exploring the potential effects of my work and acknowledging the ethical tangles that it provoked" (p. 438). As I wrap up my section of the article, I wish to emphasize the need for both reflectivity (Simmons et al., 2021) and reflexivity (Fox & Allan, 2014) in this work. As a reflective practitioner I engaged in "a *deliberate* way of thinking about experiences" (DunnGalvin et al., 2019, p. 536), setting aside time immediately after rehearsal to make notes, applying my insights to create a follow-up agenda for the next rehearsal. As a reflexive practitioner I considered my own situated position (straight White male) and its effect on the research (Cunliffe, 2009), forcing me to challenge myself in the moment (rehearsal) and later (post rehearsal, during a reflective period). Was I listening clearly to other perspectives? Did my own privilege prevent me from exploring sexist, genderist, ableist, and racist scenes for my own protection? What elements of my common speech contributed to forms of othering, preventing cast members from fully expressing themselves? As D/A/R/Tor, I constantly questioned my methods to generate conversation, my decisions to direct the dialogue or to shut it down and move on to something else, and how I may have emphasized certain avenues of creativity over another. For example, when do I embrace the power of disagreement and when do I redirect the cast to other pastures? It is an obligation I embrace.

REFLECTIONS FROM A CURRICULUM DEVELOPER: A PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Over the years, I have gained interest in exploring the pedagogical aspects of Playbuilding (Shabtay et al., 2019) and the educative qualities of RbT (Bulk, 2022; Jarus, 2022). As curriculum developer for this project, I led the creation of a facilitator's guide that would allow for the expanded use of MT scenes in classrooms / learning settings. This was no small task! As the guide is open access, meaning anyone could use these scenes, we felt a responsibility to ensure the guide was rigorous. If a health sciences teacher with no theatre experience were to use this resource, could they adequately facilitate the scenes with their students? Furthermore, given that IB can be a contentious topic, what can we include to help teachers navigate difficult conversations? These were just two questions of many we discussed when creating this resource. In this section, I reflect on our process of constructing the guide and the pedagogical intersections that have emerged.

Constructing the guide

One major question we grappled with when constructing the guide was in relation to focus. Given this was a transdisciplinary research project, with stakeholders in different fields, we often conversed on how to balance the Playbuilding and applied health science sections. This led to many different iterations of the guide, each containing its own unique layout. Ultimately, we decided on three major foci: Playbuilding and Forum Theatre; facilitator preparation, rooted in our own experience giving performance workshops to applied health science classes; and promoting reflexive practice.

Our Playbuilding / Forum Theatre sections were a complex undertaking. They needed to be extensive enough so that they were accessible to all, regardless of the reader's prior knowledge. We also knew that we should not overcomplicate things and unintentionally make potential readers apprehensive of using the scenes. Not only would we have to define Playbuilding, Forum Theatre, and "jokering" (a technique I describe below), but we would also need to demonstrate the relevance of and need for such methods. To accomplish this, we contextualized the scenes as "activating," which Rohd (1998) describes as garnering attention and care while inviting the audience to get involved and explore how the scene might be changed. One could teach the definition of IB through a traditional lecture, but we argue that a Playbuilding methodology, in which we actively engage audiences in dialogue, enables students to

implicate themselves in the discussion in an experiential learning environment.

To assist educators in facilitating scenes, we explained the role of the Joker, taken from Boal's (1974/1979) Forum Theatre, as the intermediary between the scene and the audience. To be the Joker is to be the facilitator, to listen, to avoid giving prescriptive answers, and to know when to stop conversations. In the guide, we provide a list of facilitation / jokering techniques (https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/implicitbiastraining/part/facilitating-applied-theatre/) that MT often uses during performance workshops. We go into further detail in each scene, making specific suggestions as to how one might "joker" or workshop the scene. For example, in the scene "Labels" (https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/implicitbiastraining/chapter/labeling/), we suggest that Jokers could use hot seating, wherein an A/R/Tor or participant takes on the role of a character from a scene that was just presented and is then interviewed by the audience. Norris (2009) notes how hot seating can add new depth and perspective to the character. If the scene were to be replayed, new insights might be gained as to the character's behaviours or actions. After jokering, we suggest questions that might be used to generate discussion, dialogue, and reflection.

While we felt confident in our explanation of RbT methodologies and how to use the techniques, we knew that potential users might still feel out of their comfort zone. Our principal investigator, Dr. Valerie Michaelson, wrote a section called "What We Learned in a Large Undergraduate Health Sciences Class" which outlined many suggestions for preparing the workshop and post-workshop debriefs. For example, we suggest that facilitators consider the emotional safety of the individuals in the group. As we cannot predict the outcomes of each workshop, co-constructing learning agreements with the class might prove beneficial (Hobbs et al., 2022). Safety has always been an important part of our performance workshops. We advise facilitators to encourage participation, but to never demand it. Furthermore, we strongly advise against grading participation in the performance workshops, as doing so may create pressure and a lack of authentic participation. Instead, we encourage the use of reflexive practices after the performance workshop has concluded.

The final major section of the guide, "Becoming Reflexive Practitioners," addressed our learning objective, which we outlined in the guide's introduction:

> Our main learning objective is that co-learners who engage with this resource will develop a deepened sense of self-reflexivity about the implicit biases that they themselves hold and what the impacts of addressing (or not addressing) these implicit biases may be. (Hobbs et al., 2022, Introduction and Goals section, para. 4)

Our aim was to make clear to facilitators that by using an RbT approach rooted in a Playbuilding methodology, learners can engage and develop their own skills in reflexive practice. Emily Style (1988) writes that curriculum can be viewed as a window and a mirror. As a window, learners see perspectives outside of their own, while as a mirror, learners can see themselves reflected within the curriculum. Our experiences have demonstrated that by using drama, learners could achieve similar aims — that they might begin to see how IB affects others (the window) but is also something that is rooted in the self (the mirror).

Intersecting pedagogies

As the guide was coming together, I began taking notice of the multiple pedagogies embedded within this project. As the intersecting lenses of our team informed the creation of *Haunting our Biases*, they also informed the educative outcomes. With my own personal background in drama education and curriculum development, the lens through which I saw this project was very different from those with health science backgrounds. This did not detract from our work; rather, it broadened our scope. By intersecting RbT with the applied health sciences, our result was what we believe to be a transformative learning experience. In this next section, I will outline some of the pedagogical undertones that I found present in our guide. While I am sure my colleagues could add more to this list, I have noticed three, which I separate by how I see they are brought out in our work. The first pedagogy is in the *approach* to RbT: Where/how does the teaching begin? The second pedagogy is rooted in how we *witness*, and the potentially discomforting yet necessary call to recognize IB from within. The final pedagogy moves *beyond* the workshops, focusing on how the learning may remain after.

Approach — Dialogic pedagogy

Dialogue is a core tenant of MT's work. From the early phases of data generation, MT members engage in dialogic practice, building ideas off one another through conversation and storytelling. Norris (2020) notes how performative research that utilizes Forum Theatre is dialogic, as participants discuss and often rewrite scenes to expand understandings of a given topic. This form of pedagogy runs in opposition to didactic pedagogies, which Waks (2015) describes as those where the teacher talks

while the student passively listens. Freire (1968/2000) refers to this as the "banking" method of education, wherein information is merely stored, often so that students can write an exam, and knowledge gained is forgotten shortly thereafter. By placing a dialogic pedagogy at the forefront, we intend to break down traditional hierarchical barriers of teacher / student and encourage participants and facilitators to view themselves as co-learners. We aim for learning outcomes that are much more profound.

Witness — Pedagogy of discomfort

It was not until after our facilitator's guide was published that I came across the pedagogy of discomfort; however, I immediately recognized its relevance to *Haunting our Biases*. As Boler (1999) describes:

> A pedagogy of discomfort begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others. Within this culture of inquiry and flexibility, a central focus is to recognize how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see. (p. 176)

Framed within the pedagogy of discomfort, *Haunting our Biases* not only asks participants and co-learners to recognize the negative impact that IB has within society, but it serves as a call to confront biases held within the self. This can be challenging in the classroom setting. Taylor (2015) points out that educators discussing difficult issues in the classroom (racism, sexism, ableism, etc.) may reproduce rather than interrupt the IBs and norms "that permeate our educational institutions and practices" (p. 113). We often discussed this concern, recognizing that discourse around IB can bring out heavy and emotional conversations that require openness, humility, and careful navigation. Could a facilitator intentionally / unintentionally reproduce biases we were trying to disrupt? In making this guide publicly accessible, what responsibilities do we have in ensuring these reproductions do not happen?

Rather than avoiding these difficult conversations, Taylor (2015) proposes that the pedagogy of discomfort presents an opportunity for students to engage in *witnessing*, wherein learners can be challenged to confront their own assumptions. Zaliwska and Boler (2018) describe witnessing as stepping out of one's "inscribed habits of (inattention)," daring to move beyond the comfort zone, and to recognize the ways in which we view the world, however discomforting it may be (p. 79). Witnessing, in this way, could be viewed as the beginnings of reflexivity. Witnessing not only asks one to watch the scenes, but to question how one is implicated. This is by

no means an easy task. Students may be uncomfortable, and rightly so, sharing in a room of peers. Furthermore, the scenes we present can themselves be discomforting or triggering. Each scene has its own sets of questions and assumptions that can be unpacked and discussed. However, I have seen how the pedagogy of discomfort blends with our Forum Theatre approach.

When we have shown the scene "Missed Interpretation" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZUPdV1qHH8) to health science classrooms, it is often met with reactions of discomfort and embarrassment. Non-racialized students have remarked their disbelief that such an encounter could really happen. Some are soon shocked to learn that these scenes are rooted in real life, as "Missed Interpretation" was borrowed with permission from a Woman of Colour's direct encounter at a park (Wozolek, 2020). I remember one student who challenged the idea that the scene was even a racist encounter, that because the White character was not being intentionally racist it did not qualify as a microaggression. I have wondered what caused such a reaction. Perhaps the student had not taken to the challenge of witnessing in a way that we had anticipated and that "one's fear of talking about race complicates one's ability to see … experiences of racism as reasonable" (Taylor, 2015, p. 120). Salverson (2006) notes that "becoming a witness is a process" (p. 151). We never expect our participants will instantly reach epiphanies or solutions to complex social problems, nor should we. Rather, we position our performance workshops as invitations to start the conversation and sit in the pedagogy of discomfort. Perhaps for some, becoming a witness comes after.

Beyond — Pedagogy of haunting

As the research team spent time thinking about what to title our project, we became enamored with the phrase "haunting our biases." We describe *haunting* as "the sense that the thoughts, reflections, and conversations that remain after the educational encounter are etched into the heart and mind of the learner, leaving a lasting impression that evokes further questions and more self-reflexive actions and behaviours" (Hobbs et al., 2022, para. 4). Our intention was not to scare audiences with haunting; rather, we see haunting as an invitation for the participants to think deeply about what they may have learned in the workshop.

I argue for a pedagogy of haunting that is most aligned with our aims for reflexive practice. Kelly (2019) notes the transformational qualities of reflexive practice, stating that the reflexive practitioner "will automatically self-assess and react to circumstances as they are happening" (para. 3).

Reflexivity requires self-awareness — to be able to ask how one's actions impact or contribute to a particular outcome. Whereas witnessing in the pedagogy of discomfort might be seen as the beginning of reflexive practice, the pedagogy of haunting can be seen as the maintenance of reflexive practice. To be reflexive is to engage with that which has and continues to haunt us. These moments, engrained into our memories, are lessons that shape our future outcomes and how we view the world. Reflexivity and haunting, in this way, are constantly intertwined. It would require a much larger longitudinal study to know the long-term impacts of this kind of work. While such a study has not been undertaken, after having spent almost a decade doing these workshops in various settings, I have had encounters where someone says to me, "I remember when you came to my class, and we did that drama workshop." Therein, for me, lies the pedagogy of haunting.

Through curricular and pedagogical approaches, I am consistently reminded of the educational merit that stems from RbT methodologies. We invite our participants to engage in material that does not provide answers but provokes complex questions that inspire discussion, scene-making, and reflection, all of which are deeply pedagogical. The pedagogies discussed above represent a selection among many that one could examine, with each one intersecting with another in our aim to create a rich, dialogic learning experience.

REFLECTIONS FROM A MIXED-METHODS RESEARCHER: THE POWER OF REFLEXIVITY

In this section, I discuss how my perspective shifted on implementing quantitative research practices in addition to utilizing an RbT approach in my role as the lead impact researcher and a Woman of Colour. I will also discuss the process and challenges encountered when I attempted to lead a mixed-methods study designed to empirically assess the extent to which our workshop reduces IB in participants. Finally, I reflect on the complexities of my journey when navigating the liminal space of both positivistic quantitative research and Playbuilding, as well as how this experience has impacted me as a researcher.

The process — Utilizing research to create the workshop

Based on a literature review that I conducted, it became apparent that, as far as we were aware, research had yet to explore how Playbuilding methodology could reduce IB in healthcare settings. Historically, antiquated tropes depicting Black people's aptness for slavery were used to justify their enslavement (e.g., the fictitious belief that Black [vs. White]

people are less sensitive to pain; Plous & Williams, 1995). Unfortunately, these stereotypes may still be endorsed in contemporary times, as 50% of healthcare students were found to believe at least one negative stereotype depicting fictitious biological differences between Black and White people (Hoffman et al., 2016). Such stereotypes may contribute to discrimination against Black healthcare recipients. For example, stereotypes regarding perceived differences in pain tolerances between Black (vs. White) people may contribute to Black people being prescribed lower pain medication than needed (Hoffman et al., 2016; Yearby, 2021). Stereotype endorsement can be conscious or unconscious, and healthcare professionals may be unaware that negative stereotypes may be influencing their treatment of marginalized patients (see FitzGerald & Hurst, 2017, for a meta-analysis on IB in healthcare).

The vignette "But I'm a Good Person" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWBEx-pXbtw&feature=emb_logo) was created to depict findings that unconscious stereotyping contributes to racial discrimination in healthcare. We list research that showcases how systemic racism contributes to racial disparities in healthcare (e.g., Yearby, 2021) in our facilitator's guide for students who prefer scientific research (in addition to a dramatic scene) to illustrate this point. Thus, engaging in a literature review inspired scene development but also provided additional evidence of racial bias in healthcare for audiences who may be skeptical of data derived from RbT.

While there are many conventional approaches to collecting data rooted in positivism (i.e., all truths can be scientifically verified), Playbuilding encourages insights made in the dramatic process to be employed in the final output (e.g., scenes). Through this practice, we utilized the lived experiences of our cast members to showcase negative consequences of IB as relatable to university students. For example, the team wanted one scene that depicted the harm of experiencing a microaggression (i.e., often unintentional / unconscious subtle actions rooted in prejudiced attitudes towards people from oppressed groups). Cast members who worked on this scene realized that many of our Members of Colour were often asked where they were from, which made us feel othered and implied that People of Colour do not inherently belong in North America (Vega, 2017). Here, the cast was surveyed, and we found that the majority of Members of Colour had a similar discriminatory experience, which was utilized in the scene entitled "Role Call" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_j8pDTmXoo).

This scene depicts a teacher unassumingly but insidiously asking a Student of Colour where they are from, whilst asking other (White) students benign questions related to their personality. The Playbuilding methodology promoted the use of lived experience and permitted us to depict real-life examples of microaggressions as experienced by members of our cast. Indeed, the use of lived experience, as customary for Playbuilding, transforms the norms of research by creating non-traditional spoken data that shape the final theatrical output.

The assessment – Utilizing research to evaluate the efficacy of the workshop

In addition to utilizing traditional / non-traditional research approaches in the development of scenes, we also employed various research approaches when assessing the efficacy of our workshop. Due to my training in quantitative methodologies, I became somewhat fixated on measurement and believed that developing an additional survey, alongside our original one, that could measure the extent to which our workshop reduces IB in students would be beneficial to the project. One common strategy of assessing IB in healthcare workers is the assumption method, which involves administering a healthcare scenario and having participants provide recommendations toward an assigned patient whose marginalized identity is adjusted (e.g., Black/White, male/female) to test whether participants are more likely to discriminate against certain groups (FitzGerald & Hurst, 2017). For example, in my (quantitative) MA thesis (Ganesh, 2023), I assessed the extent to which participants were less willing to prioritize Black or East-Asian (vs. White) female patients for healthcare treatment and services using the assumption method. Because the assumption method was an appropriate tool for assessing bias in my thesis, I also assumed that this strategy could work well for this project.

However, there were issues and challenges involved with incorporating the assumption method for this project. For example, the method often utilizes a deficit-based approach, which identifies inequities based on social categories (e.g., race, gender). A deficit-based approach can place blame for inequities on equity-seeking groups and derives from scientific racism wherein researchers set out to prove that People of Colour were inferior to White people (Silverman et al., 2023). Thus, utilizing such an approach was not conducive to the social justice goals of this project. Furthermore, we still have yet to receive enough data to analyze results and form conclusions because participants had to complete the survey before and after completing the workshop for this project (unlike my MA thesis), leading to a low response rate. In hindsight, after administering this survey, I began to question whether the assumption method and

quantitative methodology were most appropriate for the purposes of this research. After reviewing the data from our other survey, I realized that the qualitative data was incredibly rich and, although unable to measure the reduction of attendees' IB, qualitative methodologies encouraged participants to express in their own words whether they benefited from the workshop, without the usually more prescriptive format of quantitative questionnaires.

One participant noted that, based on this workshop, "One thing I may start doing is evaluating body language more on a deeper aspect in the same way that was done in the workshop because of how much more it can say and state in specific contexts." Overall, many participants expressed how the workshop resulted in greater awareness and reflexivity on how their body language and tone could accidentally convey IB, an insight not captured using the assumption method. I began to consider how qualitative (vs. quantitative) methodologies may be particularly beneficial during the early stages of assessing our workshop by encouraging participants to arrive at broader conclusions. Then, we could later use this qualitative data to create a quantitative survey measuring the effectiveness of our workshop if we desired.

I also began to reflect more deeply on the purposes of our research. In hindsight, it was prescriptive and dogmatic of me to assume that the methodology I had previously used was appropriate for an entirely different project with different goals. I have learned through my journey that IB cannot be reversed through one workshop alone. Consequently, it was not appropriate to mainly assess the efficacy of this workshop using quantitative methodologies. I now realize that significantly reducing IB was not necessarily the main purpose of our workshop, as our workshop is still useful even if we simply increased reflection on IB and encouraged greater reflexive practices. I originally prioritized numerical measurement when determining the efficacy of this workshop because of my primarily quantitative training which biased me from initially considering other forms of evaluation criteria beyond those rooted in positivistic quantitative methods. Through collaboration outside of my initial disciplinary home, I gained greater insight into other forms of research and can now better appreciate the value of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Furthermore, I gained a greater appreciation for qualitative approaches through this research project. In the Playbuilding workshops, participants often derived conclusions on how IB applies to their lives. These conclusions offer as much, if not deeper, insight into the workshop's effectiveness. For example, one workshop attendee did not understand

how a microaggression could occur without malice. In my opinion, this student was genuinely and respectfully attempting to gain further insight into a phenomenon that they did not understand. Although facilitators explained that microaggressions can cause harm even when unintended, some racialized students also volunteered to share personal recollections of experiencing microaggressions and the related unintended harm. I noticed that the attendee was nodding a lot and positioned themselves to directly face the Students of Colour who were speaking. This contrasted with their previous engagement wherein this student appeared to be less visibly engaged in the workshop prior to asking their question (e.g., was checking their phone). From my perspective, I witnessed the attendee respectfully listen to and engage with the discriminatory experiences of Students of Colour. Thus, the attendee who asked the question had the opportunity to gain greater insight into the harmful effects of microaggressions through peer-to-peer learning and will hopefully use this insight to further reflect on their IBs.

Moreover, as a Woman of Colour, I sometimes am particularly concerned about whether we are creating a conducive environment for marginalized students to explore bias without feeling harmed in addition to an environment that fosters reflexivity and growth for students with a rudimentary knowledge of bias. Thus, I decided to check in with some of those who volunteered to share their lived experiences with the class to ensure that they felt comfortable doing so. These students shared that they felt empowered through choosing to share their experience, but that it was essential that this participation happened organically and was not forced. Their emphasis on voluntary participation resonated with me; as an undergraduate student, I was uncomfortable in classes where I was pressured to educate White students on my experiences of marginalization and only volunteered to share my experiences when the atmosphere and environment felt comfortable to do so.

Students of Colour voluntarily sharing their experiences of marginalization, in combination with their comments following the workshop, indicated to me that we had indeed created an environment where marginalized students felt comfortable sharing their experiences of prejudice and discrimination (as well as a space where students with rudimentary knowledge on bias can also ask questions to gain further insight). Although I did not directly speak to students who witnessed the aforementioned exchange regarding microaggressions without engaging about their experience, the majority of attendees indicated that the workshop provided them with "lots to think about" (89% *agreed* or *strongly agreed*) and that "they did not feel pressure to participate more than [they]

wanted to" (95% *neutral*, *agreed*, or *strongly agreed*) in our mixed-methods assessment. Through the Playbuilding process, subtle cues (e.g., body language, conclusions made by attendees), in addition to written / numerical data, were used to better understand the efficacy of our workshop. Quantitative research methodologies and RbT as a methodology provided unique but equally valuable insights into the efficacy of our workshop.

