

# A Spotlight on Research-Based Theatre

Tetsuro Shigematsu, Graham W. Lea, Christina Cook, and George Belliveau

## Abstract

“Tell me about your research.” How does one begin to convey the importance of our life’s work—our research? Enter stage right, Research-based Theatre, an innovative, arts-based methodology that takes research data and brings it to life, by showing, rather than telling. In this article, we tell the story of how Research-based Theatre first came to be, and why it is especially well suited to the contemporary challenge of showcasing diverse and marginalized voices. We also share a short scene that illustrates the methodology in practice. We conclude by offering ways Research-based Theatre can be a meaningful approach for pedagogy and community-engaged initiatives.

*USHER: Welcome to the show. Tonight’s performance is a crash course in Research-based Theatre. But first, a sneak peek backstage. Watch your step, please. The reason why I’m holding this flashlight is because this exclusive behind-the-scenes tour has a few hazardous transitions. We don’t want you to trip and fall into confusion. So, let’s begin at the beginning, shall we? This following passage contains a fascinating origin story of how this methodology came to be.*

## The Origins of Research-Based Theatre: A Commentary

Since the early 2000s, we (George, 4th author, and Graham, 2nd author) have explored possibilities for integrating our theatrical backgrounds into academic work. As our work progressed, and we began to articulate our approach to Research-based Theatre (RbT) (Belliveau & Lea, 2016), we often found ourselves struggling to express our understandings to colleagues in academia who had little experience in theatre, and, conversely, those in theatre who had little experience in academia. A script, shared later in this article, draws upon almost 20 years of exploration, to help communicate this unique approach to research. To fully contextualize the script, we first share a brief retrospective on the development of RbT to explore how we arrived at a place where such a script needed to be written.

We come from an extensive theatre background both in and out of academia. George is a professionally trained actor who studied in Canada, and with the Jacques Lecoq school in France. He later taught theatre and English in secondary schools before earning an MA and PhD in theatre. During his first academic appointment in the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island, he met Graham, a student in one of his classes. Graham came to his education degree from an eclectic background having studied computer science and math, while taking theatre literature and performance courses as electives. Graham had more than 15 years of experience in theatre through classes, and community and professional performances with local theatre companies as an actor, musician, playwright, director, stage manager, and technician.

Both of us, George as an early career academic, and Graham, as a preservice teacher and later graduate student, began to shift our focus from theatre performance to drama education, in particular approaches such as process drama (Bowell & Heap, 2001) and role drama (Fels & Belliveau, 2008). George also began to develop a research program including projects exploring bullying (Belliveau, 2006b) and teacher workload (Belliveau et al., 2002). Yet, he retained a desire to integrate his identity as an artist into his developing researcher identity (Springgay et al., 2008): how could he draw on the skills and aesthetic of his theatre training into his academic work?

In the early phases of this integration, George worked with groups of preservice teachers (including Graham) to devise short theatrical productions relating to issues of bullying in schools: *Wasn't Me* (Belliveau, 2003) and *You Didn't DO Anything* (Belliveau, 2005, 2008), which toured local schools, accompanied by post-performance workshops with students by the preservice teachers. To develop these performances, George led the preservice teachers through a devising process that included reflecting on academic literature, music, and theatrical scripts including Joan MacLeod's (2002) *Shape of a Girl*. These resources, as well as the preservice teachers' own experiences, were used to generate the devised plays. There was no formal research component to these pieces; there was no systematic data generation or analysis. However, these productions laid some of the seeds for a continued exploration of the possibilities of incorporating theatre and academic research. In particular, these projects were designed with an explicitly pedagogical intent: to advocate for positive approaches to dealing with bullying in a way that the audience can relate and connect to.

As we progressed through our careers, George joined the faculty at the University of British Columbia, and Graham joined him as a graduate student, where we continued to look for ways to integrate our artistic and academic identities. We engaged with the work of international scholars following similar paths, including Johnny Saldaña (2005, 2011), Jim Mienzachowski (2003), Charles Vanover (2005), Judith Ackroyd and John O'Toole (2010), Gail Mitchell et al. (2006), Ross Gray (2003), Tara Goldstein (2001), Joe Norris (2009), among others. These scholars intermixed with George and Graham's interests and experience in theatre through such works as *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman, 2001), *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (Pirandello, 1954/1921), *The Farm Show* (Theatre Passe Muraille, 1976), as well as individual and organizations such as Shakespeare (1994), Sharron Pollock (1984), and The Joint Stock Theatre Company (Ritchie, 1987).

