

# Reflecting Upon Teaching Assistant Roles in Higher Education through Participatory Theater

*Joe Norris*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1992, at the end of a workshop on reflective practice I wrote the following as part of a poem that summarized my experience, “I look at my Reflection in the mirror; I smile. The Reflection changes. I smile again; The Reflection changes ... I begin to play in the mirror...” (Norris, 1993, p. 255). Back then I recognized that when one looks into a mirror, one does so with the expectation of making adjustments, soliciting feedback in order to change/refine oneself. It need not be narcissistic, an act of admiring oneself; rather can be an educative event. On the surface, the changes one makes are typically visual with modifications to appearance (Norris & Mirror Theatre, 1999). In addition to the visual, we have scales to monitor the progression to a desired weight, timers to inform us when food is ready, clocks and day timers to provide information that lets one know one’s responsibilities to others within the human construction of time, X-rays and heart monitors to give an inside perspective of one’s internal well-being, test scores to obtain details about one’s levels of accomplishments

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and speedometers to provide instant feedback from which an individual decides to either increase or decrease one's foot pressure. All are forms of reflection that both monitor our existence and enable us to make adjustments accordingly. As a species, we have created many technical tools that are designed to foster change through feedback/reflection.

Beyond the corporeal, reflective/feedback cognitive processes also exist along the intra/interpersonal planes. For example, Courtney (1980) claims that we are all playwrights. Many times a day we write internal scripts about what we plan to do (prelive) or wish what we could have done differently (relive). Reflection makes up a lot of everyday life. It is a characteristic/behavior of most, if not all people. Some have pioneered its formal usage (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Schön, 1983), spawning an entire field of reflective practice (Bolton, 2014; Sergiovanni, 2001), self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001), narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013), and duoethnography (Sawyer & Norris, 2013), to name just a few.

Arts-based approaches have also played a role in examining the lived-experience through media other than the written word. Hilton (2009) claims that, "Art *requires* reflective discussion to create and shape meaning" (p. 33). Barone (1990) believes that stories enable their readers reconsider and sometimes conspire. Contributions to Linds and Vettrains's (2015) edited book, *Playing in a House of Mirrors*, illuminate practitioners using applied theater to reflect on how their practices are forms of personal and collective reflections. This chapter focuses on some of the work of Mirror Theatre, a long-standing participatory social issues theater company, is built upon the premise that, "Theatre acts like a mirror, reflecting back at us glimpses of our lives. Its purpose is to help us stop, think, and examine our actions" (Norris, 2009, p. 152). Rather than providing answers, cast members create and perform "activating scenes" (Rohd, 1998, p. 97) that, like problem-based learning (Dochy, Segers, Bossche, & Gijbels, 2003), invite the participants to examine their own unique responses, making this a dialogic form of research and pedagogy. Cast members and their audiences then rewrite the scenes based upon their collective insights.

Over its 20-year history Mirror Theatre has employed this participatory play-building format (Norris, 2009) for pedagogical purposes. Scripts are written based upon research conducted through a storytelling methodology (Reason & Hawkins, 1988) with a representative group of actor/research/teachers (A/R/Tors) and performed for audiences interested in the chosen topic. Bullying, prejudice, body image, reproductive choice, fitness, academic integrity, and practicum politics are but

a few of the social issues that Mirror Theatre has addressed. This chapter examines Mirror Theatre's relationship with Brock University's Centre for Pedagogical Innovation in the use of applied theater to stimulate reflection upon a number of teaching issues including the instructor/teaching assistant/student triad, academic integrity, and assessment. The process is an arts-based form of collaborative critical reflexivity as the scenes act like a mirror, inviting participants to reflect on their own beliefs and behaviors in juxtaposition with the performed scenes.

