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Taiwo Afolabi, Jemma Llewellyn

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Ethics and Research-Based Theatre: Reflections from Two Practitioners

Taiwo Afolabi, Jemma Llewellyn

Abstract

The ethics of engaging a community in quantitative, qualitative and affect-driven research has received global attention in recent times, particularly in relation to the positionality of the practitioner-researcher and systems of knowledge production.

This article examines ethical tensions and entanglements that arise when working as a volunteer and professional director outside of the academy with multiple stakeholders including teachers, university students, young carers, a playwright, youth arts organisation and social services. It focuses on two case studies where the practitioners are from two distinct cultures and countries that continue to feel the impact of colonisation, Nigeria (Africa), and Wales (Europe). The practitioners reflect on their interchangeable roles in the process of facilitating community engagement and amplifying youth experiences to examine moments of convergence and divergence in their experiences and practices in an effort to decolonise research-based theatre as an academic system of knowledge production, and challenge what is defined as such theatre.

Historical Prelude

Taiwo (TA): *Every aspect of Nigerian society is influenced by the country's colonial past and later globalisation. Growing up, I was thus subjected to Western ideas by every institution involved in my socialisation. For instance, although there were three indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba) in the school curriculum, we were not allowed to speak any of them in school. How would one learn a language one is not permitted to speak within the walls of the institution that claims to teach it? The issue of language raised many questions for me, particularly that of identity (both about a country and the individual). To a certain extent, when I was growing up, everything revolved around the West (particularly the UK and the United States, thanks to Hollywood) and we were brainwashed through media and other agents of socialisation and knowledge production to believe that everything that comes from the West is better than ours, and hence worth emulating. My early applied theatre practice was rooted in this way of doing things. I come from a system where Theatre for Development (TfD) was done to and on me (and/or to the community). I read about, knew practitioners, and experienced TfD projects executed without any consultation with the participants or community. Thus, my perspective of and positionality in relation to TfD and by extension applied theatre has always been different from the person doing it. As an applied theatre practitioner-researcher who currently lives and works in Canada, and has an active practice in Africa, my practice started from this point of view; hence my interest in the ethics of socially engaged theatre and cultural ethics from a triad perspective of intersectionality, positionality and identity.*

Jemma (JL): *Cultural Disclosure. Croeso. Ydych chi'n eistedd yn gyffyrddus? (Welcome. Are you sitting comfortably?)*

I came to Canada from Wales in 2016 on a two-year work visa, with the intention of staying longer but not necessarily through academia. This is the power of the British passport and its privilege without me even realising it. Some would say I was ignorant of such power before moving to Canada. Many would say I was also ignorant of how this power came to be in Canada. Within the first few weeks of moving to Canada I quickly leant where, when, and exactly how this power was used to take what did not belong to the British from indigenous communities as I witnessed the on-going impact of colonisation on the streets of Toronto, where indigenous folks are suffering and taking direct action against the atrocities that have been committed against their ancestors, lands, women, and children.

Growing up in Wales I was not taught in school or at home about our ancestors' roles in colonisation. I only became aware of this historical reality through trying to understand the context and purpose of land acknowledgements in Canada due to having an unexplainable connection to the land in Wales. Since moving to Canada, I have become increasingly aware of Welsh heritage and culture being absorbed into England, being the generic identity of the British or being from the UK. For Welsh citizens there is an inherent desire to not be labelled English. I discovered that Wales was colonised by the English in the 13th century, which saw the Welsh language being prohibited and Welsh citizens colonising Patagonia to preserve it. My most recent

discovery was that the Welsh were unsuccessful in setting up a colony in what is colonially known as Newfoundland.

This cultural disclosure is the first step in understanding my new positionality and identity as a community-engaged researcher through an intersectional lens. Reflective praxis is the mere starting point of decolonisation with under-served communities.

TA and JL: *In this article, we reflect on two applied theatre projects located in our home countries that took place outside of the ethical boundaries of the academy, and worked with two distinct communities of practice, using theatre and research techniques to engage participants. We situate these projects within the framework of research-based theatre (RBT), in an effort to decolonise and challenge the academic system of knowledge production it is currently located in.*

Introduction: Research-Based Theatre/Applied Theatre?

Research-based theatre has been and continues to be a growing phenomenon within academic fields of research, including health sciences, social sciences, and the arts. It is difficult to provide a collective definition and understanding of RBT because the framing of this practice borrows terminology from similar and intersecting performance, storytelling, and anthropologically-centered research methods/methodologies such as verbatim theatre, performance/ performed ethnography, documentary theatre, and ethnotheatre/ ethnodrama (Beck, Belliveau, Lea, and Wager 2011: 687).

Kathy Bishop adds to the fields RBT borrowed from by noting in her definition that:

Research-based theatre encompasses but is not limited to ethnodrama and is included within applied theatre (2014: 66).

This suggests that RBT is not just one thing but everything. To complicate the situation further, the terms RBT and applied theatre have been used interchangeably within project reflections and research papers (Cox 2015; Bishop 2014). For instance, Susan Cox 'considers some of the most salient political and ethical dimensions of evolving practices in research-based theatre' (2015: 65) as a method of inquiry in the field of mental health with clinicians and social science researchers. Following this, she uses the term 'applied theatre' in the same sentence, which presents a similar entanglement of definition as that of Bishop (2014).

