

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Attempting to Pin Down Jelly: Identifying and Describing Six Key Principles of Applied Drama

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This research was motivated by the need to communicate more clearly about applied drama with those outside the field. The idea of an “applied” drama is often ambiguous and an articulation of what unifies these diverse practices remains vague. Noting this as a challenge when it comes to forming new community partnerships, this article proposes a framing of applied drama praxis that can act as a tool for use in these conversations. The article will begin by detailing the researcher’s autoethnographic approach to distinguishing key principles of the praxis and go on consider each one in greater detail.

Preamble

In 2016, while I was the Director of Theatre for Youth & Communities at Marin Theatre Company, I began a program in collaboration with the Marin County Juvenile Hall. My proposal was simply to bring weekly applied drama workshops to the facility for any young people who were interested. Getting a meeting with the director of the facility was easy enough, as he was an advocate for the arts and eager to bring in arts programs. However, describing the practice in a way that the facility director was able to understand became the challenge.

I initially found myself drawing contrasts with elements of staged theatre productions to explain applied drama praxis. This was not a successful strategy. The director was confused about why I did not intend to bring in a script and hold rehearsals for a performance somewhere down the line. In fact, explaining that we would not be using a script at all and that there were no initial plans for a performance (though the option was open should the participants request to create one) left the director asking what the purpose of the programming was (if not to have a final performance) and what exactly we would be doing. I found myself back at square one.

My next tactic was to lean into improvisation to provide an image of what the workshops would look like. This approach was more successful. I then extolled the benefits of the praxis for participants, highlighting that it encourages the process of empathy, strengthens communication, collaboration, and creative problem-solving skills, and provides an outlet for expression and reflection. This combination worked well enough to convince the director that I had a strong vision and purpose for the programming, even though he still seemed a bit unclear about what exactly these weekly workshops would look like. Due to his openness and eagerness for arts programming, we began the collaboration. I invited him to attend the first workshop so that he could experience applied drama firsthand. Happily, he attended and afterward relayed to me that he understood more clearly what I had conveyed in our meeting. But what might have happened

had he not been so willing to engage in this process and potentially attend a session? How might practitioners in similar situations communicate more clearly about applied drama with those outside the field? Might a framework for applied drama praxis, which outlines its key principles, be useful in conversations such as these? This article is driven by these three questions.

Introduction

Judith Ackroyd has emphasised that the idea of an “applied” drama is underscored by the notion that the artform has the ability to “address something beyond the form itself” (2000). Previous volumes of this journal evidence the broad capacity of applied drama to address wide-ranging fields of interest, such as education, healthcare, social justice, carceral rehabilitation, and more. Given the vast number of sectors in which applied drama can be practised, it is important that the field itself be demystified for those outside of it. While the purpose and objectives of most projects are generally easy to convey, it is the obscure and puzzling nature of the applied drama approach that often leaves those that are outside the field unsure about what they may be agreeing to become involved in. This article works to make applied drama more accessible by proposing a set of principles to provide researchers and practitioners with more tangible ways of speaking about it. This framing is not proposed as a formula for the praxis, but rather a way to identify and discuss patterns of practice.

Across the field, there are researchers who support using the terms “applied drama,” “applied theatre,” and “applied performance” interchangeably.¹ However, within this article, Monica Prendergast’s and Juliana Saxton’s (2013) delineation of applied drama from applied theatre/performance is accepted. The term “applied drama” will be used to describe a form which does not have an intended outside audience and where drama techniques are applied to engage with communities.

Hepplewhite (2020, p. 5) has described applied drama as “an eclectic and hybrid form that responds to context”, while Prentki and Preston (2009, p. 11) have argued that it “defies any one definition and includes a multitude of intentions, aesthetic processes, and transactions with its participants”. Nonetheless, there remain certain values and principles that hold this artform together, and based on my experience as both a participant and practitioner, I would argue that there *are* some defining principles that could point toward a more comprehensive survey of the form. Such a survey may help to clarify what applied drama is and provide a clearer picture of what it has to offer researchers/practitioners in other academic disciplines and gatekeepers within theatres, community institutions, prisons, and other community settings. In addition, it is also hoped that by identifying these principles, the space between practice in the field and academic discourses around that work might be more easily traversed.

¹ Helen Nicholson *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*. 2nd edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5.

The methodological approach adopted here is rooted in autoethnography. Below I will describe my process, which includes reflection upon and analysis of my experiences of applied drama. Next, six principles are espoused, with each one being teased out to present their fundamental import to the form. First though, some personal background relating to informing thinkers and applied drama work contexts is offered.