## HISTORY

Upon my arrival at Brock University in 1999, I invited students, faculty, staff, and community members who were interested in social issues theater to a series of meetings and shortly thereafter, Mirror Theatre made its transition from Alberta to Ontario. Our first public presentation, *(Re)Productions* (Norris & Mirror Theatre, 2010b), opened an event sponsored by Brock University's Center for Women's Studies. A member from the audience who worked with Brock University's Human Resources saw the potential of this format and requested that we devise a performance/workshop addressing violence in the workplace. *What Lies Beneath*, (Norris & Mirror Theatre, 2010a) was presented in the fall and was followed by a request for a new performance/workshop for faculty and administrators in the spring of 2011. The then director of Brock University's Centre for Teaching, Learning and Educational Technologies, later to be renamed the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation (CPI), was in attendance for *'Dis'Positions* (Norris & Mirror Theatre, 2011b) and requested that it be remounted in the Fall for a Teaching Assistant (TA) workshop. This began a continuing informal relationship between the CPI and Mirror Theatre. *'Dis'Positions, Academic Integrity, and the TA Experience* (Norris & Mirror Theatre, 2012), and *4.321* (Norris & DART 3F77 Class, 2012) were three such projects. *Dis'Positions* and *4.321* are discussed here with our work on academic integrity appearing in another publication (Norris & Brooks, 2016).

## THE PLAY'S THE THING

Theater is a communal activity in both its creation and delivery. Most often, even with solo performances there are a number of individuals who have input over both its form and content. Its reception is also, most often,

communal. Groups of strangers gather to publicly watch another group of individuals present. Such events make up part of the fabric of most cultures. People enjoy stories recanted both privately (reading) and publicly (performance) and vicariously live the lives of the characters portrayed. Through mass production, books, and recordings have the potential of transcending time, poised for consumption at a later date; but theater is live, providing a different ontological experience. Both the producer and consumer are present to one another, albeit in very different roles.

Boal (1979) claims that this separation between actors and audience was not always the case. Citing early rituals as examples of events in which all shared both the spectator and actor roles, he advocates for a shift in the traditional Aristotelian axiological relationship of the expert/producer and naïve/consumer to one in which both groups recognize the value of the participation of the Other. Through “forum theatre” (Boal, 1979, p. 79), the audience members become “spect-actors” (Boal, 2002, p. 19) and interact with the presentation from their seats as directors or come on stage and through improvisation collectively explore new variations of the prepared scenes. Play is returned to the people with the performance serving as a catalyst for what will follow. In real time, those gathered employ role-play as a way to have critical conversations as they dramatize their ways into new meanings. Since forum theater is live, the opportunity for dialogue is possible. The communal reflections, unlike private journals, are public, not private. In so doing, those gathered stand in the “Face of the Other” (Lévinas, 1984) with the Other acting like a mirror, providing other points of view to assist all in seeing themselves through different perspectives.

This approach aligns with Brecht’s “alienation effect” (1957). Rather than identifying with the characters, Brecht encourages a reflective distance in which audience members question what they are witnessing. However, with Brecht’s plays, audience members leave immediately after the performance. With applied theater, some form of post-performance dialogue occurs. There are a number of techniques that invite audience members to take an axiological stance moving them from passive recipients to active thinkers. This usually takes place using one of two formats. In one, there are no prepared performances, rather all participants, from the start, play a role in the creation of scenes. In the latter, a group of A/R/Tors conduct research and devise scenes that will serve as a starting point for the performance/workshop with others. Mirror Theatre’s process is the latter, with the A/R/Tors writing the scenes beforehand. At

first, the A/R/Tors devise scenes “for” the audience and then create new ones “with” them (Norris, 2015).

This act of devising scenes for future audiences is a critical reflective act in itself. Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer (1995) claim that the act of structuring data into Readers’ Theater pieces can be considered a form of analysis. The same applies to applied theater pieces. Much conversation takes place regarding the content and structure of each scene and the performance as a whole. Cast members do examine the themes but rather than making them explicit, they imbed them within the stories. In Mirror Theatre’s work, all performances employ a vignette format, which is a collage of scenes that examine multiple dimensions of a topic. This helps break a potential alignment with a protagonist found in lengthy traditional narratives and presents a map of concepts in dramatic form instead.

These resulting stories have the potential of reaching both academic and nonacademic audiences (Leavy, 2009). As Haven (2007) claims, “people are eager for stories. Not dissertations. Not lectures. Not informative essays. For stories” (p. 8). Like the “Where’s Waldo?” pictures, audience members detect the themes within the vignettes and discuss them later. A balance between express and explain (Reason & Hawkins, 1988) is sought, with the stories themselves making up the bulk of the performances.