Overall, I am grateful to have been part of this transformative experience using interdisciplinary methods to reduce IB, and I appreciate gaining greater insight into qualitative research and the unique value of RbT. In hindsight, I incorporated quantitative research methodologies because this approach was familiar and because my previous limited knowledge of qualitative research aided in my false notion that the positivistic quantitative methodology (e.g., assumption method) would translate well to an entirely different project with different goals. However, I now attempt to reflect on which approaches will be more appropriate to answer my research questions and derive conclusions rather than allowing the methodology to guide my research. My journey of becoming a multi-methods arts-based researcher is ongoing, similar to the journey of confronting and eliminating our own IBs. I constantly struggle to navigate the liminal space between quantitative, qualitative, and RbT approaches. I always encourage workshop participants to engage in reflexivity to assist in diminishing the negative effects of IB. Applying this approach to myself, reflecting on the challenges of integrating traditional and RbT practices, and how to better integrate qualitative, quantitative, and RbT methods to maximize the benefits of each approach, allows me to best navigate this liminal space and continue to grow as a researcher.

THE REFLEXIVE POSSIBILITIES OF PLAYBUILDING

At the end of one of our in-person workshops, one participant (an undergraduate student in the health sciences) said that a scene primed her to recall an experience from many years ago, and that the workshop allowed her to realize that this experience was a microaggression. Although it will take many years of conducting workshops, interviews, and questionnaires to truly understand the efficacy of this type of work, our anecdotal experience showcases that our use of Playbuilding does have a positive impact. Not only are we continually witnessing how *Haunting our Biases* contributes to our audiences understanding of IB, but we also see how this process has contributed to our own growth — that months of rehearsals and discussions have allowed us to unlearn and become more attentive and reflexive of our own IBs and those that we see in our daily

lives. Although *Haunting our Biases* is an RbT project primarily aimed at the health sciences, we recognize that IB is not limited to one field and see the potential for projects such as this to be used across disciplines. Overall, Playbuilding as a sub-genre of RbT transforms the learning process by encouraging participants to engage in greater reflexivity when examining their bias, both within and beyond the workshop, but has also transformed us, the researchers, by fostering greater reflexivity on how we can reduce our own IB throughout our lives and within our research.

REFERENCES

Allahverdyan, A. E., & Galstyan, A. (2014). Opinion dynamics with confirmation bias. *PLOS ONE*, *9*(7), e99557. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0099557

Beck, J. L., Belliveau, G., Lea, G. W., & Wager, A. (2011). Delineating a spectrum of research-based theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*(8), 687–700. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411415498

Boal, A. (1979). *Theatre of the oppressed* (C. McBride & M. McBride, Trans.). Pluto Press. (Original work published 1974)

Boler, M. (1999). *Feeling power: Emotions and education*. Routledge.

Bulk, L. Y. (2022). Cocreating spaces of belonging: A campus workshop using research-based theatre for affective learning. *LEARNing Landscapes*, *15*(1), 39–51. https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v15i1.1063

Carter, M. R. (2010). The teacher monologues: An a/r/tographical exploration. *Creative Approaches to Research*, *3*(1), 42–66. https://doi.org/10.3316/CAR0301042

Conquergood, D. (1985). Performing as a moral act: Ethical dimensions of the ethnography of performance. *Literature in Performance*, *5*(2), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462938509391578

Conrad, D. (2006). Entangled (in the) sticks: Ethical conundrums of popular theatre as pedagogy and research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *12*(3), 437–458. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284364

Cunliffe, A. L. (2009). Reflexivity, learning and reflexive practice. In S. Armstrong & C. Fukami (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of management learning, education and development* (pp. 405–418). SAGE Publications.

De Houwer, J. (2019). Implicit bias is behavior: A functional-cognitive perspective on implicit bias. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *14*(5), 835–840. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619855638

Denzin, N. K. (2003). *Performance ethnography: Critical pedagogy and the politics of culture*. SAGE Publications.

DunnGalvin, A., Cooper, J. B., Shorten, G., & Blum, R. H. (2019). Applied reflective practice in medicine and anaesthesiology. *British Journal of Anaesthesia*, *122*(5), 536–541. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bja.2019.02.006

Edgoose, J., Quiogue, M., & Kartik, S. (2019). How to identify, understand, and unlearn implicit bias in patient care. *Family Practice Management*, *26*(4), 29–33. https://www.aafp.org/dam/brand/aafp/pubs/fpm/issues/2019/0700/p29.pdf

FitzGerald, C., & Hurst, S. (2017). Implicit bias in healthcare professionals: A systematic review. *BMC Medical Ethics*, *18*, Article 19. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-017-0179-8

Fox, A., & Allan, J. (2014). Doing reflexivity: Moments of unbecoming and becoming. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *37*(1), 101–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2013.787407

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. Bergman Ramos, Trans.). Continuum. (Original work published 1968)

Ganesh, N. (2023). *"Invisible" Black women being denied, passed over, and ignored as a function of racism (not sexism)* [Master's thesis, Brock University]. Brock University Digital Repository.

Greenwald, A. G., & Krieger, L. H. (2006). Implicit bias: Scientific foundations. *California Law Review*, *94*(4), 945–967. https://doi.org/10.2307/20439056

Hobbs, K., Metz, M. M., Ganesh, N., O'Keefe-McCarthy, S., Norris, J., Howe, S., & Michaelson, V. (2022). *Haunting our biases: Using participatory theatre to interrupt implicit bias*. eCampus Ontario. https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/implicitbiastraining/

Hoffman, K. M., Trawalter, S., Axt, J. R., & Oliver, M. N. (2016). Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and false beliefs about biological differences between Blacks and Whites. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, *113*(16), 4296–4301. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1516047113

Holroyd, J., Scaife, R., & Stafford, T. (2017). What is implicit bias? *Philosophy Compass*, *12*(10), Article e12437. https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12437

Jarus, T., Mayer, Y., Gross, E., Cook, C., Bulk, Y. L., Hershler, L. A.D., Nichols, J., Zaman, S., & Belliveau, G. (2022). Bringing disability experiences front stage: Research-based theatre as a teaching approach to promote inclusive health education. *Nurse Education Today*, *115*, Article 105408. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2022.105408

Kandil, Y. (2016). Personal stories in applied theatre contexts: Redefining the blurred lines. *Research in Drama Education*, *21*(2), 201–213. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2016.1155408

Kelly, S. (2019, May 1). Reflective practice vs reflexive practice. *Parenta*. https://www.parenta.com/2019/05/01/reflective-practice-vs-reflexive-practice/

Leavy, P. (2020). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.

Madva, A. (2018). Implicit bias, moods, and moral responsibility. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, *99*(S1), 53–78. https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12212

McSweeney, B. (2021). Fooling ourselves and others: Confirmation bias and the trustworthiness of qualitative research – Part 2 (cross-examining the dismissals). *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *34*(5), 841–859. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-04-2021-0118

Norris, J. (2009). *Playbuilding as qualitative research: A participatory arts-based approach*. Routledge.

Norris, J. (2020). Improvisational drama as inquiry: The role of the simulated-actual in meaning making. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, *20*(1), 63–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708619884961

Norris, J., Ganesh, N., Hobbs, K., & Metz, M. M. (2022). Dramatizing and workshopping the data: Applied theatre as dialogic research. In N. K. Denzin & M. D. Giardina (Eds.), *Transformative visions for qualitative inquiry* (pp. 154–175). Routledge.

Norris, J., Hobbs, K., Metz, M. M., Michaelson, V., & O'Keefe-McCarthy, S. (2022). Participatory theatre: Towards humane encounters in education and professional development. In E. Lyle (Ed.), *Re/humanizing education* (pp. 162–173). Brill.

Plous, S., & Williams, T. (1995). Racial stereotypes from the days of American slavery: A continuing legacy. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *25*(9), 795–817. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1995.tb01776.x

Rohd, M. (1998). *Theatre for community, conflict and dialogue*. Heinemann.

Rossiter, K., Kontos, P., Colantonio, A., Gilbert, J., Gray, J., & Keightley, M. (2008). Staging data: Theatre as a tool for analysis and knowledge transfer in health research. *Social Science & Medicine*, *66*(1), 130–146. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.07.021

Sajnani, N. (2012). Improvisation and art-based research. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*, *3*(1), 79–86. https://doi.org/10.1386/jaah.3.1.79_1

Salverson, J. (2006). Witnessing subjects: A fool's help. In J. Cohen-Cruz & M. Schutzman (Eds.), *A Boal companion: Dialogues on theatre and cultural politics* (pp. 146–157). Routledge.

Schraft, R. J. (2018). *The director's toolkit: The directing process from play selection to production*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315146171

Shabtay, A., Carter, M. R., & Mreiwed, H. (2019). A dramatic collage: Becoming pedagogical through collaborative playbuilding. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *19*(4), 403–414. https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-02-2019-0020

Silverman, D. M., Rosario, R. J., Hernandez, I. A., & Destin, M. (2023). The ongoing development of strength-based approaches to people who hold systemically marginalized identities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *27*(3), 255–271. https://doi.org/10.1177/10888683221145243

Simmons, M., McDermott, M., Eaton, S. E., Brown, B., & Jacobsen, M. (2021). Reflection as pedagogy in action research. *Educational Action Research*, *29*(2), 245–258. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2021.1886960

Style, E. (1988). Curriculum as window and mirror. In *Listening for all voices: Gender balancing the school curriculum* (pp. 6–12). Oak Knoll School of the Holy Child.

Taylor, A. (2015). Listening in the pedagogy of discomfort: A framework for socially just listening. In L. J. Waks (Ed.), *Listening to teach: Beyond didactic pedagogy* (pp. 113–136). SUNY Press.

Thompson, C. (2022). *Reflective practice for professional development: A guide for teachers*. Routledge.

Thompson, N., & Pascal, J. (2012). Developing critically reflective practice. *Reflective Practice*, *13*(2), 311–325. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2012.657795

Vega, T. (2017, August 25). Where are you 'really' from? Try another question. CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2017/06/20/opinions/where-are-you-really-from-vega-opinion/index.html

Waks, L. J. (Ed.). (2015). *Listening to teach: Beyond didactic pedagogy*. SUNY Press.

Wozolek, B. (2020). *Assemblages of violence in education: Everyday trajectories of oppression*. Routledge.

Yearby, R. (2021). Race based medicine, colorblind disease: How racism in medicine harms us all. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, *21*(2), 19–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2020.1851811

Zaliwska, Z., & Boler, M. (2018). Troubling hope: Performing inventive connections in discomforting times. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *38*(1), 71–84. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-018-9630-7

MICHAEL M. METZ is artist director of Mirror Theatre and a drama educator that has taught at post-secondary, secondary, and elementary levels. He is a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at Brock University. metzeducation@gmail.com

KEVIN HOBBS is president of Mirror Theatre, and a post-secondary Applied Theatre educator and researcher. He is a doctoral candidate in curriculum studies at Western University. hobbs_k@yahoo.com

NADIA GANESH is a Vanier scholar and PhD student at Brock University specializing in prejudice, discrimination, and oppression. In addition to being a member of Brock's President's Advisory Committee for Human Rights, Equity, and Decolonization, she is a board member of Mirror Theatre and Carousel Players. ng14fa@brocku.ca

MICHAEL M. METZ est directeur artistique du Mirror Theatre et éducateur en art dramatique. Il a enseigné aux niveaux postsecondaire, secondaire et primaire. Il est doctorant à la Faculté d'éducation de l'Université Brock. metzeducation@gmail.com

KEVIN HOBBS est président de Mirror Theatre et enseignant-chercheur en théâtre appliqué au niveau postsecondaire. Il est candidat de doctorat en études curriculaires à l'Université Western. hobbs_k@yahoo.com

NADIA GANESH est boursière Vanier et doctorante à l'Université Brock, spécialisée dans les préjugés, la discrimination et l'oppression. En plus d'être membre du Brock's President's Advisory Committee for Human Rights, Equity, and Decolonizationn, elle siège au conseil d'administration de Mirror Theatre et de Carousel Players. ng14fa@brocku.ca

PERFORMING THE POSSIBILITIES OF FIRST-YEAR TEACHING

CHARLES VANOVER *University of South Florida*

ABSTRACT. In this article I describe the development of an ethnodrama intended to investigate relationships between 1st-year teachers and students of colour. Excerpts from the script, photographs of performers, and artists' interviews communicate the sensations of life in school. The show evokes the power of the classroom to hurt and to heal. It is intended to help the audience imagine the power of strong classroom relationships and the damage of negative connections. These efforts seek to deepen understandings of the ambiguous nature of beginning teachers' work and provide a guide for future investigations of schools and classrooms. In the conclusion, I share implications of the performance for educational policy and Research-based Theatre (RbT).

INTERPRÉTER LES POSSIBILITÉS DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE DÉBUT DE CARRIÈRE

RÉSUMÉ. Dans cet article, je décris le développement d'un ethnodrame destiné à explorer les relations entre les enseignants débutants et les étudiants racisés. Des extraits du scénario, des photographies des performeurs et des entrevues d'artistes transmettent les sensations de la vie scolaire. Le spectacle vise à aider le public à imaginer le pouvoir des relations positives en classe ainsi que les dommages causés par les liens sociaux négatifs. Ces efforts cherchent à approfondir la compréhension de la nature ambiguë du travail des enseignants débutants et à fournir un guide pour de futures recherches sur les écoles et les salles de classe. En conclusion, je partage les implications de la performance pour les politiques pédagogiques et le Théâtre fondé sur la recherche.

For most teachers, the 1st year of teaching ranks as one of the most challenging times in their careers (Admiraal et al., 2023; Bettini & Park, 2021; Fecho et al., 2020; Hong, 2012; Yang et al., 2024). Many find that their principals and other members of their school community do not

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10256

support them. Instead of feeling empowered to act as respected professionals, many 1st-year teachers feel silenced. Student discipline problems, poor facilities, and low salaries may reduce their commitment (Ingersoll et al., 2021). Many beginning teachers give up and walk away from the classroom. Others continue on, perhaps staying in the low-income schools serving students of colour[1] that tend to hire 1st-year teachers, or perhaps leaving for wealthier communities or changing careers either by choice or as a result of the next wave of reform. There is much to be done to help beginning teachers through these early career challenges (Podolsky et al., 2019; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Whalen et al., 2019), but knowing there is a problem is not the same as changing things for the better, particularly at scale.

As 1st-year teachers learn how to teach by teaching, they experience deeply courageous moments. Such experiences may become part of the foundation for a life devoted to enhancing young people's learning and well-being (Day & Hong, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2001). The 1st year of teaching can also be one of the saddest and most disappointing times in a person's life. This trauma is exemplified in a verbatim poem I constructed from an interview I conducted with a 1st-year teacher in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

I was at a very, very small school.
It's actually a small elementary school in a high school.
We had one hallway and there's one class per grade.
I was the fourth-grade teacher and I was the newest person.
I don't know how they get rid of a fourth-grade teacher, but they did,
when it's the only fourth grade teacher, but they did.
I showed up on Tuesday, they said
"You're out before the kids come."
It was a bad, bad, bad.

I subbed from October 15th, to be exact,
LAUGHS
until January 20th, to be exact.

It should be noted this experience did not define the beginning educator I interviewed. After working as a pull-out teacher from January to June, she left the CPS, first for a position in the Chicago suburbs and, later, for a position in another state where she became an accomplished, National Board Certified teacher (see National Research Council, 2008).

Research on teaching provides powerful evidence of the importance of relationships, both for the student and for the educator. Warm, close, and academically positive relationships have been found to be powerful engines for student growth (Ansari et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond &

Cook-Harvey, 2018). The benefits of positive teacher–student relationships are particularly important for students placed at risk, with some researchers finding positive relationships a necessary condition for beneficial classroom learning for vulnerable students — if students don't believe their teacher cares for them, they won't learn (Brown, 2003). Similarly, the joys teachers receive from connecting with students and seeing young people grow, even in challenging circumstances, act as powerful incentives for committing to and continuing to engage in classroom teaching (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2018; Lortie, 1975; Rytivaara & Frelin, 2017).

One area where the literature on school relationships is thin is investigating relationships between teachers and students in classrooms where the teacher is learning how to teach by teaching. As Taylor (2023) emphasizes, neoliberalism changes both how schools operate and how teachers understand their actions. Further, Craig (2019) and Ahmann (2016) use different narrative methodologies to show how neoliberal reform policies alter the stories teachers live by and shape the choices educators make in their careers. What do beginning teachers see when they look into their students' eyes as they work within the ceaseless churn of 21st-century schools? How might we best disentangle radical hope and social commitment (Love, 2019; Utt & Tochluk, 2020) from saviourism and racism? We know strong and caring classroom organizations create fields of interaction that support young people's emotional and learning journeys (Hofkens & Pianta, 2022). What is challenging to conceptualize are relationships within classrooms where organization is a work in progress and daily instruction does not inspire all students to achieve at the highest levels. There is nothing wrong with learning on the job, but beginning teachers are not distributed across classrooms equally (Grooms et al., 2021; Ingersoll et al., 2021). Because schools serving the poorest and most vulnerable students tend to have the most beginning teachers, 1st-year teachers' experiences have a complex and ambiguous character.

Investigating and communicating ambiguous content is a core function of arts-based research and has been so since the inception of the field. As Barone (2001) emphasizes, there should be a place within the field of education where we might slow down and ponder the meaning of it all.

My work using a form of Research-based Theatre (RbT; Belliveau & Lea, 2016) built on Saldaña's (2003, 2011) scholarship has been devoted to creating such spaces. I develop verbatim scripts (Vanover, 2016b, 2019; Vanover et al., in press) from interviews conducted with classroom teachers. Given that RbT is a method of inquiry, rather than only a means

of dissemination (Lea, 2015; Shigematsu et al., 2021), a core question in my own work, and for other scholar-artists to consider, is how such performance events might speak back to academic communities after the artists leave the stage and the audience goes home.

The practical and ethical complexities of transforming drama into discipline-based knowledge are enormous. In this article, I explore one initial pathway towards this goal. I ask the following research questions:

1. How might we use performance to evoke relationships between 1st-year teachers and students in urban classrooms?
2. Given the importance of artists' voice and vision, what might artists learn from participating in an ethnodramatic project that performs complex teacher-student relationships?
3. How might the findings of Questions 1 and 2 contribute to formal research on beginning teaching and to the development of RbT as a methodology?

PHOTOS 1 & 2. *Lisa Tricomi and Jai Shanae performing Chicago Butoh. Images © 2018 Teithis Miller, reproduced here with permission of the photographer.*

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE POWER OF ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

Arts-based research is a powerful form of investigation for communicating with the public (Leavy, 2020; Saldaña, 2005). As Gullion (2022) emphasizes, the general public has limited access to, and little interest in, scholarly works. If one wishes for people to slow down and reflect on the challenges and possibilities of 21st-century life, a set of photographs, a novel, or a live performance are likely more powerful media than a journal article written in jargon that inhibits community members from engaging with these issues. Developing arts-based forms of communication is critical to the field of education, given the complexity of teachers' experience and the major impact classrooms have on students' lives. As the research on methodological pluralism in arts-based research emphasizes (Barone, 2001; Eisner, 1995; Gerber, 2022), we need to learn as much as we can learn, speak as forcefully as we are able, and use whatever methods of investigation make sense to challenge business-as-usual practice in institutions serving students placed at risk.

Getting the message out matters. The general public's and policy makers' understandings of life in classrooms are shaped by their experiences as students and their consumption of popular media on school teaching. These images and opinions drive how schools are managed, governed, and reformed (Bacchi, 2023; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Myths and cultural

conditioning are so powerful that, as Hobson (2016) emphasizes, hearing teachers' personal stories and envisioning their schoolwork is a radical act. Teachers work in systems they do not control, educators implement policies they do not design, and sometimes the work is neither meaningful nor successful (Santoro, 2011, 2018). Instead of exciting tales of achievement against all odds, the research I care most about communicates teachers' hopes, struggles, and regrets (Harris & Sinclair, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lanier, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2019). In the ethnodramas I have produced, audience members confront the stories teachers are ordered to live by and the critical mistakes echoing through their minds.

My work is organized around a constrained form of ethnodrama and RbT that I call *Inquiry Theatre* (Vanover 2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2019). My work follows a set of guidelines (see Vanover, 2016a): I build scripts from verbatim semi-structured interviews; many words from the transcripts are deleted, though I neither add words nor rearrange what was said; and the lead performer reads from a script. In my early plays, similar to Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer (1995), there was almost no stagecraft. As in the Artaudian dramas of Carter (2014), minimal production values create a theatrical space where the performed narrative breaks the frame. Time goes out of joint, the classroom becomes strange, and similar to Dell'Angelo (2021), events unfold in an unfamiliar manner.

Performances speaking to the heart of teaching raise hard questions. Should White 1st-year teachers work in classrooms serving vulnerable students of colour, given beginners' bias and inexperience might hurt some of the students they serve? Should beginning teachers of colour serve in those same classrooms, given, as many studies show (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Cormier et al., 2023; Grooms et al., 2021), the working conditions and outright racism of such professional communities tend to push teachers of colour to leave at higher rates than White educators? Sometimes, we ask the hardest question of all — is it possible to teach "in such a way that people stop killing each other?" (O'Reilley, 1984, as cited in Winn, 2020, p. 128). Such inquiries matter even if they lack clear answers.

Two exemplary scholar-artists

In contrast to metric-based, neoliberal practice in higher education, arts-based research practice seeks to unify practitioners' research, teaching, and artmaking to produce powerful and alive works (Belliveau, 2015; Springgay et al., 2005). Two arts-based researchers whose scripted performances speak directly to issues in teacher education are Mindy Carter and Maisha T. Winn.

