Chapter 9

Preparing the Reflective Practitioner

Theatre Practice as Reflective Process

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Belgrade, Serbia: Spring 2000

Theatre-makers from across Serbia and I were on a stage at the National Theatre in Belgrade. Nine months after the NATO bombing I was running a series of workshops on using drama with young people. We are working on *King Lear*. It was not an accidental choice. In the play King Lear decides to divide his kingdom between his three daughters, and this is a country that recently decided to divide itself into pieces. I had been asked to look at participatory arts practice within the Belgrade International Theatre Festival's polyphony that focuses on the use of drama and theatre in educational, social engagement, and humanitarian contexts. In particular, I worked with Serbian actors and theatre directors to explore ways in which drama's capacity for metaphor and symbolism can create a safe space to explore the difficult situations many of the young people in this region have recently lived through.

In the opening moments some of the themes discussed included power and status, masters and servants, men and women, fathers and daughters, parents and children, madness and sanity, self-knowledge and lack of it, and country and exile. All of these are rich territory to mine, especially in the context of looking at ways in which theatre can tackle social issues and moral dilemmas as well as dealing with feelings. At some point the relationships between Lear and the different characters in the play were examined, and decisions were made on who would play the various roles (other than Lear). A chair, which represented Lear, was placed in the middle of the stage. Pieces of rope from the side of the stage were used to signify different relationships to Lear: positions in his court, status in the kingdom, position in the family. Who had the shortest piece of rope between themselves and Lear? How were these decided? On what grounds? Were any separate from Lear? Intertwined? Tangled? Knotted? Where were the tensions?

Negotiating the different places within what became a complex "web," adjustments were made through discussion: shifting ourselves, placing each other, arguing our case, listening and responding. At some arbitrary point consensus was reached: content with the image created has been achieved. A photograph was taken of this. Then we were on the move again, arguing for our own space, re-creating the claims of the characters we had taken on.

Eventually we took a break, put down the rope, and reflected on the exercise in small groups. We thought about the relationship between this exercise and the themes of the play and considered how we came to a shared sense of what felt right. Were we guided by meaning? By aesthetics? By a collective understanding of the themes? Did one person or different people take on leadership at some point? Or was it a truly collaborative process?

The Reflective Process

I began this chapter by describing a particular creative process and the questions it raised because I wanted to highlight the role of reflection within the theatre-making process. At the same time, as a trainer of artist teachers working in participatory contexts, I wanted to demonstrate how that process, rather than needing to be developed as a separate skill, might be drawn out of existing artistic practice. Theatre and dance practitioners understand the importance of working through reflection, trying things out "on the floor," testing out ideas by executing them. It is a creative process that always involves a willingness to work with and be open to the opinions of others, take risks, as well as make mistakes and learn from them. This means working with instinct and intuition, drawing on an aptitude for remaining present, or in the moment, and constantly responding creatively to what others offer. The teacher artist's capacity to work in this instinctively reflective way is also central to working successfully with the diverse communities. This capacity is what Donald Schön (1983) suggested exemplifies the reflective practitioner: the professional who is able to respond instinctively and intuitively in a wide range of situations.

I believe theatre making as a process parallels much of current thinking about the sharing of knowledge and theories of learning. As such, it can be an important key to developing reflective skills at a more conscious level with those who wish to become artist teachers, approaching theory through practice. In doing so I would like to challenge the division often made between "the 'activist-pragmatist' learning bias" of a "broader autodidactic tradition in the arts" and the "theorist-reflector" focus of more formal learning (Kay, 2012, p. 16). It is my contention that artists frequently move beyond activist-pragmatist to theorist-reflector within their own creative practice. How might one begin, then, to draw consciously on philosophical and pedagogical perspectives such as Michael Polanyi's (1967) theory of tacit knowledge, Schön's (1983) notions of reflecting "in-action" and "on-action" and John

Dewey's (1938) concept of the inter-relationship between experience, interaction, and reflection, to assist in analyzing and reflecting on that process? How might one show that the practice itself is an embodiment of the theory? In attempting to address these questions, this chapter will use particular moments of situated practice— indicated by place and date —to examine ways in which I believe the theory and practice of learning and reflection coincide. I have chosen examples from different cultural contexts in order to reflect the diversity of the communities in which teacher artists work. Although all the examples are based in theatre or drama practice, they could also be relevant to other disciplines.