After the performance segment, the “joker” (Boal, 1979; Hewson, 2007; Norris, 2009) facilitates the forum theater that follows. As a specialized form of host, the joker acts like a mediator focusing dialogues across the “fourth-wall” (Brecht, 1957). The fourth-wall is an invisible yet discernable space between audience and the stage. The joker is a provocateur who continually asks questions, challenging both audience members and A/R/Tors to dig deeper and to examine the context from multiple perspectives. Using techniques like hot-seating, inner dialogue, rewind to change a decision, and a voices-for and voices-against tug-of-war, the joker stimulates collective reflections through both discussion and role-play.

Many times, depending upon the size of the audience the larger group can be intimidating for some audience members. To address this issue small discussion groups are formed, each with an A/R/Tor or two facilitating discussions. As a result, we have found increased involvement. In the small groups, they choose a vignette or two to discuss exploring the issue further through role-play, and/or adding a new issue or story. When the larger group reconvenes, the smaller groups report back, sometimes with a new scene. The event is a large set of collaborative reflections.

Mirror Theatre's published scripts, like those below, are transcriptions of improvisational scenes written after the events. While of value, they are reductions missing the "contexture" (Norris, 2009, p. 28) and the textures of the context such as the elements of tone, inflection, gesture, facial expressions, time, and pace, among others. The printed word cannot efficiently convey all of the details attended to in a live performance. Many live scenes have been remounted with these and many other vignettes found at: [www.joenorrisplaybuilding.ca](http://www.joenorrisplaybuilding.ca). The video, however, while containing many more elements are also reductive as the camera frame dictates to a certain extent what will be watched. While not live, each of these still has value. It is suggested that one reads to determine one's own interpretation and then view the recordings. The scenes were devised with the intent of evoking reflection and conversation, as audience members reexamine experiences and beliefs in juxtaposition with the presented scenes. I invite you, the readers, to do the same.

Note: All cast members, including students, staff, Brock University's Academic Integrity Officer and myself signed waivers giving Mirror Theatre the rights to the scenes. The Mirror Theatre Board gave me permission to include these two in this chapter.

### 'DIS'POSITIONS

Written by: Kanthan Annalingam, Troy Brooks, Stefanie LePine, Gladys Lo, Sarah Mason, Ryan Murray, Bailey MacLachlan, Patti Malton, Joe Norris, Tia Pavan, Alyssa Rossi, Adrienne Smoke, Nicole Titus, Sadie Wolfe, Callie Wright.

*'Dis' Positions* was the fourth performance/workshop devised by Mirror Theatre in Ontario and the second for Brock University's Health and Safety Committee. By this time, while some cast members came and went, a strong working relationship among the A/R/Tors was achieved. This successful history established a trust in each other's intentions, abilities, the devising methodology, and the process of working with audiences. This time we turned the lens closer to ourselves examining on-campus relationships, in particular the instructor/teaching assistant/student triad.

Scenes dealt with issues of how each representative group can judge and misjudge one another, the giving and receiving of feedback, understanding student privilege, library conflicts (adapted from *What Lies Beneath*, our third performance/workshop), and others. The first two vignettes of

*Dis' Positions* could be considered a prologue and this, the third scene, makes our invitation explicit and defines the triad.

Scene 3—Stuck in the Middle....

Troy: This play is about power.

Joe: Who has the power?

Callie: Who's affected by the power?

Tia: Who are the innocent bystanders?

Troy: Are there any?

(Cast starts to walk back to their seats, speaking their lines as they walk).

Joe: How a prof abuses his power?

Callie: How the TAs abuse theirs?

Tia: And how the students abuse their power?

(Ryan sits on a block, Nicole on the floor. Kanthan is standing on a block stage left wearing a professor's gown.)

Ryan: Well class, I'll see you in seminar next week!

Nicole: (Standing up as she speaks) Um, I was wondering if you could help me with my paper, I just have a few questions.

Ryan: Well my office hours are later today.

Nicole: I know I have a class during that time. Can I just have some help now?

Ryan: (Begrudgingly) Well, I guess I have a minute.

Nicole: Okay! (Nicole gets on a block behind Ryan and starts to control his movements by holding his arms up with "strings") Alright, so you see where it says I have 60%, I was just wondering why? I thought I made a really strong point in my thesis.

