

**Balancing Analytic Discipline and Artistic Intuition**  
**During the Devising Process for *No Particular Place To Go***

By Lauren Jerke

## Introduction

In an influential 1989 article, *Living Contradiction and the Struggle to Recreate it Artistically*, Tag McEntegart argues that there is an embedded contradiction between the unconscious and conscious processes in humans, and the way they interact with the world (1). In her article, she addresses the question: **what are the roles of the conscious and the unconscious in art-making?** The balance between the two is neatly encapsulated in Jerome Bruner's paradoxical term 'disciplined intuition' (2). During the devising process for the play, *No Particular Place To Go*, the most prevalent conscious discipline at work was the company's attempt to represent qualitative data. The process of converting research data into theatre would seem, inevitably, to **privilege** the conscious over the unconscious (the 'discipline' over the 'intuition'). However, the unconscious role of artistic intuition functioned to supply the team with creative impulses that were **integral** to the success of the final product. The play was engaging and representative of the research findings from the older adults driving study. With a review of the devising process, this paper seeks to describe the 'disciplined intuition' at work during the creation of the play.

## Background

The play, *No Particular Place To Go*, was a collaboration between the *Centre on Aging* and the *Theatre Department* at the University of Victoria. It began with a research study that focused on older adults' driving safety issues on Vancouver Island. Focus groups were conducted across the island and were mainly comprised of older adults. Other stakeholders including doctors, police, and representatives from the provincial vehicle insurance bureau also attended the focus groups. When the data was gathered and separated into themes, it was handed over to the Department of Theatre to make a play to disseminate research findings and initiate dialogue between audience members. The theatre

company performed the play to members of the focus groups and other interested audiences and a DVD was also made. My role in this project was as a Master's student in Applied Theatre and as stage manager. I participated in the devising process by attending each rehearsal and I recorded verbatim notes of discussions and improvisations.

### **Research-Based Theatre**

Research-based theatre is one term among many, including ethnotheatre (3), and ethnodrama (4) that describe essentially the same process (see Dobson's essay in this issue for more terms). The term describes theatre that is mainly used to disseminate research findings, analyze and interpret data, or validate research findings (5-7). One common application for research-based theatre is in health contexts. It has been used for: health promotion, education, training of health professionals, and data collection and dissemination (4, 8). Research-based theatre productions can provide health care professionals with insights into their patients' struggles (7). Simultaneously, the care provider is given distance to step back and reflect and observe his or her own actions (9). In his essay describing qualitative theatre research, Mienczakowski, a renowned theatre practitioner/researcher, explains that in health contexts, research-based theatre is "a means to give insight into the lives of those who have become marginalized and disempowered through their relationships with health" (4). In the *No Particular Place To Go* project, our goal was to give insights into older adults' experiences related to driving motor vehicles, as well as other interest groups' perspectives on the issue. The post-show conversation was an opportunity for the different groups to discuss together the issue of older adults' driving safety.

I have mainly drawn information from research-based theatre in health contexts for this paper. The creation of *No Particular Place To Go* had similar goals to those of research-based theatre in

health education. We were disseminating the research data with a final goal of initiating dialogue and directly addressing the matter under consideration. Additionally, one stakeholder group consisted of doctors and other caregivers, and watching *No Particular Place To Go* would be categorized as professional development for this audience. As earlier illustrated, this is a main goal of many research-based theatre projects in health contexts.

For researchers specifically, a benefit of research-based theatre is illustrated in Gray's reflective practitioner account from a research-based theatre project: "My new task is to immerse myself in the research material and to portray it with passion.... I have rarely seen such behaviour at a research convention or at Oncology Grand Rounds" (10).

The personal gain Gray received from the research-based theatre performance was, he claims, unique, challenging, and energizing (10). At times, traditional ways of disseminating research findings in the form of written articles or presentations can be done with little emotional connection. Making a theatre production to disseminate research findings requires passion and enthusiasm from the creators/researchers throughout the entire project.

