

# The social developmental value of theater arts

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



Applied Theatre is an umbrella term used to describe theatre and drama based practices with the aim of social development. The topics can range from targets of community building, protest, cultural awareness and sensitivities, harm reduction, religion, health, socio-economic representation, and educational purposes. Within Applied Theatre, there are no set traditional theatrical methods but a preference towards innovative and interactive methods where actors often have the freedom to engage with the audience and where audiences shape the philosophy as well as the content of the piece.

As once said by Augusto Boal, a famous Applied Theatre practitioner who spearheaded a creative arts movement called "Theatre of the Oppressed;" "Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our futures, rather than just waiting for it" This philosophy is a statement of artistic humanitarianism where creative and performance arts reach the height of their power to create and inspire, as performance is combined with everyday people and represents individuals and their society rather than fulfilling a goal of entertaining, thrilling, and profit making.

This is using theatre as an investment in the social economy. To look more in-depth at the educational value and social significance of Applied Theatre, major concepts of the field could be examined through three diverse applications. These applications will include culture, harm reduction, and protest. Culture From primitive story telling, to Shakespearean cultural-

political representations of Elizabethan society; the performing arts has historically always been a part of most cultures.

Nowadays where cultures are highly mosaic in nature and where we find ourselves in the midst of fusing and evolving identities, and an influence of masses of media and technology; the need for cultural identity is more crucial than ever. This is greatly apparent in the North American indigenous population that throughout history has suffered copious amounts of underrepresentation, abuse, and annihilation. Rooted in the 16th century European explorations, the Native people of North America have always undergone ill treatment. The historical European desire to colonize and assimilate foreigners was carried out up until the end of the 20th century where indigenous peoples' children were sent to concentration camp-style schools run primarily by the catholic church under rigid government policies concerning Natives which was referred to as " Indians affairs. " The children were stripped of their language, culture, religion, and traditions and forced to behave in a foreign way.

This caused domino effects amounting to Canada and America's current situation where Native people continue to suffer from social disorders, and be at a high risk for alcoholism, drug-use, prostitution, poverty, and subjection to adoption and fostercare as well as a lack of community resources. In recent years, great efforts have been put in place to restore Native culture that was once outlawed. Traditionally their history was an oral tradition recorded through story telling.

This was seen as a unique opportunity to apply theatre arts to a suffering population in hopes of gaining cultural identity and applied to the greater North American population to raise awareness and understanding towards Native people. In the Eastern Canadian province of Ontario in the small town of Manitowaning there is a theatre group called the De-ba-jeh-mu-jig. This name comes from the indigenous languages of Cree and Ojibway meaning “Story Tellers. The company is non-profit and community based and currently produces a number of performances including children’s performances and interactive theatre using their own unique creation/writing process and methodology with the purpose of representing and showcasing the local indigenous culture and engaging in home-grown solutions to their own challenges for cultural and social development. They’ve done numerous productions and tours of shows with unique titles such as “The Indian Affairs” and “New World Brave,” whose titles themselves exemplify the content of their aim.

The productions often encompass the stories of their traditions, religion/spirituality, history, language, and survival and are often intertwined with modern day cultural challenges. The company has also done improvisation projects with topics such as careers and fetal alcohol syndrome as well as other outreach programs to foster artistic engagement in the community. The works of this company sum up the power of theatre arts in a culturally applied sense and continue to educate, inspire, and engage a generation as well as harmonize and restore a once lost people and their culture into modern society.

Harm Reduction Harm reduction is a term, which refers to policy put in place to cut down the practice of human-behavioural activity that may produce harmful effects. This includes a range of topics including illegal, and risky/dangerous practices. For example, harm reduction public policy could be attributed to things such as Drugs including illegal substances, needles, alcohol related issues, Tobacco, and drug crime, as well as Sex including topics such as safe sex, STI's, HIV, AIDS, prostitution, as well as more psychological and less intensive topics like mental health, self-harm, andbullying.

By analyzing the works of Sponsored Arts ForEducation, known as S. A. F. E. , a Kenyan non-governmental organization with the mandate of delivering social change by addressing controversial topics. They primarily focus on social aspects, treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS and safe sex andfamilyplanning, but also include topics such as peace, female circumsicion, and female rights/empowerment, water and health, prisoner outreach, environmental issues, Drug use, and LGBT topics.

All of these outreach topics are delivered through creative mobile theatre performances targeting rural areas of Kenya where social stigma, the lack info technology and education are hindering people's health and safety and contributing to the expanse of the aforementioned issues. S. A. F. E. , started by British actor Nick Reding, is a proactive charity whose philosophy states it's belief that dance, musicand theatre break down barriers and draw people in thus creating social change.

In 2012 Coronation Street writer Damon Rochefort collaborated with S. A. F. E. with a vision that the dramatic effect of a soap opera in Britain could have the same effect anywhere with any culturally differing social circumstances. Soap operas play on issues and emotions that reflect real people's lives in the cultural sense of the viewers, and they perform long running dramatized renditions that offer a real insight into each characters' lives.

