

Why theatre-based research works? Psychological theories from behind the curtain

Jessica Bleuer, Matthew Chin & Izumi Sakamoto

To cite this article: Jessica Bleuer, Matthew Chin & Izumi Sakamoto (2018): Why theatre-based research works? Psychological theories from behind the curtain, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, DOI: [10.1080/14780887.2018.1430734](https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1430734)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1430734>



Accepted author version posted online: 09 Feb 2018.
Published online: 12 Feb 2018.




[Submit your article to this journal](#) 



Article views: 2



[View related articles](#) 



[View Crossmark data](#) 



Why theatre-based research works? Psychological theories from behind the curtain

Jessica Bleuer^a, Matthew Chin^b, and Izumi Sakamoto^a

^aUniversity of Toronto, Ontario, Canada; ^bFordham University, Bronx, New York, USA

ABSTRACT

While many scholars have demonstrated the effectiveness of theatre-based knowledge mobilization, fewer studies have examined its psychological dimensions. This article examines some psychological theories that may account for the success behind theatre-based knowledge mobilization. Drawing from the *Canadian Experience Project*, a study about the labor market challenges of skilled immigrant workers, we show how theatre-based research dissemination efforts attempt to achieve optimal stress by using aesthetic distance processes. We maintain that this psychological capacity to attune to audience members, especially evident in forum theatre, makes theatre a particularly effective means for knowledge mobilization.

KEYWORDS

aesthetic distance; “Canadian experience”; immigrant employment; knowledge mobilization; knowledge translation; psychological processes; research-based theatre

The Theatre of Canadian experience: Canada’s next newcomer professional

This section is intended to be read out loud.

Scene 1—Get ready, get set, go!

The curtains open, the lights come up. Hockey Night in Canada Music Plays. Three Canadian Immigrants walk onto the stage and assume a starting race position. Determined and serious, the immigrants are ready to run this race because their livelihoods depend on it.

Host:

Welcome to *Canada’s Next Newcomer Professional*. I’m Joanne Smith, and I’ll be your host. Tonight we will see three recently arrived immigrants compete in a highly competitive job market for their dream life. Contestants, you are among the lucky 500 who have been chosen out of 13 800 skilled worker applicants (Government of Canada 2011) from candidates around the world who want to make Canada their place of residence, work, and future. You have achieved exceptional scores on the Skilled Worker Point System.¹ You really are the cream of the crop!

Today we have;

Resume 1, an engineer from Taiwan, previously Vice President of IBM Taiwan, here with his whole family.

Resume 2, a young architect from Turkey, previously employed by LG Consulting, here with his partner who is finishing his PhD.

Resume 3, a private school principal from Pakistan, with 10 years of experience teaching and leading schools, here on her own.

Not all of you will make it. Canadian-born workers have an advantage over newcomers in the job market.

Six out of 10 of you (Statistics Canada 2005) will end up working in different fields at such popular establishments as Tim Horton's (*popular Canadian coffee chain*), McDonald's, in Factories or, driving Taxis. BUT! If you are successful in *Canada's Next Newcomer Professional* you will gain and maintain employment in your field, and have opportunities for promotion based on your hard work. The Canadian dream can be yours.

Contestants, are you ready?

The three immigrant characters respond simultaneously

Resume 1: Yes

Resume 2: Yes

Resume 3: Yes

Host: Listen carefully. The instructions are very, very important. Your first challenge is to get the job. The full-time, permanent job in your field. Second, you need to navigate everyday work culture without appearing odd. The morning hellos, the passing how-are-you as you continue walking down the hall, the lunch room, the small talk, and the weather. Third, you need to keep the job and continue advancing, getting promotions, like all the other Canadians.

Clear?

The three immigrant characters nod simultaneously.

Host: One more thing. This is the most important. Make sure you understand:

At first the host says the following words slowly, but then she begins to speed up and the words start to blur together into incomprehensible gibberish.

Canadian Experience – Small Talk – Solid Resume – Network – Market Yourself – Boundaries – Politeness – Canadian Experience, The Right Inflection –Don't Worry It's Common Sense... Canadian Sense... *Gibberish Gibberish, Gibberish...* Canadian Experience Canadian Experience

As she speaks, a sense of confusion and anxiety arise from the contestants. They look at each other to see if others have understood the Canadian codes to success...

GO!!!!

Introduction

You have just read an excerpt from the play *The Theatre of Canadian Experience: Canada's Next Newcomer Professional*. This play was part of knowledge mobilization effort from the Canadian Experience Project (CEP), a community-based research project that used theatre to both collect data and disseminate its findings about the employment barriers faced by skilled immigrants in Canada. The CEP research team belong to a growing number of scholars across multiple fields who are increasingly acknowledging the benefits of using the arts in knowledge mobilization (Quinlan 2009).