With a rich and world-leading group of artist-researchers, the University of British Columbia proved to be a fertile ground for this exploration. With other artists, researchers, and graduate students, we began exploring how our work intersected with other methodologies including autoethnography (Irwin, 2004) and Narrative Inquiry (Leggo, 2008) and theoretical perspectives such as Bakhtin's (1986) notions of dialogism, chains of utterances, and genre.

Playwright Sharon Pollock uses a metaphorical diamond to describe her challenge of trying to write from another's perspective.

I am standing in one place, and I am the result of a certain time and place and experience, and I have a flashlight. If I never try to expand those boundaries I can only hold my flashlight one way, shine it on one part of the diamond. ... But I can't go all the way around that diamond. I suppose when you have many writers attacking the same story, you get the entire diamond lit up. (quoted in Jansen, 1991, p. 100)

This suggestion that having multiple perspectives can reflect a more fulsome understanding of a character reflects Barone and Eisner's (2012) call for "methodological pluralism" (p. 4) in educational research: that each methodology provides unique insights into what is being studied. As RbT continued to evolve, we considered ways of incorporating this into our approach. Inspired by Bakhtin's notion that the choice of genre creates borders and "all understanding is constrained by borders" (Holquist, 1986, p. xix), they proposed that RbT projects include a critical commentary (Belliveau & Lea, 2016) in which academic prose, theatrical text, theatrical performance, and possibly other genres function together in a form of methodological pluralism. Rather than repeat the understandings of one genre in another, a form of exegesis (O'Toole, 2006), the understandings expressed in each genre should draw on its own affordances, using the strengths of each genre to light up more facets of Pollock's diamond.

Similarly, we sought ways to position RbT as a methodology that would be inviting to people with various levels of theatrical experience or exposure, from the professionally trained actor to the person who sees potential in the approach but hasn't seen a play since grade school. Furthermore, RbT is a call to adventure for the academically minded to go beyond their comfort zone.

This led to the development of the Spectrum of Research-based Theatre (Beck et al., 2011), a way of positioning each RbT piece both artistically and academically to help clarify the intents of the research project. Building on this work, we have sought ways of conceptualizing the assessment and evaluation of RbT that honour the intents of the research, rather than the expectations of a reviewer. To do so, we draw on evaluative thinking (Buckley et al., 2015) and Liz Lerman's (2003) Critical Response Process to develop a conceptualization of assessment and evaluation that honours the multiplicity of ways of engaging in RbT. We have found Lerman's flexible process to be an effective approach to providing feedback. The four principal phases of the work (Statements of Meaning From Responders, Artist as Questioner, Neutral Questions From Responders, and Permissioned Opinions) generate a dialogic space of assessment and feedback focused on the intents of the work, rather than externally imposed, and culturally bound (Bochner, 2000), criteria. Not only does it provide the phases and strategies to protect the feelings of everyone involved, but it also restores agency to anyone on the receiving end of critiques. Evaluative thinking reminds us as practitioners that assessment and evaluation process is a continual "questioning, reflecting, learning, and modifying .... It is a constant state-of-mind" (Bennett & Jessani, 2011, p. 24) that should be considered throughout the entire life of each project.

Another significant challenge we encountered was balancing the expectations of research grants, scholarships, and fellowships with the realities of integrating elements of theatre and research. How could we engage in a methodological approach that would honour our theatrical backgrounds, the demands of academia and granting agencies, as well as participants and audiences? A key element of addressing this challenge was finding ways to communicate the understandings of RbT we had developed over 20 years that would help others who may not be familiar with arts-based or, even qualitative

methodologies, understand this approach. How could we explain RbT in a way that would speak to academics, theatre artists, research participants, and the general public?

Following a presentation of our early work, *Drama as an Additional Language* (Wager et al., 2009), an academic in the audience stood up and said, “This isn’t research.” During a subsequent sharing of this work, another colleague said, “I don’t understand what you are doing!” Rather than discourage us, such comments and questions encouraged us to be more clear in articulating and developing RbT as a methodology. While deliberately drawing upon both academic and artistic genres, such discussions have relied heavily on academic prose, with little use of theatrical approaches to help enliven the articulation of the methodology.

