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Applied Theatre:
History, Practice, and Place in American Higher Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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July, 2013

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the support and generosity of several people in the writing of this thesis and the completion of the MFA program at Virginia Commonwealth University. To Cathy Thomas-Grant for years of friendship, mentorship, and collaboration, without whose encouragement this process would not have come to pass. Neil Packham and Elly Goodman from Citizens Theatre, Glasgow, Scotland, for opening my eyes to what community theatre should be and inspiring the writing of this paper. Dr. Noreen Barnes for her counsel and advice and Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates for her practical experience and wisdom in this field.

Deep gratitude goes out to my peers who are all wonderfully professional, creative, and kind. Also to my friends and colleagues at the Virginia Commonwealth University Graduate School office, especially Crystal Wade for bringing me on board, Dr. Sherry Sandkam, Melissa Tyler, and Dawn F. Crichlow.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to Eric & Janine Grayson, Jeff & Patti Deschamps, Jerry & Vickie Obermueller, and Bill & Susan Eissele for their generous support.

Finally, to my wife, Janette, whose support and encouragement was the backbone of this experience.

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Abstract

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The goal of this paper is to examine the practice of Applied Theatre in order to better define the genre and make a case for its legitimization and inclusion in higher theatre education. By looking at the theatre practitioners of the 20th century who paved the way for its existence as well as modern practitioners, a definition will be distilled down to five core characteristics of the practice with several case studies illustrating those characteristics. Once a clear distinction has been made between Applied Theatre and other similar genres, the case will be made for why the field should be considered mainstream. Additionally, it will be revealed how underserved the genre is in higher education and why its inclusion is important in college theatre programs.

Introduction

Community Theatre has always carried a narrow definition for me. In my experience in the theatre, the attitude toward 'community theatre' from mainstream theatre artists has always been somewhat snobbish. It seems to exist on the bottom rung of the theatrical social ladder and those who work in mainstream theatre are quick to dismiss it as the most amateur form of theatre there is. There is no better illustration for reflecting this negative perception of community theatre than Christopher Guest's 1996 film, *Waiting for Guffman*. The film, a total satire of community theatre, takes place in a small town in Missouri called Blaine. A handful of citizens in Blaine audition to perform in a musical commemorating the "sesquicentennial" anniversary of the town of Blaine titled *Red, White, and Blaine*. A company of strange, eccentric, and socially awkward people are cast in the show, and a mockumentary follows their rehearsal process through all the stages of preparation for the big night. Paramount to the story is that, allegedly, a Broadway director will be coming to see the musical. Everyone involved with the musical is ecstatic at the prospect of taking the show to Broadway because obviously (they believe) that is why the director is coming to see the show. Of course, the director does not come to the performance much to the chagrin of the cast and crew. The film paints a perfect picture of community theatre as being something that cannot be taken seriously even though the people who participate in it think it is the most serious and valuable thing.

What I had not realized was that the term 'community theatre' in other countries does not mean what it means to most people here in America. While in Glasgow, Scotland, a community theatre practitioner who works in the Scottish prison system told me that what I was describing as community theatre would be what he would refer to as amateur theatre, a completely different thing. The community theatre that he spoke of actually had more to do with the community than what I had previously imagined. He described his work as being very collaborative, relational, and transformational with members of many different communities. After speaking with him, my narrow vision had been broadened, but how can one redefine a term in a culture where the definition has been rooted so long in misconception? How do you make a legitimate case for its value when most people misunderstand the practice? There must be people in America doing this type of work, how do they describe and define what they do? Little did I know at the time of asking those questions to myself that there was a movement happening with practitioners of this type of work and the term many of them were using to describe it was "Applied Theatre". The term has emerged over the last decade to define the type of theatre that my friend is engaged in at the Scottish prison and also as an umbrella term that includes a wide variety of other ways theatre is being used outside of traditional theatre. Perhaps Christopher Guest was wrong, maybe community theatre is something more than just a joke.

I quickly realized that the term is still in its infancy. The most common way practitioners define it is the way I used it above, that it is an "umbrella term" including many different forms of theatre. There have been many books, articles,

and journal submissions on the subject as people have shared stories of their practice of AT and their thoughts on what it actually is and is not. Many of the practitioners involved in the conversation are from the UK and Australia, most likely due to the United Kingdom's Theatre in Education program that began in the 1960's which has direct ties to Applied Theatre practice. Griffith University located just outside of Brisbane in Australia was the first institution of higher education in the world to offer degree programs in Applied Theatre, and that happened less than 15 years ago. They now have a very developed program for undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students. In America, interested students will be hard pressed to find more than one program that offers undergraduate education in Applied Theatre. Graduate students have increased options with three institutions that offer graduate level curriculum. This number is situated next to the number of traditional theatre programs that are available to students, which, according to the Educational Theatre Association, number over three thousand. There seems to be an imbalance.

The purpose of this paper is to join the conversation about what Applied Theatre is, where it came from, how to best define it so as to justify it as a viable theatre form, and why so few universities in America embrace it as part of their theatre curriculum. Part I will briefly explore the history and development of Applied Theatre by examining some of the early practitioners who are thought to be its forerunners. Part II is a look at the five descriptive components that I have identified as being necessary to Applied Theatre practice. By taking a snapshot of how different modern practitioners have defined it in their publications and practice (see Appendix A), I have distilled out of that a workable definition that is

mostly inclusive, but necessarily exclusive at the same time. The components, which I call the POSIT Scale, include participation, outreach, service, intention, and transformation. I will show how true Applied Theatre practice will fit into each of the five criteria points and also how cousins of AT fall into different genres when they fail to meet even one of the descriptive components (See Appendix B). Several specific case studies will be shown to illustrate the five categories. Part III will look at my experience in Playback Theatre as a specific example of Applied Theatre, from training at the Playback Theatre Centre in New York, to observing a live performance of a Playback troupe in South Carolina, to hosting my own workshop with a diverse range of participants with no prior Playback experience. Finally, in Part IV, we will take a look at the reasons why colleges and universities in America have been slow to embrace Applied Theatre as a mainstream field, what the essential components to building an Applied Theatre program are, and some thoughts on how to structure the Applied Theatre curriculum.

I want to reiterate that this paper is in no way definitive, but rather another voice in the narrative of practitioners seeking to better define their work in theatre. Helen Nicholson's words in her book *Applied Drama* serves as an excellent place to begin. She said,

In all its many guises, practice in applied [theatre] is undertaken by those who want to touch the lives of others, who hope that participants and audiences will extend their perception of how life is, and imagine how it might be different. Although other forms of theatre-making may share these experiences and aspirations, what is emphasized in applied [theatre] is its

concern to encourage people to use the experience of participating in theatre to move beyond what they already know. (166)

It is my hope that the writing of this paper and the examination of Applied Theatre practice will extend perceptions of what it is and help in our imagination of what it could be in this country.

Part I: Development and Definition

During the 20th century, a handful of theatre practitioners come up in various writings as being forerunners to the practice of Applied Theatre. J.L. Moreno, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, and Augusto Boal are most commonly referred to as predecessors because each of them sought to involve the audience in performance in a different way than the theatres that came before them. J.L. Moreno started writing on his theories about theatre during World War I, almost 30 years before Grotowski, Brecht, and Boal. He developed the “Theatre of Spontaneity” and was possibly the first, albeit unknowingly, to articulate some Applied Theatre vocabulary. As Jonathan Fox says about Moreno in *The Essential Moreno*, he was “not interested in artistically produced plays but in native inventiveness and spontaneous dramas ‘as they spring up in everyday life, in the minds of simple people” (Fox xvii). As Moreno’s career in medicine and psychiatry progressed, his influence in the theatre world remained vested in a few friends who shared his views. He did, however, go on to establish what he is most known for, using drama as therapy with individuals and with groups. Brecht attempted to break the division between actor and spectator so that the spectator would be moved to real action by keeping an objective view of the staged action. Grotowski tried to achieve a sort of transcendence with his audience by placing them in and among the performers, dismantling the aesthetic distance altogether. He hoped that the audience would experience a transformation by this merging of the actor and spectator. Augusto Boal took his *Theatre of the Oppressed* outside of the theatre building hoping to

engage community members in theatre by encouraging them to take an active role in the performance, thereby becoming what he called “spect-actors”.

What these practitioners have in common is that they were interested in engaging their audiences in the *work* of theatre. However, while Moreno was working with groups and individuals in a similar way that Boal was, and while Grotowski and Brecht similarly sought to break the barrier of stage and audience, each paved the way to a different outcome when it comes to distinguishing between applied theatre and applied drama.

Applied Theater/Applied Drama

As nice as it is to have an all inclusive, unbounded discipline, the less defined it remains, the less people will understand that discipline. The fewer the number of people who understand the discipline, the harder it will be to convince others of its purpose and value. Take, for example, a group of actors who have been charged with the assignment to create an improvised performance. They have been told that the subject for their improvisation can be anything they choose. Chances are, the actors will be rather befuddled with such broad, unspecific instructions. Where do they begin? Where can they find creativity? How can they develop a context out of nothing? On the other hand, if the actors are charged with the assignment to create an improvised performance about what happened on their way to class, they will immediately have everything they need to begin. A concrete, specific definition of

the assignment would unlock for them all the possibilities in the world as opposed to a broad, generalized definition that close down the world of possibilities.

Perhaps the first step in defining Applied Theatre is beginning with the parent terms themselves – ‘Applied’ and ‘Theatre’. Applied suggests that something has a “practical purpose or use”. For example, mathematics is used in many different ways from balancing a checkbook to navigating airplanes. As opposed to the development of the equations and theorems that allow us to balance our checkbooks, the application of those equations in the real world would be ‘applied mathematics’. Theatre, which derives from the Greek word “theatron” meaning “the seeing place” or “place for viewing”, denotes that a theatre event is some type of performance or ritual that can be observed. Applied Theatre, very simply put, is an application of theatre in the real world (or outside traditional theatrical contexts) that can be observed. If that is the case, Applied Theatre is not the same as Applied Drama.

Helen Nicholson, Professor of Theatre and Drama, Royal Holloway, at the University of London, intentionally uses the term interchangeably in her book *Applied Drama*. She contends that:

The distinction between applied *drama* and applied *theatre* is moot . . . but if the title of this book appears to emphasize ‘drama’ rather than ‘theatre’ it is because I have been swayed by the argument that many people outside the theatre business tend to associate ‘theatre’ with specialist buildings, lights, costumes and so on, rather than the more diverse and less showy practices often associated with applied drama/theatre. (Nicholson 5)

The trouble is that no sooner that Nicholson claims that the distinction is moot she makes a distinction by preferring the term “drama” over that of “theatre”.

Additionally, she defines the term ‘theatre’ and ‘drama’ using their etymology and describes ‘drama’ as coming from the Greek word “dran” which means “to make or do”. While there is, of course, similarities between the two terms, if the objective is to clearly define Applied Theatre then a distinction needs to be made. The main distinction is that drama can be characterized as a practice oriented by *process* and that theatre is an aesthetic practice characterized by *performance*. Nicholson explains that a similar distinction was made between British Theatre in Education (TIE) and Drama in Education (DIE) in the 1960s. TIE involved troupes of teaching artists that worked with students in “participatory performance programs” while DIE “was primarily regarded as a teaching methodology across the curriculum” (Nicholson 4).