Carter's work investigates the efforts of Canadian arts education students, K–12 arts education teachers, professional actors, and university faculty as they engage in projects merging art, research, and teaching. Lessons create and become art. Acting, Playbuilding, and other forms of artistry inspire instruction. Different forms of inquiry guide and change both artmaking and teaching. Thus, an investigation into a critical policy issue in arts education — drama-teacher retention (Carter, 2014) — yields a set of interviews with drama teachers, monologues constructed by both the researcher and the participating teachers, performed and published plays, K–12 professional development opportunities centered around this art-making, and the enhanced professional relationships and understandings produced by these efforts. The activities and relationships produced by arts-based research practice then become the foundation for other projects (Bickel et al., 2023) —in Carter's case, a book and aligned activities to engage with a core social justice issue in Canada, Indigenous education (see Carter, 2022).

Winn's exemplary work as an arts-based researcher confronts the anti-Black racism (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Wun, 2016) driving life in schools and other institutions serving minority communities in the United States. Her art and inquiries evoke suffering and resilience. Winn (2018) explains her perspective by sharing the following story:

> When I first moved to Atlanta more than a decade ago to begin my journey as a scholar and teacher educator, … I was approached by a group of young African American men who were selling their hip hop CD. Initially, I was not interested because of the daunting trail of cars following me hoping to covet my parking space; however, I found it impossible to ignore this group of young people and their stories about racial profiling and struggles in schools, which were themes in their music. I was surprised when one of the young men said they were from Wisconsin, and after some teasing about whether or not Wisconsin had hip hop, the young man insisted on giving me a copy of their CD. The title of the CD was "WisCONsequences." …
>
> Little did I know that I would eventually move to Wisconsin to continue my work preparing English teachers. Nor did I know that Wisconsin would become the most avid incarcerator of Black men and ranked the worst state in the country to raise Black children. (pp. 253–254)

Winn's (2011) work in Atlanta was organized around archiving and investigating scripted performances evoking these realities. The plays were staged by GirlTime, a theatre program for incarcerated young women. Winn's writing describes how the arts may contribute to a performance of possibilities (Madison, 2011), and she recounts how GirlTime's

Playbuilding process allowed youth and facilitators to reflect on their choices and envision new identities. Winn's writing also emphasizes the limits of such work. The youth who participated in the GirlTime program were physically enclosed by the detention center, but when the girls left the center and went home, they continued to be enclosed by the unjust system that shapes life in the United States.

When Winn (2018, 2020) left Atlanta, the focus of her work turned towards explicit efforts to change life in schools. Now, she organizes her pre-service English education classes around a restorative framework that seeks to use literature to create justice and peace. Winn and her colleagues live a politics of hope. They strive to create spaces where youth might dream about the many ways they might contribute to rich futures (Winn, 2021).

Arts-based research is more than a method; as Bickel et al. (2023) describe, arts-based research is a way of life that calls practitioners to live in wholeness as artists, researchers, and teachers. It is also a foundation for interventions into the systems of oppression producing a deeply unjust and unequal world society (Madison & Hamera, 2006).

POSITION

I am a White man who worked as a freelance writer and copywriter in the city of Chicago before working in the CPS for 8 years. I left Chicago when I received a fellowship to work on a vast, longitudinal, researcher-led study of school improvement. I developed my first play with Johnny Saldaña based on a narrative about my early years teaching in the CPS: "Chalkboard Concerto: Growing Up as a Teacher in the Chicago Public Schools" describes both the joys of the classroom and the limits of teachers' efforts (Vanover & Saldaña, 2005). I continued to develop my arts-based research practice performance by performance while working on the many diverse projects generated by "the qualitative component" of large research studies.

My years teaching and studying urban education have taught me what a good day teaching feels like; my work attempts to communicate this exhilaration. Experience and study have also taught what a bad day teaching is like and why conflicts between teachers, students, and administrators matter for all concerned.

DATA

Chicago Butoh (Vanover & Devin Jones, 2018), the ethnodramatic performance discussed in this article, is a collaboration between myself and Bob Devin Jones, the artistic director of The Studio@620, an arts space located in St. Petersburg, Florida. The project evolved over a series of 10 performances. The script was developed using the same data and techniques I engaged with in my Inquiry Theatre productions (see Vanover 2016a). Briefly, in the summer of 2004, after the school year ended, I interviewed seven veteran, National Board Certified teachers and five 1st-year CPS teachers 4 times each for 90 minutes about how they felt they made a difference in their classrooms. In the verbatim script I developed for *Chicago Butoh*, I chose one of the five beginning teachers, and condensed text from her first interview — the beginning teacher's other transcripts lacked the passion of her initial storytelling. I cut three quarters of this transcript to focus the script around two teacher–student relationships the beginning teacher believed were successful and two relationships the teacher believed were problematic. I showed the script to Devin Jones and we deepened our partnership by writing and winning a creative scholarship grant through my university.

As Devin Jones and I worked to refine the script and produce *Chicago Butoh*'s 10 performances, we made no attempt to convey the experience of the original teacher living a real life. The possible worlds that arise in the audience's minds as the show is performed have almost no connection to everyday life in Chicago. The performed teacher and students are, to use a term of Deleuze and Guattari (1994), "aesthetic figures" (p. 177). The performances are not real; they are monuments to teachers' and students' struggles. When the script comes alive on stage, the performances produce sensations which disappear into memory. Characters embody the chaos and connection of the classroom, but the performances are not the classroom itself.

The original project was envisioned as a story-dance where a local high school dance troupe would work with Devin Jones and myself to produce a choreographed series of movements aligned to the script. For logistical reasons, the dance transformed into a two-person show as we staged the performances over time — it was too complex to move the dance out of the high school. This revised two-person show was staged as part of a symposium at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in New York City in 2018.

PHOTO 3. *Director Devin Jones working with Jai Shanae during a rehearsal for Chicago Butoh. Image © 2018 Charles Vanover, reproduced here with permission of the photographer.*

What was lost in the transition from a dance to a two-person show was the immersive experience produced by the dancers' choreography. A different dancer played each character discussed in the script. During the story-dance, the audience experienced the jagged nature of life in the beginning teacher's classroom and the pulse of school life. As Devin Jones and I discovered, what was gained in the transition to a two-person ethnodrama was the opportunity for Shanae (one of the performers) to bring deep meaning and resonance to the script.

We revised the play based on audience feedback, and in the fall of 2018, we staged and filmed the play at two pay-what-you-wish performances at The Studio@620, using money from the creative scholarship grant. Lisa Tricomi played Keeler Kirkpatrick, the teacher, and Jai Shanae played Angel and the other students in Keeler's stories. The creative scholarship grant paid for rehearsals, publicity, and a film crew. I paid Teithis Miller to shoot still photos of the performances (see Vanover, 2021).

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: PERFORMING BEGINNING TEACHING

PHOTO 4. *Lisa Tricomi performing Chicago Butoh at The Studio@620. Image © 2018 Teithis Miller, reproduced here with permission of the photographer.*

Chicago Butoh's opening scene seeks to evoke a beneficial teacher–student relationship. The beginning teacher I interviewed shared this story in response to the first question in the interview guide — I had asked her to tell a story about a student for whom she had made a difference. As portrayed in the photos from The Studio@620 performance shown in this article, theatre artist Lisa Tricomi used this dramatized material to help the audience imagine life in schools. Her character, Keeler Kirkpatrick, tells the audience a story about her student, Angel:

> KEELER KIRKPATRICK: Angel. She is probably one of my quietest students. Loves to read. When I first got to the school—I came to the school at the 7th or 8th week of the school year—she constantly had a book open. Kids teased her constantly about how she read all the time. I didn't want her to be ostracized by the rest of the kids; didn't want her being teased that much or to make her withdraw from the class. Her favorite was Harry Potter and so I made sure to go to the bookstore and buy all the Harry Potter books I could to have them in the classroom library. I would discuss different parts of the books with her and then I would find other books that I thought she might enjoy.
>
> (*To ANGEL*) Angel, why don't you read this?
>
> (Vanover & Devin Jones, 2018, p. 3)

Strong relationships create an electric charge. Building trust and being trusted change students' and teachers' lives. *Chicago Butoh* opens in the middle of a challenging situation. A quiet student is being teased and a beginning teacher reaches out and sparks a learning journey. As the performance continues, Keeler tells the audience:

> Eventually [Angel] got sick and tired of waiting for the next Harry Potter book to come out and started writing Harry Potter Number Six. And it ended up being 62 pages long. And periodically she would give me the 10 pages or so that she had written so far and I would read over it and kind of give her feedback on it. I didn't want her getting um feeling like it was like something she had to do for school and tedious. I wanted to keep her creative instincts going. I would tell her things that I loved about it and what looked forward to next time. (Vanover & Devin Jones, 2018, pp. 3–4)

The day before our AERA session in New York, Devin Jones and I organized a rehearsal in the conference room where we would perform the show. I took the following photo to communicate the love and hope the beginning teacher in our script had for her student.

PHOTO 5. *Jai Shanae as Angel rehearsing at the Marriott Marquise, New York. Image © 2018 Charles Vanover, reproduced here with permission of the photographer.*

All of the beginning teachers I interviewed learned to teach by teaching. They said they experienced moments of connection, and they said they also made huge, screaming mistakes. Christina is the second student-story

brought to life by the verbatim script. The narrative seethes with Keeler's rage and frustration.

> KEELER KIRKPATRICK: And I had another student, Christina, she was the one whose father died right when I got to the school and she was gone for two weeks for her bereavement leave. And when she came back, she was very defiant. Apparently, she had been a horrible, horrible behavior problem when she was young and when her father was in jail. When her father got out of jail, he, even though his profession was not legitimate. It wasn't the best role model for her, he was apparently very involved with the school. And when he got out of jail and really spent a lot of time with her and was in her life a lot, she calmed down and became a much better student.
>
> Very, very bright girl. She was okay for a little bit when she came back after he died. But she was grieving very heavily, you could tell. Well around her, I also walked around on eggshells because she had she was a very loud individual. She wasn't violent like the other girl. But she was very loud. She just wouldn't get things like she—my school is 100% Black. Every single child in the school is Black. And she would just start yelling at me.
>
> (Vanover & Devin Jones, 2018, p. 8)

As the play's director, Devin Jones continued to shape the performance. When we transformed the script from a dance into an ethnodrama, he decided to add a second actor to perform the students in Keeler's stories. Devin Jones hired Jai Schanae and asked her to craft a different character for the four students mentioned in the script. I was never able to interview the Black students in the original teacher's classroom, but because of the partnership between Devin Jones, Schanae, and myeslf, the audience saw and heard their possibilities.

> *CHRISTINA steps out*;
>
> CHRISTINA: (*Her voice is more crying, sobbing, than angry*) You don't like me because I am Black!
>
> KEELER: Huh?
>
> CHRISTINA: You won't let me turn this in because I am Black!
>
> KEELER: But then why did I let her turn this in?
>
> CHRISTINA: You gave me a B because I am Black!
>
> KEELER: Well then why did I give him an 'F'?
>
> (Vanover & Devin Jones, 2018, p. 8)

Teithis Miller took the following shot of Shanae performing this sequence (see Photo 6). The original teacher, the actor who played her, and the

playwright were White. The director who crafted this scene, the artist who performed it, and the photographer who took the shot were Black. All of these professionals combined to create an image that speaks forcefully to life in school.

PHOTO 6. *Jai Shanae performing as Christina in Chicago Butoh at The Studio@620. Image © 2018 Teithis Miller, reproduced here with permission of the photographer.*

The photos in this article evoke a possible classroom. They help readers imagine what happens when the relations between teachers and students grow toxic and the hurt and frustration builds over days, weeks, and months. The images convey the anti-Black racism of U.S. school systems (Grooms et al., 2021) and why culturally responsive teaching matters (Byrd, 2016).

> KEELER KIRKPATRICK: I had so many problems with [Christina] and it got worse as the year went along. The trial—the man who murdered her father—came closer and her mother told her she was not allowed to go. She was very upset by this decision with her family and she took it out on me. (Vanover & Devin Jones, 2018, p. 8)

Our field of education celebrates resilience on the part of teachers and students. However, grit and determination, as many researchers emphasize (Goodman & Fine, 2018; Venet, 2023), are not the same thing as a connected classroom, a peaceful neighborhood, and a just society.

> KEELER: And the Dean of Students would talk to her, but she wound up suspended a lot. We actually had to send her home during the testing.

> And those are the test scores that determine whether they graduate from Middle school. So we couldn't have her then. (*coughs*)
>
> And it was just very unreasonable, irrational, and I had a hard time dealing with it. Like I couldn't, I couldn't reason with her. I could not get her to understand that she was harming the other students. (Vanover & Devin Jones, 2018, p. 9)

Life at school has very high stakes and sometimes everyone loses, especially the students.

Chicago Butoh ends with a moment of healing. The teacher tells a story about a student she benefited. Keeler was able to guide the student on a learning journey that concluded with a powerful new beginning — the student was accepted by one of the CPS's elite magnet programs and the girl would start her freshman year in that high school's honours program. This story meant a great deal to Director Devin Jones. On more than one occasion, he told me he owed his career to his White, female, high school drama teacher. Without her intervention, Devin Jones said he never would have figured out how to create a career in theatre (see Devin Jones & Vanover, in press).

One aspect of classroom life difficult for outsiders to understand is simultaneity. The classroom is a place of many stories all happening at once. Some kids connect with the teacher. Some kids focus on their friends. Some kids love every moment and some desperately want to get out of that space. Devin Jones built this simultaneity into the production. As the photos in this article show, the set was organized around five chairs: a chair where the actor playing the teacher sat and then four chairs where Jai Schanae played each of the four students. Schanae performed the students who loved their teacher and the students who hated her.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: ARTIST'S UNDERSTANDINGS

Artist interviews and stories are a common tool to appraise impact in performance-based research (see, for example, Belliveau & Lea, 2020; Snyder-Young & Omasta, 2022). I interviewed the two actors and the director — Tricomi, Shanae, and Devin Jones, respectively — a few days after we staged the show. I also interviewed the film editor, Trace Taylor, about a year later, after they and I had completed major edits for the film. The artists described *Chicago Butoh* as a successful work of art. In particular, they said they liked the show's open-endedness. The work evoked critical issues in education, but also sought to allow the audience to make sense of the meanings of the show. The actors had some complaints about the staging, and the film editor had significant

challenges with the camera placement, but all said we produced a powerful work.

PHOTO 7. *Lisa Tricomi after performing as Keeler in Chicago Butoh at The Studio@620. Image © 2018 Teithis Miller, reproduced here with permission of the photographer.*

One area of difference was the artists' understanding of Keeler's character and how she related to students. The director and the two actors resonated with how young the teacher was and how much responsibility she was asked to take. Shanae explains:

> With the teacher, I can't imagine the battles she faced. Just from her being so young, she's 22, and like I said, at 22, you're still finding yourself.
>
> She's just entering adulthood. Barely. Those four students stood out to her, but she had a classroom with maybe 20 kids and there's no way she would [be] able to reach all of those people. And if she did, there's no way she's not going to go home crazy. That's a lot of energy you have to exert. Just one child, it takes so much. That's just asking something so unrealistic of one person.

One of the reasons Devin Jones had hired Shanae was she had worked in a Black and Hispanic middle school as the building's secretary. She knew the kids who came to school early and the kids who came to school late. Shanae said,

> I won't say I wasn't able to reach them, but maybe not to the capacity I would have liked. There was not one kid I didn't try to impart goodness. But I also have to realize I'm a fixer. I can't fix everyone. I can't be everyone's hero. I'm still learning that.

I asked Shanae directly about Christina, the girl whose father had died. Shanae told me it was impossible for a teacher to make up for the death of a parent. A 22-year-old teacher is not going to fix that.

The actors were surprised by the amount of anger some audience members aimed at the character of the teacher. The artists had attempted to create a sympathetic portrait of a young woman working in a challenging situation. Tricomi told me how

> there were a couple people that said, "Well, I felt the teacher felt she was doing the kids a favor." And, and then someone else said that basically, she had failed, because she had given up on the kids.
>
> I don't feel like I fell short, but I feel curious about it. "Was my tone of voice the thing that made you think she thought she was doing them a favor? Was my posture? Would you have had more empathy for her if the actor was actually 21 or 22 years old? Would you have been like, 'Whoa, she's young?'"

In contrast, the film editor saw the character of the teacher as deeply flawed. The editor placed her full sympathy on the students, particularly kids who were troubled.

> [The editor imitating Keeler's voice] "What am I going to do? How am I going to … It's just all about me!"
>
> [The editor in her own voice] "Oh my god, you're so narcissistic!" The teacher never once said, "Perhaps I can approach this from a different angle. Perhaps I'm being too self-centered. Perhaps I don't get it at all!" … Her method. Her selfish focus. She liked the easy student. She liked the student that was already a self-learner.

For the editor, the teacher's Whiteness was overpowering. The editor suggested Keeler might not have understood the lives and circumstances of the minority youth in her classroom. Worse, the editor noted that the teacher did not problem solve:

> The teacher never said, "Why did you?" Never said, "Why? What's going on? How can I figure this out? What?" She never did that. She just wrote them off. Just like that, "Oh, you're a problem kid. That's it, you're done. You're never gonna be anything, you're gonna fail. By the time you're …"
>
> I just wanted to smack her, and I'm not a violent person.

Performance does not prove an argument; instead, it creates new realities. The show sought to evoke the pride of doing one's best, along with the

suffering of not achieving one's intentions in an unjust world. *Chicago Butoh* performed what it might be like to be benefited by a teacher and what it might be like to be wounded by one.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: IMPLICATIONS FOR RBT AND POLICY

RbT in education must acknowledge the challenging historic and present realities of schools while also imagining possible (freer) futures. Such work requires the difficult art of holding multiple truths: that racism is insidious and continues to disadvantage racial and ethnic minorities, but change is possible and necessary. Keeler Kirkpatrick healed and harmed her students. Her words and her actions inspired some of her students to engage in powerful learning journeys and caused others to disengage. These personal truths are not mutually exclusive. Racism and healing are intertwined in institutions serving youth of colour. The script to *Chicago Butoh* and the organization of this article are intended to help people experience this ambiguity.

One finding where all artists on the project agreed is that it is problematic to place young adults out of college in schools serving poor and minoritized youth. The ability to alter such structures is beyond one person. Change requires the development of systems of mentorship and professional development to give teachers the supports they need to serve all students as well as the working conditions and financial incentives for educators to commit to staying in place (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2019).

Two questions for discussion are whether such works of RbT are ethical and whether they matter. Is it right to stage such challenging and vulnerable content? What are the benefits of such open-ended performances, given, as the artists' comments and my own experience shows, not all audience members will respond to the show in the way one might hope? There are many ways to reply to such questions, perhaps the first being to state that living, writing, and performing vulnerably is a political statement and a radical hope. Troubling content in education cannot be limited to, for instance, the quantitative studies I have threaded through this article. RbT in education cannot be any less dangerous than students' classrooms.

Scripted RbT provides the chance the performance will come alive and hurl the audience into rich sensations and unexpected possibilities. The hardest thing about producing these scripts is that the shows always want more: more rehearsals, better lighting, higher production values. More

time and money might have made the show's sensations more complex and perhaps, somehow, closer to the thing itself.

I believe in the power of theatre and I believe such artistic forces matter. Bigger can indeed be better. More, sometimes, is more. A performance's smallest and quietest moments might take weeks of rehearsal to perfect. Saldaña (2011) carefully differentiates ethnotheatre from the researcher-driven work engaged in by folks such as myself — ethnodrama — to emphasize the importance of actively theorizing the dramatic forces it is possible to bring to bear in contemporary productions. We have good research on how the CPS worked at the time I conducted the interviews (Allensworth et al., 2009; Ewing, 2018; Payne, 2005), but *Chicago Butoh* does not come close to evoking the sensory experiences implied by that literature.

Similar to Norris (2020), I have made a career out of producing mostly small shows for mostly small stages. I understand the value of getting the word out and keeping at it. Doing such work also reaffirms the enormous differences in forces between folks like me — who strive to create work embedded within a discipline based, ethnodramatic perspective — and commercial media. If my journey has taught me anything, it is to value the work of scholar-artists such as Carter and Winn, whose work opens us to the chaos in our schools, but who continue to value the arts.

If we can imagine the power of classroom teaching to hurt and to heal, perhaps we might begin to conceptualize how we might teach in a way that is not tainted by racism and stops people from killing each other and the planet.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

A limitation of *Chicago Butoh* is the performance asks the audience to look inward toward the classroom rather than up at the managers whose invisible hand drives the action (for an example of such system theatre, see Kreindler, 2025). Since 2004 when I originally collected the data I used to build the play, different units of government in the United States have spent billions of dollars on testing, accountability, and test preparation. Such systems of activity shape schools across the world. A question that comes to mind is why we are spending this money in this way, given most everyone directly involved — from students to teachers to parents — would rather the money be spent for art, music, theatre, sports, games, and dancing. We live the lives dreams are made of and many of these dreams are pretty miserable. Whatever it is the performances of *Chicago Butoh* can do, what the shows do not do, directly, is making the case that we should

join with the young people in our classrooms and dance our way into a better future. It is my hope our work might inspire such an agenda on the part of scholar-artists across the world.

Every work of RbT has limitations, but ways of engaging in the methodology are practically endless. If human beings can experience it, we can perform it. *Chicago Butoh* provides one example of how to do this work, particularly if the scholar-artist is located within an academic discipline and strives to respond to and inspire the work of non-arts-based researchers. Interpretation and analysis are the heart of qualitative research (Vanover et al., 2022) and *Chicago Butoh* shows benefits of performing these practices over years and voices. In the United States, reducing teacher shortages in schools serving low-income and minoritized youth has been a goal of federal and state policy for 30 years. Our performances contribute to audience members' understanding of this issue and to the field's.

