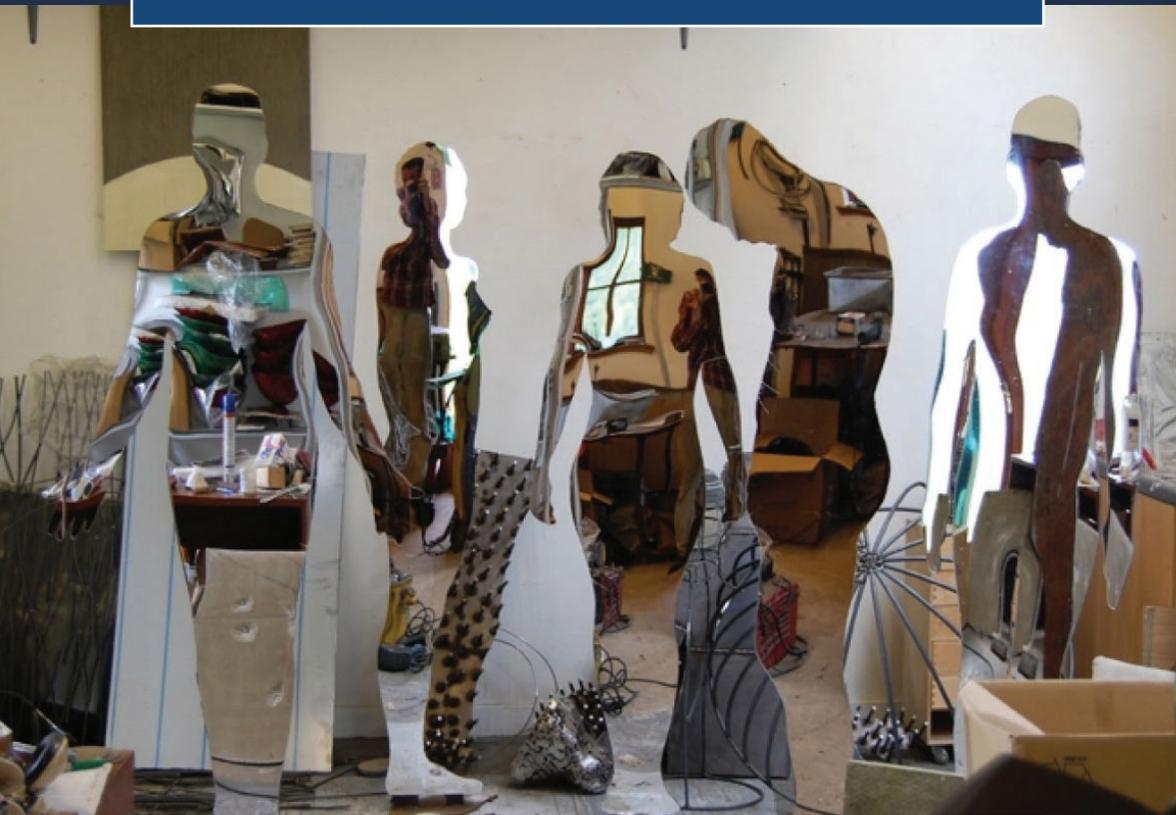


# Playing in a House of Mirrors

**Applied Theatre as Reflective Practice**

Elinor Vettraino and Warren Linds (Eds.)

*Foreword by Joe Norris*



*SensePublishers*

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*Applied Theatre as Reflective Practice*

*Foreword by Joe Norris*

*Edited by*

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*To all of the reflective practitioners  
who have inspired us in the creation of this book,  
thank you.*

*The mirrors are there too, and fill him with many fragments of turmoil, bringing  
back memories and covering them up again before they are distinct.  
(Tarjei Vesaas, The Boat in the Evening)*

*I decided to go away into foreign parts, meet what was strange to me .... Followed  
a long vagabondage, full of research and transformation, with no easy definitions  
... you feel space growing all around you, the horizon opens.  
(Friedrich Nietzsche, The Wanderer and His Shadow,  
translated by Kenneth White)*

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JOE NORRIS

## FOREWORD

### *A Prepositional Proposition*

Over my career as a teacher and researcher I have come to pay close attention to the power implied by a number of prepositions and the definite and indefinite articles, ‘a’ and ‘the’. Epistemologically they situate knowledge as either prescriptive or a range of possibilities that privilege certain dimensions of time and people in various degrees of authority or collaboration. Understanding them is vital to the practicing of applied theatre and Linds and Vettrano have assembled a diverse collection of stories of practice that problematized their early vision of the book as “the definition of this text became increasingly elastic” (p. 2). The elasticity is the strength of this book, providing readers with possibilities, not prescriptions.

I have read some applied theatre books, chapters and articles that are overly prescriptive, trying to control the practice of others. These attempt to provide ‘the’ way to do things. Others are ripe with options. Kopp (1972) claims in the title of his book, *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road; Kill Him*, that each person’s journey is unique and no one can follow another’s path. However, he does celebrate the power of stories with the conviction that we can and do learn vicariously from others. Like Barone (1990), who believes that we take from stories that which we deem relevant and act accordingly, Kopp sees the pedagogical intent of stories and advocates their telling, not as ‘the’ route or course but as ‘an’ offering of insights to others.

The prepositions ‘to’, ‘for’, ‘with’ and ‘by’ also have significance to applied theatre projects. A number of years ago, during a safe and caring schools tour, a grade eight female student approached me after our performance/workshop and volunteered the following, “I thought you were going to come here and tell us not to do drugs. Thanks for trusting us to work things out on our own” (paraphrased statement from recall) (Norris, 2009, p. 130). Not only was she well aware of the actor/audience dynamics that places those on stage as experts who presented their conclusions ‘to’ their audience, but she rejected it. ‘To’ resembles the top-down ‘banking model’ of education that Freire (1986) highly criticizes. Applied theatre strives to have dialogic encounters with participatory elements in which all parties learn from their conversations. A quote often attributed to Lila Watson (2015) that she attributed to a collective experience sums it up nicely, “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together”.

Combinations of 'for', 'with' and/or 'by' are the most common with applied theatre. Some programs have parties, other than those directly involved, conduct internal and external research to prepare performances 'for' audiences. Embedded is a strong sense of service toward others, but unlike 'to', these performances are designed as conversation starters. Rohd (1998) encourages 'activating scenes' (p. 103) that evoke strong enough reactions that the audience members want to change what they witness. I call them 'problem scenes'. While such performances are devised 'for' audiences, they serve as warm-ups that enable the subsequent conversations 'with' all participants.

Other applied theatre programs begin 'with' the people themselves and, through a series of theatrical activities, the participants come to reconceptualize themselves and the social and natural worlds in which they live. The results may or may not conclude in public performances. When the change process is the primary result, 'with' is the dominant preposition. When the participants take their work to other groups, both 'with' and 'by' play major roles.

In 'with' and 'by' relationships all participants, including workshop leaders, employ a variety of artistic lenses to expand their understandings beyond the pre-existing frames (Goffman, 1974) with which they entered. By working 'with' new groups, facilitators must expect that their understandings will also expand and change, thereby emulating Lila Watson collective belief. Rather than providing answers, participants and readers are invited into conversation. The chapters in *Playing in a House of Mirrors: Applied Theatre as Reflective Practice* are such invitations. Well storied, they have various proportions of expressing and explaining that Reason and Hawkins (1988) suggest. As readers, we travel along side witnessing their strong reflections before, in and after (another set of prepositions) their applied theatre work/play. By avoiding prescription, the chapters are evocative in nature, enabling readers to add their own thoughts to the stories, as the chapters invite virtual dialogues. They open-up rather than shut-down conversations.

My cast members often claim that the devising process changed their perspectives and behaviours. As they thoroughly examined the content and listened deeply to other perspectives, including those of their peers, they adapted and replaced existing beliefs with new ones. For them, as well as others, as made evident in the chapters, devising was a form of reflection in itself. As Lévinas (1984) claims, we need the Other to understand Self. Looking in the Face of the Other (Hendley, 2000) is like looking into a mirror; by seeing differences, we come to know who we are. Collaborative devising provides those involved with the opportunity to reflect 'before' they meet an audience. It is an end in itself that will be taken to others later.

Joking a forum theatre requires a strong improvisational skill set as one mediates what was planned with what is lived (Aoki, 2005). Whether the applied theatre presentation and/or workshop involves an audience in a forum theatre format or a group assembled to solely partake in activities and exercises, the joker or facilitator adapts, and sometimes abandons, the agenda to what emerges. Some chapters document how reflection occurs 'in' action as the leaders reflect in the moment and

redirect within milliseconds. Such examples demonstrate the complexity of working ‘with’ others.

All chapters have components of reflection ‘after’ the action. Through the distance of time, the authors step back and take another look at what they experienced. Their analyses of their ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) provide readers with both possible concrete examples to adapt to their own contexts and rationales that can provide guidance for future actions. The book contains a repertoire of choices, from which readers can pick and choose as they see fit.

So far, unlike many forwards, I have avoided referring to chapters individually. Rather, like Watson and compatriots, I prefer the more collective approach, acknowledging the contributions as a whole. I have framed the first part of this forward with what Werner and Rothe (1979) would consider an external hermeneutic framework. I have taken a predetermined set of constructs, in this case, prepositions and articles and applied them to the chapters within the book. I now employ an internal hermeneutic frame, and focus on excerpts from the book itself. In keeping the quest for an elastic definition of applied theatre and honouring applied theatre’s aim of enabling voices, I now provide a found poem (Butler-Kisber, 2002) or quote collage of insights found in the book. Like a movie trailer, they provide salient points, hopefully without revealing too much of the plot that some trailers and forwards often do. To maintain the wholeness of the book, the quotes are deliberately not identified and minor poetic license was taken to maintain a flow. The following is my synopsis of the book:

*The Elasticity of:  
Playing in a House of Mirrors: Applied Theatre as Reflective Practice*

The idea begins...

Cast a wide net,

Very open ended,

An ever-evolving, ever-dynamic, ever-expanding web of interrelationship.

Need to expose vulnerabilities

A more intuitive approach.

The intuitive within us that enables us to know how to respond to given situations and the capacity to cope with the unexpected.

Collaboration of any kind requires a degree of letting go.

When I surrendered, and let go of “getting it right, perfect” I began to see the accomplishments, the moments of beauty, achievement, commitment, joy that comes from hard work.

Always risky.

How will you improvise your life?

Pay attention to how your environment performs you.

Take an imaginative leap into someone else’s experience.

Partner's willingness to care,  
Empathizing and connecting with the stories that others were telling,  
Monitored emotional states and addressed them.  
Active listening.

We experienced genuine joy in each others' presence, celebrating our desire to connect and laugh with one another.

Creating interpersonal attunement.

The idea of supporting resistance is intriguing.

"So, you think you're going to help me, do you?"

The understandable resistance to other people 'coming in'.

At this point people usually seem uncomfortable... not to do activities in which they potentially look silly.

See yourself beyond the mirror.

Felt empowered to criticise, suggest, and give of their own experience.

Getting to know the inner self is terrible, wonderful thing.

So where do our stories come from?

The human need to share stories in order to make sense of the world.

The whole process of storytelling and physicalizing the stories enabled me to take something which was pretty awful and horrible and look at it in another way, see it from a different point of view.

The power of collective and shared stories as a way of exploring self and, very importantly, accepting self.

This co-emergent self/other/world is plastic, mutable as knowledge is enacted, not pre-existent. Self-observation through metaxis allows us to see knowledge as it is enacted in each moment of the present, not as something which already exists.

The importance of playing with story in a fictional reality is bound up in the need to enable the teller, and the listener to a lesser extent, to have a safety net; a degree of distance between the real world story origin and the myth or legend generated.

His story of its coming into being: the story he has learned, responded to, remembered, made his own such that he can pass it on to others.

Even if your understanding of someone's story wasn't the real story; that was an accepted thing from the start anyway

One thing that has changed for me, though, since doing this work is that I have started writing things down – like a story,

Improvisation is first and foremost an exploration of relationship.

Co-operative inquiry is a way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to yourself, in order to (1) understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things; and (2) learn how to act to change things you may want to change

People try things out, reflect on what they've done, and then, based on this, re-do it differently.

The method encourages open communication, self-evaluation, curiosity and courage to explore new ways of communicating.

It invites reflection, which is a consequence of the inter-relationship between participation and conscious awareness: the desire to know.

Using role playing or simulations with various problems, professionals can develop a repertoire of smoother reactions.

Drama allows us to straddle the world of fantasy and the real-world experience.

People engage their imaginations in service of exploring the possibilities in their lives. This is a natural process.

Insight is grounded in enactment.

Imagination is indispensable to understanding the unknown.

People engage their imaginations in service of exploring the possibilities in their lives. This is a natural process.

Improvisational drama should be recognized as a sort of psycho-social laboratory.

In the re-living of experiences within a fictionalized context, the participants in the group had the opportunity to stand back from their realities and view them, as though through a 'stop motion' lens, finding moments of clarity and opportunities for change or transformation.

Part of the challenge is to seek the right questions to ask, or build in structures that can be appreciated as relevant.

Raising students' awareness of their assumptions, values and beliefs and make them more explicit.

Helped me alter my thoughts, see things clearer and from different perspectives.

The performance has meaning in the physical formation of the universe, and those who inhabit it. It becomes part of who we are.

Plays have to end in frustration caused by an unsolved conflict.

In trying to find solutions, we begin to have a better understanding of the problem, its causes, and its ramifications.

Impossible to take sides, or to reach a tidy answer.

The play had taken on a life of its own, and I had become entangled in its path.

The whole process of it gave you a different way of looking at things.

Enjoyed the wide-ranging discussions of possible solutions. Beginning to recognize how complex...

The performative emerges from and represents social relationships.

By the end of the enactment the room is full of options and observations.

Developing critical awareness.

Challenged to find ways to act in congruence with their espoused values.

Using life experience as a basis to reflect and learn.

A great deal to think about; some of the responses were expected, others weren't.

It was physically, intellectually and emotionally confronting.

How might we engage our students in meaningful reflection that touches the heart of learning?

Reflection is an opening to new worlds and ideas and involves loops of learning cycling back to the beginning perhaps but with newly aware senses.

