

“What is in your heart?”
A scripted transcription of
an in-role post-show conversation

by

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Introduction: A facilitator's notes

The stage world never obeys the same rules as ours, because in its world, nothing else is possible besides what is there: no one else lives there; no other geography is available; no alternative actions can be taken.

To see this entire world, do this literally: Mold the play into a medium-sized ball, set it before you in the middle distance, and squint your eyes. Make the ball small enough that you can see the entire planet, not so small that you lose detail, and not so large that detail overwhelms the whole.

Before you is the “world of the play.” (Fuchs, 2004, p. 6)

At a talkback I attended at a professional theatre a couple of years ago, someone asked an actor what he thought about his character taking a certain action in the future, after the ending of the play. I thought to myself, “Hurrah! This is a spontaneous moment where the conversation is moving into the world of the play!” However, the actor’s response was crushing; he laughed it off by saying the question would have to be asked to the character, not to him, and that he didn’t know the answer. But He *is* the Character! Who else can we ask (perhaps the playwright, but that is rarely possible)? The actor is the only relationship we as audience have to a character; therefore, I believe it is the actor’s responsibility (and I don’t use that word lightly) to try to respond as best he can with all the expert information he has inside his body, heart and mind about that character, built up over weeks of rehearsal and even more weeks of preparation or performance. It is experiences like the one I’ve just described that have led me, as an audience educator, to wonder about how this problem of unsatisfactory and unsatisfying (for both sides) talkbacks might be addressed and improved.

While the term ‘talkbacks’ has currency in the theatre profession, I prefer to call these facilitated events *post-show conversations*, and I also really like Anne Ellis’ (2000) term “community conversations” and the guidelines she offers:

- 1) The conversation takes place in the performance space, immediately following the performance.
- 2) Everyone is welcome.
- 3) There are no experts.

- 4) Audience members are encouraged to further the dialogue by sharing stories.
- 5) As the dialogue grows, the artists tend to participate less, with audience members encouraged to speak directly to each other. (p. 93)

Janna Goodwin (2004) also writes about post-show conversations and makes a strong point when she says:

To possess the tools and abilities to competently, responsively, responsibly intervene in talk, so that it moves from routine and predictable to surprising, innovative, even transgressive, makes of the facilitator a true artistic collaborator, with the audience, in a creative act. (p. 332)

A good post-show facilitator needs to have all the skills of a good teacher, or even those of a Joker in Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed:

When the audience wants to discuss what they think, the joker's responsibility is a moral responsibility above all. It is important not to use this privileged position to impose ideas, because it is a privileged position. (Boal in Lyngstad & Eriksson, n.d., p. 3).

As Sullivan says in a 2004 article, "Effective Jokers must combine the skill of dramaturg, director, improvisational actor, drama therapist, political philosopher, rhetorician, talk show host and stand-up comic" (p. 23).

In my experience, post-show conversations work best when both the audience members and the actors have 'rehearsed' for them. The model of audience education that I developed in my graduate studies suggests that student audiences can prepare for a performance by entering into the world of a play they are to see through process drama (Fuchs, 2004; O'Neill, 1995; Prendergast, 2002, 2008). In this way, students can explore the settings, characters, themes and issues within a play through role play, improvisation, movement and other drama-based strategies. Ideally, actors in the production are invited in to this preparatory workshop to function as audience members for this work (an intentional role reversal) and to offer their perspectives on what they see happening that is of interest to them. This has always worked extremely well in

practice; actors can immediately see for themselves the relevance of what the students are doing, because it resonates so clearly with their own rehearsal process.

When these conditions are in place, the post-show conversation often takes care of itself with not too much required from me as facilitator. Both sides are reigniting a relationship they established before the show and after the curtain call they now have so much more to talk about. My attention is on keeping the conversation focused on the characters, their choices and actions as seen in the play and their future possibilities. While it is understandable that audience members will also want to take advantage of the opportunity to talk with actors around their technical challenges or their lives in the business, my strategy is to acknowledge those kinds of not-in-the-world-of-the-play questions and responses and save them for the end of the conversation.