Since that initial reception, RbT has come a long way. Now that it is better known, this methodology has reached an inflection point. Rather than having to let people know the “good news” of RbT, there is now sufficient awareness in our methodology that expressions of interest have exceeded our capacity to engage in discussions with all those interested. When we meet potential partners who are keenly interested in collaborating, it is often because they heard a colleague talking enthusiastically about one of our performances. Still, they have no idea how such a thing came to be. All they know is that they want their own version of “that.”

This begs the question, “How can we explain what we do?” Explaining a novel, embodied methodology to the uninitiated is never easy, but because we self-identify as artist/scholars who specialize in scholarly storytelling, we feel it behooves us to do so in a way that is vivid, compelling, and memorable. The answer of course was right in front of us. Why not create a short play? In other words, what if we used the methodology to explain the methodology?

This challenge led George to invite playwright/academics Tetsuro Shigematsu (1st author), Christina Cook (3rd author), and Scott Button to a weekend retreat where collectively they were tasked to write a short play to help communicate this unique approach to research.

*USHER: Thanks to George and Graham for so eloquently setting our stage. Now, the wonderful thing about a backstage tour is bumping into other members of the cast. Oh, look. Here’s Tetsuro, warming up.*

## **Real Playwrights of Vancouver**

Unlike the *Real Housewives of Orange County*, no one would ever want to watch a reality show about playwrights, not even playwrights! It’s because what we do behind the scenes lacks drama. But if there was ever a moment in my (Tetsuro’s) career as a playwright that could possibly merit the presence of a documentary film crew, it was RbT’s writing retreat during the Winter of 2019. A small group of RbT practitioners spent a weekend at a villa to tackle this challenge: how to explain Research-based Theatre theatrically?

Like a consummate reality television host, George stood before us in the cacti garden, and threw down the gauntlet. We had one afternoon to write a 10-minute play that could explain RbT to the world. How exciting is that? Admittedly, perhaps not the most thrilling challenge by reality TV standards, but consider

this, the caliber of playwrighting talent that had assembled was formidable. Playwrights are not exactly competitive by nature. We were the drama nerds in high school who avoided sports because we wanted to avoid the ignominy of defeat, as well as the spotlight of victory. But now here we were, solitary writers pitted head-to-head. Playwright versus playwright. Who will win?

Picture three playwrights, each ensconced in different parts of the villa, tapping away on their MacBooks, murmuring dialogue, as the sun made its way across the sky. After the time was up, we read our respective plays aloud, with each playwright voicing their parade of newly birthed characters. Everyone was up to the task. After all, no one is ever just a playwright. We are all playwright/actor/professional hams. With all the pomp and solemnity of a skit having its world premiere next to a campfire, we debuted our freshly minted 10-minute plays. We covered our nervousness at the prospect of being judged by our peers with stifled giggling, and broad acting.

Like a kind version of *American Idol's* Simon Cowell, George expertly reflected upon the strengths and challenges of each offering, but in the end, he was unequivocal. The collective ethos of RbT prevents me from divulging the chosen winner, but suffice it to say, that given the exceptional caliber of Canadian playwrighting talent at the retreat—Canada is a theatre superpower after all—said winner couldn't help but appear more than a little proud. And why not? Dramaturgically, the stakes were high. It was such a privilege to be invited to write in this beautiful place, and each one of us wanted the others to feel that our occupation of a coveted bedroom was warranted. Maybe we weren't that different from all those high school jocks after all, because we all wanted to win.

*USHER: Thank you, Tetsuro. Please, take your seats, everyone. The show's about to begin. One of our main characters is already on stage: LEE, androgynous, energetic, goes to the theatre weekly and usually skips over the statistical analysis sections in research articles. And ROMAN is just about to enter from stage left—imagine someone masculine, middle-aged, who gets excited by a well-crafted null hypothesis.*

Now for a bit of a spoiler alert. Far be it from me to be a theatre critic, but after this next act, you may be inclined to conclude, "Wait, that was it? That was the winning script? How unspectacular were the also-rans?" Fortunately for the authors, the publication of this script isn't taking place on social media, where they would have to deal with such comments. So, without any further ado, here is the world premiere publication of the rather prosaically titled, *The RbT Opener*.

The RbT Opener

*LEE is rehearsing an RbT monologue in an empty theatre space.*

LEE:

"My brother... my brother's name was Don –" (checks script). "My brother... my brother's name was Don. Short for Donald. Don dreamed of being a fighter pilot in the Canadian Air Force."

LEE checks the script again, and re-starts, trying to memorize the line.

