**Reflective Practice**

**International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives**

**ISSN: 1462-3943 (Print) 1470-1103 (Online) Journal homepage:** [**https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/crep20**](https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/crep20)



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**To cite this article:** Elizabeth Brendel Horn, B. Caine, M. Katsadouros & E. Freeman (2020)

‘Act Out Justice’: reflective collaborative inquiry on theatre for social change youth programming,

Reflective Practice, 21:3, 371-383, DOI: [10.1080/14623943.2020.1749585](https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080/14623943.2020.1749585)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2020.1749585>



Published online: 13 Apr 2020.



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REFLECTIVE PRACTICE



2020, VOL. 21, NO. 3, 371–383

https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2020.1749585



‘Act Out Justice’: reflective collaborative inquiry on theatre for social change youth programming

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ABSTRACT

This study outlines and analyzes the eﬀectiveness of a reflective collaborative inquiry model developed for the programmatic and curricular revisions of ‘Act Out Justice’ (AOJ), a theatre for social change youth program through a partnership between Orlando Repertory Theatre and the University of Central Florida. The authors identify a nine-step process for collaborative teams utilizing a fusion of personal narrative, reflection, and dialogue. This account guides the reader through the AOJ reflection and revision process, articulat-ing how the process revealed four concrete programmatic and curri-cular changes. The paper provides a model for collaborative reflective inquiry applicable to collaborative teams working with youth.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 January 2020 Accepted 26 March 2020

KEYWORDS

Collaborative inquiry; reflective practitioner research; youth theatre; theatre for social change

1. Introduction

Gathered around our usual table in the theatre lobby, we engaged in a pastime well familiar to us: telling stories from our three respective residencies of ‘Act Out Justice’ (AOJ), a youth theatre for social change program through a partnership between Orlando Repertory Theatre (Orlando REP) and the University of Central Florida. AOJ first piloted in 2015–16 at one school, where it was co-facilitated by director Emily Freeman, director Elizabeth Brendel Horn, and lead teaching artist Maria Katsadouros. In 2018–2019, our phase two pilot expanded to three schools, requiring one of us to take the helm as lead facilitator at each of the three schools. Because we were working in three separate spaces, these moments of reconvening as a team illuminated the diﬀerences between our circumstances. Our stu-dents, social change topics, performance styles, and logistics varied widely from school to school, though the basic premise and structure of the curriculum and program remained the same, so our planning sessions became filled with questions and stories: How did this exercise go with your group? What was the topic selection process like? How is the group dynamic? How involved is your classroom teacher? Do you feel ready for your performance? At times, telling stories from our respective residencies felt superfluous – like the idle chitchat in the way of the real work. While Lyons posits that for educators, ‘teaching is fundamentally a narrative act that progresses through layered processes of reflection’ (Lyons, 2010), these



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conversations were lacking the ‘explicit intention’ Brockbank and McGill state is necessary to move dialogue into reflective practice (Brockbank et al., 1998).

However, when we began revising our curriculum in preparation for the following year, these stories became our anchors, allowing us to define and articulate the challenges and successes of the existing AOJ curriculum. We are storytellers at our cores; as Brinkmann observes, ‘all human research must be understood as conversational, since we are linguistic creatures and language is best understood in terms of the figure of conversa-tion’ (Brinkmann, 2011). Within the AOJ curriculum we ask our students to share their personal stories, knowing that their doing so is vulnerable, brave, and unveils hidden truths. In turn, we wondered: how could storytelling become embedded in our reflective process in a way that would lead to productive and meaningful programmatic changes?

In asking this question, we sought to create a structure for reflective collaborative inquiry rooted in critical reflection (Beavers et al., 2017); dialogue (Brockbank & McGill, 1998); and personal narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which this paper will outline and assess. Our method pulled from the postmodern qualitative research genre of self-study, a simultaneously ‘externally-oriented and reflective’ process we used as teaching artists to promote our own ‘continuous learning’ as we assessed and revised the AOJ curriculum and programming (Samaras et al., 2019). Our ‘questioning, probing, framing, and reframing that is at the heart of self-study’ (Loughran et al., 2004) demonstrated in this paper also builds upon the existing body of research on autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015; Canagarajah, 2012); collaborative autoethnography (Belkhir et al., 2019); and collaborative inquiry (Walther et al., 2017). Bringing together our individual stories from our respective AOJ residencies, we experienced the ‘benefits of exploring self in community rather than in solitude’ (Chang et al., 2016). The purpose of this paper is to codify and analyze the process of collaborative reflective inquiry developed during our revision of the AOJ curriculum.

