



Addressing SDG16.: Eliminating violence towards children – An applied theatre approach

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Abstract

We offer a case study of a long-running Aotearoa New Zealand-based applied theatre programme, Everyday Theatre. As both academics and Everyday Theatre practitioners, we explore how the programme addresses the aspirations of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.2, which is centred on eliminating violence towards children. Our reflections are informed by the qualitative data collected in our ongoing discussions as facilitators, our reflective journals, teacher evaluations of the programme, and a series of collaborative research workshops. We investigate the role and place of the drama conventions of teacher-in-role, pre-text, aesthetics, and framing. They are potent constituents of participatory theatre practice that can provoke both students and teachers to collaboratively conceptualise themselves and each other as active, responsible, critical, and empathetic agents for social change. These explorations throw light on how applied theatre practice can form small but significant contributions to engendering opportunities for students and

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teachers to consider how they could change their own future narratives, creating more socially cohesive local communities, and, in this way, addressing SDG 16.2.

Keywords: applied theatre, drama education, child abuse, family violence

Introduction

Violence against children is a global problem. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) estimated that over the year ending mid-July 2019, one in two children between the ages of 2 and 17 experienced some form of violence. Many countries are increasing their efforts to ensure these figures reduce, with WHO (2020) acknowledging “drastic action is needed” (p. xiii). Aotearoa New Zealand’s family violence rates ranked an appalling fifth out of the 34 OECD member countries in 2015 (Gammon, 2016; Grant, 2016; Henley, 2016; Ministry of Justice, 2015). Research shows some victims suffer more than 50 incidents of domestic violence before getting help, with “children /.../ present at two-thirds of all family violence incidents attended by Police” (Ministry of Justice, 2016, p. 1). In Aotearoa New Zealand, successive governments have committed to addressing ever-increasing rates of family harm, with plans “to develop a national strategy and action plan to reduce...family and sexual violence” (Ministry of Justice, 2018, n. p.) being announced at the end of September 2018. The national strategy and action plan comprise parts of the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015a), in particular, Strategic Development Goal (SDG) number 16.2, to “/.../ end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children” (United Nations, 2015b).

SDG 16.2 is concerned with bringing about social change by eliminating violence towards children. We understand social change as any movements catalysed towards, to use Freebody and Finneran’s (2015) terms, “achieving improved situations of social justice” (p. 47). For Freebody and Finneran (2015), social justice

represents an aspiration to bring equality and fairness to bear in any area of society and community where a conspicuous or indeed hidden inequity exists. As such, the aspiration to teach social justice should be understood as being fundamentally emancipatory in intent; premised upon the belief that improvements can be brought about in the lives of the people with whom we work and teach. [...] self-emancipation through

reflection is possible and indeed the primary means by which human beings acquire knowledge (p. 47).

As suggested by Freebody and Finneran (2015), self-emancipation through reflection is possible to a certain degree. We propose that it encompasses reciprocal respect, an ethics of care, a sense of solidarity, and a willingness to engage in critical reflection (Gregorzewski, 2021). We argue that collective, accumulative emancipation can lead to shifts in culture. Our values and perceived normalities are taken for granted, the grand narratives we tell and retell to each other become “truth”. At the same time, we acknowledge the need for material change in a neoliberal world and the existence of wider structural contexts and forces that create injustice and inequality. We recognise that small shifts in a person’s perspective cannot bring about social justice per se. By understanding social change towards justice as the *aspiration* to bring equality, fairness, and emancipation to bear, we intend to resist creating a hero narrative of our socially engaged, participatory theatre practice, Everyday Theatre, which constitutes the case study we discuss in this article. Rather, we offer critical, personal reflections on this long-running programme, designed and continually refined to provide a safe forum for students aged 12 to 14 to discuss issues of family violence, child abuse, and neglect.

In this article, we aim to answer the following questions: 1) How does Everyday Theatre contribute to responding to the aspirations of SDG 16.2? 2) How does Everyday Theatre create and hold space for children to participate in a programme that aims to eliminate violence perpetrated towards themselves?