LEE: "My brother... my brother's name was Don. Short for Donald. Don dreamed of being a fighter pilot in the Canadian Air Force."

*ROMAN ENTERS, interrupting LEE.*

ROMAN:

Hey, I – oh sorry, am I interrupting?

LEE:

No, no – come on in.

ROMAN:

You're Lee? I wanted to introduce myself. I heard you did some kind of a play at the research symposium last week, is that right?

LEE:

Oh, what did you hear?

ROMAN:

Well, everyone was raving about Dr. Yamazaki's research, how important, and relevant, and vital it is. Must have been quite a show you put on.

LEE:

Yes, well, I'm glad that Dr. Yamazaki's work is finally getting the attention it deserves.

ROMAN:

I bet you must have gotten some serious funding to mount a whole show for her. It must have been impressive. Whenever my partner and I are in New York, we love catching a Broadway show, *Hamilton*, *Phantom of the Opera* –

LEE:

Oh yeah, what we put on wasn't really a big theatre play like that. We didn't have a stage, lighting, or costumes, and no big musical numbers.

ROMAN:

Oh, okay, so more of a campfire skit then? I used to do some improv back in high school. Is that what you did?

LEE:

Not quite, it was a little more than a skit.

ROMAN:

So if it's less than a play, but more than skit, what exactly did you do?

LEE:

It's called research-based theatre.

ROMAN:

What's that?

LEE:

Do you really want to know?

ROMAN:

Actually, I'm not sure.

LEE:

You probably don't.

ROMAN:

But if I was curious, could you tell me?

LEE:

How much time do you have?

ROMAN:

5 minutes.

LEE:

You have to be somewhere in 5 minutes?

ROMAN:

No that's the length of my attention span.

LEE:

Okay, your area of research must be really interesting right?

ROMAN:

You bet it is. I-

LEE:

I'm sure it is, but my question to you is, can you explain it to other people? Non-specialists, who aren't in your field?

ROMAN:

Hmm, now that you mention it, at parties, my partner always gives me the yawning signal whenever I start to tell someone about my research. It isn't that my research isn't interesting, but unless you're aware of ...

LEE:

Well, RbT is a way to bring your research to life in a way that can capture people's attention, enable them to better understand what you do, why it matters ... in a way they won't forget.

ROMAN:  
Research-based Theatre can do all that?

LEE:  
Yes.

ROMAN:  
Where do I sign up?

LEE:  
Whoa, not so fast. RbT is not for everyone.

ROMAN:  
But you just sold it to me as this panacea for making important research seem interesting to other people. Doesn't everyone want that? Couldn't all researchers benefit from that?

LEE:  
Likely, but here's the thing. I'll try to explain it to you from the RbT perspective. As a group of researchers from various disciplines, working alongside community members and theatre artists, we work collectively. For instance, our team might come up with a rough sketch of a scene, and it gets passed to everyone, who edit and change it, collectively re-working things. Creative contributions in RbT don't belong to any one person.

ROMAN:  
Okay, but how does that apply to me?

LEE:  
Well as a researcher, you have to be willing to take this research you've been nurturing and growing for however long, and be willing to hand it off. Imagine putting your research in the hands of other people, who are not experts in your field.

ROMAN:  
I don't know if I like the sounds of that.

LEE:  
Exactly, so RbT might not be for you.

ROMAN:  
But what if I could get over that, what if I was willing to take the leap, and trust, what could happen?

LEE:  
Let's start from the top and find out.

*LEE pretends to re-start their conversation.*

Lee:  
Hey, you're ROMAN, right? I heard you did some kind of a play at the research symposium last week, is that right?

ROMAN:  
What did you hear?

LEE:  
Well, everyone was raving about your research, how important, and relevant, and vital it is. Must have been quite a show you put on.

ROMAN:  
Ooooooh.

LEE:  
Now are you starting to understand what RbT is?

ROMAN:  
No.

LEE:  
Right. How about I just show you? I was rehearsing a monologue when you came in – it's from a research-based theatre play about an actor asking his veteran friend to help him prepare to audition for the role of a soldier, and they embark on a soul-searching journey to address difficult memories.

ROMAN:  
Sure.