Like Beck et al.:

We do not suggest that pieces of research-based theatre will fit neatly into boxes (2011: 696).

This is because as self-identified applied theatre practitioners, we understand that practices that include participatory methods are difficult to define. In turn, we respect the fact that:

[The] intent is to conceptualize general categories in the hopes that practitioners will then describe them in more particular ways based on their own works (ibid.).

However, framing RBT within the practice of applied theatre or vice-versa, also complicates our ongoing process of determining what the distinct concepts and practices are. Peter and Briar O'Connor's contestable definition of applied theatre lends itself to the arguments that we will put forward on RBT. They note that:

Applied theatre is an umbrella term that defines theatre which operates beyond the traditional and limiting scope of conventional Western theatre forms (O'Connor and O'Connor 2009: 471).

Like applied theatre, the intention is to make RBT inclusive as a methodology because it is considered as 'an umbrella term for the various uses of theatre in research' (Belliveau and Lea 2016: 3). With this in mind, we would add that theatre practitioners-researchers that identify with practice as research, research as practice, practice-based research and practice-led research also fit within the framing of RBT. All of these are:

Increasingly common methodolog[ies] for engaging in [creative] academic research (ibid.).

It is RBT's inclination to generalize and its overt inclusivity as an academic system of knowledge production that poses some ethical challenges. Therefore, we argue that the quest to make RBT inclusive opens it up to being challenged because of its generalisation and lack of specificity. This raises the question of how situating RBT within academic research changes its purpose and intent. Who is RBT really serving?

More specifically, in reflecting on our own applied theatre projects, we ask:

- What might we learn about the practice of ethics by examining RBT projects that are not conducted within the boundaries of the academy?
- What are the limitations and benefits of thinking about RBT practices in this way outside of the academy?
- How do our personal and cultural histories impact the way in which we as RBT practitioners use theatre, drama, or performance to address social justice issues?
- How do we ethically navigate and negotiate power relations in our respective co-creative spaces, where there are multiple shifting approaches, expectations and understandings of using theatre as a tool for social change?

To explore these questions, we first describe and draw out the ethical tensions and entanglements from two case studies. We then respond to Beck et al.'s statement that:

We do not suggest that pieces of research-based theatre will fit neatly into boxes (2011: 696),

by re/un-situating RBT in our previous individual practices. We aim to untangle ethical tensions inside and outside of the academy. This approach is adopted in an effort to decolonise and challenge the academic system of knowledge production RBT is currently situated in. We draw attention to the use of colonial language, the positionality of the RBT practitioner, historical ways of knowing and being in the academy, and the ethical protocols set by ethics review boards.

As we move forward we take heed of Marxist philosopher, Karl Kautsky, who proposes that:

No ethic is absolute and that moral rules can change, but also that ethical rules are necessary for particular times, societies and classes; that ethics are not a matter of convention, nor something which the individual chooses at will, but are determined by powers which are stronger than the individual, which stand over him [sic] (1983: 49-50).

The Projects: Burkina Faso and Wales

TA: In 2012, Corneille Theatre, a theatre company in Ouagadougou, invited me to be a guest facilitator during a theatre festival. The theatre project focused on artistic education (Afolabi 2013). The 13th Edition of FITMO/FAB, an edition in honour of theatre guru, Pr. Jean Pierre Guigane, ran from October to November. The theme of the workshop was 'Artistic Education' since that was one of Pr. Guigane's focal contributions to theatre in Burkina Faso and Africa at large (Mande 2011). This education project centred on using theatre games, exercises, storytelling, and dramatic techniques such as role-play for artistic education (Afolabi et al. 2017). It aimed to expose both teachers and students to:

- 1) education for art, creating deliberative space for those who receive/interpret arts for the understanding as well as for assimilation of artistic messages; and
- 2) education through art; in this case, explorative art becomes a method which endorses art's educational potential for the general development of the student personality (Morari 2016).

Hence, it was about increasing teachers and students' knowledge of artistic education to enrich the classroom learning and teaching experience. There was no final performance and there was no implicit therapeutic component to the project.

Theatre Emissary International, a cultural centre that utilises arts to educate, conscientize and create positive social change in society, developed the initiative and was invited to lead the workshop in Ouagadougou. The project took place in the Baskuy School community with 30 pupils and two teachers, and a municipal government administrator. As the Artistic Director of Theatre Emissary International and the lead facilitator, I worked with a team of four made up of logistics personnel, an interpreter, and an assistant facilitator/ animator II. Both the interpreter and assistant facilitator/ animator were Burkinabes.

As the team lead/lead facilitator, I commenced the project with a train-the-trainer a day before starting at the school. The session focused on working through the design plan with the team except for the logistics personnel. On the day the project started in the school, we held a session with teachers and the Mayor of Baskuy. They wanted to open the project and have first-hand experience of the content we were going to teach their students. I facilitated a short session (around 30-45 minutes) to give them a taste of the project and afterwards held a brief question and answer session to discuss practical tips when educating through the arts. Since a government representative was present, it was an opportunity for teachers to raise some of their concerns such as creating more learning opportunities through the arts in the curriculum, and insufficient funding and infrastructure for schools in the Baskuy region. We received the blessing of the teachers and the municipal representative and proceeded to work with the students who were around 12-15 years old.