Ryan: Can I take a look?

Nicole: Yes!

Ryan: (Starts to look over paper.) Well here you do have a sound grasp of the topic, but you didn't follow any of the guidelines.

Nicole: Oh, I thought I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. I guess the guidelines weren't all that clear.

Ryan: Well you do really show that you know what you're talking about, so I'll speak with the prof and see what I can do.

Nicole: Thank you!

(Ryan walks over to Kanthan, sits on block in front of him. Now Kanthan is controlling him by holding his arms up with "strings").

- Ryan: I have a student whose thesis really shows she has a sound understanding of the topic, but she did not follow any of the guidelines because she thought they were unclear.
- Kanthan: Do you have the paper? (Looks over the paper) Well, she did not follow MLA format, and I think that the guidelines made sense. My grade is final; she'll have to do better on the next assignment. There is nothing we can do!
- Ryan: Alright, well I will go let her know.

(Ryan walks into the middle of Nicole and Kanthan. They both pull him toward them and fight over him as they say their lines.)

- Kanthan: You can't help every student!
- Nicole: I thought I knew what I was doing.
- Kanthan: It's the policy, do your job right!
- Nicole: You're supposed to be here to help me!
- Kanthan: You're here to help me!

(Ryan falls to the ground).

The video can be found at ([http://www.joenorrisplaybuilding.ca/?page\\_id=450](http://www.joenorrisplaybuilding.ca/?page_id=450)). In this case, the recording was made prior to acquiring multiple cameras. With a one-camera live-recording, like this, the video medium is somewhat flat. Later, with new equipment, we were able to use a two-camera shoot, one with long shots and another with close-ups that were edited back and forth, more in keeping with video conventions.

## THEMES

Like a number of Mirror Theatre's productions, we ask our audiences to reflect on the **uses, misuses, and abuses of power**, with misuses being unintentional and abuses deliberate. Sometimes, these are made explicit during the post-performance and other times they are made explicit during the prologue. In this case we wanted to frame the audience's read of the scenes providing them with a series of explicit questions that focused on the power each role holds. While the scene could also be played with the professor or the student **stuck in the middle**, since the audience was to be made up primarily of teaching assistants, we chose that role and could later extend to the other two roles.



With power comes a sense of perceived **control**. The linear cliché would have the instructor on top, the teaching assistant second, and the student third. The A/R/Tors explored other possibilities and found that students could also exert power over their teaching assistants, hence this scene emerged. While the relationship between the TA and student is collegial enough at first, there are real and/or perceived expectations on TAs. In this case a **negotiation** took place over the **control of time**. The student wanted “now” and the TA wanted “office hours”. The conversation was consequently rushed, adding to the escalating tension. What might have happened, if the TA insisted on “later”? Would adequate time have been devoted then? In the interim, could the student have felt that she had been given the brush-off? What might the new scene look like? Such questions can assist those gathered to reflect on the multiple dimensions of control, negotiation, and time.

The student moves to a position of **blame**, claiming that the **instructions** were “not clear”. While conversations about adequate instructions could be useful, that would be better followed up with the instructor. Here we could explore the disposition of blame reflecting on both attitude and delivery. How could a student rephrase? What elicits a blaming stance? How might the TA address the blaming to deescalate the situation without becoming offensive or defensive? Such reflective questions delve deeper into the relationship of instructors and student asking how we can move from an I–It relationship (Buber, 1958) to a mutualistic I–Thou relationship (Norris & Bilash, 2016)?

In addition to the themes arising from the characters, the **systemics** of the structure and the **policies** that overarch the situation can also be critically examined. Negotiating a grade given by someone else is tenuous at best as the power rests elsewhere. The power of TAs exists in a larger systemic structure that lessens it. Another plausible scenario could be a student complaint directed directly at the instructor. The TA/student relationship is often in relation to an absent other. Both the structures and the policies that outline a teaching assist position are created with little input from the TAs who are grateful for finding meagre employment. There are strings beyond the characters’ that deserve reflection.