### **Importance of Maintaining Balance**

McEntegart's article, "Living Contradiction and the Struggle to Recreate it Artistically", directly addresses the importance of maintaining balance between artistic and analytic processes when creating a theatre performance that aims to educate its audience. The article was written after a discussion around this topic at a *Standing Conference for Young Peoples Theatre (S.C.Y.P.T)* conference. The topic was focused and identified at the conference in these terms:

At the two extremes, either the company places the highest value on the unconscious, the intuitive, feeling, 'can't put into words', 'just know it', 'it's personal', 'the personal is

the political’, or the company values most highly the theoretical, the rational, the conscious, ‘we have to know at all points what the work is doing’, ‘the subjective has no part in this’, ‘good work is only constructed consciously’ (1).

In her article, McEntegart further explains the merit in maintaining balance between intuitive process and analytic rigour when she describes unconscious and conscious contradictions at work in human learning processes:

[S]ensation is essential for conscious thought ...[h]owever, whilst essential, sensation alone cannot enable human beings to orientate themselves in the world collectively or individually. Only the development of the moment of sensation through the concepts and categories of cognition into practice has advanced the knowledge and humanness of humanity” (1).

Sensation is required to begin conscious thought process, but it cannot stand alone. Sensation must be augmented with concepts and “categories of cognition” (1) in order for new sensation to progress into thought and understanding. McEntegart’s perspective, originally intended for theatre in education practitioners, is directly relatable to research-based theatre because both aim to convert dyadic, non-dramatic information into a theatrical form. Theatre performances that aim to educate audiences must interlink facts, theories, and concepts with sensation for optimum learning to occur.

Gray *et al.* (2000) provide two main arguments for the use of research-based theatre. The first argument is “[the] often-neglected responsibility of researchers to have their work make a difference in the everyday world” (7). This speaks to the importance of dissemination of the research to those who could utilize the findings. The second argument is “...that it has advantages over purely textual reports in terms of validity. This is because it sustains connections to bodies, emotions and the full range of sensory experience that was present in the data-gathering situation” (7). The second argument truly acknowledges the medium of theatre and the unique possibilities that theatre holds for sensation and sensory experiences, communication, interpretation, and analysis. Just as McEntegart argues, Gray *et al.* (2000) see disciplined intuition as an opportunity for truly successful data dissemination.

For a literature review of research-based theatre projects in health contexts, Rossiter *et al.* created a spectrum based on the balance between “scientific and artistic renditions or interpretations of data” (5). The continuum ranges from performances closely aligned to the research data to purely fictional performances (5). Four main points exist on the continuum:



(A) non-theatrical performances; (B) ethnodramas; (C) theatrical research-based performances; and (D) fictional theatrical performances. Category A consists of projects that solely rely on the research data for the script. Non-theatrical performances do not use elaborate staging, and the performers may not have their lines memorized. In essence, this category consists of projects that are a “dramatized reading of transcripts” (5). For example, *In Their Own Words* was a play written by a medical education professor for her students to perform as a class assignment (11). The play was created by extracting sections of transcripts from interviews and joining them together to form a script (11). At the other end of the spectrum is category D, theatrical performances. Theatrical performances may be performed for the “purpose of health care education” (5), however the creators of the performance do not make any attempt to represent research data.

The two categories that boldly attempt to manage a balance between discipline and intuition are B and C. Ethnodrama, category B, is based on research, and often contains “creation of ‘real life’ vignettes that emerge directly from the data...” (5). Ethnodrama attempts to engage audiences, and Rossiter *et al.* state that “scenes contain elements of dramatic tension” (5). There are often interactive elements integrated into performances, mainly adapted from Boal’s Forum Theatre (5). Mienczakowski is seen as a leader in category B, the field of ethnodrama work (5). Mienczakowski shows an awareness of the danger of creating a one-sided piece when artistically presenting qualitative research findings:

“The ethnodrama process clearly does not sanction mindless adherence to verbatim textual reproduction...” (4). Here he provides a negative perspective on the possibility of falling into the non-theatrical performance, category A.

