

“And So We Write”: Reflective Practice in Ethnotheatre and Devised Theatre Projects

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Abstract

This paper follows the author’s trajectory as he collaboratively experimented with ethnodrama (theatre scripts generated from interviews, media artifacts, and written media) and devised theatre performance (theatre collaboratively created with a group), culminating in the analysis of a performance with high school students combining elements of these forms. The author defines the forms, illuminates how he engaged with them over time, and how he adapted elements of them for work with his high school students. The author proposes a framework deduced from these experiences as a provocation for future performance projects and as a demonstration of an educator’s reflective practice.

It’s funny. People are beat up and thrown out of their house and stuff, and I’m saying all this about some name-calling. For some people, though, the name-calling is just as bad as being beat up. But for me, it wasn’t. I’m not sure why. I just let it go. I never took it personally.

Maybe it was the Oprah influence.

In the early 90s, she’d interview celebrities, and they’d talk about the lies that were printed about them in the tabloids. Oprah would say that at some point you have to realize that they’re not writing about you, they’re writing about their perception of you. It has nothing to do with you personally. I guess that’s my philosophy. (Jones et al., 2003)

This excerpt is from *Voices*, a devised ethnodrama in which I performed. My colleagues and I produced the work in collaboration with the NYU LGBT Center in 2003 following a theatre-in-education model wherein a theatrical performance is presented with a workshop experience for the audience. In creating this project, my colleague Brad Vincent generated a questionnaire about personal experiences of LGBT youth which the members of the devising team completed. We read our responses to each question at our first devising session and discussed possibilities for how we might bring those narratives to life on the stage. *Voices* represents one of several experiences from when I was a graduate student in which I collaboratively experimented with theatrical forms. In this paper, I define terms, including devised theatre and ethnodrama, to give insight into those forms and illuminate the reflective practitioner methodology undertaken. I document and analyze a few of the aforementioned collaborative experiences from my graduate career and discuss how those artistic processes shaped my subsequent work as a drama educator implementing a framework for devised theatre grounded in ethnodramatic practices. Throughout the paper, I draw upon my two decades of drama teaching (at both the secondary and university levels) in order to better understand my work, such that it might serve as inspiration for other drama educators to engage in similar reflective practice.

Definitions

It is often said that theatre is the ultimate collaborative art form, requiring the time and talents of a diverse body of artists and technicians to come together and contribute to a unified artistic endeavor. Within that collaborative frame, there are particular approaches to theatre that center collaboration over the singular artistic vision of a playwright, director, or producer—among which is devised theatre. According to Alison Oddey (1994), devised theatre is:

determined and defined by a group of people who set up an initial framework or structure to explore and experiment with ideas, images, concepts, themes, or specific stimuli that might include music, text, objects, paintings, or movement. A devised theatrical performance originates with the group while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted. (p. 1)

Given the collaborative nature of this form, devised theatre fundamentally depends on the aesthetics of the collaborators—the artistic sensibilities they bring to the experience as well as those that emerge in the collaborative encounter.

In his innovative text, *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre*, Johnny Saldaña (2003) defines ethnotheatre as a theatrical genre employing, “the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre production to mount for an audience a live performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or the researcher’s interpretations of data” (p. 1). This definition is in contrast with ethnodrama, “the written script,” consisting of “dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected through interviews, participant observation field notes, journal entries, and/or print and media artifacts such as diaries, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, and court proceedings” (p. 2). The ethnodramatist arranges excerpts from this body of material into a performance script. Some commonly known examples of this work include Moisés Kaufman and Members of the Tectonic Theater Project’s *The Laramie Project*, Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*, and Anna Deavere Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles*.