In Lisa Tricomi's words, "Whoa, she's young."

As Jai Shanae told me, "That's expecting so much of one person."

We must do better.

NOTES

1. This article follows *McGill Journal of Education* style and uses Canadian English spelling and grammar — hence "colour."

REFERENCES

Admiraal, W., Kittelsen Røberg, K.-I., Wiers-Jenssen, J., & Saab, N. (2023). Mind the gap: Early-career teachers' level of preparedness, professional development, working conditions, and feelings of distress. *Social Psychology of Education*, *26*(6), 1759–1787. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-023-09819-6

Ahmann, C. (2016). "...And that's why I Teach For America": American education reform and the role of redemptive stories. *Text & Talk*, *36*(2), 111–131. https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2016-0006

Allensworth, E., Ponisciak, S., & Mazzeo, C. (2009). *The schools teachers leave: Teacher mobility in Chicago Public Schools*. UChicago Consortium. http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/schools-teachers-leave-teacher-mobility-chicago-public-schools

Ansari, A., Hofkens, T. L., & Pianta, R. C. (2020). Teacher-student relationships across the first seven years of education and adolescent outcomes. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *71*, Article 101200. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2020.101200

Bacchi, C. (2023). Bringing a 'What's the problem represented to be?' approach to music education: A national plan for music education 2022. *Music Education Research*, *25*(3), 231–241. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2023.2223220

Bacchi, C., & Goodwin, S. (2016). *Poststructural policy analysis: A guide to practice*. Springer.

Barone, T. (2001). Science, art, and the predispositions of educational researchers. *Educational Researcher*, *30*(7), 24–28. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X030007024

Belliveau, G. (2015). Research-based theatre and a/r/tography: Exploring arts-based educational research methodologies. *P-e-r-f-o-r-m-a-n-c-e*, *2*. http://p-e-r-f-o-r-m-a-n-c-e.org/?p=1491

Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.). (2016). *Research-based theatre: An artistic methodology*. Intellect Books.

Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.). (2020). Contact!Unload: *Military veterans, trauma, and research-based theatre*. UBC Press.

Bettini, E., & Park, Y. (2021). Novice teachers' experiences in high-poverty schools: An integrative literature review. *Urban Education*, *56*(1), 3–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916685763

Bickel, B., Irwin, R. L., & Siegesmund, R. (Eds.). (2023). *Arts-based educational research trajectories: Career reflections by authors of outstanding dissertations*. Springer Nature.

Brown, D. F. (2003). Urban teachers use of culturally responsive management strategies. *Theory into Practice*, *42*(4), 277–282. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4204_3

Byrd, C. M. (2016). Does culturally relevant teaching work? An examination from student perspectives. *SAGE Open*, *6*(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016660744

Carter, M. R. (2014). *The teacher monologues: Exploring the identities and experiences of artist-teachers*. Springer.

Carter, M. R. (2022). *Smallest circles first: Exploring teacher reconciliatory praxis through drama education*. University of Toronto Press.

Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Why Black women teachers leave and what can be done about it. In A. Farinde-Wu, A. Allen-Handy, & C. W. Lewis (Eds.), *Black female teachers* (pp. 159–184). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2051-231720170000006009

Cormier, C. J., Bettini, E., & Stark, K. (2023). Untying the double bind. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *104*(8), 19–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217231174708

Craig, C. J. (2019). From starting stories to staying stories to leaving stories: The experiences of an urban English as a second language teacher. *Research Papers in Education*, *34*(3), 298–329. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2018.1424929

Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). *Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success*. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/145.655

Day, C., & Hong, J. (2016). Influences on the capacities for emotional resilience of teachers in schools serving disadvantaged urban communities: Challenges of living on the edge. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *59*, 115–125. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.05.015

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1994). *What is philosophy?* Columbia University Press.

Dell'Angelo, T. (2021). *Down the rabbit hole*: An ethnodrama to explore a fantastical first year of teaching. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *27*(1), 77–84. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419879192

Devin Jones, B., & Vanover, C. (in press). Making delicious theatre: An interview with Bob Devin Jones. *The Qualitative Report*.

Donmoyer, R., & Yennie-Donmoyer, J. (1995). Data as drama: Reflections on the use of readers theater as a mode of qualitative data display. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *1*(4), 402–428. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049500100403

Eisner, E. W. (1995). What artistically crafted research can help us understand about schools. *Educational Theory*, *45*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1995.00001.x

Ewing, E. L. (2018). *Ghosts in the schoolyard: Racism and school closings on Chicago's South Side*. University of Chicago Press.

Fecho, B., Coombs, D., Stewart, T. T., & Hawley, T. S. (2020). *Novice teachers embracing wobble in standardized schools: Using dialogue and inquiry for self-reflection and growth*. Routledge.

Gerber, N. (2022). *Imagination and arts-based practices for integration in research*. Routledge.

Goodman, S., & Fine, M. (2018). *It's not about grit: Trauma, inequity, and the power of transformative teaching*. Teachers College Press.

Grooms, A. A., Mahatmya, D., & Johnson, E. T. (2021). The retention of educators of color amidst institutionalized racism. *Educational Policy*, *35*(2), 180–212. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904820986765

Gullion, J. S. (2022). Writing for a broad audience: Concept papers, blogs, and op-eds. In C. Vanover, P. Mihas, & J. Saldaña (Eds.), *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data: After the interview* (pp. 431–443). SAGE Publications.

Harris, A. M., & Sinclair, C. (2014). *Critical plays: Embodied research for social change*. Sense.

Hobson, S. R. (2016). The power and possibilities for understanding teaching in these times with ethnodramatic inquiries into teacher stories: Two reviews. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, *1*(1), 302–314. https://doi.org/10.18432/R2G59F

Hofkens, T. L., & Pianta, R. C. (2022). Teacher–student relationships, engagement in school, and student outcomes. In A. L. Reschly & S. L. Christenson (Eds.), *Handbook of research on student engagement* (2nd ed., pp. 431–449). Springer.

Hong, J. Y. (2012). Why do some beginning teachers leave the school, and others stay? Understanding teacher resilience through psychological lenses. *Teachers and Teaching*, *18*(4), 417–440. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2012.696044

Ingersoll, R., Merrill, E., Stuckey, D., Collins, G., & Harrison, B. (2021). The demographic transformation of the teaching force in the United States. *Education Sciences*, *11*(5), Article 234. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11050234

Kreindler, S. A. (2025). *Larry saves the Canadian healthcare system*: Research-based musical satire goes digital. *McGill Journal of Education*, *59*(1), 202-206.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. Jossey-Bass.

Lanier, H. K. (2012). *Teaching in the terrordome: Two years in West Baltimore with Teach for America*. University of Missouri Press.

Lea, G. W. (2015). *Don't eat the raw vegetables*: Insights into research-based theatre as methodology. *Journal of Educational Inquiry*, *14*(1), 30–41. https://ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/EDEQ/article/view/1019

Leavy, P. (2020). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice* (3rd ed.). The Guilford Press.

LeBlanc, N., & Irwin, R. L. (2018). Teachers storying themselves into teaching: Comics as an emergent and relational form of research. *LEARNing landscapes*, *11*(2), 223–239. https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v11i2.959

Lopez, A. E., & Jean-Marie, G. (2021). Challenging anti-Black racism in everyday teaching, learning, and leading: From theory to practice. *Journal of School Leadership*, *31*(1-2), 50–65. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684621993115

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. University of Chicago Press.

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.

Madison, D. S. (2011). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Madison, D. S., & Hamera, J. (2006). Performance studies at the intersections. In D. S. Madison & J. Hamera (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of performance studies* (pp. xi–xxv). SAGE Publications.

National Research Council. (2008). *Assessing accomplished teaching: Advanced-level certification programs*. The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/12224

Norris, J. (2020). Improvisational drama as inquiry: The role of the simulated-actual in meaning making. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, *20*(1), 63–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708619884961

Payne, C. (2005, April 22). *Still crazy after all these years: Race in the Chicago school system* [Speech]. Consortium on Chicago School Research. https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/StillCrazy88.pdf

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Darling-Hammond, L., & Bishop, J. (2019). Strategies for attracting and retaining educators: What does the evidence say? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *27*, Article 38. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3722

Rytivaara, A., & Frelin, A. (2017). Committed to trouble: Learning from teachers' stories of challenging yet rewarding teacher-student relationships. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *68*, 12–20. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.08.004

Saldaña, J. (2003). Dramatizing data: A primer. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *9*(2), 218–236. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800402250932

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

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

Santoro, D. A. (2011). Good teaching in difficult times: Demoralization in the pursuit of good work. *American Journal of Education*, *118*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1086/662010

Santoro, D. A. (2018). Is it burnout? Or demoralization. *Educational Leadership*, *75*(9), 10–15. https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/is-it-burnout-or-demoralization

Schaefer, L., Downey, C. A., & Clandinin, D. J. (2019). Shifting from stories to live by to stories to leave by: Early career teacher attrition. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Journeys in narrative inquiry: The selected works of D. Jean Clandinin* (pp. 113–129). Routledge.

Shigematsu, T., Cook, C., Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (2021). Research-based theatre across disciplines: A relational approach to inquiry. *Applied Theatre Research*, *9*(1), 55–72. https://doi.org/10.1386/atr_00048_1

Simon, N., & Johnson, S. M. (2015). Teacher turnover in high-poverty schools: What we know and can do. *Teachers College Record*, *117*(3), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811511700305

Snyder-Young, D., & Omasta, M. (Eds.). (2022). *Impacting theatre audiences: Methods for studying change*. Routledge.

Springgay, S., Irwin, R. L., & Kind, S. W. (2005). A/r/tography as living inquiry through art and text. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *11*(6), 897–912. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405280696

Taylor, L. A. (2023). "If I was better at managing all this": The role of neoliberal logic in framing one teacher's narratives about accountability. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *121*, Article 103944. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103944

Utt, J., & Tochluk, S. (2020). White teacher, know thyself: Improving anti-racist praxis through racial identity development. *Urban Education*, *55*(1), 125–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916648741

Vanover, C. (2016a). Inquiry theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *22*(4), 238–248. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1077800415572395

Vanover, C. (2016b). Listening to the silences: A teacher's first year in words and music. *Art/Research International*, *1*(1). https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/ari/article/view/24952

Vanover, C. (2017). From connection to distance: Using the practice of arts-based research to interpret field work. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *46*(1), 51–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241615598201

Vanover, C. (2019). What does it mean to work in a system that fails you and your kids? A beginning teacher's journey through the Chicago Pubic Schools. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, *20*(4). https://doi.org/10.18113/P8ijea20n4

Vanover, C. (2021). The magic of theater: Photographing a performative academic career. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, *21*(1), 41–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708620931136

Vanover, C., Babson, A., Langtiw, C. L., Rogers, T., Salaam, O. J., & Trelease Knobloch, K. (in press). "*Goodbye to all that! A teacher's last year in the classroom*": Complete playscript with photos from the TQRC 2016 performance. *The Qualitative Report*.

Vanover, C., & Devin Jones, B. (2018). *Chicago butoh* [Unpublished script].

Vanover, C., Mihas, P. & Saldaña, J. (Eds.). (2022). *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative research: After the interview*. SAGE Publications.

Vanover, C., & Saldaña, J. (2005). Chalkboard concerto: Growing up as a teacher in the Chicago Public Schools. In J. Saldaña (Ed.), *Ethnodrama: An anthology of reality theatre*. AltaMira Press.

Venet, A. S. (2023). *Equity-centered trauma-informed education*. Routledge.

Whalen, C., Majocha, E., & Van Nuland, S. (2019). Novice teacher challenges and promoting novice teacher retention in Canada. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *42*(5), 591–607. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2019.1652906

Winn, M. T. (2011). *Girl time: Literacy, justice, and the school-to-prison pipeline*. Teachers College Press.

Winn, M. T. (2018). Building a "lifetime circle": English education in the age of #BlackLivesMatter. *Urban Education*, *53*(2), 248–264. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917747114

Winn, M. T. (2020). *Justice on both sides: Transforming education through restorative justice*. Harvard Education Press.

Winn, M. T. (2021). Futures matter: Creating just futures in this age of hyper-incarceration. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *96*(5), 527–539. https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2021.1991693

Wun, C. (2016). Unaccounted foundations: Black girls, anti-Black racism, and punishment in schools. *Critical Sociology*, *42*(4-5), 737–750. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514560444

Yang, C., Rho, E., Lin, X., & Stomski, M. (2024). Empowerment and silence: A grounded theory exploration among new teachers. *School Psychology*, *39*(3), 291–301. https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000612

CHARLES VANOVER is a scholar-artist at the University of South Florida. He has taught hundreds of Florida teachers to be school leaders and authored eleven performed scripts evoking teachers' stories. vanover@usf.edu

CHARLES VANOVER est un artiste-chercheur à l'Université de Floride du Sud. Il a formé des centaines d'enseignants de Floride à devenir des leaders scolaires et a écrit onze scénarios performés mettant en scène les expériences vécues d'enseignants. vanover@usf.edu

FIND A HOME, LOSE A HOME: A RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE JOURNEY INTO ACADIAN HERITAGE

TETSURO SHIGEMATSU *University of the Fraser Valley*

EVA GÖSKEL *Independent Scholar*

ERIKA PIAZZOLI *Trinity College Dublin*

GEORGE BELLIVEAU *University of British Colombia*

PHILIPPE NAUD *Professional Artist*

ABSTRACT. "Meet me in France to help me encounter my Acadian ancestors." The Acadians were French settlers who established a unique culture in Atlantic Canada before being forcibly removed by the British in the 18th century. Taking up the invitation, five disparate artist/scholars gathered in France, but all their approaches would fit under the bigger tent of Research-based Theatre (RbT), an arts-based methodology in which embodied performances are created through the systematic research of real-life events and social issues. How does RbT serve to help us navigate the liminal space between research questions and the creation of theatre itself? If RbT is a term that encompasses a variety of approaches, how would grafting disparate artistic techniques transform our understandings of research?

TROUVER UN FOYER, PERDRE UN FOYER : UNE EXPLORATION DE L'HÉRITAGE ACADIEN PAR LE THÉÂTRE BASÉ SUR LA RECHERCHE

RÉSUMÉ. « Meet me in France to help me encounter my Acadian ancestors. » Les Acadiens étaient des colons français ayant établi une culture unique dans l'est du Canada avant d'être déportés de force par les Britanniques au XVIIIe siècle. Acceptant cette invitation, cinq artistes/chercheur·euse·s aux parcours divers se sont réuni·e·s en France. Bien que leurs approches soient variées, elles relèvent toutes du grand domaine du théâtre basé sur la recherche (RbT). Comment le RbT peut-il nous aider à naviguer l'espace liminaire entre les questions de recherche et la création théâtrale elle-même? Si le RbT est un terme qui englobe une

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10301

variété d'approches, en quoi le croisement de techniques artistiques disparates peut-il transformer notre compréhension de la recherche?

"What have you been up to?"

"I was on an artist retreat in the middle of France."

As far as personal updates go, it doesn't get much more envy-inspiring than that. And that's exactly how five artist/scholars were able to self-report in the middle of October 2022.

What took place was in fact even more inspiring.

We gathered to co-develop a new piece of theatre exploring Acadian history and identity. The reader may wonder: "What exactly does 'Acadian' refer to?" We didn't know either, but together we would soon find out.

"… an artist retreat in France?"

We make use of this reflective essay to share our experiences of Research-based Theatre with you. In doing so, we are afforded an opportunity to revisit the site of shared learning that we developed together: What was it like? What did we come away with? How did this artistic research experience help us learn about a moment in history, and how did we individually connect this experience to our own lives and artistic practices? These questions and more served to scaffold our journey, which took us back in time to explore the roots of the *Grand Dérangement* – the forceful expulsion of the Acadians from Acadia – located in the present-day Eastern Canadian Provinces of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. The expulsion began in 1755 and was the beginning of a tumultuous back and forth between new and old worlds.

As artist/scholars we dove into this historical event by means of five different arts-based approaches. While dwelling on themes that resonated with our own lives and personal struggles, we also considered how these experiences may have enabled our personal quests to experience the frisson of unfamiliar artistry.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

A reliable trope in any ensemble action movie is the montage of disparate accomplices before they come together.

Eva Göksel – Drama pedagogue, multilingual, musician, and mother, is in her kitchen in Uppsala, Sweden. She is attempting to multitask by cooking dinner, preforming childcare, and writing a paper. (Emphasis on *attempting*).

Erika Piazzoli – Researcher, arts practitioner, mother – caught in-between multiple languages, stares at the Irish sea outside the window on her morning commute to Dublin, pausing to see the world through the eyes of her child.

George Belliveau – Drama professor, father, trained actor, and an authentic, certified Acadian. He is the instigator of this rendezvous. Based in Vancouver, he loves to cycle wherever his travels take him. Using self-propelled energy, he inhales, breathes, and discovers new environments and ideas.

Tetsuro Shigematsu – a solo theatre artist, playwright/performer, artist/scholar, father, *also* based in Vancouver – twists the throttle on his electric bike and zooms past George.

Philippe Naud – un peintre professionnel – is in his Parisian atelier, surrounded by his brilliant vivid canvasses. He is doing the impossible: floating mid-air, free as a mote of dust, hovering in the pale light of the studio skylights. Français is his mother tongue.

Who brought this motley crew together? George is a descendant of the Acadians. He is also continuously seeking to expand understandings and applications of Research-based Theatre (Belliveau & Lea, 2016; Shigematsu, et al., 2022). This methodology is a theatrical approach in which embodied performances are created through extensive research and examination of real-life events and social issues, with the aim of exploration and raising awareness. As far as methodologies go, Research-based Theatre (RbT) is a big tent, big enough to encompass artist/scholars as disparate as the ones George gathered as an ensemble in Tours.

By bringing this group together, George hoped to explore timeless questions: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where are we going? As artist/scholars, the personal questions of our lives and our ever-evolving identities often serve as the impetus for our life's work. How does RbT serve to help us navigate the liminal space between our research questions and the creation of theatre itself? If RbT is truly an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of approaches, how would grafting disparate artistic techniques (devising, painting, play-building, song, dance) transform our understandings of research? To what degree can RbT build bridges to a past that is shrouded in mist?

THE LOCATION

Arriving from various corners of the globe, these five artist/scholars assembled in a place foreign to them all: *gîte La Bulle*, the bubble shelter, located in the middle of France. The converted barn was aptly named, as it conjured the aura of a floating bubble, an oasis away from our daily routines, an inviting space in the quiet countryside outside Tours, France. There were two floors, five bedrooms, a well-equipped kitchen, and a large living room in which we could facilitate our respective workshops. It also boasted a garden in which there was further space for work and play.

EVA: The cottage itself was located in one of the regions of France from which the Acadians originated. Knowing this gave us a sense of connection to history, through experiencing food, language, and landscapes that have likely not changed much since the Acadians left the old country.

TETSURO: Getting out of Philippe's car, the scenery looked like it was designed to be a photogenic backdrop for Instagram selfies. Indoors, there was a winding spiral staircase – double-helix DNA wrought in iron. Tellingly, the original wooden beams of the house were exposed here and there, poking through the newly painted walls. The home's original history, juxtaposed with the contemporary architecture, was a reminder that even beneath the most modern of appearances are the oldest of bones.

PHILIPPE: By entering this bubble, we began to create a home together, cooking meals as well as ideas, and our various languages, cultures, artistries, and pedagogies came together in a melting pot. Our exchanges being predominantly in English, my path to understanding often resembled a kind of obstacle course (the game was worth the effort), thus obliging me to find new ways of understanding. This experience gave me a sense of kinship with the Acadians landing in New France, meeting communities of Mi'kmaq and English.

GEORGE: The space had an open feel such that it seemed we would only be limited by our imagination to seek what was possible. This sense of freedom, *liberté,* was what the Acadians longed for, a place of opportunity, to dream of a better life. The French peasants who left France in the 17th century to eventually develop *Acadie* were from various regions of France with different languages, religions, and cultures. The five of us also brought this diversity of identities and languages to *La Bulle.*

A unique feature of the bubble retreat was the communicative environment we created: we were immersed in a constant flux between

English and *Francais*, at times interpreting from *Anglais* into French and vice versa, and at others moving between the two.

ERIKA: As George mentioned before we met, the retreat was an opportunity to explore themes with no predetermined results, no prescribed outcomes. We were entirely free from stakeholders' expectations, academic outcomes, and quantifiable goals. This was liberating and invigorating; it took the pressure off and left me with a sense of presence and playfulness – in that present playfulness, I felt right at home.

FIVE APPROACHES TO PRACTICE

George was on an artistic quest to reconnect with his Acadian ancestors, a journey so epic that he invited us along to be his travel companions. The path of artistic creation is always fraught, but in the company of collaborators courage is contagious. By convening diverse artist/scholars, George's exploration of Acadia might better refract through our disparate practises. In order to delve into the past, we chose to shift the Acadian story into a space in the present. Together, we reimagined this space. We exchanged ideas, questions, and artistic approaches through a mix of playful, deliberate exercises, and put them 'on the floor' (Belliveau & Sinclair, 2018) to ponder our own modern interpretations of 'Acadians.'

I CHAIR OF POWER, FACILITATED BY GEORGE BELLIVEAU

The Activity

Before the retreat I shared written excerpts, songs, and images as stimuli, starting points to explore Acadian identity, history, and language for our time together. Rather than sitting and talking about what we encountered in our "homework," I thought we could explore key moments through images. Using an adaptation of Boal's (2005) image theatre, I invited the group to creatively arrange three chairs in the open space to depict a moment or a theme that resonated with them around Acadian history.