Thus, they are drawing the viewers into long time subscription and allowing them to experience a sense of escape. During the collaboration, the cast of Coronation Street visited Kenya to create a unique soap style piece of drama that plays on life changing messages in the sense of local cultural and the issues and struggles that face their society. The team visited Bangala, a slum of 20 000 people, one of the nation of 1. 5 million HIV positive people's hardest hit areas.

Most people don't know how to prevent the spreading of the disease and usually don't know their own status. There is a huge social stigma about HIV and families known to be positive are demonized and alienated. Infected mothers pass the virus to their children because there is a lack of knowledge about drugs for pregnant women that block the passing, and the children face barriers to education and freedom because they too are infected. The virus continues to be spread because of stigma, ignorance, and unavailability of condoms.

The cast of Coronation street had to use these issues to train Kenyan actors and collaborate to put on a rehearsed non scripted (improvised) production.

The finished product was a story about two local families who have to come to terms with a series of events consisting of whatever life threw at them (in a local context) including relationships, rape, child prostitution, family planning, female courage, health, and violence. They portrayed positive ways of dealing with and preventing these things and used comedic effect to break stigma and engage the audience and set them at ease.

The production was done with the use of a mobile theatre that consists of a large vehicle, which has been fitted to store a stage, which retracts out of the side of the vehicle forming a large raised platform, and fitted with speakers. This is a very pure and original form of theatre, which is intimate and innovative. A perfect fit for the unique and original concept of applied theatre. Analyzing the creation of such a performance, it is apparent that copious attention to detail is necessary to create the right effect. Dealing with such serious topics it is important to know how to combine the right amount of comedy with the right amount of seriousness. In utilizing this form of theatre correctly it is possible to realize the full potential of the arts and reduce harm to the masses. After the Coronation Street/S. M. A. R. T. show, counseling services and resources were available such as a condom tent and family planning tutorials. After a one year tour of one S. M. A. R. T. applied theatre tour in Kenya, an audience of 80 000 people would have viewed the show and 18 000 would have learned their HIV status as a result.

Protest The early formations of applied theatre are apparent through the theatrical practices of classical drama and the politically motivated arts movements of 18 and 19th century Europe. Most notably, the French

Revolution had a largely politically fuelled theatre scene. During France's period of the "Ancien Regime" where France was under monarchical rule, theatre was highly regulated by the monarchy and only three approved theatres existed in France. These displayed works that were highly censored and apolitical.

After the fall of the monarchy, there was more freedom, which allowed for more theatres to be put up and a more vivid dramatic arts scene emerged, but continued to be censored. In 1791 a law was passed called the Chapelier Law which gave theatres the right to operate free from governmental oversight. Immediately following this the number of theatres boomed and theatre began to be seen as an arena of new French ideology and a pillar in the community. This period, known as the Enlightenment, fifty three new theatres opened and were constructed with vast audience space whilst new plays were constantly being written.

There was an area of the theatre known as the 'Parterre' where the working class would react and interact with their emotions towards what was being portrayed on stage quickly became a melting pot of political ideology and national identity and emotion. During the Enlightenment, plays were so politically fueled that French newspapers would criticize plays which lacked political representation saying that they were anti-revolutionary and a distraction from the pressing issues of society.

For example, a famous and elaborate dramatic opera by Paisiello performed in Paris and was condemned, publicly petitioned against and reported to the



National Assembly because of the general opinion of it being sensuous blasphemy with no significance or respect towards political fuel, national identity or democratic flow of interest. In fact, the importance of political theatre was so grave that the law even stated that any theatre that "performs works attempting to undermine public spirit and to revive the shameful superstition of royalty will be closed, and the directors will be arrested and punished to the full extent of the law." This type of theatre was labeled as 'Pieces de circonstance' or more literally translated, Pieces representing the circumstances. Plays such as "The Fall of Toulon" by benoit Picard used a story line based on true events and speeches by notable French figures such as Robespierre, whilst incorporating fuel for national pride, the national anthem, and a portrayal of overcoming struggle, freedom of expression, and comedy to make a mockery of the plight once faced in regards to the old monarchical system.

These innovative pieces gave the ever so changing nation pride, courage, and esteem to address issues facing the build of their new society, as well as a safe place to discuss political feelings and national identity. The role played by the more scripted and political classical French drama from the Enlightenment period of the French Revolution, was pivotal in producing direct effects upon society and can be used as inspiration for modern theatre applied to modern day struggles. Now with an added creativity and freedom, with aspects such as improvisation, and deliberate engagement with the audience, the power to be mobile, and more insight to the diversity of issues that perturb the human race, theatre can be used as a perfect tool for

engaging a society in forms of protest and movements in a peaceful and democratic manner. These early works gave way for modern practitioners to fulfill their own philosophies using theater as a catalyst in an ongoing protest for change. Augusto Boal, a Brazilian applied theatre pioneer spent a lifetime producing social change via dramatic arts. In his early life he felt the need for the underclass of his nation to up rise through peaceful means.