2. Methodology

Dewey defines critical reflection as ‘active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it ends’ (Dewey, 1933). As Cushion observes, Dewey produced a ‘rational technicist model of reflection that emphasizes a conscious search for solutions to problems’ (Cushion, 2016). Schön (1983) problematizes Dewey’s model, arguing instead for ‘an experi-ential-intuitive model where knowledge is tacit, in action, and does not derive from rational thought or ‘prior intellectual operation’ (Schön, 1983)’ (Cushion, 2016). As Cushion expounds, ‘When reflection is understood as turning back upon the self, the danger is that it will reveal no more than what is already known, thereby reasserting the existing state of aﬀairs.’

Thompson and Pascal oﬀer a further critique to common reflective practices, stating, ‘the theory underpinning reflective practice is often not integrated with practice’ (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). The researchers build upon Schön’s concepts of ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’ with a third option: ‘reflection-for-action,’ which ‘refers to the process of planning, thinking ahead about what is to come, so that we can draw on our experience (and the professional knowledge base implicit within it) . . . ’

Working from a framework of Schön’s model for reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, and incorporating Thompson and Pascal’s assertion for reflection-for-action, we developed a model for collaborative reflective inquiry adapted from self-study research as

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outlined by Samaras (2011). Brockbank and McGill identify four requirements for reflec-tion within higher education: ‘dialogue, intention, process, modeling and the notion of personal stance’ (Brockbank et al., 1998). The pair also outlines a hierarchy of reflection, with the fourth and most encompassing dimension ‘reflection of the description of the reflection-in-action.’ The collaborative reflective inquiry outlined in this paper represents one round of our process, in a system that, when applied annually, will achieve a cyclical approach of identifying a problem, brainstorming solutions, experimenting, and evaluat-ing as outlined by Taggart and Wilson (2005). In this paper we will evaluate how the collaborative reflective inquiry process developed and employed in AOJ meets these criteria, and its eﬀectiveness as a model for collaborative reflective inquiry.

This paper first provides a brief history and overview of AOJ and its participants. We then outline the nine steps in our collaborative inquiry process. Our analysis summarizes changes it led to within our programming and examines opportunities for strengthening the process. As Richardson observes, ‘We are fortunate, now, to be working in a post-modernist climate, a time when a multitude of approaches to knowing and telling exist side by side’ (Richardson, 2000). The AOJ team relates strongly to the sentiment described by Richardson: ‘Writing stories and personal narratives have increasingly become the structures through which [we] make sense of [our] world . . . ’ (Richardson, 2000). While we have always found community in our stories, our process within this paper examines how intentional, thoughtful storytelling paired with reflective collaborative inquiry can provide theatre makers (or other collaborative groups) with greater insight into their work and can guide their course of action.

3. About AOJ

The following section provides an overview of AOJ to contextualize the collaborative reflective inquiry demonstrated in this paper. AOJ is a long-term theatre residency for high school students in which they explore a social justice issue through devised theatre (the creation of original material for performance, often by an ensemble). The final performance of the piece incorporates audience interaction to extend the discussion of the topic, which the high school students facilitate for the audience, who is comprised of members of their broader community.

AOJ began with a phase one pilot in 2015–16, then operating under the name The Justice Project and focusing on the police/civilian dynamic. We partnered with an all-male leadership class in a majority-minority high school, working with twenty-two male stu-dents of color with no previous theatre training. The class devised an original theatre piece based on their personal narratives related to the topic of police brutality. In January 2016, the pilot residency culminated with the students performing this piece and leading an interactive theatre for social change workshop for an audience of police academy students and active police oﬃcers.

The phase two pilot occurred in 2018–19; in response to an evolving sociopolitical land-scape, we applied the same project structure and curriculum while allowing the students to select a social justice topic of their choosing. We expanded the program to work with students in three Orange County Public Schools, who selected the topics of mental health stigma, social media, and identity and microaggressions. Emily, Elizabeth, and Maria each facilitated the AOJ curriculum at their respective schools. Research assistant Brittany Caine administered surveys

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and scales, observed rehearsals and performances, and gathered focus group discussion responses from all three residencies.