Applied Theatre vs. Pure Theatre

In 2012, Neil Packham, Community Drama Director for Citizens Theatre, Glasgow, made an important comment to our group of students during a two-day workshop he and his partner were facilitating. One of the students asked how they came to be involved doing community-based work. Neil told the students that he had studied in drama school with other people who had gone on to find great success in commercial theatre and television. One of those people was the actor Colin Firth. Neil said that if he and Colin were to get together that Colin would

consider Neil's success in theatre in as much regard as he holds his own success. It was in that moment that I knew I held what I understood to be "community theatre" at a lower standard than "legitimate theatre" – whatever that is. The work that Neil has done and continues to do is very important and should be regarded in the same esteem as any other successful career. Where along the way did I get the impression that any theatre practice other than mainstream, commercial theatre was substandard? Since the revelation of my spurious attitude I have seen that many of my mainstream theatre colleagues have a similar attitude. This, in turn, is an attitude that is passed on to young theatre artists who develop a similar sort of elitist opinion about pure vs. applied theatre.

As James Thompson suggests, using the word 'applied' does denote a departure from the 'pure' form and creates a division. In applied mathematics, anthropology, physics, or theatre, the applied version separates itself from the root and becomes something other than mathematics, anthropology, physics, or theatre.

In all of them 'applied' becomes a critical word that condemns and at the same time pleads with the 'non-applied' cousin. It condemns in that the related disciplines are by implication disconnected from the 'real'. They are presented as ivory-tower abstracts. 'Applied' is added to bring the sheltered out of their comfortable buildings – theatres or lecture halls – into the world . . . it also pleads with the 'non applied' disciplines to legitimize practices that that have been kept out of the academics or have struggled to justify their place in them. (Thompson 17)

Thompson goes on to say that the argument, which states that the applied versions of specific disciplines are considered to be the opposite, lesser form derived from the pure, competes with the argument that states the applied versions are indeed a part of the root disciplines and worthy of the same regard. Particularly in a culture that values self-promotion over selflessness and fame over ambiguity, the struggle to legitimize the applied versions of theatre is a challenging one. Yet, with the amount of students that flock to the more than 3,000 higher education institutions offering theatre degrees, the responsibility to shape the students' concept of success is an important duty.

Augusto Boal said, "In the beginning the theatre was the dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air. The carnival. The feast. Later, the ruling classes took possession of the theatre and built their dividing walls" (Boal 119). As Boal suggests, it has not always been the dominant practice of the theatre to put the audience in the dark and have them silently observe what happens on the stage. There was a time when participatory theatre was the norm, a time when the merger of the actor and spectator was not so awkward. There was a time when the 'pure' form of theatre was the collective participation and performance of the community.

Starting with what it is NOT

If it is true that the Applied Theatre genre can be specifically categorized in greater detail than simply an "umbrella term", than a good way to discover its definition is to examine what it is not. Inspired by a chart that Judith Ackroyd developed in her article *Applied Theatre: Problems and Possibilities*, you will find in

Appendix B a scatter plot with four distinct quadrants representing what I posit are the four major identifiable categories of theatre: Applied Theatre, Applied Drama, Pure Theatre, and Pure Drama.

Pure Theatre is what you could call mainstream theatre. In Helen Nicholson's argument, this is the type of theatre that most people think of when the term 'theatre' is used. Whether it is found in a Broadway house, a regional theatre, or a local playhouse, the common thread with pure theatre is that actors present the performance to an audience who are separated to some degree from the stage. The audience participates only insofar as their ability to quietly observe and interpret the action taking place onstage. Traditionally, mainstream theatre relies on scripted material written by playwrights and the show is produced according to the interpretation of the script.

Pure Drama, on the other hand, never makes it to performance but remains theoretical in nature. Its purpose is to be explored and developed in closed rehearsal or workshop format utilizing actors or participants that have some sort of specialization or training to be able to participate. Jerzy Grotowski's theories in his book *Towards a Poor Theatre* is an example of Pure Drama. Initially, he wanted his theatre to involve the audience, to take them and the actor through a transformative experience. He said,

[It is] necessary to abolish the distance between actor and audience by eliminating the stage . . . let the most drastic scenes happen face to face with the spectator so that he is within arm's reach of the actor, can feel his breathing and smell the perspiration. (Grotowski 42)

A communal act of transformation was encouraged in Grotowski's theatre by placing the actor and spectator in the same space, eliminating any aesthetic or physical distance. Later in his career, before he completely rejected his theories all together and moved into anthropology, Grotowski turned his work away from spectators and more exclusively toward performers. He determined that the transformative nature of his work occurred mainly in the people engaged in the rigorous physical training required to execute his methods and not necessarily in the observers of the work.

Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* may be another example of Pure Drama because his theories, as practitioners like Peter Brook later pointed out, were unattainable. Brook described Artaud's vision this way, "Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed" (Brook 60). There was not a way to successfully put his theories in to practice. More generally, any person or group of people who train and develop a theatre piece that is never presented in performance could be classified as pure drama.

The 'applied' categories differ in *how* the participation of the audience occurs. In both, practitioners and participants come together with the goal of using theatre techniques to reach a desired end. However, as we have discussed, Applied Drama does not culminate into performance. It is therefore categorized as being more process-oriented. For example, the Theatre Department at Virginia Commonwealth University, in partnership with the VCU Medical School, runs a Standardized Patient Program. In it, actors are paid and trained to simulate patients needing medical care and the medical students "see" the actor-patients. The program is designed to give the students as close to a real world experience as

possible without using actual patients. They learn to diagnose, treat, and, perhaps most importantly, interact with patients in a professional but relatable way. The drama that is enacted can be alternatively described as a role-play where the medical students play themselves as doctors and the actors play themselves with a medical condition. Using theatre techniques in this scenario is obviously valuable and does meet some of the specific criteria for applied theatre, but the fact it does not culminate into a performance and that the participation is very exclusive and predetermined keeps it snugly in the applied drama category. J.L. Moreno's psychotherapy work would also be categorized as applied drama. The participants are utilizing the technique in order to move through a process that will ultimately lead to improvement of self and/or skills, but again, there is not an aesthetic performative component of the work.

Legitimizing Applied Theatre

Before moving into a deeper exploration of what Applied Theatre is, it is important to note why it is important to make these distinctions in the first place. At Virginia Commonwealth University, I am constantly amazed at the volume of students who audition to enter the BFA program each year. The university does almost no recruiting, and yet, each year the department hosts five audition days giving hundreds of students the opportunity to be one of the 35 selected to be a part of the program. Clearly, these aspiring actors take little heed of the economic climate facing our nation, the abysmal statistics confronting those who go on to professional

theatre work after graduation, nor do they have any sense of what it takes to become successful. Therein lies the key word – success. Too many students have a narrow view of what defines success and as long as our institutions keep applied theatre education out of theatre education, then success will continue to be only for the chosen few.

Many students would thrive in the types of settings Applied Theatre practice offers. As of this writing, there are only four institutions in the United States that offer Applied Theatre curricula; University of Southern California, City University of New York, Pacific University, and New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. Only Pacific University in Oregon offers undergraduate coursework in Applied Theatre.

I sought the opinion of Dr. Dale Savidge, founder of the Applied Theatre Centre and chair of the theatre department at North Greenville University, about why the availability of applied theatre education was so scarce. His immediate response was that the undergraduate student, in general, does not have the maturity or life experience to fully grasp the complexities of the practice. One can certainly understand that an 18 or 19 year-old student may not have the understanding or capacity for understanding how to engage with different community groups. When asked how an actor trains to work within community settings, like prisons, Packham and Goodman emphasize that practical experience and working with others who do similar work is the best way to train. Is it even possible then to have an undergraduate program in Applied Theatre? How can we legitimize the practice if

we are unable to introduce the work to students in the most formative years of their theatrical career? Hopefully the following pages will answer those questions.

Part II: The POSIT Scale

Over the last decade, increased effort has been made by Applied Theatre practitioners to define the practice. With its varied and unique practical applications, the process of developing an inclusive definition yet also set some exclusive boundaries has proven to be challenging. The discussion has ranged from simple definitions such as, “Applied Theatre has a job to do”, by University of Exeter Applied Theatre professor John Somers, all the way to formulas, like the eight part criteria developed by Philip Taylor, professor of Applied Theatre at New York University. All of these definitions connect in some way to each other, but a consensus has not been reached.

To summarize the different ways the more prominent practitioners across the globe have defined the practice, a diagram detailing the different definitions can be found in Appendix A. Based on comparing the definitions, certain themes were repeated enough times to indicate a common language and specific criterion that exists under the Applied Theatre umbrella. I have distilled the terms and key words down to five main points by which the classification of the different forms can be examined. The five distinguishing characteristics are:

- Participation
- Outreach
- Service
- Intention
- Transformation

Of the many genres that can be included under the Applied Theatre moniker, all of them share each of the five characteristics above. What I posit with this scale is that

if a form of theatre/drama does not meet even one of the criteria above then it probably is better situated in one of the remaining three quadrants on the Applied Theatre/Drama scatter plot found in Appendix B.

Participation

Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, J.L. Moreno, and Augusto Boal have all been named, from various modern practitioners of Applied Theatre, as possible originators of the form as we know it today. What all of these people have in common is that in their philosophies of theatre they sought to disrupt the passivity of the observer and incorporate them into the action. Perhaps not the action as it unfolded on the stage, but rather move the audience into action outside of the theatre. In other words, the separation between the actor and the audience needed to be destroyed.

Bertolt Brecht is considered to be one of Applied Theatre's main forerunners in the ways he imagined how his audience would begin to participate in the theatre. In his *Organum for the Theatre*, proposition 26 details his disgust with what the audience of his time had been reduced to – passive, nearly comatose observers who were swallowed up by the plot, the tricks, and the contrivances of the play and who walked out of the theatre unmotivated and unchanged. Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston state in the Introduction to *The Applied Theatre Reader* that,

...the idea of using theatre in the service of social change lies at the core of Brecht's practice and theory . He took Marx's dictum articulated in the *Theses*

on Feuerbach, 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it', and applied it to the practice of theatre. (Prentki, Preston 12)

Armed with this motto, Brecht sought achieve audience transformation by abolishing the "distinction between actor and audience". He employed various techniques, including his *Lehrstück* technique, or as he translated it, "the learning-play" to try to engage the audience in the play in such a way that they would respond in their lives in the world. Brecht used the *Lehrstück* to meet that end, saying, "its task [was] to show the world as it changes (and also how it may be changed)" (Willett 79). This countered the "static" Aristotelian plays common in his day that simply showed the world "as it is" and left the audience with little more than an acknowledgement that they were simply part of the world with no power to change it. Many of the techniques Brecht established were designed to counter the laziness he observed in his audiences, forcing them to think about what they had seen, consider that there may be other ways to interpret the world, and acknowledge that they had bought in to the dominant culture's narrative of "normal". The idea was that his techniques, like "verfremdungseffekt" and "gestus" would allow the audience to maintain an objective view of the performance and, as a result, be able to intellectually respond to what they had seen and be motivated to act in the world outside of the theatre. While Brecht's work does not meet all of the requirements of the POSIT scale, his ideas, which were developed early in the 20th century, paved the way for many of the other alternative practices that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s.

