

## The reflective facilitator: Navigating practice, ethics, and community in theatre for development (TfD) in Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

Reflective practice is widely recognised as central to professions marked by relational complexity, ethical risk and situated professional judgement. However, its role in Theatre for Development (TfD) facilitation remains insufficiently theorised, particularly within community-based practice in Ghana. This study examined how TfD facilitators understand and use reflective practice before, during and after community interventions. Guided by Schön's reflective practice framework, the study adopted a qualitative interpretive research design. The target population comprised TfD facilitators in Ghana, including university-based student facilitators, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)-based professional practitioners and experienced academic facilitators. Twelve participants were selected through purposive sampling across three tiers of professional formation. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically through an inductive–deductive process. The findings show that TfD facilitation creates a dual reflective demand comprising individual reflexivity about artistic, pedagogical and facilitative choices alongside communal ethical accountability to the communities whose experiences are theatricalised. Two major dilemmas emerged, namely securing meaningful community consent and managing the unintended consequences of participatory performance. The study further identifies reflection-beyond-action as a temporally extended ethical concern that persists after formal project closure. This paper recommends that TfD training programmes must embed structured ethical reflection into facilitation pedagogy, supervision and post-project accountability.

**Keywords:** Community-Based Theatre, Dual Reflective Demand, Facilitation Ethics, Ghana, Reflective Practice, Theatre for Development (TfD), TfD Facilitation, Reflection-Beyond-Action

### I. INTRODUCTION

Reflective practice has been widely recognised as a foundational competency in professional disciplines whose work is situated, relational and ethically consequential, including medicine, law, teaching and the arts (Schön, 1983; Boud et al., 1985; Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Since Schön's seminal formulation of the reflective practitioner, reflection has been understood not merely as retrospective evaluation but as a dynamic process through which professionals think before, during and after practice, drawing on accumulated experience and theoretical knowledge to navigate the irreducible complexity of real-world professional encounters. Reflection, in this sense, is not supplementary to practice but constitutive of it, enabling practitioners to transcend habituated responses and engage with the unpredictable, often contested terrain of their work (Thompson & Pascal, 2012).

In higher arts education, reflective practice has received growing scholarly attention. Researchers increasingly argue that explicit, collaborative and critically reflexive modes of reflection are essential to preparing artists for contemporary professional life (Treacy & Gaunt, 2021; Georgii-Hemming et al., 2020; Guillaumier, 2016). However, much of this scholarship has focused on institutional arts training, ensemble performance and conservatoire contexts. Less attention has been given to community-embedded performance practices whose primary site is the community and whose material is often social suffering, inequality, conflict and collective aspiration. Unlike therapeutic or purely educational applied theatre frameworks, such community-embedded practices are defined by an explicit development mandate, that is, the deployment of theatrical process as a deliberate instrument of collective conscientisation, social critique and community-driven transformative action.

Theatre for Development (TfD) is one such practice. Rooted in the participatory theatre traditions of Augusto Boal (1979) and the popular education philosophy of Paulo Freire (1970), TfD uses theatrical processes as instruments of conscientisation, dialogue and social transformation. Operating in villages, schools, health centres and community squares, predominantly across Africa, Asia and Latin America, TfD facilitators work with and within communities to identify development challenges, devise theatrical responses and create participatory spaces in which communities can

collectively interrogate and reimagine their circumstances (Etherton & Prentki, 2006). The practice is distinguished from other forms of applied theatre by its explicit development mandate, its deep embeddedness in community life and the ethical weight of its relational commitments (Plastow, 2014).

These characteristics make Tfd one of the most reflectively demanding of all performance practices. The Tfd facilitator must simultaneously attend to artistic process, community dynamics, power relations, ethical accountability and the unpredictable consequences of activating participatory performance in vulnerable communities. Each stage of the Tfd process, from initial community entry and needs analysis through workshop facilitation and devising to performance and post-performance dialogue, demands a different quality and mode of reflection, operating under conditions of heightened ethical responsibility that are rarely encountered in conventional arts practice. And yet, despite this distinctive reflective demand, the reflective dimensions of Tfd facilitation remain insufficiently theorised in any systematic or integrated manner. While adjacent scholarship on applied theatre reflexivity and participatory development ethics has engaged related concerns (Etherton & Prentki, 2006), it has not produced a sustained theorisation of facilitated reflective practice as a professional and ethical competency.