On a personal note, out of the necessity of time I was provided with a **marker/grader**. I was uncomfortable with this much-needed structure and over a period of years worked to change it. The new structure has me grading everything (my preference); however, there is no longer the marker/grader position. It begs the question, “What roles can a TA effectively play?”

From the discussion on themes, it is readily apparent that drama can elicit reflections on a number of complex issues that are experienced by many. However, rather than being prescriptive, they are designed as activating scenes (conversation starters) with audience members choosing which issues to address more fully along with providing their own insights.

### THEATRICAL CHOICES

The scene could obviously have been played realistically with the TA traveling between his desk and that of the instructor. However, we searched for a **metaphor** that represented the existing tension in that role and settled on the dramatic form of marionettes to articulate the expectations that are placed upon teaching assistants. Through this metaphoric staging of power using **marionettes** we were able to make the theme of who would pull the strings explicit within the vignette itself. In the post-performance reflection we could extend it by having the audience suggest how the student and/or the instructor could be **stuck in the middle**. We have found that **realism** can be too specific with the discussion caught up in the particulars. With metaphorical scenes, the general issues can be extended and more readily explored.

**Costuming** is, most often, minimalistic with the A/R/Tors dressed in black. Due to the vignette format, the **exposition** of characters and plot need to be **economical**. Whenever we want to convey a specific role, a select prop, like a stethoscope or clipboard or costume piece, like a construction hat, or in this case, an academic robe quickly informs the audience what role the A/R/Tor is portraying.

The **prologue** opening this scene provides questions that frame the viewing, inviting the audience to reflect upon power issues. By directly addressing the audience, the invisible **Fourth Wall** that separates the audience from the A/R/Tors is disrupted, foreshadowing its removal during the workshop stage.

### 4.321

Written by: April Bartley, Carwyn Bassett, Mary Code, Larissa Evans, Linda Faddoul, Hayley Faryna, Martine Fleming, Lauren Hudson, Gisele Kotarski, Alexa Leal, Janet Matic, Meaghan McKeag, Joe Norris, Mitchell Paisley, Alana Perri, Ariella Pileggi, Maddie Roesler, Megan Svajlenko, Monica Taylor, Erin Weitendorf

4.321 was a series of vignettes generated as a class project in DART 3F77, Theatre in Education: Theatre for a Community for the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation. It was presented once and later merged with scenes from *'Dis'positions* and renamed, *How Do We Rate?* Spinning off the competitive sports scoring system of holding up cards, 4.321 examined and questioned the ethos of assessment within and outside of the educational system. Real-estate marketability based upon school ratings, scoring of genders, unfair testing due to learning styles, the general disposition of giving scores, and instructor evaluations were some major topics provided for reflection.

Scene 13–Voice Collage on Feedback ([http://www.joenorrisplaybuilding.ca/?page\\_id=478](http://www.joenorrisplaybuilding.ca/?page_id=478))

(Shadow screen lights from behind revealing the silhouette of a person in a teacher's robe)

Teacher: Okay class, I am handing back the papers today. You'll see that I have written some comments. Take a couple of minutes in seminar to take a look at them please.

Student 1: Too vague.

Student 2: April, this was truly a pleasure to read.

Student 3: Need more examples.

Student 4: You'd be a great teacher someday.

Student 5: You have a book in you.

Student 6: You have a book in you. Wait?

(Last two look at each other)

Student 7: Lacks clarity.

Student 8: I always knew you were something special.

Student 9: Why did you even bother writing this?

Student 10: Awk.

Student 9: (looks at 10's paper) Awkward.

Student 10: It's obvious you put a lot of hard work into this.

Student 11: Poorly demonstrates adherence to the criteria. Please see me.

Student 12: Excellent.

Student 13: Good MLA formatting.

Student 14: This was a goooood effort.

Student 15: Garbage.

Student 16: Gaffa mafasa ja ja ba? (Looks directly at the teacher in the shadow screen) Well, I can't even read this.

## THEMES

Assessment primarily uses numbers and words to provide **summative** and/or **formative** feedback. Comments can provide specifics that numbers cannot and this scene provided a range. Most were **vague** and even the specifics told little, begging the questions, “What **pedagogical role(s)** does feedback play?” and “What type of **instructor/student relationship** does the grading systemically reinforce?”

