

Using Storytelling Theatrics for Leadership Training

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Abstract

The Problem.

How can leaders learn to use power in ways that minimize oppression and resistance, and instead are more liberating? As perceived oppression leads to resistance, leaders who are untrained in these power dynamics may enact oppressive behaviors and trigger resistance without awareness or intention to do so.

The Solution.

This article describes a leadership training process we call storytelling theatrics. These storytelling theatrics formats explore power dynamics in multi-voiced scenarios that incorporate many perspectives. This method gives participants a voice in their own learning and creates actors instead of auditors. It brings hidden sources of oppression to center stage, to fully explore more liberating possibilities for both followers and leaders. Leaders can minimize repression and resistance if they understand, uncover, and confront these expressions of power.

The Stakeholders.

Organizational leaders as well as their followers are stakeholders in this embodied theatrical training. This intervention creates benefit for both leaders and followers, because both are potentially oppressed by power dynamics.

Keywords

story, storytelling, theater, leadership, leader training, embodiment

Introduction

Storytelling theatrics focuses on processes of exploring and questioning leader–follower dynamics. This relational approach to leadership incorporates the view of the follower, sometimes identified as the “oppressed” in critical literature. However,

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closer examination of critical literature reveals that both leaders and followers are viewed as potentially (and usually) being the oppressed. Our storytelling theatrics approach to leadership development brings hidden sources of oppression to center stage, to fully explore more liberating possibilities for both followers and leaders. Leaders can minimize repression and resistance if they understand, uncover, and confront these expressions of power.

This is an art-based methodology that provides aesthetic experiences (Edwards, Elliott, Iszatt-White, & Schedlitzki, 2013). The theatrics exercises described here allow participants to experiment with, and respond proactively to, power dynamics (cf. Pina e Cunha, Clegg, Rego, & Neves, 2014; Simpson et al., 2014). This further allows them to develop their own, more liberating, leadership development program design (Iszatt-White, Kelly, Martin, & Rouncefield, 2005). These exercises offer new ways to look at a situation using storytelling and theater. They help participants reflect upon, and question the status quo of how people are heard. They help participants recognize that there *are* many voices and that everyone embodies life differently (cf. Hitchin, 2014; Izak, 2014; Izak & Hitchin, 2014). Storytelling theatrics allows participants to enact, share in, and interact with others' lived experience to develop leadership relationally (Elliott & Stead, 2008).

We will explore the literature on leadership and oppression and then we present three approaches to theatrics: Image, Invisibility, and Forum theater. We draw on years of experience utilizing and developing these approaches to theatrics. We present an assessment of participant reactions to these methods. We conclude that our storytelling theatrics are de-centered, which means they allow for perspectives that come from outside of those who traditionally have power and influence. These tools are rooted in the works of such seminal scholars as Freire (1970) and Boal (1974/1979, 1992, 1995). Typically these approaches include the uncovering of both oppressive and liberating language. Theoretically this work shows that there are multiple sides to any story of leadership development. Practically, this work shows how to explore alternative formats for collaboration during leadership development.

Instead of the trainer being the source of alternative views, discussions are de-centered. This means that different perspectives come from the participants themselves. Participants undertake a deconstruction process regarding leadership stories by finding counter-stories. They look for multiple sides of stories, marginalized voices, and unexplored plots. By using a theatrical embodiment of participants' lived experiences of leadership, organizational power dynamics become more visible and accessible.

In a situation of multiple voices, multiple actors, and multiple authors, it is virtually "impossible to sustain monological accounts of social reality" (Bryant & Cox, 2004, p. 580, citing Oswick & Keenoy, 2001). The greatest opportunity storytelling theatrics creates in leadership development is in telling many sides to a story. This process exposes the dominant storying as well as the web of surrounding alternative marginalized storying. Such expanded storytelling is essential for opening creative new possibilities for ontologically reflexive leader behavior (Boje & Saylor, 2014). In addition, these processes incorporate both leaders and followers in this approach to leadership.

An essential element of the leader–follower relationship is the relationship between leadership and oppression.