While many art modalities have been used for research, we contend that theatre's relational aspects make it particularly useful for the dissemination of research findings. Theatre has the ability to capture and communicate knowledge about social relationships (Quinlan 2009) in ways that are not necessarily possible through traditional academic texts (Rossiter et al. 2008). Theatre makes use of emotions, gestures, and sensory experiences to express the multifaceted nature of human experiences (Simhoni 2008). To this end, it is not surprising to find numerous theatre-based research projects that communicate the relational aspects of diverse topics such as widowhood, end-of-life issues, Alzheimer's disease, alcohol dependence, dementia, cancer, and HIV (Deloney & Graham 2003; Dupis et al. 2011; Gray et al. 2003; Kontos & Nagalie 2007; Mieniczakowski & Morgan 1993).

The dissemination of research findings through theatre in itself is a fundamentally relational process. This occurs through theatre's capacity to "evoke and invoke shared emotional experience and understanding between performer and audience" (Denzin 2003, p. 13). Existing studies illustrate that theatre can increase audience members' understanding of other people's lived experience by cultivating a greater empathy for the issues they witness on stage (Belliveau & Nichols 2017; Denzin 2003; Strickert & Bradford 2015).

While many studies report on theatre's efficacy as a means of knowledge mobilization (Wernick et al. 2014; Feldman, Hopgood & Dickins 2013; Shapiro & Hunt 2013), there is a scarcity of literature accounting for the processes behind this knowledge mobilization. Informed by our professional background as psychotherapists, creative arts therapists, and social workers, we (the authors of this article) will draw from drama therapy and other psychotherapy literature to postulate some of the psychological processes involved in theatre-based knowledge mobilization. We maintain that theatre achieves knowledge mobilization through a process of *aesthetic distance*,

which works to achieve optimal stress among audience members to support learning. We will also address the particularities and challenges of engaging these psychological processes, and share implications for further research and practice.

The research: the Canadian experience project (CEP)

The CEP attempted to understand and address the labor market challenges faced by skilled immigrants to Canada. Despite higher educational attainment, Canadian immigrants experience underemployment and unemployment rates higher than those of their Canadian-born counterparts (Sakamoto, Ku, & Wei 2009). Those who are able to secure employment are often compelled to either take positions outside of their realm of expertise and/or accept positions that are well below their education and training (Sakamoto, Wilson, & Chin 2017). Employer's requirement of "Canadian experience" (CE) has been identified by human service providers, academics and policy makers as the number one barrier for skilled immigrants (Weiner 2008). The study found that contrary to popular belief, CE is not about having prior work experience in Canada; rather, it serves as a proxy to determine the extent to which a potential employee can "fit" into an existing Canadian workplace (Sakamoto, Chin, & Young 2010a). The CEP explored the implicit and elusive aspects of this fit and uncovered the challenge of understanding subtle cultural workplace rules that are not explicitly explained by employers or employment counselors.

Led by Izumi Sakamoto since 2007, the CEP was carried out using a grounded theory approach in which different phases of the study informed each other in an iterative manner (Charmaz 2006). While the complex methods of the study have been discussed elsewhere (Author 2014), it is important to note that the findings of the project (including the theatre piece under discussion) were informed by semi-structured interviews (n=20) and five arts-based focus groups (n=37) with job seeking skilled immigrants, their service providers, and human resources (HR) professionals. While the research team disseminated the CEP findings through academic conferences and journal articles (e.g., Sakamoto, Chin & Young 2010a, Sakamoto 2014), they also recognized the need for dissemination beyond a "dusty library shelf" (Gray et al. 2000; Finfgeld 2003; Simhoni 2008). The CEP team used reader's theatre as a means of research dissemination, making the research more accessible to multiple stakeholders (Boydell et al. 2012; Simhoni 2008). Jessica Bleuer and Matthew Chin wrote the reader's theatre piece drawing extensively from the study, including direct quotes from interview/focus group transcripts. Both researchers and research informants participated as actors in the production of the piece, while Bleuer served as the director of the play.

The first performance took place at a university-based venue to a racially diverse audience of about 80 people comprising students, academics, and social service providers, both immigrants and Canadians. The second performance took place as part of a larger conference organized to generate solutions to immigrant labor market exclusion and was attended by more than 100 people, including HR professionals, employers/business owners, service providers, activists, academics, politicians, and immigrants. Both performances were followed by lively question and answer periods and the research team used evaluation forms to assess audience reactions to the performance. Post-performance evaluation forms from the first performance were overwhelmingly positive—nearly two-thirds of the audience members found the play “very useful” (64%) and one-third found it “useful” (36%).