The non-verbal and playful placing of three chairs would be an opportunity for us to explore, interpret, and make connections. It was a prompt that allowed us to collectively make meaning and share what we saw in the images created by each participant. The emphasis was on what we saw, rather than what it was.

As a group we each brought our own knowledge of diasporic narratives, migratory cultures who seek new homes, and found refuge in language, either an 'imported' language or the locally dominant language or dialect.

Central to our explorations was the understanding that this Acadian story – an epic saga of hope and devastation – was but one variation of a timeless story unfolding again and again throughout human history.

PHILIPPE: In a moment of spontaneity, I precariously balanced two chairs, one against the other, to reflect the fragility of a meeting between two entities, two cultures, who had for a moment created a sense of alliance and balance. With this exercise, George offered us a key to unlocking our collective imaginations.

ERIKA: As we took turns to position and reposition the chairs, I watched those sturdy objects, made for sitting, catapulted before my very eyes. Those chairs were much more than objects for sitting, they were provokers of thought: *How are the Acadian people framed in the pages of history? What would we find in the shadows of history? And, even then, whose shadows would we be looking at?*

TETSURO: As an early career artist/scholar, it could have been intimidating to be among accomplished academics and artists, but there was something so liberating about the act of flipping a chair upside down, or laying it sideways, and then simply noticing what you notice. After all, no one can really show off their expertise at interpreting a jumble of chairs. When it came my turn to arrange, I took one of the chairs across the room, opened the sliding door, stepped outside into the night, and walked barefoot up the gravel driveway. The group had trouble perceiving what I was doing because they had to see through their own reflections against the glass sliding doors. *Can we ever peer into the darkness of the past without the distortions of our own reflections?*

EVA: Boal's (2005) Great Game of Power shows us that there is power in every relationship, even in the seemingly random set-up of everyday objects, such as, in this instance, three chairs. The question this exercise raised for me was: *How are we representing the Acadians in our artistic renderings? Are we erring towards a positive bias, in continually depicting them as a peaceful people, living an idyllic life? If so, what are the ramifications of this?*

II SCROLL PAINTING, FACILITATED BY PHILIPPE NAUD

In my metaphorical artist's backpack are the experiences of establishing a theatre company, working as a mime, and founding a dance company inspired by Japanese theatre and Butoh. A trip to Florence for a workshop in Venice allowed me to discover the painters of the Renaissance. Without my realizing it, painting was taking up more and more space and time in

my life. In a horizon that was slowly brightening, the colours beckoned to me. What is colour? What is light?

Kandinsky had the gift of synesthesia: he could hear colours (https://www.guggenheim.org/articles/checklist/synesthesia-a-visual-symphony-art-at-the-intersection-of-sight-and-sound). Each colour, for him, had the sound of a musical instrument. He painted while playing music. In order to broaden the spectrum of my curiosity, I studied with Jacques Lecoq, who used the language of colour to allow young actors to improve the sensitivity of their craft and vocation (https://www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com/school-history/?lang=en).

For Lecoq, each colour had its own unique movement. Regardless of the nationality of the speakers, the chosen colour was drawn in similar choreographies within the theatre space. For several years I worked on this discovery, from empirical study to pedagogical practice. I became, what I wanted to be: Chromo-Sapien.

TETSURO: With a flourish, Philippe unravelled a lengthy scroll across the floor. He then placed jars of water with little palettes of black paint along the scroll. He handed us well-worn paint brushes.

ERIKA: I was intrigued by the solemnity of the rituals in the preparation of the workspace: a huge plastic sheet, spread into the air then taped to the floor; a sturdy roll of wallpaper, carefully unfolded on the floor; several sets of brushes positioned at different locations; and, finally, the ink – a pitch-dark monster that stained beyond redemption.

TETSURO: Within this extremely multilingual group, Eva seemed most at ease with real-time translation, and so it was through her that I listened to Philippe enlighten us about the true nature of colours, and how their vibrational energy would manifest in our bodies. For example, green might mean a stuttering form of energy that should cause our painting arms to zig zag.

GEORGE: The painting furthered the images the group had created the night before with the chairs, allowing us to translate our thoughts through another medium, one to which most of us were novices. Philippe's approach invited us to 'get out of our heads.' It started as a solitary activity as we worked on different sections of the large canvas, then it became much more collaborative as we began to engage with one another through our painting. These non-verbal conversations were often symbolic and metaphoric, and they were getting us closer to understanding what an essence of Acadian identity might mean.

EVA: Concerned that I might ruin the artwork, it was with some trepidation that I engaged in painting with India ink. My fear, however, was soon forgotten in the pure joy of co-creating a pictorial story in shades of gray. Attempting to master Lecoq's language of the 7 colours, as taught to us by Philippe, was a good distraction! Using thick and thin brushes we painted our way into the past, following prompts to fill in the negative space and to add to the others' creations. The moment that most resonated with me was when we were each invited to 'read' our image from one end of the scroll to the other, pointing out conflicts, tensions, and reconciliations. Each of us offered a different interpretation of Acadian history, and yet each rendition seemed to connect in some way to the other participants that went before.

TETSURO: Being invited to tell the story of the scroll felt revelatory. It was as if we all dreamt the same dream, but our interpretations were so different – all were fragments of a larger nocturnal vision of the Acadian experience. The scroll was brimming with barely figurative imagery. Are those stick figures interacting with music notes? No, maybe those are haunted trees, being hit by a storm of squiggly arrows? Or are they windswept boats? Well beyond Rorschach inkblots, together we were imaginatively telling the story of a people buffeted about by the tides of history.

ERIKA: We were to avoid sitting down; instead, we were encouraged to squat, paint in one location and then move on, letting our wrists be guided by senses rather than being trapped in a pre-defined narrative (i.e., I will draw a tree). I found myself painting hundreds of dots in a sequence that followed the length of the scroll, like a cartographer mapping my *imaginaire* through time and space. This phase was carefree and joyous, with jazz music playing in the background. At the end of the exercise, as we were asked to discuss our experiences of the activity, I shared my vision of the dots as a timeline. This offer was accepted by the others, culminating in George's annotation of the years of the Acadian *Grand Dérangement* (1755-63). The scroll thus transformed into a visual map – our collective map – of our version(s) of Acadian history. *How could we delve deeper into this map to explore, and experience, shadows of history, identity, and migration?* I proposed for the scroll to be hung from the ceiling, as I had a hunch this would be the pretext for my drama workshop in the afternoon.

III PROCESS DRAMA/WEIGHTS, FACILITATED BY ERIKA PIAZZOLI

The practice was influenced by my background in voice, physical theatre, Butoh dance, and process drama. I used found objects around me: the sheet of plastic paper used by Philippe; ink and brushes; two pieces of music titled *ingranaggi* (inner workings/gears), a keyword which I associated with the Acadians' ingenuity; and a set of antique scales found in our *La Bulle* home.

I found inspiration in the actions carried out by Philippe when preparing the space for his workshop:

1. Spreading the sheet at the start of the session
2. Pouring the ink into the containers
3. Positioning the brushes on the plastic sheet
4. The contamination between the water and the ink
5. The sensation of bare feet on the plastic sheet
6. Folding the plastic sheet at the end of the session

I was also drawn to a sentence, spoken by Eva while reflecting on our work: "Find a home, lose a home." It captured a note of identity, loss, and displacement which aligned with our central theme. It soon became the leitmotif of our time together.

As a warm-up, I asked everyone to hold the edges of the large plastic sheet and, in silence, to practise holding it up and letting it go. We then moved

to a visualisation: the plastic sheet became the sea, with waves ranging from calm ripples to stormy surges. Once we established a sense of group cohesion, I ducked underneath the marine sheet, and invited others to negotiate taking turns in going in and under, emerging on the other side. *How many storms at sea did the Acadians face during their journey across the Atlantic? What did it feel like to 'emerge on the other side'?*

I then shared the actions from Philippe's workshop (points 1-6 above). For each one, I asked participants to recall the sensory experience and anchor it with a movement or gesture. After we practiced those movements in order from 1 to 6, we went on to practice them out of order.

I then directed the participants' attention to the scroll we had created in the morning, our visual map of the Acadian diaspora that had emerged from our *imaginaire*. There was one sentence, spoken by Philippe while we were working, which captivated me: "Find the negative space between the lines and fill it with history." *Could we do the same now, through performance?*

Working in three pairs, participants were to choose a segment of the scroll that resonated with them and that represented a moment in time – framed as the interaction between two Acadians on the verge of departure. Rather than using words, however, they could only use the range of gestures practised in the previous phase, like a newly found alphabet.

In the presentation phase of the work, the three pairs performed their pieces. Minutes before the performances, I remembered seeing an antique object in the kitchen: brass scales with a set of weights. I placed weights of different dimensions in each participant's hand to symbolize whatever the character felt was at stake in the dramatic situation. It felt like inhabiting some of the negative space within the lines of Acadian history. As a final step, I asked participants to write a short text, in role, inspired by the weight they carried (or left behind).

> My digging scoop. I worked the land with this shovel for years. It's small, but it's mine. My brother wanted to give me his, which is much larger. He knew I would need this for the new world. Despite receiving his cherished tool, letting mine go was not easy. But now I have a little part of him, and he has a little part of me. (George)

TETSURO: The invitation to take a gesture, born of the scroll, and repeat that physical phrase until it became the action of a dramatic moment was inspiring. It was as if we were guided to conjure moments of history from the fumes of the painting.

EVA: What resonated with me was the specific use of the drama building blocks, such as the still-image, visualisation, and improvisation, to

transport us in time and space. Erika captured a key phrase from each of us – one that we had used as we read the ink scroll after our painting exercise.

GEORGE: The whole experience was of flowing from one space to another through gentle guidance. The non-verbal and physical allowed us to continue the work of seeking what might be, rather than striving for something definitive, that we had begun in the morning. The exploration allowed us to bump into meanings, unsuspected stories, and narratives.

PHILIPPE: For each moment there was an appropriate gesture. Step by step, we arranged story fragments to create a mimed dance. And Erika knew how to assemble it all, how to make the puzzle come together so that the invisible became visible.

IV EXPLORING LANGUAGE PORTRAITS THROUGH MUSIC, FACILITATED BY EVA GÖKSEL

Our voice is a unique instrument – sharing it is an intimate and sometimes vulnerable act. And yet joining in song is also a source of joy and strength — it creates community. We thus began by singing together. I invited the group to think about how we use our voices in song, in speech, and in different languages and settings.

As a musician (violin, recorder, and vocals) I had already decided to offer a musical experience to the group. However, the decision to work with Language Portraits (Kusters & De Meulder, 2019) was spontaneous and based on a suggestion made by Erika, who had brought along some paper dolls. The work we had done with Philippe and Erika the previous day had prompted me to consider the importance of music as a vessel for carrying and preserving culture, language, and a shared history. The goal of my workshop was to invite everyone to journey back into their past via music to reconnect with lived linguistic and cultural experiences. *What languages and dialects are residing in our bodies now?*

We began by walking around the space and considering how we move and stand (differently) in each of the languages we speak. If we were to map these various languages onto our bodies, where would they reside? Everyone was given a flat paper doll, marking on it where each language or dialect lived.

I next invited the group to lie down and close their eyes. I offered some guided imagery accompanied by music to help reconnect to memories that might be relevant for their language portrait. *What language(s) did you speak there -with your family? And with classmates?* I interwove the questions with

musical prompts that I selected based on my knowledge of the group. The music included children's songs such as 'Au Claire de la Lune,' a Japanese folk song 'Sakura,' and tunes from Italy, France, and North America. As a Canadian, I could not resist including 'Home for a Rest' by Spirit of the West.

We then shared our language portraits with the group, some of us offering stories about childhood language experiences. In a final step, we worked together in pairs to transform a language portrait into a musical soundscape. We ended the session with a final musical offering: I sang "The Raggle-Taggle Gypsies" a traditional Scottish folk ballad, in which a lady choses freedom above all else. A fitting theme as the Acadians also valued their freedom – refusing an oath of loyalty to the British, which eventually became their downfall.

GEORGE: As I recalled the places in my body where French, English, and Acadian language reside, I was deeply torn and nostalgic. Cultural currency and opportunity where I grew up meant losing my Acadian accent as it was deemed 'less than' speaking a proper French, prompting me several times since to wonder what else was lost. My Acadian ancestors were also surrounded by multiple languages in their communities and no doubt faced some of the same challenges of learning and unlearning languages for advancement and survival.

TETSURO: Even though I look Japanese, English is my mother tongue. Yet, when Eva invited us to recall a song from our childhood, only one song came to mind, and it was Japanese, Zousan, ぞうさん. I knew this lullaby by heart, but I wasn't sure if I was pronouncing it properly. I realized it didn't matter. We were already engaged in a much larger, much more impossible task – evoking the lost history of the Acadians. We strive towards the unreachable. We can't succeed, but attempting is all that matters.

ERIKA: While Eva was talking, I recalled a lullaby that my mother used to sing to me, 'Au Claire de la Lune,' and saw myself, as a child, taking comfort in the sound of her French. Moments later, I could not believe my ears when Eva started to play the exact same tune on her recorder! I held back the tears. As I heard the music play, I realized that though French had once been my mother tongue, it was not my language now. Although I understand both English and French, from the beginning of the retreat I had taken refuge in the safety of English, hiding my crippled French, ashamed of having lost my ancestors' language. *Did Acadian people forced to repatriate to France after le Grand Dérangement also feel an uneasy sense of foreignness at their language loss?*

V BUTOH/SURI ASHI, FACILITATED BY TETSURO SHIGEMATSU

I self-identify as a writer, but lately I've been drawing upon my experiences of Butoh, a contemporary Japanese dance form. I originally learned this type of dance in my twenties, while I was living in Japan. I had the privilege of learning from Kazuo Ono himself, one of the originating masters of the form.

When I left Japan nearly three decades ago, I pretty much left Butoh behind as well. But recently, this dance of darkness came thundering back into my life thanks to Jay Hirabayashi and Barbara Bourget (https://www.createastir.ca/articles/dcd-hall-of-fame-2022).[1]

Suri ashi refers to a sliding walk found in Japanese dance and martial arts. The head remains steady, as your feet glide horizontally to the ground. This was the foundational movement we executed together as a group, upon which I offered prompts in the form of guided visualizations.

After giving some instructions on how to do *suri ashi*, I prompted everyone to begin moving. Because there wasn't enough room for five adults to do the sliding walk at length, I decided we would do the exercise outside. Each person had their 'lane' that enabled them to walk about 30 metres in a straight line, before turning around. *Suri ashi* is exquisitely slow. In fact, the slower the better.

During *suri ashi*, I offered a series of prompts inviting everyone to reimagine what was happening on different parts of their body. For example, the tension you might feel within your calves from lowering yourself as you walk isn't just muscle fatigue, it is Acadian farmers tilling the fields. On your shoulders are ship masts, swaying in the wind as you make the journey from France to the New World.

After we settled into the rhythm of *suri ashi*, I invited everyone to 'imagine your parents walking behind you, with your grandparents walking behind them, until you could imagine yourself leading the pyramid of your ancestry with every step.' I wanted to reimagine our own individual stories against the backdrop of the larger continuum of our ancestries, as we delved into the parallel history of the Acadians.

EVA: I was struck by the imagery that Tetsuro conjured for us as we balanced and held ourselves still, all the while moving forwards. Imagining one's own life cycle from zygote to death, accompanied – or perhaps shadowed by – our ancestors over generations is an intense way to think about family and home. I thought about how connected these ideas were for me, realising that home was indeed where my family *was*. *Find a home*.

ERIKA: A decade of Butoh training inhabits my joints, muscles, bones. When I realised Tetsuro was going to lead us through a *suri ashi*, I took to the exercise with rigor and commitment. I was standing on the grass, and I was barefoot. This, I soon discovered, was not conducive to the Butoh walk I had been trained to perform in the polished wooden floor of a dance studio, and for the first few minutes my rational side was entirely focused on trying to 'get it right.' Before long, however, my ridiculous attempt to adhere to a self-imposed protocol fizzled away, erased by a visualization that Tetsuro offered: we were invited to imagine our parents and ancestors walking behind us. Being in France, the land where my grandmother and my mother had fled to, was a powerful activator for me. I transcended the technicalities of the exercise and began to see myself as part of a whole, sliding across generations and reaching back to the Acadians, looking for a place where I could walk my walk, as myself.

GEORGE: This final workshop seemed most fitting to cap off our time together. Again, we dwelled in the imaginary as Tetsuro carefully guided us with specific Butoh steps and Acadian images, accompanied by haunting, spiritual music. Also, knowing that the ground we were treading upon could be traced back to some of the original French families who travelled to present-day *Acadie* made each foot placement more poignant. Images of 18th century French peasants working the land were joined with my father and grandfather in large potato fields in present day Acadia. The holding of the mast, the torch, the spirit of what it means to be Acadian was made physical. A responsibility to pass on the story and keep it alive seemed imperative.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There is no place on earth with higher, more extreme tides than the Bay of Fundy (*Baie Francaise*) in the centre of *Acadie,* Canada. A wild, beautiful, and fertile place, watered with the blood, sweat, joy, and tears of generations of Acadians, who like the tides, were constantly ebbing and flowing. Arriving from France in the 1600s, a small community of pioneers reclaimed the land from the sea and peacefully lived, worked, and intermarried with local Indigenous tribes for decades.[2] They developed a shared language and culture, steeped in music, tradition, and history. Despite their declared neutrality, the French-speaking Acadians were forcefully expelled from their homes, and from their lives, by the British over a period of 8 years (1755-1763). *Le Grand Dérangement* would continue to affect generations of Acadians. We came from around the world to join George on his journey through the mists of history in search of his ancestors. As RbT practitioners, we are all diverse mariners traveling in

very different crafts. Navigating the liminal space between our research questions and the creation of theatre itself, we climbed into each other's methodological boats, allowing ourselves to blend various artistic techniques, and transforming our understandings of research. This process inspired new questions: Could RbT serve as both compass and current in guiding us through the uncertain waters between research questions and theatrical creation? If RbT is a term that encompasses a variety of approaches, how would grafting disparate artistic techniques transform our understandings of research?

Ultimately, George's exploration remains a solo journey, but as he meets new companions along the way, his insights into what Acadia is, then and now, will continue to evolve like the shifting waves of the ocean.

During the retreat, we drew on RbT methods to tap into our collective *imaginaire*. Throughout our creative processes, two-dimensional textbook-like descriptions of Acadian history gave way to rich, multimodal processes of discovery, connecting to our personal experiences, and re-shaping them into a multi-layered offerings that explored the themes of identity, language, and migration. Textbook history was transformed into lived experience.

The Acadian journey did not end in the 1760's—it continues today. Do we recognise that we are all on the same journey? From far flung places, five artist/scholars came together for a retreat. A retreat from our families, a retreat from the present, but also a departure from our familiar ways of doing things. Artistic collaboration is challenging at the best of times, and colliding different artist/scholars with such vastly different approaches was akin to operating a particle collider. By accelerating our particular artistic approaches to high speeds, we were able to collide them into each other and gain insights into the fundamental nature of displacement and dispossession. We didn't study Acadian history in the traditional sense, but for the briefest of moments, we were afforded glimpses into what life may have been like for the Acadians. By pushing up against each other's practices, and into the mists of history, we expanded our understanding of what RbT can do. It is a Ship of Theses, forever being dismantled and rebuilt, circumnavigating the joys and hardships of the human condition.

NOTES:

1. Prominent figures in the Canadian dance community. Jay Hirabayashi and Barbara Bourget are co-founders of Kokoro Dance, a Vancouver- based contemporary dance company known for its Butoh-inspired performances
2. Upon arriving in New France, Acadians formed alliances with the Mi'kmaq while facing territorial tensions with English settlers.

REFERENCES

Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.) (2016). *Research-based theatre: An artistic methodology*. Intellect.

Belliveau, G. & Sinclair, C. (2018). Touchstones of practice: Consideration from the theatre workshop floor. In P. Duffy, C. Hatton, & R. Sallis (Eds.) *Drama Research Methods: Provocations of Practice* (pp 3-18). Brill/Sense Publishers.

Boal, A. (2005). *Games for actors and non-actors*. Routledge.

Kusters, A., & De Meulder, M. (2019). Language portraits: Investigating embodied multilingual and multimodal repertoires. *Qualitative Social Research*, *20*(3), 10.