A recently published short reflection piece in *Research in Drama Education* looks at an experiment I carried out when performing in an applied theatre production of Dario Fo and Franca Rame's one-woman play *Peace Mum*, about American peace activist Cindy Sheehan (Prendergast, 2010). I performed this play in 2007 and 2008 both for the general public and in applied theatre classes at the University of Victoria and in a number of Victoria area high schools. I decided to try to carry out the post-show conversations—facilitated by the show's director Lina De Guevara—while remaining in-role. It occurred to me that this technique, which is used a lot in theatre in education, might work well in other applied theatre or even in mainstream theatre productions. In *Peace Mum*, De Guevara—who is a very experienced educator and Theatre of the Oppressed Joker—established that I was in-role when I sat in the folding camp chair that Sheehan used for her six week vigil outside of George Bush's ranch in Texas. If a question came at me as the actor, I simply stood up and responded out-of-role. As it turned out, very few questions were posed to me out-of-role, but when it happened it seemed to

work very well to stand and then sit back down if the next question was for the character. The experience was overwhelmingly positive for both me and the student audiences involved, so I have been interested in furthering this work. The main advantage of this approach, of course, is that the characters live in the world of the play, so audiences can stay in that world with them for a longer period of time.

Theatre for Young Audiences playwright Laurie Brooks (2005) talks about developing interactive post-shows for her own plays where audiences engaged with actors in-role using both Theatre of the Oppressed and process drama techniques. Audiences were asked, for example, to place characters in a line-up of personal responsibility (from least to most 'guilty') in relation to events in one of her plays. The audience has to work together to determine where to place each character, and the characters are in-role so they get to respond by agreeing or disagreeing with where they are being placed. My one concern is that there is a risk that these events become like a game-show or talk-show and could perhaps be a bit silly, a negative possibility for which post-show Jokers/facilitators will be directly responsible in handling. Careful preparatory work with the actors should alleviate these concerns, including Brooks' wise advice to keep the actors' attention on the audience and on the learning opportunities in these activities.

Audience members enter into a kind of social contract with a performance, and I think it is only appropriate that the contract continue into a post-show conversation (Galper, n.d.). Because of that, as facilitator I greet the audience, thank them for their participation in the post-show event, give them a clear timeline—twenty minutes is pretty standard—and let them know what the 'rules of the game' are going to be. For an in-role post-show conversation, I begin by introducing the characters and then ten minutes later re-introduce them as actors. The second half of the conversation then allows for audience members to dialogue with either a character or an actor.

In 2008, I was invited to join a joint interdisciplinary research study on older driver safety in which the data collected from focus groups held on this topic were used as the basis for an applied theatre project developed and performed by members of the Applied Theatre program at the University of Victoria. My role was to facilitate some post-show conversations and we successfully applied for ethical approval to capture these dialogues via audiotape. My plan was to conduct in-role experiments with each of these post-shows, which meant having data gathered on this under-researched area in the fields of theatre studies, drama/theatre education and applied theatre.

There is a need to be honest about the limitations of this in-role post-show approach, as it is not going to necessarily work in all kinds of settings and theatre productions. For example, in applied theatre—in which post-show conversations are a pretty essential ingredient of the overall process—many playbuilt shows involve actors taking on multiple roles. Who does the audience address a question to if one actor has played three or four (or even more!) different roles? There may be some creative ways to get around this problem, such as having placards, props or other objects representing each character onstage and having audience members indicate which character they are interested in speaking with, but this is a very real issue to think through.

I was expecting to have to deal with this situation in this current research project, but much to my surprise and delight, the acting company, director and playwright in this project developed quite an atypical applied theatre production out of the research data they were given by the qualitative research team from The Centre on Aging. Whereas most applied theatre shows are presentational in nature and tend to be mixed-bag collections of scenes, monologues, and other techniques (such as puppetry, songs, movement sequences etc.), this script is entirely representational. It is a fully developed and one-act play called *No Particular Place to Go* with three characters who remain in those set roles throughout the 45 minute show. They are a single

mother, her young adult son and her aging father. The father/grandfather's driving ability is diminishing and the play explores how the problem of convincing Grandpa to give up his driving licence is addressed. It is played out at the family's kitchen table in a number of scenes over a period of weeks and it is left fairly open-ended with the audience wondering how this issue will eventually be resolved. The production is highly polished and professional and the play is very well-written. As the play turned out to be a more traditional script than I expected, ironically it lent itself to in-role post-shows.