Category C, theatrical-research based theatre is slightly closer to the artistic/intuitive end of the spectrum because the research data is seen as “preparatory fieldwork for the theatrical production work” (5). Performances do not precisely follow the research data, but the creation of the performance is informed by it. Ross Gray, a well-known practitioner from category C, theatrical research-based performances, recalls the possible tendencies of falling into category D, fictional theatrical performances:

We wanted to make sure we did not lose our way in artistic cleverness, or our own ideas about coping with illness—to be sure that the voices of the women with Metastatic disease would ring clear and strong in the eventual production (7).

In South Africa, a research-based theatre performance, known as the *S.A.S.P.I project* was created to understand the prevalence of and social context of stroke. In this case, the performance could not use verbatim data due to issues of confidentiality (6). Rossiter *et al.* note that in category C, one must work in a “highly flexible, and interdisciplinary manner, drawing as strongly from the arts, and from artistic practitioners, as from the science and researchers” (5). Rossiter *et al.* encourage a mutual relationship—where the researchers are open to theatrical interpretations and presentation styles, and where the theatre practitioners are familiar with and understand the “needs of the data” (5).

It is clear that well-experienced practitioners in the field of research-based theatre work are aware of the need to maintain a balance when creating theatre productions based on research data to disseminate, or to educate. As McEntegart states, “the false separation of ‘reason’ from the ‘heart’[\[i\]](#) leads to completely distorted relations to reality” (1). A performance that does not realize or utilize the communicative, analytic, and interpretive possibilities of theatre could risk inaccurately representing

the data—ultimately jeopardizing the project’s validity. Researchers who are inexperienced with theatre but are still interested in the field of research-based theatre collaborate with theatre practitioners to make research-based theatre (4-9,12-14). In our case with *No Particular Place To Go*, the playwright, Dobson, also highlighted the reciprocity of mutual collaboration. He described the researchers as essential components in the project to provide guidance, expertise with data interpretation and analysis, and constant reminders to accurately represent the data (15).

### **Devising *No Particular Place To Go*:**

#### ***Personal Connections***

The first task undertaken in the devising process was to explore our own existing knowledge surrounding issues of older adults and driving, and share personal connections that we had to the subject. As one actor explained, “Sharing our own stories personalized the subject matter for us and gave us the opportunity to become acquainted with each other” (16). We explored our own experiences of driving by sharing our memories of the first car we ever drove. The detail and emotion that each story contained revealed the great significance that comes hand in hand with driving and cars. We revealed other life experiences that were connected to cars and discovered that it was not just older adults that connect feelings of independence, power, nostalgia and wealth with cars and driving, so did we!

John, in his early 70’s, and the actor who would portray Grandpa in the play, told the devising team stories of his father and his connections with vehicles. John had many memories of himself and his father driving together, and his father soon became a common interest among the members of the devising team. An actor’s reflection on the devising process further supports this:

It was incredible the way we, as a company, gravitated to John's story about his father. Immediately it was clear that the memories and information John told us about his father were to be the starting point for devising (16).

The company began to develop Grandpa's character first. In this section, creative and artistic impulses led into character development.

### ***A Starting Point***

Choosing a place to begin dramatically exploring the issue was partly intuitive and partly guided by the directors. The company was immediately attracted to the moment when older adult drivers are forced to give up their license, and this took up the majority of our preliminary explorations. The directors were already familiar with the data content, because they had participated in the planning of the research project and attended focus groups, and they knew that the moment that older adult drivers had to give up their license was at the heart of the themes that came from the data. As theatre practitioners, we were especially interested in finding ways to show the data—to make themes speak for themselves, rather than retelling. Giving up a driver's license is a moment of action. Improvising began with a character (inspired by the actor, John's, father) and a conflict (the moment one must stop driving) to began theatrically exploring issues related to older adult's driving safety.

### ***Characters***

Developing believable, natural characters was one of the most important elements in the devising process. In order to engage the audience and hold their attention, we were required to produce a compelling story—a story that not only contained believable situational action, but also rounded, well-developed characters and roles that were well suited to the actors who were cast. The strategy used to develop multi-layered, life-like characters was to draw from the actors' personal experiences. Characters became exposed as a result of the actor's past experiences and the discoveries they made during the devising process.