Our reflections were shaped by our individual residencies within the 2018–19 AOJ project; Emily, Elizabeth, and Maria each led the AOJ curriculum in three respective schools with varying circumstances. In 2018–19, we worked with diﬀerent demographics regarding gender, race, ethnicity, and class; we accommodated diﬀerent schedules; and we addressed diﬀerent social justice topics. Emily led an all-female after school group that selected the topic of social media; the school demographic was 85% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 2% white, with 100% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Notably, Emily’s residency was shaped by the long-standing partnership between this school and Orlando REP; Emily worked with this group of students on other projects in prior years. Elizabeth worked with a racially-diverse and mixed gender after school theatre group. The residency occurred at an economically disadvantaged, predominantly Hispanic school and addressed the topic of mental health stigma. Maria worked in an economically disadvan-taged school in an agricultural community with a large immigrant population. Her students, who were racially diverse, mixed genders, and had varying abilities, were part of a theatre class that met during class time, and chose the topic of identities and microaggressions.

Due to diﬀerences among our three respective residencies, the use of personal narra-tive and reflection served as the most direct way for us to gain perspective into one another’s residencies, allowing us to identify the commonalities and diﬀerences among our experiences. Brittany, as our research assistant, had the clearest perspective of the project among the three schools, especially as it pertained to student perspective. These perspectives were meaningful as we sought to create an AOJ curriculum that was consistent enough to meet our program objectives while flexible enough to accommo-date the varying needs of student groups.

4. The reflective collaborative inquiry process

This section of the paper describes each of the nine steps of the reflective collaborative inquiry process we employed when revising our 2018–19 AOJ curriculum, along with excerpts from the process to serve as examples. We will summarize the ways in which this process allowed us to arrive at programmatic changes supported by our narratives, reflections, and collaborative inquiry. Following, we will analyze the eﬀectiveness of this process and opportunities for improvement.

4.1. Collaborative teams identify a guiding question

First, we identified a guiding question to motivate our reflective process. We sought one that was specific to the AOJ programming while also broad enough to leave space for the multiple stories and experiences from our 18–19 year. Our question was: ‘How do I critically engage AOJ youth participants in dialogue about relevant social justice issues using theatre as a medium?’

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4.2. Individual team members free-write based on the guiding question, focusing on narratives from the past year

Based on the guiding question, the first tasks were completed by the three team members who served as teaching artists working directly with the youth (Emily, Elizabeth, and Maria). Individually, these team members wrote for a timed twenty-minutes responding to the guiding question. Seeking to make meaning of our stories, these reflections focused on the memories that popped up most strongly for us in our respective AOJ residencies. For example, in her free-write, Elizabeth wrote about her residency’s process of selecting a topic:

“My students and I have social justice topics written on the white board: immigration rights, a long list of -isms, and the prison system, to name a few. After much discussion and exploration, we land on our final topic: mental health stigma. I find myself torn between wanting to support the group consensus and feeling concerned. Mental health stigma feels like something too big to wrap our heads around, and simultaneously too personal and present for some of the students. How could I guarantee that we approached this topic safely and productively?”

This free-write captures a challenge felt by Elizabeth during her AOJ residency: that providing students with the agency to select their own social justice topic gave her, as the adult facilitator, a sense of unease due to her fear that her students would either feel distanced from the topic or that it could be emotionally triggering. In this step, the condensed and focused free-write period allowed the team to focus on the memories from the residency that stood out the most, indicating that these were moments with which we were not done making meaning in the reflective process.

4.3. Individual team members reread and respond to their own free-writes

Again, pulling inspiration from Samaras (2011), we responded first to our own free-writes before sharing and discussing them with one another. This step places trust in the storyteller, recognizing that we, as individuals, have much to glean from our own narrative experience. To keep the process eﬃcient and motivated, we also set a twenty-minute timer for this segment. Elizabeth’s response to the above excerpt of her free-write said:

“I see a lot of fear here – the need for everything to be perfect. Some of these fears are valid: do the students feel safe? Can they safely approach this topic or share space with the audience members? Some of them do not seem as important: does it really matter if they relate deeply to the topic when it’s selected? I know that we want them to have buy in, but maybe some of what could make AOJ interesting is opening their eyes up to a topic they didn’t know they related to.”