Literature on Leadership and Oppression

The critical leadership literature is concerned with becoming aware of oppressive systems and oppressive practices, and how to facilitate inclusion or democratic practices that get beyond various forms of oppression. Civilized oppression is unquestioned norms and prescribed behaviors (Deutsch, 2006) and the other-ing of those who question or cannot fulfill the duties and expectations of those in power. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) addressed how a dictatorship leader is oppressive and may enact a pseudo transformational approach. Leadership power may be used to set the goals and manipulate the values of others, and to prescribe the behaviors that structure the tasks toward the fulfillments of those goals. Leadership also involves organizing the stories of the “public performance” to maintain legitimacy (Kelly, White, Martin, & Rouncefield, 2006). Kezar (2011) has a typology of forms of leadership oppression that includes silencing, controlling, inertia, and micro-aggression.

All members of an organization possess the “vulgar competencies” of leadership (Iszatt-White, 2010). Anyone can perform the mundane tasks of leadership: listening, talking, sending emails, leading meetings, and creating presentations. Those in power in the institution dictate access to the authority to perform these tasks within institutional systems (Appelbaum, Hébert, & Leroux, 1999; Saylor, 2014).

The recent shift from one person as leader to multiple persons engaging in leadership functions (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010) requires organizations to empower their employees to perform these leadership tasks. Empowerment of employees has been depicted as the employee having the initiative to go outside the bounds of their job description, even if their actions might be in error. However, most organizations have defined a more limited version of empowerment of employees. This limited empowerment involves giving employees clear instructions for a task, the tools to perform that task, and then leaving them to do that task (Appelbaum et al., 1999). Although this limited approach might spread leadership functions to a wider cast of characters, it does not address the pitfalls that can turn leadership power into oppression. This is because to have power to empower requires that first the worker be disempowered (Boje & Rosile, 2001). We must warn the reader these techniques are not simple ones to manage or facilitate and are not for the faint-hearted trainer who does not have the skill set to support emotions (for more on this please see Clegg, Pina e Cunha, Rego, & Story, 2014)

Weiner (2003) referred to leadership paradigms that go beyond oppression, suppression, and rigid hierarchy models by incorporating Paulo Freire’s (1970) democratization of power. Weiner (2003) pointed out that Freire looks at ways that the leader can become aware of being trapped or embedded in oppressive relationships. Our method for addressing these issues of oppressive leader–follower relationships is Boal’s (1974/1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*. As a follower of Freire, Boal designed

theatrics to help bring about leader awareness of followers' experiences of oppression. Next we explain how storytelling theater, attuned as it is to relational power dynamics and potential oppression, can offer leaders opportunities to develop their own more liberatory leadership styles.

Relational Leadership Learning Through Storytelling Theatrics

The storytelling theater methods described here are based on a model of leadership that is relational. Relational leadership means that the authority and activity of the leader is constructed by the interaction of those within the leadership–follower context. By understanding and enacting leadership within the relational context of leader and follower, these theatric methods allow for the leadership to be distributed using this theater pedagogy.

Other research (see Greenberg & Miller, 1991; Moshavi, 2001) also reports that similar theatrical improvisation enhances participant understanding of concepts. The theatric methods described here go beyond an understanding of concepts, to the understanding of context regarding how the authority and leader activity is distributed across participants of that context. These methods place the leader in the *Tamara*-land of multiple voices and multiple simultaneous stages that comprise the leader's context in an organization.

We suggest the following tips when using storytelling theatrics for leadership development:

1. Provide plenty of individual and group coaching on stagecraft. For example, some may need to learn how not to stand with their back to the audience, not block another actor, get into character, project their voice, use props, and so on. Similarly, some may need to learn sequencing, the provision of background for events. Still others may need to learn suspense, the use of rising and falling action toward a cathartic ending. At times, we have used local community theater volunteers to help coach the groups transform leadership oppression.
2. Emphasize the personal, lived experience, *story* as the starting point. We suggest using stories of getting fired, being reprimanded, being treated unfairly, and so forth. The trainer should offer personal examples first. Make these traditionally taboo topics into valuable resources in your leadership training session.
3. Model the use of storytelling and theatrics with your own behavior. Use your personal examples when demonstrating the theater concepts.
4. Explain and then demonstrate (act out) all aspects of the theatrical events, these will be unfamiliar to most participants in a human resource development (HRD) setting.