Although the scope of the CEP project did not include collecting data on the effectiveness of its knowledge mobilization efforts, the postperformance evaluation data contained particularly relevant themes. Audience members expressed being able to personally connect with the authentic experiences portrayed in the performance. The majority of audience members spoke about the moving nature of the performance and how it allowed them to develop a sense of identification with skilled immigrant workers. One participant wrote, “even though I’m not an immigrant, I really understand the feeling of the immigrants.” Other audience members with experiences of immigration shared how the play resonated with their experiences, and words most commonly used to describe the play included “truthful,” “accurate,” and “relevant” (direct citations from evaluation forms).

Audience members also commented on the merits of the play’s theatre method of knowledge mobilization as well as a desire for it to be seen more broadly. These sentiments are demonstrated in these five quotes by the audience members: “I feel this was one of the best ways that I have ever seen research results disseminated. I appreciate the ‘show’ rather than just ‘tell approach.’” “Excellent form of knowledge translation. Very accessible and informative, this could/should be used to inform the workplace, students, the general public, etc.” “Very well done. This workshop/event should be bigger and more accessible. It’s important for all Canadians to watch.” “The material resonated with the audience but it would also be good to get this over to others who need to hear it or see it (more mainstream Canadian ‘allies’). “Include employers, policy makers, and other government officials to be aware of the experiences of immigrants.”

The second performance was planned as part of the action-oriented, community-university collaboration that later emerged from the CEP (*Beyond ‘Canadian Experience’ Project*), which mobilized research-based knowledge to engage business and policy stakeholders toward social change. Compared to the overwhelmingly positive feedback in the first showing, postperformance evaluation forms from the second performance indicated

a more mixed, moderately positive response; 44% found the play “very useful” and 47% found it “useful.” The words most commonly used to describe the performance were “informative,” “engaging,” and “diverse.” While some participants praised the play (“I absolutely LOVED the theatre presentation. It was a unique and innovative way to present findings and convey the concept of ‘tacit knowledge’”), others expressed disagreement or discomfort with the play. For example, some participants expressed that the images of HR professionals were stereotypical; others championed ideas of meritocracy, citing that immigrants needed to create their own opportunities. The most commonly cited source of discomfort with the play was the use of masks (see play excerpt below) that was used to represent a common feeling among research participants that, in order to be accepted and succeed in the Canadian workplace, they needed to hide who they were. Several respondents not understanding the use of the mask and referenced it as a weakness of the play. One respondent explained, “I am not entirely comfortable with the ‘mask’ idea. I feel newcomers should focus on honing their skills, competencies, attributes rather than focus on putting on a show or a mask.” Interestingly, the same scene did not illicit negative feedback from the first audience, perhaps owing to the different composition of audience members (service providers, immigrants, and students vs. HR professionals and employers). The play seemed to provoke a defensiveness among some audience members of the second showing.

Although the CEP did not originally intend to investigate theatre-based research dissemination, our desire to engage a wide variety of stakeholders, including those in positions of power to influence the lived realities of skilled immigrant workers (HR professionals, employers, and social service workers), propelled us to examine the discrepancies of responses between both audiences. With no opportunity for audience follow up, the authors turned to contemplate these differential audience responses from a psychological perspective, which is presented in the following section.

The psychological processes of theatre-based knowledge mobilization

To understand differences in audience reception, we draw from the psychological processes of *optimal stress learning theory* (Kaufer 2011) and *aesthetic distance* (Landy 1983; Landy 1996). Optimal stress learning theory (Kaufer 2011) postulates that while moderate stress is beneficial for learning, extreme stress or stress that is too mild negatively impacts the learning process. Extreme stress may activate the “fight or flight” response, making it difficult to retain new information. On the other hand, too little stress produces a lack of motivation to engage in the effort needed for change (Kaufer 2011; Stark 2015). We understood that successful knowledge mobilization would require

that we modulate the level of stress caused by the research findings among audience members.

While recognizing the necessity of engaging HR professional and employers in order to bring about change, the CEP research team were also aware of the potential challenges of this endeavor. The premise of the study, that skilled immigrants faced barriers to equitable participation in the Canadian labor market, clashes with the Canada's self-image as a multicultural inclusive meritocracy (Kantor & Einhorn 2016). In identifying HR personnel and employers as targets for its research dissemination efforts, the CEP team faced the challenge not only of disrupting the meritocratic, inclusive, and multicultural image these individuals may have of Canada but also drawing their attention to the way in which, by the very nature of their jobs, they are implicated in systems that result in the economic exclusion of skilled immigrants. To facilitate HR professionals and employers reception of the research findings, the CEP team knew it would need to attend to the potential dissonance from its findings carefully since the stress of this dissonance could impede knowledge mobilization.