The company toured the show around Victoria and Vancouver Island in senior centres and then went on to Richmond, BC to present it at a conference dedicated to eldercare.

The scripted transcription that follows has allowed me to present an edited version of the in-role post-show conversations I facilitated at three performances of *No Particular Place to Go*, two with senior audiences and one from the geriatric care conference. I am choosing to use a scripted form as an experimental arts-based way of working with qualitative data that is consciously very resistant to standard practices of coding and analysis (Saldaña, 2003, 2005). As an arts-based researcher, I always feel I am methodologically in the right place when my method works as a way of 'verbing' my topic, of putting it into action. It feels right to me, therefore, to represent my understanding of a post-show conversation in the form of dramatic dialogue as *verbatim* or *transcript theatre* (see Belliveau, 2008; Blank & Jensen, 2005; Faulkner, 2009; Reinelt, 2006; Saldaña, 2003, 2005). Every word is taken from the transcripts, but I have created composite responses for the Audience Members and the dialogue incorporates parts of each of the three transcribed post-show conversations.

This process has proved very useful as a way to reflect and see in very concrete ways how deeply engaged the audience members were with the play. Across the transcripts in their raw form, audiences for this play chose to speak more often and with more commitment to the

characters rather than the actors, although the overall quality of the conversation was high in both instances. My long-term goal in presenting this scripted transcription is to encourage in-role post-show conversations becoming standard practice in both applied theatre and more mainstream theatre settings.

Walter Pitman (2003) says that informal post-show discussion amongst audience members that “takes place after 10 p.m. in theatre foyers, on the street...and in nearby bars and restaurants [is] the largest, most consistently pervasive, and most continuing form of drama education to be found in our society” (p. 163). If applied theatre practitioners and drama/theatre educators can get those kinds of conversations started effectively after a show, there is real hope they may continue. The scripted transcription of an in-role post-show conversation that follows allows for thinking through the implications of what Pitman says in relation to developing audience education curricula in drama education and post-performance practices in applied theatre. The potential of this approach lies in engendering cultural conversations, as presented below, that are rooted in the world of a play and within which actors and spectators can co-exist, collaborate and communicate in educational and meaningful ways.

No Particular Place to Go: A Scripted Post-Show Conversation

CAST:

MONICA.....Post-show facilitator

JOHN (Actor).....Grandpa (widower who lives with his daughter Joanne and grandson Mikey)

ANNE (Actor).....Joanne (divorced single parent and caregiver)

REID (Actor).....Mikey (son and grandson, late teens)

AUDIENCE MEMBERS #1-11

SETTING: In an Auditorium and onstage following a performance of *No Particular Place to Go*.

Audience members are older drivers, their family members, and various professional stakeholders in driving and geriatrics.

TIME: The present

MONICA enters along with the three actors, who are all still in-role. The actors sit in a row facing the audience. MONICA remains standing throughout.

MONICA (*To the audience*): I would like to invite you into a conversation. If you have a question you can ask a question if you have one, but we are really interested in hearing how you responded to the story of the this family that you met in the play and if there was anything that came to mind around your own experience, within your own family, or circle of friends around the issue of older driver safety. Those are the kinds of things we want to talk to you about. I promise it will be maximum 20 minutes. I would ask to begin this conversation by talking to the characters. You know that this is Grandpa, and this is Joanne, and this is Mikey. If you have

something that you would like to say, or ask a question of one of the characters in the play, we would love to hear it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1: Grandpa, putting aside Joanne's and Mikey's perception and beliefs about whether or not you should drive, they are applying a lot of pressure on you to not drive, put that aside, what is in your heart? Do you think you are safe to drive, honestly?

JOHN (as Grandpa): I think I am pretty much safe to drive. Little things I am aware of now. As I said, it is going to be me that decides.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1: What do you need to have in place to help you make that decision, either way?