*LEE steps forward and starts the monologue they were rehearsing at the start of the play from the top.*

LEE (speaking as GEORGE from *Unload*):  
My brother... my brother's name was Don. Short for Donald.  
Don dreamed of being a fighter pilot in the Canadian Air Force.  
Eighteen years old and he aced his aptitude test, the fitness component... but he didn't have 20/20 vision, so they wouldn't take him.  
He found other ways of chasing that... rush, the adventure.  
He started rock climbing, ice climbing, mountain climbing.  
At 27, he was the First Canadian to peak Mt. Tilicho, one of the most challenging mountains in the Himalayas.  
A few months after that trip, he came to visit in Toronto, where Sue and I were living at the time. It was his birthday, and we bought him a... headlamp. For his climbs.  
That night, he told us this story of a solo overnight climb he did a year or so ago.  
He said he never shared this story with anyone, cause it felt too real.  
He was nearing the peak of Mt. Columbia in the Rockies.  
It was almost nightfall, and he was ready to put his pack down and settle for the night.  
Then it's as if the floor dropped under him.  
He started sliding, holding on to his backpack for dear life.  
He had no idea if he slid 10 feet or 100 feet?  
10 seconds or 100 seconds.  
All he knew was that when he regained consciousness it was morning.

*LEE steps out of the role of GEORGE and looks at ROMAN.*

ROMAN:  
Okay, okay – so we hear the participant's voice. It's like an interview transcript on stage.

LEE:

Sometimes research-based theatre sticks to the words of the participants really closely. And sometimes, the collaborators – researchers, artists, community members – work together to transform those words into a new form, one that gets right to the heart. Another example is from a research-based theatre play about the experiences of water operators. This character is a university researcher who goes to a community that's been facing a drinking water advisory for years. It starts like – well, actually, do you want to try reading this one?

ROMAN:

Me? Oh, um, sure.

*LEE hands ROMAN a script, and encourages ROMAN to read of the RESEARCHER.*

ROMAN (speaking as the character RESEARCHER, from *Treading Water*):

I'm taking questions at the community meeting and this one lady sticks up her hand and I can tell – this won't go well.

This woman, she says, "Those fancy degrees and you people got it all wrong."

This lady, she's angry. And that seems natural. When you've had a boil water advisory for 12 years, you're gonna be angry.

"The Operators, the Researchers, all of us: we have been doing the best we can, with the resources that we have –" She waves her hand, she cuts me off.

"I'm not as mad as I used to be about the water – that's nothing new. I'm mad because there's no dialogue between the government and the community. You build a treatment system – big whoop – but you don't speak a word to us, and you don't hear us. You refuse to hear what we really need."

Hmm. She makes a good point. "Look, I understand you're upset, but ... What this community needs is clean water."

The room goes quiet for a sec. I think, maybe, I got through to her. To all of them.

But then comes a smaller voice, from the back of the room – one of the community elders. Her voice cuts through the room like ice: "We just need you to listen."

Then I realize – this whole time, I've been trying to listen. I've been really trying. I just didn't know how. But I have to try to start. I have to...

"I'm sorry. I'm... I'm sorry."

*ROMAN hands the script back to LEE.*

LEE:

That was great. You know, ROMAN, I think you've got a performer in you.

ROMAN:

This is ... really different. Really new for me. But you know what? I think I get it. You're not a company trying to sell a product. You're more like an ad agency.

LEE:

Come again?

ROMAN:

Sorry, I just finished binge watching *Mad Men* on Netflix. Have you seen it?

*[LEE signals "no".]*

Never mind. Well, the university or the community at large is like the marketplace. You got all these companies who have something to sell, something worth sharing. And you're the solution. You're the midwife who helps these groups get their message out there to a wider audience. Because all these business executives, these researchers, they're good at what they do, but they don't necessarily have creative ways to share it publicly. Am I right?

LEE:

Actually that's pretty close, but I'd like to add that we're more of a boutique storytelling agency for research – whether we're doing the research ourselves or working with others to tell the story of their data. Either way we're not interested in mass production. So we have to pick and choose who we work with carefully.

ROMAN:

Which is your way of saying, you're still not sure if you want to work with me.

LEE:

No, it's me saying, you should really consider if RbT is right for you. Because, as I said before, it's not for everyone.

ROMAN:

You know what I think? Up until now, I thought, maybe this is your selling tactic. You're using reverse psychology to play coy, and make me want to work with you. But I think the real reason you're so evasive is because you look at someone like me, and you have no idea where to begin. Right? You're trying to see if I'm prepared to wander through the wilderness with you, without either of us fully knowing where or when or how we'll arrive.

LEE:

And would you be okay with that?

ROMAN:

Tell you the truth, it sounds kinda scary. Maybe?