This article responds to that gap by examining the reflective practices of Tfd facilitators in Ghana. It argues that Tfd facilitation imposes a distinctive dual reflective demand on practitioners, combining individual reflexivity concerning artistic and facilitative decisions with communal ethical accountability toward the communities whose lived realities constitute the raw material of the practice.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

- i. To explore how Tfd facilitators in Ghana reflect on their community-based practice at different stages of their professional development.
- ii. To identify the main professional challenges that require critical reflection in Tfd facilitation.
- iii. To expand Schön's reflective practice framework to capture the ethical responsibilities and continuing reflective demands of community-based theatre practice.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 Schön's Reflective Practice Theory

Schön's (1983) reflective practice theory provides the primary analytical lens for this study. Schön challenged the technical-rational model of professional knowledge, arguing that the most significant challenges confronting professionals in fields such as architecture, medicine, psychotherapy and education are precisely those that resist technical solutions, what he termed the swampy lowlands of professional practice, characterised by complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict (Schön, 1983, p. 42). In such situations, effective professionals do not simply apply fixed knowledge; they reflect in and on practice.

Schön (1983) distinguished three interrelated modes of professional reflection. Reflection-for-action involves anticipatory thinking prior to practice, including planning, imagining scenarios and drawing on accumulated experience to prepare for what lies ahead. Reflection-in-action, which Schön considered the most distinctive and sophisticated mode, describes the real-time thinking that occurs while practice is unfolding, specifically the capacity to notice unexpected developments, reframe situations on the spot and adjust one's responses in the moment without interrupting the flow of action. Reflection-on-action involves retrospective analysis after practice has concluded, enabling practitioners to extract learning from experience and incorporate it into future professional decisions. Together, these three modes constitute what Schön described as the epistemology of practice, a form of knowing embedded in and inseparable from doing. These three modes map analytically onto the distinct phases of Tfd work, namely community entry and preparation, facilitation and performance, and post-performance evaluation.

However, the Ghanaian Tfd context also stretches Schön's framework. In Tfd, the swampy lowlands are distinctively populated not merely by the professional ambiguities of architecture or the clinical uncertainties of medicine, but by human suffering, structural oppression and systemic power imbalances, conditions that intensify the ethical demands of reflective practice in ways that Schön's original institutional contexts did not fully anticipate. Reflection in community-based Tfd is not only about professional learning; it is also about ethical responsibility to communities whose stories, vulnerabilities and social relationships may be exposed through performance. This study therefore extends Schön's framework by proposing the concept of a dual reflective demand and, subsequently, reflection-beyond-action.

The dual reflective demand refers to the simultaneous operation of two distinct but inseparable reflective obligations in Tfd facilitation. The first is the individual reflective obligation, which refers to the practitioner's responsibility to think critically and continuously about their own artistic, pedagogical and facilitative decisions. The second is the communal ethical obligation, defined as the Tfd facilitator's accountability to the communities whose lives, stories and vulnerabilities are directly implicated in and shaped by the facilitation process. These two obligations

do not merely coexist; they interact, sometimes productively and sometimes in tension, generating what this article conceptualises as the dual reflective demand of Tfd facilitation.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

### **2.2.1 Reflective Practice as Professional Competency**

Subsequent scholarship has both extended and critiqued Schön's framework. Boud et al. (1985) emphasised the affective dimensions of reflection, arguing that the emotional content of professional experience is not incidental to the reflective process but central to it, and that effective reflection requires practitioners to attend to feelings as seriously as to thoughts and actions. Thompson and Pascal (2012) proposed a more explicitly critical dimension, distinguishing between technical reflection concerned with the efficiency of practice, practical reflection concerned with the values and assumptions underpinning practice, and emancipatory or critical reflection concerned with the broader social, political and structural contexts within which practice is embedded. This distinction is particularly consequential for practice disciplines operating in contexts of social inequality and structural injustice, where unreflective practice risks reproducing the very conditions it seeks to address (Thompson & Pascal, 2012).