Storytelling Theater

Traditionally in theater, the audience passively consumes the actions of actors. The proscenium arch, traditionally hung with curtains that open upon the stage, forms an

invisible “fourth wall” of the stage. This invisible wall prevents the audience from invading the stage and taking an active role in the story. Our storytelling theatrics changes this by applying the work of Augusto Boal (1974/1979, 1992, 1995) to leadership training.

The purpose of Boalian theater is to call into question power dynamics and oppression systems, which cast some as powerful and active and others as powerless and passive. The three forms of theater help explain leadership oppression. Boalian theater challenges these power dynamics by destroying the proscenium arch and removing the barrier between actor and spectator, creating “spect-actors.” A word that combines “spectator” and “actor” the word “spect-actor” is one of Boal’s key concepts. Both actors and spectators break the fourth wall of the theater and become participant observers. These spect-actors are essential to our theatrical approach to leadership development.

Below, we present three specific formats of the storytelling theatrics approaches: Image, Invisibility, and Forum theaters. We begin with a detailed walk-through of an Image theater classroom session. While experienced groups may follow any sequence, we recommend novice groups start by using these methods in the sequence presented here: Image, Invisibility, and Forum. The Image theater is less threatening to participants, helping them get comfortable with less-demanding activities first as they embark on these unusual exercises.

Image Theater

Image theater allows participants and trainers to become a silent visual theater. It is a theater of images not words. Participants can form body sculptures that silently depict and co-construct a story. Image theater begins with the trainer asking participants to think of a leader–follower scenario. The use of the scenario in HRD is to focus on sense making, and the changing of the senses made (Chermack & Swanson, 2008). Participants might never reveal the story the authorial participant intended. Instead, every participant’s interpretation is valid. Furthermore, participants do not look for *the correct* interpretation, but one that *resonates* with them. This unveils the myriad ways each observer experiences the event. In this way, Image theater de-centers meaning making, personalizes learning, and creates bonds of shared experience. This shared experience begins with the introduction and warm-up.

Introduction and warm-up. What follows is a sequence of how a potential classroom module for Image theater might unfold. First, the trainer explains the Image theater using a lecturette. The trainer explains that Image theater is the silent physical portrayal of an experience of oppression. The trainer asks participants to think of a leader–follower situation where they felt oppressed. Each participant may recruit one or more partners to help in portraying their own experience. While some of the participants are staging their experiences, others are portraying the characters in the experience. Finally, if time permits, multiple rounds allow each participant to enact their experience as others take turns being characters in the scenario.

The trainer next explains that before conducting Image theater, participants will practice some needed skills. The trainer demonstrates the following warm-up process with a participant volunteer. The trainer begins the warm-up by telling participants to pick partners, and to decide on which partner will be A and which partner will be B. The trainer asks Partner B to shake hands with Partner A, then freeze. While B remains frozen, Partner A should move away and repositions her/himself in relation to B. This new position tells us something else about the relationship between A and B. Next, A freezes, and B repositions.

This activity moves quickly. Each reposition should only take half a minute or so. After repositioning about seven times, the pair discusses what they experienced. This warm-up exercise takes about 10 min. The trainer may use more warm-ups, depending on the trainer's assessment of the needs of the audience. Once the warm-up is accomplished it is time to move on to the rehearsal and performance.

Rehearsal and performance. The trainer instructs the A–B pairs that Person A will take the first turn to stage their personal scenario. The participants find a space in the room, then rehearse their sculpture body poses, desired body movements, and a non-verbal sound, to enact the scene of the injustice. After rehearsal, the groups are split into two categories. One set of groups performs while the other set of groups spectates. After an initial round of performances and scene processing, the other pairs take their turns to present. An alternative format is for each pair to present while the rest of the group acts as audience. Another alternative is to allow simultaneous scenes with the audience moving as they choose among the theaters.

Spect-acting. After each group presents, the audience members become spect-actors. They take an active role by commenting on what they see in the scene. They act on what they think is going on. They bring forward similar personal experiences. Emphasis is on personal experiences that *resonate* within the observers, not the actual story. Image theater does not reveal the actual story in Person A's head. This is because Image theater does not focus primarily on an actual story. Participants may gain more of the actual story if the instructor progresses to a Forum theater format as we describe below. However, emphasis is on using Image theater as a trigger to elicit the observers' actively linking the theater to their own experiences. A concluding de-briefing discussion may incorporate more theatrical elements. For example, the protagonist might utilize three wishes, and play out what happens with each wish. Another spect-actor might re-sculpt the body poses to enact a scene to show a resolution.