In this response to her free-write, Elizabeth examines the value of identifying social justice theme(s) that are relevant to participants both on stage and in the audience, and also the role that AOJ plays in helping students deepen their understanding of how social justice plays out within their own lives. While Elizabeth's reflection on her own narrative observa-tions proved valuable, her analysis is innately limited by her own perspective, particularly her focus on her own fear and perfectionism that kepther from looking at the broader issues present in the curricular choices of AOJ. Thus, the next step will allowed Elizabeth’s reflection to begin interacting with the other members of AOJ, moving toward

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a collaborative dialogue that eventually inspired a major change in the topic selection process in the AOJ curriculum.

4.4. Team members share their individual free-writes and responses with the team, which are examined critically through written peer review and group discussion to identify themes, similarities, diﬀerences, and further questions to explore

In this step, individuals share their work up to this point with the team to foster collaborative critical inquiry. This step could be done in multiple formats: reading work aloud, discussing work with a partner, passing work around a circle multiple times until everyone has read each team members, or through digital peer review. In our process, we wanted to respond to one another’s work in writing as well as in full group discussion. To facilitate this, we took turns reading our own work aloud while the other team members took bulleted notes; once this was completed for each of Emily, Elizabeth, and Maria’s responses, we shifted to a group discussion about the ideas that emerged throughout our papers. In Emily and Maria’s response to Elizabeth’s writing excerpted above, they observed Elizabeth’s fixation of a binary on work being right or wrong. They noted a theme of how much we step in and take the lead as facilitators, and how much we step back and allow the students to lead the process. Through this discussion, we explored the importance of bringing intentionality to shifts in control within our curricu-lum, and to examine how we can communicate those shifts to our students with transparency. Power exchange between students and facilitator was a reoccurring theme in this conversation, surfacing in all three of the team members’ narratives about topic selection, story sharing, script development, and the final performance. Thus, examining how we might adjust our curriculum to address this concern became a primary point of reflection through the remainder of this process.

4.5. Individuals write formal final reflections influenced by the peer responses and group discussion

This step, though time consuming, allowed us to further reflect on our own personal experiences, the peer feedback from our collaborative group, and broader voices from the field. In this step, we moved our free-write narratives and responses into fuller, more developed formal reflections, including external academic resources. Our process bene-fited from an impending conference presentation that made these individual papers a necessity; still, we would urge any interested in adopting this process not to skip this step, as it ensured we were dialoguing not only with one another, but with external academic researchers and practitioners. We completed this step individually over a two-week period, each of us creating formal reflections of eight to ten pages in length. Continuing with our initial example of Elizabeth’s free-write, she wrote in her formal reflection:

“Neelands says educators should ‘be willing to take informed risks in order to develop [their] own experiences as a teacher, and [should] encourage children to do the same in order to broaden their horizon’ (Neelands, 1984, p.24; emphasis in original). What constitutes as an ‘informed’ risk

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in community-based theatre residencies, in which the circumstances are constantly evolving? How can we, as AOJ leaders, develop a curriculum that creates space for these risks while proving itself successful in a variety of classroom spaces and with a wide array of student demographics?

“As I embarked on our phase two pilot of AOJ, I questioned what risk there was in the exploration of mental health – especially considering that in this iteration of our curriculum the topic was not determined when students signed up to participate in the project. The topic of mental health is often considered taboo, frequently dismissed in young people as hormones or melodramatics, and something at times too nebulous to concretely grasp. How aware were the students of the ways in which mental health stigma impacted their lives? Were they informed of the risk of broaching this subject?

“How then, could we examine the topic of mental health from an authentic youth perspective that also protected their individual well-being? Was the key to deviate from the past iteration of AOJ that relied on personal stories for its devising content? Aware of the potential for other script fodder, such as statistics (Cahill, 2014) or folklore (Breed, 2015), I questioned if our script needed to take another direction.”