Everyday Theatre constitutes a distinct example of applied theatre practice. Applied theatre describes socially engaged participatory theatre-making processes that have the potential to provoke embodied experiences to catalyse personal, first-hand explorations of pivotal social issues. The three of us, all concurrently academics and applied theatre workers, write this article based on our reflections of our experiences as Everyday Theatre facilitators. Peter O'Connor and Briar O'Connor’s Applied Theatre Company Ltd (ATCo) devised the programme in 2004, together with several other contracted collaborators. Dozens of others have since facilitated the programme. Moema Gregorzewski joined the team in 2017.

Reflective case study

Our reflections are informed by the qualitative data collected in our ongoing discussions as facilitators, our reflective journals, and teacher evaluations. We engaged in a series of research workshops, using Richardson's notion of writing as enquiry to co-create this article (Richardson, 2005). Specifically, we reflect on the role and place of the conventions teacher-in-role, pre-text, aesthetics, and framing as potent constituents of participatory theatre practice geared towards contributing to social change.

As part of our research workshops, we revisited teacher evaluations, collected over the programme's 20 years of delivery. Although not contractually obliged to provide an evaluation to funders, ATCo offers every adult present during the workshop the opportunity to feedback on the programme after every session. The company developed evaluation forms that have remained constant over the many years of delivery. The evaluation goal is for facilitators and the company directors to ask how other professionals in the room see the work. We continually use responses to shape and inform workshop changes. Facilitators clarify that completing the form is optional. Around 50% of forms are returned. To encourage honest feedback, the only identifiers collected are school or organization name, room number, and date of delivery.

The evaluation questions are based on the primary focus stipulated in the Everyday Theatre funding contract: to check the workshop created a safe forum for engagement with and discussion of sensitive topics. Only the adults in the room (usually teachers, but also teachers' aides, visitors, and others who attended) are asked to complete the evaluation form. This is primarily a pragmatic choice: asking a class, around 30 students, to complete a form would likely take up a considerable amount of time not available to a touring Theatre-in-Education company. However, we discuss the workshop with students at the end of each session, once they have "won" the game, to provide an opportunity for reflective discussion that deepens the learning (Bolton, 1984). Here, both facilitators and students are out of role. Students have the opportunity to tell the facilitator what they enjoyed the most about the workshop. They can query any issues and considerations they feel they have not addressed during the workshop. Facilitators also encourage students to talk about where in their school or community someone like the characters from the workshop might go should they require help on the topics raised. During this time, the facilitator gives students their bonus prize, which is a card printed with websites and telephone

numbers for young people to contact if they want to seek assistance for themselves or any of their friends. Discussing the bonus prize reinforces the need to be an active bystander, which is a topic usually raised during the workshop and always discussed in the reflection session.

As part of the post-workshop reflective discussion, we talk with students about the ideas they have offered. We ask if they assent for us to include their responses, either oral or written, as examples in the future, such as in reports to funders, or in academic writing. All facilitators keep a reflective journal in which they capture notable points from these oral discussions, participants' responses during the workshop, and the overall workshop structure and procedure. We discuss these journal entries during ATCo staff meetings. Over the years, we have incorporated students' ideas into the workshop. For example, students continuously enrich the workshop with specific gaming language and contemporary local vernacular. Drawing on these multiple conversations and prompted by our ongoing reflections in our journals and the evaluations, we wrote this article as a collective remembering of our experiences.

History and overview of Everyday Theatre

The alarmingly high rates of violence against children spurred Everyday Theatre's initial development in 2004. Along with a team of collaborators, Peter and Briar devised Everyday Theatre as part of the community-wide "Everyday Communities" multiagency initiative. The then Department of Child, Youth and Family (now Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children, or simply OT) funded the initiative to raise awareness of family violence, and foster advocacy for open dialogue and everyday interventions via an assets-based community development model. Since its inception, the Department has funded Everyday Theatre to provide a safe forum for intermediate school students (approximate ages 12 to 14) to discuss family relationships, particularly those issues that might contribute to family violence, child abuse and neglect. At the programme's heart sits the attempt to transform the dialogue surrounding the issue of violence against children to ensure children's participation in discussions about keeping themselves safe. Internal evaluations previously undertaken by the Department suggested they were successful in getting adults to talk about child abuse, but that children were missing from the conversation. Their evaluations showed the adults involved both figuratively and literally talked "about" the children at the centre of the issue (O'Connor, O'Connor, & Welsh Morris, 2006). However, children have the right to participate in these conversations.