Informing Thinkers, Contexts and Participants

The applied drama practice informing this article includes over fifteen years of leading workshops in educational, community, and carceral settings. This work was keenly informed by Michael Rohd's *Hope is Vital: Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue* (1998) and Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) which were critical for my development as a facilitator. Paulo Freire's work was also highly significant, particularly his notion of dialogic exchange, as well as his views on critical pedagogy. These ideas are foundational to my artistic approach. Additionally, seminal work in the field by scholars such as Helen Nicholson, Sally Mackey, James Thompson, Judith Ackroyd, and Jonathan Neelands have also been influential to my development as a practitioner, impacting my decisions and choices.

For this research, I considered work I had done as far back as 2006 with CLIMB Theatre Company.² This work consisted primarily of process drama and drama-in-education techniques. My academic experiences and experimentation at the University of Central Florida and with New York University Steinhardt School's summer programme in Ireland were also important in the development of the principles I outline below, for it was during this period that my practice expanded to include community-based practice and projects that dealt with social justice issues, such as violence against women and explorations of gender. This led to my involvement with projects such as: the Gaiety School of Ireland's *BREATHE* project, which was focused on suicide and suicide prevention; a drama program for neurodivergent young adults in collaboration with the ARC of St. John's County;³ and a project I started and ran working with teens in the Marin County Juvenile Hall.

This practice, which has encompassed an array of different contexts, age groups (from four years old to adults in their eighties) and neurodiversity within my participant groups, has given me meaningful insight into the breadth and depth of applied drama praxis. Together, these experiences have informed the detection and recognition of the proposed principles.

² CLIMB Theatre Company is a TYA company based in greater-Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota, USA.

³ The ARC of St. John's County is an organisation that provides services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The programme included on session each week working with a higher-functioning group of young adults and one session each week for a lower-functioning group of adults at their community campus. For more information on this organisation see <https://www.arcsj.org/services/community-campus/>.

Methodology

I began this autoethnographic research process using a free association exercise in which I wrote out thoughts, words, feelings — anything that came to mind in regard to my practice in applied drama. Next, I spent time poring over my journals relating to work completed over the past fifteen years. Within these, I had contemporaneously reflected on my practice as well as taken notes relating to conversations with colleagues and provocations offered by them through workshops and conferences. I then added to the list I had started with the free-association exercise, coding the various descriptors of the practice that were bubbling up through the text. Additionally, I returned to the interviews I conducted for my MFA thesis⁴ with artists/facilitators based in both Ireland (Jenny Macdonald, Declan Mallon, and Stephen Murray) and the US (Michael Rohd and James Rone.) Though these interviews were conducted with a focus on facilitation, each of the practitioners described their practice in rich detail making it possible to read back through these texts with an eye toward this new focus.

Next, I analysed this material to identify patterns and identified four categories: values, outcomes/effects, anecdotes, and actions taken. I chose to focus on the identified values as the anchor-points for moving toward a set of principles that manifest within my practice and the practices I had observed of my colleagues. These values were: community-building, inclusivity, participation, accessibility, dialogic and dialectic exchange, diversity, creative freedom of the individual in concert with the community, responsiveness, and reflection. Following this I used the content coded as “actions taken” to expose how these values were evidenced in practice, creating subcategories for the actions taken. For example, storytelling, image theatre, improvisation, scene work, sculpting, movement exercises, machines, music, and think-pair-share all became grouped under polyphonic communication. I then worked to create combinations of the values and their manifestations that touched upon all the various items that had been taken stock of.

The desire was to create a list of specific principles that: allowed for and accommodated the flexibility, adaptability, and ambiguity of the form; were reflective of the fact that every project has a unique purpose and objectives; while also recognising that each facilitator has their own strengths and style. After identifying a new principle, I would go back to the original data to determine how well it held up and make sure that each was offering something new.

As a result, each of the six key principles I propose reveal a vital aspect of applied drama and can be used by a broad swathe of the field to articulate itself to others. These six are as follows: (1) insistence on an embodied practice, (2) emphasis on process, (3) thoughtful consideration of place and space, (4)

⁴ Courtney Helen Grile, “Creating Art that Truly Reflects the Community: An Exploration into Facilitation of devised, community-engaged performance” (University of Central Florida, 2013).

attention to collaboration, (5) the use of polyphonic⁵ communication, and (6) focus on a reflexive practice. In the sections that follow I will further contextualise each of the principles, incorporating literature published on the subject to tease out the significance of each principle to the overall form of applied drama.

Principle One: Insistence on Embodied Practice

One of the most obvious principles of applied drama is that within workshops participants' bodies occupy the same space and interact through a variety of physical and verbal means.⁶ Of course, this is the surface-level observation of the focus on embodied practice, for embodiment "refers to understanding the role of an agent's own body in its everyday, situated cognition" (Gibbs, 2006, p. 1). This view highlights a holistic approach informed by phenomenology. It dismisses Cartesian mind/body dualism and considers the presence of the body and co-presence of other bodies in the space, an aspect which is crucial to the meaning-making that occurs within it. Further, this links in with theories of kinaesthetic intersubjectivity, "characterized as participatory sense-making: the embodied, interactive coordination of sense-making" (De Jaegher et al., 2017, p. 492). This section will outline the significance of such an approach and touch upon what this looks like within applied drama praxis.