Like Brecht's dream of what theatre could be, participation in Applied Theatre requires that of both the performers and spectators. Sheila Preston said, "... encouraging participation and involvement by people in their own developmental change, whether these be changes in knowledge, attitude, behavior, and health practices seems a pragmatic and effective pedagogic strategy, whilst, seemingly, being an ethical one" (Preston 127). As pragmatic and pedagogically sound as it may be, facilitating the relationship between performer and spectator is a delicate process. Brecht had a difficult time in doing it successfully. Audience members in American theatre are generally reticent about participating in theatre related activities. There is pressure to perform and deeply rooted fears of failure and embarrassment. Overcoming these fears and pressures is one of the reasons why participation is so important in Applied Theatre. Through careful and conscientious facilitation, spectators are able to participate freely and openly, thereby overcoming any reservations they previously held.

Brazilian teaching artist Augusto Boal is perhaps the figure to whom most credit is due for the development of Applied Theatre and dissolving the barrier between performer and spectator. His work was largely influenced by the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire's work in education. Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, revolutionized educational practice by asserting the notion that "at the heart of educational transformation is an enabling of human beings to consciously reflect on their actions and then change their behavior in light of their discoveries" (Taylor 8). He also suggested that the promotion of participation is by "co-intentionality", meaning the purpose or process of the event is shared between

everyone involved. Freire also discusses the importance of the teacher and student having shared interest in the process of learning and the discovery of reality. He suggests that this approach creates an even playing field where both teacher and student are “subjects” (Preston 128).

Boal took this concept and developed his *Theatre of the Oppressed*. The same idea about the relationship between teacher and student is what he applied to actor and spectator. Boal believed that “everybody acts, that everybody is an actor” and Adrian Jackson furthered that by saying, “It is fundamental to Boal’s work that anyone can act and that theatrical performance should not be solely the province of professionals. The dual meaning of the word ‘act’, to perform and to take action, is also at the heart of the work (Jackson preface). Through techniques like Forum Theater, Image Theatre, and Invisible Theatre, he sought to help the participants take part in the creation, analysis, and solutions to the problems present in their communities. Participation occurred through a gradual process of training, mostly through the playing of a variety of the games that he developed to assist spectators in becoming what he called “spect-actors” – the games being tools to build trust among the participants, discover the problems within the community, and open up the imaginative process.

Forum Theatre provides an excellent example of the role of participation in Applied Theatre. The basic structure of the form is that, after the problems (oppression) present in a particular community have been established, a group of actors present different scenarios depicting the problem and the key oppressors in the situation. A protagonist is seen moving through the story, unsuccessfully fighting

against the oppression. Once the scene has been enacted, the participants (audience) are invited to enter the action during the second portrayal of the scene. If they identify a place in the story where they believe the protagonist could say or do something differently that could potentially change the course of the action, they may say, “stop”, and take the place of the protagonist on stage to offer their alternative choice. The actors then respond to the new choice while still maintaining the oppressive environment. This mode of collaborative participation between actor and spectator continues until all the people who have an idea to share have taken the place of the protagonist on the stage.

After the second time through, a discussion takes place regarding the effectiveness of the different choices that were presented on stage. The spect-actors evaluate the different choices, why they did or did not change the outcome, and discuss other options. After the dialogue takes place, the scene is enacted again only this time the spect-actors can call “stop” and take the place of any of the characters, offering different ways of dealing with the situation. The performance concludes after the third enactment and further discussion. Its primary purpose is to put the participants in a position to “practice” alternative realities so that in a real life situation they can respond accordingly based on the solutions they found in the Forum Theatre exercise. The audience and the actors become one in the development and performance of the piece.

The following is a case study in Forum Theatre that occurred in a graduate level Modern Theory class involving approximately 25 graduate students. I offer this

case study as a way to illustrate the practice, but also to illustrate the power of the form and its capacity to elicit participation from the audience.

A group of four students had the task of presenting an informational session on the work of Augusto Boal during a designated class time. Instead of lecturing, the students engaged the class in an experiential look at the Theatre of the Oppressed. After participating in several activities designed to bring a group together and foster openness, the students facilitated what was supposed to be a mock Forum Theatre exercise. Instead of allowing the class to discover for themselves a common problem in their specific community as would happen in a real Forum Theatre exercise (due to time constraints), the students presenting chose a problem that they felt affected most of the class members – financial concerns faced by graduate students. The scene portrayed a female graduate student trying to engage different professors in a conversation about her need for financial assistance. However, each person she talked to could not help her. They were too busy, too distracted, or unsure of the correct answer or where to send her. In the end, the protagonist's problems were not solved and the onus was placed on the class members to become the spect-actors in the second showing of the scene.

It was during this second showing that the demonstration of what Forum Theatre was turned in to an actual Forum Theatre performance. Various students stopped the action and took the place of the protagonist, offering different ways of trying to get help with the financial concerns. As different students went up to participate, the level of investment in seeking a solution to the problem heightened. The class members were becoming more and more engaged in what was happening

and interested in how different people would suggest alternatives. The second enactment concluded, and while there were minor successes in getting assistance, a solution had not been reached.

A third enactment began, and the class members were invited to take the place of not only the protagonist but the other characters as well. During the final encounter of the scene, the protagonist is engaged in a conversation with the Chair of the department. Students were taking the place of both the protagonist and the Chair, but a solution was still not being discovered. It was clear that some information was missing which was why there had been such a stalemate in finding an answer to the problem. At this discovery, the professor of the Modern Drama class stepped into the scene. The professor, who also serves as the Associate Chair of the department, chose to play himself in the scene along with the person playing the protagonist, which at that moment happened to be me. He was able to offer answers to why the Chair was unable to find a solution to the problem. Various other students stepped into the role of the protagonist and engaged the Associate Chair in conversation. He was able to hear the concerns of the students, that many of them felt confused and misguided in the process of finding funding for their education, and in turn the students developed a greater understanding of how the funding process worked and what the potential reasons were for the Chair's inability to answer their questions. At the conclusion of the performance, a consensus had been reached that a person needed to be established as a financial liaison between graduate students and potential funding opportunities.

As class was dismissed that evening, several students commented that the demonstration of the exercise actually turned into a real performance. It was said that the following day the professor of the course pursued the idea of a liaison with some of his colleagues. What was meant to be a fictitious mock up of Forum Theatre morphed into an event that, through the participation of everyone, actually did what Forum Theatre was meant to do – find potential solutions to problems faced by a community through engaged action.

This is the type of participation that Applied Theatre requires. Participants with theatrical training and those who have never stepped foot in a theatre should be able to participate equally in Applied Theatre process and performance. The goal of the facilitators and actors is to encourage participation through careful research of the community and understanding of the people involved. It cannot be Applied Theatre if the performance maintains the separation of stage and spectator and does not change the spectator into a participant.

Outreach

An important hurdle to overcome in the process of participation is the framing of the event itself. This leads us to the second component of the POSIT Scale – Outreach. The conditioning and behavior of a typical theatre patron has been taking place for years. It is the same behavior today that Brecht fought against almost one hundred years. In order to frame the experience differently for the spectator, Applied Theatre must extend its practice out into the community. It seeks

out people in various different settings and takes its practice to them where they are. Seeking out the audience and taking the theatre to them is of particular importance as we move further into the 21st century. As the composition of audience members in traditional theatres stereotypically includes a generation who will no longer be attending the theatre in the next ten to twenty years, they will leave in their absence at their favorite local theatre many empty seats. Those people involved in the theatre who compose a younger generation of theatre patrons understand the value and power of live theatre, but the majority of people in this generation will never step foot in a theatre building, not to mention the communities of people who might benefit most from its practices. The outreach component is important in that it takes the theatre to places and people who would not otherwise be exposed to it.

It is immediately evident how Augusto Boal's work meets these criteria on the POSIT Scale. He has taken his work all over the world, adapting the methods to serve the people best in whatever situations he found them. For example, in his native country of Brazil, the oppression that the people dealt with came from external sources, namely, the government and the disparity between socio-economic statuses. What he encountered in countries like Great Britain and the United States was that the oppression people experienced took on an internalized form, it was the oppression of negative voices inside one's head. He developed different methods of dealing with this type of oppression like his "Cop in the Head" exercise where the internal voices are spoken out loud by different participants thereby exposing the oppressor (Boal 192).

James Thompson, Professor of Applied and Social Theatre at the University of Manchester wrote “Applied Theatre first made sense to me when trying to make theatre relevant, challenging, yet sustained inside prisons. We had to apply our craft to disciplines where the language and theatre was unfamiliar”. Indeed, a component of outreach involves the uncomfortable position of going into unknown places and being uncertain of the outcome. He continued, “... we had to apply ourselves to a difficult set of negotiations . . . pushing theatre work into troubling contexts certainly revealed things about that context and about the practice” (RiDE 1). Theatre work can be revelatory for everyone involved and particularly in Applied Theatre settings, where there is a certain degree of uncertainty, the revelations can be surprisingly profound.

Citizens Theatre - Glasgow

There are many theatre companies that, as a part of their regular, traditional season, extend an arm of their theatre into the community. Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, Scotland is an excellent example of the outreach component of Applied Theatre. For more than ten years, teaching artists from the theatre have collaborated and worked with members of the community. From Scottish youth, to recovering addicts, to the homeless and the incarcerated, they have provided experiences for and with them in theatre and performance.

The Citizens Community Company consists of 30 regular company members from all walks of life. Some had no prior performance or theatre experience before

joining the group. They have the opportunity to learn all about production elements, acting, working in an ensemble tapping into their creativity, and it all culminates into professionally produced productions. One of the members commented that his experience in the company “has given [him] a sense of pride, confidence, and just the feel good factor” (web).

The community productions they do are only a part of their outreach. They also facilitate a whole host of community projects where they go into different parts of their city and surrounding communities to use drama as a tool to engage participants in issues relevant to them. They have worked in conjunction with the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce to offer workshops in conflict resolution in the workplace, fostered new playwriting by hosting workshops in different communities and selecting scripts for production, and they even have an on-going relationship with the Scottish Prison System where they bring the work of theatre to inmates. Currently, teaching artists from Citizens Theatre are working on a three-year project at HMP Barlinnie, which is, according to their website, “Scotland’s largest and most complex penal establishment”.

The work is divided into three sections. The first, called “Actor Factor”, exposes the inmate participants to theatre work, many of whom have never done any type of theatre before. Much of the first section deals with ensemble building and group dynamic. The dynamic among the inmates can be a difficult one to manage. In a phone conversation with Neil Packham and Elly Goodman, the teaching artists working in Barlinnie, they expressed the challenges they face inside the prisons when trying to stabilize the group dynamic. The inmates will often struggle

in being vulnerable with their peers. They will often seek power positions among the group and in doing so will sabotage the work. Goodman also said that the dynamic can change for better or worse depending on the guard present in the room. To overcome these obstacles, Packham and Goodman strategically introduce drama techniques to build confidence and a sense of trust and respect among the group. They also teach improvisation and devising techniques and, using excerpts from scripted material, teach some performance techniques. Because some of the inmates are illiterate, the script work teaches literacy as well. The sessions are meant to be fun, lively, and educational for the participants that ultimately lead to group collaboration and cohesion.