Warrington and Larkins (2019) emphasise that protection and participation are often regarded separately yet should be addressed concurrently. Children's role in school-based child protection work should include ensuring children are made aware that people of any age have a right to object to unacceptable behaviours (B. O'Connor, 2021). Children's participation is enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Article 12 (Krappman, 2010) clearly upholds these rights, including children's right to "have a say in processes affecting their own lives" (Smith, 2016, p. 11).

Between 2004 and 2023, Everyday Theatre worked with 205 discrete schools across Aotearoa New Zealand. Many schools engaged the programme to return on an annual or biennial basis. We worked with approximately 80000 participants in nearly 2500 in-school sessions. Between 2004 and 2022, Everyday Theatre worked with 205 discrete schools across Aotearoa New Zealand. Many schools engaged the programme to return on an annual or biennial basis. We worked with approximately 75000 participants in 2344 in-school sessions. We ran additional sessions in evenings with some schools' wider community. Here, students who had participated in-class during the day could return and mentor caregivers through the programme. We ran other sessions with groups such as men's anger management classes, both training and experienced social workers, KidsLine telephone volunteers, and legal aid lawyers. We delivered further sessions at conferences both locally and internationally, at schools as masterclasses outside Aotearoa New Zealand, and as part of applied theatre training sessions with adults.

Everyday Theatre's structuring conventions

All sessions of Everyday Theatre employ a process drama structure. Students engage in a range of carefully scaffolded drama processes or conventions. This creates a safe forum within which students can critically reflect on the issues around family violence and child abuse. Everyday Theatre facilitators are, in role, intent on winning a multilevel, multiplayer game called *The Family Game Reloaded*. Each level of the game requires players to interact with the family and their story.

The game levels are designed so facilitators, students and teachers can manipulate the conventions towards richer learning about family dynamics, and, simultaneously win the game. Opportunities for improvisation with the structure – to respond in the moment to the game – help it unfold as a form of co-creation with all the players. The content generated by students is different each time the game is played. The

sequencing and adaptations of the conventions are different every time. This means the game is genuinely fresh and new whenever it is played, even after nearly 20 years.

The teacher-in-role convention frames Everyday Theatre facilitators as fictional "Games Masters". A Games Master is a gaming enthusiast who has played "every game there is" and enrolls students to "clock the hardest game online – *The Family Game Reloaded*". The role of the Games Master ensures that everyone in the classroom is aware that they are located within at least one fictional frame. This awareness provides everyone with distance, and thus a sense of safety, to the issues explored. Crucially, Games Masters ensure they encourage all teaching staff present in the classroom to join their students in participating in the game. Neelands' (2010b) notions of genuine active collaboration towards critical citizenship and the importance of ensemble-building among educators and learners in both dramatic and real worlds sit at the heart of how Everyday Theatre conceptualises its own potency as an avenue towards social change. Facilitators only drop their Games Master role once the class has won the game and is engaging in the final reflective discussion.

Games Masters ensure they carefully scaffold the workshop activities. They begin by encouraging students and teachers to participate and improvise only in pairs. Activities then slowly build up. Small group work ensues, with the option to perform group work to the whole class. Games Masters do not force students who do not want to perform to do so. Part of Everyday Theatre's child protection training focuses on ensuring Games Masters are aware of ways students might want to protect themselves from discussing the subject. Games Masters discreetly bring these behaviours, such as over- or under-engagement, to teachers' attention. Without discussing the student's personal circumstances, Games Masters remind teachers to review and, if necessary, enact their school's child protection policy.

In Everyday Theatre a performance introduces the fictional "augmented reality" game, *The Family Game Reloaded*. The performance is a scripted, rehearsed 20-minute piece of theatre based on a fictional, fragmented, open-ended, non-linear story. Games Masters intermittently take on the roles of different fictional family members. The performance clarifies that the only way to win is to help each of the six family members students meet in the game.