Critical reflection that includes the willingness and ability to identify and critique our actions and the beliefs and motivations that underlie them. This requires self-awareness and willingness to take the risk of identifying our own actions that are not best practice, that do not align with the theories we believe in, that are motivated by our own biases or needs, or that do not best serve the people with whom we work.

Reflection as a multi-sensory, embodied activity.

Embodiment is reflection... reflection as embodiment

Exploring both what happens through embodied work to individuals and how this work enables critical reflection.

Reflection as a collective experience is arguably richer and more valuable because of the input of others to the individual's thought process together to offer new knowledge in a way that isolated practice would not.

How do we access and act upon...

*Who shall I become in my encounter with you?*

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WARREN LINDS AND ELINOR VETTRAINO

## INTRODUCTION

*Playing in a House of Mirrors: Applied Theatre as Reflective Practice*

A hall of mirrors, a passage way in which (two things) not only reflect one another and get confused in the multiple reflexivity, but in which reality and illusion often co-mingle. (Brougher, 1996, p. 14)

*The Idea Begins...*

When I, Elinor, think back on how the idea for this book began for me, I can pinpoint almost the exact moment when the original thought took on some form of shape in my mind. I was driving Warren to the airport in Edinburgh so that he could begin his journey onwards from spending a week in Fife, Scotland delving into the artistic practices of students within one of the local further education colleges as well as debating and discussing the benefits of applied theatre practice with me and my colleagues. Immersed as I was in my doctoral work, Warren was fundamental in helping me work through some of the approaches to data gathering that I was wrestling with and as we drew up to the drop off point in the airport carpark, I turned to Warren and the following conversation ensued:

*Elinor:* ‘Hey, why don’t we write a book about this stuff?’

*Warren:* ‘About this, about reflection?’

*Elinor:* ‘Yes, why not?’

*Warren:* ‘Okay’

While not verbatim, the genesis of this text stemmed from the essence of that conversation. Both of us have had a multitude of experiences over many decades working with applying theatre in a range of settings and contexts. All of these experiences have left a mark of some kind on the work that we do. But how we go about understanding the learning that these dramatic moments leave is something that we wanted to unpack through the medium of theatre itself. This book, therefore, is an international collaboration between authors from a range of professional contexts around the world who share a belief in the use of applied drama and theatre as a tool for reflective practice.

Unlike other reflective practice texts, this book considers the use of drama as the vehicle through which learning takes place for the leader, facilitator or manager of

an experience rather than the use of drama and theatre as an artistic, aesthetic and embodied method for learning subject content.

We had questions that we wanted to address including

- what is the potential for drama and theatre to transform practice?
- how do you bridge the gap between reflective thought and dramatic action?
- how do you translate what you have learned through engaging in the drama to the actual practice of working and living in the world?
- how does reflective practice (reflecting on practice) become reflective praxis (reflection and action questioning each other)?

### *The Idea Takes Shape...*

When we began to get abstracts in from the contributors, we realised we needed another conversation, one that has been going on for the duration of the project—and from the afterward, you'll see that it will continue. The second conversation was really: 'what is this book *actually* about? In fact, more importantly maybe, what is it *not* about?'

To begin that process we needed to really define our understanding of terminology that we believed we shared: applied theatre, reflection, reflective practice and practitioner. We define practitioners as people who work practically with individuals or groups with and/or in a range of organisations. We were particularly interested in those practitioners using theatre and drama to reflect on their own practice and enable those they work with to reflect on theirs. In our idea the focus would be on the drama/theatre as the vehicle for the reflection but also an integral element of the practitioner's growing understanding of self. However, that also seemed a little woolly and trying to explain our 'requirements' to potential contributors became increasingly difficult as our thought processes around the idea became more fluid. Therefore, the definition of this text became increasingly elastic. What we were clear about was that we were not producing a text about how drama/theatre is used to teach other subjects. While that has continued to be a clear idea in our own development of this work, the reality is that the reflective experience within workshops or sessions or classes where drama/theatre is used intentionally, or otherwise, as a learning process often involves the idea of learning through, as well as learning in, other subjects. The other element we were clear about was that this was not a text about teaching theatre or teaching reflection. This concept has been easier to delineate in our own and others' contributions but the call itself generated responses from a range of individuals and groups who were from a very broad spectrum of sectors; educational, social services, corporate leadership, and artist practitioners.

### *Multiple Jewels Converging and Diverging...*

Through all of the chapters we received we realised that despite the diversity (or maybe because of it?), there was a clear thread of Applied Theatre and Reflective

Practice, the perspectives depended on the particular discipline and praxis the author/practitioner was engaged in. This made us think of the Hua-yen Buddhist tradition of Indra's net (Cook, 1977). This net has a crystal at every knot, stretching multi-dimensionally, through all space and time. If you arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, you will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the web, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an "infinite reflecting process occurring" (Loy, 1993, p. 481). Thus we found in discussing the chapters there was an emergent telling about reflection at a deeper level, the idea of 'stretching what reflective practice is about.'

Derrida (1978) suggests, therefore, that

in this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer simple origin. (p. 36)

As we find ourselves (to mix the metaphors) in this house of reflecting mirrors, what we see are traces of the original idea of the book, reflected in the material that it contains, which, in turn, mirrors the praxis of those who contributed and those who they worked with. Only mirrors reflecting mirrors, traces of traces.

In turn, this meant that we explore here in this introduction, several frameworks and perspectives to augment the experience of viewing these jewels. Within each perspective on reflective practice, we note particular chapters that providing the viewing platform for these perspectives. First, though, is the need to define what we understand by the terms 'applied theatre' and 'reflective practice'.

## APPLIED THEATRE

Applied theatre is a central aspect of this book as it is the method or form wherein reflective practice takes place. The journal *Applied Theatre Researcher* defines it as "theatre and drama in non-traditional contexts." The journal contains articles on drama, theatre and performance with "specific audiences or participants in a range of social contexts and locations."

To address that complexity, Thompson (2003) unpacks the term Applied Theatre. He suggests "Applied theatre can cast a wide net.... The metaphor of the net is deliberate, in that applied theatre brings together related fields as much as it constitutes its own" (p. 14). The specific features we find relevant that he provides are that

- projects always take place in communities, in institutions or with specific groups
- they often include the practice of theatre where it is least expected
- it is a participatory theatre created by people who would not usually make theatre

Thompson adds that “it is, at its best, a theatre that translates and adapts to the unfamiliar” (pp. 15–16). He feels applied theatre programs “can be a vital part of the way that people engage in their communities, reflect on issues and debate change... central to different groups’ experience of making and remaking their lives” (p. 16).

This range of possibilities is reflected in this book, covering a diversity of disciplines and approaches to theatre. Forms of applied theatre are varied. Rikke Gjørum and Gro Ramsdal, and Kate Collier use Forum Theatre; Ellie Freidland, and Brian Leslie, Lynn Kelly and Tracey Small, and Elinor Vettrains write about the use of Image theatre; Warren Linds and Tristan Khaner write about theatre games, Image Theatre and Rainbow of Desire Sara Breslow used scripted theatre, Jason Butler is writing about dramatherapy techniques, and Adam Blatner, psychodrama, and Tony Gee’s Afterword looks at the role of the puppet.

#### WHAT IS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE?

Reflective practice, and particularly its impact on life-long learning, became increasingly prominent in the 1980s amongst many of what have been termed the ‘caring’ professions. Educational literature in teacher education, social work, community learning, nursing/midwifery focused on the need to understand one’s practice through a process of self-introspection and evaluation. Although the authors expounding the virtues of critical reflection offered different theoretical lenses through which to develop self reflection, the focus remained the same for all: to transform practice through critical pedagogical reflection.

Definitions for reflective practice are as numerous as the levels of introspection that can be developed. Mezirow (1990) links reflection to ‘higher order mental processes’ (p. 5) and the importance of looking back at previous experiences to understand and move forward. He also makes a distinction between reflection – the practice of looking at previous actions and behaviours and understanding how and why they occurred – and reflexivity – the thought in action which transforms the practice during the process of acting. “Thoughtful action” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 6) involves the idea of the transformative ‘stop’ moment (Appelbaum, 1995) that Fels writes about in her chapter in this text. This is the ability to halt the action and think ‘what is not working here and how can I change that?’

Bolton (2010) echoes the view that reflection on its own is not critical in its own right, nor does it offer real and deep opportunities for transformation. In her writing on ‘through-the-mirror’ reflective processing, Bolton argues that reflection as a metaphor indicates that you are simply looking at an image you already know that is staring back at you – she offers: “what is the reflection of shit? Shit” (p. 10). In order to have momentum in reflective work there is a need, she argues, to see yourself beyond the mirror and to “get beyond a notion that to reflect is self-indulgently ... thinking about ourselves” (p. 10). Rather it is an opportunity to turn our thoughts inside out and our worlds upside down and to intentionally learn through a problem solving space that reflexivity allows. Arguably, there is also a need to ensure that

reflective practice is a shared experience from which existing knowledge and understanding can be confirmed, challenged or changed and new knowledge and understanding can grow. Mezirow (1990) supports the idea that if there is only you looking back at yourself in the mirror, how does anything change when he states that “we are all trapped by our own meaning perspectives, we can never really make interpretations of our experience free of bias” (p. 10). Reflective learning through shared discourse is therefore a key part of the transformational practice Mezirow advocates.

Reflection as a concept has certainly changed considerably from the early models associated with professional learning. For this text we, the editors, define reflective practice as the development of capacities to critically understand actions, behaviours and attitudes that impact on our own practice, or on the way others engage in their practice, so as to be part of a process of continuous learning. It is therefore crucial for any professional to understand how and why they behave and interact with others the way they do.

Ultimately, reflective practice is context driven and thematically this book explores a range of contexts within which reflection and reflexion occurs. Within this text, potentially one dimensional learning opportunities from reflective cycles that promoted a think-do-review approach to understanding have been re-visioned in order to move away from the mirror response that Bolton (2010) refers to. There are real complexities in terms of definitions of practice as well as methods and models to follow. Reflective practice for us, therefore, is narrative; is collective; is creative, improvised and emergent; is embodied and embodies theatre as living; is diffracted; is about praxis and metaxis. Reflection is an opening to new worlds and ideas and involves loops of learning cycling back to the beginning perhaps but with newly aware senses.

Throughout this book, you will see links to all of these elements but they have been explored below in more detail as a starting point for reflexive discourse.

## ELEMENTS OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

### *Reflection as Collective Process*

Reflective practice can be solitary. In any given moment in the facilitation of a workshop, for example, the leader could be rethinking strategy, redirecting focus and energy and realigning her understanding of the socio-political dynamics at play. This form of ‘on-your-feet’ reflexive experience is about being able to read the environment and re-write the continuing script as a result. However, even within those moments of apparently solitary reflection, the collectivity of the group is having an impact on the change of direction being considered. While the facilitator/leader might believe they are reflecting and acting alone, they are part of a collective process which can be consciously or unconsciously directed.

Reflection as a collective experience is arguably richer and more valuable because of the input of others to the individual’s thought process. Turner (1977) writes that

“an anthropologist tends to think in terms not of solitary but of plural reflection, or, much better, plural reflexivity, the ways in which a group or community seeks to portray, understand, and then act on itself” (p. 33). The impact of such group connection is a greater shared understanding of what could have been initially an individual concern. There are many examples of theatrical processes working as collective reflective experiences. One of the bodies of work that explores this dynamic as fundamental to its processes is the work of Augusto Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed. Very literally the needs of the many outweighing the issues or desires of a few, TO techniques focus the group to the challenge of turning individuals’ needs, desires and oppressions into communal ones; it is theatre of the oppressed not theatre of the *one* oppressed (Boal, 1995, p. 45).

Boalian work is connected to the concept of process drama as understood in an educational context. Initially developed by practitioner/theorists like Gavin Bolton, Dorothy Heathcote and Cicelly O’Neill, process drama is a non-scripted, evolving form of drama that requires of the facilitator and participants the ability to work in the moment, reflect in action and reflect for action. Working through a situation or challenge using a variety of dramatic tools, techniques or conventions to achieve an understanding of self that was previously hidden, either consciously or unconsciously, Boalian techniques also explore reflection in action through the concept of metaxis (explained later in this Introductory section). It is also absolutely a way of working that brings people together to strive for resolution through the generalisation of issues rather than the individualisation or singularisation.

Boal’s (1995) explanation of the practice of engaging in TO is that all are active observers or ‘spect-actors’ in the drama that is unfolding not before them but around them, within them. The entire space within which the ‘theatre’ is occurring becomes the stage, not the limitation of a fixed stage space. All participants are therefore engaged in reflective moments. Sharing experiences through offering observations and empathy through verbal expression or physical movement, creates openings for the tensions between the individual and collective to become “fruitful spaces to challenge a group in its exploration of a theme” (Linds & Vettrains, 2008, para. 7).

Throughout the book, many of the chapters refer to this collective process experience. Alan and Maggie Newell’s work with Forum Theatre as a diagnostic tool within the field of new technologies indicates how shared concerns can come together to offer new knowledge in a way that isolated practice would not. Lynn Fels, and Warren Linds and Tristan Khaner also consider the power of the collective to move facilitation of reflective experiences forward and both chapters indicate the importance of the facilitator’s role within that collective, to join the group in the experience of investigating (Bolton, 2001).

### *Creativity and Improvisation and Emergence*

We can break the rules ‘without fear, with relish—what will we find out if we do it this way?’ (Boal, cited in Jackson, 1992, p. xxiii)

The ‘what if’ question is paramount in relation to improvisation and creativity, both of which are bound up in the aesthetic principle. The aesthetic principle engages creativity, response and expression to offer an answer to a question raised and it relates directly to the way in which we as humans reflect on our experiences. When we taste, touch, smell, see and hear the world around us, we respond to these sensations by offering an expression of some kind and this expression reflects the way in which we have connected with these sensations. Although we have no set of written rules about how we react, inside us there is an instinctive ‘action-inaction’ (linked to the idea of ‘fight, flight, freeze’) ability that enables us to improvise; we hear a piece of music and we dance, we see an argument and we retreat, we smell burning and we raise the alarm, we face a challenge and we stop and think. We improvise and create.