The second section, called “Story and Script”, encourages participation through story development and creative writing using written and spoken form. Goodman explained that one of the exercises they use to encourage and stimulate the creativity of the participants is to use sticky notes. The participants are instructed to write down four words on their sticky note that they would say to their younger selves if they had the chance. The sticky notes are anonymously compiled together and from them an opening line of a story is created. It is the beginning of the process to opening up and discovering how to tell their story.

The third section is called “Performance Project” and it is the culmination of all three sections. This phase of the work puts into rehearsal some of the creative pieces written during the previous phase. The participants, now actors, work with the teaching-artists, now directors, in the shaping of their story. A small-scale play is

eventually produced and performed for an invited audience to showcase all the work the actor-inmates created.

The prison work performed by Citizens Theatre attempts to introduce “the possibility of change to some of the most vulnerable and damaged in our communities, [and hope] to make a significant contribution to their rehabilitation. We aim to inspire change, by helping prisoners and ex-offenders to reflect on their crime, develop new skills, attitudes and opportunities” (web). What they have found is that prisoners bring to the work more than what the facilitators expected. Through the work, they uncover hidden talents, discover new skills, and feel what Goodman calls “the magic that theatre can produce”.

The outreach of the Citizens Theatre even extended into the community of theatre students from Pepperdine University in Malibu, California while they were in residence at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2012. During a two-day workshop, Packham and Goodman lead the theatre ensemble from Pepperdine in activities that they use to engage the different groups they work with. They used sociometric tools, developed by J.L. Moreno, the founder of psychodrama, to help the group better understand themselves and the cultures from which they came and the culture in which they found themselves. While the ensemble of actors already knew one another, the work brought them even closer together and prepared them for the work planned for the following day.

Citizens Community Company joined Goodman, Packham, and the student ensemble from Pepperdine during the next day’s session. It was a fusion of two very

different groups of diverse backgrounds. The ages in the room ranged from 19 to 70 and at first, there was a little tension of uncertainty in the room. After the work began, though, the new ensemble began to take shape. One of the activities was a performance style introduction exercise. Groups of 4-5 people had to creatively introduce each member in their group to the rest of the class, which meant that each person in the individual groups had to get to know each other. After some time for preparation, all the groups were introduced in fun and creative ways. Through activities like the introduction game, connections were being made and barriers were coming down. Soon, groups of students and Citz Company members were devising work together and, by the end of the day, friendships had been formed. The “magic” of theatre had occurred.

The outreach displayed by the Learning Team at Citizens Theatre in Glasgow presents a great example of type of outreach needed in Applied Theatre settings. In several different arenas and with a wide variety of participants, the teaching artists at the Citz take theatre techniques to participants and serve them wherever they happen to be – in a prison, a school, a rehabilitation center, and even in their own theatre space with the various groups they bring in.

Service

In the two examples we have looked at so far, both Boal’s Forum Theatre exercise as an illustration of participation and the community work by Citizens Theatre as an illustration of outreach, each also share the third component of Applied Theatre – Service.

Augusto Boal said of his Theatre of the Oppressed that it was created to serve people – rather than them being there to serve Theatre of the Oppressed. Most practitioners who use theatre work in the way Boal did would agree that there is an element of the work that goes beyond the self, that it is theatre of, by, with, and for, what JanMohamed calls, the “Other” (Counsell 97). The Other represents those who are marginalized, who are in situations that prevent their voice from being heard, or who belong to a subaltern community. Who, for whatever cultural or societal reason, are considered to be less important than the dominant group. There are many groups that could be considered ‘others’; the homeless, recovering addicts, people with developmental delays, and the incarcerated are a few examples. While the dominant culture tends to ignore these groups, practitioners like Boal sought to give them an opportunity to speak, be heard, and be valued. Service, in any form, works best when the provider of the service makes the recipient feel valued, respected, and worthy of the service. Think about the last time you were at a restaurant where the server made you feel important or paid close attention to you. Did you later remark, ‘the service was so good! Our server was outstanding’? How many commercials have you heard recently from businesses boasting excellent service? Service is something people seek everyday as it is an important part of daily life. Unfortunately, service is often given with an expectation for something in return. It is a reciprocal action. The service that is present in Applied Theatre is different. It is the one directional kind – like paying for the tab of the car behind you in the drive through lane, or helping a neighbor rake the leaves just because, or going down to the senior living facility to play the piano for them during dinner

without pay. Genuine service takes away any expected reciprocity, removes any type of monetary transaction, and simply gives. Storycatchers Theatre in Chicago, Illinois is a perfect example of the genuine service Applied Theatre provides.

Storycatchers Theatre - Chicago

Founded in 1984 by writer, lyricist, and director Meade Palidofsky, Storycatchers Theatre, then known as “Musical Theatre Workshop”, focused on family issues, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and violence utilizing the Theatre in Education model of performance. Groups of actors would write original pieces addressing specific concerns of young people and perform them at different Chicago public schools. Palidofsky spent much of that first year interviewing and getting to know the teens that they were performing for and it was through those relationships that the model of what would become Storycatchers Theatre emerged. They would “[work] with teen writers and actors to use musical theatre to prepare youth to make positive life choices” (web). Since then, they have worked in several places like the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, Columbia College's Urban Missions Program, and the Illinois Youth Center. The focus of their work was to teach the participants how to turn their personal narratives into works of art and therefore be able to reflect upon their choices.

One can get an essence of the work being done at IYC by the title of an article written by Palidofsky that appeared in the book *Performing New Lives* – “Fabulous

Females: Secrets, Stories, and Hope, Guarding and Guiding Girls Beyond the Barbed Wire Fence”. Palidofsky explains the work of the company as,

Storycatchers Theatre’s job is to teach and encourage marginalized youth to use poetic rhyming language, melody, and tempo to explore and reflect their emotional realities. The company works with them to overcome their fears of both playing themselves and taking on alternative roles, introducing them to a medium in which they can chart, for themselves, friends, and families, a more hopeful future in an ever-changing maze of obstacles. (143 Shailor)

She continues by saying that she has “always seen youth in trouble as an opportunity – often, they’re in deep trouble, but they have time on their hands and the motivation to fill it” (144). This is where Storycatchers steps in to serve the girls at the Illinois Youth Center, a residential correctional facility for girls aged 13-20. Teaching artists engage with the girls in different ways to help them feel comfortable enough with each other to begin to open up about themselves. What the Storycatchers team found in their work was that the girls were more likely to open up and feel safe when they were speaking to each other about their experiences rather than to counselors or staff. In the process of sharing, stories would begin to emerge and commonalities between the girls would become apparent. Many of them had experienced the same types of violence or abuse. As the discussions continued, the teaching artists would begin to help the girls write their stories down in dramatic form.

Many girls found that their anxiety about life outside the facility increases as they drew nearer to their release date. They began to worry about returning to what got them in trouble in the first place. One girl, Aremy, felt this anxiety as she approached her release date. In order to cope with the growing anxiousness, she began to speak up about her story and history. She was reticent to tell her story to the group and when asked why it took her so long to tell it, she replied, "I wasn't ready to tell it yet. A lot of the girls didn't know about my past because I wasn't a troublemaker inside [the facility]." (154). Her story involved violence through gang activity. She told about a time when she was with her group of friends at a corner store when Carlos, one of her friends, saw that a girl was walking toward them who hung out with the "lames" on the other side (meaning the other gang). Another of Aremy's friends said to her, "Hey, Aremy, this is your chance to show us what you're about". Aremy walked toward the girl and remembered thinking that she did not want to do what she was about to do. She confronted the girl, exchanged a few threatening words, and then unleashed a violent storm of physical abuse onto the girl. In her words, "My fist [flew] through the air hitting her face like a hot brick. Again and again and again" (155).

The lines quoted above are actual lines from a script developed by Aremy and the Storycatchers team. It was part of a group project called *Facing the Unexpected*. When the performance took place, another girl, Kelly, played Aremy in the story. When asked what it was like to watch her story, Aremy said, "My heart started pounding as I watched Kelly go after [the girl]. After seeing that story, I knew gangbanging was my addiction and I had to talk about it. It was important for me

because I knew I was doing something wrong and I couldn't apologize for it, so I had to let it out, and I felt it was important for other people to know the consequences" (155).

After that project, Palidofsky and another teaching artist led nine of the girls in the creation of a musical production. Aremy said, "this is when I felt I had to tell the whole story. No one knew this story and I felt guilty . . . the gang asked me to shoot someone from the other gang. They told me this would bring me fame and respect when it actually brought me trouble and tears" (158). Aremy was released during the creation of the performance, so she came back to watch as the other girls involved put the play into production. A friend, who was still serving time in the facility, played the role based on Aremy's life. Aremy recalled being moved to tears by the play. Shortly after the performance she saw inside of the facility, Aremy was given the opportunity to perform in the show during a performance outside of the facility, a wonderful moment for her in the journey of telling her "secrets, stories, and hopes on the free side of the razor-wired chain-link fence".

Why was "Fabulous Females" so important to Aremy and the other girls? Because, as Aremy said, "we felt free to be who we [were]. Nobody judged us". Because of that, the girls were able to express themselves fully, without fear of retribution or violence, ultimately using their personal stories as platforms "for producing hope and creating positive change for all the girls who find themselves caught in the juvenile justice system" (160-161).

Over the last three decades, Storycatchers has worked with numerous girls at IYC in teaching them how to write and perform the stories of their lives. The gift

those teaching artists give those girls is invaluable – it is truly a selfless act of service.

Intention

Intention has to do with the specific contexts where theatre is applied. Whereas in mainstream theatre, a production is mounted and the doors are opened on opening night to anyone and everyone who is willing to buy a ticket, Applied Theatre requires more intentionality than that. James Thompson says, “applied theatre projects always take place in communities, in institutions or with specific groups. They often include the practice of theatre where it is least expected . . . in prisons, refugee camps, forgotten estates, hospitals, museums, centres for the disabled, old people’s homes, and underserved rural villages: sometimes in theatres” (Thompson 15). The specificity of Applied Theatre requires the context to be thoroughly researched by the practitioners of the work. As Philip Taylor points out, attention must be paid to who the audience will be, what the project hopes to achieve with the specific audience it is being created for, and how it can all be designed to meet the needs of the audience/participants (Taylor 10).

Storycatchers Theatre, Citizens Theatre, and Forum Theatre are all good examples of utilizing specific intention. In the early days of Storycatchers, when a clear mission had not yet been established, they sought to better understand how they could serve the at-risk youth in Chicago. As their work developed, so did their intentions. I would suggest that it is their clear, intentional focus on whom they are

serving and why that creates for them a solid foundation and has secured their success for almost 30 years of service. Boal said, “theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it” (Boal xxxi). That is precisely the intention of Storycatchers Theatre with the girls they serve and it is their intention to make a positive difference in the lives of the girls when they reenter the world. It is the intention of Citizens Theatre to use the stories of the inmates to help them rehabilitate and reincorporate into society. It is the intention of Theatre of the Oppressed to provide an avenue for people to overcome their oppressors.