The pre-text begins:

Games Master 1 (to students): Kia ora, everyone! My gaming handle's JJ and we are here from Everyday Theatre to work with you today. Who here likes playing videos or computer games on their devices? Fantastic! Today we'll be playing a new augmented reality game. Hey, instead of me talking about it, how about I jump on in and show you how it works? I'll grab this games piece – this belongs to Jack. Jack's 12, and when I put this on I'll become Jack. Then you guys will have to help swipe me in, okay? I'm gonna count down from three, and I want you to swipe the play screen in front of you, like this, okay? Ready 3,2,1 Play

Games Master 2: What did you do that for, JJ? It's in multiplayer mode – hey JJ, you can't play on your own – it's in multiplayer mode. Hahaha. Now she's going to be stuck in there forever... Hey everyone, my name's Doc and I'm a Games Master. See, I've got the shirt Games Master, and the jacket. I'm just playing for the badge. I'm the best there is – you see my name at the top of all the online leader boards. I've clocked nearly every game there is, except this one, that is. It's called The Family Game Reloaded. They say it's the hardest game online. You see, it switches between all these profiles and players, and it gets really confusing. The only way to win is to help this family and everyone stuck inside it, and as this one found out, if you don't play by the rules, you can get stuck inside forever! JJ's done the right thing in taking on the games piece of Jack. Jack and T are both 12. Jack and T keep skipping school, hanging out at some carpark – I don't know why. If you count me in, you can send me to the carpark and we might be able to find out... 3,2,1 play.

The pre-text deliberately shows only fragmented snippets of the fictional family's life, which often provoke a handful of superficial student responses. As the workshop progresses, students collaboratively reflect critically on these instinctual reactions. For example, the pre-text shows the father, Dave, playing video games, bossing his partner Maraea around, disregarding his family's worries and needs. "He's a lazy bum!" "A cracked egg!" "A loser!" "A psycho!" students are often quick to exclaim. Sometimes this sentiment lingers, even after they have met a Games Master in role as Dave. Progressively, however, they co-create stories of a Dave who was abused during his own childhood, who is ridden with guilt, shame, fear, and sadness, who

escapes into the video game world every day because it is the only world in which he could ever win. As one student in role as Dave put it recently: "I play all the time to escape into another life. Because, to me, my own ... is not worth living for." Similarly, students slowly unpack how the mother, Maraea, is not simply a self-absorbed "cheater", as some students often call her as they watch the pre-text, but a complex human being acting within even more complex circumstances. Students might not engage in a fully-fledged critique of neoliberalism, yet they do talk about how seemingly inescapable and recurrent financial worries impact on the family's relationships, and on Maraea's desires and decision-making. Everyday Theatre's aesthetic and framing play a crucial role in catalysing such critical reflections.

Aesthetics in Everyday Theatre

Everyday Theatre's pre-text establishes the non-naturalistic aesthetics of the participatory theatre practice that constitutes the remainder of the workshop. The non-linear, complex game structure disrupts the tendency many students exhibit to exclusively engage in naturalistic forms of theatrical representation. Thanks to this structure, students, teachers, and Games Masters collaboratively play, rewind, fast forward, and "time jump" the fragmented and ever-evolving story. We do *not* work towards plot but move beyond simplistic chronological cause-and-effect narratives by generating complex webs of meaning (O'Neill, 1989; O'Neill & Lambert, 2006). We switch between characters and gradually introduce "think", "feel", "hope", and "fear" buttons to progressively complicate the meaning-making process and challenge students' emerging understandings. Everyday Theatre combines immersion in dramatic improvisation in-role as different fictional family members, and distance to that immersion and representational frame. In this way, Everyday Theatre catalyses personal reflection on the dramatic experiences at hand and, by extension, students' very own worldviews and attitudes (Heathcote, 1982; O'Neill, 1990). This connects the experiences made during the drama to the real world. For example, when students create still images of different moments in the family's past, present, or future, and bring these moments to life, they are only ever intermittently in role. We use so-called "freeze" and "release" buttons, which transport students out of the frame of the family's cosmos into the reality of the classroom as an abuse- and violence-free, supportive learning environment. When students interview a Games Master in role as a family member, the Games Master only ever portrays a character for a few minutes at a time. We frequently break out of the fiction and engage students in critical reflection, not only on the fictional character and their circumstances and social contexts, but also on students' own behaviours and

attitudes. Students discover how they – and the people around them – create meaning and interpret experiences, images, and utterances, both during the workshop and in their everyday lives.