In higher arts education, scholars have argued for collaborative and dialogic approaches to reflection. Treacy and Gaunt (2021) show that reflective practice can support collective creativity, while Georgii-Hemming et al. (2020) and Guillaumier (2016) underline the importance of reflective learning in arts training. These studies are useful but remain limited for this paper because they largely focus on institutional arts contexts rather than community-embedded development practice. Across this body of scholarship, a consistent argument emerges: that reflective practice is not a supplementary professional skill but a foundational ethical and epistemological commitment without which practice in complex, relational and morally laden fields cannot be responsibly conducted.

### **2.2.2 Theatre for Development, Facilitation and Community Ethics**

Tfd emerged in Africa during the 1970s through the influence of Freirean popular education, Boalian participatory theatre and postcolonial development communication (Mda, 1993; Mlana, 1991). Freire's (1970) insistence that communities must become subjects of their own development, and Boal's (1979, 1992) development of Forum Theatre and the spect-actor, continue to shape Tfd methodology. From these foundations, Tfd developed as a practice in which theatrical processes are used with and within communities to identify development problems, generate collective analysis of their causes and consequences, and rehearse possible responses, in what Boal (1979) described as the rehearsal of revolution.

The facilitator occupies a central role in this process. Unlike a conventional director, the Tfd facilitator does not impose a finished artistic vision or a predetermined developmental message; rather, they create and hold the conditions under which community members can identify, dramatise and interrogate their own issues. This facilitative role demands theatrical knowledge, cultural literacy, conflict sensitivity and ethical judgement. Kerr (1995), Mda (1993), Etherton and Prentki (2006) and Plastow (2014) all caution that Tfd can reproduce external agendas if facilitation is not critically and ethically grounded. Plastow (2014) specifically examined questions of representation and voice, arguing that the communities most targeted by Tfd interventions are frequently the least empowered to determine the terms on which their stories are theatricalised and performed. Plastow (2014) mapped the ethical terrain of applied theatre more broadly, identifying the tensions between community ownership, practitioner authority, funding imperatives and developmental ideology that structure every Tfd encounter.

African Tfd scholarship also emphasises indigenous knowledge, communal deliberation and local epistemologies. Wiredu (1996) and Gyekye (1997) provide important grounding for understanding reflection not merely as an individual cognitive process but as a communal responsibility. Wiredu (1996) and Gyekye (1997) have articulated frameworks of communal consensus and shared ethical responsibility that find direct expression in the Tfd facilitator's relational obligations, suggesting that the dual reflective demand identified in this study has deep indigenous philosophical roots that Western reflective practice theory has yet to fully engage.

### **2.2.3 Community Consent and Participatory Performance**

Community consent is repeatedly identified in Tfd and applied theatre scholarship as a core ethical concern. Yet consent in community-based theatre is rarely straightforward. Approval from chiefs, elders, institutional partners or NGOs may provide procedural access, but it does not automatically guarantee informed participation by women, youth, widows, minority groups or other less powerful community members (Plastow, 2014). This raises the fundamental question of whether consent is a single event or an ongoing relational process.

Participatory performance also produces ethical risk because it invites unpredictable community response. Forum Theatre deliberately creates openings for intervention, contradiction and emotional disclosure. While this is central to its emancipatory potential, it may also surface unresolved trauma, conflict or social tensions that extend beyond the performative frame and that facilitators may not be equipped to manage (Boal, 1992; Etherton & Prentki, 2006). This concern connects with broader scholarship on the ethical weight of community entry, needs analysis and

post-performance responsibility in development-oriented applied theatre. The literature therefore supports the need for facilitators who can reflect before, during and after performance, and who can remain accountable to communities beyond the immediate event.

### 2.3 Gap in the Literature

The reviewed literature shows that reflective practice theory and Tfd scholarship have developed largely as separate conversations. Reflective practice scholarship has not sufficiently examined community-based theatre contexts where ethical stakes are high, while Tfd scholarship has not systematically theorised facilitator reflection as a professional and ethical competency. The most recent contributions to the higher arts education literature, including Treacy and Gaunt's (2021) exploration of collective creativity in higher arts education, have productively pushed toward more collaborative, dialogic and practice-embedded conceptions of reflection, yet have done so within the relatively protected institutional environment of conservatoires and university arts departments rather than in the exposed, ethically charged terrain of community-based practice.