JL: Located within a coal mining community in the South Wales valleys, Mess Up the Mess Theatre Company is a youth arts organisation that has been responding to social issues pertaining to youth since 2005, and has partnered with youth organisations in New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Australia. The organisation is made up of four white middle-class women, who are funded through the local authority, the arts council, and the UK charity, Children in Need. Its primary focus is providing a space for young people aged 11 to 18 who are not in education, employment, or training, whilst remaining committed to reaching children and young people that are first language Welsh speakers.

Hidden, a collaborative project/RBT play was created with young people from Carmarthenshire Social Services' Hidden Harm programme, the University of Trinity Saint David theatre students, professional actors, youth who attend the company's weekly theatre programme, and Welsh playwright, Bethan Marlow. The youth who took part and produced a collection of stories were aged 12 to 18 and from low-income families. There were no direct therapeutic components; however, this is not to say that the participants and audience did not experience a therapeutic effect. The main aims of the play were to raise awareness among adults in positions of power, facilitate community engagement with youth, increase knowledge of the topic in the hope that Hidden Harm services would be used more, and change the attitudes of young people and give them an opportunity to see that they were not alone in their experiences.

The initial steps in this project were workshops where youth participants were invited to gather the stories and experiences of parents with substance misuse and mental health issues. These formed the foundation of the theatre production, *Hidden*. The characters created from the youth's stories were a mother with a substance misuse issue, a social worker who found it difficult to communicate with the youth, a 'bad teen', schoolteacher, 'bad teenagers' (played by a youth ensemble - university students and young people), and a grandmother that did not know how to talk about substance misuse issues.

The second phase of the project was workshopping scenes with the university students and the members of the youth arts organisation. They were predominantly white, with one young person and one student being a person of colour. The young people that helped build the story observed the scenes and gave feedback. Puppets were used to show the experience of the younger children, as the Hidden Harm youth thought this would be less traumatizing for the audience.

The final stage, the rehearsals, brought together professional actors who often rehearsed in a different space to the university students and young people. The production was performed for audiences in South Wales and Ireland, including schools, youth groups, treatment centres, and theatre venues. In some instances, talkbacks were held with the audience.

My role in this project was three-fold; a volunteer that provided transport for the youth; a youth participant with my own experiences of the topic discussed; and as an assistant director that mainly worked with the youth ensemble.

Ethical Tensions and Entanglements

In this section we engage Kathy Bishop's (2014) six perspectives to help us work through the ethical tensions and entanglements in our projects. Bishop's article focused on practitioners in the field including Jim Mienczakowski, one of the pioneers of RBT, who shed more light on his approach, the moral imperative and the ethic of justice. Bishop asks practitioners to consider questions such as:

What are my responsibilities as a researcher? Has the appropriate ethical clearance from the university human ethics committee and/or other relevant organisations been obtained? What other responsibilities, above and beyond the traditional researcher role, must I, as a theatre-based researcher consider? What other ways could the ethic of justice be represented in our field? (2014: 67-68).

Using these questions as guideposts, we believe that practices in RBT conducted outside of the academy are just as important to reflect upon, especially for those who are now in academia but had no intention of becoming academics. We argue that much can be learnt from those that are not conducting and disseminating research through the Western lens of academia. In addition, it is our belief that, by cracking

open the Eurocentric paradigm through going beyond the boundaries of academia, we will expand the legitimacy of knowledge produced and documented in non-academic ways.

TA: Coming from Nigeria, my lingua franca is English because Nigeria was colonised by Britain through indirect rule (a system of government used by the British and others to control part of their colonial empires, particularly in Africa through pre-existing indigenous power structures). In contrast, Burkina Faso (formerly called Upper Volta) is a former French colony. Thus although both countries are in West Africa, we do not speak the same language and due to colonisation, many indigenous languages have become extinct.

When I arrived in Ouagadougou, I used the first day to work through my drama workshop lesson plans with my team. The translator was a theatre student from the theatre company that invited me. I facilitated a train the trainer exercise for the team so that we could all understand what I was trying to do. My lesson plan was full of games and exercises that could easily captivate participants who were secondary school students. The following day the workshop started at Baskuy school in Baskuy District in Ouagadougou.

The first challenge was language and identity. I observed that each time I talked to the group, they were not interested, but waited for my interpreter because they did not understand English and I did not understand French. We struggled through the first day and afterwards, I debriefed with my team. I realised that if I was to make something meaningful with this group, I needed to do things differently. I had a thought, 'what if we exchanged roles'? Instead of leading the group in facilitation, why not join the team and allow both of the team members (my translator and the assistant) to co-facilitate if they were comfortable and I could support them and also participate. I shared the idea with them. There was initial hesitation because I was the lead facilitator and that was the reason I travelled from Nigeria. I assured them that this was not a problem, adding that it was important for the participants to benefit from the experience and I did not want to be in their way.

They agreed because they had some background in theatre, were familiar with the dramatic process and theatre techniques I was using, and I had already taken them through the workshop. I relinquished power to them, and joined the participants; the rest is history. In retrospect, the ethical tension lay between myself, team members and the students. Although I agree that the decision to switch roles was motivated by good intentions and I respectfully asked my team members if they were willing to take on the facilitation while I shifted between assisting them to facilitate and participating as a member with the students, the question of power relations stands out for me. I did face any challenges in shifting gear in roles, perhaps because I had to make it work, but I did not know how my team members experienced that process. During our daily debrief and final evaluation sessions, the team indicated that they were pleased that I made that decision because it helped the students to better understand what we were talking about, and it saved time.