The juxtaposition of presentational and representational theatre resonates with the principles of Neelands and Goode's conventions approach (2000). Anchored in an explicitly Brechtian philosophy (Neelands, 2007), Everyday Theatre is imbued with alienation strategies, or *Verfremdungseffekte*.

Consequently, in both the programme's pre-text and students' subsequent engagement, those participating are constantly alienated from the fictional story of T's dysfunctional family. Games Masters sequence dramatic conventions so they shatter familiar perspectives and attitudes into provocative strangeness, and turn ideas and identities perceived as foreign into shocking familiarity (Neelands, 1997). By rendering the familiar strange and bringing the unknown close to home, Everyday Theatre invites students to critically interrogate the dramatic events and the wider circumstances that brought them about. As a result, they challenge their own and each other's conceptions of self and other, prejudice, stereotypes, and distorted representations (cf. Neelands, 2010a). Specifically, *Verfremdungseffekte* includes Games Masters going in and out of role, giving or inviting from students' social commentary about their roles or utterances in role as their own "Games Master selves". This also includes montage, the distinct non-linear assembly of form and content that juxtaposes images, scenes, and sounds (Neelands, 1997; Neelands & Goode 2000). The *Verfremdung* occurs thanks to the gaming structure that throws participants in and out of their engagement in the dramatic strategies facilitated by means of the imaginary game buttons. Students are performing their aspiring Games Master selves, consciously presenting a story and its characters to each other. On the other hand, they are fully engaging in, and intermittently losing themselves in, the make-believe, or representation, of the fictional story and its characters. In this way, a provocative combination of presentational and representational theatre is at play. As a result, Everyday Theatre disrupts and challenges the normalisation of the realities experienced within representational frames (cf. Neelands, 2010b).

Everyday Theatre's aesthetic choice to engage in non-naturalistic theatre-making enables an interplay across ambiguity, uncertainty, and open-endedness of story and representation. It creates productive tension and fragmentation, which complicate and enrich meaning-making by inviting students to critically make personal

connections between their own everyday lives and fictional narratives. For example, when students hot-seat Moe in role as T (the 12-year-old protagonist, physically abused by his father, Dave, and emotionally neglected by his mother, Maraea), they sometimes ask her (T) what her cultural background is. Within the fictional frame, they are easily able to disregard the actor's accent and skin colour, just as her gender is no longer a dominating signifier. And so it is that Moe sometimes becomes a Samoan boy – because it *matters* to the young people; because they often subconsciously long to insert their own (hi)stories, knowledges, and experiences into the fiction. “T, what culture are you?” “Oh, he’s a Pacific Islander, man, can’t you see?” “Oh yeah, true!” Rich discussions emerge out of role on how our cultural backgrounds shape who we are and how we relate to the world. We explore how understanding T’s culture might enable us to help him better, more appropriately, more responsively. Back in the fictional frame, students test out their new understandings in what Boal (1979) would call “a rehearsal for the revolution” (p. 141), a momentary micro-evolution that is unlikely to be a magic wand that stops family violence and the conditions allowing it to thrive. Rather, it becomes a fleeting reminder of possibility. This possibility of change by virtue of compassion, agency, and commitment to solidarity may remain in a few students’ minds and hearts for a few minutes – in others, for many years.