In short, Image theater portrays the potential oppositional behaviors of leader control and worker resistance. Scenes demonstrate oppression, discrimination, or unfairness. Portrayals can also show the liberation, acceptances, or equity-resolutions. This helps participants overcome dynamics of resistance and “stuck-ness” and instead, leads to a resolution within the Image theater scene. This ability to shift from oppression-and-resistance to enacted resolutions within our “theater” is a valuable skill for leaders. Next, we tell a story of an Image theater session, based on an amalgam of several actual experiences.

Image theater example. In this example, Person A depicts their scenario by positioning B onto her knees, hands raised overhead, in a posture of adoration. Person A stands over B, looking annoyed and perhaps a bit angry. The scene is ready to be viewed by the audience. No one tells the audience anything like who A and B are portraying or information about the situation. We gain useful perspective and distance by not addressing the actual story. This is particularly valuable as when there are multiple actors there is no one true story. However, for the purposes of explaining these methods, we will tell you the story Person A had in mind. The story was that of the relationship between a doctor and a nurse. The doctor was angry because the stool he preferred to use in the operating room was not present. Instead there was a different stool set to the wrong height. Person B is playing a nurse and apologizing, attempting to calm the irate surgeon.

While the audience is viewing this scene, the trainer calls “Action!” This indicates that the actors may move or make sounds, but still may not speak. The motions Person B chooses are to bring her hands together in a prayerful pleading manner. Person A responds by turning away in disgust. The audience offers interpretations of what they see. They think Person B, on her knees, may be asking a big favor, asking forgiveness, or expressing admiration. They notice she also looks distressed. They notice that Person A appears disdainful, perhaps angry, impatient, and does not want to see Person B. Discussion continues. The trainer may conclude the Image theater with whole-group activities and discussion. All, or only a selection of different Image theater scenes may be observed and discussed by the whole group.

The audience members resume their dyads, resuming their roles as A and B, and discuss what they have seen. Person A talks first, and relates the image to one of A’s experiences. Person B listens for about 3 min, then repeats back to A what they heard A say. Repeating back, with corrections from A as needed, is the only feedback. After feedback, discussion between A and B may extend from 2 to 10 min. Then A and B change places, and repeat the cycle. Now B relates the image to one of B’s experiences that came to mind because of the Image theater. A single cycle may last from 5 min to half an hour. Are these people who know each other well and like to talk, or are they strangers likely to be done in 5 min? The trainer may need to adjust the anticipated times accordingly and be firm regarding timing.

Let us assume that in this particular case, after the discussion, the trainer asks Person A to tell the “originating” story of their experience. Person A tells of the irate surgeon and the penitent nurse. The trainer invites audience members to re-imagine the scene, still without dialogue. One participant volunteers to play B the nurse, and another plays A the surgeon. The nurse grabs a chair, stands it next to the surgeon and points to it, with a reproving look. It is as if the nurse is saying, “this is the only chair we have for you today, so quit complaining and use it!” Another person takes over for the nurse, kneels down, and places a hand over her mouth. It appears as if the nurse is saying contritely “Oops, I goofed!” Meanwhile, the nurse has one hand behind her back hidden with a raised middle finger.

Perhaps at this point, the trainer decides to use another technique, and chooses to give Person A three wishes. The original A and B resume their starting positions. For

wish 1, Person A notices B, and smilingly reaches a hand out to B. In wish 2, Person A grabs a chair and makes the OK sign, with a big smile directed to B. In wish 3, Person B is directed to stand and shrug shoulders with upraised hands. It is as if to say, “sorry, I don’t know how this happened.” Person A’s reaction is to reassuringly pat B’s shoulder, smiling into B’s face. All is well.

In the concluding discussion, the trainer asks each actor how he or she felt in his or her roles. The actors and the audience discuss the reasons behind the oppression, and the hidden power dynamics. They consider the efficacy of different actions. They speak to the possibilities of creating the various “wish” scenarios. Using the above-described activities, a class quickly becomes proficient in Image theater. Augusto Boal has similar activities available at TheatreOftheOppressed.Org, however, it would be even better for trainers to make up their own activities. After sufficient experience with Image theater, the group is ready for Invisibility and Forum theaters. Next, we move onto Invisibility theater, the storytelling theater that makes the invisibly repressed visible to leadership.