As a theatrical genre, ethnotheatre is a form that evolved over time both in qualitative research (as performance ethnography) and as an emergent theatrical form. Victor Turner (1982) describes performance ethnography as a process that would allow the ethnographer to get “‘under the skin’ of members of other cultures, rather than merely ‘taking the role of the other’” (p. 90). Ellis and Bochner (1996) further explored the potential of ethnotheatre when writing,

The dramas are public performances heard and responded to by a wide and diverse population of people who have something at stake in the issues addressed by the plays. Fieldwork is transformed into dramas that are explicitly political and public. (p. 38)

In describing her initial work in this form, Anna Deavere Smith (1993) wrote,

My goal has been to find American character in the ways that people speak. [...] At that time, I was not as interested in performance or in social commentary as I was in experimenting with language and its relationship to character. (p. xxiii)

From this perspective, Smith approached this work as a performer and a researcher: “If I listened carefully to people’s words, and particularly to their rhythms, [...] I could use language to learn about my own time” (p. xxv). Taken together, we understand ethnotheatre as an arts-based research methodology grounded in qualitative inquiry and performance that balances insights into a population, the researcher/artist’s experience of the population, and performer/audience discourse. The ethnodramatist invites the audience to gaze closely in on a particular population, time, and/or place, provoking them to reconsider their preconceived notions and examine other perspectives.

Methodology

When faced with a challenge, reflective practitioners draw upon their prior experiences in order to analyze the problem and adjust in the moment. Schön (1983) first articulated an approach to reflecting-in-action, which formed the basis of his reflective practitioner theory. According to Schön, the reflective practitioner considers the following:

What features do I notice when I recognize this thing? What are the criteria by which I make this judgment? What procedures am I enacting when I perform this skill? How am I framing the problem that I am trying to solve? (p. 50)

In this paper, I took a more expansive view as a reflective practitioner. Rather than reflecting in the moment on a particular challenge, I am looking back on my experiences in three theatre projects (*Assessment: Putting the Pieces Together or AH—SSESS*, *Folktale Journey*, and *Voices*) in order to make sense of how those experiences informed my future teaching and artistic practice. As Schön instructs, I consider the features of those experiences, I tease out criteria that framed the work that followed, and I investigate the procedures that I employed in that subsequent work.

My Experience Being Ah—sessed

In preparation for *Assessment: Putting the Pieces Together or AH—SSESS*, Lisa Donovan (2003) interviewed educators and school administrators in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, about their views on assessment in K-12 schools. Donovan collaborated with Joe Salvatore (an expert in documentary theatre and verbatim performance) on the script, coding the interview data into themes and developing the data into a traditional ethnodrama. Philip Taylor (2003), the production’s stage director, described the script as: “A dramatic and comedic commentary on school assessment which raises many intriguing questions about what is and isn’t valued as educators, administrators, parents, students and the wider school community make decisions about human progress and achievement” (p. 34).

The circumstances of the production guided our artistic process as the piece would serve as a provocation for discussion at two international conferences—the International Drama in Education Research Institute: IDIERI Goes 4th in Northampton, UK, and the Forum on Arts Assessment at NYU in New York. We were tasked with conveying the thoughts and ideas expressed by the stakeholders that Donovan interviewed, and this superseded any particular artistic vision. The audience could read the script, but what value would be added from the performance? This was our task. In rehearsal, we spent a lot of time talking about the subject—what did we know of assessment in the arts or drama? What were our experiences in

the drama classroom? How did those experiences shape the artists and educators that we were at that time? Hours were spent working through our understanding of our experiences, what we understood the perspectives of the characters in the script to be, and in what ways we could best illuminate what was said therein.