Referring to the long history and dominance of descriptive knowledge within research, Dwight Conquergood (2002, p. 146) notes:

What gets squeezed out by this epistemic violence is the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, co-experienced, covert – and all the more deeply meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out.

While a more holistic, embodied approach is less-easily quantifiable, it has come to be embraced more fully in recent years by the fields of cognitive and social science which have come to realise that "embodiment can capture the complexities between the intersubjective and incorporeal nature of our experiences and the social and cultural contexts within which we live" (Thorburn & Stolz, 2020, p. 98). Meanwhile, psychologist Shogo Tanaka (2015, p. 461) highlights how an embodied practice leads to what he calls intercorporeality, which "focuses on the relation between one's own body and that of the other to illuminate intersubjectivity and social understanding in an alternative way." Tanaka (2015, p. 462) explains that this involves a

⁵ Referring to the use of multiple modes of communication used within the praxis that allows for the engagement of many voices, ideas, and perspectives. For more see Emily Beausoleil, "Political Actors: Performance as Democratic Protest in Anti-Apartheid Theatre," in *Doing Democracy: Activist Art and Cultural Politics*, ed. Nancy S. Love and Mark Mattern (NYC: Suny Press, 2013), 257-285.

⁶ This is an area for further exploration as the increase in the use of online spaces, such as Zoom, to facilitate workshops during the COVID-19 pandemic raised questions about the praxis within this context. Is it still applied drama? Is it a new form? What key elements of embodiment transfer into this way of working?

“perception–action loop between the self and the other” which manifests itself through mirroring behaviour (such as contagious yawning) and interactional synchrony in which “the self and the other are reciprocally seeking potential action through each other’s perception” (p. 467). Tanaka’s perception-action loop links in with Mark Chou, Jean-Paul Gagnon, and Lesley Pruitt’s (2015, p. 611) observation that “when theatre is premised on embodied participation it can [...] combat the sense of alienation that individuals often feel.” Not only is the embodied approach generating meaning/understandings between individuals that is happening without words, but it is also creating opportunity for the formation of relationships between individuals — no matter the strength of the bond.

What Tanaka describes also links into what Conquergood (2013, p. 48) characterises as “performance-sensitive ways of knowing.” Both Conquergood (2013) and Mallika Henry (2000) link performance-sensitive ways of knowing with that of an ethnographer. The field of performance ethnography is rooted in this idea. In his book, Norman K. Denzin (2003, p. 8) writes that “[p]erformance approaches to knowing insist on immediacy and involvement. They consist of partial, plural, incomplete, and contingent understandings.” James Thompson (2012, p. 51) also addresses this when emphasising that embodied approaches in drama aid in bypassing false binaries and stereotypical or narrow views in favour of more complex and interwoven narratives.

Linking into performance-sensitive ways of knowing are ideas around kinaesthetic intersubjectivity and empathy. De Jaegher et al. (2017, p. 492) explain that embodied processes “are the stuff of understanding each other and of understanding the world together — in short, of intersubjectivity.” The presence of bodies in a space moving dynamically — in action — in meaningful engagement allows for collective sense-making and a “better understanding of and identification with the other, which is elicited by the joint task that is being pursued” (Reynolds & Reason, 2012, p. 112). Embodied practice opens up a wide range of potential for meaning-making that is both personal and collective, enabling relationship-building amongst those involved. By leaning into an embodied approach applied drama is able to tap into all of these benefits.

Prendergast and Saxton (2013, p. 5) write that in applied drama “[o]ur bodies and our minds work together, in concert, to explore issues, themes, ideas and situations through improvised role play and other process-based activities.” Activities rooted in Image Theatre that require participants to create an image (sometimes spontaneously and often without the use of words) or sculpt an image using a partner or in small groups are also ways in which applied drama leans into getting participants to use their bodies in relation to other bodies to express or create meaning. Even when transferred into online spaces, as so many were during the COVID-19 pandemic, modified versions of these activities still had participants using their bodies to express and communicate ideas in relation to the individuals and bodies within the shared, digital space.

Drawing from the skillset of artists in drama/theatre, facilitators actively call attention to factors such as proximity, eye contact, visual direction, haptics, levels, gestures (this list is not exhaustive) through questions/prompts in an effort to bring active awareness of the meaning-making that is occurring through the embodied work. In effect, facilitators are priming participants of applied drama workshops to step into the role of a performance ethnographer; they are using their total being to participate, observe, and reflect on the activities taking place during the workshop.