As mentioned earlier, the first scenes to take place developed the character named Grandpa. First, the actors explored situations where they tried to confront Grandpa about the issue of his declining driving skills. At this point the other two actors did not know their roles, and they adopted different roles according to the scene. For instance, at times the actor, Anne, would play the character of Grandpa's wife, and in other scenes she would play Grandpa's daughter. During periods of reflection after the scenes, the actors would examine Grandpa's relations. This was the impetus for actors to begin creating characters that naturally related to Grandpa. The initial scenes also brought up questions about older adults and driving. For example: *How does a family address this with the seniors in their lives? Or, What are the processes in British Columbia that lead to older adults having their licenses taken away?*

To decide which scene to dramatize next, actors were asked in role what actions they would like to take in the future regarding Grandpa's driving. To fully develop the Grandpa character, all three actors were prompted with the following questions in a physicalization exercise that addressed these questions: *What is Grandpa afraid of? What does giving up his independence /losing independence really mean for him? Try to get a sense of what is driving this fear.* This exercise greatly influenced the creative process because each actor's performance stemmed from different times in Grandpa's life (i.e. his teenage years, when he was on a date, trying to maintain the vigour of his youth, and his frustrations in the present). As a result of this exercise, Grandpa's character gained real depth.

The devising starting point (the moment one must stop driving) immediately delved into the heart of the qualitative data collected. During the character development stage of the devising process, disciplined intuition was in evidence because the director and assistant director supported this research-based starting point, while the devising company remained very exploratory in their initial stages of creation of characters, favoring the artistic intuitive impulses.

### ***Developing a Holding Form***

Our discussion became very engaged and lively when we began talking about cars and their influence on popular culture. Because of the unique excitement that it invoked during discussion, we began to brainstorm possibilities on how to integrate this element into the play. Two Chuck Berry songs popular in the 1950's and 1960's, *Maybellene*<sup>[ii]</sup> and *No Particular Place To Go*<sup>[iii]</sup> both featured cars prominently in the lyrics. *Maybellene* was played used in the first scene of the play and resonated with Grandpa's stubbornness. *No Particular Place To Go* was played in the final scene. The title of the song also doubles as a conspicuous line in the chorus and clearly represented Grandpa's acceptance. The songs book-ended the play and function as a holding form. Here, the balance between discipline and intuition operated because the initial excitement in our discussion was an unconscious process, and conscious processes were at work when the company recognized the impact of cars on popular culture and integrated it into the play.

### ***Integrating Research Data***

As the play began to take shape, the playwright suggested that each point in the play's story-arc draw on themes from the research data. We built a story-arc diagram, and then matched up themes from the research data to the story-arc wherever possible. Some of the scenes that the actors had already created fit well into portraying themes from the data, and we also listed other ideas, or discussions that we had that related to the themes taken from the research findings to fill in the gaps.

Attempts to use verbatim quotes were unsuccessful. The following rehearsal notes exemplify this:

*Grandpa: Looking though memory box. He finishes reading a letter. He begins to have a conversation with his wife. You know, the possibility of losing my license is almost*

harder than losing you. I know it sounds awful. It sounds awful. I won't be able to get in the dark and take off, drive around the city (17).

The participant quote was “losing my license was harder than losing my wife”. In the monologue it is obvious that this quote does not fit in with the situation, or the character. Grandpa immediately contradicts the verbatim quote saying that, “it sounds awful”. This quote does convey the true importance that the license was to this man; however, the essence of the quote greatly informed Grandpa's character and the plot line.

Natural, organic characters that the actors could portray successfully were very important to the aesthetic value of the play. The context was built from the actors—and guided by the directors who had extensive knowledge of the research data. Each verbatim quote contains a lifetime of context; context that this company had not researched and therefore could not portray. A verbatim quote cut and pasted into another context is not an accurate representation of the data since it carries a different meaning when placed in a different context. In our case, the use of verbatim quotes was also not effective because it did not complement the unique character that each actor had created.