Verbatim performance can be characterized as a subset of ethnotheatre wherein the script is composed only of spoken data (interviews, media artifacts, and/or audio or video recordings) without incorporating written material. Verbatim tasks the performer with replicating that spoken data word-for-word and gesture-for-gesture (in so far as gestures have been captured by the researcher). In his writing and teaching about verbatim performance, Salvatore (2020) speaks of disfluency as the moment where people reveal their unsanitized selves (p. 1047)—when words fail us—when we stop speaking in jargon and what we think people want to hear—what Anna Deavere Smith (1993) describes as the intervention of listening:

We can listen for what is inconsistent as well as for what is consistent. We can listen to what the dominant pattern of speech is, and can listen for the break from that pattern of speech. [...] The break from the pattern is where character lives, and where dialogue, ironically begins, in the *uh*. In the pause, in the thought as captured for the first time in a moment of speech, rather than in the rehearsed, the proven. (p. xxxix)

It is in these margins of dialogue that perspectives are revealed. Note how the text appears in the script from *Ah—ssess*:

I tend to think of assessment in terms of ...
what the student can do
rather than what's being done to the student
aaaaand so to me a-assessment includes authentic
if it's true assessment
and that means that you ask a student to show you
what the student can do
bring to that performance certain criteria to measure
how well the student's done (Donovan, 2003)

Here, the line breaks indicate a break in speech—be that from a pause, a breath, or a thought moment. The underlined words indicate that the interview subject emphasized those words as they said them, and the extended vowels are meant to replicate elements of the speech pattern. In these ways, the ethnodramatist indicates clues to the speaking cadence in the layout of the dialogue on the page (Salvatore, 2020, p. 1047).

Beyond the speaking pattern, as Smith (1993) indicated, we also gain insight into the character. As the speaker paused between lines one and two, perhaps they hadn't previously articulated a definition of assessment. As they extend the vowel in line four, perhaps they are grasping for what they think the interviewer wants to hear—that assessment is “authentic” and that it should “show.” But then comes the disfluency—“what the student can do...bring to that performance certain criteria to measure...how well the student's done”—what Smith described as a “thought as captured for the first time in a moment of speech, rather than in the rehearsed, the proven” (p. xxxix). If you are familiar with assessment jargon, you will note that all the keywords are included in that short excerpt, but their meaning is sometimes

unclear or misconstrued. And yet, in spite of the disfluency, the speaker manages to arrive at the heart of assessment—a measure of “how well the student’s done.” Providing the audience with the full stream of consciousness, the ethnodramatist reveals an educator who may be overwhelmed by the jargon but when you strip all of that jargon away, they *do* see to know what assessment is. In other approaches (be it in journalism, research, or playwriting), that disfluency is sanitized, often only presenting the most articulate moments or even cleaning up what the subject actually said, airbrushing away all the flaws, thereby preventing the audience from engaging as closely as we might like with those perspectives.

Capturing the unvarnished truth of human dialogue was a key takeaway from this project. When we worked on *Ah—ssess*, Taylor coached us to set aside our ideas about the content or the characters and to let the words speak for themselves—to allow the struggle to be articulate—the imprecision of it all—to wash over the listener. We were to embody the perspectives as they were—without judgment or critique—just put the words into our voice and body and let the audience come to their own judgments about what they observed.

The director proposed a framing device in order to highlight keywords in each sequence of the script: anal probes, lock step, cookie cutter, MCAS, question, pressure points, imagination. This sequence became part of a mantra (adding in multiple repetitions of “Ah—ssess” as well)—we chanted it in rehearsal; we chanted it in the performance. The ensemble created tableau to represent each term and re-created them in the moments between each segment of the performance. These keywords functioned like *in vivo* codes (themes derived from actual words in the text) and the director employed them as a way to break up the whole into discernible chunks—each code framing the section of text that followed. The director devised the codes from a Brechtian approach, with the codes serving as titles to disrupt the action and provide a moment of reflection for the audience: *what are anal probes? How might that image convey a perspective about assessment in the arts?* German dramatist Bertolt Brecht employed this technique of displaying titles during many of his plays to comment on the action in a particular scene. Though the codes in our production of *Ah—ssess* were pulled from a particular section of text, hearing them again when juxtaposed with a different section such as those framed by “question” or “imagination,” pressed the audience to engage with the material: *what might anal probes conjure when hearing about questions or imagination?* Not only were these titles Brechtian, but so too was this dialogic approach to the performance as seen in Brecht’s learning plays, wherein, “contradictions are provoked, and events are discussed from different perspectives” (Demirdiř & Aksoy, 2021, p. 147), which then inspire further conversation among the audience—and in this case, the dialogue occurred at the conferences where we presented the work.