Invisibility Theater

Invisibility theater focuses on the difference between what is on the main stage and what is invisible. Things may be invisible because they are *back stage*, in the corridor of power, or *off stage*, such as outsource subcontractors. Invisibility theater can offer the spect-actors the opportunity to use verbal and visual dialogue. In addition, actors on stage can enroll members of the audience as spect-actors. Those remaining in the audience can ask for changes to the scene or offer up solutions to the staged dilemma. Making a suggestion in this theater is tantamount to volunteering to try out the idea on stage. Participants need not wait until they are home to try out a different leadership approach; they may do so in real time, on the spot.

If we go back to the rules of Image theater, we must remember that there is no dialogue in the first scene. There are no costumes. The props are very minimal, only what can be found in the room. The story comes mostly from the nonverbal posturing from the actors themselves, their body orientation, their facial expressions, and their gestures. The audience then breaks down the story and talks about what nonverbal behaviors would change the scene. Here in the Invisibility theater, this is where words and extra images fill in more of the story. Pulling from the first example of the doctor and nurse, this is where the scene would have the nurse say, “Doctor, I am sorry that your stool was not properly prepared.”

Obviously if in the first scene with no costume that says this is a nurse and doctor interaction, just the word doctor, being said already puts more detail into the story. It is not about a parent–child interaction, it is not about a police–civilian interaction. Notice how the story feels, if the doctor said, “Just fix the situation nurse,” versus, “well, you are a patient here, I will just have to have a nurse fix the situation.” Surely it would be quite odd if a patient were bending down on pleading knee. But just consider then how the person being addressed in words as a nurse or a patient changed our expectations of the interaction in the story, or just our reaction to how we think or feel toward the person on bended knee.

Extending upon the difference between Image theater and Invisibility theater, there is still so much more to be done when participating in Invisibility theater. It is more than just considering the impact that language may have on our perception of the scene. It now also is an opportunity to bring in new scenes that are related to the story in unexpected ways. Now we will exemplify what we mean by Invisibility theater.

Invisibility theater example. Invisibility theater may show a customer–employee interaction at a shoe store. Next to that scene might be a scene of the factory floor of a sweatshop making those shoes. After that, there might be a scene in the boardroom where executives make decisions about outsourcing. Next, the participant team doing this presentation then deconstructs the various scenes. They assess the situation and possible points of intervention or resistance. They make connections with leadership concepts. One participant might portray a task-oriented leader behavior, and then enact what a people-oriented leader might do.

Whereas Image theater has no dialogue, Invisibility theater adds in dialogue, and uses various strategies for encouraging audience interaction such as three wishes. Instead of merely discussing “what if . . .” the facilitator grants wishes. The team leader wishes for better equipment. Those playing employees ask for a training allowance. And so it goes. Our next type of theater is Forum theater, which is potentially the most engaging and interactive theater of the three. Now able to expose leadenly oppression, we move onto Forum theater where resistance of oppression can start.

Forum Theater

Leader–Follower Forum theater is storytelling theatrics of power or leadership placed onto the stage. For example, the trainer asks a group of participants to depict a way to resist some sort of abusive power. This does not have to be legitimate power created by the organizational structure. It is acceptable to resist expert, position, referent, and so on, forms of power. Participants generate their own vignettes based on work experiences. In Forum theater, the trainer asks participants to form groups of leader, follower, and observer. One group goes first and the other spect-actors can observe how it is done. A person designated leader gives verbal commands to the follower to do some activity. Activities might include sitting down, standing up, writing on the board, fetching a book, and so on. The follower is allowed to either submit or resist. The observer lets the action unfold for a few minutes, and then calls a halt to the action. The observer asks the follower how he or she felt about the leader’s style. For example, the observer may ask whether the leader was friendly or more of a taskmaster. These moments of friendship help escape limited narratives and appreciate the living stories of others (Saylor, Boje, & Mueller, 2014). The observer then asks the leader what the leader experienced in the interaction.

After a brief discussion, the roles are switched such that everyone gets their turn in each role. Those in the audience are then invited on stage as spect-actors. The spect-actors take a role as leader or follower and create a new result. Theatric rules can be modified, new solutions attempted, and resistance can be increased or thwarted. Next

we offer a more detailed account of these methods as they might play out in a short leadership training session.