Practice as Process

In considering the overlap between practice and theory, it is interesting to note how many models of theatre and dance practice inhabit texts dealing theoretically with the nature of knowledge and learning. In his critique of objectivism, for example, Polanyi (1967) drew on the image of a dancer observing a master to explain the role of "empathy," or what he later came to call "indwelling," within the learning process:

> Two kinds of indwelling meet here. The performer co-ordinates his moves by dwelling in them as parts of his body, while the watcher tries to correlate these moves by seeking to dwell in them from the outside. He dwells in these moves by interiorising them. By such exploratory indwelling the pupil gets a feeling of the master's skills and may learn to rival him. (p. 30)

This description of learning as a process of watching, gathering, and interiorizing the actions within one's own body is central to theatre and dance practice, where practical, dialectical engagement occurs with what already exists. Bertolt Brecht would insist that this engagement is crucial to the theatre-making process. Challenging a vision of creativity that "applauds nothing but what is 'original,' 'incomparable,' 'never been seen before,'" Brecht (1964) argued for a new paradigm:

> The creative act has become a collective process, a continuum of a dialectical sort in which the original invention taken on its own has lost much of its importance…The model is not set up in order to fix the style of performance; quite the contrary. The emphasis is on development: changes are to be provoked and made perceptible. (pp. 211–212)

Polanyi, like Brecht, was forced to flee Germany because the ethics and morals of the Third Reich began to impact the worlds of scientific and artistic thought. Both believed real learning, like the creative process, involved a constant, dynamic dialogue between learner and teacher, where the sharing of "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi, 1958, p. 92), or knowledge that comes from belonging to a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 49) should be a communal experience. After World War II both advocated collaborative working as central to building a fairer, more just, more enlightened society.

Brohm (2007) took this notion of theatre as a paradigm for sharing our knowledge further. Interrogating the analogy of culture as "an iceberg" (Hall, 1976), where tacit knowledge, or what makes up our cultural diversity, is something inexpressible and submerged, Brohm suggested theatre might provide a more useful model. Although a little outdated in terms of today's theatre, his comparison remains interesting, "On the stage" he proposed, "there is a certain setting… The spotlight indicates the current focus of the play. It shows what is relevant; it creates a foreground, so that the rest of the stage becomes background." (Brohm, 2007, p. 4). This focus may shift and change throughout the performance. "But to explain this," he stated, "we need the director of the theatre. The director is the principle that creates meaning on the basis of tacit clues…developing meaning and performing. He summons memories, clues, and bodily movements to fit a focus he demands" (Brohm, 2007, p. 4). The director, in other words, draws on the tacit knowledge of both audience and performers by offering moments of perspective. This is what Brecht would have referred to as gestus: where social

meaning and physical action work together to enable us to contextualize a character's behavior /attitude in a specific moment. "Perspective," according to Brohm, is not something fixed but something continually influenced by our social context and informed by experience. Like Brecht, he suggested that the audience's presence and response is as important to what is understood as the action we are watching onstage.

Perspectives of the participants in the *King Lear* workshop were almost certainly informed by their recent experiences of living through conflict and division, very different from mine as the workshop facilitator. Reflecting within the process, as well as after it, we could be said to have shared our tacit understandings of the characters and the play and made what Polanyi called "mutual adjustment." It is at this intersection between theatre practice and the methodologies and theories of knowledge sharing that I believe we can begin to recognize the value of engaging with creative practice as a tool for preparing the reflective practitioner.

The Process of Reflection

In describing how Japanese companies have become leaders in innovative thinking, Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi (1995), compared Western and Japanese practice by noting the greater comfort the Japanese have in the sharing of tacit knowledge by the use of metaphor, pictures, or analogy to describe what they mean. Creating a physical image is frequently a starting point for the theatre practitioner. Sometimes there is no need to explain why this image is successful or pleasing to the group, it can just be sensed. At the same time, if one really wants to understand why it worked, or in another situation, why something similar might not work, one needs to move beyond tacit sharing of knowledge into a more conscious process of reflection. One needs to engage with what Schön identified as reflecting *on-action*.

Tokyo: Autumn 2008

Theatre-makers from across Japan and I were in a rehearsal room in Tokyo, looking at the notion of reflective practice with artists who work in a range of teaching-participatory contexts. I was introducing what Boal in his *Theatre of the Oppressed* called his arsenal of games. Participants worked in pairs, leaning into one another, shoulder to shoulder, pushing against their partners but trying not to push them over. Through trial and error, we discovered the exercise does not work properly unless we put equal effort into the push. We neither wanted to overcome our partner nor did we want to give way. Both would lead to a fall. The more we used our own strength, the more we realized we could encourage our partner to use theirs. We made continual adjustments to maintain our shared equilibrium. Reflecting while we did this proved useful. Soon there was a new energy to the pushing. Everyone was able to hold balance for a long time. Finally, exhausted, we broke and sat down.