Folktale Journey: Old Stories Told in New Ways

David Montgomery (who also appeared in *Ah—ssess*) directed *Folktale Journey*, a student-devised production of folktales for young audiences. In the production, Montgomery asked the cast (in dual roles, as we were also the devising team) to research folktales from different cultures. Over a period of weeks, we identified several stories representing American, Western European, African, and Chinese cultures and shared them within the group. Note that this was before a deep recognition of cultural appropriation was at the fore of social justice discourse—so our investigation was oriented towards stories that might

reflect the cultures of folks in our audiences rather than that of the performers—certainly different from what we would do today. We took it on faith that there was an absence of diverse folklore in theatre for young audiences repertoire, and under the guidance of our fearless director, we presented the work to New York City audiences.

In the initial devising meetings, someone would read the story aloud and following that initial reading, the group would improvise the narrative. As director, Montgomery would offer feedback on the improvisation and then we would do it again. After several run-throughs, the devising team and stage management would sort out a working script which remained fluid through the rehearsal process such that we might incorporate new ideas as we developed the script. As rehearsals unfolded, physical theatre, movement, and original music, were devised to round out the performances. We devised an original story, *The Forgotten Town*, about a traveler who collected stories from around the world and shared them with an audience of young people (the other performers). The traveler arrived in a village that was building a wall in order to keep the world out—and here the traveler sought to bring the world in (Montgomery et al., 2003).

Traveler: I'm traveling the world. Look, here's a book of all my travels. It's got pictures and stories.
 Hadley: Hey, what's that picture? Who are those people...and those strange animals?
 Traveler: Oh, those are llamas. That's a story from Ecuador. It's called *The Search for the Magic Lake*. Do you want to hear it?
 Kristen: This whole book is full of stories?
 Traveler: *(singing) These are folktales
 —from my many journeys.*
 Townspeople: *(singing) Won't you tell us what they are?*

Each time the storyteller began a new story, the other performers morphed into the characters and performed the story. The stories were relatively short in length and the intended audience was 6-9 years old. As such, rather than having a deep character exploration in our rehearsal, we set about focusing on conveying each narrative—*who did what, when, and where?*

In many respects, we had the same directorial orientation here as we did in *Ah—sness*—the young people could read the story, so what value would be added from the live performance? To that end, the perspectives of the townspeople were meant to reflect how the young people might interact with the Traveler character. This was similar to the Brechtian dialogic approach between performers and their audience as we experienced in *Ah—sness*: *what questions might the young people have, how might they respond to unfamiliar terms or ideas, and what might they be inspired to do with the information that was shared?* We devised dialogue that could take on these potential perspectives such that our young audience members might see their perspectives represented on stage. Like Brecht's work and what we sought to achieve in *Ah—sness*, we did not want a passive audience, but rather participants engaged in a shared dialogue about the topic at hand—in this case, cross-cultural storytelling. Often, this dialogue is merely a metaphor for the performer/audience exchange of ideas, but we followed a few of our performances with a post-performance talk back so that we could actually have that conversation with the audience.

Voices

Concurrently with the folktale project, I was also a member of the devising team for an applied theatre project: *Voices*. From our initial conversations about the project, we had one primary aim: in getting LGBT youth to hear our stories about our lived experience, we hoped to encourage them to share their own stories. The devising team believed that liberation from homophobic oppression was possible through this kind of artistic process—and with that, self-actualization (Freire, 1970). But how do you devise a script that will achieve that? In this experience, the devising team responded to the questionnaire mentioned at the outset of this article just to see what stories emerged within the group. Among the survey questions were:

- In my elementary school/middle school/high school, the students or faculty/administration:
 - physically harassed or assaulted students they perceived to be gay
 - verbally harassed students they perceived to be gay
 - expressed their belief that gay people are morally offensive or sinful
- In my elementary school/middle school/high school, faculty/administration intervened when:
 - students made homophobic comments or used epithets based on sexual orientation or gender identity in a derogatory manner
 - people expressed their belief that gay people are morally offensive or sinful
- I felt unsafe in my elementary school/middle school/high school because others did or might perceive me as gay
- My elementary school/middle school/high school made special resources available to gay students.
- I felt a sense of “belonging” in elementary school/middle school/high school. (Vincent, 2006, pp. 267–289)

As we had a lot to say on these topics, there were reams of data to analyze. Without a clear path forward, we sat together in an early planning session and read the responses aloud. We left that evening with a firm sense that something was possible, but the sheer volume of material left us a bit perplexed as to how to proceed. Fortunately, one of the group members employed a close reading of the survey responses. In so doing, he discovered a narrative arc and generated a framework from which the performance script emerged. Through the devising and rehearsal process, we continually discussed LGBT culture and our experience of that as young people, youth culture in a variety of American contexts (from urban and rural Texas to urban California to suburban New York), and religious experiences. The culminating script then encapsulated the diversity of our perspectives such that we could best present similarities and differences among our own experiences in order to allow multiple entry points for the audience, as indicated in this excerpt:

ROBERT (Stepping forwards) I guess I was in high school.

DONNIE Preschool

ADAM First grade

NICK Elementary school

KELLY	Fourth grade
ARNOLD	Jr. High
ROBERT	when I first noticed I was attracted to men. His name was Jesse, and we were best friends. I never thought that much about it at the time. I just figured I was attracted to him because he was my best friend... nothing more, really. I was also pretty fond of stars: Brad Pitt, Ricky Martin...
DONNIE	Han Solo
NICK	Andrew McCarthy
ADAM	Kirk Cameron
KELLY	Farrah Fawcett
DONNIE	Butch, from <i>The Little Rascals</i>
ROBERT	I didn't think that was weird though. I freely spoke about the attraction toward the stars that was safe. It was okay to say that a celebrity was "hot." (Jones et al., 2003)

Given the range of ages and generational scope of the stars, the audience might either identify with one of the perspectives or situate their own experience among those that were shared.

Like the *Folktale Journey* process, we employed improvisation and physical theatre strategies to flesh out the performance, but also drew upon the in-vivo coding approach from *Ah—ssess* in order to develop a new mantra (fag, fudge-packer, dyke, pansy, queer) that drew upon the many homophobic slurs used against us at different points in our lives. As in the prior experience, we used the mantra as a framing device for transitions between vignettes. The performance script was deeply personal as we were portraying scenes and monologues from our own lived experience. We regularly asked what value would be added from the live performance—and at which points a scripted scene could safely invite the audience into an emotionally fraught experience—or when might the material be better conveyed as an observational, omniscient monologue.

As we presented the work as part of a workshop experience, that now-familiar Brechtian dialogic approach was not limited to metaphorical audience discourse; instead, we had those conversations directly with the audience following the performance. We invited the audience members to free write or draw as an initial response to the performance. Thereafter, we invited them to share words or phrases that occurred to them during their reflective writing or drawing which were then categorized. We then asked the audience members to gravitate towards the category that best described their reactions to form breakout groups. Within these groups, the teaching artists facilitated a discussion where the audience members could elect to share their own stories relating to the thematic category. Following this sharing, each small group composed a short dramatic representation of their discussions and then shared them

with the larger group. In the closing activity, we asked each audience member to respond to one of three prompts: I feel..., My voice..., or Sharing my voice....