Each improvisation, each action (or conscious inaction) gives us more knowledge about the way in which we respond, and express that response and so our net of learning and reflection grows. In Ellie Friedland’s chapter as in Anne Hewson’s contribution, we see how this experience of think and act is both conscious and unconscious. Very few people sit down and dedicate time to ‘reflecting’, and those that do tend to have a specific reason or connection with their work that requires them to do this. Participants or students on programmes of study requiring reflective elements will need to dedicate space and time to complete reflective logs or diaries; training teachers, nurses, social workers and community learning practitioners will have a considerable element of their studies that link to reflective approaches to understanding self as practitioner and yet in both Friedland and Hewson’s chapters we can see that processing of action takes place in the moment. Therapists, counsellors, coaches and other practitioners involved in the caring professions will also spend time reflecting on the experiences of practice that they have had. These will often be at defined times; supervision meetings, directly after client sessions and so on. Reflection in these ways is time bound and defined by requirements linked to the individual’s profession but again, Jason Butler and Adam Blatner in their chapters remind us as they weave their dramatherapeutic and psychodramatherapeutic narratives, that they feel reflexive moments in the aesthetic and therapeutic spaces created through their work.

And yet, all of us reflect continually throughout the experiences we have on a daily basis. Moment to moment, we make sometimes subtle changes in our behaviours and actions to respond to ‘in the moment’ feedback that we get from those around us. We are reflexive in the way that we can halt mid-action and pivot on the moment that asks us to re-think, re-act and thereby change our behaviour and thought process in an instant. To stop in the moment and change direction is part of our ability to *know how* to do what we do (Fels, 2012; Linds, 2008) and it is often unintentional, sub conscious.

In many ways, our capacity to continually reflect and grow from that process, is itself reflected in the story of Indra’s Net that we referred to earlier; a never-ending web of interlaced threads. As we engage and interact with the world, we

think on our feet, changing direction and improvising new ways of thinking and doing which emerge from our internal processing. In Fels' chapter we see the impact of such emergent thinking through the thought processes made manifest through performative writing evidencing the spontaneity driven by reflection in action. These moments of pause, allowing for an expression of response within an aesthetic and reflective space, is also present in Warren Linds and Tristan Khaner's chapter on embodiment and ethical practice, and in Adam Blatner's consideration of the place and purpose of psychodramatic pedagogy within the reflective sphere. In fact, throughout the entire body of work represented in this text, you will find explosions of creativity, improvised stillness and the emergence of reflective jewelled moments.

### *Reflection as Embodiment*

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) assert that "what we take to be true in a situation depends on our embodied understanding of the situation" (p. 102). This understanding is shaped by our senses, an ability move and manipulate objects, the structures of our brain, our actions, and our interaction with the environment. Collectively these aspects define embodiment. They outline three levels where embodiment occurs:

- the neural level which involves the circuitry in our bodies
- the phenomenological level which is everything we can be aware of, and
- the cognitive unconscious level which "consists of all those mental operations that structure and make possible all conscious experience, including the understanding and use of language" (p. 103).

These three levels are interrelated as "a full understanding of the mind requires descriptions and explanations at all three levels" (p. 104). For example, many aspects of embodiment are about the feelings we have during an experience and how our bodies function in the world. "People are not just brains, not just neural circuits. Neither are they mere bundles of qualitative experiences and patterns of bodily interaction. Nor are they just structures and operations of the cognitive unconscious. All three are present" (p. 104). As Wright (1998) points out, "all thought is a consequence of reflection upon embodied nervous activity which, through further interaction with the nervous system, become an object of additional nervous activity" (p. 93).

If we want to understand how embodiment is reflection, we need to understand these three interrelated levels. The idea of 'know how' helps us see how this might help us understand this process as this is where the neural, the experiential and the unconscious overlap. John Dewey (1922) notes

We may...be said to know how by means of our habits... We walk and read aloud, we get off and on street cars, we dress and undress, and do a thousand useful acts without thinking of them. We know something, namely, how to do them. (p. 177)

This know-how is embedded and embodied in practices that we engage in daily. Therefore, Depraz, Varela and Vermersch (2003) assert that reflection through practice is “the process of becoming aware from its every enaction, to describe it as it is carried out” (p. 155). The situations where these engagements happen are called microworlds (Varela, 1999). We act appropriately in relation to the context of these situations. How what is ‘appropriate’ is determined can be understood through two concepts developed by the philosopher of phenomenology Maurice Merleau-Ponty: the *intentional arc* and *maximum grip*. “*Intentional arc* names the tight connection between body and the world” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1999, p. 103). The skills we acquire become ways to respond to situations we face. *Maximum grip* refers to our body’s tendency to respond to the world in ways that bring the situation to this tight connection.

The embodied nature of the learning arrived at through reflection cannot be emphasized enough because all thought is a consequence of reflection upon embodied nervous activity which, through its further interaction with the nervous system, becomes an object of additional nervous activity. “All doing is knowing; all knowing is doing” (Maturana & Varela, 1992, p. 27). Maturana and Varela argue that, through the process of reflection upon experience, we define – moment by moment – our changing world. Explanation through language then takes that definition into a social domain, creating another context for both experience and reflection because language is not a representation of a world ‘out there,’ “but rather as an ongoing bringing forth of a world through the process of living itself” (p. 11).

Theatrical processes enable/create spaces for an embodied mode of reflection, in that this reflection arises through the bodily, lived experience of the practitioner and is revealed in action. In Applied Theatre work, reflection as embodiment comes in many forms throughout the processes used, particularly in the more therapeutic techniques based on the Rainbow of Desire. Boal (1992) in fact wrote that “A bodily movement is a thought and a thought expresses itself in a corporeal form” (p. 61).

Several chapters in particular focus on the embodied experience of reflection. Anne Hewson explores how Forum Theatre engages both mind and body in the act of reflection by teacher candidates. Reflection is directed towards developing a quality relationship in the teaching and learning process. David Wright extends this to look at the overall phenomenological affective experience of participating in an applied theatre process. How did the experience feel then, how does it feel now, and how is it going to feel some time after the event? What lingers, what is forgotten? Elinor Vettraino explores storytelling as an embodied experience as participants embody the stories and are questioned about their ‘as if’ experience. Tristan Khaner and Warren Linds explore the use of the body in ethical practice of students learning to be process consultants with organizations and communities. Lynn Fels, through performative inquiry asks her students to reflect on the embodied sensorial experiences that emerge in Stop moments that calls their attention to something significant in their lives.

In order to understand, then, how this embodied reflective process connects the world of theatre to the world of practice, we must explore the notion of praxis (reflection/action) and its associated concept used in applied theatre of metaxis (the world of theatre is the theatre of the world).

## REFLECTION AS, AND THROUGH, PRAXIS AND METAXIS

### *Praxis*

Praxis is a reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.  
(Freire, 1970, p. 36)

The Introduction to a special issue of *Education and Urban Society* special issue on Reflective Practice (Osterman, 1990) states that reflective practice “is an exciting concept because it is simple yet complex; simple because it begins with the simple premise that ideas shape action; complex because the theoretical and practical implications are boundless” (p. 1).

However, one of the premises of this book on Reflective Practice and Applied Theatre is that the ‘simple’ in that statement is in fact complicated by the complex—that action as exemplified by applied theatre processes leads to action, or that ideas can be embodied by action as exemplified by applied theatre processes. This can be better explained by exploring the notion of praxis as Freire has described it above.

Freire (1970) writes that praxis involves action and reflection where each element builds upon the other as “the act of knowing involves a dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action into new action” (p. 31). These actions take place in the real, not some imaginary or hypothetical, world and this world is the world of people interacting with each other. As interaction around important issues, praxis is always risky, requiring that a person “makes a wise and prudent judgment about how to act in this situation” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 190).

Word and action, action and reflection, theory and practice are all facets of the same idea. Action as praxis is not merely doing something (what Freire describes as activism) or acting upon something for the sake of doing. “Knowing-in-action is dynamic” (Schön, 1987, p. 25). It is a creative act, and dialogic in that both our actions and the world are emergent in the action, and learning arises through theory and practice together. Schon points out that “although we sometimes think before acting, it is also true that in much of the spontaneous behaviour of a skilful practice we reveal a kind of knowing which does not stem from prior intellectual operation” (1987, p. 51). Liberative action flows out of insight and back into insight. Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch (2003), who come from a phenomenological approach, see praxis as “the process of becoming aware from its very enaction, to describe it as carried out” (p. 155).

Linked to praxis is the idea of conscientisation, which Freire (1970) defines as

the process in which men (sic), not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality. (p. 27)

Through praxis, the facilitator draws participants into a process of critical reflection by first discovering the generative themes that are the common experiences in one's social milieu, developed by people to make sense of the world around them. Once discovered, the facilitator or educator and participants work together to initiate new understandings of what is going on and one's place within it. The goal is to determine appropriate action and change. Thus knowledge is valid because it can be implemented in practice. But this is not about simply *applying* knowledge. Practitioners need to learn "critical creativity" (McCormack & Titchen, 2007): how to "pick out salient features of their environment, develop perspicuous responses to those features, and adjust and adapt themselves to the particularities of a given situation" (p. 43).

Fregeau and Leier (2002) give another example of this process as they discuss a school based anti-racism program:

- Understanding one's social reality
- Reflecting on that reality and experience
- Realizing that it can be changed and imagining how
- Deciding one has the power to make changes, and
- Taking action to make changes in that reality

If you take all these elements and consider them within the world of applied theatre, all these elements happen in the theatrical process through a process called metaxis (Boal, 1995; Linds, 2006).

### *Metaxis*

The notion of praxis as both/and is mirrored by the notion of metaxis, which is an important concept in the exploration of theatre as reflective tool.

By being an actual part of the shared process of story creation and enaction, the participant is able to exist in two worlds; the 'real' world of the here and now—them as actor—and a shared reality which is exploring another version of them—them as character. This in-between space, called metaxis by Boal (1995) and liminal by Turner (1977) is "the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image. The participant shares and belongs to these two autonomous worlds: their reality and the image of their reality, which she herself has created" (Boal, 1995, p. 43). The characters in a theatrical or imaginative exploration must cast aside (at least temporarily) the 'real world' which was the original of the exploration, and play with theatre itself, "in its artistic embodiment, thus practicing in the second world (the aesthetic), in order to modify the first (the social)" (Yuen, Linds, Goulet, Episkenew, & Arnason, 2010, p. 49).

The theatre workshop participant and storyteller is able to both observe and be observed by themselves. They can understand and sympathise with both actor and character and through this connection, learn more about how they respond to and react with the world around them. “I am not penetrated by the emotion of others; instead I project my own, I guide my own actions, I am the subject. Or else someone like me guides the action: we are both subjects” (Yuen, Linds, Goulet, Episkenew, & Arnason, pp. 43–44).

As the participant forgets the ‘here and now’ to focus on the image or story being created, they are able to create solutions to problems that they as actors face. They can play with these solutions and through the playing, gather more alternatives to coping with different challenges they face. “The scene, the stage, becomes the rehearsal space for real life” (Boal, 1995, p. 44).

Through metaxis we hold a mirror up to nature and, instead of trying to represent it, find it accessible. We can see that this co-emergent self/other/world is plastic, mutable as knowledge is enacted, not pre-existent. Self-observation through metaxis allows us to see knowledge as it is enacted in each moment of the present, not as something which already exists. Boal (1995) concludes that,

if the artist is able to create an autonomous world of images of his own reality, and to enact his liberation in the reality of these images, they will then extrapolate into his own life all that he has accomplished in fiction. (p. 44)

Another way of thinking about this is the notion of ‘doubling’. Looking into a mirror we see our double—an image of ourselves—and possibly a background and anyone else standing around. The doubled image moves and we can make judgements about it. “Our humanity as reflected in the mirror has shape, colour, texture, form, attitude, and emotion; it is even capable of limited movement within the mirror’s frame” (Barranger, 1995, p. 13). The theatre is not, in fact, just a fiction, but also both a performed world and an illusion of a real world at the same time.

Reflection *within* the theatrical process allows knowing to unfold and emerge and become more explicitly known. Knowledge about praxis becomes more tangible, and is made available for future deepened exploration, sitting there, smoldering. Thus, the process of metaxis, where many worlds exist in the each actor’s body, coincides with praxis, where possible actions are always emerging.

So it is in this world of praxis and metaxis, we see connections—in-between spaces, the person standing in front of the mirror, with their back to another mirror, reflecting on reflection. What happens to images of oneself and one’s world in this in-between space? Is ‘reflection’ enough? We turn to the metaphor of diffraction as a way into deepening our understandings of our praxis in this metaxic encounter.

### *Reflection as an Opening to New Worlds*

Playing within drama or theatrical forms means that we play in a vocabulary and aesthetic (which comes from the Greek word *aisthesis*, meaning perception or

sensation – a breathing in or taking in of the world). This language includes our responses to the image or stories presented. Sensing and imagining are one through an awakening of the sensing, imagining heart with a language expressing things which cannot be said in any other way; thus playing with/in the ambiguity of the visual, allowing others to write themselves into it. Thus, as expressive form, Image or story speaks, showing the shape it is in. “They announce themselves, bearing witness to their presence: ‘Look, here we are’” (Hillman, 1982, p. 102). This is a territory with its own laws, which are easily learned. We explore, fool around, muck about, hypothesize, juxtapose, and then retranslate the image back into a written or oral vocabulary. Image as a mode enlivens our experiences, returning us to confront our “animated faces” (p. 87). Subjectivity then is freed from the literal. Each image/story becomes a subject, “out there” performing in front of us. A story bears witness to itself in the image it offers, and its depth lies in the complexities of this image/story.

These notions of praxis, metaxis and transformation of our very perspective of looking at the world, and the world of our practice are implicit in all the book chapters. Each one is describing the use of theatre in transforming something or someone. In particular, David Wright raises fundamental questions about our worldview and how we might incorporate ecological consciousness into our praxis; Warren Linds and Tristan Khaner use embodied work to explore ethical practice in particular contexts; Lynn Fels asks students to be aware of moments of their experiences when time and space stop so that they are able to unpack that moment. That unpacking illustrates the above notion of articulation, so that these moments become moments of transformation that could be carried into daily life when similar moments occur. Rikke Gjørum and Gro Ramsdal look at rethinking communication strategies in workplaces, Ellie Friedland and Anne Hewson both ask in their chapters, through Image and Forum theatre and ‘re-playing’ educational experiences, their teacher education students to explore what it means to be ‘student’ and ‘teacher’.