Shigematsu, T., Lea, G. W., Cook, C., & Belliveau, G. (2022). *A spotlight on research-based theatre*. *LEARNing Landscapes*, *15*(1), 349-365. https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v15i1.1081

TETSURO SHIGEMATSU is a playwright/performer. He was the first person of color to host a daily national radio program in Canada. His acclaimed solo works include Empire of the Son and 1 Hour Photo. tshigematsu@gmail.com

EVA GOKSEL has a background both in broadcasting and in education. She has taught in multiple languages, as well as training teachers. Her work explores performative teaching and learning including drama, storytelling, and listening. evagoksel@gmail.com

ERIKA PIAZZOLI is a researcher and lecturer in arts education with a background in process drama and Butoh. She teaches Embodying Language, Master in Language Education. erika.piazzoli@tcd.ie

GEORGE BELLIVEAU is Professor of Drama/Theatre Education at the University of British Columbia. He has led or collaborated on over a dozen Research-based Theatre projects and leads UBC's Research-based Theatre Lab. george.belliveau@ubc.ca

PHILLIPPE NAUD He masters drawing, painting, theatre, directing, mime, and sculpture. But today, it is the magic of colors that draws him in: namely, in the form of painting. From now on, the artist is fully devoted to freely expressing his inner landscapes through his art. netb.naud@gmail.com

TETSURO SHIGEMATSU est dramaturge et performeur. Il a été la première personne racisée à animer une émission de radio nationale quotidienne au Canada. Ses œuvres en solo, acclamées par la critique, incluent « Empire of the Son » et « 1 Hour Photo. » tshigematsu@gmail.com

EVA GOKSEL possède une double formation en radiodiffusion et en éducation. Elle a enseigné dans plusieurs langues et a assuré la formation d'enseignant·e·s. Son travail explore l'enseignement et l'apprentissage performatifs, notamment à travers le théâtre, la mise en récit et l'écoute. evagoksel@gmail.com

ERIKA PIAZZOLI est chercheuse et chargée de cours en éducation artistique, avec une expertise en drame de processus et en Butoh. Elle enseigne le cours intitulé « Embodying Language, Master in Language Education. » erika.Piazzoli@tcd.ie

GEORGE BELLIVEAU est professeur en « Drama/Theatre Education » à l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. Il a dirigé ou collaboré dans plus d'une douzaine de projets en théâtre basé sur la recherche, et dirige le « Research-based Theatre Lab » de l'UBC. george.belliveau@ubc.ca

PHILLIPPE NAUD Il maîtrise le dessin, la peinture, le théâtre, la mise en scène, le mime et la sculpture. Mais c'est aujourd'hui la magie des couleurs qui l'attire : la peinture. Désormais, l'artiste se consacre totalement à dépeindre ses jardins intérieurs en toute liberté. netb.naud@gmail.com

AGREEING TO BE CHANGED: ITERATIVE THEATRE-MAKING AS DECENTRALIZED PEDAGOGY IN ENGLISH

EJ KNEIFEL, PATRICK RIZZOTTI, JACK MOSHER *University of British Columbia*

ABSTRACT. Formatted as a conversation to reflect its collaborative nature, this article explores an iterative, symbiotic, and decentralized pedagogical paradigm developed at the University of British Columbia, preliminary data for which stemmed from a student-led, devised theatre project staged in July 2022. This article seeks to extrude and articulate the project's continuous incorporation of its own components — from student anecdotal experience, to the co-construction of language and design, to the accumulation of sheer time — so that similar processes might be reimagined in other pedagogical contexts.

L'ENTENTE DE LA CO-TRANSFORMATION : VERS UNE PÉDAGOGIE DU THÉÂTRE ITÉRATIVE ET DÉCENTRALISÉE

RÉSUMÉ. Présenté en conversation collaborative, cet article décrit un modèle de pédagogie itératif, symbiotique et décentralisé développé à l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. Les données préliminaires proviennent d'un projet théâtral réalisé par des étudiants de premier cycle, mis en scène en juillet 2022. Cet article tente d'articuler et de rendre tangible l'incorporation continue du projet de ses propres composantes — de l'expérience anecdotique de l'étudiant, la coconstruction de vocabulaire, et l'accumulation du temps partagé — afin que ses processus puissent être réimaginés dans d'autres contextes pédagogiques.

In January 2022, Jack Mosher and EJ Kneifel, two undergraduate students at the University of British Columbia, proposed an independent study to Professor Patrick Rizzotti. After meeting in Rizzotti's scenic design course that fall, then collecting thoughts, references, and dreams on a

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10200

collaborative digital whiteboard called Miro, they wanted to know: What would happen if they used theatre-creation to research theatre-creation?[1] More specifically: Could they rid themselves of the roles and hierarchy of North American theatre-creation, and, if not, what discoveries lay within decentralized, iterative collaboration? Moreover, in a pedagogical context, what would happen when the classroom's roles and hierarchies were disrupted?

With author permission, EJ and Jack adapted Renee Gladman's 2010 novel, *Event Factory*, for the stage. They added poems and rearranged scenes, developed choreography to establish a shared sense of time and to implicate the presence of the audience, and discovered, through props and gesture, how certain characters might signal special understanding.

The real research began, however, when this first back-and-forth exploration expanded to incorporate others. Jack and EJ first hosted a workshop with their student stage manager, Lauren, as well as seven participants, to discuss what emotions the script conjured while taking care to guide the students in and out of those states. The work only grew from there: After auditions, a second stage manager joined, student collaborators developed costume, makeup, set, sound, and prop design, and a student composer developed an original violin performance. Each student was involved with each part of the process. Professor Rizzotti, Jack, and EJ had to be "willing to hand it off" to an increasingly amorphous collective of students, both within the creative process as well as the pedagogical structure (Shigematsu et al., 2022, p. 356).

Along Beck et al.'s (2011) spectrum of Research-based Theatre (RbT), this project integrated a "closed/conference" setting with a distinct "aesthetic" performance, grounded in "informal, first-hand research" (p. 690). Intimate stakeholder participation and continuous dialogue, as well as the importance of aesthetic elements such as choreography and abstract language, reinforced and enriched the ultimate research goal of deep student reflection.

The student researchers' informal dialogue about immigration, illness, and personal struggles — highlighted by a student sharing a story in Punjabi during the performance run — also drew from rich secondary sources, including Gladman's (2010) novel. Working from a novel meant that no participant had privileged access to the source material. This allowed the group to collectively construct and evolve meanings, fostering a dynamic scaffolding of emotional and intellectual engagement through RbT's "slow rhythms and pauses" (Shigematsu et al., 2022, p. 356).

What began in a traditional university class turned into a decentralized research-creation project in which each student, as well as the professor, was a participant and researcher. This pedagogical framework empowered students to design and craft a process that served as an immersive counter to the lasting effects of isolation following the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly within the impersonal setting of a large university like the University of British Columbia (UBC).

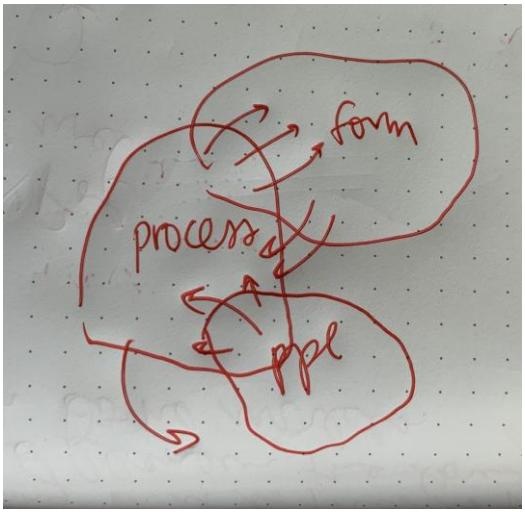

FIGURE 0. *Form, process, people*

By positioning our work at the intersection of closed / conference and aesthetic performance stemming from more informal, first-hand research, we hope to stake out a non-linear RbT progression, wherein the process feeds the form, and the form feeds the process (see Figure 0).

The following section, a conversation conducted before the 5-day performance run, traces this project's accumulation: how the scaffolding of research coincided with the buildup of trust, which coincided with students' ability to make their own impacts upon the work. This, in turn, delineates the shape of a *crucially iterative* collaborative creative process, a process of research and classroom structure which can be changed, and which continues to change its participants.

CONVERSATION

For ease of reading, the authors' names are abbreviated to their first letters. The professor's name is marked with a "P." The students' names are "J" and "E."

The following figures, drawn over the course of the conversation, made it possible to imagine this project's cumulative process as a more general series of movements, applicable to further research contexts.

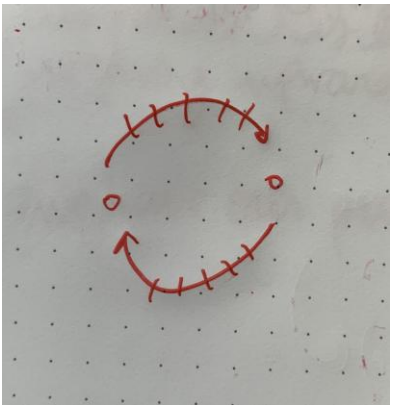

FIGURE 1. *The first strength*

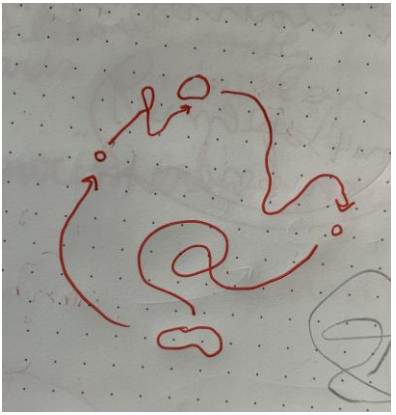

FIGURE 2. *Incorporation*

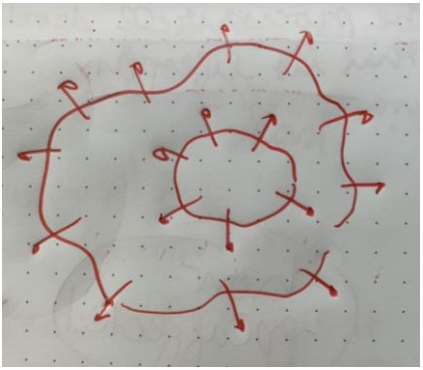

FIGURE 3. *Sedimentary behemoth*

Note. We are using the term *sedimentary behemoth* to describe a layered accumulation of processes, relationships, and inherited structures, revealing how meaning, memory, and collaboration build on top of each other over time.

E: We met in Patrick's design class, and —

J: We pushed away from the same things.

E: We were like,

J: "There's something else here."

E: "Something else is possible." So we looked at the same line. We learned how to talk to each other. Eventually the amount of things we needed to say to each other became too hefty to wait a week to say it.

P: You began to process asynchronously on a Miro board: "This movie feels like this," "I had this dream." You allowed time.

E: And we didn't always have to talk *to* each other. We could just write, "I'm thinking this" for the other to read.

J: I went on a lot of tangents, impulsive things I would have forgotten to say.

P: From there, it bloomed: two students to three to more —

J: Which confirmed to me that work is built on top of work. The Miro informed our syllabus, which informed our readings, which informed the script. That momentum was there throughout the process.

E: And how life is built on top of life. We met, we looked, and because *this* [see Figure 1] was so strong, and ongoing — we are still looking at each other — other things could be incorporated [see Figure 2]. We could hold more. We talk about Renee Gladman, the author of the source novel, as a collaborator, too.

This process became its own class, with you, the facilitator, pinwheeling at the centre. Now there is also an outer layer, where we ourselves are facilitating for other students. I wonder how that is? You're relinquishing so much control.

P: Because there's so much trust. The two of you built that trust. I thought, great, now go give it to others.

E: They're the ones who gave, I think. I think the last thing Jack and I wanted was to arrive at the end of this and be like, "All we did was drag these people behind the plow of our ego vision." So we were always asking, "How is this going for you?" At one important moment in particular —

J: The lead actor and I were early to rehearsal. I asked how things were going, and she detailed a disconnect she was feeling between the "how" and the "why."

E: For the next three rehearsals, we just sat with the actors and talked.

J: Instead of answering questions, we were going to work through them together.

P: And you felt there was time and space for that?

E: There was only time for that.

J: It *was* the process.

E: We've been talking about the sedimentary behemoth [see Figure 3] of our relationship and the world of the show, but we also came up against the sedimentary behemoth of actor training, the fossils at the centre of that. We didn't know! We couldn't just say, "Nothing exists anymore! We're breaking it all!" There's still a thing above your head blinking, "Director!" It still exists. The structures are there.

P: It's muscle memory, right? We all do it. Going through a process, good or bad, 100 times or 150 times: Ruts are created in one's body and one's brain. I get on my bike every morning and I push down with my right foot first.

As soon as we put a label on ourselves, assumptions come with that. Director. Actor. Designer. Those are safe in some ways: I can define that role. In a process that is the one you describe, all of the safety around defined roles evaporates. You've got to build trust.

E: Do you want to talk about the dance that the actors choreographed?

J: In a rehearsal with the two lead romantic interests, they were like, "I feel like something's missing." They started moving together; I would occasionally give them a little prompt. That culminated in this dance. We were like, "Why don't we just add this to the show?"

E: It's *this* [see Figure 2], right? To get to the point where someone can say, "Something's missing, *and* I'm going to say that, *and* I'm going to add something, *and* we're actually going to put it in." There are so many levels of trust that have to reach a tipping point for that to be possible.

P: This is a mirror of you two early on in your writing process. As soon as you started to hear the words aloud, the world presented things to you. The same way it sounds like it presented things to the actors, who then spoke that back to you.

J: Yes, this show has basically built itself. When we put the script up on a wall and moved things, the show unraveled into itself. Talking through the visual helped us understand each character's relationship to the world. That just kept going each time we added a layer.

E: One of our actors said the whole room changed when [Figure 4] appeared. I think a big block to explanation and understanding was just the "work on top of work" / "life on top of life" thing: How do you even begin to ask someone about their knowledge of an entire world? But this was proof that we weren't just making things up. Like, there's a map!

J: There's some evidence behind this.

P: Did you find yourselves going back to [Figure 4], or was doing it enough to move forwards / sideways / backwards from it?

J: It's a bit of both. When we came up with [Figure 4], it was locked in our brains and we built on it. But we also referred back to it when new questions arose. The figures are wonderful tools for showing people the world.

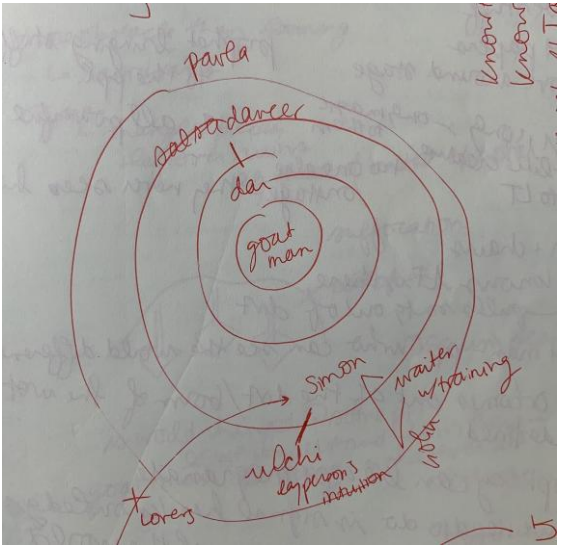

FIGURE 4. *Artifact of effect*

Note. This is one map of the characters in the show, and how their knowledge of their world relates them to one another.

E: They're tools, but they're also artifacts — in the way that maps are tools and artifacts. You can find a map that's outdated; we have outdated maps, and we remember why they looked the way they did. [Figure 4] is actually a more recent map where Goat Man, whom the lead character meets at a crucial turning point in the show, is at the centre. This mapping happened during an early design meeting. When we asked what the Goat Man might be carrying, we thought, "Oh my God, a set piece! He's the creator of this whole world!"

E: In callbacks, the actor himself changed the shape of the world a second time. He was in a scene as another character, the Salsa Dancer, and he started to sing. I wrote to Jack: "He is both. The Goat Man and the Salsa Dancer." That totally changed how we understood things: that the Salsa Dancer, who is otherwise just a brief romantic interest, is actually this visitation, which we couldn't possibly have known before.

J: There's a layer of discoveries built from adding more people.

E: There's something so special about the fact that, in both this world and this process, the more people you add, the more like life the layers become.

J: There's life in each one of these sections. There's something to be learned and added to everything.

P: How do we share this with others? How do we actually use this now?

E: I'm thinking about the layers required to get to that point of choreography. You have to address the structure, that there will be a gap, and then you need to affirm the student at each step. Then they'll start to see the pattern, and slowly create the sedimentary behemoth of the knowledge of their own sensibilities.

J: Knowing what you know has been a huge aspect of this process. The choreography isn't based on forcing actors to move in a certain way; it's working with them to build comfort in their own bodies and joints. So we tried replicating that in a design and teaching sense.

P: Does this feel student-led?

J: Absolutely. Even when you are present, you are a collaborator in that space. You are contributing in the same way that we all are, in this wonderful flattening of hierarchy.

E: A question that I have is if we're trying to draw one of these [see Figure 2], what would ideal teaching look like?

P: There's a start: me and the student. We establish a beginning. And *here* is where we think the end is. And that's it. That's all we know. Who knows what the inside looks like, but it definitely goes backwards. It definitely goes backwards, and then we land somewhere.

E: What happens when you start with 15 people? Is it that 15 times?

P: I think it's that 15 times, which is why it's hard for a class to be 25 students. But there's this concept of "the trainer training the trainer, training the trainer." In our time together, I handed it over. You were the guides for the (eventually 38) others.

E: An important feature here is consent. I was talking to the actors recently about how time moves in our show's world. It's very specific, but, like any measure of time, it's based on an agreement. We've all agreed how long a second is; in our world, time passes the way that it does because of this tacit agreement.

Jack and I had to agree first: We're doing this, we're building this. When other people come in, they have to agree. Again, not pulling them behind the ego plow; they have to want to be a part of the construction of time. So with teaching too, there has to be an agreement.

P: You need a community agreement, even if it's nonverbal. It's many times harder with more people. The nice thing is, if I layer 10 of my maps on top of each other, they're individual. If somebody chooses a simpler journey, that's theirs to choose; if somebody chooses a deeper journey, that's theirs to choose. If you're all doing it together, you're right. You have to agree to walk at the same pace.

E: Well, we're talking about life too, right? So much life has happened during this process, in the same way that life happens during school. Maybe a student can't go deeper right now, because something else is really pushing. So there are also ways, maybe, of creating a structure where that student's still supported to go to the depth that they are able to right now. We cancel rehearsal if people are not feeling well. We change what the rehearsal looks like if people are tired.

J: Or once, we were going to do two runs, but it was really emotionally taxing for people. It was a lot to do it once. We decided we'd just talk.

P: There's this ethos, right? "The show must go on."

J: One of the actors semi-seriously said once, "Anything for the vision." I was like, "No!"

E: Nothing for the vision. That way of thinking is cruel. To agree to be changed by something is not submitting to a vision; crucially, we're talking about the fact that you have to *trust* the people you're working with. You have to know that they *care* about you and your well-being.

P: Do you think all of this was a door your collaborators were trying to step through, or do you think it was awakened?

J: I think it was both. Some people were searching for it, but it was awakened in others.

E: It just starts with the agreement, right? We've agreed to be changed by this. At the beginning of the drawing, you're agreeing, but you have no idea about the boundlessness of the whole page.

J: The spirals might start smaller; you have flares over here. It gets bigger. It keeps going.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Special thanks to our many collaborators: Renee Gladman, Lauren Semple, Amy Currie, Rachel Angco, Maheem Bista, Miles Davies, Ripley Twardzik Ching, Carol Tu, Taylor Wen, Isabelle Barlow, Kirc Cohen, Lee Funnell, Samantha Webster, Shaliya Ma, Will Warburton, Joy Warburton, Rachel Angco, Nico Pante, Sera Jorgensen, Siscilie Wong, Tara Shawwa, Aleks Kovacevic, Nicole Smith, Peihwen Tai, Daniel Yang, Jack Campbell, Nishant Nanda, Kit Baronas, Francis Rogers, Danielle Morr, Kalina Lashkova, Bridget Meehan, Khushi Patil, and Amelia Walker.

NOTES

1. This question holds resonance with Shigematsu et al. (2022)'s question, "What if we used the methodology to explain the methodology?" (p. 352).

REFERENCES

Gladman, R. (2010). *Event factory*. Dorothy, a Publishing Project.

Shigematsu, T., Lea, G. W., Cook, C., & Belliveau, G. (2022). A spotlight on research-based theatre. *LEARNing Landscapes*, *15*(1), 349–365. https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v15i1.1081

Beck, J. L., Belliveau, G., Lea, G. W., & Wager, A. (2011). Delineating a spectrum of research-based theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*(8), 687–700. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411415498

EJ KNEIFEL (BA, UBC, MFA, OCAD) is a psycholinguist, poet-critic, and multidisciplinary facilitator. Through the concentric scaffolding inherent to collaboration, EJ hopes to tap into the teaching and healing inherent to gathering. ejkneifel@gmail.com

PATRICK RIZZOTTI is an associate professor in the Department of Theatre and Film at UBC. He also maintains an active design practice. patrick.rizzotti@ubc.ca

JACK MOSHER is a theatre director, designer, and recent graduate from UBC's Theatre Design and Production program. jackmosher4@gmail.com

EJ KNEIFEL (BA, UBC, MFA, OCAD) est psycholinguiste, poète-critique et facilitateur multidisciplinaire. Grâce à l'échafaudage concentrique inhérent à la collaboration, EJ espère accéder aux connaissances et au pouvoir de guérison qui résident dans le fait de se rassembler. ejkneifel@gmail.com

PATRICK RIZZOTTI est professeur associé au Département de Théâtre et de Cinéma de l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique (UBC). Il poursuit également une pratique active en design. patrick.rizzotti@ubc.ca

JACK MOSHER est metteur en scène, designer et diplômé récent du programme de design et production théâtrale de l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. jackmosher4@gmail.com

REASONS FOR BEING: STORYTELLING THE CREATION OF A PLAY ABOUT YOUTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

MONICA PRENDERGAST, TRUDY PAULUTH-PENNER *University of Victoria*

ABSTRACT. This article reflects on an arts-based Social Science and Humanities Research Council funded study (2021-24), entitled 'Youth mental health performance: How young people respond to portrayals of mental health, resilience, and well-being in and through drama and performance creation.' Secondary theatre students as co-researcher artists from Riverside Secondary School in Coquitlam, BC were invited to explore how mental health was portrayed in Canadian Theatre for Young Audiences plays. Participants responded to these portrayals through play analysis workshops and collective theatre devising and performance. This paper highlights the voices of the participants, making their thoughts and impressions the centrepiece of the paper. Methodology integrated ethno-theatre/drama, research-based theatre, and poetic inquiry processes. This study aligned with university and school district ethics protocols.