As we tried to navigate optimal stress, we relied on a theatre process of emotional regulation known as *aesthetic distance*. We argue that the concept of aesthetic distance is one way of achieving optimal stress, and that theatre-based research dissemination uses theatre processes in order to engage aesthetic distance in audience members. In drama therapy, aesthetic distance refers to the use of specific drama therapy techniques to achieve a balance between emotions and cognitive processes (Landy 1983, 1996). This balance aims to minimize defensiveness and to allow participants to use all of their cognitive and affective resources so they can develop empathic responses and cognitive clarity. The use of fiction, storytelling, metaphors, symbols, masks, and other forms of aesthetic process are used to help people modulate between overly emotional, underdistanced states, and overly rational, overdistanced states. Underdistance "is characterized by an over-abundance of emotion, which, when expressed, brings neither relief nor insight" (Landy 1996, p. 367). This underdistanced state can make it difficult to learn and change. Conversely, overdistanced is a state in which primarily involves the use of intellectualization and engagement in rational processes and in which learning around human experiences may also be impeded.

The aim of achieving aesthetic distance, the balance of emotion, and cognition is to promote "thought, reflection and perspective" (Jones 1997, p. 95). It is the use of selected drama processes that creates the opportunity for equilibrium between *underdistanced* and *overdistanced states*. Some drama therapy techniques are known for their tendency to engage emotions, and others are known to prioritize rational processes.

Drama therapists use both overdistanced and underdistanced techniques together to engage aesthetic distance. Through the use of theatre, the CEP team attempted to balance stress, emotion, and cognition to increase audience member receptivity. The authors wanted to circumvent the stressed response that might arise from witnessing the systemic exclusion faced by skilled immigrants so that audience members could be free to use their hearts and minds in equal measure to make sense of the research findings.

While the performance used many different techniques in order to achieve aesthetic distance, we will illustrate one here: the metaphor. Metaphors can communicate sensitive material in an abstract manner (Jones 2005) and can be effective for presenting information about inequitable social conditions. Metaphors side-step psychological defense mechanisms that would otherwise arise as a response to stress from more direct confrontations. The metaphor enables the subconscious to explore sensitive topics, representing and recreating lived realities with some distance (Campbell 1990; Mann 1996).

The CEP reader's theatre script contained two main metaphors. The first was the metaphor of a race or a game. Framing the performance as a game show/race was a deliberate choice not only because research informants themselves described the employment process as a game with rules they could not quite grasp but also because it served to bring humor to a serious problem. In an attempt to achieve aesthetic distance, the authors of the play interspersed evocative excerpts from interviews about newcomer professionals' struggles to find work (underdistanced) with more fictionalized, highly theatrical and comedic elements of the script. In this game show/race recently arrived immigrants compete against challenging odds to obtain, maintain and advance in their respective jobs. Instead of directly confronting audience members with the inequity and racism within existing hiring practice, the game show/race metaphor holds more complexity, communicating: 1) the idea that the game is rigged; 2) the skilled worker is competent and deserving of opportunity; and 3) the HR professional is a nuanced human being doing the best they can with the knowledge and circumstances afforded to them by the game/system. In addition to holding complexity, the game show/race metaphor also holds play and lightness.

The second salient metaphor used in the CEP reader's theatre script was that of the mask as a representation of needing to hide one's true self to achieve economic success. The CEP team chose this metaphor because when CEP study participants were given a choice of objects, masks were the object they chose most consistently to express important parts of their experience in the Canadian labor market. Masks are also known to be particularly effective and eliciting underdistanced/

emotional responses (Landy 1983), serving as a tool to connect audience members to their emotions.

Script excerpt on the mask

The Host: (*Introducing the next part of the game*) Let's see what you have learnt about the Canadian workplace culture, about Canadian Experience, and about soft skills. At the count of three you are going to say all the rules you have learnt thus far... On your marks get set go...

Resume 801 (*Host has a microphone for her*): You have to wear a mask, don't ask if you don't know, don't show if you're upset, eat conflict, be positive, nod how are you, keep walking, talk about children and the weather, eye contact, be confident, please and thank yous, business casual, don't ask questions, pretend you know, wear the mask (*verbatim quote from CEP raw data*).

Ding Ding Ding. (Bell ringing to indicate that the correct answer was given.)

The Host: That is correct.

801 moves all the way up to front.

Scene 8: The Mask

Researcher: Through the arts-based activities, many of our participants were drawn to the masks.

All newcomers sit in chairs, for their mask fittings.

Newcomers look at the masks fearfully, or with resignation.

A person comes around and helps them with their mask, they are all struggling a bit and trying out how close and how far from their face they want to put the mask.

Host, & HR Professional standing behind people as they struggle with their masks.

Resume 200: I speak right, I act right ... inside I feel like this.

We see the image of the mask with the lump in the throat and the eyes bulging out on the powerpoint. (See Figure 1.)

Resume 200: I have a frog in my throat, I cannot sleep. (*verbatim quote from CEP raw data*.)

Resume 345: They basically squeeze you to get everything. I mean during the day if they force you to work really hard without break, without fun, and you just work, work work work for thirteen years. It gets all your energy and you go home by each night, you are almost exhausted. You have to hide yourself (*verbatim quote from CEP raw data*).