The good intentions of practitioners is an obvious characteristic of the work, but intention must also be included as a descriptive to exclude any dramatic events whose outcome might not be so good. As Franc Chamberlain said, “the Applied Theatre practitioner must ‘intend’ appropriate ends [even though] good intentions don’t always bring about the desired transformation”. Without the inclusion of intention, Chamberlain suggests, there would be no way to discriminate between Theatre of the Oppressed and the Nuremburg Rallies. Both events utilized participation as means toward transformation, but the intention of Theatre of the Oppressed is to free people to imagine a better future where the Nuremburg Rallies were meant to indoctrinate people to a certain ideology (RiDE 94). This is an interesting caveat about intentionality. Chamberlain also used the attack on the Twin Towers as an example of applied performance. He suggested that if you leave out intentionality in the equation of Applied Theatre, events such as 9/11 actually fit into the criteria. Perhaps it is a little bit of a stretch, but at least the good intention of the work excludes anything that would otherwise be destructive.

Transformation

No matter what the theatre or dramatic discipline, one could venture to say that transformation of some kind is the desired result of any theatrical event. However, it is very subjective and difficult to measure. What may be transformative for one person, community, or group in a specific context may not be for another, but the hope for transformation should always be the intention of Applied Theatre practice and, without exception, all Applied Theatre practitioners hope that transformation will be achieved.

Kennedy Chinoyowa is a senior lecturer in Applied Theatre at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. In his book *HIV and AIDS Education Through Applied Theatre*, he looks at the efficacy of using applied theatre practice as a tool to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic in his country. In the introduction, Chinoyowa states, “the challenge posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa is no longer a question of statistics but a threat to the annihilation of the continent”. He details statistics of the crises facing his fellow Africans with findings from a 2002 study by the organization UNAIDS which states that many of the countries in Africa have the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in the world. It was reported then that the highest number of HIV cases in the world are in South Africa, a statistic that remains true as of the UNAIDS more recent study in 2011.

The problem Chinoyowa observed in the strategies to address the AIDS crises in terms of education and behavior modification was that they seemed to be delivered through an “exogenous” model. He points out that “more often than not

individual theatre groups remain preoccupied with taking theatre *to* rather than making theatre *with* the target communities . . . the *top down* model tends to underestimate the target audience's ability to 'author' their own lives". The impetus for his book was to try and reverse the common "outside in" approach to a more "endogenous" approach, giving people in specific communities and contexts ownership over the process of education and transformation. Chinoyowa adds, "The endogenous model recognizes that processes of transformation are internal to the mechanisms of social structures and cannot entirely be determined by outside agents" (74-75).

It is what Thompson calls the "politics of prepositions" that defines the transformative aspect of Applied Theatre (15). The exogenous model that Chinoyawa describes takes a message to a community and imposes it upon them regardless of the context or specific needs of that community (of course, this subverts the intentionality of Applied Theatre as well as disrupts the chance for transformation). Therefore, the community has no stake in the purpose of the work. It is theatre 'for' a certain group. The endogenous model switches the directionality of the message and hands it over to be discovered by the individual being served. It is theatre 'of', 'by', and 'with' a certain group. Transformation comes as a result of this directionality shift, which produces a democratic ownership of the work.

In each of the Applied Theatre examples we have looked at so far, the theatre produced has followed the endogenous model. Participants are encouraged to find their story and experience how that story can change their future, honor their past, and enrich and valorize their present.

Part III: Playback Theatre

My experience with Playback theatre came to be through a little bit of serendipity. The Fall 2012 issue of *Southern Theatre* magazine caught my eye with the cover headline reading, “Applied Theatre Comes into Its Own as a Mainstream Discipline”. Surprised by such exposure, I flipped open to several pages’ worth of information and stories about how different theatre practitioners were using theatre to impact different communities. One of the forms highlighted in the article was “Playback Theatre”.

As the article was covering several different modes of Applied Theatre, Playback was only given a paragraph of description. In it, Jimmy Bickerstaff described the form as being “created through a unique collaboration between performers and audience. Someone tells a story or moment from their life, chooses actors to play the different roles, and then watches as their story is immediately recreated and given artistic shape and coherence” (15). This piqued my interest and I began to look into this improvised form of Applied Theatre.

As I began to research, I discovered two important things; the first was that the Playback Theatre Centre in New Paltz, NY was hosting a core training session in Playback Theatre in February of 2013. The second was the discovery that VCU Arts offered a research grant to graduate students to use at their discretion in their particular field of study. Without knowing very much about Playback other than what I had read in the *Southern Theatre* Article and their website, I applied for and

was awarded the grant to attend the training. I really did not know what I was getting myself into.

I became a little nervous about participating in the training the more I tried to figure out how Playback worked. Like many Applied Theatre forms, it is extremely difficult to grasp the concept of the practice solely from research. Everything that I could find, including the seminal work on the subject, *Improvising Real Life* by Jo Salas, co-founder of Playback Theatre, left me uncertain about the practice. I could not get a grasp on how it worked, how the performances were organized, how the audience came to be comfortable in participating, and whether the form was altogether awkward in performance. Particularly discouraging was trying to find video resources on-line. The few clips I could find, when viewed completely out of the context of the performance, seemed to confirm my suspicions that Playback Theatre was a strange, awkward, and ineffective practice. However, I had the grant, so I was going to find out.

I traveled to Saugerties, NY in February of 2013 to participate in a three-day, introductory training to Playback Theatre. I joined five other participants, three of whom came from international places, and Tim Van Ness, the facilitator. Each session explored a different component of the practice ranging from the ritualistic element of the performance, to the role of the actors, the conductor (who facilitates a playback performance), the musician, and the audience. Every participant in the training had the opportunity to experience each role and several of the different performance techniques. It was during this practical experience that I began to see the immense value and usefulness of Playback.

I had a hunch before going to Saugerties that the essence of Playback Theatre probably could not be fully captured in written or video format. I hoped that the elements I was uncertain about would become clear during the training where I would see and experience the process live. I was honest with the group at the beginning that I was skeptical, but by the end realized my hunch was right. My conversion started when one of the participants took on the role of the “teller” who is a member of the audience that shares a true, personal story to be reenacted. The teller, who I will fictitiously call Anna, told a story from her childhood in Trinidad and Tobago. Her family raised chickens and she became particularly fond of one of them. Her story was about her relationship with the chicken and what happened to her when the day came that she and her father had to butcher the chicken, something she was accustomed to doing with other chickens but not this special one. In the interview, Tim, who was playing the conductor, allowed her to tell as much of the story as she could remember and then asked specific questions to retrieve a little more information. She chose an actor to play her and another to play the chicken in the story. With the customary words “let’s watch”, spoken by the conductor, the reenactment began.

The story was presented as fluidly as possible, starting with the hatching of the chicken all the way to its death and the moments that followed. The two actors who were chosen to play her and the chicken maintained their characters throughout while the other actor and I came in and out of the scene as needed. After about 10 or 15 minutes, the story concluded, we paused, acknowledged the teller and gave the story back to her (part of the ritual of Playback), and returned to our

places on the stage. What happened next is when my impression of Playback Theatre changed.

Anna was asked if the performance captured the essence of her story and if we got most of it right in the retelling. She sat quietly for a moment before affirming that we had indeed captured the essence of her story. She went on to say that we had captured some moments that she had not told us initially nor had she remembered until she saw us perform. For example, the moment right after her chicken was killed when the actor playing Anna was reacting to the event, I stepped on the stage as her Father and simply stated as a matter of fact, "Anna, it's time to come in". Evidently, that moment was significant to her in her memory of the event. It illustrated the friction between her sorrow about the loss, the inevitability of it, and the perceived callousness of her father toward her in that moment. She paused for another second after she told us that and then broke down into tears.

We all sat quietly, a little unsure of how to proceed, as Anna wept about what she had seen and experienced. We thought perhaps we had hit upon too sensitive of a subject for her and wondered what our reaction should have been based on her reaction. The conductor gave her a tissue and patiently gave her the time she needed to regain composure. He asked her if it was hard to see her memory on the stage and she replied that it wasn't, that it had been wonderful to see her story come to life. The tears were not in response to the grief she had experienced during that time as a little girl but rather in response to a profound longing for home. What she had seen on stage transported her back to a place she had left long ago and she relived what it was like to be there. Her story came to life in an aesthetic framework,

which heightened the reality of it, and she had a visceral reaction to what she saw. She was transformed, and so were the rest of us.

When I witnessed Anna's story come to life and her reaction to it, I returned to Jo Salas' explanation of Playback Theatre with much more clarity. I am quoting the passage in its entirety because there is no other explanation that comes close to its depth and eloquence:

The basic idea of Playback Theatre is very simple. And yet its implications are complex and profound. When people are brought together and invited to tell personal stories to be acted out, there are a number of messages and values that are communicated, many of which are radically at odds with the prevailing messages of our culture. One is the idea that you, your personal experience, is *worthy* of this kind of attention. We are saying that your life is a fit subject for art, that others may find your story interesting, may learn from it, be moved by it. We are saying that we can look closer to home than the cultural icons of Hollywood and Broadway to find reflections that can bring meaning to our world. We are also saying that effective artistic expression is not the exclusive province of the professional performer; that all of us, even you, even I, may be able to reach into ourselves, or out of ourselves, to create a thing of beauty that can touch other hearts. We are saying that *story* itself is of the profoundest importance, that we need stories to construct meaning in our lives, and that our lives themselves are full of stories, if we can learn to discern them. We are saying that there is more – and less – to theatre than the great plays of our heritage, that before and alongside the tradition of

literary theatre there has always been a theatre that is more immediate, more personal, more humble, more accessible, and that this theatre grows out of the undying need for connection through aesthetic ritual. (Salas 7-8)

In this passage, and from my experience training in Playback, it is very clear how the practice fits into the POSIT Scale. The division between audience and actor is immediately dissolved in Playback Theatre through the conductor, so much so that if the audience does not participate the performance cannot happen. Playback has the capability of reaching out to different communities comprised of a variety of individuals and serve them by allowing their voices to be heard and their stories to be honored and made to be important. The intention of Playback is go back to the roots of oral tradition and provide a platform for people to share their experiences with one another, which can, and does, produce a transformative effect on the teller as well as on the audience, as was the case with Anna's story about the chicken.

The training I had participated in gave me a much better understanding of how Playback Theatre worked, but I was still uncertain about how a real audience would respond. All of us in the training were, in one way or another, involved in the arts and were willing, as artists are, to dive in, explore, and be vulnerable with one another. Would an average audience member who most likely has no theatre or performance experience want to participate? How do you encourage participation from people who are probably very uncomfortable with the notion of sharing a personal story in front of others? I needed to see Playback Theatre in action.

In 2012, Dr. Dale Savidge began a Playback Company called "Playback Café" in Greenville, SC after Jo Salas had lead a workshop on Playback at the 2012 Applied

Theatre Conference. He and his troupe perform bi-weekly at a shelter for the homeless in their community. I was able to travel to Greenville in April of 2013 as part of my research grant to experience a live Playback performance and it was a highly successful event.