Participants anxiously rubbed their partners' shoulders, bowed, smiled, and began to laugh. I asked if anyone surprised himself or herself in the activity. "Being in opposition with each other is not something we're comfortable with in Japan," someone said, "except perhaps in the subway." Someone else added, "At first I didn't want to push, then I began to realize if I didn't push my partner would fall anyway so I had to keep pushing to make sure my partner pushed back." We discussed what went through our minds when we were playing this game. I introduced Schön's concept of reflecting *in-action* and *on-action* as a way of identifying the different stages of our thinking. We began to realize that when we decided we needed to put more energy into pushing our partners, we were literally thinking on our feet, or in Schön's terms, "reflecting-in-action." Each push, each moment of resistance needed to be carefully evaluated. This kind of reflection had to happen while we were doing it. Like driving a car on an icy road, we were constantly making adjustments within the action.

We went on to consider why Boal might have thought this would be a useful exercise for his actors, engaged as they were in creating theatre that asked audiences to make a critical response to the oppressions they saw enacted on stage. We recognized that the Joker, or audience facilitator, in Boal's Forum Theatre needs to be confident in managing the metaphorical "pushing" of the spect-actor: the audience member who goes in and makes new suggestions for a characters' behavior or actions. The Joker needs to be able to judge when to encourage them to go beyond the most obvious answer. To "push" them into thinking differently, to avoid clichéd responses, be brave enough to challenge the actors and keep looking for solutions that might really change behavior or cause someone to re-consider their actions. By thinking about the pushing exercise in more metaphorical terms, we began to move away from the current workshop and consider how we might employ the exercise as a model for our own facilitation. In other words we are now reflecting on-action.

Reflection in and on action: Observation

Both forms of reflection are important for artist teacher development: to make each moment in a session work in itself and then to reflect on the whole session once it has been completed, in order to improve the next one, or to reflect on why a particular session worked so well. Identifying what went "wrong" is often much easier than recognizing what went "right." In developing our facilitation skills, one needs to learn to reflect on the reflection-in-action moments that happened in the actual workshop. As Schön (1987) explained in *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, the knowing is in the action. When we are employing tacit knowledge meaningfully or skillfully, he suggests we are "action present" (Schön, 1983, p. 62). If he had been speaking of theatre or drama practice he might have referred to it as the need for what Keith Johnstone (1996) called "being there."

Becoming skilled in using "several levels and kinds of reflection," Schön advocated, plays an important role "in the acquisition of artistry," enabling the practitioner to "respond to the unexpected or anomalous by *restructuring* some of her strategies of action" (Schön, 1988, pp. 31–35). One of the ways in which different stages of reflection can be encouraged is by careful observation and more conscious questioning. As Brecht (1976) explained in his poem, *Speech to Danish Working-Class Actors on the Art of Observation*:

> In order to observe
> One must learn how to compare. In order to compare
> One must have observed. By means of observation
> Knowledge is generated; on the other hand knowledge is needed
> For observation. (p. 233)

In the *King Lear* workshop, for example, when we went on to look more closely at the characters using some of Keith Johnstone's status exercises, I asked participants to tell me what they *saw* when two actors created an image that suggested the status relationship between characters at a particular moment in a scene. Participants described how the image of Goneril and Regan (Lear's daughters) made them feel. One participant responded, "I saw two sisters who hated each other." We begin to unpack this in more detail. "What did you see?" I insist. In turn they answered: "I saw a woman with her arm over another woman's," "I saw one woman pushing down on another woman, " "I saw the one woman allowing another woman to lower her, then resisting," "I saw one woman's arm turn at a sharp angle to another woman," and "I saw the rope between two women tighten." Only when we made ourselves describe what we saw and felt, in the same way that Brecht worked with his actors, could we begin to speak about what we, as the audience, felt in response to the image or to interpret its meaning.

Trusting our Practice

In his introduction to *The Art of Focused Conversation* (2000), Stanfield highlighted the importance of beginning any reflective process with objective observation. Describing the way a female professor helped Joseph Matthews understand the process she used with her students, he explained how they are told to always begin with the colors, the shapes, the objects, the strokes on the canvas or the juxtaposition of one with another, before being allowed to move on to interpretation. Deconstructing this process afforded Matthews an insight into a questioning process that he eventually translated into "the focused conversation" (Stanfield, 2000) or the ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional) questioning methodology. What is intriguing is the way in which the systemizing of arts practice by others tips the balance: the further a methodology is removed from the art itself, the greater validity it seems to be given. For example, in a report about peer learning (Artworks North East, 2011) the trainers introduced artists to the ORID method as a tool for reflection. While the artists involved acknowledged its usefulness, no reference is made in the report to enabling them to see how it parallels their own practice. The danger seems to be that, as social science and business increasingly adopt and adapt artistic practice, there is a tendency to draw too much on the business training methodologies that emerge to legitimize one's own process. Although other sectors are instinctively looking to the arts as a way of facilitating experiential learning, those who work in the arts seem to be moving away from trusting the value of practice.