In Elizabeth’s incorporation of Neelands' quote, she identifies a key element that further articulates her initial discomfort with the topic selected by her students: that selecting the topic with the students made it impossible for them to be informed of the risk of their participation in the project from the beginning. This, paired with the recognition that theatre and personal storytelling are intended to help someone go deeper into a subject and, as such, may mean that a student does not initially realize how close they feel to a topic, makes it understandable that Elizabeth felt such unease. As Elizabeth continued to grapple with the way topic selection and the use of personal story were situated within the AOJ curriculum, her survey of other devised theatre for social change projects began to reveal potential other routes that AOJ could take instead of, or in addition to, the use of personal stories.

4.6. As a team, read and critically examine the formal individual reflections, allowing the reflections to come into conversation with one another

This next step began with reading aloud each of Elizabeth, Emily, and Maria’s formal reflections, though certainly this could be done silently or digitally as well. Through reading and discussing our formal reflections, the team began to, similarly to Step Four, identify commonalities and diﬀerences that emerged in our respective reflections. At this point, a clear picture emerged of each of the individual residencies, as well as common opportunities, challenges, and successes.

Moving through these reflections, the ways in which the reflective texts supported and challenged one another became a conversation, so we then edited the reflections into one dialogue. We achieved this digitally by cutting and pasting the formal reflections into one large document, though this could also be accomplished with hard copies using tape and scissors. In the ‘conversation’ that emerged from cutting and pasting our formal reflections into a dialogue, Maria and Elizabeth spoke about the diﬀerence between the initial pilot, in which the black male students knew the topic of police brutality (and the very relevant risks associated with it) in advance, compared to students not knowing the topic in advance and thus not being able to assess the risks as accurately. Emily observed that the classroom teacher influences the topic selection as well, as he or she may better know the needs of the

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students. The team continued to struggle with what power looks like in a space where adults want to empower young people but also are in a lead facilitator role.

For the purposes of presenting this reflective dialogue at a conference, we made some minor alterations to the text to smooth out transitions and create a conversational flow. For a team working internally, such edits may not be necessary; however, these edits did encourage us to give further attention to how our individual thoughts interacted with one another. Our final product in this step looked like a script, with each person’s name proceeding their lines, and individuals often directly responding to the ideas of one another. The editing process further allowed the team to engage with and shape the conversation that emerged. The end result grouped the dialogue into four major chal-lenges that the team identified in the 18–19 AOJ programming: building relationships, determining a social justice topic, accessing prior knowledge, and determining audience demographic.

4.7. Bring the voices of the youth participants into the process, examining how their written or verbal feedback during the residency interacts with the dialogue crafted by the adults’ reflective process

At this point the reflections were compiled as a collective dialogue, scripted as a series of questions and dialogical reflective examinations of those questions; however, the voices of the youth participants were missing. Thus, research assistant Brittany compared the team analysis to the data she collected via student surveys, audience surveys, and observations of rehearsals and performances. Within the example explored above, Brittany summarized the generally positive response within the student surveys, as well as her observations of power dynamics within rehearsals. Both of these things she used to suggest that perhaps the team need not feel so reticent in steering the process as adult facilitators, alleviating the fear that making a decision disempowers youth participants.

It is important to note that Brittany, as an adult theatre maker and researcher, filtered her analysis through her own adult lens; another iteration of this process could explore other ways to directly incorporate youth in this process. Additionally, incorporating Brittany’s data earlier might have more authentically folded the youth perspective into our analysis.

4.8. From the final reflective dialogue, identify and write action items or programmatic changes

The four challenges revealed through this process were met with clear, tangible changes to our AOJ curriculum for the 19–20 year. Naturally, many of these ideas occurred to us earlier in the process, since we were in dialogue throughout. However, this step encour-aged us to put into writing what those changes would be (writing, for the first time in the process, from a collective ‘we’ point of view). Importantly, we successfully linked each programmatic change to each of the challenges explored in the reflective collaborative inquiry. Doing so illuminated how the reflective and dialogical process grounded the programmatic changes in personal experiences evident across all three of the 18–19 AOJ residencies. The change arrived at through the example shown in this paper, where

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Elizabeth and fellow team members examined the challenge of selecting a social justice topic with the students, is as follows:

“We will shift away from a social justice topic as a primary focus, such as police brutality or mental health stigma. Instead, we will provide a universal prompt such as ‘clothing,’ ‘hair,’ or ‘transportation.’ We will then examine the prompt through four ‘lenses of social justice’: Gender; Race; Socioeconomic Status; and Ability. Through this change, students will be able to take informed risks, as they will know from the beginning of the residency that these four lenses of social justice will be explored.”