Forum theater example. This example is an amalgam of some of the authors' actual experiences using these activities for organizational consultations, professional development conferences, and leadership courses. The trainer begins by giving participants the task of creating a McDonald's restaurant on stage. This is a context with which most will be familiar. Participants are workers, a manager, and customers. Participants act out usual behaviors at McDonald's. With a short rehearsal, participants know the drill: Customers queue up for their orders, workers make up the orders, and the manager keeps time and motion performance standards.

Participants begin with silent Image theater scenes of customers receiving their orders of burgers and fries. This may express an answer to a number of questions: What is happening? Who has power? Who feels oppressed? Who feels happy? Then participants move into Invisibility theater with behind-the-counter scenes of power abuse. They might be scenes of sexual harassment, or the kinds of bigoted language that is often presented in a joking manner. These scenes include dialogue. A manager badgers a gay worker to man up. A worker spits on a burger going to a rude customer. "Double Cheeseburger" is the worker code for a female customer with large breasts. Questions come from actors and audience. Very little direction is required. Before long, a good deal of bureaucratic repetitiveness, routine performativity, and rationalization set in. Invisibility theater brings the hidden power dynamics to center stage for study.

The trainer calls for a "stop action" to allow for discussions and reflections. The implicit bias created by this kind of behavior can be shown for what it is: not a joke, but actual bigotry. The trainer invites audience members to step into a role and attempt to improve the situation. Participants then move smoothly into the Forum theater format. One former audience member is a new manager, trying a "participative" approach to worker motivation. Stop again, and someone else takes orders at the counter. What is happening? Who has power? Who feels oppressed? Who feels happy?

The trainer points out some connections to leadership theories. Did participants observe anything about efficiency, calculability, predictability, or control (cf. Ritzer, 2000)? Frederick Taylor's *principles of scientific management* may be applied. Textbook concerns of human behavior efficiency and effectiveness quickly overlay with power struggles. This unveils power struggles surrounding class, gender, race, ethnicity, material conditions of work, and so forth (for a further discussion, please see Boje & Saylor, 2013).

The theater techniques build on each other. Furthermore, each of the three techniques illuminates a different aspect of a leader's problem solving, so all three techniques are very important to this leadership development design. The Image theater allows the leaders to bring their most immediate dilemmas onto the stage. It is posing a problem to be solved. In the Invisibility theater, it is a process of finding the components of a selected problem that are being addressed. The Forum theater allows leaders to explore and experience the leader role from all perspectives, taking turns as leaders,

followers, and observers. The process of enacting a concrete, embodied experience gives rise to creative ideas about what other actions they could take, or ask others to take. Then these new ideas can be enacted immediately on the stage.

We have been successful using these methods—some of us for more than 5 years now. We include in the appendix a brief suggested chronology of activities employed successfully over many years. Next, we move onto how storytelling theatrics can move past oppressive leadership into relational leadership learning.

Summary and Conclusions

Storytelling theatrics can add a rich and embodied experience of the business world to leadership training. It is important to emphasize the value of storytelling in creating lasting learning focused on positive outcomes. Play, through the exchange of positive emotional contagion (Cast, Rosile, Boje, & Saylor, 2013) can lead to a general spirit of resolution. Further these theatrical exercises offer a means to balance what is, with what could be. This can open the exciting possibilities of partnering in co-creating, re-visioning, and reshaping our world. Storytelling theatrics (a) links leadership concepts to personal lived experience, (b) focuses on perceived injustice, (c) exposes hidden power dynamics and oppression, and (d) invites broad participation where audience members may become actors.

This process allows for the members of the organization, no matter their position to express their stories with each other. This allows for a middle manager to express what pressures that were once invisible to their employees that may have impacted the decisions they have been making. This allows employees to bring forward what barriers they have encountered when trying to perform the duties inside or outside of their job description in service of the organization. This also allows them to evaluate their expectations and biases in a nonthreatening forum, and it is an opportunity to co-create solutions that the participants can achieve together.