### *Deepening Reflection*

One approach to engaging in a systematic way to praxis and metaxis is called the spiral model (Arnold, Burke, Martin & Thomas, 1991). It begins with personal experience, moves onto sharing those experiences in a group to find commonalities and differences, adding new theory and information to help understand the experience(s) and then plan for, and carry out action, thus creating a new experience to explore in a new spiral. Each iteration of the spiral takes the participant and the facilitator and the worlds they are exploring deeper and wider at the same time. Diffraction fits with such a spiral of learning as it is always recursive.

Argyris (1976), based on, among others, Bateson’s (1972) and Schön’s (1983, 1987) work, developed an approach to the dynamics of learning called triple loop learning. Single loop learning (following the rules) means small changes are made to specific practices or behaviours, based on what has or has not worked in the past.

This involves doing things better without necessarily examining or challenging our underlying beliefs and assumptions. Changes happen in improving procedures or rules. Double loop learning (changing the rules), individuals are able to reflect on whether the 'rules' should be changed, not only how to correct them. This kind of learning involves 'thinking outside of the box'. "To learn to double-loop learn implies learning to carry out the reflection on, and inquiry into, the governing variables, values and norms underlying organizational action" (Tosey, Visser, & Saunders, 2012, p. 5).

Triple-loop learning involves 'learning how to learn' by reflecting on how we learn in the first place, going beyond insights and patterns to looking at context and making corrective changes in the sets of alternatives from which choice is made. This is generative as this leads to an entirely new set of alternatives. This form of learning challenges us to understand how problems and solutions are related. It also challenges us to us understand how our previous actions might have created the conditions that led to our current situation. Here you would reflect on how you think about the 'rules', or your own operating assumptions and principles, not only on whether the rules should have been transformed.

Bateson (1972) in his model of Learning I, II, III, and IV extended this process in Learning IV to explore how reflection also happens "beyond language." He thus emphasized the role of the unconscious and the aesthetic, saying that learning entails the "double involvement" of primary process and conscious thought" (cited in Brockman, 1977, p. 61).

Furthermore, Kahane (2004) suggests there is a connection between loop learning and complexity. When there are low levels of complexity, single loop learning is often enough. When the levels of complexity in our work are high, it becomes more critical to be able to use double and triple-loop learning to working at a systemic level, accept that solutions emerge as situations unfold, and involve those concerned with the situation in developing the solutions. This points out that, although reflective practice and applied theatre are processes of engagement and transformation, outcomes are important to consider.

This connects to McIntosh's (2010) point that reflection is a three dimensional process and argues that we need to create "models which are more than flat, unidimensional propositions" (p. 177). This opens up the metaphor of reflection as light (and experience) reflecting back to other possibilities, including refraction and diffraction where light (and experience) bends and doubles back.

While all the chapters in this book are about relating the applied theatre process to particular skills or orientations in professional practice, several chapters take a particular approach to skills development. Kate Collier has developed an adaptation of Forum Theatre called Forum Learning whereby diabetes educators learn through theatrical processes strategies to help them deal with the complexities of working with their clients. Rikke Gjaerum and Gro Ramsdal use Forum Theatre to develop communicative strategies that would strengthen dialogue in workplace relationships. Ellie Friedland, Lynn Fels and Anne Hewson are all working with students becoming

teachers. Anne Hewson focuses on disciplinary practices in schools; Ellie Friedland uses Image Theatre to identify and critique actions and beliefs and motivations that underlie them in teaching in schools, and Lynn Fels asks students to reflect on Stop moments in their lives and reflect on how these might help inform their practice in whatever field they are in. Warren Linds and Tristan Khaner explore how embodied inquiry enables students in process consultation to examine how they live in, and relate to, the world of their practice. Alan and Maggie Newell work with theatre in order to help designers and engineers enable technology to be useful to older adults. Lastly, Elinor Vettrano and Brian, Lynn and Tracey look at their own practices as teachers in higher education settings through the 6 part storytelling method.

### *Reflection as Narrative, Storytelling and Metaphor*

Theatre is life's double, but it is also something more than a reflection of life. It is a form of art—a selected reflection. It is life's reflection organized meaningfully into stories and fictions. (Barrenger, 1995, p. 14)

Have you ever been in a situation where things didn't quite go to plan and yet you can't explain in a straight-forward way why? How many times have you reached for a metaphorical or fictional explanation to help make your point? How many times have you said the words: 'it's like ...' in these contexts? When we reflect on experiences we have had we often use metaphors and fictional narratives to explain what happened, not only to ourselves but also to others. Narrative is part of the human make-up; Geary (2011), for example, notes that we use around six metaphors every minute. Individuals often use metaphor to explain and describe how they feel, think and behave in different situations. Story creation and narrative are modes of expression and communication, they enable us to present ourselves and our histories to the world (Cobley, 2014) in ways that engender a shared knowing or understanding. Frequently used as tools for addressing a vast and diverse range of issues from deep rooted fears, through the traumas of conflict and the horrors of war, personal, fictional and metaphorical storytelling has offered people solace, a virtual stronghold to contain the challenges faced and a voice for truth and for their narratives to be heard.

'Narrative' and 'fiction' are not synonymous. Narratives are used to describe and reflect on real events. For example, narrative accounts of current and recent events are easy to explore as factual experiences. It is often possible to identify first hand narratives from individuals or groups present during particular experiences and also to critique documentation that has come from such experiences. Narrative accounts of events in the distant past are harder to examine factually because often information or data is not available or cannot be regarded as accurate (Cobley, 2014). In both cases, however, there is always the additional dimension of human interpretation. The way in which one individual reflects on an experience or event will be different from the way another individual views the same experience or event. Perhaps this

is where the element of fictionalisation occurs? Narratives are not necessarily 'fictional' but can contain representations and reflections that have occurred because of that individual's own connection with the experience. For example, the result of my reflection on an event would not appear as fictional to me but to someone else present in the same event, it may well appear as unreal because they did not experience the event in the same way.

Narrative is a form of representation for human communication and an aspect or approach of this representation is reflection. Cobley (2014) indicates that narrative as a reflective approach to representation is about giving meaning to people or places or things. The narrative used reflects the experiences that were part of a person's understanding of the people/place/thing. Using narrative and working with metaphor or fictionalising narrative can enable a fresh and non (or less) threatening view of a challenging situation. In turn, this offers individuals a chance to reflect on the way in which they have dealt with an interaction, event or experience. For example, Baron and Kassem (2004) explore the benefits that the reflective nature of story and narrative can bring to extremely traumatised situations through their work with the 'To Reflect and Trust (TRT)' storytelling group in Israel. Reflecting on work they did with Israeli and Palestinian students they show how the participants in their binational sessions were able to understand more about the internal differences that existed within the group of both nationalities. Members of the group expressed the desire to express more peaceful views outside of the narrative space created by the TRT group.

Fictionalised story and narrative also offers the individual a safe degree of distance between the real world situation explored in the story and the fictionalisation of the situation. The idea of having distance from the 'ownership' of your story provides an important space in which to explore 'what if' questions and, as Rogers (2012) indicates, is a way of contextualising and understanding our world. Informally, this is actually a way of thinking that is common-place; formalising it through a defined reflective process benefits the individual by a focus on capturing the new knowledge that emerges from the reflective moment. Throughout the book, there are examples of this one-step-removed, metaphorical experience of reflection. Often this links to the idea of having the space between thought and action discussed by Bolton (2010) in her argument against simple mirror-response.

While every chapter here contains some forms of stories of experiences, narrative and storytelling are particularly at the heart of Brian Leslie, Lynn Kelly and Tracey Small's chapter as well as Elinor Vettraino's. Working dramatically with the whole of or parts of stories created by educational leaders working through the 6 Part Story Method process offered aesthetic and temporal spaces to think, work, try and review experiences that had occurred to both the group participants and the facilitator/Joker/researcher/co-participant. Sara Breslow's journey through the creation of a theatrical documentary exploring environmental conflict in the Skagit Valley in Washington, U.S.A. throws a very different light on the concept of reflection as narrative as we

are taken through her experience of being both playwright and unintentional star and how that parallels the journey of the local peoples she is working with.

### *Reflection as Diffraction*

The metaphor of diffraction offers a response to a key challenge articulated by Barad (2007): “develop new ways of thinking about reflection that recognises the complexities and relational qualities of practice” (p. 89). Keevers & Treleaven (2011) suggest diffraction as an approach to deepened reflection as it is a “useful optical metaphor and tool for working within a relational ontology [that] extends understandings of critical reflexive practice” (p. 509). If we think of reflection as diffraction, we are drawn towards the physical phenomenon where light bends. For example, we sometimes see sun dogs in Northern winters. These sun dogs, also called parhelia, are patterns of light produced by the interaction of the sun with the dry cold air in the atmosphere. They “are visible when the sun is near the horizon and on the same horizontal plane as the observer and the ice crystals. As sunlight passes through the ice crystals, it is bent by 22 degrees before reaching our eyes” (Department of Atmospheric Sciences, UI-UC, 2010). This bending of light results in sundogs. (In fact, if the ice crystals are randomly oriented, a halo is observed.) The sundogs cannot be attributed to any one element in our world. This diffractive phenomenon speaks to entanglement, relationship, co-production and represent the effects of these intra-actions. (The same could be said of rainbows.)

Diffraction enables us to move beyond identifying what was present in an interaction to analyzing intra-actions as a process<sup>1</sup>. “Analysis shifts from concerns related to meaning to questions of production – what effects are produced in the entangled relations” (p. 509) that we are engaged with. Surprises, crises, and aha moments become welcomed as something to explore rather than to be seen a negative consequence to solve. Knowing how to respond then emerges. Practitioners are able to become responsive, “mindful in the midst of action” as a consequence of this process. We begin to look at “what are the conditions that produce dark places, where the diffraction patterns cancel each other out – where practitioners are confounded and cannot make the next move.”

Diffraction as a metaphor extends reflection into multiple dimensions. It foregrounds “entanglement, co-production and the relational qualities of practice” (p. 505). In that way, it enables us to see that “reflective practice can be directed other than back on itself, it can spread outwards, bend around corners and can be other than self-referential” (p. 518). Therefore, a diffractive process enables us to focus beyond ourselves towards the effects and consequences of our practices on others and on the systems in which we work. “It is this focus on the effects of practices that leads us to distinguish multiple forms of reflective practice that support the in-the-moment, embodied judgements that are made as practitioners decide to do next” (p. 507).

Applied theatre practices enable us to see that one cannot become detached, as we are embedded and entangled in the action. Orlikowski (2010) suggests replacing the notion of interaction with intra-action. This stresses that human and more-than-human in relationships are not distinct entities but entangled in each other. Boundaries that separate each other are then not “treated as pre-given, but as enacted” (Keevers & Treleaven, 2011, p. 508) in our relationships with others and the world we live in. Reflection, then “is not a detachment, a second thought, but an aesthetic and ethical act of participation in the world” (Bleakley, 2000, p. 328). This is a shift in emphasis from what we see or experience to a critical reflexivity, where we problematise action as it happens. This is a more complex and demanding form of reflexivity, where practice is conceived as artistry

The implications of this for reflection is that our attention then shifts from thinking back on our practice through the elements of actors, experience, tools and activity becomes a process of enacting through theatre the relationships, their patterns, who is excluded and included and the boundaries that are created by “the intra-actions making up complex communities” (Keevers & Treleaven, 2011, p. 508). Through this process, we then see that the world can be different, with different relationships and different practices.

The challenge then becomes, how might we reflexively study these relational patterns? How might we write about something that is less linear and more dynamic? One tempting response is to say this is not possible, that we should not attempt to translate the creative form into words, that something is lost in the translation. David Abram (1996), in his historical study of the phenomenon of literacy, suggests another path:

For those of us who care for an earth not encompassed by machines, a world of textures, tastes and sounds other than those that we have engineered, there can be no question of simply abandoning literacy, of turning away from all writing. Our task, rather, is that of taking up the written word, with all of its potency, and patiently, carefully, writing language back into the land. Our craft is that of releasing the budded, earthly intelligence of our words, freeing them to respond to the speech of the things themselves. (p. 274)

We take up this challenge, similarly, in writing about and through reflection as a multi-sensory, embodied activity.

### *The End of the Beginning ...*

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive at where we started and know the place for the first time. (Eliot, 1959, p. 59)

As we review the path we created by walking on it, what has become clear is that there is a diverse and complex range of possibilities that exist for practitioners to

engage in reflection through applied theatre processes. What follows in the chapters of this book will hopefully offer a new look at known processes.

## NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> Keevers and Treleaven (2011) suggest diffractive questions such as What are the effects or consequences of our actions? What are the effects of differences generated by our practice? Where do these practices appear to be moving? When and what differed from the expected? If we were to do x...what differences might those we work with notice? (All these questions can easily be incorporated into theatre practice and their debriefing)

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ANNE HEWSON

## 1. “YOU CAN’T MAKE ME!”

*Working with Scripts of Classroom Resistance in Forum Theatre*

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers are encouraged to be vigilant in a classroom setting so they can catch problematic behaviour before it escalates (Kounin, 1970). Reprimands, “logical consequences,” detentions, and other forms of punishment are used as means of enforcing desired behaviour, sometimes without any attempt to look for the wider circumstances accompanying the “infraction.” Students may comply because they feel fear or shame; alternatively they may resist in anger, starting the very escalation the teacher wishes to avoid. Students’ trust – in themselves and in the teacher – can be damaged by such interactions. Because secure relationships are essential to support the kind of neural growth needed for active learning, modes of discipline are therefore important to address in teacher education and parenting (Cozolino, 2013; Siegel 2007; Weinstein & Novodvorsky, 2011).

For several years, I have been using Forum Theatre strategies in teacher education classes to help teacher candidates critically examine some of the oppressive disciplinary practices in schools. While many acknowledge the importance of a quality relationship between teachers and students for the learning process, not all understand how traditional methods of discipline might adversely affect that relationship. Their tacit knowledge about how schools work, built on their extensive experience as students, may lead them to choose familiar punitive tactics when facing a problem in the classroom, tactics which may disturb, or even break, the rapport between them and their students. This chapter will explore how Forum Theatre may engage both the mind and body in the act of reflection, making it possible to identify preconceptions about classroom behaviour as participants seek effective, compassionate responses to difficulty. Attunement to others – Moreno’s quality of “tele” (Fox, 2008) – is the necessary condition for the emergence of “spontaneous compassion” (Varela, 1999) that enables teachers to respond ethically and well in a difficult moment.