LEE:

We can work with that. Let's meet again, and you can tell me all about your research.

ROMAN:

Okay, but no yawning.

LEE:

No promises.

*USHER: No applause necessary. They can't hear you. Finally, please join me in welcoming Christina, who will ground this methodology within a wider tradition.*

Since our writing retreat, we have performed this script numerous times, in a variety of contexts which I, (Christina), will unpack for you. This isn't "great theatre," but it works, and that's the point. RbT was never meant to be theatre for the ages, or masterpieces, and for those of us who moonlight in professional theatre, that is actually a relief. Much like the way film auteurs might shoot commercials, or industrial

films, creating RbT plays is a way for playwrights to use our chops and not have to fret about vicious critics on opening night.

That being said, it makes a big difference having a professional playwright. One of the affordances of RbT is that you can cut corners, and it will still work. You don't necessarily need a director, a dramaturg, a stage manager, a lighting designer, or even professional actors, but starting off with a solid script penned by a professional, or devised by someone experienced, is a must.

RbT is to theatre what a ukulele is to classical guitar, or a fiddle to Stradivarius. Aesthetically, we usually don't take ourselves too seriously, but it works. Maybe it's more pure this way, more elemental. I dare say, Peter Brook (1968) himself would approve. Two erstwhile actors performing a brief script before an audience seated in stackable chairs. What could be more simple? Yet, every time, RbT will grab your attention and not let go. By the time it's over, your view of the world has changed.

### **Can I Play Too? A Rehearsal**

"How do I do this?"

Tetsuro and I (Christina) have just finished performing the RbT Opener over Zoom, and an audience member has turned on their microphone and is asking, "Can I do what you are doing?"

This audience member's question gets at the heart of the pedagogical intent of this scene.

"No, let me start again."

Stories change in the telling, and stories change between tellings. Yet, second productions and remounts are a rarity in Canadian professional theatre. So often, the artistic team—the playwright, the director, the designers, the actors—only gets one shot, and the play's potential for change and growth is never realized.

One of the privileges of working on an RbT piece is the learning opportunities created by mounting a piece over again in diverse contexts, which allows the piece to evolve. As Tetsuro describes above, this script was written on a sunny retreat in late 2019. By the time we were scheduled to share it for the first time, in the midst of COVID-19, in-person theatre was impossible. Already the piece changed, and we were learning: What possibilities exist for sharing RbT online? We have performed the scene on Zoom for workshops, as part of conference sessions and colloquia, with diverse audiences, including researchers, graduate students, theatre artists, and community members. After we share the scene, we engage in talkback or open dialogue with the audience. In some way, these dialogues are an extension of the scene itself and center relationship-building—

"No, let me take that back. I want another go at this."

Drawing on Bertolt Brecht's writings on theatre, Baer and colleagues (2019) define "startling empathy" (p. 418) as an empathy that moves audiences from a passive form of witnessing to a witnessing of protest, where feelings remain present in the audience after the play and inspire action. Of course, for an

audience who is not theatre-going, and not actually in a theatre, rehearsal hall, or studio class, for those attending a conference or a seminar, seeing a scene performed may just be startling.

If our RbT scene startles, what might this startling allow? Permission to slow down. Maggie Berg and Barbara Karolina Seeber (2016) write that slow scholarship

gives meaning ... to thinking about scholarship as a community, not a competition. It gives meaning to periods of rest, an understanding that research does not run like a mechanism; there are rhythms, which include pauses and periods that may seem unproductive. (p. 57).

Slowing leaves space for starting again—not to fix mistakes, but because starting again supports discovery in rehearsal and creation processes—in research.

In these slow rhythms and pauses, relationships can be built in new ways. Pedagogically, we intend our RbT scene to offer an invitation to play or to act as if. ‘As if’ is a powerful phrase. For Carl Rogers (1957), a 20th-century pioneer on empathy, reaching out to someone *as if* you can see from their perspective is integral to relationships. This empathic *as if* is also integral to acting and playwrighting. Offering the tools of RbT, the opportunity to create scripts from the perspectives of research participants and collaborators, the opportunity to play *as if*, supports the creation of research and scholarship rooted in empathic exchanges and understandings. As LEE suggests to ROMAN at the end of the scene, this is just the beginning. But why not start by building space for relationships?

“How do I do this? Can I do what you are doing?”