Tfd scholarship, conversely, has engaged deeply with the ethics of facilitation but has not drawn on the rich conceptual resources of reflective practice theory to analyse how facilitators navigate those ethics in real time. The result is that the reflective practitioner as a theoretical construct remains essentially invisible in Tfd scholarship, despite the fact that the qualities Schön (1983) identifies, including the capacity to recognise and respond to uncertainty, to reframe problems under pressure and to learn from practice, are precisely the qualities that distinguish an effective Tfd facilitator from an ineffective one. This study addresses that gap by bringing Schön's framework into dialogue with empirical accounts of Ghanaian Tfd facilitation, enriching both fields simultaneously.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative interpretive research design. This design was appropriate because the study sought to understand the meanings Tfd facilitators attach to their professional experiences rather than to measure variables statistically (Creswell, 2014; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A qualitative approach is not merely methodologically convenient but epistemologically necessary, as it is the only design capable of accessing the complex, situated and often tacit knowledge through which Tfd practitioners navigate the ethical and relational demands of their work.

### 3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Ghana, where Tfd has a substantial institutional and professional presence across university Theatre Arts departments, NGO-based development communication organisations and community-level interventions in multiple regions. Three universities with established Tfd training programmes served as the primary institutional sites. These were the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) in the Central Region, the University of Ghana (UG) at Legon in the Greater Accra Region and the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in the Central Region. These institutions were selected on the basis of their active Theatre Arts departments offering structured, supervised practicum placements in community-based Tfd.

The professional NGO sector was represented by practitioners based in two locations. The first was Accra, which concentrates the headquarters of development-oriented NGOs operating nationally, and the second was Northern Ghana, which constitutes a significant site of field-based Tfd activity addressing development challenges including food security, health communication, land rights and gender-based violence. The experienced academic tier included practitioners from UG, Legon and the University for Development Studies (UDS), Wa, in the Upper West Region, extending the geographical reach of the study from the southern coast to the far north of the country. This multi-site, geographically distributed design ensured that the findings captured variation in institutional context, regional setting and facilitation tradition.

### 3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised Theatre for Development facilitators in Ghana. This included student facilitators undergoing supervised practicum training, NGO-based professional facilitators engaged in community development work, and experienced academic facilitators involved in teaching, supervising and practising Tfd.

### 3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Twelve participants were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study required information-rich participants with direct experience of Tfd facilitation (Patton, 2015). The sample was organised into three tiers of professional formation in order to compare reflective practice across different levels of experience and institutional context.

**Table 1***Three-tier purposive sample of TfD facilitators in Ghana (N = 12)*

Tier	Participants and Sample Size	Institutional / Professional Location	Rationale
Tier 1	Student facilitators (n = 6)	Two each from UEW, UG and UCC Theatre Arts Departments	To capture reflective practice at the stage of initial professional formation through supervised practicum
Tier 2	NGO-based professional facilitators (n = 4)	Two based in Northern Ghana and two in Accra	To capture field-based facilitation shaped by sustained community engagement
Tier 3	Experienced academic facilitators (n = 2)	One from UG, Legon and one from UBIDS/UDS, Wa	To capture experienced facilitation and pedagogical perspectives on reflective competence

This tiered design enabled comparison across emerging, active and highly experienced practitioners without claiming statistical representativeness. The geographical spread of participants across Accra, the Central Region, Northern Ghana and the Upper West Region also added contextual variation to the data set.