JOHN (as Grandpa): Well probably spending more time, as somebody suggested, going on the bus with my kids, to see what that is like. Although where we live that is impractical. We have to walk a ways to get the bus. In the bad weather that is not good. Possibly I might consider moving back to the city. If I am living in a more urban environment, I can ride the bus easily then, I guess. Not my first choice, but I know, like everybody, that that time is going to come, but I just don't want it to happen right away. I'm not ready for it to happen, but I know it is there. It is in my mind and I'm starting to make plans.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2: I want to ask Joanne [something]. As you know you can anonymously report somebody who you think can be a danger on the road, and they have to come in and do a driving test. I am just wondering why didn't do you that, or if you did?

ANNE (as Joanne): Well in fact I didn't, I hadn't. I think would probably be doing that very soon. I did mention to the doctor in one of my conversations, I said, to him, "What if I reported him?" And he said, "No they don't accept that." I am not sure. But yes, I am at the point where I am going to do pretty much anything I can to get him off the road.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2: It is a difficult choice.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3: We had that experience.

MONICA: And how did that go?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3: Well he did have his driver's licence taken away from him, but he was also suffering from the early stages of Alzheimer's. ... Then we had to stop him from giving money away...

MONICA: Thank you for sharing your story. That is exactly what we are interested in, to see if your experiences are in any way triggered or related to what we saw in the play. Would anyone else like to ask a question of the characters in the play, or make a comment?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #4: I felt like grandpa there and she sounds like my daughter. I feel that I am still okay. But she is watching me.

MONICA: Is there anything you would like to say to the grandpa or the daughter?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #4: No, I feel that I know that I want to be driving. I can tell myself.

MONICA: I think grandpa feels pretty much the same way.

JOHN (as Grandpa): I have gotten to the point where I am starting to think that I am probably going to have to make this decision on my own, but it is going to be my decision.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #5: I know we have been talking about senior drivers, but I am really concerned about Joanne, because she was always stressed and I was wondering how you were feeling behind the wheel?

ANNE (as Joanne): I'm pretty stressed behind the wheel. I am feeling pretty stressed all the time. I hate to admit it, but I'm talking on my cell phone when I am driving obviously (*as seen in the play*). That is not a good thing. I definitely need to think about my own safety and I think I should get some yoga happening pretty soon as well. I think I'm just taking care of everything and I'm so focused on doing what I have to do, that I am not really thinking too much about my own safety on the road, which is wrong.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #5: In New York state, and I think a few other states in America, they have banned cell phone talk in cars. My sister-in-law who is a very good real estate agent, bought herself a Bluetooth, that is the hands-free that goes on your ear, so you can keep your hands on the wheel. You are still talking which is a distraction, but much safer than holding a phone up to your ear. That is something to think about Joanne.

MONICA: Thank you for that. Nice advice.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #6: (*to Grandpa*) I understood that you had suggested to Sara (*the character's deceased wife*) to stop driving. When you were talking to Sara, your wife, you told Sara to stop driving when she was sick. How is that the same as your situation? And how is it different?

JOHN (as Grandpa): That is a hard one you know. Sara did get ill, and there comes a time when you become so ill that you simply can't do something. I think she wanted to. It got to the point where her mind was going. She would go down to the mall and disappear and sometimes I was worried if she was ever going to come back. And there were times when I actually had to go with somebody to find her because she forgot where she parked the car. That scared me a lot. And that is when I did say to her, "I have got to take your keys away. I can't lose you this way."

AUDIENCE MEMBER #6: Do you think that Joanne is scared like you were scared?

JOHN (as Grandpa): She probably is, yes. I'm listening to Joanne.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #7: I want to ask Mikey why he didn't tell his mother about the time that Grandpa almost hit somebody?

REED (as Mikey): Well, I really respect my grandpa, I'm worried about him, [and] there was no real way to tell him to his face that he needs to get some help in driving. He has been there for me; he has driven me around my whole life. I don't want him to give up his licence, especially now because I am struggling, because I don't have a car, I don't have a licence right now. I need

to get around. It is difficult for me to try and talk to my mom about it. It is really tough. I respect the man, but it is hard.