Dr. Savidge is often concerned about how many people will attend the performance. When working with such a transient community, one can never be sure who or how many people will come. Some people have come multiple times and have become known to the Playback troupe, others have come only once and have not been seen again. The particular night I attended they had one of their largest audiences, around 40 people. Some had been before, there was a group there from a nearby women's shelter, a woman and her three children were return audience members, a couple from the associated church to the shelter came to check it out, so it was an eclectic crowd with small groups of people who knew each other.

The troupe gathered an hour before the show began to warm up. They had been training together for a few months before they started to perform and it was obvious that the group had developed a good rapport with each other. Having a cohesive company is an important component of successful Playback. Since the actors do not know beforehand what stories will be told, they rely on each other for support in the telling of the stories. They talked about what the evening might be like, including some people who may be in the audience. The troupe members knew several of the repeat audience members and also knew that many of them struggled with addictions and other health problems. Some, they reminded each other, were

unpredictable in performances depending on if they are clean or not. They were very aware of who their audience was and the context of the performance.

In their experience performing at the Triune Mercy Center, they discovered that creating a theme for the evening helped the audience to think of stories to share. The night I attended, the theme was “helping hands”, and the conductor invited the audience to think of times in their life where they either offered or were the recipients of help in one way or another. There are some specific short form techniques that are used at the beginning of a performance to introduce the actors to the audience and to ease the audience into participation. The first thirty minutes was dedicated to short forms because it serves two essential functions. First of all, during the introduction of the actors, one of the actors comes forward and tells a story from their own life related to the theme of the night. The company then reenacts the story using a short form technique called Fluid Sculpture. The technique is meant to capture the essence of how the teller felt during the experience of the story they just told. The performance is brief, only lasting about a minute or two, and is often done with few words and more movement and gesture. When the audience sees that the actors are simply being themselves telling their stories, it communicates that there are no special requirements to tell a story. They see that it is easy to participate and it does not require much effort or time in the spotlight. The second thing is that it eases the audience into what the night is going to be like, setting up the frame for the evening, and getting their minds working to find their story.

After the introductions, the audience was invited to share some brief stories from their seats. The conductor would ask a few questions of the audience/ participants and the actors would present short form performances of their stories. After about twenty minutes of short form storytelling, the audience was ready to move into some stories that would be presented as long form performances.

I want to highlight just one of the stories that was told that evening from a woman I will call Erin. Erin had come to the performance with a small group of women from a nearby women's shelter. After mustering up the courage during a couple of preceding stories, she raised her hand to share her story. At this point in the evening, the tellers were invited up on stage to sit with the conductor and tell their story. As Erin went up to the stage, her group of friends cheered for her. She settled in next to the conductor and began to tell her story.

Erin was having a difficult time securing a job for herself. She was applying to different places everyday with no results and was beginning to get very frustrated. Not only that, the staff at the women's shelter was putting pressure on her to find a job. They provide wonderful care and advice for the women but cannot keep them for too long at the shelter, so the sooner they can secure a job the better for everyone. One day, a friend of Erin's told her that a McDonald's restaurant was holding open interviews on the following Monday afternoon and all she had to do was show up. She arranged to get a ride to the interview with her mentor because the restaurant was almost 3 miles beyond the final stop on the bus route. She went to the interview and was offered a job on the spot. She was ecstatic about the opportunity and accepted the offer, but knew in the back of her mind that there was

a problem, how was she going to get to work? She certainly could not walk the 3 miles after the bus stop, especially in the dark, early morning hours when her shifts would begin. Her mentor helped her brainstorm solutions to the problem and remembered that someone at the Mercy Center said they had received a bicycle from a donor. Erin reached out the director of the Mercy Center and was thrilled when they offered to give her the bike. She was able to take the job without worrying about how she was going to get there.

Before the reenactment began, we learned that the story had just happened the week prior, so it was all very new to everyone. Erin chose an actor to play her and another to play her mentor who drove her to the interview, and the performance began. It was riveting. The audience was engaged in the story, the actors depicted it with sincerity and detail, and Erin sat with eyes wide open as she saw her story come to life on the stage. I observed her, more than once, lean over to the conductor with a big smile and whisper things like “that’s exactly how that happened”. Sometimes she was laughing, sometimes her hands were over her mouth, and when the news came in the reenactment that she had gotten the job there were tears in her eyes, not only from her but from her friends in the audience. At the conclusion of the story, the audience was in an uproar. We had just watched a dramatic scene take place that captivated the entire audience. It was satisfying, wonderful, and magical in the way only live theatre can produce. When the evening was over, several members of the Playback Troupe made it a point to go into the audience to meet newcomers and say hello to the people who had returned.

Playback Theatre Workshop

Participation, outreach, service, intention, and transformation, all of the five components are met in Playback Theatre. The only thing left to do was to try it out for myself. In June of 2013, I hosted my own Playback workshop at Virginia Commonwealth University involving a mix of undergraduate and graduate students and community members. Using what I had learned from participating in the training in New York and what I had seen in the live performance in South Carolina, I organized a three-hour workshop designed to simply introduce the participants to the form and hopefully generate some interest in its power as an Applied Theatre practice.

I relied heavily on a book by Michael Rohd titled *Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue*. In it, he outlines what a successful program progression looks like when working with the community and details several activities within each stage that helps the progression of the work. The four stages are warm-ups, bridge work, improvisation, and activating material. During my session, I was able to get through the first three stages but fell short on time to really move into activating material.

I began the workshop with some easy and fun warm up games designed to get the participants moving and relaxed. The first few minutes of any workshop is always tense as everyone anxiously anticipates the work to come, especially if the group is comprised of strangers. I played a game I call "Trading Spaces", which is a well known game referred to with different names. One player stands in the center

of the circle while the other players on the outside attempt to trade spaces with another person in the circle, not on their immediate left or right, using non verbal communication. The players must get to the space left open by the other player before the person in the middle gets to the empty space. If the player in the middle gets to the space first, the player who did not make it fast enough has to stay in the middle. Once the group understands the game, I introduce different themes onto the game that make it extra fun and it forces everyone to look silly in front of one another. For example, we will play “barnyard” trading spaces where players must cross the circle as a barnyard animal, or “dance moves” trading spaces where players must dance across the circle. “Hot lava” trading spaces is the best one to end with because it always ends in pandemonium and you can instruct them to keep moving around the room so as to not lose the momentum the exercise creates.

After the warm up, as they were moving around the room and filling in the empty spaces, I asked them to strike a pose when I clapped my hands. Their poses needed to be dynamic, physical expressions. I asked them to try and move beyond their normal range of physical motion. They practiced striking poses together for a few minutes and then I moved into a sculpting exercise. One person would remain frozen in a pose and the rest of the group would relax and examine the sculpture, each describing the story that they could see within the form. Each person had different ideas about what could potentially be happening, and with minor adjustments to the pose made by a sculptor, the story would change dramatically.

In the most activating exercise of the day, I asked the group to come up with some words to describe how an audience of Playback Theatre might feel coming

into a performance. We developed a list of about twenty words like nervous, excited, anxious, and mischievous, and I asked the group to pair up with a partner. Each took turns sculpting the partner into the shape of a particular word on the list. Every sculptor created a different image for the same word, highlighting the fact that everyone sees things differently. We moved into a similar exercise where one sculptor sculpted a small group into one of the words. The group not being sculpted was asked to interpret the sculpture and make any changes to it to make it a clearer representation of the word.

The sculpting exercise is meant to help the participants understand that the audience experience in a Playback performance is a subjective one, that the stories they tell can have many interpretations and that the job of the actor is to take the essence of the story and try to reenact that as opposed to a literal reiteration. Playback is largely ritualistic and abstract, and participants need to understand how to use their bodies and minds in unique ways to retell the stories that will be told. For example, one of the short forms that I taught the group is called Fluid Sculpture. In this form, an audience member simply responds to a simple question like, “how did you feel when you woke up this morning?”. The audience member might say, “A little groggy”. The actors would then, one by one, present their version of “groggy”. The first player comes on to the stage doing a gesture and motion that captures the sense of the feeling, then, the second player adds another sequence to the original one, then the third and the fourth. By the end, there are four images on stage representing the one feeling expressed by the audience member – groggy. The aesthetic framework allows the audience member to see their story with multiple

interpretations, therefore allowing an artistic experience of personal experience. I gave every participant the opportunity to play actor and storyteller in each of the different forms, and from Fluid Sculpture we moved to Pairs.

Like Fluid Sculpture, Pairs is another short form that requires only a brief story from an audience member. Instead of reenacting one feeling, Pairs is a form that reenacts two opposing feelings. For instance, an audience member may have recently been married. The Conductor (one who facilitates a Playback performance) might ask if the wedding day held two opposite emotions for the Teller (audience member telling the story). He or she might say “excitement and terror”. As one unit, two actors would take one of the two words respectively and portray them together. Since we often experience many emotions at the same time, this form expresses two emotions at the same time, giving it artistic shape and cohesion. Tellers are often struck by how the expression of their dual emotions on stage accurately reflected the way they really felt in the moment.

We had enough time to briefly talk about how music is incorporated in Playback and each participant had the opportunity to be the musician. We also had a chance to do one long form story. Recognizing that the participants had only been introduced to the work a few hours earlier, they did remarkably well with the long form performance. Of course, everything we did in the training session could have been expanded upon and given more time, but in the short time we had I felt like it was a success and I was able to take away some important lessons.

Lessons

While I appreciate all the research I have done on this subject, theory can only go so far. At some point one must take a step into the unknown and actually do the work. There is no amount of study that could fully prepare someone for practical experience with Playback Theatre, or Applied Theatre in general. There is a degree of discomfort with that, but the best thing to do is host a workshop, invite some willing participants, and lean into the discomfort. It reminds me of what I learned from Stephen Wangh at a master class he hosted at the Southeastern Theatre Conference in 2013. He spoke at length about the process of learning and how it is within failure where the real lessons can be found. He used as an example the time he spent studying with Jerzy Grotowski in 1967. They were instructed on how to do several kinds of headstands. Wangh described it this way, “we students tilted left and right, sweated and wobbled, struggling to keep our balance until we crashed to the floor. When we did, Grotowski would say, ‘when you fall, you must think of the ground as someone or something that loves you and will not reject you’” (Wangh 101).

Not everything during the workshop was successful. One form I taught them, called “Flying V”, involves three actors, one of whom stands in the center with two other actors standing at their left and right just off the shoulder. The middle actor retells the story of the teller using gesture to illustrate while the other two actors emphasize the gesture only. It is a very abstract form and one that I could not get right with the actors even though I tried it a few different ways. The learning came

from trying it out and discovering what didn't work about it and having the patience and the willingness to let it fail again and again.

One of the participants in the workshop was a very weak performer, and that made a huge difference in the success of the different scenes. This person was very tentative with every decision, was overly cautious to commit to actions, and would constantly check in with me during scenes to see if I was approving of the work. One of the stronger actors in the group commented at the end of the workshop that the power of Playback Theatre was evident, especially if you had the right group of people performing. I can better understand now what kind of ensemble I would need to have in order for the troupe to be cohesive.