### 3.5 Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Data were collected through twelve semi-structured interviews conducted between March and November 2024, each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. The interview guide was organised around the pre-intervention, facilitation and post-performance phases of TfD practice. Participants were invited to discuss experiences of planning, community entry, consent negotiation, devising, performance, post-performance dialogue and unresolved ethical concerns after project closure. Participants were not introduced to Schön's terminology in advance, so that their accounts of reflection would emerge from practice rather than from the imposed language of the framework. All interviews were conducted in English, audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim and returned to participants for member checking. Prior to the main data collection, the interview schedule was reviewed by two TfD-informed colleagues who were not participants in the study, and a pilot interview was conducted to verify the schedule's clarity and neutrality. Minor adjustments to question phrasing and sequencing were made following this process.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically in two stages. First, the transcripts were coded inductively using open coding to identify recurring patterns, dilemmas and reflective orientations across the interviews. Second, the emergent themes were interpreted deductively through Schön's reflective practice framework and the concept of the dual reflective demand. This inductive–deductive process allowed the analysis to remain grounded in participant accounts while also supporting conceptual development beyond description. The analytical process was iterative and reflexive. Codes were revised in response to the full data set, and negative cases that complicated emerging patterns were retained rather than excluded. Interpretive validity was strengthened through peer debriefing with TfD-informed colleagues and by sustained comparison between themes and contradictory instances in the data.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the University of Education, Winneba. All participants gave informed consent, were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time and were protected through pseudonyms and the cautious handling of identifying details. The principal researcher is a lecturer in Theatre Arts at UEW and an experienced TfD practitioner. This insider positionality provided contextual familiarity with Ghanaian TfD practice but also raised the possibility of unexamined assumptions and constrained participant candour. These risks were addressed through reflexive journaling, careful interview conduct and critical scrutiny of emerging interpretations across the full body of data. Because the TfD community in Ghana is relatively small and interconnected, quotations are attributed using role-based identifiers to preserve anonymity.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Reflective Practice Across Tiers: Challenging Initial Assumptions

Our analysis of interviews with twelve TfD facilitators across three tiers of professional formation, namely student facilitators, NGO-based professional facilitators and experienced academics, generated insights that both confirmed and complicated our initial theoretical expectations. In this section we present these insights in two movements. We begin by attending to the ways the interview material challenged some of our assumptions about how reflective practice operates in TfD contexts. We then focus on two professional dilemmas that emerged across the full body of interview material as central to the dual reflective demand of TfD facilitation, namely navigating community consent and managing the unintended consequences of participatory performance.

#### 4.1.1 Challenging Assumptions About Reflective Practice in Tfd

Our analysis revealed that reflective practice in Tfd facilitation is significantly more complex, contested and unevenly distributed across the profession than our initial theoretical mapping anticipated. Several of our assumptions were productively challenged by the interview material.

We began, for instance, with the assumption that reflection-on-action, the retrospective evaluative mode of reflection Schön (1983) describes, would be the dominant and most developed form of reflective practice among our participants, given that post-performance evaluation is a standard component of most Tfd methodological frameworks. The interviews revealed a more complicated picture. While structured post-performance reflection was indeed familiar to participants across all three tiers, its quality, depth and ethical reach varied considerably. Among student facilitators, reflection-on-action tended to be externally prompted and institutionally directed, shaped by practicum assessment requirements rather than by an internalised commitment to professional reflexivity. As one student facilitator from UEW observed:

*“Honestly, I write the reflection because it is part of the practicum. You have to submit it. When I sit down to write it, I am thinking about what the lecturer wants to see, not what I actually felt or what went wrong. It is only after I submit and get my grade that I sometimes go back and think about what the community was really saying to us.”* (Student Facilitator 1, May 2024)

In Schön’s (1983) terms, this describes reflection-on-action evacuated of its substantive professional function, where its form is preserved while its content is shaped by institutional expectations rather than by authentic engagement with the ethical and relational dimensions of Tfd practice. This finding suggests that the development of genuine reflective practice among emerging Tfd practitioners may require pedagogical approaches that go beyond assessment-driven reflection to cultivate intrinsic reflective motivation.

Among professional NGO facilitators, by contrast, reflection-on-action was described as essential but often informal and unsupported, functioning as a private, intuitive process rather than a structured professional practice. Several participants in this tier described reflecting primarily alone, without access to supervisory relationships, peer dialogue or conceptual frameworks that might deepen and structure their thinking:

*“After the performance, the team packs up and we drive back to the office. Everyone is tired. There is no one to sit with and really go through what happened, what worked, what did not, what we should have done differently with that woman who started crying. I do it in my head, alone, sometimes at night. But there is nothing to hold onto. Nobody checks.”*

(NGO Facilitator 1, interview, July 2024)

This isolation of reflective practice in the field represents a significant professional development gap. Without peer structures or shared analytical frameworks, the communal dimension of the dual reflective demand has no mechanism for critical interrogation, and ethical preoccupations about the community remain private and unresolved rather than being examined and acted upon.