The *Centre on Aging* provided a brief on themes from the data. Afterwards, the devising team worked through all of the sectioned summaries, each containing fifty or more quotes, and discussed which resonated the most with them. The data informed scenes, characters, and gave us ideas for new scenes. It was our job to disseminate the data—because there was so much of it, we focused on conveying the prominent themes that had emerged from it. There were some pivotal quotes that represented the themes that we were addressing. These remained at the forefront of our minds throughout the entire devising process:

- *Significance: Personal Identity, Symbolism of Driving and Quality of Life*: “the world shrinks”.
- *Barriers: (Older Adults): Social Pressures (Stakeholders)*: “The car has always been a symbol,

for many generations, for a whole lot of things- independence, wealth, stability, and so forth.”

- *Barriers (Older Adults): Attitudes and Perceptions (Stakeholders):* “fear of isolation”.
- *Significance: Personal Identity, Symbolism of Driving and Quality of Life:* “Having a driver’s license was a status symbol” & “it is a bit of an ego thing”.
- *Significance: Personal Identity (Stakeholders):* “that is the thread that is holding their life together”.
- *Significance: Personal Identity (Stakeholders):* When you lose your license, “it is the end of the road”.
- *Responsibility for Safe Driving: Family, Friends and Neighbours (Older Adults):* “My kids have tried to talk to me. Forget it!?”
- *Responsibility for Safe Driving: Family, Friends and Neighbours (Older Adults):* “I have seen it about four different families where they have told their father or mother that they shouldn’t be driving and it has caused friction”.

In the final draft of the play, the plot points in the story did not exclusively address one single theme from the data as we had originally planned. The plot points and story-arc became multi-layered, informed by several themes. Rather than using verbatim text, we identified lines that represented a common perspective from the data. They informed the story-arc and were layered into the lines and characters that the actors created.

### ***Improvising with Research Data***

After reviewing the data, in rehearsal the director lead a writing exercise that encouraged the company to begin “tucking in highlights that stood out in the data” (17).

The youngest actor, playing the son and grandson in the family, had a pivotal realization while working on this exercise. He discovered an empathetic disconnect between young people, older adults and driving. This actor's moment of realization is one example where the personal connection to the material helped create unconscious artistic impulse. This realization greatly informed his character, and it also effectively and organically integrated the themes of ageism and intergenerational issues from the research data.

### ***Perspectives from Research Data***

Early in the process the company decided that it would be too confusing for three actors to play double roles. The company originally planned to include more actors if a supplementary grant was approved. The grant did not materialize; therefore, integrating all perspectives from the data was difficult with only three actors in the company. Our solution to include more perspectives was with unseen characters. The character of Grandma had dementia, a condition commonly referred to in the data, and we also incorporated another process towards driving cessation through her character that was also common in the data. The *Centre on Aging* pointed out that there were no characters representing people that live alone, so it was decided that Grandpa's friend Norm lived alone, and he had a significant presence in the final draft.

The devising company also began to consider rural residents throughout the island and the limited alternatives they have to driving. In order to include this, the play was set far from the downtown of Victoria in the suburbs.

### ***Adjusting the Order of Scenes***

The last major devising component clearly demanded a mixture of artistry and discipline. The task was to strategically order the scenes in the play to create an interesting and engaging story

structure.

The characters Joanne, the mother, and MJ, her son, were also further developed in the final rehearsal week before the devising work was handed over to the playwright. For MJ, character development built dramatic tension, momentum and brought significance to the moment when he reveals his driving suspension, and it became a major crisis for the whole family. Joanne's responsibilities and stresses are multiplied, deepening her character and raising the stakes for all members in the family.

The play became one that focused on Grandpa and his family members. This multiple focus allowed for a representation of many perspectives/voices involved in issues related to older adults and driving.

### **Similarities in *No Particular Place To Go* to Other Projects that also Strove to Balance Analytic Discipline with Artistic Intuition**

Several components were main motivators to maintain a balance between disciplined integration of qualitative data and our artistic theatre skills in *No Particular Place To Go*. These main components were also similar processes in other research-based theatre projects.