### EMERGENCE OF A RESEARCH QUESTION

After our years as students in schools, we have acquired implicit understandings and beliefs about what teachers and students are supposed to do. When our experiences

have taught us that discipline means “coercion,” it can be difficult for those of us who return as teachers, desirous of using a different but unpractised approach, to respond otherwise in novel or stressful circumstances. Feeling the pressure to act quickly, we may resort to responses based on unconscious beliefs or habits. I once felt my “default position” of coercion when as a teacher I faced student resistance in a math class. I was a grade six French Immersion teacher for one year, responsible for teaching all subjects except music and gym. I had no teacher training in math, and it showed. One day four of the boys, bored and exasperated, asked (with a tone that some might interpret as rude) why they had to do the particular math process I was trying to clarify. I defensively responded, “Because it is on the test.” I was aware as I spoke those words what a lame excuse it was. I was conscious of my desperation to keep the class on track, fearful of having a full-scale math mutiny. I have no memory of how I physically felt, but since my typical response to anxiety back then was to *not feel*, I am not surprised. The problem, thankfully, did not escalate; the relationship I had developed with these students through the teaching of other subjects probably allowed us to continue without incident.

Years later I can interpret my response in terms of Britzman’s (2003) three cultural myths about teaching: because it did not occur to me to consider the possibility of being honest about what I did not know, I was unconsciously playing the role of “teacher as expert;” I enacted the idea of the “teacher as self-made” by not consulting with colleagues; and finally, by not inviting student feedback on the problem, I was behaving as if “everything depends on the teacher.” Such tacit beliefs are examples of what Siegel (2007) would call “top-down influences.” They can impede our responsiveness to our “bottom-up experiences,” as was demonstrated by my inability to effectively address the needs of the students in math class. Using Varela’s framework of ethical know-how (1999), the enactment of these beliefs might also be understood as manifestations of ego, preventing me from spontaneously connecting with these students, or responding with care. However, such habits of *thought* can be dissolved like any habit, with the right kind of attention (Siegel, 2007).

Many Classroom Management (CM) texts suggest avoiding discipline problems by establishing a positive rapport with students and making instruction engaging. Much research has been conducted, and many books written, about effective instructional methods. Cothran (2003) however, claims that the discussion and development of the interpersonal skills necessary to build quality teacher-student relationships is largely absent from teacher education programs. One popular text, *Cooperative Discipline* (Albert, 1996), has a short chapter discussing the importance of “connection” (p. 13–17). Canter’s book, *Assertive Discipline* (2010), places its one chapter on relationships in a larger section entitled “Working with Difficult Students.” While there is no doubt that attunement is important when working with students in difficulty, the concept is important to the entire teaching enterprise. There are newer textbooks that advocate “caring” as a foundational value and consider the teaching of social-emotional skills in school to be important (Weinstein, Romano

& Mignano, 2011; Weinstein & Novodvorsky, 2011; McDonald, 2013). However, without an experiential exploration or explicit modeling by instructors, the learning may be forgotten as pre-service teachers are socialized in the process of “managing behaviour” during their practice teaching in schools. Additionally, there is no guarantee that university supervisors or the teachers with whom the pre-service teachers work as they learn to teach will explicitly “celebrate” (as cited in Weinstein & Novodvorsky, 2011) these or other aspects of relationship building when they happen.

The importance of actively working towards the feeling of having students *with* you became a conscious realization for me only during doctoral studies. I was fascinated with the intuitive, implicit knowing that teachers spontaneously enacted when responding to students. I asked the following research question (Hewson, 2001, p. ii). If the practical knowledge teachers demonstrate in their classrooms is a kind of “knowing-in-action” that we are characteristically unable to make verbally “explicit” (Schön, 1987, p. 25),

- what form of educational theory may best serve those who are struggling to learn how to teach?
- how does a teacher educator help to make such tacit knowledge conscious and available for pre-service teachers?

In an attempt to find an answer, I observed a Drama teacher educator teach his methods course and shadowed him on his supervisory visits to schools. Keen to express the “language of the body in the language of the mind” (Shapiro, 1999), I used narrative, poetry, and Reader’s Theatre in the documenting of the project, writing a dissertation that was, at the time, somewhat unconventional in its form. Certain representational conventions for writing a thesis needed dissolving in a number of ways so that I might do justice to my lived experience. I believe I was attempting to awaken those 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> senses of body sensation, emotional awareness and relatedness—all senses that Siegel considers important for the process of reflection (2007, 2012). The playing with representational form of the thesis might also embody a beginning dissolution of the egocentric teacher position represented by Britzman’s (2003) three cultural myths.

Recently, when I returned to the thesis to conduct a search of the word “rapport,” I found its highest incidence in an analysis of the teacher educator’s supervisory visit with a pre-service teacher who was feeling lost teaching drama. The teacher educator was attempting to coach her, not only in establishing rapport, but in searching for concrete signs that would answer the question, “Are they *with* me?” Looking back on this case, I see three important things that Ned (pseudonym) modeled for me: he drew attention to students’ actions and responses; he made suggestions about structuring the lesson material to make it more engaging; and, after giving the student Danielle (pseudonym) time to share her insecurities, he helped her plan a response to move her past this state. Ned challenged her perception of the students

being “against” her, underlining instead the reason for her uncertainty as being the discomfort she—and they—were feeling with the processes and content of the drama curriculum (Hewson, 2001, p. 168):

*Ned:* This is where some of your drama background is holding you back, because you’ve been very comfortable with a script.

*Danielle:* Yes.

*Ned:* We don’t have a script in the classroom, okay? [laughs] We have human beings that are going to go in any direction, and we’re not sure where they’re going to go. And it is doubly hard when you have [the teacher associate] or me or Anne sitting in the room [because you’re] saying all right. Now I’m performing because someone is watching me.

During his supervisory visits, Ned continuously monitored emotional states and addressed them. He modeled learned optimism; he encouraged the sharing of feelings and the naming emotions; he helped beginning teachers move beyond the focus on self, a focus often exacerbated by fear of evaluation; and he continually coached his pre-service teachers to establish, maintain, and when necessary repair, rapport. Two weeks after this conversation with Danielle, he *celebrated* her breakthrough with this class.

In doing an intensive observation study with this master teacher educator, I learned much more than I could consciously articulate at the time. When we observe the intentional actions of others, we activate areas within our own brain that correspond to the performance of the same actions, and to the processing of the same emotional states (Iacaboni, 2009). I was intensively rehearsing for my own teacher education practice, establishing an implicit repertoire of actions and responses that I have most definitely called upon in my own teaching and supervising. This learning was within the very comfortable working relationship that Ned and I established and maintained for the duration of the research project. In neurobiological terms, I experienced the attunement necessary to establish this large, complex block of implicit learning. I feel much gratitude for this experience as I write; I think about our pre-service teachers needing that kind of working relationship for their own learning in a classroom setting and not always having it. Conversely, they may have a fine relationship with the cooperating teacher, but may pick up questionable “scripts” for action.

I take Ned’s statement about not having scripts in the classroom as an ideal for which to aim. The reality is that there are many scripts intersecting a classroom space: attentional and behavioural habits; personal histories that can often distort our interpretation of what is going on in the present moment; prejudices and biases; cultural capital and habitus – they are all what Siegel (2007) and Goleman (2006) would call “top-down influences,” preconceptions arising from the implicit learning that happens in everyday life. Perhaps the best we can do, when scripts get in the way, is to practice dropping them. Siegel (2007) suggests that paying attention to what is felt in the moment can help us become aware of these “top-down impediments,” and may even lead to their dissolving.

In teacher education, reflective writing assignments are frequently used to encourage pre-service teachers to think back on their experiences in the classroom. Tremmel (1993) suggests they write “slices of classroom life” in two stages, to help them focus attention on the qualities of classroom life, since he believes such attention allows us to be more responsive as teachers. Writing, however, can be a more difficult way of awakening this kind of reflection, as I learned in writing the dissertation. It is an action, and like any action can carry preconceptions which make discernment difficult. While narrative deconstruction is possible to teach and to learn, Forum Theatre’s relational arena of action may better provide beginning teachers with an introduction to the process of attending and responding to students’ needs in the moment.

#### A FORUM THEATRE PROJECT: CONTEXT, METHOD, AND STORIES

Currently, I work in a small education faculty that has a yearly cohort of 75–90 students. The Bachelor of Education programme is intense, squeezing sixty credit hours of work into three condensed semesters over ten months. This workload includes a seven and a half week teaching practicum following both the first and second semester. The programme is post-degree, meaning that our students already possess at least one degree and some life experience, including teaching or volunteer work with younger people. The students have been separated into two streams (elementary and secondary), to facilitate the scheduling of compulsory courses. I teach a compulsory CM course in which students explore creating a positive learning environment in the classroom and learn about methods of dealing with students deemed “difficult.” My choice to use Forum Theatre strategies as a means of exploring problematic classroom situations, was, at first, simply an effort to introduce something interactive and experiential into the course.

Forum Theatre (FT) is part of a larger repertoire of theatrical strategies known as the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), created by Brazilian director Augusto Boal (1979). Actors (*Teacher-Actors*) present scenes depicting issues or problems, but no solutions. After a first run-through, the facilitator (*Joker*) invites participants to watch again and call for a pause at any point where they would like the actors to try a different strategy or direction. Alternatively, they may choose to try their strategy for themselves, and replace the *protagonist* who is fighting the oppression. Some might believe that in teacher education we are in fact conducting “Theatre of the Oppressor” (Schutzmann, 1994), since we typically only ever replace or make suggestions for the teacher/antagonist. However, our goal is always to bring about a response in which the student feels cared for, respected, acknowledged. As we tune in to students’ body language and emotions, we can begin feeling empathy for them. Based on the number of stories from participants’ own school days that these scenarios generate, it seems that they find it easy to identify with what the students “undergo” in our scenes. This work therefore, may have the potential to undo some instances of “internal oppression” – what Moreno

(Fox, 2008) would call “conserves”, Siegel (2007) “preconceptions,” and Boal (1995) “Cops in the Head.”

After an enthusiastic response to FT from the pre-service teachers in the first year, I designed a small Action Research process, with a two-fold purpose: 1) to improve my facilitation skills and 2) to discover what could be learned about teaching by using this medium. I taped and transcribed FT classes; I invited a colleague, a teacher who had received permission from her school board to teach education courses at our university, to sit in and then dialogue with me afterwards about what had happened in during the class. Students wrote exit slips (the equivalent of a journal entry) to hand in at the end of each class and I kept a journal for the duration of the course. Because I have been exploring the cultivation of attention to what is happening as we teach, noticing how we are feeling and responding in the present moment, I have used arts-based and narrative-based methodologies as appropriate modalities within the Action Research frame for the exploration of the research questions and for the dissemination of the work (Hewson, 2007, 2008). These modalities permit “the *enhancement of perspectives*” (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 96) that allow the reader/spectator to access detail of interaction, time and context – information that is essential to the situated, practical knowledge of teaching (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000).

In small groups, participants would share stories of school problems, shape one or two of these into a typical FT scenario, ending the vignette with the crisis at its peak. Titles were written on the board, providing a “running order” for the initial performance. The stories participants recalled from their school days were mostly about resisting the teacher’s directives in some way, as can be surmised from this list of this list of titles from one FT module:

- The Straw that Broke the Camel’s Back
- Showdown in Shop Class
- Sabotage!
- The Young and the Determined
- The Breaking Point
- “You’re not My Teacher!”
- “Don’t Fence me In!”
- What’s the Magic Word? “NO!”
- Mutiny
- Class Gone Wild
- “You Can’t Make Me”

As I documented the project, I read in students’ written responses an appreciation for this work, despite some initial hesitations about “acting”: they enjoyed the wide-ranging discussions of possible solutions, and were beginning to recognize how complex teaching problems may be examined from multiple perspectives – including the often-overlooked viewpoint of the student. Those playing these roles

are often stunned at how authentic and intense the feelings can be. Following is a FT scene that provoked such a response in actors and audience alike.

*A Forum Theatre Scenario: The “F#\*% You” Story*

It is High School physics class, and as students are filing in, the teacher is writing notes on the board. The actors playing student roles are cheerful and chatty – all except one who seems sullen. He goes to his seat and slumps there, ignored by others. The teacher then addresses the class, asking everyone to open their books, and he starts lecturing. When he notices that the sullen student’s book is still closed, he approaches him to quietly request that he open it. Without waiting for a response, he strolls back to his original position at the board, still talking, but the student has not complied. Two minutes later, the teacher repeats the same stroll, the same request, the same return. The student’s response is to slump further in the desk. Now the teacher is keeping his eyes mostly on the “boy” while he talks. Finally he says in a voice that all can hear, “Really Tim (pseudonym), time to open the book and get with it.” Tim just looks at him calmly, stonily in the eye, and says, with astonishing venom, “Fuck YOU!” There is an audible gasp from the audience of pre-service teachers when Tim, a quiet, likeable man, responds as a character that is not at all congruent with the Tim they know. The scene ends there.