Principle Two: Emphasis on Process

The principle of process is supported by the valuing of dialogic exchange, reflection, responsiveness, and flexibility. This principle acts as a foundation for each of the other principles, which all feed back into the process. John O'Toole's (1992, p. 2) definition of process in drama is framed as "negotiating and renegotiating the elements of dramatic form, in terms of the context and purposes of the participants," which fits well with applied drama praxis. He highlights that the various disciplines or genres within drama/theatre necessitate varying degrees of process and describes drama-in-education as being "extremely processual" (O'Toole, 1992, p. 3). Prendergast and Saxton (2013, p. 1) write that applied drama "is a facilitated process in which the value of the work lies in what it does for participants", emphasising that it is the doing of the work itself, the process, that holds particular significance for participants. They argue that it is through the process that participants benefit from community-building, discovery, exploration, and collective meaning-making. Put simply, the focus in applied drama settings is on the actions, development, growth, and discoveries that occur within the participating group and for the participants in the workshop setting. The following paragraphs will touch upon what the creative process looks like in applied drama and how leaning into that process, without the pressure to perform for an outside group, creates space for building relationships and constructing meaning.

The creative process allows for the exploration of many ideas, providing time for them to be thoroughly examined and considered in a setting that allows for experimentation. O'Toole (1992, p. 13) writes that participants operate within at least two contexts within drama work. The first is the *real* context, which is "what we know to be real, and what we bring to the drama in terms of our cultural background, experience, and attitudes," and the other is the *fictional* context, which is "the make-believe world of the drama which we have agreed to believe in together" (O'Toole, 1992, p. 13). Each of these contexts are present simultaneously within applied drama work and impact one another, leading to new discoveries and insights for those participating.

Within an applied drama process, the structure of the dramatic activities used in a workshop is what the facilitator offers to the group, while the content (the topic/subject to be explored) typically comes from workshop participants or the entity commissioning the workshop, such as a school. Cecily O'Neill (1995, p. xvi) posits that the process contains "powerful elements of

composition and contemplation,” emphasising the balance between the structure offered by the dramatic form and the thoughts, ideas, and reflections offered by participants. Michael Rohd (1998, p. 3) writes about the process this way: “The process is a journey. Like any journey, it has a beginning, a route, and a schedule, but it does not have a predetermined destination.” Applied drama projects are structured with the intent that the experience and the process are themselves the purpose, the means, and the ends. Within each workshop there are smaller share-outs within the group which are used to open up an idea, think about a topic from a different angle, or dive deeper into a subject.

What becomes clear through this creative process is the complexity and ambiguity of most issues/situations — and though ambiguity can be distressing, through the process participants become more comfortable working through these complexities. This opens up possibilities for discovery, awareness, and learning within and through the community that often lead to collective knowledge-building (outlined in detail above in the embodied practice section and further elaborated on in the polyphonic communication and reflexivity sections). The collective meaning-making and strengthened community ties developed through the process can be seen as the more tangible “product” that is offered through applied drama. For this reason, O’Neill (1995, p. 25) writes:

If an improvised experience has been of any significance, the participants and spectators will retain an impression of the occasion after the event, and this impression, or outline, can be seen as a dramatic ‘product.’

It is the time afforded through an emphasis on process that allows for greater capacity for collaboration, reflexivity, working through issues of place/space, and incorporating and adjusting communication approaches. In the sections to follow, it is important to keep in mind that this commitment to process underpins each of the other principles.

Principle Three: Thoughtful consideration of place and space

Applied drama practitioners consider place and space not only as points that occupy a map, but also in terms of a type of imaginative space described by Doreen Massey (2005, p. 130) where stories are collected which act as “wider power-geometries of space”. Sally Mackey (2016a, p. 110) writes of place:

Place is an aura of a location together with the location itself and one with which a person builds a relationship and interaction, even if not necessarily a positive relationship and even if temporary.

The attention given to place/space is manifested in myriad ways by practitioners of applied drama. It can most simply be broken down into three main threads: attention given to significance and history of a given geographical

locale to participants (and how this might be different for each); a focus on creating a “space of potentiality” (Sloan, 2018, p. 587); and consideration of accessibility.

In choosing a locale in which to work, facilitators ask questions regarding the history of the geographical area, as well as the specific building and the room within which the workshop(s) will take place. Does the place/space hold any special significance to the community? Are there signifiers of power within the room? Sally Mackey and Nicolas Whybrow (2011, p. 7) contend that there can be “manifestations of cultural restriction associated with particular local places and community customs”. The significance of a place or space may determine its use for a project. Once a location has been chosen for the site of the project, Mackey and Whybrow (2011) assert that it is critical to be mindful of how those places are envisioned and challenged.