While the mechanics of legibility, obtuse abbreviations, and degree of specificity can be discussed, much deeper issues underpin the scene. In the collage we see little in the way of interpersonal relationships. Rather the students are “done to” by an amorphous other in a mechanical way. Whether or not the pedagogical relationship is a positive or negative one, the **systemics of assessment** tend to foster more of an **I–It** than an **I–Thou** relationship as one has the power to judge another. In a later scene, the tables are reversed with course evaluations. Again, an **ethic of care** (Noddings, 1984) is missing as the individuals are regarded as an It, not a Thou. The underpinning reflective questions ask, “What are the **ontological and axiological issues** of standing in judgement of another?” and “What are the ontological and axiological issues of being judged another?” As an entire piece, *4.321* encourages reflection on the **ethos of judgment** within our species.

## THEATRICAL CHOICES

A **voice collage** of words and phrases can economically cover lot if issues in a short period of time. To portray each, in real time, would (a) be inefficient and boring and (b) distract from the major issue about giving and receiving comments. The A/R/Tors brainstormed actual and plausible comments and sequenced them for dramatic effect. The technique is not character-based giving audience members no one with whom to align. It invites them to recall their own examples and reflect upon what they would consider good and poor feedback.

Every assessment has an assessor in the shadows, sometimes ominous and others an absent presence. The **shadow screen** was chosen for this and a few other scenes as it portrays these individuals as generic rather than particular. Audiences experience these portrayals as roles rather than characters permitting a broader read of the situation. In this case, the metaphor of the judge as a shadow figure is also present as he or she remains

as a **trace** after the papers are handed back and read by each student. In one instance the **shadow is confronted**, introducing the possibility of critique.

### EFFICACY OF DRAMA AS A FORM OF REFLECTION AND CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

Barone (1990) claims that the power of a narrative can be determined by its resonance with its readers/audience. Laughter, grimaces, tears, and applause of a live performance immediately indicate an audience's resonance and, in part, demonstrate its efficacy and impact. With applied theater, the degree and intensity of audience participation during the interactive session could be considered strong empirical data. Over the years, we experienced countless critical conversations with our participants that were dialogic in nature. The performances evoked ideas from our audience and the intensity of these encounters provided us with informal in vivo feedback that our audiences not only resonated but extended the issues under examination, articulating personal connections. Early in Mirror Theatre's work, since the work was primarily pedagogical, we let the interactions within the performance and workshops be our mirror, informing us how effective the play and scenes were. Participant engagement has always been high and is palpable when experienced. Most were deep in thought and many volunteered their insightful ideas and stories to be shared with the entire group. We used and still use this as affirming data. While fleeting, like improvisation, the value of the event is what participants experience and can potentially take away perhaps to be used at a later time.

While we did receive positive letters of thanks from agencies with which we worked, at times, we were asked for more formal data regarding how others valued the work. Such data initially came from our work with the CPI. The Centre collected data about their entire day of training, including data about our *'Dis' Positions* performance/workshop. This was at the end of a long Saturday training day for 131 TAs (106 responses) and again after our specific 2-hour optional Saturday morning session with 14 TAs entitled, *Academic Integrity and the TA Experience*. According to Article 2.5 in the 2014–Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, “program evaluation studies” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research

Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) (2014, p. 18) do not require review. CPI collected the data and made them available to us.

One overall numerical rating was requested with a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest with room for anecdotal comments.

### OVERALL RATING—‘DIS’POSITIONS

<i>1-Poor</i>	<i>2-Fair</i>	<i>3-Good</i>	<i>4-Very Good</i>	<i>5-Excellent</i>
2	1	19	32	49

‘Dis’Positions was presented after a long day of workshops and was originally planned to have small discussion breakout groups. Due to timing, this part was cut and the performance was immediately followed by a workshop with the entire group. Some reported that while they enjoyed the session they found it long. One claimed that it “would have been better at the beginning or middle” with another stating that it “seemed to be the session I attended where the TA’s were the most enthusiastic to engage”. The comments and numerical ratings suggest that while the timing and structure was less than desirable, the majority of the participants found the process to be engaging and thought provoking.