The man who played the teacher had been surprised by the strength of his feelings when Tim swore at him:

Tim actually did a great job of being realistic, because it was his scenario that we had discussed. So we knew exactly how that student looked at him and spoke to him and reacted and everything, so Tim did a perfect portrayal. And yes, I was slightly shocked. I was preparing myself for it, so I didn’t expect to be shocked at all. So when I was, I paused for a second or two, just to gain myself back, and then I was like, okay, now what do I do? (Focus group, March 2006)

I was astonished to learn that the quiet man who had played the student had in fact been the teacher who had had the problem! In an email, he reflected on what he had gained from the FT experience:

By putting myself in the student’s role I was able to see how a teacher’s reasonable request might be viewed as confrontational or irrational to a student who is so absorbed with other problems. This helped me understand that in some situations, the best thing a teacher can do is relax the rules and give the student some space. The teacher can then pick the time and the place to discuss the matter and cool heads on both sides of the equation would prevail. (Tim, Email Correspondence, March 2006)

I continue to use this simple but dramatic story scenario as a teaching story. This year I used it as the class's introduction to FT early on in the CM course. The student played it as if he had had a fight with his girlfriend. The response eliciting the most support from the audience came when the teacher took the student aside and asked with concern what was happening for the student. He then gave him a few moments to let the emotions settle, telling him to join when he was ready. In an exit slip, one pre-service teacher named the teacher's strategy and comments that it does not quite feel "natural":

Supporting resistance is a good reaction but not necessarily something intuitive. Having a quiet area in the class is something I would not have thought of but after thinking about it I do see the value in it and realize that for some students this could make or break some days in class. (Student 14, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013)

Another pre-service teacher creates a potential opening for reflection on the power of labels to script behaviour:

The idea of supporting resistance is intriguing to me as there are undoubtedly going to be situations where we are faced with extremely "oppositional students" or more appropriately "students who appear oppositional." (Student 15, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013)

A third pre-service teacher sees the power of caring to help students open up:

There are a number of ways to deal with this kind of conflict, but the most effective ways concern compassion. When Bob took Ethan aside (pseudonyms for this year's characters) and let Ethan know that he was cared for, the real problem at hand began to surface. It is the skill of getting to the root of things quickly that teachers need in order to properly manage a class. (Student 16, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013)

We finished our discussion by exploring how this problem might be entirely avoided by having a teacher simply greet and connect with students as they arrive in class.

### *The Dissolving of a Research Script*

One year, an Elementary stream class who were not comfortable acting as young children in our Forum Theatre scenarios asked me to turn off the camera. I am now deeply grateful to that class for their request, for it allowed the "script" of the FT project to dissolve. The following year, I kept the camera still off, and found I was beginning to integrate FT and TO strategies throughout the course rather than restricting these activities to the end, a structure that had been suggested by the University Ethics Committee. Some of the exercises I now regularly do came spontaneously to me in class during those years.

In one such activity, I explain that we will set up three groups engaging in three different conversations, and I ask for three volunteers to step out of the room while

we are getting ready. Once conversations are underway, I will invite the three volunteers to return and join one group each. Their task is simply take note of the feelings they are experiencing in their bodies. When the three have left the room, the remaining students are divided into three groups: Group 1 welcomes the individual, centering the conversation on him or her, giving the individual sustained warmth and attention. The second group shows an initial interest, and then proceeds to ignore the person, giving just cursory affirmations should he or she continue to try integrating into the group. The third group shuts the person out completely.

When the three volunteers share how being welcomed or ignored makes them feel, it elicits recollections and stories from others in the class. The exercise puts them briefly into the shoes of their future students, adding an emotional dimension to the discussion of how teachers go about making a welcoming learning environment; it begins our exploration of the concepts of empathy and attunement.

After I tried this exercise for the first time, what emerged next was the group’s fear of losing control when facing a class of students. In response I asked for a volunteer to exit the room. On a signal, he or she would return as a teacher walking into a Middle School class for the first time, and was simply to notice how he or she felt. Afterwards the volunteer would share what bodily sensations they had immediately upon walking into the room. Once the volunteer was outside, I quietly asked the class to be happily chaotic, throwing paper planes if they wished, and purposefully ignoring the teacher. When the person returned, I let this play out for just sixty seconds so that he or she could easily recall the felt bodily response to the scenario. The exercise allows us to discuss how to deal with the fear response that many feel in their bodies, the fear that many profess to have about losing control of their classes. Even though it is a simulation with adults, people comment on the authenticity of the actors’ emotions, and their own resonance with those feelings as they watch. Other “feeling tones” may for be used for this experiment: participants can walk in to find students being frustrated, resistant, anxious or bored. The experiment affords me the opportunity to introduce the idea of “mirror neurons” and the complex circuitry that allows us to observe the intentional actions of others and understand their intentions and feelings (Goleman, 1996; Iacoboni, 2009); it is also an introduction to the ideas that 1) how we feel is something to be managed (emotional regulation, self-presentation), and 2) how what our students feel is important “data” for us to gather, letting it help us determine how to respond (connection, empathy, attunement).

This exercise primed me for asking people in later Forum Theatre scenarios what they were experiencing in their bodies, something that I did not do in the earlier videotaped classes, as evidenced by the transcripts I had made of the discussions. The following week in the elementary CM class, as we worked through the staged story of a young child diving under a table and refusing a teacher’s request to put her coat on, I drew attention to how the individual playing the child would either inch forward or back, depending on the teacher’s strategy, and would be either louder or softer in her verbal protests. The woman playing the child happened to have a lot of theatrical experience; however, in the second section of the CM course that day,

I noted an equally authentic response from an individual with no theatre background. He was playing a High School student who was clowning around and distracting others from their work. He would lean forward, or recoil, or smile in response to different teacher interventions, and I pointed out these reactions to the class.

Reading body language and emotion is something that most of us implicitly do in social interactions (Goleman, 2006). Becoming consciously aware of such information allows teachers to better assess the effects of our interventions. The pausing or freezing of action in Forum Theatre work may create a space to practice the kind of attention necessary to *feel* what is happening in the moment, and to name it. If the Joker asks the “teachers” in these classroom scenarios what they are feeling, they turn inward to answer that question, thereby practicing *intrapersonal attunement* (Siegel, 2007), a state that can easily be disrupted in situations provoking anxiety or anger. When the Joker asks the “students” how they are feeling in response to a teacher’s action, and particularly if the Joker asks audience members to look for the physical and physiological signs of those feelings, the “teachers” are becoming aware of the kind attentional focus necessary for creating *interpersonal attunement*. Having gathered the “data” from within and without, it is easier to gauge the value of what one has done, and to determine what to try next. If we name strategies without first developing this bodily base of awareness, we are adding to the abundant list of recipe-like “scripts” that already exist in the field of classroom management.

## CONCLUSION

*“Awake the Kraken!”*

Our Drama Across the Curriculum Class is discussing a case study, “Finding a Focus through Play building,” taken from “Learning to Teach Drama: A Case Narrative Approach.” It documents a pre-service teacher’s struggle to establish a working relationship with a grade nine drama class. One of the exercises tried on the first day was a sound collage entitled “Rain Forest.” Students stand in a circle with their backs to the centre and think of a sound that they can make appropriate to this particular environment. On a cue they begin, listening to, coordinating with, one another so as to make this representation in sound as realistic as possible. It apparently did not work until the fifth try, because “at least one person could not resist making a stupid remark or deliberately destroying the rhythm” (p. 37).

In class, I choose a modified Forum Theatre route; I ask people to volunteer for a sound collage of a peaceful rain forest, and for one individual to purposefully shatter the mood. Kevin (pseudonym) is happy to oblige; after some minutes of a beautifully serene rain forest, he unfolds his arms with a grand gesture and loudly proclaims, “Awake the Kraken!” We all laugh, here, in our comfortable drama class. What does the laughter mean? What has been implicitly understood here?

The depiction of the rain forest was performed with “angelic” intent. It was then paired with an overly dramatic pronouncement of impending chaos. Kevin may be

making an allusion to John Wyndham’s science fiction novel, “The Kraken Wakes,” but the Kraken is in fact a mythological, nightmarish creature that supposedly rises to the surface of the ocean when disturbed by ships, swamping them with its huge tentacles and devouring the sailors. The class as a collective seems to have performed and recognized the drama teacher’s idealistic expectations for students’ behaviour, and the “monstrous” fears she/he had of losing control.

I ask people to think of what a teacher might try in these circumstances. Someone immediately steps forward into role, saying accusingly, “Why did you do that?” This Drama course takes place in the second semester after the first practicum. I do not get such swift responses to the invitation in the first semester classroom management courses; in fact, many participants tend to prefer making suggestions from their seats. By keeping the teacher role “vacant” this time I have made it more accessible for “walk-ons.” I turn to ask the “resister” how the question from the teacher makes him feel. He tells us that it feels confrontational, and it would quite likely make him want to disrupt again in this exercise, and maybe in others. I ask for another response. Someone from the audience adds that it might encourage others to adopt this tactic. As Joker I could have checked with the other “students” but do not in this instance. Instead I invite someone else to try something different, and we play it again.

Another person steps forward, this time to greet the student response with laughter. “That’s funny,” he says. I wonder what the Kraken might sound like in an urban setting. Can we try that?” They indulge in a purposeful cacophony that soon has them all in stitches. I ask the teachers if this looks like it worked. They agree it does. I do not, in this course, ask them for the body language they are witnessing; instead, I ask them to name this strategy. Three of them offer three different verbs, which we decide to keep: support, surprize, redirect. It is interesting that the individual who was so quick to step forward with this strategy was the same one who played the explosive student in the “F... You” scenario during term one. The “disruptor,” meantime, is still “glowing” with the energy of the marauding Kraken. I ask if he felt acknowledged. Smiling, he confirms that he did, and that he would quite likely be cooperative with this teacher.

Sometimes with the right kind of attention, a Kraken can dissolve back into the sea and reorganize its energies, to emerge as a creative force supporting the travels of sailors.

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## **2. TRANSFORMING REFLECTION THROUGH A FORUM THEATRE LEARNING APPROACH IN HEALTH EDUCATION**

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will illustrate how a modified form of Forum Theatre, Forum Learning, was employed as an educational strategy at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) to stimulate critical, reflective learning in students who were diabetes educators, health professionals involved in educating patients who have diabetes.

Forum Theatre was developed in the late 1960's by Augusto Boal (1979) initially to help poor and disenfranchised groups of people in Brazil realise there were practical options and strategies that could be employed to help change their situation. The theatre technique employed by Boal in Forum Theatre encouraged participants in groups to develop improvised scenes that depicted their personal experience of being oppressed. It then challenged them to replay and alter the outcome of these scenarios so the participants could explore other ways of dealing with and improving, their situation. Change is promoted through "critical consciousness, exploring and rehearsing alternatives and seeking possibilities for future action" (Strawbridge, 2000, p. 11).

Later, when working in Europe with different participants who were not materially and politically oppressed in the same way as the poor of South America, Boal modified his Forum Theatre approach. He identified that privileged participants were oppressed less by external factors than by internal influences such as their limited perspectives. Boal (1995) identified these mental limitations as being like a "cop in the head" which prevented people from seeing how ideologies presented in the media for example, restricted their choices and power to act and challenge so called 'established truths'. Boal adjusted to this new European context and adapted his theatre strategies to focus more on therapeutic learning. He continued to adapt and further develop his theatre techniques to meet the changing needs of the people and places he worked. Forum Theatre therefore, is presented as a flexible model that can be used in educationally diverse situations "for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions" (Boal, 1995, p. 15).

Diabetes educators are not a conventionally oppressed group but they often work in extremely difficult circumstances with a wide range of people, where resources, especially the time they have with diabetes patients, are often inadequate to deal with

the educational challenge of helping these people change their lives. The stresses involved in their professional practice can lead diabetes educators feeling they are not in control, which is a form of disempowerment. Therefore, a modified form of Boal's Forum Theatre approach can be seen to be a relevant strategy to use with diabetes educators. It has the potential to empower them so they can "take control of their lives and change prevailing power relations" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 71) through an exploration new possibilities and approaches to their professional practice.

I modified the Forum Theatre approach to meet the learning needs of the diabetes educators I was working with and named this strategy Forum Learning. The modifications made use of the Forum Theatre arts strategy to emphasise its reflective learning potential rather than the political dimensions or therapeutic aspects of the approach, though these were often also present in some form.

Theatre, in the form of drama-in education, has been employed systematically as a learning strategy in educational institutions since the 1950's (Bolton, 1979; Byron, 1986; Heathcote, 1984; Slade, 1954; Way, 1967) and applied in a variety of subject areas such as History, English and Social Science to teach specific content, and explore social, and personal relationships within a dramatic context. In the sphere of Adult Education where I work and the students are mature age, the learning emphasis tends to be on using their life experience as a basis to reflect and learn (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). The Forum Learning approach I developed therefore focuses on learning through critical reflection.

I specifically designed Forum Learning as an educational tool to help diabetes educators reflect and practically examine the relationships and communication complexities involved in motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing is a person-centered, goal-orientated method of communication for eliciting and strengthening intrinsic motivation for positive change. The primary goal of motivational interviewing is to draw out from the patient their reasons for concern and the arguments they find convincing for change (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). This technique is used to encourage a change in attitude in diabetes patients towards their lifestyle choices. These choices can be extremely difficult for diabetes clients to accept. They often fail to recognise the alterations that need to be made in their lives to ensure their future wellbeing and how to implement change as this challenges their existing, strongly established belief patterns and behaviours. Consequently, promoting perceptual change in their clients is a major professional challenge for diabetes educators. The dramatic form of Forum Learning offers the possibility of helping diabetes educators look at the complex situations they encounter with their clients in multiple ways and to 'reflect-in-action' as well as 'reflect after' as is more usual, in the post-activity discussions. When the diabetes educators play out and observe different possibilities within a problematic scenario in Forum Learning, it has the potential to stimulate critical reflection and transformational learning: "observing itself, the human being perceives where it is, discovers where it is not, and imagines where it could go" (Boal, 1995, p. 13).

Transformation is stimulated by “an unexpected situation that makes you think differently about something you have taken for granted up to that point” (Brookfield, 2012). Transformational learning involves learners in reflective practices that challenge established patterns of thinking and as a consequence can promote attitudinal change (Mezirow, 2000). “The human being alone possesses this faculty for self-observation in an imaginary mirror” (Boal 1995, p. 13).

This chapter will describe the professional context of the learning, the theoretical principles that inform Forum Theatre and how it was modified into Forum Learning and implemented in practice as a reflective learning approach in this context. Finally it will demonstrate, through written feedback collected from participants, how the Forum Learning approach can promote transformative learning through the multiple reflective approaches offered by this strategy.

### THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CONTEXT

The Graduate Certificate in Diabetes Education and Management has been offered to students at UTS for the past twelve years. It consists of four compulsory subjects that are completed within one year and the program is delivered on-line and through two four day face-to-face workshops in Brisbane and Sydney. One of the unique features of the program was that it was developed and taught by Adult Education and Health specialists so students were presented with contrasting learning approaches both in the way content was presented and the kind of educational focus adopted. The Adult Education approach used experience-based learning strategies, including drama, to explore the challenges of facilitating learning in the diabetes health context, and had a strong focus on reflective practice. Health used lecture-based learning with a focus on experts in the field sharing their knowledge and professional experience.