Resume 200: I am trying to learn the code to get in.



Figure 1. Masks created by the research participants. One research participant created the mask on the left and spoke about his inability to sleep due to extreme stress from searching for a job and having a frog in his throat. Another participant created the mask on the right and said that she needs to hide who she really is, symbolized by half of the mask having blonde hair and a blue eye while the right side having dark hair and a dark eye with a bindi.

This scene had a strong impact on audience members both times the script was performed. Audience members in the first performance, largely composed of students, service providers, immigrants, and academics were sympathetic, identifying with “the analogy of having to wear a mask, to be someone you are not” (verbatim evaluation form comment). Audience members in the second performance, however, had a different response to this scene. Comprising a larger proportion of HR personnel and other employers, many audience members had strong negative responses to the notion that immigrants felt as though they had to hide their true selves, and that they had to use a mask in order to fit into the Canadian workforce. The spokesperson for a postperformance discussion group communicated that “we were surprised that so many immigrants, that participants in the study felt that they had to wear a mask because they are under pressure, because they were being different...what we can still work on...[is that immigrants] should just try to be honest.” The strong responses from audience members are not surprising given that drama therapists have long known about masks’ underdistancing effects (Landy 1983), connecting people to their emotions and, as a result, possible discomfort. The two different responses from two different kinds of audiences to the readers’ theatre piece have implications for how we approach the psychological dimensions of theatre-based research dissemination and knowledge mobilization which we discuss below.

Discussion

We argue that the success of theatre-based knowledge mobilization efforts may lie in theatre’s ability to produce optimal stress through aesthetic

distance (balancing of cognitive and emotional processes) among a wide range of stakeholders. However, in practice, achieving aesthetic balance is difficult. Although the CEP team did not interview audience members to learn more about their responses, it is likely that (the metaphor of) the mask engaged HR professionals and other employers (hereafter both will be referred to simply as “employers”) in an overly *underdistanced* way that evoked uncomfortable emotions. It is possible that employers found it difficult to see themselves directly implicated in systems that result in immigrants feeling compelled to behave in ways that are not “true to themselves.” Employer responses show that while finding the right balance of aesthetic distance and moderate stress can help to create the optimal conditions for learning, the failure to achieve this balance may result in audience members affectively over-engaging and/or disengaging with the material presented.

Achieving the right amount of stress through aesthetic distance is always somewhat of a moving target. Theatre audiences comprise members from a diverse range of social identities and lived experiences. In the case of the CEP, audience members included immigrant service providers, mentors to skilled immigrants, employers (including HR professionals), and social work students. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to script a performance that will produce the same effect among such a wide range of people. Those who occupy different social positions will (affectively) respond to the same material in different ways. Diversity among audience members serves as a barrier to achieving any collective sense of aesthetic distance.

Effective knowledge mobilization through the achievement of aesthetic distance is also challenged by the fluid and contextual nature of the ideal of cognitive-affective balance itself. In clinical settings, aesthetic distance shifts over the course of any session. These shifts may be the result of interventions by the drama therapist, but these shifts may also occur because of the inherently fluid nature of the psychology process. Research that use theatre-based knowledge mobilization is contending not only with psychological diversity among audience members but also with the psychological states of these audience members being constantly in flux.

The difficulty of achieving aesthetic distance should not be a deterrent for theatre-based researchers. As we claimed in this article, theatre can be a holistic and profoundly human (and humanizing) way of sharing study results with a wide range of stakeholders. The challenge is not to do away with theatre-based knowledge but to come up with more effective means of achieving it.

Different theatre forms provide varying possibilities for participation and relational engagement. While reader’s theatre is certainly more relational than the academic journal, its lack of real-time participation from the audience does not provide the same opportunities for relationality afforded

by more participatory forms of theatre. Forum theatre (Boal 1979), for example, is an innovative critical reflection technique used by both educators, activists, and researchers to collect and disseminate data (Madurga & Serra 2016; O'Toole, Burton & Plunket 2005; Tarasoff et al. 2014; Wrentschur 2008). In forum theatre, study findings are converted into short theatrical vignettes demonstrating the research problem. These vignettes are performed by researchers, actors, and occasionally research informants. Audience members are then invited to come up on stage and take the role of one of the actors to see if they can change the outcome of the research vignette. Forum theatre highlights the dialectical relationship between actors and audience members. Because forum theatre can change with audience input, it is well suited to the pursuit of aesthetic distance. This interactivity lends itself to a more attuned connection between researchers and audiences. Audience members may still become affectively overly engaged/disengaged with the material presented, but unlike other kinds of theatre, actors have the opportunity to adjust the direction of the performance in response. A skilled research team, well versed in improvisation, has the opportunity to change aspects of their delivery to modulate audience stress. Here the research team has the complex challenge of maintaining the integrity of the research findings while also spontaneously responding to perceived audience reception, stress, emotion, and rationality.