Part IV: Applied Theatre in Higher Education

An Interview with Dr. Ellen Margolis; Chair of the Theatre Department at Pacific University in Forest Grove Oregon, June 14th, 2013:

In 2012, Pacific University's Department of Theatre introduced an Applied Theatre program to their students, becoming the first institution in America to offer a Bachelor of Arts in the field. I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Margolis about her experience with Applied Theatre and about the process of developing the curriculum at her university. What follows are highlights of that conversation which affirmed my notion that at some point you must take a leap of faith and do the work, which Dr. Margolis did by offering this degree. Also, the conversation confirmed that there is quite a bit of energy around this work and that hopefully a movement is occurring to include Applied Theatre programming at the university level. My questions and comments are in bold while her responses are in plain text.

Do you think that students at the undergraduate level lack the maturity and life experience necessary to fully understand what goes in to doing Applied Theatre work?

I think it's a really live question for us. We're such a young program and my strategy has been to start with what seemed like some likely successes and things that weren't likely to be overly complicated or risky, but that's not to say we won't be working with various other populations as we go. I think it's wise to be aware of the

maturity level of the students and how much life experience they may or may not have. I think there are people who are doing roughly the equivalent kinds of work, maybe not quite so much with undergraduates, it's not that it's not out there, we were bold in saying let's make a degree and you can get a BA in this kind of work. To have a major, to call it a program, was partly a way to make ourselves more apparent, not just to students but also to other people who are doing this kind of work.

What that does is force a definition of the practice. It removes the ambiguity of what the work actually is when an institution legitimizes it by calling it something and offering a degree in it.

When I was researching and I was trying to do my proposal, if you've worked with university administrators, they want to know both that other people are doing it who think it's a good idea and they also want to know that we would be doing something unique. As I was looking for what was out there I often found a class tucked away; theatre for social change, theatre and community, somewhere in a traditional theatre curriculum, and I think that's all great, it's not insignificant, but we just made the choice to wave the flag of hoping to become a part of what we hope is going to be a movement.

I get that sense. In my experience so far there is not a shortage of students who have a passion for theatre and pursue it regardless of its economic challenges. Students show up for these programs and if institutions are offering these types of classes and are helping students redefine what success in theatre looks like, I

think that is a win for everybody. For those students who come in and discover this whole other world and all of these different avenues that you can take, I can't see how that would not be beneficial for everyone involved, particularly if you're the flagship saying 'hey you can do this, you can get trained in these forms', I think it is an attractive incentive. When were you first exposed to Applied Theatre and when did you first begin using the term?

I was really pleased to see and had a moment of recognition when I saw that your question was about using the term because it really pulled together a lot of things I'd been increasingly aware of over the years. I went to Berkeley as an undergraduate and already then, the center for independent living was right there and theatre was coming out of that, some political theatre in the Bay Area. I was involved in a theatre company back then that made it a point to make visits to Alzheimers day care centers, we had a community minded mission as individual artists and as a company. This notion of the social utility of theatre has always been in my world and in my blood. When I moved to Portland about 10 years ago to start teaching there, I really saw that the whole pulse of it had really picked up, and I feel like in the last decade there's so many people doing good work with a wide variety of populations; at risk youth, older citizens, people with life changing diagnoses, veterans. Not only are they doing the work, they are also assessing who they are helping and who they are they doing it for. I had moved to Oregon and taken over as Chair of this tiny department at Pacific University, but where for the first time I had a lot of influence over a program. I was encouraging my students to check out Playback Theatre, we have a strong company here, and I think it's brilliant. So all of

this was happening and I became very good friends with an actor who works with an organization called Playwrights Inc. which is a non-profit that runs a two week residency program for at risk youth in transition. I was absorbing what they were doing and going to the showcases at the end of the residencies, and I was getting really excited about the power of this kind of work. Each student who signs up for the workshop is mentored one on one for two weeks on a writing project. The mentor is there only to ask questions and help facilitate the writing and then the script is given to professional actors to perform in a showcase for the community. I always get a little goosebumpy when I talk about it because for two weeks that kid who has been a problem, or a number, or moved from foster care, they are a writer. That's how they are referred to and that's how they are spoken about and at the end of it a professional actor does their work. The transformation can be huge. In many cases it is. There is a lot of powerful art coming out of Applied Theatre work and I wanted my students to aspire to that kind of work.

I taught at University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point for five years, which is a very pre-professional program. The students there were great and went places, national tours, Broadway. Coming then to this tiny liberal arts school it made me question what really constitutes an undergraduate degree in theatre? To me, this is where the energy is right now, theatre with this social utility. At the same time, the characteristic of my school is public service oriented and it has always been that way. It draws students who are service oriented and who have questions like 'I love

this work but what do I do with it' or 'I'm not really interested in that nomadic life', which is something else I really understand.

I spent some time in the UK with our sister institution, York St. John, in 2009 simply to follow people around and shadow their classes. That is where I heard the term applied theatre for the first time and I said 'oh, okay, it's all related!' and something in my body relaxed when I went, 'oh there's a word for all of it'.

In Glasgow, they were calling it 'community theatre' and I had the opposite reaction that you had when they were using that word because of the difference in connotation of that term between our country and theirs. It means something different to them, so what we think of as community theatre in this country is not what they were doing. That is what flipped the switch for me, when I realized there was something more to what was going on than my impression of 'community' theatre.

Right. I know what you mean and I had that same confusion because I ran into that expression a couple of times in literature and I thought that it didn't quite seem like the same thing. Their community theatre seems really energized and powerful and it seems like it's truly community theatre.

The kinds of things I was seeing over there were students creating work with young women in a recovery center for eating disorders. These were 20, 21 year old undergraduate students that were leading these projects. They worked with an

organization called *Out of Character* that had evolved as a service for users of mental health services. Not only were they doing this kind of work but they were speaking about it with a lot of authority, that really struck me. They didn't seem different from my students in almost any other way, but when they were talking about these projects they knew what they were doing and knew they had these skills.

That totally debunks the theory that undergraduates are not mature enough to handle the work.

We're being a little more conservative than we need to be at Pacific in regards to where we go and with whom we work, but in terms of what the students are capable of I think it's a lot. Students have a certain amount of confidence and courage inherent in their age that actually serves them in this type of work.

So in 2009 you had that experience and then how did you go about realizing the idea to introduce the curriculum and how did you go about presenting your ideas to the administration?

The President of the university suddenly put out a call for proposals for new programs and if it was an idea that they thought might fly you would get \$5,000 to research it further and come back with a formal business plan and proposal. I went through that door after talking to some people about it at the grassroots level. I created a proposal and was awarded the money, which I used to go back to York and really made an attempt to shadow everybody who was doing applied work. I spent a lot of time with Nick Rowe who is a dream come true when it comes to

understanding this work. His background is in psychiatric nursing, he was the initiator of Playback in London and has a company in York, he created the Out of Character company that I talked about earlier. He actually came out to Oregon while I was actively working on my proposal and did some workshops which was really exciting for the students and he spoke with the dean and other administrators. He is so eloquent and that was really useful. When the culture at the university went from 'don't come to us with new ideas for programming' to 'please submit ideas' I felt like I couldn't miss the opportunity. Within a year I had the proposal done and vetted by anyone on campus who wanted to take a look at it.

Also, completely independent from what I was doing, the administration had decided to open an office of civic engagement on campus to help connect students with internships, or trips to service projects, and they served as the entity to manage the academic part of those experiences. With that center on campus, then I was able to really pick the brain of the woman who started it and she put me in touch with community partners like retirement homes. The great thing about that particular community is that you can't go that far wrong with doing workshops with older adults who love to have young people come in and play theatre games with them once a week. That's a great win for us, meaningful for everybody.

One of the likely reasons it got approved was because it did not require hiring another full time faculty person. That really wasn't in the budget. It also allowed me to be flexible with it and try things without having to worry about it crashing and

burning with a full time faculty person who has committed their life to it. The people who I hired are people from the Portland area who I know that have a lot of devising background.

This last year was the first year of your program. Can you give me a snapshot of how it went and how you felt about things that were successful or challenging?

The core class that we offer is the Applied Theatre workshop, which is offered at a 200 and a 300 level. The thrust of it being that it is hands on, it's in the community, there's a lot of site visits and reports back. The work this year at a local retirement center involved discovering what the participants there liked to do, which was mostly theatre games and improv, and also then to draw out their stories and do a slow-rolling Playback. There were a lot of adjustments on our end, and the person I hired was very open minded and flexible which was great. At first it didn't seem like they were getting the same people every week and there was this certain improvisatory attitude you had to take at the site visits every week until it all settled. By the end it was very successful and the final workshop presentation was done at a very high level for several of the younger students who had never done devising work before. The community definitely wants us back, but in the fall we're going to expand a little and not put all our eggs in one basket. We are going to also work with a Veterans organization and split the students into teams.

When the students are reporting back to you about their on site experiences, how is that facilitated?

At first it was questions about what they were supposed to even be reflecting on, what were they supposed to make of everything. We had to flesh that out with the group. The fact that we had to make adjustments wasn't a failure but part of the process. We had to redefine success, not only from a career standpoint but week to week as well. We talked about assumptions we make and what we project on to people.

The conversation I had with Dr. Margolis was excellent in a couple of important ways. First, it was inspiring to hear a professional, with years of experience in higher education, speak about taking a leap of faith in her program to try something she had never done before. Her risk taking encouraged me to do the same, to get to know the community in which I will work and to get out in to that community. She certainly displayed confidence and courage in her decision to move on her idea. Secondly, an important relationship was formed between one of the pioneers of Applied Theatre in higher education and me. I am excited to see how we might collaborate in the future and look forward to utilizing her as a resource in building an Applied Theatre program at my university.

Conclusion

I leave this writing ready to put the books back on the shelf and begin a career that I believe will be focused heavily in the direction of the community engagement and Applied Theatre. Much like Dr. Margolis, I will be teaching at a university where service and outreach is at its core and where the students have a particular interest in the social utility of the theatre. I consider the theory that I have generated here to be valuable in that it has helped me not only define what Applied Theatre practice is but also aided in my ability to speak clearly and intelligibly about it to others. My ability to have authority over the subject will be paramount to my success in building a program around it in my position at the University of Sioux Falls. I am now looking forward to moving beyond the theory and into the “wobble” of actually doing the work. The task before me is to get to know the different communities of Sioux Falls, understand how to engage them in the work of theatre, and then discover how to equip my students to do the same. It will be an interesting and fundamental part to the longer narrative of my career.