Framing

In Everyday Theatre, a double framing takes place. One dramatic perspective, the cosmos of the fictional family, is placed within another: the fictional game structure. Bolton (1979) suggests that framing productively protects students *into* emotion, rather than from it. O'Connor et al. (2006) suggest that the double framing “provides a double protection but, paradoxically, a double opening for young people to feel the issues of the video game family” (p. 239). The framing allows students to take a step back from their own perspective and view issues from another standpoint. This distance allows framing to catalyse genuine, affective, and bold engagement with sensitive issues (Bolton, 1984). As no-penalty zones (Heathcote, 1991), frames afforded by participation in Everyday Theatre enable experimentation with attitudes and behaviours without fearing consequences or judgement in the real world. A reframing can occur. In the process of reframing, knowledges students and teachers hold about the world, particularly presumptions about family violence and child abuse and neglect, can be

placed in a new perspective. To take on a role is to detach oneself from what is implicitly understood and to blur temporarily the edges of a given world. It invites modification, adjustment, reshaping, and realignment of concepts already held. Through detachment from experiencing one can look at one's experiencing anew. (Bolton, 1985, p. 156)

Such reframing occurs not only in relation to students, but also teachers. A Games Master can challenge stereotypical teacher views on the characters, and on what "proper" in-class engagement should look like. The former routinely involves telling T, regularly abused by his father, to just listen to his hard-working mum more, do what he is told, and not be so difficult and selfish. The latter demands "conformist" student behaviour in which any kind of passionate, spontaneous acts of *acting* unexpectedly, impulsively, or critically is synonymous with *acting out*. As T in the hot seat, a Games Master can quite bluntly, even defiantly, oppose teachers' demands or comments. After all, in the moment of dramatic engagement, the Games Master is a 12-year-old troubled boy. Often, bearing witness to this shift in dynamic unchains students to express themselves, give form to critical thoughts, and articulate empathy with someone whose actions may seem, from the outside looking in, simply those of a bully, a truant, a nuisance.

As a framing device, Mantle of the Expert casts learners as experts of the themes explored in the dramatic engagement (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). We very subtly and implicitly frame students as experts. This tips the normalised adult-child power relations not only in- but also outside the classroom on their head. After all, students are experts at being 12, at playing games, navigating the microcosmos of an intermediate school, interacting with peers, teachers, principals, parents, and other adults. Sometimes, Games Masters genuinely do not understand what students say to them when they are in role as T. Students have to explain their vernacular to the Games Masters if they are to have any chance at gaining a deeper understanding into T's struggles. Sometimes, engagement in the fictional frame provokes students to explicitly frame *themselves* as experts, when they suggest they become (or spontaneously decide to act as) social workers, counsellors, or class representatives who talk to T and some of his family members.

Everyday Theatre's framing allows participants to experience themselves simultaneously occupying the realms of reality and fiction. Here, they can find themselves in a heightened state of double awareness (Collier, 2015). Boal (1995)

defines this liminal state as metaxis, “the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image” (p. 43). When “the fictional world overlaps or collides with lived experience” (Chinyowa, 2015, p. 170), participants experience themselves concurrently as protagonists and spectators of their own actions. The dual experience of empathising with a role, while reflecting on the self and the social circumstances influencing it, creates an interplay of memory and imagination. This reciprocal action opens up possibilities to reinterpret the past and to picture alternate ideas of the future (Boal, 1998). The notion of “dual affect” similarly describes how playing can cause children to “simultaneously weep as a patient and revel as a player” (Vygotsky, 1976, p. 549). This duality of experience, of role and affect; this simultaneity of dissonance, of different affective and cognitive responses, represents a perpetual cognitive and affective struggle towards meaning-making. A student may embody the character of the abusive father Dave in a freeze frame, in the moment he is hitting T. The student, as themselves, may be feeling deep contempt and even disrespect for Dave. Simultaneously, as Dave, they experience decades-old pain stemming from his own troubled childhood: shame, despair, fear of abandonment, and longing to be accepted, respected, and understood. The student can connect the unfamiliar – being an abusive father – with the familiar. Most of us know some shade of pain, shame, fear, and longing. We see the inner workings of T’s dysfunctional family in a different light, from a different perspective, through a different lens. Shifts in meaning-making occur. In applied theatre, we provoke participants to externalise their experiences; to critically reflect on, contextualise, and communicate them verbally or in an embodied manner.