RAISONS D'ÊTRE : RACONTER LA CRÉATION D'UNE PIÈCE DE THÉÂTRE SUR LA JEUNESSE ET LA SANTÉ MENTALE

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article propose une réflexion sur l'étude financée par le CRSH (2021-2024), intitulée : « Youth mental health performance: How young people respond to portrayals of mental health, resilience, and well-being in and through drama and performance creation. » Des élèves de théâtre au secondaire en Colombie-Britannique ont exploré les représentations de la santé mentale dans des œuvres canadiennes de théâtre destinées au jeune public. Les participant·e·s ont répondu à ces représentations à travers des ateliers d'analyse dramaturgique ainsi que des processus collectifs de création et de performance théâtrales. L'article met en évidence les voix, les réflexions, et les impressions des participant·e·s. La méthodologie adoptée combine les approches de l'ethnodrame, du théâtre basé sur la recherche et de l'enquête poétique.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10489

Our paper begins with selected quotations from participants' devised script, entitled 'I'm Fine.'

Raison d'être:

> We all need to blow off steam. Some need alone time to self-regulate.
>
> Many things can be true at once.
>
> Reputations can be on the line, online.
>
> Actions have consequences.
>
> We have all been stuck feeling like "not enough" and the negative impacts of this analysis can be long-lasting.
>
> Chosen family can be lifesaving for young people who face discrimination at home.
>
> We use "I'm fine" to stop honest conversations like these. Being seen, and heard, is something everyone seeks to make them feel valued.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a 70 per cent increase in rates of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation among youth aged 15 to 24 years (Jones et al., 2021). Adolescence is one of the most optimal periods to intervene with mental health promotion (World Health Organization, 2021). The performing arts – including theatre and the dramatic arts – play a vital role in the development of secondary students' mental health, well-being, and resilience (Conrad, 2020).

The study's methodological design integrated Research-based Theatre (RbT) – the theatricalization of data – with the critical and empathetic principles of Poetic Inquiry (PI). As noted by Lea and Belliveau (2016): "When theatricalizing data, researchers show, not tell, the results of their research, creating a three-dimensional (re)presentation of their research data" (p. 7). In our study, participants' reflections (data) were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, analyzed, and reshaped into their own theatre performance. RbT, then, provides opportunity for critique, meaningful realizations, and cathartic responses for audiences and performers.

PI was used to synthesize experience in a direct and affective manner, reconfirm or reconstruct experiences, and to elicit emotional responses. Herein the researcher is interconnected with research participants as their own affective responses inform the poems. Flint (2024) emphasizes that PI is an analytical method as "research poems do more than communicate

research findings; they are part of condensing, crystallizing and interpreting research insights" (p. 6).

We intentionally focused on poetic transcription, utilized in this study as a method for creating found poetry from research participants' documents. Extracts from existing texts were re-structured and re-ordered to create poems (Byrne, 2017). Poetic transcription also reflects the voices of the researcher and the sources used in the dialogue (Flint, 2024).

This study was structured in two parts: play analysis and devising. Next, we briefly reflect on the processes, with student responses integrated into the researchers' poems.

PLAY ANALYSIS

The play analysis phase of this project included a selection process involving the review of over 125 Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) plays from a literature search, narrowed down to 10 plays which were then used in a pilot project carried out at a high school in Saanich, BC (see Pauluth-Penner & Prendergast, 2023). Feedback from the pilot project made us reconsider the number of plays we were working with, which we reduced to three: *Still/Falling* by Rachel Aberle (2022); *Selfie* by Christine Quintana (2020); and *This is How We Got Here* by Keith Barker (2017). We watched a video of *Still/Falling* and listened to the other two plays on the PlayME podcast from CBC Radio.

In this phase, students engaged in researcher-facilitated play analysis workshops. They read the plays, created still images, and engaged in reflective discussions which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to capture students' authentic language. Transcripts were further analyzed to identify prominent themes. Themes reported by several students exemplified collective resonance with the play's characters, demonstrating mature sensitivity, respect, and impressive depth of understanding of the various mental health scenarios that emerged within the plays. The following Haiku found poems reflect themes from each play analyzed.

Still/Falling, a solo play, follows a protagonist as they struggle with growing anxiety that leads to acts of self-harm. Students' comments are rendered into Haiku from transcripts (see Prendergast, 2016; Prendergast et al., 2009).

Feeling overwhelmed:

everything felt,
like way too much you just want
need to be alone

Anxiety:
i really liked the
attention to detail, as
i have anxiety

she has good people
but she's still struggling 'cause
people just don't know

Self-perceptions / Esteem:
mostly self-hate thing
"i hate myself, i'm ugly"
"i'm not good enough"

when i'm in my head
it's not about myself, it's
what people think

Panic attacks:
sometimes things just happen
there isn't always a reason
sometimes it just happens

it comes from nowhere
everything comes crashing
your skin feels too tight

Bouncing back:

panic attacks don't just go

away like snap...a day or

even two days in bed

bouncing back can be

coping mechanism but

i think it's too much

The second play, *Selfie*, examines the aftereffects of a party where the protagonist is sexually assaulted and subsequently faces both cyberbullying and in-person harassment after choosing to report the incident to the police. Student comments on this play were as follows:

Accountability / choices / consequences:

i hate attitude

"can't hold me accountable"

you are making choice

Realism / relatability:

interesting how

not everything was just

in black and white

it didn't end with

"oh, everything's okay"

things happen not okay

The play's language:

it's the way adults
think kids work online, one photo
and it's everywhere

not how teenagers
talk, that's not what it's like
not how people talk

Party scene:
you have this sinking
feeling in your stomach like
oh, it's so sad

Consent issues / victimization:
i feel like she got
raped…the bigger picture of
consent for females

Parents' role:
where are the parents?
"ah, you threw a party!" is
elephant in room

Finally, the third play, *This is How We Got Here*, written by Indigenous playwright Keith Barker, looks at the tough topic of youth suicide. It follows parents who have separated after the death of their son by suicide and are navigating the one-year anniversary of his passing. Students' comments on this play are as follows:

Male gender roles / attitudes:

"we have to be men"

"we have to not feel things"

i didn't like that

Grieving processes:

his wife was grieving

he was acting superior

his grief was better

"i'm a man, that's how

i deal with it (alcohol)"

everybody angry

Processing pain:

it's self-destructive

he went and drowned his pain, but

the mother's in a lot of pain

processing feelings

is intense...everyone

not really themselves

Intergenerational trauma:

that kind of trauma

intergenerational trauma

prevalent in that community

Mental health:

I just think that this

story is more about grieving

than suicidal child

it struck a memory

anxiety comes with grief

it creeps up on you

Realism / relatable:

in the end, Paul says,

"do you want to sit with me

for a while?" "yeah, sure"

I just want to vent

just want to be in the moment

looking for comfort

Significance of the fox (who appears to the mother as the dead son, in her imagination):

the fox brought an egg

it was very heartwarming

her son reincarnated

The student comments in these haiku reflect an understanding of the dynamics of anxiety, the consequences of a party gone wrong (a theme which became an important through-line in their own play), and the complexities of grief. It became evident in these conversations and transcripts that students were willing to engage deeply, relating the plays to their personal experiences of anxiety, grief, depression, and other mental health challenges. All of these insights supported the next stage of the project, the devising process, which involved the creation of an original play.

DEVISING PROCESS

Students from Riverside Secondary School in Port Coquitlam, BC participated in a series of researcher-facilitated play devising workshops. First, students developed rules of engagement that outlined how they would work collectively as a theatre company. Secondly, they brainstormed and documented themes to guide their scene development.

In the devising process students were encouraged to think about statements as starting points for scenes. These were recorded on folded strips of paper. Students were separated into five pairs and asked to develop 10 rounds of quick improvisations from these statements. Then, students narrowed the scene selections to three. They continued to share and refine the scenes for the final script.

FINAL SCRIPT SYNOPSIS

Students collectively devised their play, *I'm Fine*, reflecting their views on mental health. They performed it at their school's drama festival where it was selected to compete in the provincial drama festival hosted by the Association of BC Drama Educators (ABCDE), which took place at Douglas College in New Westminister.

In preparation for the drama festival, we needed to create a scene to share at the festival preview – this would ultimately become the first scene in the final version of the play. In it, a character named Martha stands centre stage as family members (parents and siblings) stick colourful sticky notes on her body. Pictures from the party, which Martha was not allowed to throw, have been posted online, ousting the secret. The sticky notes that her family paste onto her body say things such as, "I thought you knew better," "I told you so," and "What were you thinking"? Later, when Martha goes to school, her peers do the same, saying, "I'm in so much trouble because of you," "Did you hear? Everyone's talking about it"! and (sarcastically), "Great party, Martha"! The group of actors move around Martha, repeating lines repeatedly until she screams "STOP"! The actors melt offstage as a teacher comes on to ask Martha if she's feeling okay, followed by her friends running on and removing the sticky notes, letting them drop to the stage like falling leaves. She embraces one friend, then her best friend Nancy (who posted the party photos) tries to apologize. Martha accepts a hug from Nancy but says she's going to need some time before she can really forgive her for what she's done. The scene, while lightly fictionalized and with name changes, was based on a students' real-life experience.

STUDENT-DEVISED PLAY SYNOPSIS

This synopsis begins with a research response poem from script text followed by scene synopsis as presented at the provincial drama festival and concluding reflections.

> No thanks. I'm fine… I'm not hungry.
>
> Are you ok? Your eyes…
>
> Trust me, guys. I'm fine. Really, I'm FINE!
>
> The truth is I'm not fine
>
> I'm so sick of it. I just want to hang out
>
> with my friends
>
> AND
>
> Be Normal

The staging of the play was simple, with six blocks re-used as chairs and benches in a number of scenes. At times students also used these blocks to stand on. Actors wore black shirts and pants or leggings. The only other props were red cups for the party scene, cell phones, and coloured sticky notes.

Scene 1

> Students enter the stage from the audience, with recorded music playing (the song, 'Crazy'). They greet each other as if before school, then face front (see Figure 1.) and share the following lines:

1. I thought you knew better.
2. I tried so hard to fit in.
3. What will my parents think?
4. I wish I could remember.
5. I was so jealous.
6. No one will believe me.
7. What are you doing Saturday?
8. You're a liar.
9. I told you so.
10. They're all looking at me.

FIGURE 1: *Opening of show*

Scene 2

The party: The cast is at a party with the host and others taking selfies and videos. There is drinking, dancing, and one actor breaks away to give a monologue about how the party is triggering her anxiety.

Scene 3

Classroom: A student presentation day in the classroom. A student is struck with severe anxiety, tries to back out unsuccessfully, panics, and runs out.

Scene 4

Social media contagion: Students mill about as music plays, and we hear "bings" as they each receive a text revealing that the photos and videos of the party have been posted online. Finally, the party host, Martha, stops centre stage and says, "Oh shit"!

Scene 5

Yoga class: The news begins that a video of the party is circulating on social media; a jealous friend admits she posted the video.

Scene 6

School lunchroom: Gossip spreads as people view the video and photos on their phones. The friend who posted the video is confronted. Martha feels betrayed (see Figure 2).

Scene 7

Sticky notes: Martha is covered with sticky notes with negative statements from parents, peers, and fellow classmates.

Scene 8

Dance class: Students are excited, looking forward to class. The teacher tells a student in cruel fashion that she does not have the right body type for dance. An eating disorder is revealed through a monologue.

FIGURE 2: *Betrayal*

Scene 9

Two girls, one asks the other out on a date. The second girl accepts but worries about her parents' reaction. Her friend tells us her parents are supportive of her sexuality.

Scene 10

Four friends meet after school on bench: One girl is clearly upset, her friends probe her until she says, "You know what happened last summer with my father? Well, it happened again." The friends call her brave and surround her with loving support (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3*: Friends*

Scene 11

Poem: Actors in pairs say the following lines while miming being punched in the belly, moving upstage. Then, they turn and place sticky notes on each other repeating these lines. Finally, they move downstage yelling lines, pause, and slowly remove the sticky notes, ending in hugs.

1. Who do you think you are?
2. Who cares it's just one time?
3. Who did you run off with?
4. Who told you?
5. Who are you trying to impress?
6. What are you wearing?
7. What did you tell him?
8. What is your problem?
9. What were you thinking?
10. Whatever?
11. When are you going to grow up?
12. When will you have it finished?
13. When are you going to learn?
14. When is it going to get easier?
15. When are you going to have time for me?

Scene 12

Audience address: The performance ends with actors forming a final tableau followed by a direct out-of-character address to the audience. One by one, actors walk to the front, breaking the fourth wall. Seated on the stage edge they offer the following lines:

1. Dear Parents - There was a time in your life when you were just like me…
2. You were just a teenager with anger and anxiety and nowhere to put it.
3. Dear Teachers - Please try to understand that it can be really hard to ask for help…
4. I know I'm not the best student in the class but…
5. I'm working really hard.
6. Dear Parents - Sometimes I wish you could walk in my shoes…
7. Technology brings out the best and the worst of us.
8. Hey - We don't really know each other but I see you in the halls and I wonder…do you stress about the same things I do?
9. Dear Classmates - Please give me a second chance.
10. Dear Friends - thank you for listening when you have problems too…
11. Dear Audience…
12. This is what it's really like.

FIGURE 4: *Final moment of I'm Fine*

FIGURE 5: *Talkback following the show*

POST-PRODUCTION REFLECTIONS AND EVALUATIONS

Student participants, family, audience members, and the school drama teacher reflected upon the study/project components through post-production Likert-ratings in questionnaires, surveys, and open-ended

commentaries. The project met the overall goal to create a collaborative context wherein youth could openly analyze how mental health is represented in selected Canadian TYA plays, while also expressing their views on mental health through their collectively devised play, *I'm Fine*. Students expressed that this project was particularly meaningful for them, that engagement in the dramatic theatre processes enabled them to authentically as co-researchers/artists be the experts of their own lived experience. Engaging in creative explorations, students could express themselves while stimulating open dialogue amongst their peers, thereby creating new understandings around the complexities of mental health for youth.

The observations from this study align with the pedagogy of research-based theatre's pedagogy, which fosters collective dialogue and deepens understanding of complex and challenging subjects, such as mental health, with, for, and about youth.

REFERENCES

Aberle, R. (2022). *Still/Falling and The Code: Two plays for young adults.* Talonbooks.

Barker, K. (2017). *This is how we got here.* Playwrights Canada Press.

Byrne, G. (2017). Narrative inquiry and the problem of representation: 'Giving voice', makingmeaning. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 40*(1), 62-81.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. (2023). *PlayME* [podcast]. CBC. https://www.cbc.ca/listen/cbc-podcasts/211-playme

Conrad, D. (2020). Youth participatory action research and applied theatre engagement: Supporting Indigenous youth survivance and resurgence. *Theatre Research in Canada, 41*(2), 258-277.

Flint, A. (2024). Poetry, paths, and peatlands: Integrating poetic inquiry within landscape Heritage research. *Landscape Research*, *49*(1), 4-18

https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2023.2237432

Jones, E. A. K., Mitra, A. K., & Bhuiyan, A. R. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on mental health in adolescents: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(5), 2470. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052470

Lea, G. W., & Belliveau, G. (2016). Introduction. In G. Belliveau & G. W. Lea (Eds.), *Research-based Theatre: An artistic methodology* (pp. 3–12). Intellect.

Pauluth-Penner, T. & Prendergast, M. (2023). Youth mental health performance: How young people respond to portrayals of mental health, resilience and wellness in and through drama and performance creation. *Applied Theatre Research*, *11*(1), 23-42. https://doi.org/10.1386/atr_00074_1

Prendergast, M. (2016). What I learn from theatregoing: Review haiku. *Art/Research International*, *1*(1), 258-267. https://doi.org/10.18432/R23018

Prendergast, M., Gouzouasis, P., Leggo, C., Irwin, R. & Grauer, K. (2009). A haiku suite: The importance of music-making in the lives of secondary school students. *Music Education Researcher*, *11*(3), 303-317. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613800903144262

Quintana, C. (2020). *Selfie*. Playwrights Canada Press.

World Health Organization (2021). Guidance on community mental health services: Promoting person-centred and rights-based approaches. World Health Organization.

MONICA PRENDERGAST is Professor of drama/theatre education at the University of Victoria. She has written or co-edited 12 books, and many articles and chapters in top-ranked journals and books in her field. mprender@uvic.ca

TRUDY PAULUTH-PENNER, an assistant adjunct professor in Applied Theatre and sessional instructor in Health Information Science at the University of Victoria, has implemented arts-in-health initiatives across diverse contexts. troods@uvic.ca

MONICA PRENDERGAST est professeure en « drama/theatre education » à l'Université de Victoria. Elle est l'autrice ou la coéditrice de douze ouvrages, en plus d'avoir écrit de nombreux articles et chapitres publiés dans des revues et ouvrages prestigieux dans son domaine. mprender@uvic.ca

TRUDY PAULUTH-PENNER, professeure auxiliaire en Théâtre appliqué et chargée de cours en « Health Information Science » à l'Université de Victoria, a mis en œuvre plusieurs initiatives liant les arts et la santé dans des contextes variés. troods@uvic.ca

CONTEXTUALIZING *IF YOU WANNA SWITCH SEATS, WE COULD*

LUCY MEDEIROS, LILLY STANNARD, JOE SALVATORE *New York University*

ABSTRACT. The Verbatim Performance Lab (VPL) at New York University's Steinhardt School conducted a Research-based Theatre investigation entitled *If You Wanna Switch Seats, We Could*. The project involved secondary school students from across the US performing a section of the September 2020 presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. The aim was to explore how perceptions change when the debate is performed by young people. The project used the ethnodramatic form of verbatim performance, where actors portray someone word for word and gesture for gesture and often of a different identity. The project culminated in a virtual public sharing of the filmed investigations, and offered students an opportunity to gain a better understanding of their place in the political landscape.

METTRE IF YOU WANNA SWITCH SEATS, WE COULD EN CONTEXTE

RÉSUMÉ. Le Verbatim Performance Lab de l'École Steinhardt de l'Université de New York a mené une enquête théâtrale fondée sur la recherche intitulée *If You Wanna Switch Seats, We Could*. Ici, des élèves de secondaire américain ont interprété une section du débat présidentiel de septembre 2020 entre Trump et Biden. L'objectif était d'explorer comment les perceptions changent lorsque le débat est présenté par des jeunes. Le projet utilisait la forme ethnodramatique de la performance verbatim, dans laquelle les acteurs incarnent une personne mot pour mot, souvent en assumant une identité différente de la leur. Le projet s'est conclu par une présentation publique virtuelle des enquêtes filmées, offrant aux élèves l'opportunité de mieux comprendre leur place dans le paysage politique.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10266

This piece accompanies a video submission called *If You Wanna Switch Seats, We Could* (https://bit.ly/VPLSwitchSeatsExample). The video features excerpts from a verbatim performance investigation of the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, moderated by Chris Wallace, that took place on September 29, 2020. This particular version of the investigation was performed by high school students from Appoquinimink High School and Middletown High School, both located in Middletown, Delaware.[1]

During the first 100 days of Joe Biden's presidency, New York University's Verbatim Performance Lab (VPL) embarked on a Research-based Theatre investigation (Belliveau & Lea, 2016) entitled *If You Wanna Switch Seats, We Could*, in collaboration with several middle and high schools across the United States. The title of the performed investigation came from a statement made by Wallace during the September 29, 2020 debate in response to the candidates' behavior. Using the ethnodramatic form of verbatim performance (Salvatore, 2023; Vachon & Salvatore, 2023), 60 teenagers and 12 teachers from schools around the US explored what happened to their perceptions and audiences' perceptions when a section of that Biden-Trump debate was performed verbatim by young people.

Verbatim performance is "the precise portrayal of an actual person using their exact speech and gestural patterns as a data source for investigation, literally 'word for word' and 'gesture for gesture'" (Verbatim Performance Lab, 2024). It often includes "portraying across identity," meaning that an actor portrays someone of a race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, age, ability, or orientation different from their own (Salvatore, 2023, p. 6). VPL has created many projects using verbatim performance to investigate current events. For example, *The Kavanaugh Files* used gender-reversed casting to recreate moments from the testimonies of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh during confirmation hearings for Kavanaugh's appointment to the US Supreme Court. and game penalties she received. The project included three versions of the interactions, each featuring a change to the gender and/or race of the actor portraying Williams' words and gestures verbatim. In both examples outlined above, VPL asked audiences to consider if their responses shifted when the gender and/or race of the original individual changed in the investigations.

As VPL's mission is to disrupt assumptions, biases, and intolerances across a spectrum of political, cultural, and social narratives, we hypothesized that a verbatim performance of a debate excerpt between Trump and Biden

could assist performers and audiences in identifying the effects of the communication styles of the debaters and the moderator. The project embraced theatrical performance as an embodied form of investigation, exceeding the boundaries of ethnodrama and ethnotheatre (Saldaña, 2011; Salvatore, 2018, 2020) and placing it within a Research-based Theatre paradigm (Belliveau & Lea, 2016, p. 6).

After the first contentious debate between then-President Donald Trump and Democratic Presidential nominee Joe Biden, there was much discussion about the childlike behavior of the two men. As reported by *Politico* on September 30, 2020, Alex Castellanos of ABC News described his perception of the debate: "Apparently, I tuned into the wrong debate. I saw children debating, interrupting, calling each other names, never listening to dad" (para. 14). This recurring theme in the media coverage sparked a question for VPL's leadership: What would happen to an audience's perception of the interactions between the adults during the debate if younger and differently-bodied actors took on these roles through verbatim performance? VPL recruited teachers from twelve middle and high schools across the U.S. to investigate this question and began meetings and rehearsals in early February 2021. As an entry point for the teachers and students, VPL posed a second question: What might young actors discover about these candidates and the moderator when they take on their speech and gestural patterns through verbatim performance?