Among others, this singular experience prompted me to question and reflect on two things: first, on a personal level, the African identity (the shared history of colonisation and its present-day effect in different aspects of our existence), and secondly, on a professional level, interchangeable roles in the process of facilitating community engagement. The Burkina Faso experience offered me an 'aha' moment to explore the ethics of engaging communities outside the academy, especially in qualitative and affect-driven research. It was an opportunity to carefully consider different perspectives for ethical considerations as outlined in Bishop's (2014) work. For instance, different ethical considerations such as justice, critique, and care better position me as a practitioner to ethically navigate and negotiate power relations in my co-creative space and process, especially where there were multiple shifting approaches, expectations and understandings of using theatre as a tool for social change (Shapiro and Gross 2008; Bishop 2014).

The artistic education project was independent of any educational institution; hence there was no formalized ethical process governed by a research ethics review board. Both theatre companies that conceived the project envisioned it as a part of a larger event, an annual theatre festival, FITMO/FAB. We were thus bound by the festival's rules and protocol and the guiding principles of both theatre companies. As an African traveling to another African country, I had a sense of what was acceptable and unacceptable because even though we speak different languages, as Africans, we share some belief systems, ways of knowing and being. Thus, I followed culturally accepted protocols and my professional ethics. For instance, I used songs, riddles, and proverbs that were known to the students. We also played local games and worked separately with the teachers. Personally, it was the ethics of my practice (even though I didn't have that vocabulary at that time) or what Bishop refers to as a morality perspective of profession based on her correspondence with Kathleen Gallagher and Anthony Jackson (2014: 70) that made me ask my team members if they could take on more leadership in the project. According to Gallagher and Jackson in Bishop's article:

Its moral imperative, if there is one, might be: Don't let artistic questions cloud the ethical dimensions/relationships of the work AND don't let ethical assumptions obscure the drive towards robust artistic work. (Kathleen Gallagher) ...the main moral imperatives would seem to me to be: (1) value the art form as a remarkable means of generating insight, curiosity, debate and an imaginative openness to 'changing things for the better' – at both the individual & wider, social levels; and (2) value the participating audience as not only potential learners but as co-creators of the learning process, i.e. understand that the making of meaning is a shared process and that artist-educators (or actor-teachers) need to ensure that their artwork is dialogic as well as powerful and finely honed (Anthony Jackson) (2014: 70-71).

I wanted the project to be of great benefit to the students, but I acknowledged my language deficiency and I thought of a way to address this without putting the responsibility on others. When I asked my team members, they initially hesitated because of the fact that they were there to help me but the moment we discussed it

and they understand that I was not leaving the project, but would play a supporting role, and we went over the lesson plan when they were able to add their materials and their contexts, the process went smoothly.

Did I think of my change in plan from an ethical standpoint at the time? Did I consider the implications of this decision for my future practice? And did I think for a second of the ethical tension that may arise navigating different roles? Absolutely not. I was interested in ensuring that both the students and my team had a great experience and that the project's objectives were achieved. Some years later when I met the organizer of FITMO/FAB at another gathering elsewhere, he informed me that the project was successful because my approach raised an awareness to consider partnering local talents with international experts in their community engagements. While I did not consider this implication when I decided to approach the project the way I did, it became imperative to me that the project opened up opportunities for growth for both myself and my host.

JL: Due to my mother's unexpected passing in 2010, I returned to Wales once I completed my teaching degree at Portsmouth University in England and began volunteering for a youth arts company. Ironically, my mother had been talking about this company that she had read about in a local carers' newsletter only a few years earlier, and she thought it had a great name, *Mess Up the Mess*. She liked the prospect of being able to mess up the already messy world that we lived in. In 2011, in the *Hidden* project my role in the company changed at each stage, between assisting youth with transportation, discussing my personal experiences of Hidden Harm, and assisting in the direction of scene work with the youth ensemble.

Being situated outside of the academy, this project was not governed by a research ethics board. However, ethics were present in a mutually unspoken moral code, because we were working with 'vulnerable' young people. In addition, the social services and the youth arts organization followed their own protocols around informed consent that allowed participants to cease involvement in the project. I am unsure if the university students participating in the project needed institutional research ethics clearance as they were accessing the project through an internship embedded in the course they were taking.

I confess that I had not thought about the ethical tensions and entanglements of this project until TA and I began reflecting on the practice, research and scholarship of RBT. In reflecting on Bishop's (2014) ethical questions in relation to responsibility, tensions and ethical entanglements reveal themselves in this project, just in the way my mother pointed out the world being 'messy'. Therefore, I use the concept of 'ethical messiness' in relation to work that is co-produced (Thomas-Hughes 2018). This is with a view to offering a critical view on:

The polarisations and generalisations that can too often dominate discussion of collaborative research (Facer & Enright 2016: 31).

As an adult researcher whose work focuses on collaborating with young people using theatre techniques, and in response to my own experiences as a youth polarised and generalised by adults, I am committed to disrupting this colonial narrative. In my commitment to changing this narrative, as a mark of respect for the youth participants and a deep sense of responsibility for the lasting legacy of this co-produced project, it would be unethical to give the same level of ethical scrutiny to this project as TA does above in his project.