The students who attend the Graduate Certificate in Diabetes Education and Management program come from diverse professional backgrounds that include nurse educators, dietitians, physical exercise specialists, pharmacists, podiatrists and doctors. This is indicative of the multi-professional approach that is required to deal with this complex disease, which can over time affect the overall health of diabetics. All those who enrol in the program are already qualified health professionals, are usually experienced practitioners in their chosen specialism and in many cases are already either formally or informally, involved in diabetes education. These mature-age students are looking to add another specialist health qualification to the ones they already have.

The field of diabetes education is also diverse. Practitioners work in many different settings: in public and private hospitals and doctors’ surgeries; in community centres and specialist diabetes education centres; in remote areas of Australia with indigenous communities and in inner-city settings with a range of age groups and people from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The focus of their work is to ensure their patients understand what it means to have diabetes, how it can impact on their health and how to manage it effectively in their everyday lives. This

involves not only educating patients on how to medicate and monitor their condition but also how to change their diet and lifestyle to sustain their health into the future and prevent the occurrence of further medical complications.

Recent health policy changes (Lee & Dunston, 2010, 2011) have directed health professionals to adopt a patient-centred learning approach to health care (Ford, Schofield, & Hope, 2002; Morris, Dalton, Govern, & Symons, 2010). This means that the health educator acts as a facilitator who informs, encourages and supports patients to take responsibility for maintaining their health into the future. In many cases the patient has to make huge changes to their lives, radically altering what they eat, how they exercise and their intake of alcohol and cigarettes. Not surprisingly, many patients resist making these changes and altering patterns of behaviour developed over a lifetime. This makes the job of the diabetes educator a particularly challenging one, and depending on the level of funding available, they may only have between two to four half hour sessions with a patient to achieve these goals. These time constraints, and the magnitude of the learning brief, can be disempowering for the diabetes educator. There is a tendency for the educator to cope with these challenges by taking control of the situation and telling the patient what they should know and do. This prevents the patient from making their own choices and decisions and consequently disempowers them and restricts the learning and subsequent behaviour changes that can occur.

The complex communication and relationship skills that diabetes educators need to develop to meet these professional challenges is an area that I taught on the Graduate Certificate in Diabetes Education and Management program. Presenting the topic in a theatre form such as Forum Learning gives the learning that occurs a special reflective focus because “theatre is more visible, more vivid than (life) on the outside.” It presents a view of life that is “simultaneously the same thing and somewhat different” so demands to be noticed and reflected upon (Brook, 1998, p. 11). Importantly, in relation to Boal’s Forum Theatre approach, Forum Learning remains a strategy that focuses on empowerment and the ability to find areas of change in oppressive situations.

Before describing the process of Forum Learning in more detail and how it was employed with diabetes educators, it is necessary to take a step back and examine the theoretical basis for this practice and the importance of Boal’s Forum Theatre in the development of the modified Forum Learning approach.

#### THE CONCEPT AND PROCESS OF BOAL’S FORUM THEATRE

Forum Theatre was deliberately designed as an educational process but was not intended to be “didactic in the in the old sense of the word and style, but pedagogic, in the sense of collective learning” (Boal, 1995, p. 7). It presents a dramatic form where “the spectators intervene directly in the dramatic action and act” (Boal, 1979, p. 126) and was devised as a means of empowerment through the practice of actions

that might lead to a possibility of change. It is this focus on practice that may lead to change that I saw as most relevant to the needs of diabetes educator.

Boal renamed the participants who take part in his dramatic events ‘spect-actors’. This term is used to stress the dual nature of the performance process: it is to do with action but also with watching action and being critically aware at the same time that “theatre is born when the human being discovers that it can observe itself; when it discovers that, in this act of seeing, it can see itself *in situ*: see itself seeing” (1995, p. 13).

It is the strategies that Boal used to promote critical learning through theatrical form that I believe have most impact on the potential learning for diabetes educators and which I incorporated into the Forum Learning approach. The key reflection strategies taken from Boal were: Image Theatre development and analysis, which in my work is referred to as ‘Still Pictures’ (Neelands & Goode, 1990), the improvisation of alternative scenarios and the facilitator as ‘Joker’. These strategies are described briefly below.

The body is the starting point for Forum Theatre. Participants in small groups are asked to create frozen images of an event that has particular significance for them in terms of demonstrating an unresolved “social or political error” (Boal, 1992, p. 18). Although the facilitator suggests a learning focus, it is the participants who choose and decide how to interpret the experience they wish to represent. They are the creators, the actors and the directors of the scenario, so they determine how the images should be presented. However, they are given analytical feedback from and are influenced by other participants and this encourages reflection on what has been created.

The Still Pictures are gradually developed into improvised scenarios that show the unresolved problem in action. Then the ‘game’ of Forum Theatre really begins. The aim of this exercise is to challenge the ‘vision of the world’ presented by the performers. This happens when a member of the audience intervenes in the action and offers a different vision, another possibility of what could have happened, to challenge the moment of oppression that has been portrayed. The audience member takes over the part of the oppressed person in the piece and re-plays the scene with the changes she envisaged. The actor who has been replaced does not retire immediately “but stays on the sidelines as a kind of coach or supporter, to encourage the spect-actors and correct them if they go wrong” (Boal, 1992, p. 20).

Other audience members can then offer different suggestions and try to find a solution to the problem. Alternatives are practiced in action and then discussed. It is this connection between doing and critiquing that is at the heart of the Forum Theatre learning process.

The problems depicted in Forum Theatre may or may not be resolved but the value of the process resides in how the complexities inherent in any situation are revealed and how theatre is able to demonstrate the many ways of approaching or thinking about them. Boal (1992, p. 237) suggests that Forum Theatre should generate “a

dialog about the oppression, an examination of alternatives, and a ‘rehearsal’ for real situations.”

Overseeing the action is the facilitator who Boal names the ‘Joker’—‘the director/master of ceremonies’ (Boal, 1992, p. 237). She is responsible for ensuring that the Forum Theatre process and its specific rituals are adhered to. The ‘Joker’s role is also to provide a pragmatic ‘sounding board’ for the suggested solutions that the group proposes in Forum Theatre and checks that they are not using ‘the rules of magic’ to solve problems. This refers to solutions that are impractical and unrealistic. For example, a group of participants who are exploring problems they are having with their managers at work decide they are going to win the lottery and will never work again!

Forum Theatre therefore, can provide a valuable learning framework for diabetes education students. It introduces participants to the key elements of theatre form but in a way that is less likely to intimidate either participants or facilitators who are unused to working in this way. It allows participants a great deal of autonomy by letting them decide what scenarios relating to their experience, should be explored. It also encourages them to engage in problem-solving and deal with issues that arise in the scenario so they determine what is learned through this process. Forum Theatre does this in a manner that both challenges and protects the participants by finding a balance between how engaged or detached they are from the drama. It is Forum Theatre’s ability to detach participants from the drama whilst they are still in it that encourages critical, reflective learning.

Those participating in Forum Theatre are drawn into the drama because they choose the topic to be explored. This could be seen as dangerous as the participants could relate so closely to the topic under consideration that they are unable to separate fiction from reality. Boal uses theatre form to counter this. He avoids using ‘now time’ which is the most difficult dramatic time in which to operate as it so closely resembles that of real life. Instead he utilises the Still Picture convention. This freezes the action and stresses the artifice of theatre form and represents past and future time modes. The movement into ‘now time’, is very gradual and because the emphasis is on including only the elements that are essential to communicating meaning, the symbolic aspect of theatre is stressed and acts as a distancing device.

One of the other key elements of theatre that Boal uses in Forum Theatre is the suspension of form. This creates a sense of dramatic tension as time after time the drama is stopped, replayed but not completed. Instead it is presented again and again, allowing a further exploration of its form and meaning to take place. Boal claims that “in theatre any break stimulates” (1979, p. 170). It forces the participant to momentarily move out of the drama and look at it from the outside as an audience does. This helps the participants sustain a psychic distance from the event and encourages reflection.

Forum Theatre provides a model of learning that empowers participants to create their visions of what the world could be rather than what it now is. This is done in a

critical, pragmatic way that does not allow participants through the ‘rules of magic’ to create unrealistic, impractical solutions. Boal consciously uses a range of theatre forms to help participants achieve this learning goal.

The Forum Theatre approach described above clearly has the potential to educate and therefore can be seen as relevant to the development of health professionals. However, there is a contradiction between what Boal sees as Forum Theatre’s fundamental learning goal, which is to bring about political change, and the educational goals set out in curriculum for The Graduate Certificate in Diabetes Education and Management. Therefore, before using the Forum Theatre approach with diabetes educators, it was necessary to develop Forum Learning, a modified form of Forum Theatre that better reflected the professional learning goals of the Certificate program. I will now describe how I used the modified version, Forum Learning, as a reflective learning strategy to teach motivational interviewing with a group of diabetes educators.

#### FORUM LEARNING IN PRACTICE WITH DIABETES EDUCATORS

Primary Health Care, one of the subjects offered in the Graduate Certificate program, focuses on ‘the therapeutic relationship between diabetes educators and those for whom they provide care’. It is designed to broaden ‘students’ orientation to helping people manage and cope with diabetes by emphasising a self-management model of care’ (University of Technology, 2014). One of the topics taught in this subject is motivational interviewing which I was responsible for as a drama and adult educational specialist.

Forum Learning is one of the strategies I employed to help students on the program not only link theory to practice but also understand through a process of critical reflection, that there is no one correct method to deal with motivating clients. Throughout the Forum Learning session the educational focus is on the curriculum topic of motivation and motivational learning. However, as you will see, issues of disempowerment and empowerment are included in the briefing and de-briefing of the Forum Learning exercise.

The motivational theory topic I taught in the Primary Health subject workshop was a four hour session. Class sizes have varied from sixteen to forty but once numbers get too large, it is hard to ensure everyone participates in the forum and that their problem is examined. The whole session was facilitated using experience-based methods (Beard, 2006, 2010; Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Boud & Miller, 1996; Kolb, 1984) culminating in a Forum Learning session.

The first hour and a half of the session began with an examination of the concept of motivation starting with the students existing knowledge and understanding of the topic; this was developed as a ‘mind-map’ on the white board. Then an ‘Egg Timer exercise’ (Beard, 2010) was conducted where students working in small groups, were given four sheets of coloured paper and asked to come up with the

essential steps involved in motivational interviewing. These were laid on the floor in a sequence of one to four in a ladder formation (see Figure 1) so the group can compare and contrast their proposals (groups were identified by their having different coloured sheets). Finally these sequences developed by the students are compared and contrasted with established theories of motivational interviewing and a strategy for practice established.



*Figure 1. The 'Egg Timer' exercise. Looking at the concept of motivation and the steps involved in motivational interviewing*

The rest of the session time was taken up with presenting the Forum Learning strategy as a means of exploring how theory can work in practice. Students were split into groups of four or five and each had to come up with a personal example of a time in their professional practice when they found it difficult to motivate a client and felt disempowered as a professional. The story must finish with the problem unresolved. These stories were shared amongst the small groups. Each of these groups was then asked to choose one story that interested them all and that they would like to develop further. Once they had done this they created a Still Picture like a physical photograph, of the moment of most difficulty and disempowerment for the diabetes educator in the story and her patient (see Figure 2). The facilitator made it clear that the person whose story was chosen must not play themselves in the scenario. According to Boal, depending on the style or theatre genre used in a theatrical presentation, “the distance between actor and character can increase or diminish” (1995, p. 23). The separation of the storyteller

from their character in the scene being developed helps to ensure that all participants retain a critical distance from what is being presented and do not identify emotionally too closely with the person represented.



*Figure 2. Still Picture development: representations of diabetes educators and their clients*

Each of the small groups' Still Pictures were shown one at a time to the other student participants and they commented on them according to Boal's (1979) denotative (descriptive), connotative (interpretive) and symbolic levels of analysis. The denotative level required the students to just describe what they saw in the Still Pictures in an 'objective' manner; for example, 'there are two people in the Still Picture sitting on chairs; the person on the left has her hands in their lap and the chin is on her chest; the woman on the right is facing the other person and her left hand is placed on the other person's left arm'. The students then moved to the next level, connotative description and began to add their interpretation of what is going on; for example, 'the person on the left looks as if they may be a patient in distress and the person beside her is the diabetes educator showing her concern'. It is not always possible to reach the symbolic level of picture analysis because of time but when a gesture or physical placement of people in space has resonances of issues that go beyond the scenario presented, the symbolic elements of non-verbal communication can be highlighted; for example, 'the setting up of a table with the health professional behind and the patient on the other side on a lower chair, emphasises unequal power relationships'.

Whilst the students analysed the Still Pictures of each of the small groups (or if the numbers are large a sample of the small groups) the people in the Still Picture are listening and absorbing what has been said. They do not give their feedback on what they have heard but once all the Still Pictures from each of the small groups have been analysed, the groups get back together and use the analysis to strengthen their picture and make it clearer if necessary. Then each small group develop two more Still Pictures to add to the original: one showing the moment before the moment of most difficulty and the other the moment after (but this must not be a resolution scene, the problem must be presented as an unresolved one). Selected groups show

all three pictures in time sequence, one after the other with the moment of most difficulty ‘sandwiched’ between the moment before and after. The facilitator claps to indicate when the students showing the pictures should move from one moment to another. The audience groups analyse the pictures again but this time spend less time on the denotative level of analysis.

The process is repeated with two lines of dialogue created for each of the three moments in the scenario and finally the scene is presented as an improvised piece of drama. The students look at the different dramas and choose one they would like to work on further. It is only after this period of careful preparation that Forum Learning can properly begin!

#### A SCENARIO EXAMPLE

A diabetes educator is meeting for the first time with a new patient, a sixteen-year old girl who has Type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the pancreas is not producing enough insulin and the insulin is not working effectively (Australian Diabetes Council, 2014). She is accompanied by her parents who insist on talking on behalf of their daughter so the educator and patient are unable to communicate effectively. The educator needs the parents understanding so they can support their daughter with her treatment, but the educator also must be able to establish the patient’s needs so she can motivate them to change their diet and lifestyle to best manage their condition. The educator and the patient are both disempowered in this situation as their needs are not being met. How can the situation be changed to empower all those involved so they feel supported and in control?