MONICA: It is hard to squeal on your grandpa. I want to open up this conversation by conjuring up three people that you haven't met yet who are right here: Reed, Anne, and John. These are the actors who played their roles. Now we have six people on the stage, and you can choose to ask a question of an actor or a character. It shifts your opportunities here. You are still in the world of the play if you choose to continue that, or you may switch out of the world of the play and ask a question about this project, the process, the challenges, anything you like.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #8: Question for Joanne and Mikey Jr., how aware are you of the alternatives for driving? What are you going to do? How do you access that information? How aware is this family?

ANNE (as Joanne): I'm very aware of what his options are.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #8: What are the options?

ANNE (as Joanne): The bus is an option. He seems to think that he has to walk 10 miles to get the bus, but it is actually just a few blocks. Taxis will work if they need to. But we are a very tight family, and we will make it work, we will work together so that this transition, when it happens, works for all of us.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #8: What are the alternative transportations forms? How do you get that information?

ANNE (as Joanne): What we would need to do is sit down and do some research, find out what is out there, available for my dad and for me, in order to help him. Also my father goes to church every Sunday, he has a number of people that he has been close with for many many years, and I think what we would do is start working to create a driving pool for him, that kind of thing. He does have very close relationships and I want to help to foster that in any way that I

can. I am very busy. I work very hard. I have just become a single parent, and I have a lot on my plate. My top priority is my family. Right now, the big issue for my family is my dad's safety.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #9: Really awesome job. That was a really great performance. How much did you take from the actual, your own characters in the play building?

JOHN (as himself): It is inevitable in this process that you work from a personal point of view at times. I had an experience with my own father who drove until he was 91 years old, but he had to get around with a walker. He was living in Florida at the time with my sister and brother-in-law. I was down visiting with my daughter. My sister and my daughter and I, sat my dad down one day and said, "Maybe it is time to maybe think about giving up the car?" "Oh, I just drive to church on Sundays." But the traffic was horrendous. The amazing thing was, the next day at lunch or breakfast he said, "I have thought about it, and you are probably right." He made the decision. We didn't put any pressure on him. That was a personal experience that I had.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #10: I just wanted to address the very personal aspect of driving/not driving, it is quite powerful in that nothing was resolved in terms of your presentation. There was not a final decision made, or final decision or direction to be taken, because it is such a huge issue. You really addressed that so powerfully and strongly in terms of how important it was for you, and what a strong part of your own identity it was. I also can relate to it, from my own experience with my mother. My mom drove for many many years, as an older adult, and lived many miles away from her kids. We heard, years later, in little clips of conversation that she had had an accident that had caused the end of her driving. But this was never fully divulged and shared. We only found out about it after the fact. There was always a great deal of shame and disappointment attached to it. Besides that, which was big, what lasted for many years after that was her sadness, her sadness and disappointment and how much she had loved driving, as a

single older woman, had loved driving and the fact that she was able to drive her friends around, and help, and provide that service to them when they had no other means. It was very powerful stuff.

MONICA: Thank you for your story. So much of what we hope will happen is happening with people saying, “this reminds me of something that I have gone through, am going through.”

AUDIENCE MEMBER #11: I have a question for you, how do you intend to use the information that you gather?

MONICA: We are a research team from different disciplines. I’m obviously the theatre person with this team of wonderful actors. I’m interested in actually what we have just done. My research interest is in having the actors come up here, in character, [as] an experiment, and I really didn’t know how you might respond to that. It was wonderful to hear you engaging with the characters. Generally in theatre we don’t do [that] with adults, or older adults, we do that kind of process with kids in schools. Kids in schools would be totally comfortably talking to the characters, but I wasn’t sure how it was going to go with a mature audience, so I am very happy. And of course the actors did a lovely job didn’t they? The questionnaire that you just did, that material is for the qualitative researchers in The Centre on Aging at the University of Victoria and they are going to go through that information and the focus groups and the interviews that they have already done and they are going to see if this play has had a measurable affect on people’s attitudes and ideas around this issue. That is again, the research we don’t know. That is what we will find out. Thank you everyone for helping us. (*Applause*)

THE END

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