While the comment section was open-ended and not focused on the concept of reflection, a number of participants did report on how the performance/workshop assisted them in thinking more deeply about the complexities of being a TA and appreciated they could collaboratively explore possible actions that they could take:

- Very good acting, complex but relatable, and enjoyed the interactive element of group problem solving
- Allowed for insightful consideration of situations
- A good eye-opener and I appreciated key points highlighted
- ...the breakdown of alternative ways to handle these problems was great
- Second half “rewriting” more useful than the scenes alone
- Created a good discussion afterward
- ...enjoyed the interactive element of group problem solving

- Great visual—the interaction at the end made for valuable/discussion/learning
- I liked the whole idea of retakes and redoing certain portions of the play to address a specific issue and find collaborative solutions
- Very visual and informative—will remember when having to solve my own problems

With very little prompting, these and other responses indicate that a number of participants both understood and appreciated the ability to prelive through role-play and reflect on the choices made in preparation for future possible encounters.

One of the cast members in *'Dis'Positions* was Brock University's Academic Integrity Officer and based upon both the feedback and the need to explore academic integrity in depth, he, along with former and new members of Mirror Theatre, and I devised a new performance/workshop. This was presented as an optional session on a Saturday morning with those participating receiving credit toward a training certificate.

Based partially of the information provided by the first CPI questionnaire, we restructured the session. With the smaller group and more allotted time, the A/R/Tors were able to have small discussion groups with the audience between the performance and the entire group discussion. Given that the event was voluntary and that the structure was a pedagogically stronger process, the ratings could be expected to be higher.

### OVERALL RATING—ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THE TA EXPERIENCE

<i>1-Poor</i>	<i>2-Fair</i>	<i>3-Good</i>	<i>4-Very Good</i>	<i>5-Excellent</i>
			1	13

For this assessment the CPI provided two framing questions to elicit responses:

- What was the most useful/meaningful thing you learned during the session?
- What question(s) remain uppermost in your mind as we end the session?

A number of participants commented that they appreciated the dramatic approach:

- Drama is a great learning tool!
- It was a different approach to the subject. Nicely done.
- ...an effective and engaging method.
- Great insight, meaningful skits. Truly beneficial in a creative unique way.
- Best workshop yet. This performance should be required viewing for all undergraduates.
- Other comments focused specifically on their expanding understanding of academic integrity:
- How varied/blurry lines are/can be on academic integrity issues.
- Discuss gray areas and brainstorm solutions.
- It was really interesting to see all the complexities and multiple solutions...
- How can we help students understand boundaries when they are blurry? How can we avoid fear of plagiarism from limiting creativity and taking over time spent on a paper?
- These things were tough to deal with.

Collectively, these comments demonstrate that the applied theater workshop fostered an atmosphere of reflective critical conversations. The participants moved beyond simplistic solution seeking to thoughtful engagement exploring the complexity of policies and behaviors. The aim was to have the participants dwell in the question, leaving both informed and haunted. As one participant commented, “It will ‘stick’ much more than a lecture.”

Later, the academic integrity topics were expanded into *Common Knowledge* and performed at an international academic integrity conference (Norris & Mirror Theatre, 2011a). A specialized version, *You Be the Judge* (Norris & Mirror Theatre, 2015), was devised for English as a Second Language (ESL) students at Brock University and both the full scripts and discussions will appear in *Addressing Issues of Academic Integrity in Post Secondary and ESL Settings through Applied Theatre* (Norris & Brooks, 2016). Both were remounted and studio recorded for web distribution. *Common Knowledge* can be found at [http://www.joennorrisplaybuilding.ca/?page\\_id=1467](http://www.joennorrisplaybuilding.ca/?page_id=1467) and *You be the Judge* at [http://www.joennorrisplaybuilding.ca/?page\\_id=1602](http://www.joennorrisplaybuilding.ca/?page_id=1602).



*How Do We Rate?* integrated aspects of 4.321 and *Common Knowledge* and was also presented for CPI as an optional Saturday morning workshop. For this event we wanted to move beyond the evaluative nature of previous questionnaires and created our own questionnaire with more of a research orientation that solicited comments on how the performance workshops engaged the participants and how it extended their thinking about the issues presented. Brock University’s Research Ethics Board approved the research component and questionnaire.