Understanding the places and spaces I enter impacts how I prepare for any workshop, though I have learned that despite the best planning, a real understanding of the significance of any place and the participants’ relation to it is only truly possible once we begin working together. To further complicate this, Mackey and Whybrow (2011, p. 10) posit that leaning into Debra Massey’s idea of place as “interstitial and fluid” is meaningful for applied drama praxis. This links in well with Cathy Sloan’s (2018, p. 587) view which acknowledges that the idea of place as a fixed thing is complicated by the lived experience of a place and can be further complicated when linked with creative practice that inspires participants to imagine beyond the confines of a physical place. Understanding that the meanings of, and feelings toward, a place/space are constantly in flux leads to the next thread in this exploration of place/space: creating a “space of potentiality” (Sloan, 2018, p. 587).

Accepting that the meaning and experience of a place/space is fluid, means that “the role of the practitioner is to create spaces of potentiality that encourage new experiences, the making of new connections, experiences of active choice-making that allow things to ‘become’ whatever they will ‘become’” (Sloan, 2018, p. 594). Hartley (2012, pp. 58–61) describes one such experience in a project designed to address gang violence in the United States that took place at a community centre with significant police security and metal detectors. She and her team had the participants create a mural over the course of their project, with objects of significance and drawings. Hartley (2012, p. 67) writes that “the mural the gangs created was a testimony to the journey they took and to the trust and honesty they brought to the telling of that story”. It transformed the space in which the participants were working, helping them to claim the space and leave their mark upon it.

Sometimes the transformation of a space happens physically through rearranging furniture or as noted above, via the creation of a physical object, such as the mural. Sometimes however it is done through imaginative work, including through simple, yet powerful activities such as having participants imagine cans of spray paint in their hands and requesting that they physically go through the action of “painting” the walls, ceiling, and floor. This

intervention within the space can be one of the initial steps to creating a “safe space”⁷ for participation and collaboration. Awareness of the weight that certain places/spaces hold and how to create “spaces of potentiality” link in to the final thread of this exploration because a lack of accessibility to a place/space directly impacts participants’ attitudes toward it.

The consideration of accessibility to place (and within space) is crucial to planning a workshop within any community. Cornerstone Theatre Company in Los Angeles, known for its community-engaged approach, emphasises the importance of place in training workshops, noting that it is important to “go to the places where the community is already likely to gather” (Rauch et al., 2006, p. 38). They suggest that facilitators ask themselves: How easy/difficult is it to get to the location without a car? What is the parking situation? Are there any variety of obstacles to participants physically arriving at the location? Once a locale has been selected that is accessible to the community, there is a further consideration of barriers, physical or socially constructed, to accessing the place/space, like whether it is accessible for people with mobility issues, and because facilitators seek the active engagement of participants throughout the workshop rather than spectatorship, questions should also be asked regarding the set-up of any space that a workshop is held in.

For example, I remember working on a project which was to be held on a stage in a school auditorium. The stage was elevated, and in the first workshop the only path we had to the stage was using the stairs at the front. We had a student in a wheelchair. While it was not the plan, we ended up working in the aisles of the auditorium so that all of the students would have access to participate. We were eventually able to get the pathway to the stage from the back using a ramp so that all students could access the stage. Once the issue of accessibility to the stage was resolved, I was able to focus more on transformation of the space in line with the agreed-upon focus for the project and create an environment that was more conducive for group collaboration.

Principle Four: Attention to collaboration

Thompson writes that collaboration is at the epicenter of the art of drama/theatre, and this axiom holds true for applied drama. Applied drama moves participants from mere “working together” into collaborative creation, falling within Sawyer and DeZutter’s (2009) theory of “collaborative emergence.”⁸ In this section these ideas are explored, together with how the praxis works toward this key principle.

The type of collaboration that occurs within applied drama is best expressed through the term “collaborative emergence.” Sawyer and DeZutter describe this type of collaboration as looser and more open, allowing for unpredictable

⁷ Defined here as a space in which participants feel comfortable dealing with issues/topics that may be uncomfortable for them. Some practitioners prefer the term “brave space,” emphasising the need to be willing to take risks, rather than feeling safe, which “safe space” can connote. This is much debated. For more on this see Flensner and Von der Lippe (2019).

⁸ Sawyer and DeZutter, “Distributed Creativity: How Collective Creations Emerge From Collaboration,” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 2 (2009): 81-92.

outcomes — as opposed to collaboration in which the outcomes are foreseen or planned in advance. Sawyer and DeZutter outline four characteristics that bring about collaborative emergence:

The activity has an unpredictable outcome, rather than a scripted, known endpoint; There is moment-to-moment contingency: each person's action depends on the one just before; the interactional effect of any given action can be changed by the subsequent actions of other participants; and the process is collaborative, with each participant contributing equally. (2009, p. 82)

These ideas of moment-to-moment contingency and an interactional effect fit well within applied drama, as they are in conversation with the principles of reflexivity and the emphasis on process. This helps to give a clearer picture of the specific type of collaboration that is sought within these settings: creative activity that is shared between persons, that is open, flexible, and responsive, and through which collective knowledge is generated.