To support the students and teachers in their investigations of these questions, VPL's Education and Outreach Coordinator Lilly Stannard and Education Intern Lucy Medeiros (2021) developed a curriculum that framed verbatim performance as a form of the scientific method, a process that many students learn in their elementary or middle school science classes. The method starts with a researcher posing a question and then forming a hypothesis. Next, the researcher tests the idea through an experiment, collects and analyzes results, and then presents their conclusions. In this case, the student researchers presented their findings through a recorded verbatim performance for an audience. Stannard and Medeiros developed and distributed the curriculum, encouraging teachers to implement it as written or adjust it in ways that worked best for them and their students.

The first phase of the curriculum introduced VPL, its mission, and examples of past projects to illustrate the performance style. It then defined key terms and concepts related to VPL's verbatim performance practice. The second phase used mixed-bias media reports about the debate to provide context, assess the students' existing knowledge and

understanding of the debate, and gauge their levels of political engagement. The teachers then introduced the video selection from the debate that the students would investigate through rehearsal and performance. Following a guided discussion about their objective and subjective observations of this debate moment and its participants, students formulated hypotheses about what they might uncover through their investigation and performance of Biden, Trump, and Wallace. Several groups also developed additional research questions specific to their communities and their interests.

In the third phase, the students chose – or the teacher assigned – a role for each student to investigate. Most students wanted to act in the investigation, but a few also served as assistant directors and designers for their school's project. Before rehearsals began, all participating teachers and students completed a pre-investigation survey that prompted them to share their initial observations about the debate excerpt, their initial hypotheses about what they might discover through their investigation, and any questions they had as they began the rehearsal process. This surveying process is part of VPL's standard procedure when working on any verbatim performance project. Students then learned how to read the scored transcript of the debate excerpt that VPL had prepared (Salvatore, 2020; Leavy, 2020; Stamatiou, Kildow, Spearing, Nodding, & Price, 2022) and how to code that transcript for speech and gestural patterns. A scored transcript uses a transcription style that reflects an individual's speaking cadence by taking a hard return each time the individual pauses. The transcription appears more like poetry on the page than prose (Salvatore, 2020, 2023).

In the fourth phase, the students rehearsed their roles using the original debate video and their coded transcripts. Through the rehearsal process, teachers and students adjusted the gender pronouns within the scored transcript to match the gender identity of the student investigating and performing a particular role, when necessary. VPL provided fictional names for each candidate and other individuals referenced in the original debate exchange. These names matched the number of syllables in the original names: "King" replaced "Trump" and "Thompson" replaced "Biden."

Given that the project occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and that each participating school had its own COVID safety protocols, some schools rehearsed virtually, while others rehearsed in person, with varying masking and social distancing practices. At the pandemic's start, VPL shifted quickly to a virtual environment with projects like *Portraits U.S.* and

You Can't Unring Bell. The learning from those previous projects helped guide the schools working with virtual and asynchronous investigations. When requested and possible, VPL team members attended virtual rehearsals with the students and their teachers and assisted with coaching the verbatim performance investigations. The VPL team also provided basic guidelines for costumes, encouraging students to wear clothing that matched their gender identity. For example, if a female-identified student investigated and performed Joe Biden, she was encouraged to dress as a female-identified presidential candidate would dress for a debate.

Following the rehearsal period, each school created a video recording of their verbatim performances. Some schools created one version, while others created multiple versions to accommodate student interest and participation in the project. When developing the curriculum to guide the investigation, Stannard and Medeiros made the lessons accessible and malleable enough to serve different communities at each school. This flexible curriculum, the logistics of working virtually across time zones, and the varying resources available to each school, contributed to many variations across the final video submissions. The emphasis on student discovery took priority over uniformity, which impacted the performed investigations and the data collected. However, it provided opportunities for students to exercise their creativity and explore their unique curiosities. Further, these different approaches provided insight into how each community interacted with the original artifact and how different geographical and socio-economic contexts might influence perspective.

Schools had varying production resources available, so the final filmed investigations embraced a variety of approaches and aesthetics. Some schools filmed their investigations remotely through live Zoom recordings; some filmed in person and unmasked but standing far away from each other. Others filmed with transparent masks, standing at a similar distance as the speakers stood in the original debate. Each school's investigation also reflected the demographics of its student population, and their availability and interest in participating. For example, The Westtown School in West Chester, Pennsylvania, featured three international high school seniors working remotely from China; Appoquinimink and Middletown High Schools in Middletown, Delaware, and Lady Bird Johnson Middle School in Irving, Texas, each featured six students with varied racial and ethnic identities; Deerfield High School in Deerfield, Illinois, highlighted 19 students from an advanced acting class performing a mash-up of the debate excerpt; and The Chapin School in New York, New York, worked with students from their debate team. The varied approaches adopted by each school allowed audiences to experience the

verbatim performance of the debate through different bodies and contexts, thus emphasizing how identity and space inform our perceptions.

If You Wanna Switch Seats, We Could culminated in a virtual public sharing of the filmed investigations on April 17, 2021, about two weeks ahead of President Biden's first 100 days in office. The event featured four curated 90-minute sessions. Each session included a viewing of two or three schools' recorded verbatim performance investigations followed by a discussion with the participating teachers and their students, co-led by a VPL affiliate and a faculty respondent. The session concluded with a facilitated question and answer session with the audience, which included participants' families, school community members, the general public, and other NYU colleagues. Over 250 attendees participated in the virtual event, 58 of whom completed an optional anonymous audience survey presented at the end. A virtual event program lists each school, its participants, and a statement from each teacher about their approach to the investigation. The program also includes information about the moderators and respondents and lists all participating VPL team members and their roles in the project.

The project's final phase asked students and teachers to complete a post-investigation survey to evaluate if they had experienced any changes in their perceptions of the debate and its participants after completing the verbatim performance investigation. In general, students reported that their perceptions of Biden, Trump, and Wallace did not change much; however, they shared that they gained a more nuanced understanding of the candidates and greater empathy for Wallace as he tried to keep the debate under control.[2] One actor who investigated Trump noted the following in her pre-investigation survey:

> I think I may find some deeper sense of empathy for Trump… I disagreed with just about every one of his policies, and so I rarely really took the time to hear him out while he was president. I believe stepping into his shoes and really getting to know his words, mannerisms, and other behavior will help me understand him better even if I don't agree with the words I am saying.

Following her investigation and performance, the actor concluded:

> I think this project has taught me that Trump is actually somewhat smarter than I previously gave him credit for. He think[s] a lot about the manner in which he needs to say things or the words he needs to use in order to get the most amount of people on his side. Since he doesn't really stand for much of anything himself, it is evident that gaining support is his top priority.

She also "discovered that, as a female, I have a tendency to shut down when I am interrupted in a way that Trump certainly does not."

An actor investigating Biden initially wrote in his pre-investigation survey that:

> My hypothesis is that I will discover a frustrated politician, upset by the way things are being run at the time, at the center of Biden's mannerisms. I think these details will be subtle parts of his character and I think part of his struggle will be an inability to articulate everything he wants to say in a debate that is as wild as the artifact is.

After his investigation and performance, the actor noted:

> I'm more forgiving of Biden's actions after this, now that I've seen and understand a bit of his side. Before I was holding him to a higher regard, and I believed this debate wasn't representative of what I wanted in any of my leaders. But I think that kind of limited my ability to appreciate Biden when he was being honest, and whether I like it or not, I think he's pretty honest (for a politician) in this debate, which I can respect.

An actor investigating Chris Wallace hypothesized in her pre-investigation survey that "audiences will be able to empathize with [Wallace's] situation when I, as a young person, am placed in his position." When noting discoveries from her investigation and performance, the actor stated:

> I always saw Chris Wallace as a level-headed person trying his best to control a situation that was completely out of his control. I guess I now see just how lost and worried he actually feels in this conversation, and I have more empathy for him.

Participants also offered insights beyond what they learned about Biden, Trump, or Wallace. The student assistant director for Lady Bird Johnson Middle School's project expressed a discovery that was echoed by other students, saying "it's really important to see different perspectives, listen and allow everyone the opportunity to take space. I feel like this experience has me more aware of my surroundings and understanding conflict" (Irving Weekly Staff, 2021, para. 9). Another student noted that "Verbatim performance is extremely effective at helping us understand why people act the way they do." Similarly, Alex Ates, theatre teacher and director of the project at Westtown School, co-authored a piece with his students about their experience and concluded that:

> This mode of performance allowed the students to analyze and interpret political events that were directly impacting their lives… allowing them the opportunity to kinesthetically consider political concepts and subversively respond to political provocations through the

> transgressiveness of aesthetic conflict. (Ates, Feng, Hu, & Zhang, 2021, p. 43)

VPL wanted to engage pre- and emerging voters as citizens of this country and, by extension, the world with this project. Through the discoveries outlined above it became clear that the project succeeded in that respect.

As a Research-based Theatre project using verbatim performance, *If You Wanna Switch Seats, We Could* offered students an opportunity to identify disconnects between themselves and the men in the highest leadership positions in the U.S., while also gaining a better understanding of how they fit into the current political landscape. They were able to interrogate the intersections of their identities and those of Biden, Trump, and Wallace, and engage in a mode of political participation and discourse available to them as young people without the right to vote.

NOTES:

1) All students completed a photo/video release form to allow for the screening of the videos created for this project. A parent or guardian also signed the photo/video release form for students under the age of 18.

2) Most of the following cited student responses come from assignments completed as part of the curriculum created for this project. One student response comes from a local newspaper article which is cited. All student responses have been anonymized for this article.

WORKS CITED

Ates, A., Feng, D., Hu, S., & Zhang, E. (2021). Measuring a verbatim effect with high school students 12 hours away and across the world. *ArtsPraxis*, *8*(2), 32-45.

Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.). (2016). *Research-based theatre: An artistic methodology*. Intellect.

Castellanos, A. (2020, September 30). *Trump's strategy is to turn the debates into a dumpster fire on steroids*. Politico. https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/09/30/trump-biden-debate-roundup-423475

Irving Weekly Staff. (2021, May 18). *Theatre can change the world*. Irving Weekly. https://www.irvingweekly.com/s/3389/Theatre-Can-Change-the-World.php

Leavy, P. (2020). *Method meets art* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.

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

Salvatore, J. (2018). Ethnodrama and ethnotheatre. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of arts-based research* (pp. 267-287). Guilford Press.

Salvatore, J. (2020). Scripting the ethnodrama. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.; pp. 1045-1083). Oxford University Press.

Salvatore, J. (2023). Verbatim performance and its possibilities. *ArtsPraxis, 10*(1), 1-20.

Stamatiou, E., Kildow, E., Spearing, F., Nodding, G., & Price, J. P. (2022). Developing the critical verbatim theater artist during the pandemic: A transatlantic collaboration. *ArtsPraxis*, *9*(1), 13-33.

Stannard, L. & Medeiros, L. (2021). *Curriculum outline:* If You Wanna Switch Seats We Could. https://drive.google.com/file/d/17H-ASu8kfKbBfSyl3aZX9y6nY3b5LXM9/view

Vachon, W., & Salvatore, J. (2023). Wading the quagmire: Aesthetics and ethics in verbatim theater act 1. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *29*(2), 383-392. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10778004221098988

Verbatim Performance Lab. (2024). *Frequently asked questions: A conversation*. https://wp.nyu.edu/verbatimperformancelab/f-a-q-s/

LUCY MEDEIROS teaches theatre full-time to New York City students in grades 6-12. She has a BS and MA in Educational Theatre from the Steinhardt School at New York University. lkm349@nyu.edu

LILLY STANNARD is co-founder of Impact Arts, a prison-based arts nonprofit, and is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, and artist-researcher interested in the transformative nature of the arts in various settings. lillystannard@gmail.com

JOE SALVATORE is the founder and director of the Verbatim Performance Lab and a Clinical Professor of Educational Theatre at the Steinhardt School at New York University. joe.salvatore@nyu.edu

LUCY MEDEIROS enseigne le théâtre à temps plein aux élèves de la 6e à la 12e année à New York. Elle est titulaire d'un BS et d'une MA en théâtre éducatif de l'École Steinhardt de l'Université de New York. lkm349@nyu.edu

LILLY STANNARD is est cofondatrice d'Impact Arts, une organisation artistique à but non lucratif établie en milieu carcéral. Elle est artiste interdisciplinaire, pédagogue et artiste-chercheuse, intéressée par le pouvoir transformateur des arts dans divers contextes. lillystannard@gmail.com

JOE SALVATORE est le fondateur et directeur du Verbatim Performance Lab ainsi que professeur clinicien en théâtre éducatif à l'École Steinhardt de l'Université de New York. joe.salvatore@nyu.edu

LARRY SAVES THE CANADIAN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM: RESEARCH-BASED MUSICAL SATIRE GOES DIGITAL

SARA A. KREINDLER *University of Manitoba*

ABSTRACT. *Larry Saves the Canadian Healthcare System* is a research-based satirical musical tackling fundamental health policy issues. This companion text describes *Larry*'s content, style, and educational intent. It also tells the story of the piece's development, including its pivot to video due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its evolution following initial audience reception.

LARRY SAVES THE CANADIAN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM : UNE SATIRE MUSICALE BASÉE SUR LA RECHERCHE DEVIENT NUMÉRIQUE

RÉSUMÉ. *Larry Saves the Canadian Healthcare System* est une comédie musicale satirique fondée sur la recherche, qui aborde des enjeux fondamentaux de politique de santé. Ce texte d'accompagnement décrit le contenu, le style et l'intention pédagogique de l'œuvre. Il raconte également l'histoire de sa création, y compris son passage au format vidéo en raison de la pandémie de COVID-19, ainsi que son évolution à la suite des premières réactions du public.

Larry Saves the Canadian Healthcare System is a research-based satirical musical that tackles the complex of issues making emergency department crowding such an intractable problem. It uses humour, song, metaphor, and narrative to facilitate understanding of one of the most critical — but frequently misunderstood — issues facing the Canadian health system. *Larry* is being piloted as an educational tool in university classes, but in equal measure its intent is to educate and empower the general public to participate meaningfully in the conversation about health reform.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/mje/rsem.v59i1.10270

Satire is a powerful genre for exposing systemic errors by drawing attention to the contradictions and absurdities inherent in prevailing assumptions or practices (Bore & Reid, 2014; Day, 2011). It is also a genre with which I have long been well acquainted, having created and performed musical political satire since my teens. Nonetheless, I did not make the leap to research-based satire until my program of research on patient flow generated findings so absurd that only a musical could do them justice (Kreindler et al., 2021). As well as translating evidence from this research program, the show provides an overall health policy primer and a (heavily) fictionalized account of my experiences as an embedded researcher in a regional health system.

The story, set in an unspecified Canadian province, follows an idealistic young policy analyst's quest to get to the bottom of the crisis plaguing emergency departments. On this voyage of discovery, Larry encounters misaligned structures, dubious improvement projects, bankrupt ideas, political posturing, and the ghost of Tommy Douglas. At the show's core are 12 satirical songs, each highlighting a particular systemic absurdity. The scenes provide context for the songs and advance the comic mystery plot as Larry excavates ever-deeper and zanier layers of system dysfunction. During the process of workshopping the screenplay with director / dramaturg Ann Hodges and music director Paul De Gurse, a subplot was added to embed the action in a personal journey. The 5-day Zoom-based workshop also enabled us to incorporate feedback from six diverse actors and a few healthcare professionals and researchers.

Larry as a project adheres to key elements of Research-based Theatre (RbT) by engaging closely with research and the artistic process (Belliveau & Lea, 2016). Its commitment to honouring the research and the art form situates it within the spectrum of RbT delineated by Beck and colleagues (2011); specifically, it is a public-facing "aesthetic performance" with systematic research as its primary source (p. 693).

I initially drafted *Larry* as a theatre script, which was to have been presented on university campuses and revised iteratively upon audience discussion and feedback. The advent of COVID-19 compelled us to pivot to video, with each actor filmed individually in front of a green screen (with the exception of one 2-actor scene, for which we obtained special permission). Needing a product that would outlast the pandemic, the creative team strove to maximize the aesthetic potential of COVID-safe video by incorporating digital gags and advanced visual effects by production company Tripwire Media Group, as well as "site-specific" choreography by Matthew Armet. We took inspiration from the quirky,

kitsch aesthetic of Randy Rainbow's (n.d.) green-screen videos (see https://www.youtube.com/@RandyRainbowOfficial) and from pandemic-era digital musicals, while also seeking to innovate.

The switch to video led us to shift our initial focus from student to public audiences, aiming to maximize reach by hosting the production on YouTube. On the advice of a communications professional, we split the hour-long show into 11 micro-episodes, hoping to accommodate short attention spans, facilitate sharing of single episodes, and build momentum across multiple release dates. In the 6 months following its June 2022 launch, *Larry* garnered over 30,000 episode views. However, releasing 11 discrete videos proved a poor distribution strategy: Typically, viewers simply watched the episodes in sequence, so the introduction of barriers to continuous viewing fuelled viewer drop-off without yielding the intended benefits. With the advantage of hindsight and YouTube analytics, I would now suggest that an attention-grabbing opening, fast pace, and congruence with YouTube's raw, anarchic aesthetic are more important than video length.

The great challenge in translating research into satire is harmonizing a researcher's precision with a satirist's exaggeration (in this project, these two personages happened to be one and the same). The most information dense of *Larry*'s songs ("When Medicare Was Born") is also the most restrained in its satirical approach, simply recounting a historical incident in a humorous way. Most of the songs, however, critique practices by portraying their absurd extremes (e.g., "You're Going Home Today," in which a chipper flow nurse hustles a heavily bandaged patient out of the hospital). I believe all episodes did maintain the delicate balance between madcap irreverence and fidelity to the evidence, with one exception. In Episode 5, the comic impulse pushed me too far, resulting in a misleading representation — which I did not recognize as such until some viewers posted critical comments. This episode's song ("Guidelines") actually predated the musical, beginning its life as a crowd-pleasing singalong about some doctors' nonadherence to clinical practice guidelines. As it seemed a perfect stylistic fit for *Larry*, I shoehorned it in to serve as an indirect comment on system fragmentation, neglecting to consider how the change in context would alter the audience experience. As a stand-alone song, its manifest intent was to have satirical fun with the topic; however, as part of an educational product, it appeared to be making a serious and fundamental statement about primary care — and worse, about physicians. I soon added an extensive content advisory to this video; however, the fact that the episode itself did not properly represent the evidence continued to gnaw at me.

The chief advantage of video over theatre — the creation of an enduring artifact that can rapidly reach large audiences — is also its chief drawback when one belatedly discovers elements one would like to amend. In pivoting to video, we gave up the ability to revise iteratively; financial and contractual considerations made reworking and reshooting scenes impracticable. However, I ultimately realized that some remedies still lay within our grasp — especially when working in a medium (YouTube) that celebrates the homemade and ragged edged and disdains the stuffy and slick. Accordingly, I redressed the problematic episode by interpolating a DIY cameo in which the author (identified as "The Research Scientist — An Expert") addresses the audience against a backdrop of nonsensical images, and making its incongruity part of the humour. I also recut the episodes into a continuous version, with some tweaks to ensure a consistently fast pace and an immediate hook at the beginning of Episode 1. Having confirmed that the recut was outperforming the original playlist on audience retention and engagement, I changed the older version's visibility from public to unlisted.

Linked here is the recut version of *Larry Saves the Canadian Healthcare System* (Kreindler, 2023): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_7weVo2qV0. Findings on public reception, as well as student responses to in-class screenings, are shared in Kreindler et al. (2024). Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy the show.

REFERENCES

Beck, J. L., Belliveau, G., Lea, G. W., & Wager, A. (2011). Delineating a spectrum of research-based theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*(8), 687–700. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411415498

Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.). (2016). *Research-based theatre: An artistic methodology*. Intellect.

Bore, I.-L. K., & Reid, G. (2014). Laughing in the face of climate change? Satire as a device for engaging audiences in public debate. *Science Communication*, *36*(4), 454–478. https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547014534076

Day, A. (2011). *Satire and dissent: Interventions in contemporary political debate*. Indiana University Press.

Kreindler, S. A. (2023, February 9). *Larry saves the Canadian healthcare system – The musical (complete)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_7weVo2qV0

Kreindler, S. A., Hunter, M., Lea, G. W., Archibald, M., Rieger, K., West, C., & Hasan, S. M. (2024). Lifting the curtain on the emergency department crisis: A multi-method reception study of *Larry saves the Canadian healthcare system*. *BMC Health Services Research*, *24*(1), Article 13. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-023-10512-9

Kreindler, S. A., Schull, M. J., Rowe, B. H., Doupe, M. B., & Metge, C. J. (2021). Despite interventions, emergency flow stagnates in urban Western Canada. *Healthcare Policy*, *16*(4), 70–83. http://doi.org/10.12927/hcpol.2021.26498

Rainbow, R. (n.d.). *Home* [YouTube channel]. Retrieved April 2020 from https://www.youtube.com/@RandyRainbowOfficial

SARA A. KREINDLER (DPhil) is a health-systems researcher, composer / lyricist, and playwright. During this project, she held the Manitoba Research Chair in Health System Innovation at the University of Manitoba.

SARA A. KREINDLER (DPhil) est chercheuse en systèmes de santé, compositrice, parolière et dramaturge. Pendant ce projet, elle occupait la Chaire de recherche du Manitoba en innovation des systèmes de santé à l'Université du Manitoba.