Transhistorically, youth have been and continue to be treated with contempt and dismissed by adults in positions of power (Skelton and Stuart 2019; Levison 2021). When I reflect on the *Hidden* project and witness RBT and applied theatre work in the academy I am able to draw on one aspect of similarity; how access is gained by youth participants. Adult 'gatekeepers' come in many different forms, teachers, social workers, parents, guardians, etc. Described as a 'protected population', 'vulnerable', or 'marginalised', the oversight of this demographic is often political (Heath 2004; Kay 2019) and fuels the narrative of adultcentrism (Campbell 2021), where power and biases are always in conflict with young people's agency (Petr 2004).

However, the *Hidden* project gatekeepers operated from a place of adult allyship and youth agency by providing consultation and feedback opportunities at each stage of the process. What was key to this process was a mutual understanding of reciprocity, multiple opportunities for dissemination of gathered stories and genuine interest in facilitating change for youth. Is this possible in projects that are overseen by institutional research ethics boards? If so, why is there such a deficit in research that is co-produced with youth?

When I reflect on my positionality as a youth in this project, I now realise that I was processing the impact of substance abuse that was one of the factors in my mother's death, in addition to my lack of emotional capacity and experience of working on a project like this. Had I been the main researcher on this project, if it was being conducted in the academy, would it have received ethical clearance? Insightfully, Megan Altruz (2006) notes that from a child drama perspective, ethical practices come from a personal space, and are inseparable from the research itself (Wilson 2008). Thus, how do institutional research ethics boards determine if researchers can be objective when conducting research with youth? Furthermore, from what I have observed inside the academy thus far, Altruz's (2006) concept of 'personal space' contradicts the ideology of the academy, and in reality such boards reinforce the colonial narratives of academic intellects distancing themselves from everyday life. Framing this project as RBT outside of the academy reveals the messiness that can occur because of personal investment in a project, but also that care and agency of voice is critical in this work.

(Un/Re) Situating Research-Based Theatre: Applied Theatre Experience and Location of Practitioners

Frame of reference for the analysis

Although there is an emerging field of literature on RBT, we primarily focus on the 2011 article by Beck et al. titled 'Delineating a Spectrum of Research-Based Theatre'. The reason is that the spectrum presented in the article poses ethical issues because it situates itself within the vectors of academic research and performances derived from participants' personal storytelling. For us, framing and positioning RBT as an academic system of knowledge production raises major questions about the ethics surrounding such systems.

Furthermore, it is evident from the projects presented that institutional research ethics governed by a research ethics board in these projects were nonexistent. We concur with Bolt and MacNeill that as creative practitioners using research techniques in our work:

[We had] to develop, call on, and use [our] own sense of ethics to make 'judgement calls' when issues of an ethical nature arise in [our] creative practice' (2020: 6),

including applied theatre.

Finally, in our analysis, we adopted crystallisation which:

Combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them (Ellingson 2009: 4).

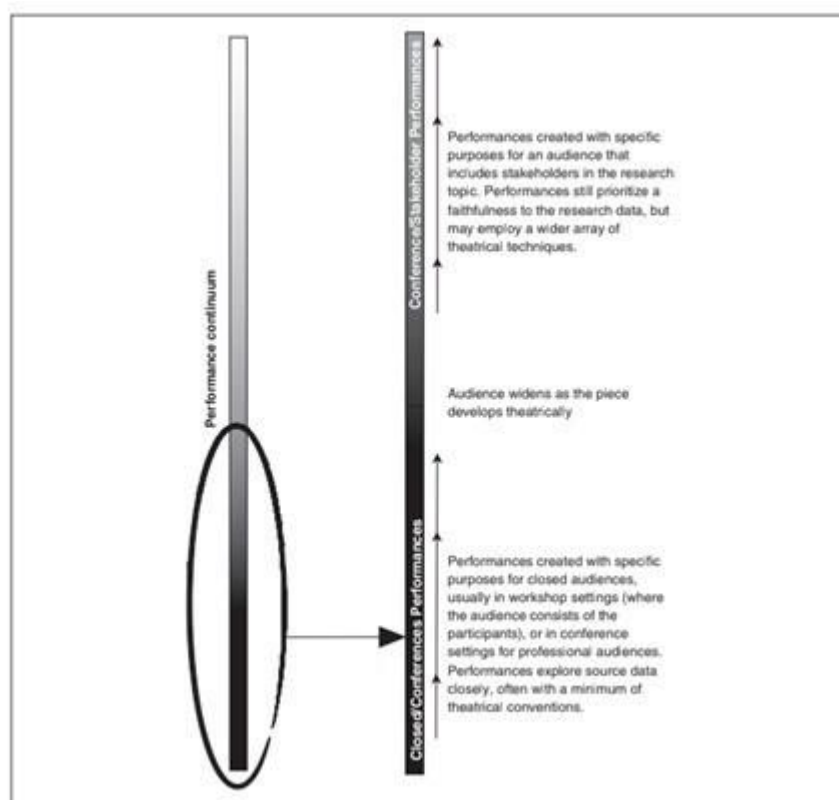
Therefore, we tentatively place our applied theatre projects we have discussed within the RBT spectrums (figures 2 & 3) and/or the performance and research continuums (figures 1 & 4).

Un-Situating Research-Based Theatre

What might we learn about the practice of ethics by examining RBT projects that are not conducted within the boundaries of the academy? What are the limitations and benefits of thinking about RBT practices in this way outside of the academy?