The experienced academics in Tier 3 offered a third, qualitatively distinct account of reflection-on-action, distinguished by its explicitly pedagogical dimension. Both participants described reflecting not only on their own facilitation practice but on the reflective practices of the student facilitators they supervise, a meta-reflective orientation that extended the individual reflective loop into a collective, intergenerational one:

*“When I read my students’ field reports, I am not just evaluating them. I am reflecting on my own teaching. When a student says they did not know what to do when the community started arguing during the joker session, I ask myself: did I teach them how to handle that? And the honest answer is often no. Their gaps become my mirror.”* (Academic Facilitator 1, March, 2024)

This meta-reflective stance represents the most sophisticated register of the dual reflective demand encountered in the study, extending individual professional reflexivity into an intergenerational ethical accountability toward the field as a whole and toward the students who will carry its practices into future communities.

A second challenged assumption concerned the relationship between experience and reflective sophistication. We anticipated that more experienced facilitators would demonstrate more developed and nuanced reflective practice. The interviews complicated this expectation. While experienced participants did articulate more elaborate and theoretically grounded accounts of their reflective processes, several professional NGO facilitators demonstrated exceptional reflective depth born not from formal training but from the pressure of sustained community accountability, a finding that suggests the relational and ethical demands of field-based Tfd practice may function as a powerful, if informal, reflective education in themselves.

#### 4.2 Professional Dilemma One: Navigating Community Consent

The first professional dilemma to emerge prominently across all three tiers of the sample was the complex and often fraught question of community consent, including who gives it, on what terms, what it actually authorises and how facilitators reflect on their own role in shaping the conditions under which it is given.

Participants across the sample were consistent in their understanding that community consent is a foundational ethical requirement of TFD practice. What varied significantly was their account of how consent actually operates in the field and how they reflected on their responsibilities in relation to it. Several professional facilitators described the formal consent process, encompassing community meetings, explanations of the TFD process and agreements with community leaders and gatekeepers, as inadequate to the ethical complexity of what participation in TFD actually involves:

*“We hold the community meeting. We explain what TFD is. People nod. The chief says yes. But do they really know what it means when we say we will make a play about their lives? Do they know that their neighbours will sit and watch their problems performed in front of them? That is a very different thing from agreeing to a meeting. By the time they understand, we have already started.”* (NGO Facilitator 2, interview, July 2024)

This tension between procedural consent and substantive informed consent was particularly acute in relation to the performance of sensitive community issues such as domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, land disputes and chieftaincy conflicts, that regularly constitute the thematic material of TFD interventions in Ghanaian communities. Reflection-for-action among experienced participants was characterised by extended, often difficult anticipatory deliberation about the boundaries of what should and should not be theatricalised, and about their own capacity to predict and manage the consequences of bringing sensitive material into a public performative space:

*“Before I enter any community, I have a set of questions I ask myself. Not a formal list, but I go through them every time. Who are the powerful people here? Who has the most to lose if certain issues come out? Are there conflicts that have not yet been resolved? What could happen if this performance opens something that cannot be closed again? I spend more time on those questions than on anything else in my preparation.”* (NGO Facilitator 3, August, 2024)

Student facilitators, by contrast, tended to report significantly less anticipatory reflection on the ethics of consent, focusing primarily on the logistical and artistic dimensions of intervention planning. This differential was consistent with the finding noted above regarding the externally prompted character of student reflection, and it points to a significant gap in TFD pedagogy, one in which the ethical dimensions of facilitation may be inadequately foregrounded in the training of emerging practitioners.