In the context of applied drama settings, creating a collaborative environment amongst participants is paramount to the success of the process. Practitioners seek to generate collaboration defined as a “process of shared creation: two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none has previously possessed or could have come to on their own” (Sanker, 2012, p. 4). Qualley and Chiseri-Strater point out that collaboration is both dialectical and reflexive, writing that the “paradox of collaboration is that through the process of interacting with others, individuals (re)discover their selves” (1994, p. 111). The dialectical encounters with people and ideas that Qualley and Chiseri-Strater refer to are discussed in the sections looking at polyphonic communication and embodied practice.

In order to facilitate a high level of collaboration amongst participants, within applied drama there is an emphasis on fostering relationships through community-building activities. Prendergast and Saxton dedicate an entire chapter to this in their book, *Applied Drama: A Facilitators Handbook to working in the Community* (2013), to highlight the importance of, and share techniques for, community-building within applied drama contexts. Linking in with the principle of place/space, creating a safe/brave space for participation is crucial to building a sense of community that will foster active exploration and collective creativity. Often practitioners will create a social contract with a group outlining expectations and rules that everyone helps create and agrees to work within.

In speaking about her practice during an interview I conducted with her in 2012, Jenny Macdonald asserted, “I do contracts with all ages and all groups, just because I think it never hurts any human being to put a focus on what

it actually means to listen or make space for people”. Once the group has established a set of agreements for moving forward, the focus shifts to the process of building community through active endeavors.

In order to foster a sense of camaraderie that leads to collaborative emergence, facilitators often use warm-ups and theatre activities created for this very purpose. Irish practitioner Stephen (Jed) Murray explains (2012, n.p.):

I will always do introductory exercises at first and let people make a bit of a tit of themselves...get them working together with exercises that involve stuff that they want to achieve...challenging stuff that can be got. Even just a ball and you have to keep it up for a count of thirty.

These exercises (or games) are linked to theatre performance techniques used in rehearsals and are designed to quickly and effectively build an ensemble from a group of artists who may have never met before, but who must work together intensely and intimately to accomplish their task. The games often involve laughing together when the group might make a “mistake” and begin the game again working toward a common goal — an example of this would be the simple exercise of counting to twenty as a group, but if any two people call out a number at the same time, the group must begin again. This motivates a desire to work together and requires participants to become attuned with one another. All of this sets the tone for an environment which is inclusive of all present and their ideas, as well as opens the door for participants to work together to collaborate and co-create.

Once participants are working and laughing together, they are ready to move toward collaborative emergence — delving into concerns or topics that the group would like to consider. Whether through storytelling, image theatre, sculpting, and/or improvisation — applied drama fosters collaborative emergence through combining avenues for artistic expression with prompts that are designed to evoke both specificity and openness.

An example of this type of prompt is: “where are you and where are you going?” This is open to interpretation by the participants and they are free to respond in whatever way they are most compelled through the exercise outlined. Some might stay rooted to specific geographic places, some might think to a situation they are currently involved in and how they would like that to be resolved, some might speak to their goals and where they are in terms of achieving them, and so on. Providing prompts that are able to bring focus to specific moments and ideas, but are also open enough to allow for each individual’s interpretation, allows for spontaneity and unpredictability, which is then bolstered by the translation of those ideas through the artistic form. When this is combined with partner, small group, and whole group work in which the material offered by each individual based on the prompt passes through many hands and many iterations, the concept of moment-to-moment contingency and interactivity is realized. These moments of collaborative

emergence, offered through applied drama, allow for deep exploration and curiosity to take place, leading to the generation of shared knowledge within the group.

Collaboration is closely linked to the next principle relating to polyphonic communication, as the idea of polyphony “suggests a number of different voices participating” (Mackey, 2016b, p. 287), which weaves these two principles closer together.

Principle Five: Use of Polyphonic Communication

Creating opportunities for all participants to contribute is a fundamental task for an applied drama practitioner. This is often phrased as making sure that everyone’s “voice” is heard, and this is easily seen in the use of storytelling, scene work, and improvisation. However, not every participant is comfortable with “voicing” their thoughts and feelings verbally. Participants may be better able to represent their ideas using other modalities of communication. Supporting this idea, Richard Courtney wrote that “[spoken] language is not capable of capturing the whole of feeling because human feelings are less tangible than linguistic expressions” (1995, p. 19). Fortunately, applied drama also employs the languages of gesture, body language, facial expression, image, metaphor, and symbolism through exercises that involve movement, proxemics, and touch.