Helsinki: Spring 2013

In a large hotel room in Helsinki, I led a workshop examining the nature of leadership. Some of the participants came from a theatre background; the rest were from the Ministries of Culture and Labour, the business sector, the not-for-profit sector, and universities. We worked in pairs, engaged in a mirroring exercise. We took turns to lead and follow. Slowly

we tried to make the change from leader to follower, to a less formalized and more fluid approach, making the change instinctively and without instruction. We attempted to make the exercise aesthetically pleasing for the audience and so smooth that it would be impossible to tell who was leading and who was following. Eventually we stopped and discussed what made the exercise work well and questioned how it felt when our partner took over the lead, what we enjoyed about leading, and what we liked about following.

We talked about the need to be present (absorbed in what we are doing), the need to take responsibility for the follower, the need to be unafraid to lead, to be clear in our actions when we led, the need for speech (even if there are no words) and listening (even if there are no words), being open to what we are offered by our partner, to work together, to sense who might best lead at each specific moment. In *The Way We Think* John Dewey (1933) suggested three attitudes reflective thinking develops: open-mindedness (freedom from prejudice), wholeheartedness or absorbed interest, and responsibility in facing consequences (p. 33). Reflection, he stated, is an "active" on-going process not to be separated from the activity or experience that informs it.

In Helsinki we went on to reflect on what the exercise opened up in our wider thinking about what was required for twenty-first-century leadership . We also looked at ways in which such arts and cultural activity might contribute to an overall aim of improving health and well-being in the workplace. Dewey's three attitudes extended the ways we have explored the shifting nature of responsibility, specifically the need for it to be dialogic and particular to the moment, provide useful starting points. Thinking about leadership in more contextual, ever shifting terms, we considered people who might be seen as traditional leaders —from CEOs of large companies to army officers, managers of sports teams, head teachers of schools, religious leaders, and politicians. Playing with stereotypes, we physicalized their usual poses. Even as we made the first offers we question them. What if it was the head teacher of a nursery

school, a female CEO, a leader of a silent religious order, the manager of a mum's netball team? Leadership, when it works well, is always situated and contextual. We became more precise with the models we offered, trying to resist cliché in order to move beyond Brechtian concepts of the archetype.

Then we considered someone we admired personally as a leader. In this exercise, we sculpted our partners into a position we thought might be typical without telling them who they should be but rather working with their bodies as clay, guiding them into position, trying to give a sense of the person through their physicality. We looked at where tension might be in the body, offered a model if needed, demonstrated facial expressions, shifted balance as necessary. When we were satisfied we asked our pieces of sculpture (partners) to respond to what we have offered them: What do they observe about their position? What does it make them feel about the person? In what ways do they imagine this person might be a good leader? I offered the group Dewey's (1934) description of the role of "shaping" in *Art as Experience*:

> Until the artist is satisfied in perception with what he is doing, he continues shaping and reshaping. The making comes to an end when its result is experienced as good and that experience comes not by mere intellectual and outside judgment but in direct perception. (p. 51)

We looked at the way being shaped into a living sculpture of these leaders affected our understanding and knowledge of who they are and the role the perception of the sculptor has played. We thought about how our own embodiment of this person contributed to a shared knowledge. Just as importantly, we wondered what the sculptors have learned from the suggestions made by their living pieces of art. We shared the stories of the leaders we have shaped and explored what knowing the story adds to what we have already imagined by inhabiting or indwelling their being. There is a constant dialogue about the process involved in the exercise itself and our conversations about ways in which it might

help people in the workplace think about new leadership models and shifting paradigms. One builds on the other. In terms of David Kolb's (1984) model of the learning cycle, we might have been said to be moving "from actor to observer" from specific involvement to "general analytical detachment" (p. 31).

Experiential Learning: Real or Imagined?