He recognized the social iniquities and racial divide facing them. He felt that his own social class, race, and social status impeded the progression of a generation of people subjected to life in the slums of his city. His philosophy was that change came from within the target group rather than an imposition of change upon them. His slogan was a quote from William Shakespeare's Hamlet stating that "theatre is like a mirror that reflects our virtues and defects equally." Boal went on to start the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed. This organization had as an objective the study, discussion, and expression of social issues.

They used this to protest and up-rise against diverse issues such as citizenship, culture, and oppressive policy all by means of theatricality. The works of Boal through the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed even gained a feat of having a law passed protecting crime victims and witnesses in Brazil, a valuable asset in the society of the oppressed people represented by the organization. Boal wrote many books including Theatre for the Oppressed, Games for Actors and Non Actors, The Rainbow of Desire: The Bo al Method of Theatre and Therapy, and Legislative Theatre.

In *Games for Actors and Non Actors*, Boal outlined a nearly every dramatic exercised he applied during his career. From this stemmed new kinds of innovative theatre such as the following: Newspaper Theatre is a technical system allowing an audience to make use of local news articles and other non-dramatic pieces of literature, and apply them into becoming a theatrical scene. Legislative theatre is a form that provides an opportunity for local voters to voice and protest their opinions in dialogue with government and institution using theatrical methods. The formulation of a piece is created based on proposed laws and policies.

The audience may join in as actors and express their views thus impacting the creation of the local policy. Forum Theatre is a highly interactive form of theatre where audience members could call upon a piece to pause, where mistreatment or oppression was evident in the storyline or amongst character interactions. Audience members would formulate solutions for a rational and preferred means of addressing and dealing with the subject. The audience shaped the course of which the piece would take. Invisible Theatre is the pursuit of an ambiguous performance in a location unsuspecting of a performance such as in a public setting.

This tricked spectators into thinking that a real event was taking place but the theme would always address social issues. It is a means of getting a message across to an audience who may not normally be open to view a such performance. It also allowed for public interaction into the piece. Boal's work went on to creating a practice called Drama Therapy based on the aforementioned principles. It is apparent that by drawing upon classical

methods and applying dramatic aims into aims of social development; that theatre can be used as a catalyst for change in modern society.

Innovation in theatrical forms are endless, and as long as creativity is used with enough insight into social needs, a powerful fusion is developed.

Whether the goal is to educate to reduce harm in a developing country and within vulnerable communities, or to build a sense of community and culture, to gain political interest, or to revolutionize a nation, the power of the dramatic arts is an unparalleled tool where possibilities are endless. Task List

1) The topic for my research is the social developmental aspect of theatre.

The aim is to look at the diversity in which theatre can be used as an applied tool.

The research will analyse Applied Theatre methods, history, and applications.

My reasoning for choosing this topic was because of a personal career specific interest. The only limitation was my inability to find live performances to gain a first hand experience as there were none in my area.

I was also limited to choosing only a few possible applications of applied theatre as the lists are endless as it is a creative process rather than a set method. 2) My sources of info are listed in detail in the bibliography. I used books and Internet.

Primary sources are sources of information that offer first hand knowledge of the subject. They are created during the time and within the direct context/environment of the subject. Secondary sources are continuations of primary sources, they are analysis, continuation, and interpretation of

subjects, and events out of direct context/period. 3) I chose to use books mainly and internet to look more in depth at concepts discovered in my readings. I will acquire my books from the Central Vancouver Public Library where there is the largest collection of books in Canada as well as a wealth of resources. (I used the system to search keywords such as: social change, applied theatre, theatre for change, political theatre, social drama, sociological drama, democratic drama, drama for change, theatre in the third world, humanitarian theatre. ) When using Internet I will verify sources prior to relying on their information. I will check the credibility of the authors and publicists.

4) Choose topic on the day asked by the instructor, find practical examples to broaden my perspective, select sources, gather notes and source details in a clear and concise method including brain tools such as mind maps and connections logs, analyse notes including primary and secondary information, choose a format for the final piece including the desired form of presentation, compose piece based on chosen format and information, proof read, edit, submit/present. 5) Do the research and write up project 6) Present project 7) Evaluation of Aims and Methods - Drawing on personal interests, my aims of showing the breadth of applications of theatre, its educational value, and its ability to impact society by bringing about social change, became very easy.

I feel that the sources of my information applied directly to my aims and that breaking down my aim into three subcategories of culture, protest, and harm reduction- made for a more concise way of getting my point across. These

three subcategories embodied the initial aim and each showed the educational value of theatre for that specific application. This happened through using practical examples, historical events, and practitioner profiling. My time table was effective as everything came together easily and on time.

My time table was more of a checklist instead of a dated series of events. My sources were very clear and understandable, as well as verified for credibility. Looking at websites, I always checked the name of the author and searched them on google, as well as the date of their publication to get the most up to date examples. Also when looking at the study of Applied Theatre I found that referring to university prospectuses aided myself in personally understanding its researchable value.