While individuals unconsciously interpret body language and gesture in daily interactions, artists in the field of drama consciously examine these modes of communication for optimal expression. Nicholson writes:

In drama, communication is embodied and meanings are created and read through the body, aurally, visually, and kinaesthetically [...] drama is a form of literacy – you can think, feel, represent ideas and experiences with your body as with your mind. (2005, p. 53)

Applied drama facilitators guide participants toward an intentional awareness of nonverbal expressions which “help to fill out the words we are saying” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2013, p. 77). Through the conscious awareness of these factors, differences in how people express and interpret these modes of communication are revealed, and are then able to provide greater context and nuance to the exchange of information occurring within the workshop.

Rooted in an awareness of staging and scenography, applied drama employs the methods of tableau (frozen images) and sculpting (participants moving each other to create an image), as well as other image-based approaches to working labelled “Image Theatre” by Augusto Boal (1992). All of these exercises engage with haptic and proxemic communication. Anderson (2018) elaborates on the use of tableau, writing that these compositions “include creative and aesthetic choices for proximity of actors, facial expression, implied motion, shape/flow, contrasting levels, focal points, bodily gesture, and orientation to audience, among other possible textures” and pointing out that image-based drama work “directly challenges the pervasive idea inherited from

analytic philosophy of linguistics and knowledge that meaning must be tied to words” (2018, p. 73). At any point, these “fixed” images can also become animated, tapping into a kinetic form of communication.

Applied drama also incorporates the language of metaphor and symbol through exercises and games. Mallika Henry writes: “Drama, through its use of symbols, has been a powerful tool for communicating public and political meaning in those cultures in which a living theatre speaks to broad audiences” (2000, p. 58).

Through symbolism and metaphor, arts-based practices are able to draw connections in human experiences and tap into individuals’ tacit knowledge. Courtney explains that “[i]n dramatic acts symbols become felt realities – fictional entities of significance in the players’ doing and Being. Symbols then become cognitive elements available to our intellectual potential” (1990, p. 125). The use of metaphor allows for the inclusion of more perspectives and aesthetic distancing from a subject, promoting abstract thinking. Abstract thinking leads to greater comfort with ambiguity through asking questions, being amenable to getting something “wrong,” and by acknowledging that there may be more than one solution to a problem, supporting greater collaboration and capacity for reflexivity.

Through the use of such a wide range of communicative forms, applied drama praxis provides multiple opportunities for the translation of ideas. Clegg and his associates write that “[t]he process of translation produces not so much a right or wrong translation—although some may work better than others in specific contexts—because every single attempt can be a point of departure for a new understanding” (2011, p. 347). In my practice I frequently move from storytelling activities in which an individual shares a story, to having the group create a tableau based on what they heard. The narrative is not only translated from a verbal to a nonverbal medium; it is also translated by and through the perspectives of the individuals in the group. Reflection and reflexivity aid in this endeavor by helping to inform the direction the group takes.

Principle Six: A focus on reflexive practice

The principle of focusing on reflexive practice is informed by the values of reflection, dialogic and dialectic exchange, and responsiveness. A “reflexive practice” is defined here as the continuous reflection on one’s practice combined with introspection, which leads to not only a change in one’s beliefs/assumptions, but to active changes/modifications within the practice itself. The following section will address the concept of reflexivity and its ties to reflection, how this informs this paper’s preferential use of the term “praxis,” and how reflexivity is manifested within applied drama settings.

The lexical source of the term “reflexive” means “to bend backwards upon oneself” (Lumsden, 2019, p. 2). While Lumsden (2019) wrote of a variety of forms of reflexivity within philosophy and social theory that date back to early writings of Immanuel Kant, this article looks to Dawson and Kelin (2014),

authors of *The Reflexive Teaching Artist*, to define reflexivity as reflecting on an experience and then engaging in action based on that reflection. They write that:

The reflexive individual understands how to thoroughly investigate choices and alternatives and when to challenge her choices to improve both her practice and the experience of colleagues and collaborators. (Dawson & Kelin, 2014, p. 31)

Jonathan Neelands (2006) reinforces this idea, writing that a reflexive practice presumes structural occasions for reflection on the work being created and the process itself among all participants and this will determine “the interpretation and modification of, the on-going practice” (Neelands, 2006, p. 19). The notion of shifting an approach or actively changing course as a result of thoughtful reflection about what has been experienced is at the heart of the notion of reflexivity in applied drama.