The Burkina Faso project, if conducted inside of the academy, we agreed is difficult to situate within the spectrum; however, it could fall within the first half of the performance continuum (figure 1), a performance that is created for a specific closed

audience ‘usually in workshop settings (where the audience consists of the participants)’ with ‘source data’ (Beck et al. 2011: 692). The placing of the project within the spectrum is complicated when we consider the intention of the project (education-focused, not research), its location (secondary school), the participants (primarily students and teachers), and team (no academics were in the team).



(Figure 1. Beck et al. 2011: 692)

The project in Wales, if conducted within the academy, we agreed could fall under many different areas of the spectrum, because of the different stages of the project. However, it is difficult to decipher because of the language used. Therefore, again we turn to the continuums to assist in our understanding. As the second phase of the project was the focus of the ethical tensions and entanglements section, we will only use the continuums to determine what this part of the project could be classified as. We hesitantly agreed, without any degree of certainty, that it slides up the first half of the performance continuum and we remained unsure of its position on the research continuum.

In the process of tentatively situating our projects within the spectrum and continuums, we increasingly felt uncomfortable for a number of reasons that we will discuss shortly. For now, as creative practitioners engaged in using theatre as a way to gather stories and experiences (we consciously choose not to use the term data here) for performances, workshops, and research, respectfully, we are still puzzled as to who these continuums and spectrum are for and what they are for. Perhaps by re-situating them we will gain a better understanding?

Re-situating Research-Based Theatre

In reflecting on the different ethical processes that must be considered in academia and those that are set by the intuitive nature of community-engaged practitioners, we hope to gather a sense of grounding and extension of the parameters of RBT. Given that our projects occurred more than a decade ago, in 2011 and 2012 outside of a formal process governed by a research ethics board, the practitioners take a step back from their positions as practitioner-researchers in order to test and better understand the scholarly spectrum set out by Belliveau and Lea (2011). In the following section, we discuss the four main ethical issues we have identified:

1. Ethical protocols inside the academy
2. The quantitative and qualitative divide
3. Perpetuating colonial narratives through language inside the academy
4. The RBT practitioner

Ethical protocols inside the academy

As creative practitioners that did not intend on following a career in academia we identify with Barbara Bolt and Kate MacNeill's reflection in *The Meeting of Aesthetics and Ethics in the Academy* on:

[The] incongruity that faces creative practitioners who become engaged in creative-practice research in the academy and find that they are required to negotiate the complex ethics processes and procedures of the university as well as deal with an increasingly risk-averse institutional culture (2020: 1).

Thus, we are acutely aware of the ethical pressures and parameters in which RBT maintains itself.

The quantitative and qualitative divide

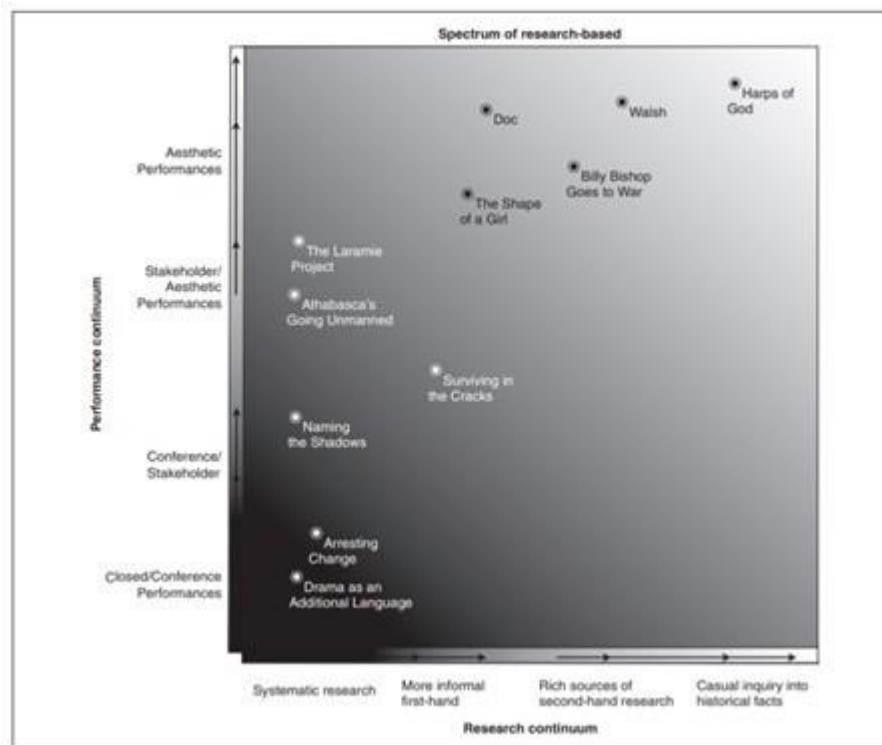
From our combined experience of reading different academic material, diagrams like those above are unusual in the dissemination of applied theatre research, and are more likely to be seen in quantitative research papers.

Bourgeault, Dingwall, and de Vries contest that quantitative and qualitative methods are mutually reinforcing and complementary. However, they also point out that these methods come from different paradigms and:

The dichotomizing of qualitative health research misrepresents the variability within each category (2010: 5).

We would contest the research practices of graphs, statistics, spectrums and continuums that are dominant modes of colonial knowledge production within the academy, relying on science that can quantify experiences. This divide and linguistic framing challenge us to reflect on the psychological and emotional response that may

be invoked among research participants when they find out that their lived experiences/stories have been quantified and plotted into graphs. What is the ethics of turning people's stories into the type of data output in figure 2?