Appendix A

Practitioner/Field	Applied Theatre Definition	Key Concepts
<p>Dr. Annette Kramer</p> <p>Annette Kramer Consulting, London (via New York).</p> <p>“Her work with companies to craft and deliver more compelling stories has helped them to break into new markets, raise investment, and excel at sales”.</p>	<p>Applying theatre techniques to situations in which problems need solving (such as applying drama to emotional therapy, conflict resolution, or corporate learning) (web).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Problem solving ❖ Outside mainstream theatre
<p>Dr. Franc Chamberlain</p> <p>University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom.</p> <p>Among a vast history of research and publication in performance studies, he has lead workshops in prisons, for adult education, drug and alcohol resource center, and the Centre for Excluded Pupils</p>	<p>Its origin can be traced to education departments and has ties to Theatre for Development (TfD) and Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). “Many of us who have been with Boal’s work . . . with different client groups would have been doing Applied Theatre for years without calling it that.</p> <p>“Is not the application of theory to practice as such, but a label applied to a set of practices as a means of gathering them together”.</p> <p>The family of AT is identified by certain characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation • Transformation <p>If we leave it at that then there is no way to differentiate AT practice to other performative events whose intentions are unethical, such as the attack on Sept. 11.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Participation ❖ Transformation ❖ Intention

	There must be an intention to achieve appropriate ends, which may mean “ethical” outcomes (E-Debate 1).	
<p>Dr. Catherine McNamara</p> <p>Central School of Speech and Drama, London. Course leader of the MA in Applied Theatre Program. She is Chair of the Equality & Diversity Committee and manages the Learning Centre. Her Applied Theatre praxis has engaged queer identified young people.</p>	<p>Applied Theatre education “focuses on theatre practices that promote inclusion and access in a variety of settings where difference or disadvantage might exist . . . addresses the ways theatre can be an agent for change, empowerment, enablement, and transformation but also explore the problematics/ethics of such terms and concepts”.</p> <p>The “applied” aspect concerns practices that engage with the issues, dramatize relevant stories, and involve participants in processes that they find useful, informative in ways specific to them (web).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Inclusion ❖ Involvement ❖ Transformation ❖ Storytelling ❖ Specific Contexts
<p>Dr. Sheila Preston</p> <p>Central School of Speech and Drama, London.</p> <p>Facilitated community TfD projects in the fields of mental health and disability. Published in <i>The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance</i>. Co-edited <i>The Applied Theatre Reader</i></p>	<p>“Applied Theatre has emerged in recent years as a term describing a broad set of theatrical practices and creative processes that take participants and audiences beyond the scope of conventional, mainstream theatre into the realm of a theatre that is responsive to ordinary people and their stories, local settings and priorities”</p> <p>“AT works in contexts where the work created and performed has a specific resonance with its participants and its audiences and often, to different degrees, involves them in it”</p> <p>Participants are “motivated by the belief that theatre experienced both as a participant and as audience, might make a difference to the way in which people interact with each other and the wider world”</p> <p>“...there may be an overt political desire to use the process of theatre in the service of social and community change . . . [or a] less overt [intention] with using theatre to draw attention or reveal the hidden stories of a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Communal ❖ Responsive to ordinary people ❖ Localized and Specific context ❖ Involvement of the people the work serves. ❖ Service ❖ Transformation

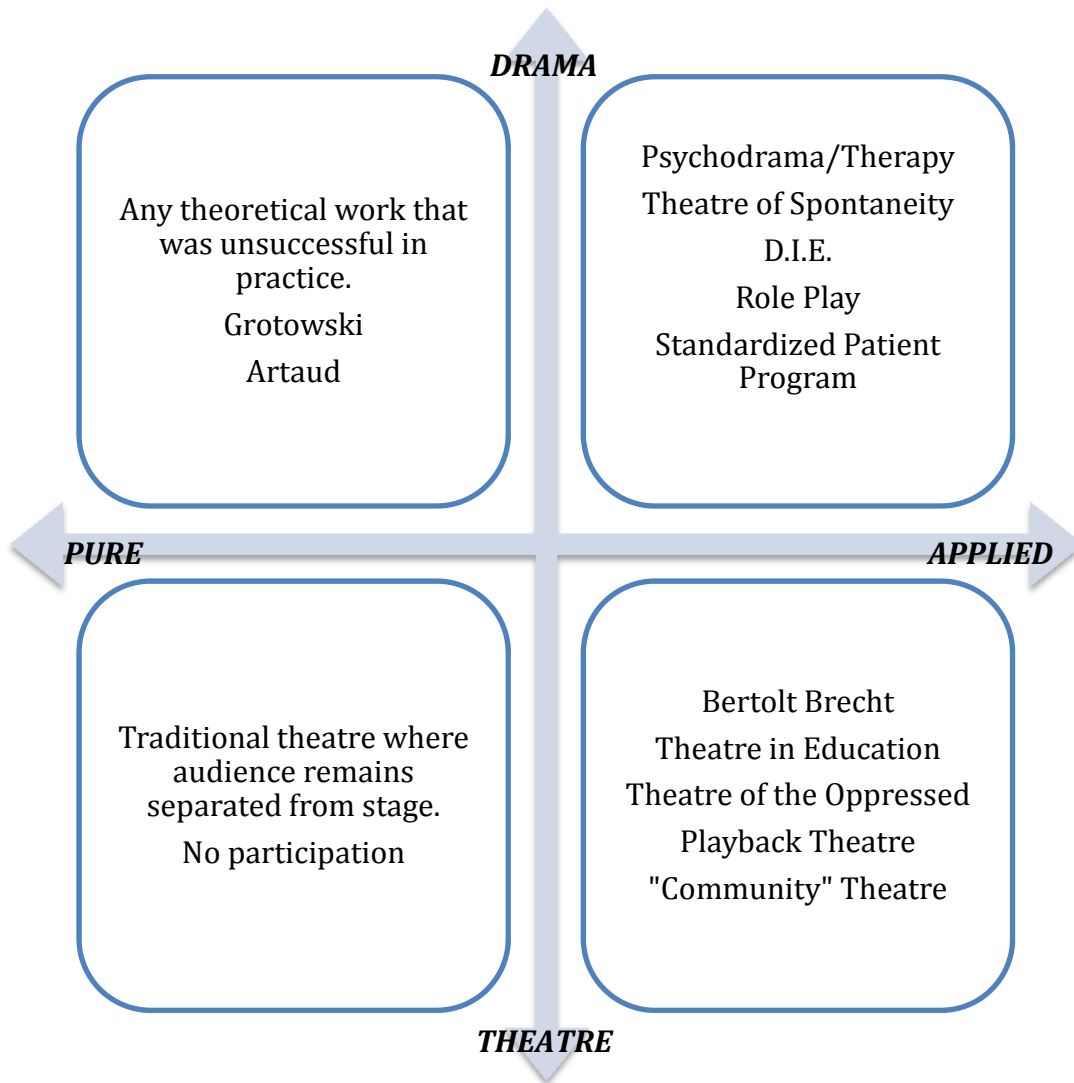
	community (Prentki 9)	
<p>Helen Nicholson</p> <p>Professor of Theatre and Drama, Royal Holloway, University of London. Author of <i>Applied Drama</i></p>	<p>Nicholson refrains from immediately defining “Applied Drama” as she refers to it. She explores some varieties of definitions from institutions in the UK, New Zealand, and other AT practitioners, quoted below. Ultimately, she said “applied drama is undertaken by those who want to touch the lives of others, who hope that participants and audiences will extend their perception of how life is, and imagine how it might be different”.</p> <p>“intervention, communication, development, empowerment, and expression when working with individuals or specific communities” - Central School</p> <p>AT is presented in “non-traditional spaces for marginalized communities” - University of Manchester</p> <p>AT is “Theatre and Drama in non-traditional contexts – theatre in the community, theatre in business and industry, theatre in political debate and action, theatre in lifelong education and learning”. - Applied Theatre Researcher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Community, specifically marginalized ❖ Transformation ❖ Diverse in its application ❖ Outreach in to varying communities ❖ Service for others ❖ Alternative Spaces
<p>Greg Giesekam</p> <p>Senior Lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow.</p>	<p>He claims that the rise of the term AT has more to do with the decline in the use of the term “community theatre” and the connotations associated with it whether they be political or otherwise. He finds the term inappropriate and calls it “a very capacious and portmanteau term”</p>	
<p>John Somers</p> <p>Founded the MA in Applied Drama at the University of Exeter and is the founding director of the Exeter</p>	<p>AT is “drama which has a job to do” (web).</p> <p>Where mainstream theatre performances are presented to whoever walks through the door, AT is usually done with known populations. There are usually four parts to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “A job to do” = Intention ❖ Specific context ❖ Transformation ❖ Outreach

<p>Applied Drama Research Conference. Developed an array of AT programs concerning issues such as alcohol abuse, runaway children, bioethics, self harm, depression amongst farmers and stress and suicide in the veterinary profession</p>	<p>the process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the societal context is researched 2. the drama event is customized for that context 3. you do it 4. you evaluate its effect 	
<p>James Thompson</p> <p>Professor of Applied and Social Theatre, University of Manchester, UK. Director of the Centre for Applied Theatre Research</p>	<p>“Applied Theatre first made sense to me when trying to make theatre relevant, challenging yet sustained inside prisons. We had to apply our craft to disciplines where the language of theatre was unfamiliar” (e-debate)</p> <p>AT projects always take place in communities, in institutions, or with specific groups. The often include the practice of theatre where it is least expected; for example, in prisons, refugee camps, forgotten estates, hospitals, museums, centres for the disabled, old people’s homes, and under-served rural villages: sometimes in theatres. Applied Theatre is a participatory theatre created by people who would not usually make theatre. It is, I would hope, a practice by, with, and for the excluded and marginalized. It is, at best, a theatre that translates and adapts to the unfamiliar.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Alternative location ❖ Non theatre participants ❖ Creating universal theatrical language ❖ Outreach in to community ❖ Exploration and conflict resolution ❖ Transformation
<p>Dr. Philip Taylor</p> <p>Associate Professor of Educational Theatre, New York University</p>	<p>AT “has a transformative principle at its core, unlike applied drama, usually is powered by a presentational aspect from skilled teaching artists and actors”.</p> <p>There are 8 guiding principles of Applied Theatre. Applied Theatre:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is thoroughly researched 2. Seeks incompleteness 3. Demonstrates possible narratives 4. Is task-oriented 5. Poses dilemmas 6. Interrogates futures 7. Is an aesthetic medium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Transformative ❖ Distinction between applied theatre and drama, theatre having the performative aspect. ❖ Participation in varying degrees

	8. Gives voice to communities	
<p>Dr. Monica Prendergast</p> <p>Formerly on faculty at the University of Victoria and Lesley University. She most recently published a companion book to <i>Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice</i> entitled <i>Applied Drama: A Facilitator's Handbook for Working in the Community</i></p>	<p>AT is most often “played in spaces that are not usually defined as theatre buildings, with participants who may or may not be skilled in theatre arts and to audiences who have a vested interest in the issue taken up by the performance or are members of the community addressed by the performance”</p> <p>AT is “an umbrella term that refers to all the alternative theatre forms that have emerged since the 1960’s including grassroots, community, social, political, and radical theatre”.</p> <p>“traditional mainstream theatre is most often centered on the interpretation of a prewritten script, [whereas] AT, in contrast, involves both the generation and interpretation of a theatre piece that in performance may or may not be scripted in the traditional manner”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Scripting vs. Devised ❖ Communal in nature ❖ Outreach into community ❖ Specific contexts are analyzed ❖ Alternative spaces ❖ Diverse participant background
<p>Dr. Judith Ackroyd</p> <p>Dean of Faculty, Regents University, London.</p>	<p>AT “uses drama to improve the lives of individuals and create better societies . . . [it has] an intention to generate change (of awareness, attitude, behaviour, etc), and the participation of the audience”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Transformation ❖ Intention ❖ Participation

Appendix B

Pure vs. Applied Scatter plot



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Vita

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