These eight steps, which led to a focused reflection on the challenges of selecting a social justice topic, inspired this drastic shift in our curriculum. Concerns we had discussed many times throughout the year, but to which a solution had not yet been found, were more concretely and productively explored in this process. Through this structured reflective collaborative inquiry, we identified the root of the challenge and grounded the solution in practice as research. In summary, Table 1 provides an overview of the steps presented in this paper within the reflective process on the 18–19 AOJ programming.

As Table 1 illustrates, the process unveiled four challenges in the 18–19 AOJ program-ming. Through narrative, reflection, and group dialogue, the team arrived at four concrete programmatic changes supported by individual and collective experiences and the feed-back collected from youth participants. These changes will be further evaluated in the next implementation of this process; while this paper captures once through the first eight steps of this process, it is our intention that these steps be repeated annually, ending with this step:

4.9. The team repeats this process, developing a cyclical reflective practice

5. Conclusion and analysis

In summary, the reflective collaborative inquiry process developed for AOJ includes the following steps:

1. Collaborative teams identify a guiding question.
2. Individual team members free-write based on the guiding question, focusing on narratives from the past year.
3. Individual team members reread and respond to their free-writes.
4. Team members share their individual free-writes and responses with the team, which are examined critically through written peer review and group discussion to identify themes, similarities, diﬀerences, and further questions to explore.
5. Individuals write formal final reflections influenced by the peer responses and group discussion.
6. As a team, read and critically examine the formal individual reflections, allowing the reflections to come into conversation with one another.
7. Bring the voices of the youth participants into the process, examining how their written or verbal feedback during the residency interacts with the dialogue crafted by the adults’ reflective process.

Table 1. Summary of reflective collaborative inquiry findings.



Step 1: Guiding Question: ‘How do I critically engage PROJECT NAME youth participants in dialogue about relevant social justice issues using theatre as a medium?’



|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Challenge (Identified |  |  |  |  |  |
| in Step 6, or through- |  | Dialogue and Reflection (Steps 3–6) |  |  |  |
| out dialogue) | Narrative (Step 2) | Youth Perspective (Step 7) | Change (Step 8) |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Building | First day of class | -We are new to the space | N/A | Implement PROJECT NAME with new and |  |
| Relationships |  | -Returning over years builds trust |  | return schools; develop leadership |  |
|  |  | -Creating a safe space |  | opportunities for program alums and |  |
|  |  |  |  | classroom teachers |  |
| Identifying a social | Brainstorming and voting | -Student risk-taking | Students were satisfied with the | Shift from social justice topic to open-ended |  |
| justice topic | on topics with students | -Classroom teacher influence | overall experience and recognized | prompt explored through four lenses of |  |
|  |  | -Shifts in power | the student/teacher dynamic in the | social justice |  |
|  |  |  | rehearsal process |  |  |
| Accessing prior | Students not wanting to | -Stories being general rather than | N/A | Incorporate current events to supplement |  |
| knowledge | share stories or not | specific |  | prior knowledge and relate back to the four |  |
|  | claiming stories as their | -Needing to backtrack to teach |  | lenses of social justice |  |
|  | own | content about social justice topic |  |  |  |
| Determining | Students not knowing who they want | -Wanting to replicate the actor/ | Survey findings demonstrated | Open PROJECT NAME performances to public |  |
| audience | to invite to the performance; the | audience dynamic of the pilot year | students felt empowered by | audiences, aiming to bring in diverse |  |
| demographic | audience ending up diﬀerent than | -Students wanting to perform for | performance regardless of audience | populations, and train students in dialoguing |  |
|  | who was expected | peers/youth rather than adults | demographics | across diﬀerences |  |
|  |  | -Ideal audience not being accessible or |  |  |  |
|  |  | interested |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |



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1. From the final reflective dialogue, identify and write action items or programmatic changes.
2. The team repeats this process annually, developing a cyclical reflective practice.