(Figure 2. Beck et al. 2011: 695)

Furthermore, Beck et al. point out that:

Individual research-based pieces may overlap into more than one category, and some may happily exist in two quite separate places on the spectrum (2011: 689).

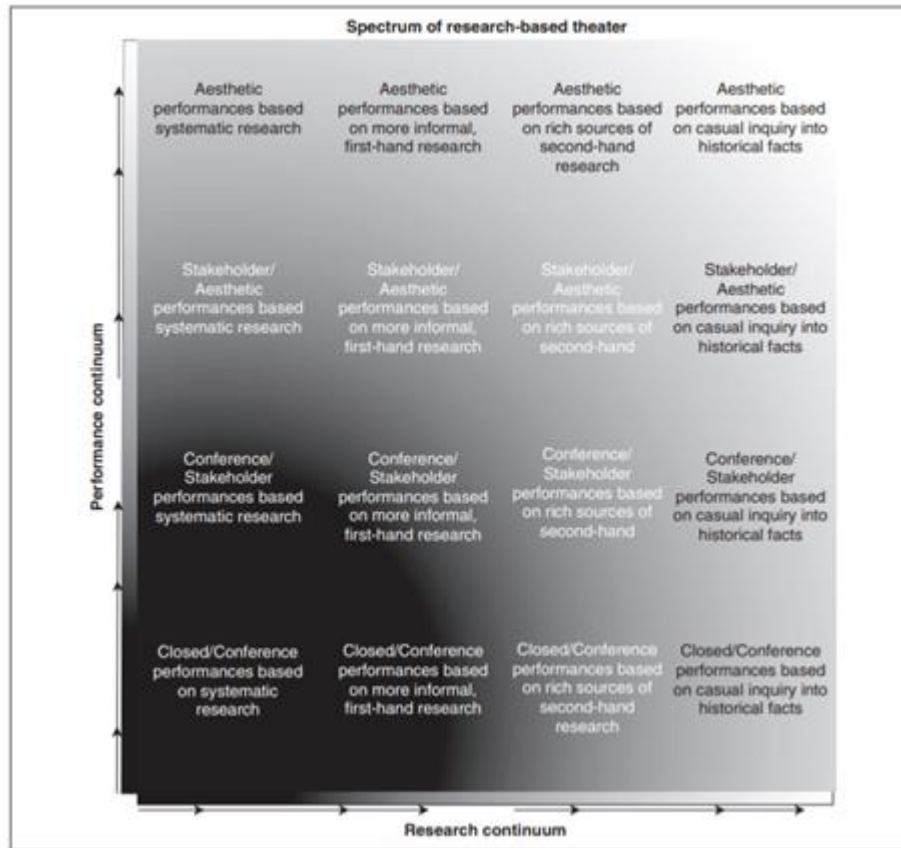
The categorization of RBT practices within this hierarchical system, both vertical and horizontal, which are present in the individual performance and research continuums, and in the spectrum, we read as being within a binary framework. In *Working the Hyphen* Michelle Fine notes that:

If poststructuralism has taught us anything, it is to beware of the frozen identities and the presumption that the hyphen is real, to suspect the binary, to worry the clear distinctions (Fine 1994: 80).

Since our projects took place in different locations, we find these dichotomies simplistic as they do not take into consideration what Gust Yep refers to as 'thick intersectionalities', a concept that refers to:

[A deeper] exploration of the complex particularities of individuals' lives and identities associated with their race, class, gender, sexuality, and national locations by understanding their history and personhood in concrete time and

space, and interplay between individual subjectivity, personal agency, systemic arraignments, and structural forces (2010: 173).



(Figure 3. Beck et al. 2011: 694)

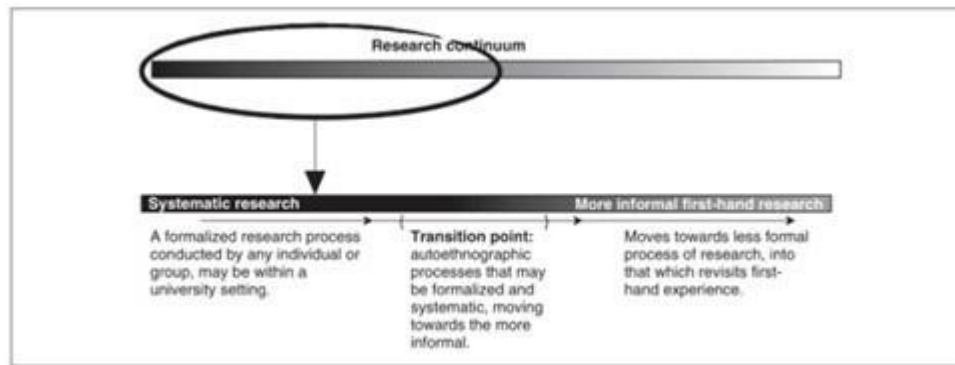
While Beck et al. state that:

Delineating a spectrum of research-based theatre has the advantage of allowing practitioners to acknowledge the larger parameters of research-based theatre while articulating a specific tradition relevant to their own practice (2011: 690),

we would ask what *specific tradition* means? Is it in relation to indigenous practices? What about practitioners working in the Global South?