If Tetsuro and I can turn on our videos and microphones and perform a short play, possibilities hang in the air: possibilities for new ways of relating to participants, collaborators, colleagues, graduate students, and community members, and telling the stories of our research.

So, can you do this? As a chorus of RbT practitioners, we answer, “Yes, you can” (Beck et al., 2011; Belliveau, 2006a, 2014; Goldstein, 2011).

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to Madjid Mohseni, Candace Cook, Warren Brown, Keyvan Maleki and RES’EAU for giving us permission to include an excerpt from *Treading Water*. We also wish to recognize Luke Bokenfohr, Scott Button, and Grant Charles for their contribution to the development of *Unload*. Finally, thank you to the University of British Columbia’s Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation for their funding support on this project.

## References

- Ackroyd, J., & O'Toole, J. (2010). *Performing research: Tensions, triumphs and trade-offs of ethnodrama*. Trentham Books.
- Baer, P., Salisbury, J., & Goldstein, T. (2019). Pairing verbatim theatre and theatre of the oppressed to provoke startling empathy. *The Educational Forum*, 83(4), 418–431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2019.1626961>
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. University of Texas Press.
- Barone, T., & Eisner, E. W. (2012). *Arts based research*. Sage.
- Beck, J. L., Belliveau, G., Lea, G. W., & Wager, A. (2011). Delineating a spectrum of research-based theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(8), 687–700. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411415498>
- Belliveau, G. (2003). Pre-service teachers engage in collective drama on anti-bullying [Wasn't Me!]. *English Quarterly*, 35(3/4), 1–6.
- Belliveau, G. (2005). An arts-based approach to teach social justice: Drama as a way to address bullying in schools. *International Journal of Arts Education*, 3(2), 136–165.
- Belliveau, G. (2006a). Engaging in drama: Using arts-based research to explore a social justice project in teacher education. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 7(5). <http://ijea.asu.edu/v7n5/>
- Belliveau, G. (2006b). Using drama to achieve social justice: Anti-bullying project in elementary schools. *Universal Mosaic of Drama and Theatre - IDEA Publications*, 5, 325–336.
- Belliveau, G. (2008). You didn't do anything!: A research play on bullying. *Educational Insights*, 12(2). <http://www.ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/v12n02/articles/belliveau/index.html>
- Belliveau, G. (2014). Research-based theatre and a/r/tography: Exploring arts-based educational research methodologies. *Performance*, 3(1).
- Belliveau, G., & Lea, G. W. (Eds.). (2016). *Research-based theatre: An artistic methodology*. Intellect.
- Belliveau, G., Liu, X., & Murphy, E. (2002). *Teacher workload on Prince Edward Island*. Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation.
- Bennett, G., & Jessani, N. (Eds.). (2011). *The knowledge translation toolkit: Bridging the know-do gap: A resource for researchers*. International Development Research Centre.
- Berg, M., & Seeber, B. K. (2016). *The slow professor: Challenging the culture of speed in the academy*. University of Toronto Press.
- Bochner, A. P. (2000). Criteria against ourselves. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(2), 266–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040000600209>
- Bowell, P., & Heap, B. (2001). *Planning process drama*. David Fulton Publishers.
- Brook, P. (1968). *The empty space*. Touchstone.
- Buckley, J., Archibald, T., Hargraves, M., & Trochim, W. M. (2015). Defining and teaching evaluative thinking: Insights from research on critical thinking. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 36(3), 375–388. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214015581706>