Final Destination: “And Yet I Write” – Children of the Holocaust: Journals and Diaries

A few years after the *Voices* project, I was teaching high school and collaborating with a colleague, Barbara Rottman. We were interested in developing an interdisciplinary unit of study that would deepen connections to what our high school English language arts students were studying in their history classes. We were surprised to learn that their history teacher spent an inordinate amount of time focusing on World War II and that students characterized the content as “hard to grasp.” I had recently attended a professional development training with the organization Facing History which focused on the Holocaust and human behavior (Strom, 1994), so I knew that there were existing methodologies that would allow for a more critical look at students’ identities and socio-cultural connections, but Barbara and I wanted something more. The students traditionally read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (1967), *Night* by Elie Wiesel (1960), or *Farewell to Manzanar* (Wakatsuki Houston & Houston, 1973), so we were aware of the opportunities that personal narratives presented to the students, allowing them to see the experience from a firsthand account, but we wanted the students to make focused connections, reflect on the experience, and share that with the larger school community. Barbara was previously curator of the Los Angeles Holocaust Museum where she brought the *Anne Frank in the World* exhibition in 1986. As part of her work there, she crafted a performance script (Rottman, no date) from victims’ and survivors’ personal diaries and journals (Ehrmann et al. in Zapruder, 2002; Hillesum, 1996; Lieblich, 1993; Zucker, 2020). As such, we drew together Barbara’s experiences and my own history with devised theatre and ethnotheatre to devise an original ethnographic performance with our students.

In this devising process, the students read from the journals and diaries and crafted personal writing that reflected on or responded to what they had read. They selected passages from the texts to share with their classmates and identified excerpts from their personal writing to share. Working across three classes, Barbara and I worked with student representatives from each class to compile segments from the student writing and excerpts from the journals and diaries into a draft script. The classes could then expand or shape the script with additional student responses, dramatic readings of selections, or dramatic interpretations of active moments. Throughout the process, the students were engaged in ongoing cultural critique—looking both at the historical context as well as their experience of contemporary youth culture in Southern California.

From the final scene, here are a few excerpts from the performance text (Jones et al., 2007):

Speaker A	The Holocaust showed how evil people can be.
Speaker B	So why do people hate? They know it doesn’t do anything but cause danger. Do people want danger?
Speaker C	According to Elie Wiesel, hating is self-destructive.
Speaker D	Adolf Hitler hated so much, that at the end of the holocaust, he killed himself. By tearing apart the lives of others, he also tore apart his own life.

- Speaker E Hatred is everywhere. It's not just in Sobibor or Auschwitz—it's in the entire world. You don't hate people because you don't like them, you hate because it's put into your head. The whole world is full of hate. Can anybody stop that?
- Speaker F I don't understand...
I feel bad for the children who did not get to live a full life.
I feel bad for the elderly people that did not get to live out their retirement.
I feel bad for the people who did survive; who had to work hard labor while their families were gassed; they had to listen to their families scream while they were being brutally murdered.
I don't understand how all those Germans just stood there and did not help the Jews.
I don't understand how the Germans knew what the Jews were in for—
The Germans knew the Jews were going to be killed
The Germans knew the suffering the Jews were going to experience
Yet most stood there and did absolutely nothing.
- Speaker G During the holocaust, many people stood by and watched Hitler kill Jews and gypsies. People wonder if standing by is a crime. I say it is, but it's not as bad as the crime itself.
- Speaker H If one stands by and fails to act, that is evil. It might never be as evil as the crime, but it is still evil and should be considered a crime.
- Speaker I Recently, there was a case in Las Vegas where an 18 year-old guy raped and murdered a seven year-old girl. His friend was a bystander and did nothing to stop it. The bystander was seen as unethical but never charged with a crime.
- Speaker J How come when something happens to America, everyone has to get involved, but when another race or nation has a problem, no one does anything? It's just weird, because all men are created equal, so if everyone helps us when we have a problem, we should be the first ones to help others.
- Speaker K It's sad because we are alive and still complain about our lives when thousands of children were killed and their bodies turned to dust before they had a chance to live in our world.
- Speaker L Many of the people we have heard from died in the Holocaust. Fortunately we still have their diaries which, with their collections of thoughts, feeling, and personal experiences, have survived. In a way then, you could say the writers have survived.
- All And so we write.