Perpetuating Colonial Narratives through Language Inside the Academy

Furthermore, we noted our discomfort with the language used within these continuums and spectrum within the un-situating section of this article as we believe they feed into the narrative of colonialism in the academy, particularly the use of 'stakeholder' (figure 3). We confess that the original title of this article used the term 'multi-stakeholder'. Upon reflection, we acknowledged that this term is specifically used in relation to countries, populations, or demographics that have been and continue to be impacted by colonisation.



(Figure 4. Beck et al. 2011: 691)

In presenting the 'research continuum' (figure 4) Beck et al. assert that:

The defining feature of research placed within this section of the continuum is that the research itself is conducted with intentionality, that it represents a formal and systematic research process.... Systematic research may be carried out by professional researchers in university or laboratory settings but may also be conducted by any individual or group (2011: 690).

What does it mean to place this work within *formal and systematic* structures? The continuum and spectrum reveal that RBT requires the extraction of data (stories) and 'salient moments' (2011: 696) from participants (primarily from non-academic folk) for research inquiry that is driven by professionals.

As more and more practitioners of RBT have begun to work with health scientists we acknowledge that the 'performance continuum' is as a result of knowledge exchanges between these fields of inquiry and we are in favour of an interdisciplinary approach to research, practice, and scholarship, but concerns arise when a qualitative approach to research is then turned into quantitative data without finding ways to mitigate the ethical issues that may arise.

The RBT/Applied Theatre Practitioner

Self-criticism is an essential component of positionality (Sanchez 2010; Rose 1997). As researchers from two distinct historical experiences – from colonised and coloniser countries, self-critique of our practice over a decade ago provided the opportunity to take a step back, act on 'both material and abstract' knowledge, and unpack some of the complexities of the different roles and positions we found or put ourselves in (Sanchez 2010). This is because:

Positionality is the notion that personal values, views, and location in time and space influence how one understands the world. In this context, gender, race, class, and other aspects of identities are indicators of social and spatial positions and are not fixed, given qualities (Sanchez 2010: 2258).

As active participants in the narratives we presented, our knowledge is the product of a specific position that reflects particular places and spaces.

As a volunteer with a lack of experience in working in a project that used personal stories to create a piece of theatre, JL was unaware of the ethical implications of sharing her experiential knowledge of the youth issue whilst moving between different roles. Her role was intertwined with different positions of power that were not always clear to her.

TA's project was a different experience; he was from a country with a different lingua franca from the one he was working in, even though they are in the same region and share some identities as Africans. His social status (as an invited expert) also offered him the choice to make demands of his team. Navigating ethical boundaries is challenging within this work; however, ethical considerations have always been an innate part of the process of devising with participants, even outside of academia. As co-creators we are accountable at each stage of the project to one another through our lived experiences.

Thus, we support Belliveau et al.'s assertion that RBT practitioners need to develop critical awareness of emergent ethical issues and explicitly and continually address these as an integral part of the RBT process (Belliveau et al. 2020: 142).

Conclusion

Based on our analysis of RBT's conceptualization, academic boundaries can increase the likelihood of a project becoming product and data oriented which raises further critical ethical questions around power relations, the politics of representation, institutional agendas, and colonial systems of knowledge. Opaskwayak Cree knowledge keeper and seeker, Shawn Wilson, notes in *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*:

Axiology is the ethics or morals that guide the search for knowledge and judge which information is worthy of searching for. One's view of ontology will be reflected in what knowledge is worth seeking in order to better understand reality. In addition to judging the worthiness of the pursuit of certain types of knowledge, axiology also concerns itself with the ethics of how knowledge is gained (2008: 34).

We must therefore take our thinking outside scholarly research to understand and give way to undiscovered or ostracised practices because of the indoctrinated ways of knowing that the academy legitimises. We must engage in the practice of questioning, reflecting, and pushing the borders and boundaries to broaden the horizon of the knowledge worthy of seeking and sharing.

This article has not only assisted us in directly discussing some of the issues related to the two sides of the globe, but we present these ideas about RBT as a way to go beyond the abyssal line and emerge with a better understanding and respect for this work. In the wise words of educator Paulo Freire:

Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (2017: 244).

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Notes on Authors



Taiwo Afolabi, PhD., holds the Canada Research Chair in Socially Engaged Theatre; and is the Director, Centre for Socially Engaged Theatre (C-SET), and an Assistant Professor at the University of Regina. He is an artist, qualitative researcher, theatre manager, applied theatre practitioner and educator with a decade's experience in a variety of creative and community contexts in over a dozen countries across four continents. He researches, creates works, performs, and teaches at the intersection of performance and human ecology. His research

interests lie in the areas of applied theatre and policing, social justice, decolonisation, art leadership and management, migration, and the ethics of conducting arts-based research. He is a Senior Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg (South Africa) and the founding artistic director of Theatre Emissary International.

taiwo.afolabi@uregina.ca



Jemma Llewellyn is a PhD student at the University of Guelph studying Critical Studies in Improvisation. As an Applied Theatre practitioner from Wales, UK, her research and practice focuses on amplifying youth voices through adult allyship. Her research aims to disrupt and decolonise standard adult youth paradigms in learning and identifies promising practices in multi-modal approaches to local/global civic actions. She is a non-resident research associate at the Centre for Socially Engaged Theatre, University of Regina.

jemma@uoguelph.ca

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