Imagine an audience member who believes in meritocracy, triggered by the play's systemic lens, could come up on stage and play the role of an immigrant who works hard, stating that "immigrants need to create their own opportunity" (quote from postperformance evaluation number 2). The researchers (who are also actors) could respond by pushing back theatrically, turning down the immigrant's job applications, refusing to consider the immigrant for field-related work. The audience member would keep trying, and the actors would give life-like justifications for their multiple rejections. The theatricality of this intervention would attempt to move past this audience members' emotional response to the research findings by trying to encourage an understanding of research-based reality through engaging cognitive and rational processes. By role-playing a situation repeatedly, participants develop a multifaceted understanding of the problem being presented (Boal 1979, 2002). The goal here is not to single out forum theatre as the ideal method for knowledge mobilization but rather to identify relational qualities in its structure that have the possibility of securing aesthetic distance.

Ultimately, what we have hoped to show in this article is another facet of what theatre scholars have already long known; that is, theatre is an inherently relational process (Sajnani 2012). This article also contributes to transformational learning literature, illustrating that people learn in relationships (Baumgartner 2002; Carter 2002; Eisen 2001; Lyons 2001; Taylor 2000). As

we attribute theatre's success in knowledge mobilization to its relational capacity to attune to aesthetic distancing processes, it would behoove us to leave out the origin of the authors' relationships to each other, and the fact that it was forum theatre that brought the authors of this article together. While authors Chin and Sakamoto had known each other previously, they both met Bleuer through a forum theater workshop that she facilitated. We end this article with a quote commonly used by Augusto Boal: "Together we are stronger than we are alone" (Bleuer 2005), and we advocate for further research attuning to the use of relationship during the knowledge mobilization process.

Note

1. Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2011 Statistics, source: Government of Canada, 2011, Changes to Economic Immigration Process will Help Further Reduce Backlogs and Improve Wait Times, viewed December 6, 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/news/archive/2011/06/changes-economicimmigrationprograms-help-further-reduce-backlogs-improve-wait-times.html?=&wbdisable=true>

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank research assistants Ruth Wilson, Heidi Zhang, Sehr Athar, and Theon Harrichand as well as collaborators, research participants, actors, and community partners to the second project, including Dr. Lin Fang (University of Toronto), Mennonite New Life Centre Toronto, and Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter).

Funding

The research presented herein was supported by the two research grants by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC): (1) Public Outreach Grant (2011–2013), "Do skilled immigrants need 'Canadian (work) experience?': Public engagement and conversations through new media and reader's theatre"; and (2) Standard Grant (2006–2010), "Re-examining the 'Canadian experience' and acculturation: The missing context of Canada's high-skilled immigrants."

Notes on contributors

Jessica Bleuer is psychotherapist, university lecturer, and cultural equity consultant. She teaches graduate level drama therapy courses at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, and works as a cultural equity consultant training professionals from educational, therapy, and corporate settings how to increase cultural safety in their workplace. She specializes in the use of creative facilitation in training and research, and she engages in arts-based research on topics of equity, immigration, cross-cultural dialogue, and suicide awareness. She serves as diversity chair on the board of directors of the North American Drama Therapy Association.

Mathew Chin is an assistant professor in the Graduate School of Social Service at Fordham University and a visiting scholar in the Department of Sociology at Columbia University. He

completed his PhD in social work and anthropology at the University of Michigan. His research examines the role of the arts in the relationship between queer and trans of color community organizers and urban government institutions in Toronto, Canada. He received a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowship, and his work has been published in venues such as *Canadian Social Work*, *Journal of Community Practice*, and *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*.

Izumi Sakamoto is an associate professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto. Originally from Japan, she was a Fulbright scholar and obtained her PhD in social work and social psychology from the University of Michigan. She has a background in music therapy, community artist (as a taiko drum player), and community organizing and has conducted arts-informed research for the past 10 years. She has a strong interest in tacit dimension of knowing, which is reflected in her research with immigrants and other marginalized populations conducted with several research grants from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