Results from the numerical section strongly indicate that the participants highly valued this pedagogical approach:

STRONGLY DISAGREE, DISAGREE, NEUTRAL, AGREE,  
STRONGLY AGREE

	<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>
I found this type of professional development format made a stronger impact on me in comparison to other professional development programs such as: Lectures			1	4	3
PowerPoints				3	5
Movies			1	3	4
The performance provided a range of issues that enabled good discussion.				2	6
I appreciated the interactive features of the session.				3	5
I appreciated that I was given the opportunity to provide my opinions on the topic.				2	6
While I was invited, I did not feel pressured by the actors to participate more than I wanted to.			3	1	4
The performance workshop provided me with lots to think about.				3	5
I would recommend this type of program to others.				1	7

The length of this session was:

<i>Too short</i>	<i>Just right</i>	<i>Too long</i>
	8	

The above focused predominately on the process itself and the results confirm that our intent to make the workshop invitational and conver-

sational rather than imposed and didactic was achieved. Critical conversations have a stronger chance of occurring in places of trust and the responses indicated that we created such an environment.

Seven questions were also asked with the three most relevant to this paper reported here with the number representing a particular respondent:

1. Please provide your opinion on the effectiveness of this style of workshop.

- 
- 1 I loved attending the workshop. It is very helpful. I learned a lot and I recommend my friends attend it. Good job!
  - 3 I was very effective. I wish it was longer. You learn a lot through conversation.
  - 4 Very effective and got me thinking of the many styles of learning and teaching.
  - 5 It was excellent.
  - 6 A good range of people participated of different backgrounds, provided for a nice cohesive whole.
  - 7 Amazing. The best I've had. Emotionally engaging which will make it memorable!
  - 8 I learn from interactions and this was just perfect for me.
- 

2. Did you reconsider interpersonal aspects of your work and/or home environment as a result of the program? If so, what?

- 
- 3 Yes, because assessment whether we like it or not, is personal too.
  - 4 I want to get to know my students' names more! I think it helps to show you care more about the students' education.
  - 5 Yes, the office hours should be extended to suit students' schedules.
  - 6 Yes, I'm an instructor, TA and student so I saw relevant experiences in all of these aspects.
  - 7 It helped me understand the perspective of professors, other students, fellow TAs better. I'll be more empathetic and encouraging of different styles of learning.
  - 8 Yes, in a way.
- 

3. Based upon the performance/workshop, what might you start doing, stop doing, continue, or increase doing?

- 
- 1 I learned to stop judging students based upon appearance, personality, background, and relationship
  - 3 I feel a lot more prepared for future assessment issues, should they arise.
  - 4 Look at all the various perspectives of knowledge/learning more.
  - 5 I will start to acknowledge the different lines of thought of my students before grading.
  - 6 Continue to encourage students to voice their opinions and to increase the cohesiveness of a learning group.
  - 7 Allow students greater say in how they are assessed.
-

Participants during the workshop and as reported in the above responses, focused primarily on interpersonal relations, from their positions as both a student and a TA/instructor. The scenes portrayed the people behind the issues and those gathered began to see beyond the issues to the complexities of the people portrayed in the roles. They were able to look at the student/teacher relationship from different characters' perspectives. The rhetoric of the mechanical aspects of teaching and assessment can overshadow the fact that it is a human endeavor. When one moves from the "banking model" of teaching that Freire (1970) opposes and moves more toward a dialogic interaction, the relationship shifts from an I-It to an I-Thou. The style of workshop models a democratic form of educational practice (Henderson, 2001) and as a result participants expressed interest in providing more opportunities for student voice.

Hamlet, claims that the "The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (Shakespeare, 1972, p. 935). He created a play that mirrored his perception of reality hoping to critically expose what was rotten in the state of Denmark. His was a didactic and accusatory form of conscience raising. Tragically, no critical conversations occurred. On the other hand, Mirror Theatre's work is dialogic, inviting all gathered to reexamine the past and prelive the future. A crystal ball reflects possibilities examining hypothetical projections from which we can learn. Employing the "what if" of role-playing, A/R/Tors and audience members in participatory dramas prelive possible scenarios and through reflection and collaborative critical conversations on the dramas created, begin to imagine other ways of being. They look into the mirror and both they and the mirror change.

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