This article has presented step-by-step processes, with illuminating examples, of these storytelling theatrics methods for leadership training. We summarize these steps as follows: First, participants recall personal experiences of unfairness, injustice, or oppression, in a leader–follower situation. Then they used Image, Invisibility, and Forum theater formats. They enlist partners to convey stories to the rest of the group. The themes of power and hidden power dynamics are incorporated into the content of theatrical events. The deconstruction of the theatrical events happens via actor and spectator questions, interventions, and suggestions. This is supported, but not dominated by, trainer comments. Overall, this de-centers the theatrical processes, by inviting multiple voices and ways of thinking. These methods reduce the oppressive potential in the training methods used, as well as in the leadership contexts co-created by participants.

Participant's responses to storytelling theatrics have been very positive. Participant evaluations as well as informal comments, for example, "I see everything differently now," exemplify this. These theatrics engage participants in a very lively process that offers a critical perspective without imposing it. They allow participants to connect

their experiences with their personal stories. This allows leaders to see when they may be contributing to oppression and inviting resistance, and then experiment with alternative behaviors. Followers also see how they have a role in this embodied relational leadership context.

In sum, storytelling theater evokes the questioning of the taken-for-granted assumptions, and the finding of one's voice, in the language of the storyteller and the thespian. As spectators repeatedly step into the roles of actors, what emerges on the stage is the leader in each of us.

Appendix

A Chronology of Boalian Theater

1. Begin with simple silent warm-up exercises.
2. Explain Image theater, and coach participants on how to express meaning without words, using just their bodies.
3. Explain Invisibility theater, which compares on and off stage, front and back stage, and the invisibility of power in way-off-off stage events. For example, scenes of sweatshops or the impact of media on the home life of workers and managers might normally be invisible in traditional management stories. Invisibility theater juxtaposes these hidden scenes with the dominant story lines.
4. Explain Forum theater, which looks at power games of oppression and liberation such as sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and dealing with various situations of unfairness and injustice.
5. Conduct a practice overview of all three theaters, using the McDonald's example presented in this article, or your own example.
6. Practice Image theater with the entire group.
7. Conduct some improvisational dialogue coaching to prepare for Invisibility theater, which incorporates dialogue.
8. Recruit one or more groups (of five to seven participants) to develop Invisibility and/or Forum events for particular leadership topics.
9. Remind participants that during Invisibility and Forum theaters, participants take on the role of the trainer. Participants conduct the commenting and deconstructing of the theatrical event by pointing out the episodes of oppression, discrimination, and injustice, and strategies for their resistance.

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Author Biographies

David M. Boje is an amateur blacksmith artist and professor of storytelling, distinguished university professor, and Bill Daniels Ethics Fellow in Management Department at New Mexico State University (NMSU). His speciality is qualitative methods specialist who can advise people about several types of storytelling research methods, ranging from traditional narrative memory work, to living story emergence, to the new work in antenarrative and quantum storytelling that is more ontological. Presently he is working on storytelling methodologies that can tease out spiral and quantum processes. He is a member of STRADA, the Strategic Analysis Discourse Group at NMSU. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Aalborg University, Denmark, in 2011 for his contributions to quantum storytelling. He does keynote conference presentations and university seminars around the world. He is founder and president of Standing Conference for Management and Organizational Inquiry and the new annual conference on Quantum Storytelling each December. He is founder and past editor, *Tamara Journal* and Chair of the NMSU Sustainability Council. He is former Bank of America Endowed Professor of Management (awarded September 2006-2010), and past Arthur Owens Professor in Business Administration (June 2003 to June 2006) in the Management Department at NMSU.

Grace Ann Rosile, PhD, a professor of management at NMSU, studies organizational storytelling, ethics, and pedagogy. Her most recent work is the coauthored "Storytelling Diamond" in *Organizational Research Methods* (2013). She wrote and produced a half-hour film "Tribal Wisdom for Business Ethics," which aired on KRWG-TV. Her training program in embodied leadership, teamwork, and communication using structured experiences with horses is at HorseSenseAtWork.Com

Jillian Saylor is a doctoral candidate at NMSU. Her research interest is at the intersection of human resource management training and development and curriculum and instruction. In particular, she seeks to bridge the gap between education and organizations to help those on the autism spectrum be better utilized.

Rohny Saylor holds a PhD from NMSU. He has published in the journal *Organizational Research Methods*. His passion is the advancement of human creativity, hope, and authentic compassion through, and within, organizational scholarship. His research is focused on entrepreneurial storytelling processes and methods.