References

- Baumgartner, L 2002, 'Living and learning with HIV/AIDS: transformational tales continued', *Adult Education Quarterly*, vol. 53, pp. 44–70. Bell, DA 1992, *Faces at the bottom of the well: the permanence of racism*, Basic Books, New York.
- Belliveau, G & Nichols, J 2017, 'Audience responses to Contact!Unload: a research-based play about returning military veterans', *Cogent: Arts & Humanities*, vol. 4, pp. 1–12.
- Bleuer, J 2005, 'Introduction to popular theatre: A legislative theatre manual', *North American Students of Cooperation*, viewed 11 December 2016, <<https://www.nasco.coop/search/node/boal>>
- Boal, A 2002, *Games for actors and non-actors*, 2nd edn, Routledge, New York.
- Boal, A 1979, *Theatre of the oppressed*, Pluto Press, London.
- Boydell, KM, Gladstone, BM, Volpe, T, Allemang, B & Stasiulis, E 2012, 'The production and dissemination of knowledge: a scoping review of arts-based health research', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, no. 13, viewed 4 February 2017, <<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1201327>>.
- Campbell, B 1990, 'Metaphor in drama therapy', *Dramatherapy*, vol. 13, pp. 1–6.
- Carter, TJ 2002, 'The importance of talk to midcareer women's development: a collaborative inquiry', *The Journal of Business Communication*, vol. 39, pp. 55–91.
- Charmaz, K 2006, *Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis*, Sage, London.
- Cole, A & Knowles, G 2001, *Lives in context: the art of life history research*, Altamira, Walnut Creek, CA.
- Deloney, LA & Graham, CJ 2003, 'Wit: using drama to teach first-year medical students about empathy and compassion', *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, vol. 15, pp. 247–51.
- Denzin, N 2003, *Performance ethnography: critical pedagogy and the politics of culture*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Depuis, S, Gillies, J, Mitchell, GJ, Jonas-Simpson, C, Whyte, C & Carson, J 2011, 'Catapulting shifts in images, understandings and actions for family members through research-based drama', *Family Relations*, vol. 60, pp. 104–20.
- Donmoyer, R & Donmoyer, JY 2008, 'Readers' theatre as a data display strategy', in JG Knowles & AL Cole (eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 209–24.

- Eisen, MJ 2001, 'Peer-based professional development viewed through the lens of transformative learning,' *Holistic Nursing Practice*, vol. 16, pp. 30–42.
- Feldman, S, Hopgood, A & Dickins, M 2013, 'Translating research findings into community based theatre: more than a dead man's wife', *Journal of Aging Studies*, vol. 27, pp. 476–86.
- Festinger, L 1957, *A theory of cognitive dissonance*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.
- Fingfeld, D 2003, 'Metasynthesis: the state of the art—so far', *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 13, pp. 893–904.
- Frydman, JS & McLellan, L 2014, 'Complex trauma and executive functioning: envisioning a cognitive-based, trauma-informed approach to drama therapy', in N Sajani & DR Johnson (eds.), *Trauma-informed drama therapy. Transforming clinics, classrooms, and communities*, Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, IL, pp. 152–78.
- Government of Canada 2011, *Changes to economic immigration programs will keep further reduce backlogs and improve wait times*, viewed 9 January 2017, <<https://www.canada.ca/en/news/archive/2011/06/changes-economic-immigration-programs-elp-further-reduce-backlogs-improve-wait-times.html>>.
- Gray, R, Fitch, M, Labrecque, M & Greenberg, M 2003, 'Reactions of health professionals to a research-based theatre production', *Journal of Cancer Education*, vol. 18, pp. 223–29.
- Gray, R, Sinding, C, Ivonoffski, V, Fitch, M, Hampson, A & Greenberg, M 2000, 'The use of research-based theatre in a project related to metastatic breast cancer', *Health Expectations*, vol. 3, pp. 137–44.
- Jones, P 2007, *Drama as therapy volume 1: theory, practice and research*, 2nd edn, Routledge, New York.
- Jones, P 2005, *Drama as therapy. Theatre as living*, Routledge, New York.
- Kantor, J & Einhorn, C 2016, 'Refugees encounter a foreign word: welcome', *New York Times*, July 1, viewed 8 January 2017, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/01/world/americas/canada-syrian-refugees.html>>.
- Knowles, G & Cole, A (eds.) 2008, *Handbook of the arts in social science research: methods, issues and perspectives*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Kontos, P, Miller, K & Colantonio, A 2014, 'Grief, anger and relationality: the impact of research-based theatre intervention on emotion work practices in brain injury rehabilitation', *Evaluation Review*, vol. 38, pp. 29–67.
- Kontos, PC & Naglie, G 2007 'Expressions of personhood in Alzheimer's disease: An evaluation of research-based theatre as a pedagogical tool', *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 17, pp. 799–811.
- Landy, R 1983, 'The use of distancing in drama therapy', *Arts in Psychotherapy*, vol. 10, pp. 175–85.
- Landy, R 1996, 'Drama therapy and distancing: reflections on theory and clinical application', *Arts in Psychotherapy*, vol. 23, pp. 367–73.
- Lyon, CR 2001, 'Hear our stories: relationships and transformations of women educators who worked overseas', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, vol. 33, pp. 118–26.
- Madurga, AC & Serra, JC 2016, 'El potencial del teatro foro como herramienta de investigacion. Forum theater's potential as a research tool', *Athenea Digital*, vol. 16, viewed 19 September 2016, <<http://atheneadigital.net/article/viewFile/v16-n1-calsamiglia-cubells/1462-pdf-es>>.
- Mann, S 1996, 'Metaphor, symbol and the healing process in dramatherapy', *Dramatherapy*, vol. 18, pp. 2–5.
- Mas, S. 2016, 'Liberals shift immigration focus to family reunification, refugee settlement', *CBC News*, viewed 8 March 2016, <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/liberals-immigration-levels-plan-2016-1.3479764>>.
- McKay, M & Bright, S 2005, 'Dementia care: learning through drama', *Practice Development in Health Care*, vol. 4, pp. 18–23.