Students may have past experiences of witnessing adults behaving aggressively and erratically out in the community, and they may label them as, for example, “psychos”. However, the meanings embodied in the presence of dramatic engagement may expand students’ frame of reference and depth of thinking about the contexts and roots for such “psycho”-labelled behaviour. Similarly, a young person like T might have been considered a “weirdo” or “loner” in the past. However, the explorations within the fictional frame may inform different perspectives of such past interpretations – and possibilities for alternative future engagements with, or even simply conversations about, those perceived as different in real life. Games Masters always provoke students to both empathise with the characters and think critically about their behaviours and the wider fictional context in which they are embedded. We progressively begin to empathise with T, but also critically reflect on his own

aggressive behaviour towards others at school, or his new stepsister. We empathise with T's mum, Maraea, who has suffered abuse at the hands of her ex-partner, Dave, but critically interrogate how and why she has started to (deliberately? unconsciously?) deny T any sincere attention. We sometimes empathise with neighbours, who witness the abuse, but feel too uncomfortable to report Dave's behaviour, while critically reflecting on their inaction, contextualising it within T's wider community. We even empathise with Dave, the abusive dad, while critically reflecting on *his* thinking, behaviour, childhood, without making excuses for his acts of violence. In so doing, we encourage empathetic and critical self-reflection, on our own action and inaction. It reflects our – maybe at times – rather fixed perspectives and attitudes on others, on ourselves, on the way things are in our community. Often, we reflect on the wider structures that influence T's – and thus students' – own perceived agency to bring about change. During the hot-seating strategy, for example, we often wonder how the structure, culture, and hierarchy of T's fictional intermediate school and wider community impede him from feeling accepted and safe enough to seek help. Students critically reflect on how they themselves are, in the drama, part of these structures, cultures, and hierarchies, as they talk to their Games Master in role as a fictional family member. Students start to consider what structures, cultures, and hierarchies they uphold or disrupt in their own everyday lives.

Summing up

Our reflections on this case study suggest applied theatre can only ever aspire to contribute to social transformation by provoking participants to desire to become responsible, empathetic agents for social change. Applied theatre might accomplish this provocation by nudging students and teachers alike towards moving beyond the idea that they are either voiceless victims or passive bystanders blindly fitting in, conforming to accepted norms. Applied theatre can encourage participants' deductive and hypothetical reasoning in the real world to be based on critical thinking and empathy. It can model flat hierarchies of support, collaboration, dialogue, and care between young people and adults. It can inspire, in everyone, interest in social justice over blind allegiances to unquestioned ideals and convictions. It can question authority, even that of one's own, one's peers', one's parents', one's communities', taken for granted narratives, which might do more harm than good.

In sharing our reflections on our practice, we do not propose that applied theatre can save or empower individuals. Applied theatre cannot overthrow existing social, economic, cultural, political, historically contingent conditions that create and uphold

existing unequal relations of power in a society. Applied theatre might provoke an extraordinary moment of critical reflection and deeply felt agency. Yet, such an isolated instance does not, indeed cannot, subvert wider existent structural inequalities that play a part in maintaining the fertile grounds on which abuse, violence, emotional disconnect, and intergenerational trauma can continue to grow. We do argue, however, that even the most transient instances of open receptiveness, civil debate, and deliberate compassion that occur within people's everyday interactions with others, can form small but significant contributions to creating more socially cohesive local communities. This is how we perceive Everyday Theatre addresses SDG 16.2. At best, accomplishing glimpses of social justice and change is a matter of provoking "theatre[s] of 'little changes'" (Balfour, 2009, p. 356) whose evasive effects are as ambiguous, chaotic, and contradictory as the postnormal times in which they take place (Gregorzewski, 2021).

Involving young people in critical discussions about how and why some families might be dysfunctional offers the opportunity for considering how they could change their own future narrative. We assume the changes Everyday Theatre elicits may only ever be ephemeral. However, we also know there might be greater transformations happening. Briar and Peter remember the day they returned to a school 18 months after their previous visit. A 12-year-old boy came up to them and said, "Are you here to play the game?" He then displayed the Games Master badge he had won when we were last there. He had pinned it to his shirt sleeve under his jersey. "I wear it every day," he said. We do not know what personal meaning he continues to carry within him by wearing the badge privately, every day. What we continue to wonder about is the potential for Everyday Theatre to make small but nonetheless significant changes in the lives of those who play it, including ourselves, and therefore in some way contribute towards addressing the concerns of SDG16.2 and meaningful social change.

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