Exploring personal connections and understandings of the issue before dramatizing the data was a significant first step in our devising process, as well as other projects (6-9,11). For example, during the *Handle With Care?* rehearsal, the actors were given time to familiarize themselves with Metastatic breast cancer (7). Examining one's understandings, perceptions, and connections to the issue brings the devising team closer to the work because they learn that they have a part to play in addressing the issue. Forming close connections with participants who struggle with the issue can bring a great deal of responsibility and significance to the project for actors to present data with the utmost care and skill.

Learning more about the issues the performance aims to address, and meeting people who are actually involved in the issues in their lives, makes the devising team feel responsible for accurately representing the voices of the participants from the research study.

In *No Particular Place To Go*, John, a professional actor who was also an older adult experiencing similar issues to those of the older adults in the focus group, was a prominent member of the devising team. He shared his driving memories, pictures of his old cars, newspaper clippings about older adults driving on the island, and ideas on how to formulate the plot. A person in the devising team who has come from the same group as the participants that the data was collected from is a true asset. The personal connections and relationships that formed and the genuine emotion that the devising team was able to witness was above and beyond anything we could have received from the mountain of data. The creative team for *Handle With Care?* also consisted of some actors with metastatic breast cancer, and Gray et al. report similar experiences:

It was listening to the stories about their lives, and in coming to care about them as people that we entered more fully into the meanings of diagnosis for their lives and for the lives of the people around them. From this, we were able to engage in a more direct and emotional way with the research data, to understand it more fully, and to carry that understanding into our performances (7).

John, the older adult actor in *No Particular Place To Go*, was so personally devoted to the project that he served as a motivator for the whole team to bring our hearts and minds to the project, unconsciously developing our whole team.

Theatricalizing themes, rather than staging verbatim quotes, requires artistic impulse and creativity. This method, if appropriate for the data that is to be represented, can assist in the drive to the intuitive. In addition to *No Particular Place To Go*, theatricalizing themes was also done in *Handle With Care?* (7), as well as in the *S.A.S.P.I* project in South Africa (6). In all three projects, theatrically

exploring themes provided an impetus for both the audience and devising team to dig deeper into the issue and find out more.

The emphasis that our devising process had on developing rounded characters made our project unique. Strong character development was one main aspect that kept us from creating a play that was not too didactic. During the creation of the play, if the situation or lines did not seem natural for that character, they would be adjusted. One actor, John, was an experienced and established professional actor and was able to improvise very naturally in character. The other two actors were University of Victoria graduates who had specialised in Applied Theatre; yet all of the actors felt extremely comfortable improvising with their characters on and off the stage, and could answer questions about their motivations, future plans, etc. The multi-layered characters created contributed to the success of the in-role post-show conversations, where the audience directed most questions to the characters, and not the actors (18).

A delicate balance was maintained throughout the devising process for *No Particular Place To Go* between unconscious artistic processes motivated by what ‘felt right’, and conscious thought processes concerned with accurately representing research data. The natural, organic character building process added theatrical substance to the play and, consequently, integrating verbatim lines from the data was not effective. It was our purpose to present themes and the general perspectives of the participants. The themes and quotes from the research data directly informed characters, situations, and scenes. This play showed what the data told.

**Notes:**

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[i] Bruno Bettelheim uses a phrase analogous to Bruner's in his book, *The Informed Heart*.

[ii] Excerpt from *Maybellene* by Chuck Berry:

Maybellene, why can't you be true  
Oh Maybellene, why can't you be true  
You've started back doin' the things you used to do

As I was motivatin' over the hill  
I saw Maybellene in a Coup de Ville  
A Cadillac arollin' on the open road  
Nothin' will outrun my V8 Ford  
The Cadillac doin' about ninety-five  
She's bumper to bumper, rollin' side by side  
Maybellene

[iii] Excerpt from *No Particular Place To Go* by Chuck Berry:

Ridin' along in my automobile  
My baby beside me at the wheel  
I stole a kiss at the turn of a mile  
My curiosity runnin' wild

Cruisin' and playin' the radio  
With no particular place to go.

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