The student group was reconfigured so they sat in a semi-circle and those acting out the drama were placed in front of them as in a theatre setting. The facilitator drew attention to the space where the drama will be enacted then described the rules of Forum Learning. These rules were that the small group acting out the scenario will play it through a couple of times showing the unresolved problem. Members of the audience were then invited to take on the part of the diabetes educator and empower her and the patient by offering alternative strategies to address the problem presented using the principles of motivational interviewing that they learnt about in the morning session.

Those coming into the drama to change it cannot use ‘the rules of magic’ and suggest a completely unrealistic solution such as the diabetes educator informing the parents that there is a new policy in this clinic that prevents them from accompanying their children during an education session. The made up policy would be professionally unacceptable in this workplace context; additionally, the problem of getting the parents to support their child with their diabetes treatment has not been addressed.

After the scenario had been performed and an audience member had presented a resolution, this was discussed as a whole group with a focus on the behaviours that were observed (referring back to denotative analysis) and the impact this had on the

patient and others in the scenario. For example, as the facilitator I may ask, “What did the educator do differently in this replay of the scenario and what impact did it have on the people involved and the situation?” Personal criticism, for example, ‘I did not think the way you introduced yourself to the patient was appropriate’, is discouraged (referring back to connotative analysis). More audience members were encouraged to offer different strategies of empowerment and resolution. The dialogue between the audience and actors continued and was enriched by the different perspectives that were offered. Boal (1992) emphasises that it is more important to achieve a good debate than a good solution.

The potential for Forum Learning to stimulate reflection and promote transformational learning will now be examined further. The nature of reflection and the contribution of theatre form to the deepening of this reflective process is a key strength of both the Forum Theatre and the Forum Learning educational approach.

### FORUM LEARNING AS A REFLECTIVE LEARNING APPROACH

Boud, Keogh and Walker (1998, p. 19) describe reflection as being “an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it.” They argue that through this deliberate process of returning to an experience, and the consequential conscious reconsidering of it, we can evaluate it and “begin to make choices about what we will and will not do.”

Reflection has been presented as an essential tool for continuing professional development (Boud, Cressey, & Docherty, 2006; Brookfield 1987, 1995, 2005; Schon, 1987, 1996) because it encourages professionals to be more conscious of their practice. Brookfield argues that this increased consciousness helps professionals change and continue their learning in the workplace.

Educators use a range of reflective strategies such as journaling and discussion, to help learners analyse their experiences more deeply. Some reflective activities require individual reflection whilst others such as Boud et al. (2006) ‘productive reflection’ approach, emphasise the need to reflect in groups.

Wright (1995) sees Forum Theatre as a reflective strategy because it encourages the development of different perspectives that can give rise to significant change. He argues that change occurs first and foremost in the individuals but the action that results from such a change is necessarily social.

In addition Forum Theatre as an art form can draw upon the specific properties of drama to promote reflective learning (Collier, 1999, 2005, 2010). It has a sense of destiny. In the theatre the audience knows that every aspect of the action they are observing will lead to a particular destined future. Every word that is said, every gesture portrayed, every action that happens, has a special significance. This creates dramatic tension and “the peculiar intensity known as ‘dramatic quality’” (Langer, 1979, p. 308). It is the intensity that Brook (1986) was referring to when he defined theatre in its most basic form as a man walking across an empty stage.

Obviously the man walking across a space is not in itself inherently theatrical. It is the observer's focusing on this act and their expectation that the walking *will have future significance* that makes it theatrical (Collier, 2005, p. 137).

Boal has a strong sense of how theatre operates as an art form and uses this form to develop critical awareness. He notes the importance of establishing the space where the drama is going to take place. The kind of space designated is not important but the recognition 'that 'here' is 'the stage' and the rest of the room, or the rest of whatever space is being used, is 'the auditorium': a smaller space within a larger space' (1995, p. 18) is crucial to the development of aesthetic concentration. According to Boal, it is the interpenetration of these two spaces that creates the 'aesthetic space', a space that draws attention to itself because it is the focus of an audiences' gaze and 'attracts centripetally, like a black hole' (1995, p. 19).

Forum Learning employs Forum Theatre strategies so it also has the potential to use theatre form to stimulate reflective practice but with the emphasis on examining professional rather than political practice. Once the diabetes students' professional experience stories are given form through the development of dramatic scenarios, they take on a special quality because they are filtered into particular 'scenes' which are 'bracketed off' from the chaotic mess of our of everyday experience. This allows a situation to become like a scene from a play and as such it can be viewed differently and contemplated in a way that eliminates distractions. This can bring about a heightened consciousness that promotes perceptual change and encourages the reflector to pay attention to the scenario and look at it as an audience might do. Consciousness then "shifts into another gear" and the displayed object or person becomes "a signifying, exemplary image" (Carlson, 1996, p. 40). An example of this is Andy Warhol's famous screen print of a Campbell's soup can. This ordinary object becomes extraordinary because it has been taken out of its everyday context and re-presented as a framed print.

This heightened form of consciousness is part of the aesthetic experience that drama as an art form can provide for participants. This dimension of heightened attention is not only relevant to the elements of dramatic form mentioned above but also related to the participants' experience when they create a scenario for Forum Learning. This involves participants being involved in acting out a situation but also as spec-actors being aware at the same time that they are contributing to a presentation of a piece of artifice: a representation of reality. Bolton (2000, p. 18) proposes that "all drama is dependant on participants having a dual awareness of both the 'real' and the fictitious worlds." This form of heightened consciousness in drama is known as metaxis (Boal, 1995). Metaxis offers participants the opportunity to view experience from the perspective of being simultaneously part of, yet apart from, the role they have adopted: "simultaneously existing in the two realities of the me and the not me" (Landy, 1991b, p. 4). This dual awareness allows participants to reflect-in-action, the "thinking what they are doing while they are doing it" (Schon, 1987, p. xi) rather than outside it at the end of the scenario.

Boal in Forum Theatre manipulates form in a way that both engages and distances participants from the scenario being explored. In Forum Theatre it seems as if Boal's intention is to gradually build up the drama in a non-threatening manner. Flemming (1995) notes however, that the initial still picture or tableaux strategies are also techniques that "provide focus and slow the drama down—they halt the onward rush of story line in order to promote reflection, engagement and serious attention to the consequences of actions" (p. 3).

He does this for a purpose and that purpose is to engage participants in critical learning. It is only when there is a balance between engagement and detachment in drama that there will be an understanding of how the worlds of fiction and reality operate. Once that has been achieved then metaxis can take place and participants can experience their capacity to observe themselves in action. For, as Boal (1998) suggests:

This possibility of being simultaneously Protagonist and principal spectator of our actions, affords us the further possibility of thinking virtualities, of imagining possibilities; of combining memory and imagination—two indissociable psychic processes—to reinvent the past and to invent the future. (p. 7)

Forum Learning is able to harness the reflective strength of Boal's theatre arts approach to promote a state of metaxis in its participants. Their involved-detachment in the dramatic scenarios they have created allows them to experience "concrete dreams" (Boal, 1995, p. 21) and see the possibility of what could be—how a situation could be transformed. Transformational learning can then occur "when, through critical self-reflection, an individual revises old or develops new assumptions, beliefs, or ways of seeing the world" (Cranton, 1994, p. 4).

I will now illustrate, by analysing the feedback from diabetes educators who participated in Forum Learning sessions held in Sydney in 2013, the educational impact of reflective learning on these participants.

#### THE REFLECTIVE IMPACT OF FORUM LEARNING ON HEALTH PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

At the end of the Forum Learning session, students filled in a detailed evaluation form. This form collected both qualitative and quantitative data but for the purposes of this chapter I will focus on the qualitative data collected from forty two participants from the Sydney group in 2013 and relate it to the principles of critical reflection examined in the previous section of this chapter.

Students were asked to evaluate and give examples of their participation in Forum Learning as an actor and as an actively engaged member of the audience. They were questioned about what they learned and its relevance to their professional practice. Whilst students referred to the explicit content of the workshop—motivational interviewing—and expressed a better understanding of the principles and practice

involved in that approach, other issues emerged that were of equal importance. The key learning points that were highlighted in the evaluation forms were:

- an appreciation of different perspectives
- the danger of making assumptions
- the importance of promoting self-esteem and respect in their communication with clients
- the communicative power of body language, active listening
- the empowering effect of having different options
- the need to empower participants by allowing them to develop their own strategies and solutions.

Participants in Forum Learning repeatedly stressed that they gained new insights into their understanding of diabetes practice by “learning from other peers in the interactions.” One student said how this had shown him/her “how other people conduct their practice” and approach similar clinical problems differently. The Forum Learning process raised the possibility that there are alternative ways to deal with problem situations. Students reinforced the idea that Forum Learning “offered ways to manage complex situations” and allowed them “to consider the consequences of different approaches.” This echoes Linds’ (1998) comment on the powerful impact of replaying the scenarios in Forum Theatre whereby, “in trying to find solutions, we begin to have a better understanding of the problem, its causes, and its ramifications” (p. 3).

Of almost equal educational importance to students was “seeing from another point of view”, especially the insight they gained into how the diabetes educator and the patient have different perceptions and expectations of their meeting. Many students recalled the denotative and connotative analysis they used to ‘read’ the Still Pictures and stressed that “it is important not to make assumptions” or pre-judge the patient and their needs.

This led to an appreciation of the complex interpersonal communication skills that were necessary to gain an understanding of the patients learning needs because as a student commented, “our agenda is unlikely to be their agenda.” Some of the communication skills that students identified were “interpreting body language” which they saw as “essential in clinical practice” active listening to provide patients “with more space to reflect” and to allow them to “hear the patients story” so the educator can “identify the need/goal of the patient.” Active listening also enabled the educator to consider “the issue of exploring what lies behind the statements” of the patients. Open questioning was also identified as an important skill to elicit “responses from the patients to allow them to develop solutions/strategies” once the patient is offered choices they can “take more responsibility” for their treatment and are empowered. The need for building the self-esteem of the patient and their “feelings of worth” were considered to be crucial as was “the importance of affirmation for the client.” Students suggested that this could be developed through encouraging “respectful, mutual relationships and demonstrating empathy.”

The experience of being an engaged audience member as well as an actor was appreciated. A student reflected that it helped her/him “to look at the angle of the educator and client (patient) and see their different perspectives’ as well as reiterating that the session should be “client-centred and personalised for individual patients.” Forum Learning’s ability to allow participants and the audience to view the problem situation more objectively comes through in these comments:

Seeing things from the outside emphasised that it is not personal. It is not about you. (Participant Y, S6/8/13)

There is no one ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer. (Participant H, S6/8/13)

This suggests that the form of Forum Theatre has promoted ‘metaxis’ and the ability to see a problem in a more objective manner.

Participants in the Forum Learning Session were also able to identify the links between what they experienced in the scenarios and their ‘real life’ professional practice. A student recognised that:

the identification of different techniques helps remembering to use such techniques in real life scenarios. (Participant F, S6/8/13)

Another student saw the scenarios as applicable as they had given her “some strategies that I can use to assist clients to make fundamental behavioural change.” Yet another said that it gave her “a chance to observe interactions that I am involved in daily.”

The final comment below demonstrates how the Forum Learning experience has encouraged perceptual change in this learner. It also reinforces that Forum Theatre can be a powerful stimulus for critical learning and change.

I value this activity as it has provided me with many alternatives, options and strategies rather than the ‘one size fits all’ approach to patient education. (Participant J, S6/8/13)

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored how Boal’s Forum Theatre was modified and used as a reflective learning strategy with health professionals studying to become diabetes educators through a University Graduate Certificate program. Whilst Boal’s Forum Theatre approach offers a range of learning strategies that are relevant to professional practitioners, it is “first and foremost political theatre rooted in his experience of violent oppression and Latin-American politics” (Strawbridge, 2000, p. 8). Boal’s focus on political learning did not meet the curriculum needs of the university Graduate Certificate program so was modified by the author into the Forum Learning strategy. This modified version of Forum Theatre facilitated the attainment of the professional learning goals outlined in the curriculum, in this case, motivational learning skills. It also emphasised the importance of “critical self-reflection, a process that lies at the heart of transformational learning,”: a form of

learning that promotes attitudinal change (Cranton, 1994, p. 59). The social and political goals that are fundamental to Forum Theatre still remain to a lesser extent in Forum Learning through the examination of the power relations between diabetes educators and their patients.

Forum Learning was developed as a learning strategy to stimulate critical reflection in diabetes education students by challenging their established ideas of professional practice. Self-reflection becomes critical when it involves “a searching view of the unquestioning accepted presuppositions that sustain our fears, inhibitions and patterns of interaction, such as our reaction to rejection, and their consequences on our relationships” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 7).

Forum Learning provided diabetes education students with a context for critical reflection because it created through the improvised exploration of a range of professional scenarios, different perspectives that challenged established practice. These improvised scenarios also offered the students options to empower them and their patients as they negotiated how best to jointly manage the impact of diabetes on their patients’ lives. Most importantly, diabetes education students were encouraged to use their imagination to consider different ways they could conduct their professional practice:

Imagination is indispensable to understanding the unknown. We imagine alternative ways of seeing and interpreting. The more reflective and open to the perspectives of others we are, the richer our imagination of alternative contexts for understanding will be. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 83)

Forum Learning’s use of dramatic form offers the participants a range of learning possibilities in addition to an understanding of the complex communication skills involved in the practice of motivational interviewing. This learning is achieved by acknowledging that inequity exists in the use and abuse of power in relationships and expressed through the conscious use of dramatic form and the development of still and moving images. The dynamic manipulation of time, action and role in Forum Learning allows participants in the scenarios to be both in the experience and yet outside it (Landy, 1991a). They can critically evaluate what the situation means to them through the process of metaxis and this provides the opportunity for reflection ‘in action’ as participants in the scenarios and ‘outside the action’ as part of the actively engaged audience. They are learning not only the content of the issue under exploration but also something about the nature of theatre and how to manipulate its forms in order to gain insight into learning issues.

Forum Learning as an art form therefore, can offer a uniquely powerful strategy for learning: a space to explore how we live in society and how we live in the world. It has the capacity to offer multiple views and value varying perceptions of any event that is performed. In this way it invites “the exploration of ambiguities, pleasures, unease and contradictions which contemporary living entails” (Nicholson, 1999, p. 85).

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