Through this process, we identified four key challenges that we experienced in our 18–19 AOJ residencies: selecting topics; accessing prior knowledge; identifying an audience demographic; and building trust and relationships. Directly related to these challenges, we identified four concrete changes we will implement moving into our 19–20 program-ming: shifting to open-ended prompts examined through ‘Four Lenses of Social Justice’; building on prior knowledge through ‘On the Daily’ current events; crafting interactive theatre experiences relevant to a diverse audience base; and building continued leader-ship experiences for AOJ alums and partner teachers. These challenges and changes were identified and explored through a process both interpersonal and intrapersonal, both personally reflective and collaboratively dialogical. With this process, we propose a model for reflective collaborative inquiry to promote story-sharing, dialogue, revision, and re-envision for collaborative teams engaged in work with youth.

As we analyze and reflect on this process, we believe these steps successfully integrate reflective theory and practice. We structured a process based on our under-standing of Schön’s experiential-intuitive model of critical reflection. Within these steps, Thompson and Pascal’s assertion of ‘reflection-for-action’ is achieved, as we drew on our past experiences with AOJ to plan ahead in anticipation of what our residencies would need the following year. Our process also incorporates the four requirements for reflection in higher education as identified by Brockbank and McGill: dialogue, inten-tion, process, modeling and the notion of personal stance. It utilizes both internal dialogue and dialogue between individuals, recognizing that ‘learning is not merely an individualistic process’ (Brockbank et al., 1998). Intention allowed our conversations to shift from feeling frivolous to proving fruitful, for, as Brockbank and McGill observe, ‘The explicit intention to engage in reflective dialogue is suggested as a requirement for such dialogue. . . . we need to be clear what the purpose of that kind of interaction is intended’ (Brockbank et al., 1998). These steps provided us with a clear process, moving us beyond the purpose of our reflective practice and allowing us to understand how we would achieve it. While in the fourth requirement ‘modelling’ pertains to a teacher/ student dynamic that is not relevant to the AOJ team, we can appreciate how ‘personal stance’ – the positions we take in life that are influenced by our acquired knowledge and lived experience – are fully present in this process through the use of personal narrative, though the process would be well served by our increased awareness of those personal stances. Finally, the structure of the process, and the multiple layers of reflec-tion built into the steps, allowed us to reach the deepest dimension within the hierarchy of reflection described by Brockbank and McGill: ‘reflection of the description of the reflection-in-action,’ and applying this process multiple times will allow teams to cycli-cally identify problems, brainstorm solutions, experiment, and evaluate as described by Taggart and Wilson (2005).

We believe that other collaborative experiences may benefit from a similar process, especially cases similarly situated to our own, where teams must at times work separately from one another (as Emily, Elizabeth, and Maria each led diﬀerent residencies). As AOJ recently completed its third year of programming, we believe this model to be especially

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pertinent to collaborators working on developing programs. We will continue to imple-ment this process in our own annual reflection on and revision of AOJ curriculum, though we acknowledge it has room for improvement. Most notably, our process would have benefitted from incorporating the youth perspective well before Step Seven, an oppor-tunity made clear by the lack of youth opinion shown in Table 1. In the future, we will reimagine what this might look like: perhaps inviting the research assistant to write a paper summarizing the youth opinions earlier in the process; or conducting focus group conversations with youth. Centering youth perspective is essential to the work we do in AOJ, and we fell short of accomplishing that in this reflective process.

We, as humans and theatre artists, have always gravitated toward our stories when coming together to discuss AOJ. As our innate instinct to make meaning of our lived experiences moved us naturally and authentically toward narratives, this process guided us through the synthesis and analysis of our respective narratives. The dialogue that danced between our stories did not unfold automatically, but rather, through careful reflection and dialogue, bringing attention to the ways in which our stories interacted through the steps outlined above. With this process, we were able to strengthen the AOJ curriculum, and felt better able to articulate the justification behind those programmatic changes. As we encourage our AOJ students to act bravely, we aim to do the same, by never resting on our laurels but rather seeking to constantly sharpen our purpose and strengthen our approach. Through ongoing, pointed, ambitious story-sharing and reflection we strive to think critically about our own work and how it may better serve our students.

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the 2018–2019 Act Out Justice high school students, classroom teachers, and assistant teaching artists Morgan Cobb, Ximena González, and Arius West for their contributions to this work.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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