We wanted the students to experience history through the frame of personal examination and reflection: in what way did these voices from decades ago speak to this contemporary generation, what was lost in that horrific time, and what does it mean for us today? Through this process, Barbara and I intentionally sought to make the unfamiliar familiar. I drew upon the experiences I had in each of the preceding theatrical projects—but rather than thinking about audience when asking what value would be added from the live performance, we turned that question around as an assessment of our teaching and facilitation—what value would *our students* gain from devising the script and participating in the live performance? And I think the above excerpts give a sense of what the students took away from their experience—and this was stated right in the performance.

The students gained a closeness to the texts in evaluating what to include in the performance—but also through scripting and developing improvisations based on what they had read. They drew upon their own experiences as similarly aged young people and were often most connected to the most mundane

of the diary entries—as these moments showcased the diarists’ humanity. These were Holocaust narratives—and the disfluency of the mundane—as Smith (1993) stated, “In the pause, in the thought as captured for the first time in a [diary entry], rather than in the rehearsed, the proven” (p. xxxix)—those were the moments that our students identified as those that best illuminated what made the Holocaust so horrific.

And Now, You Do It

Reflecting on our rehearsal process in *And Yet I Write*, we employed many of the approaches detailed earlier in this article. These included:

- deep conversation about the subject matter
- selecting ethnographic material (be that found or created through interview, dialogue, or written response) that can be incorporated into the performance text
- Brechtian approaches including titles and a dialogic approach to the text that showcase multiple perspectives
- decoding those perspectives through the devising process and in the performance script
- exploring in-vivo codes (words taken directly from the text as themes for a particular section) in order to organize the performance into thematically linked segments
- drawing upon physical theatre, movement, and music in order to diversify the performance aesthetic
- interrogating what value the audience might gain from viewing each part of the live performance

In service of proposing a methodology for devised ethnographic theatre, this list provides a framework for what we did. Know that it was a process that developed over time, rather than some predetermined protocol that we followed. Recall that I prefaced all of these experiences with the notion that we were working without a framework, and while I think this list is a good start, it should not be viewed as exhaustive.

As in all devising processes, engage your devising team in experiences that task them with sharing their aesthetic sensibilities and experiences—such that these can provide additional approaches to working that are best suited towards your particular group. When thinking about the material and subject matter, note how I began this article: “they’re not writing about you, they’re writing about their perception of you” (Jones, 2003). Ask your devising team what their perceptions are and what perception or perspective they want to put out into the world; what will their audience gain from viewing this performance? In qualitative research, we promote the value of member checking to confirm that the research participants feel their perspective is being appropriately represented. Should you have access to the population that is being presented, check in with them. If the devising team will present their own perspectives, ensure that they are comfortable sharing them. In one of my recent pedagogy courses, a student was critical of devising theatre in this way, noting, “We don’t have a right to our students’ trauma.” Let that alone serve as provocation for more reflection and writing. Employ an ethic of care for the research subjects and your devising team and see what develops.

More than just considering how to devise ethnographic theatre work with your students, I recommend we step back from the particular content here to address a more general query: how can you reflect on your own experience and teaching practices in order to inform your current and future teaching? As I mentioned earlier, Schön (1983) tasks the reflective practitioner with asking “What features do I notice when I recognize this thing? What are the criteria by which I make this judgment? What procedures am I enacting when I perform this skill?” (p. 50). I keep binders of notes, scripts, lesson plans, and the like from every production I am a part of or class I teach so that I can reference that work when needed. You might do the same. Reflective practitioner work often puts the onus on the teacher—*how will you draw upon your prior experience to navigate a challenge you experience?* What if you include the students in the discussion—what might they draw upon from their prior experience to help navigate a current challenge? Or, what if you shared some artifacts from an old unit or artistic endeavor and asked them if they observe any process or procedure that might help us/them navigate a current challenge? Just as theatre is collaborative, so too are teaching and learning and we all benefit from diverse perspectives within the room contributing to the process.

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