- Fels, L., & Belliveau, G. (2008). *Exploring curriculum: Performative inquiry, role drama, and learning*. Pacific Educational Press.
- Goldstein, T. (2001). Hong Kong, Canada: Playwriting as critical ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(3), 279–303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040100700303>
- Goldstein, T. (2011). *Staging Harriet's House: Writing and producing research-informed theatre*. Peter Lang.
- Gray, R. E. (2003). Performing on and off the stage: The place(s) of performance in arts-based approaches to qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(2), 254–267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800402250957>
- Holquist, M. (1986). Introduction. In C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Eds.), *Speech genres & other late essays* (pp. ix–xxiii). University of Texas Press.
- Irwin, R. L. (2004). A/r/tography: A metonymic métissage. In R. L. Irwin & A. de Cosson (Eds.), *A/r/tography: Rendering self through arts-based living inquiry* (pp. 27–38). Pacific Educational Press.
- Jansen, A. (1991). *Airborne: Radio plays by women: Anthology of plays originally broadcast on CBC's Morningside program*. Blizzard.
- Kaufman, M. (2001). *The Laramie project*. Vintage Books.
- Leggo, C. (2008). Narrative inquiry: Attending to the art of discourse. *Language and Literacy*, 10(1), 1–21. <https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/langandlit/article/view/9770>
- Lerman, L., & Borstel, J. (2003). *Liz Lerman's critical response process: A method for getting useful feedback on anything you make, from dance to dessert*. Liz Lerman Dance Exchange.
- MacLeod, J. (2002). *The shape of a girl*. Talonbooks.
- Mienczakowski, J. (2003). The theater of ethnography: The reconstruction of ethnography into theater with emancipatory potential. In *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* (pp. 415–432). Altamira Press. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049500100306>
- Mitchell, G. J., Jonas-Simpson, C., & Ivonoffski, V. (2006). Research-based theatre: The making of I'm Still Here! *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 19(3), 198–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894318406289878>
- Norris, J. (2009). *Playbuilding as qualitative research: A participatory arts-based approach*. Left Coast Press.
- O'Toole, J. (2006). *Doing drama research: Stepping into enquiry in drama, theatre and education*. Drama Australia.
- Pirandello, L. (1954). *Six characters in search of an author* (F. May, Trans.). Heinemann. (Original work published 1921)
- Pollock, S. (1984). *Doc*. Playwrights Canada.
- Ritchie, R. (1987). *The Joint Stock book: The making of a theatre collective*. Methune.
- Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21(2), 95–103. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045357>

Saldaña, J. (2005). *Ethnodrama: An anthology of reality theatre*. AltaMira.

Saldaña, J. (2011). *Ethnotheatre: Research from page to stage*. Left Coast.

Shakespeare, W. (1994). A midsummer night's dream. In P. Holland (Ed.), *A midsummer night's dream* (pp. 127–256). Oxford University Press.

Springgay, S., Irwin, R. L., Leggo, C., & Gouzouasis, P. (2008). *Being with a/r/tography*. Sense.

Theatre Passe Muraille. (1976). *The farm show*. The Coach House Press.

Vanover, C., & Saldaña, J. (2005). Chalkboard concerto: Growing up as a teacher in the Chicago public schools. In J. Saldaña (Ed.), *Ethnodrama: An anthology of reality theatre* (pp. 62–77). AltaMira Press.

Wager, A., Belliveau, G., Beck, J. L., & Lea, G. W. (2009). Exploring drama as an additional language through research-based theatre. *Scenario: Journal for Drama and Theatre in Foreign and Second Language Education*, 3(2), 50–63. <https://doi.org/10.33178/scenario.3.2.4>



**Tetsuro Shigematsu** became the first person-of-colour to host a daily national radio program in Canada, when he became host of *The Roundup* on CBC Radio. Tetsuro's theatrical solo-work *Empire of the Son* was named the best show of 2015 by the Vancouver Sun, and has been touring continuously throughout Canada, and beyond. It has played in 18 cities to over 20,000 people. His other solo-work, *1 Hour Photo* garnered five Jessie nominations, winning for Significant Artistic Achievement, and was named as a finalist for the 2019 *Governor General's Award for Drama*. He is also a former writer for *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*.



**Graham W. Lea** is an Assistant Professor of Theatre/Drama Education at the University of Manitoba. His research interests include research-based theatre methodology, narrative in mathematics education, and theatre/drama in health and teacher education research. He has coedited two books with George Belliveau. *Contact!Unload: Veterans, Trauma, and Research-based theatre* (UBC Press, 2020) details a project using research-based theatre to explore the experiences of military veterans returning to civilian life and living with stress injuries. He also coedited *Research-based Theatre: An Artistic Methodology* (Intellect, 2016), which explores a variety of international projects that use theatre to examine social issues.



**Christina Cook** is a PhD student in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. She is a registered clinical counsellor and a playwright, and her work explores mental health through inquiry and art. Christina's play *Quick Bright Things* was a finalist for the 2020 *Governor General's Literary Award for Drama*.



**George Belliveau** is Head and Professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. His research focuses on research-based theatre and he has published extensively in the areas of theatre & drama education and arts-based research. His latest coedited book *Contact!Unload: Military Veterans, Trauma, and Research-based Theatre* (UBC Press, 2020) explores a project with military veterans, artists and counselors. He is a professionally trained actor, and has participated in over 100 theatre productions as an actor, director, or playwright. He was inducted into the College of the Royal Society of Canada in 2017.