The importance of engaging the learner in an activity or experience before being given information has a long history within theories of learning: from Aristotle's declaration that, "the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them" to Kolb's model of experiential learning. The importance of what Jennifer Moon called the "reflective learning phase" (Moon, 2004, p. 126) and the ability to draw on the tacit knowledge of the learner are constantly underlined. Does this action or experience, however, have to be real or is there a role for the imagination, for metaphor, for the power of symbolism in what is now being termed authentic learning?

Enfield and City of London: Autumn 2011

At two different places in London––a school gymnasium in Enfield and a training space in an investment bank in London––I was employing what Heathcote termed the Mantle of the Expert drama technique with two very different groups (Heathcote and Bolton, 1994). Taking up the drama facilitation position known as *leader in role*, I entered each space playing the role of the Deputy Minister for Children in Haiti, engaged with the aftermath of the recent earthquake. The children in Enfield and the bankers in the city were put in staff roles running three orphanages outside Port au Prince. The current crisis meant that each of them would need to feed, sleep, and clothe twice the number of children for whom they currently care. They were asked to present the minister with a plan for how they were going to deal with this situation and what support

they might need—all in fifteen minutes. The minister is a busy person and the circumstances are desperate.

In small groups participants took up flipchart paper and pens and got down to the planning. In both spaces, teams worked well together with intense focus. Both the children and the investment bankers have a tacit understanding of basic physiological needs. There is equally imaginative thinking about how to move beyond these needs to the next stages of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954), creating a sense of safety and belonging. The children and the bankers move constantly between being orphanage carers: the children in the orphanage being told to welcome new "friends," and people at the Ministry looking at how they can meet requests for extra bedding. As the drama developed, I introduced the idea of a Christian organization that wishes to take some of the children to families in the U.S. The children, in role, have to decide whether they want to go with them and then argue their own case for being chosen. They created images of themselves leaving for their new life and speak, from the physical position they have taken up, about what they hope for and expect. They wrote letters to their biological parents in case they were ever found.

Ten years later (in the drama) the group, in role as the children who have chosen to go to the U.S., discover their biological parents are alive, looking for them and wanting them back. They have to decide what they will do. Stay with their adoptive families or go back. Each of them got a turn to speak, making the case for their individual decision. Almost immediately I shifted their roles to being the biological parents whose children have decided not to return. They read the letters their children originally wrote. They decided how they would respond. The final scene is the children in the U.S., as grownups, deciding whether they might be willing to go back and assist a country that is still in need of skilled workers, as the doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, engineers, scientists they have become.

In the reflective discussions that followed this session both the school pupils and the bankers realized how many of their decisions had been intuitive, instinctive, informed by their values, their philosophy, and their tacit knowledge. The bankers were able to reflect on the nature of teams and leadership within a fairly hierarchical workplace and to think about how they might want to challenge this. They were able to note how, in role, one junior member of the team had taken total leadership over the practical details of how the new children would be looked after; she had also been the one to remind them that more than physiological needs should be addressed. The school pupils were able to look at their own ability to take responsibility, to make decisions, to know what mattered to them. As the artist facilitating the action, I considered where I had reflected in action, changing the written workshop plan by responding intuitively and instinctively to what was offered in the moment. Like most of the creative work I do in participatory or learning contexts, this drama was constantly dialogical. It was also dialectical, investigative, and relied on what Dewey (1922, p. 314) identified as the ability to be "responsible in accepting the consequences" of actions. However, when one thinks about training or preparing artist teachers to be reflective practitioners, one frequently reverts to more formal learning methodologies. Why does one feel that it might be more important to offer a lecture on the epistemology of leadership than to play a game of "follow the leader" and reflect on is learned from it? Of course the two approaches are not and should not be exclusive. I want my own MA students to engage critically with Dewey, Schön, Kolb, and Polanyi as much as I want them to understand ideas from Gramsci (on cultural hegemony), Raymond Williams (on cultural production), and bell hooks (on race and gender). I want them to be able to write about their reflective journey in creative versions of the learning journal described by Moon (2006). However, I also want them to understand the intuitive process of physicalizing their thought within the theatre and drama process that might enable them to reflect deeply on their teaching or facilitation practice. Developing Pfeiffer and Jones's (1985) version

of Kolb's Learning Cycle into a practical exercise, Jacobson and Ruddy (2004, p. 2) suggested a useful questioning model to encourage reflection. The five questions they offered are:

1. Did you notice…?
2. Why did that happen?
3. Does that happen in life?
4. Why does that happen?
5. How can you use that?

I think these questions are ones most theatre practitioners, from Brecht to Boal and Johnstone, would agree are essential starting points for reflecting within the process of making a piece of theatre. Perhaps it is time for teaching artists to learn to trust their practices and claim the territory more forcefully.