- Mienczakowski, J & Morgan, S 2003, 'Ethnodrama: constructing participatory experiential and compelling action research through performance', in P Reasons & H Bradbury (eds.), *Handbook of action research: concise paperback*, Sage, London.
- Mienczakowski, J 1995, 'The theatre of ethnography: the reconstruction of ethnography with emancipatory potential', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 1, pp. 360–75.
- Ontario Human Rights Commission 2013, *Policy on removing the "Canadian experience" barrier*, Author, Toronto.
- O'Toole, J, Burton, B & Plunkett, A 2005, *Cooling conflicts: a new approach to conflict and bullying in schools*, Pearson Education, Sydney.
- Quinlan, E 2009, 'New action research techniques using participatory theatre with health care workers', *Action Research*, vol. 8, pp. 117–33.
- Rossiter, K, Kontos, P, Colantonio, A, Gilbert, J, Gray, J & Keightley, M 2008, 'Staging data: theatre as a tool for analysis and knowledge transfer in health research', *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 66, pp. 130–46.
- Sajnani, N 2012, 'The implicated witness: towards a relational aesthetic in dramatherapy', *Dramatherapy*, vol. 34, pp. 5–20.
- Saldaña, J 2008, 'Ethnodrama and ethnotheatre', in JG Knowles & AL Cole (eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 195–207.
- Sakamoto 2014, 'The use of arts in promoting social justice', in M Reisch (ed.), *International handbook of social justice*, Routledge, New York, pp. 463–79.
- Sakamoto, I, Ku, J & Wei, Y 2009, 'The deep plunge: *Luocha* and the experiences of earlier skilled immigrants from Mainland China in Toronto', *Qualitative Social Work*, vol. 8, pp. 427–47.
- Sakamoto, I, Chin, M & Young, M 2010a, 'Canadian experience, employment challenges, and skilled immigrants: a close look through tacit knowledge', *Canadian Social Work Journal*, vol. 10, pp. 145–51.
- Sakamoto, I, Ricciardi, J, Plyler, J, Wood, N, Chapra, A, Chin, M, Allan, B, Cameron, R & Nunes, M 2010b, *Coming together: homeless women, housing and social support with a special focus on the experiences of Aboriginal women and transwomen*, Wellesley Institute, Toronto.
- Sakamoto, I, Chin, M, Wood, N & Ricciardi, J 2015, 'The use of staged photography in participatory action research with homeless women: reflections on methodology and collaboration', in D Conrad & A Sinner (eds.), *Creating together: participatory, community-based and collaborative arts practices and scholarship across Canada*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, ON, pp. 69–92.
- Sakamoto, I, Wilson, R & Chin, M 2017, 'The labour market and immigration', in MC Yan & U Anucha (eds.), *Working with immigrants and refugees: a handbook for social work and human services*, Oxford University Press, Don Mills, ON.
- Shapiro, J & Hunt, L 2003, 'All the world's a stage: theatrical performance in medical education', *Medical Education* vol. 37, pp. 922–7.
- Simhoni, O 2008, The false witness: artistic research on stage, *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 13, viewed 9 July 2016, <<http://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1583&context=tqr>>.
- Stark, M 2015, *The concept of optimal stress — the transformative power of optimal stress*, Online International Psychotherapy Institute, Chevy Chase, MD.
- Statistics Canada 2005, 'Longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada', viewed 9 January 2017, <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/051013/dq051013b-eng.htm>>.
- Strickert, GEH & Bradford, LEA 2015, 'Of research pings and ping-pong balls: the use of forum theatre for engaged water security research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 14, pp. 1–14.

- Taylor, E 2000, 'Analyzing research on transformative learning theory', in J Mezirow & Associates (eds.), *Learning as transformation: critical perspectives on theory in progress*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, pp. 285–328.
- Weiner, N 2008, 'Breaking down barriers to labour market integration of newcomers in Toronto', *IRPP Choices*, vol. 14, pp. 1–37.
- Wernick, LJ, Woodford, MR & Kulick, A 2014, 'LGBTQQ youth using participatory action research and theater to effect change: moving adult decision-makers to create youth-centered change', *Journal of Community Practice*, vol. 22, pp. 47–66.
- Wrentschur, M 2008, 'Forum theatre as a participatory tool for social research and development: a reflection on "nobody is perfect." A project with homeless people', in P Cox, T Geisen & R Green (eds.), *Qualitative research and social change. European contexts*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, pp. 94–111.