Qualley (1994, p. 223) explains the interconnection of reflection and reflexivity by noting that they are “different aspects of the same process that can work separately or together.” Dawson and Kelin (2014) use a model of looped learning to describe how reflection and reflexivity are connected and can work together. In this model: single-loop learning (reflection) asks “are we doing things right?”; double-loop learning (reflexivity) asks “are we doing the right things?”; and triple-loop learning (learning how we learn) asks “how do we decide what is right?” (Dawson & Kelin, 2014, p. 32). The idea is that the loops build upon the knowledge of the others. Though no claims are being made about always completing the third loop within applied drama praxis, there is definitely a focus on working through the first two. Additionally, and importantly for applied drama praxis, Wanda Pillow (2003, p. 176) notes a further distinction between reflection and reflexivity, writing, “to be reflective does not demand an ‘other,’ while to be reflexive demands both an other and some self-conscious awareness of the process of self-scrutiny.” This shines a light on the need for reflexivity within the praxis due to the need for participants (at minimum one other, though usually more) in shared space.

The primary focus of this principle is of the reflexive practice of the facilitator. A reflexive approach allows facilitators to be aware of “social, ethical, and political impact” (Lumsden, 2019, p. 4); the ever-shifting power dynamics at play; and the facilitator’s own relationship with the participants. Reflexivity is what allows facilitators to be responsive to “the momentary and evolving needs” (Dawson & Kelin, 2014, p. 31) of participants in the room and adjust course of the work as necessary. This could translate into changing course with the use of various modes of communication styles, the size of group interactions (putting people in pairs, small groups, etc.), where in the space the work is taking place, etc. These adjustments happen in-the-moment as well as between workshops when planning for the next session.

While this reflexive process is a must for facilitators, it is not uncommon for participants to move from a reflective into a reflexive mode as well. The reflexive approach taken by facilitators offers both individual (within each participant) and collective opportunities for reflection and meaning-making. Courtney (1990, p. 161) refers to this creation of meaning as a dual process writing:

The essence of dramatic action is doubling: identifying and empathizing with others, impersonating them, thinking from their point of view, and transforming our metaphoric imaginings into external symbols that create multiple meanings.

As Courtney stated, this new meaning-making often leads to participants' greater ability to empathise with others with whom they may hold differing opinions or beliefs – a process that is closely tied to Boal's understanding of "metaxis" as a state of being in both the real and imagined worlds simultaneously (1995).

Moments of reflection, both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, are embedded throughout applied drama praxis. This is emphasised in the literature by practitioners and scholars across the discipline. Prendergast and Saxton (2013, p. 7) note that "[r]eflection-in-action can be done through a number of drama activities: writing-in-role, hot-seating, pair-share and reportage," while "[r]eflection-on-action usually occurs at the conclusion of an activity or a session as well as at the end of a workshop series" (p. 8). Reflection "allows individuals to process the content that is being explored" in addition to "the process itself" (Grile, 2013, pp. 43–44). Through these many opportunities offered for reflection, which then lead into new exercises or activities, it is possible and probable that some of the participants move during workshops from single-loop learning into double or even possibly triple-loop learning.

A focus on constant reflection throughout the process and then acting upon that reflection through embodied practice is what informs the preferential use of the word "praxis" to describe applied drama over "practice." While "praxis" is generally accepted as the fusion of theory and practice, in order for that to work it requires an iterative process which puts theory into action, reflects upon that action/practice, updates the theory based upon the practice, and then puts the new theory back into action. This lends applied drama the characteristics of fluidity and mutability which make it quite difficult at times to pin down. It is the honed skill of reflexivity combined with the form and structure of drama/theatre and an emphasis on process that allows for the iterative processes which support the praxis and make applied drama uniquely suitable for use in contexts of learning, conflict resolution, dialogic exchange, and investigating social and political concerns.

Conclusion

Through the process of identifying a set of principles to characterise and describe applied drama, what becomes evident is how interwoven these ideas are and how important they are for supporting the flexibility and variety of

aesthetic processes the praxis is known for. For example, an emphasis on awareness of place/space generates greater collaboration, while embodied practice allows for the inclusion of multiple modalities of communication. All of this is made possible through the focus on process, which in turn allows for a reflexive praxis. Each principle flows into the other, supporting and maintaining a delicate democratic balance within the praxis. Like rivers joining together, these then connect with still more bodies of water, creating a flow that is constantly in motion. However, it is this shifting and unpredictable quality that can make the praxis so difficult to explain to someone who has never experienced it. Nevertheless, by undergoing a thorough examination and reflection on my personal practice, it became clear that I had employed these guideposts to support my work and that they were manifest within all my experiences.

Of course, a limitation of this research is that it is borne out of an anglophone-centred experience,⁹ however, it is my hope that rather than attempting to define applied drama praxis in relation to other drama/theatre practices, the principles offered in this article may provide others with the language to characterise applied drama praxis in its own right. While this research has at times felt like an attempt to pin down jelly, and given that the praxis may always remain somewhat elusive, I hope that these principles have nevertheless captured the flavour and essence of the praxis.

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⁹ I have personally practised in the USA and Ireland and those I interviewed work primarily within a UK/US/Irish context.

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