A further dimension of the consent dilemma concerned the role of community gatekeepers such as chiefs, elders, religious leaders and NGO representatives, whose authority to consent on behalf of a community does not necessarily reflect the full community’s willingness to participate or to have their lives made the subject of theatrical representation. Several participants described navigating complex negotiations between gatekeeper authority and individual community member agency during the facilitation process, and reflected on the degree to which their own facilitative choices had either reinforced or challenged existing community power structures:

*“The chief gives his consent. Fine. But whose story are we telling? It is the women’s story. It is the young men who cannot find work. It is the widows. Has anyone asked them? They may be sitting in that community meeting when the chief says yes, but can they stand up and say no? That is the question I always come back to.”* (Academic Facilitator 2, interview, October 2024)

#### **4.3 Professional Dilemma Two: Managing Unintended Consequences of Participatory Performance**

The second professional dilemma to emerge with particular force across the interview material concerned the management of unintended consequences, specifically the moments during and after TFD performance when the participatory process generates responses, emotions, revelations or community dynamics that the facilitator did not anticipate and may not be equipped to handle.

This dilemma was most vividly articulated in relation to Forum Theatre, whose fundamental methodology of inviting audience members to replace oppressed characters and attempt alternative solutions to the dramatic situation is specifically designed to generate unpredictable community interventions. While this unpredictability is Forum Theatre’s greatest methodological asset, it is also, as Boal (1992) acknowledged, its greatest ethical risk. Several participants described interventions in which Forum Theatre had activated community conflicts, surfaced suppressed traumas or generated confrontations between community members that extended beyond the performative frame and required urgent facilitation responses for which they felt professionally unprepared:

*“We were doing the Forum. A woman came up to replace the spect-actor and she began to speak, and then she stopped being in the play. She was speaking about herself, something that had happened to her, something real and recent. The room changed. I froze for a moment. Do I stop? Do I let her continue? Do I break the frame? I said something, but I still do not know if it was the right thing. I go over that moment a lot.”* (NGO Facilitator 4, July, 2024)

Reflection-in-action in such moments demands what participants across all tiers described as a particular quality of attentive, ethically responsive presence, an ability to read the community’s emotional state in real time, to decide rapidly whether and how to continue the performance, and to prioritise the community’s safety and dignity over the

completion of the theatrical process. Experienced facilitators described developing this capacity through accumulated field experience and the painful memory of moments when they had misjudged the community's readiness for the material being performed:

*"You develop a sense over time. You can feel when the energy in the room shifts, when laughter becomes nervous, when silence means something is wrong. But you only develop that sense because at some point you missed the shift. You kept going when you should have stopped, or you stopped when the community was ready to go deeper. And it is the community that pays for your learning. That never stops bothering me."* (NGO Facilitator 3, August 2024)

The post-performance management of unintended consequences generated equally complex demands for reflection-on-action. Several participants described cases in which Forum Theatre performances had catalysed community conversations or conflicts that persisted long after the facilitating team had left the community, raising profound questions about the facilitator's ongoing ethical responsibility to communities they have activated but cannot continuously support:

*"There is a community in the Upper West Region where we worked four years ago. It was a very difficult intervention, issues of land and a family that had influence there. After the performance there was a lot of tension. We left two days later. And I still think about that community. I do not know what happened after we left. I have no way of knowing. Did we make things better or did we open something that made things harder? I carry that question."* (NGO Facilitator 1, interview, July 2024)

This dimension of the dilemma points toward a temporal extension of the dual reflective demand that Schön's (1983) framework, developed in relation to bounded professional encounters, does not fully accommodate, and which is taken up in the discussion that follows.

#### 4.4 Reflection-Beyond-Action

The most conceptually significant finding is that several participants described reflective obligations that persisted beyond the formal end of the intervention. This reflection was not primarily about extracting professional lessons for future use. Rather, it took the form of lingering ethical concern for communities that had been activated, unsettled or exposed through participatory performance and then left to live with the aftermath.

This temporally extended reflective mode is distinct from reflection-on-action in both object and orientation. Reflection-on-action focuses on completed practice in order to derive learning for future facilitation. Reflection-beyond-action, by contrast, concerns continuing accountability to communities even in the practitioner's absence. It is therefore less a bounded professional review than a moral commitment that continues to shape facilitative identity and future decision-making.

#### 4.5 Theorising the Dual Reflective Demand

The findings presented in this article substantiate and deepen the theoretical argument advanced at its outset, that TfD facilitation imposes a distinctive dual reflective demand on practitioners that exceeds what Schön's (1983) original framework, developed in relation to institutional professional practice, fully anticipates. Across all three tiers of our sample, namely student facilitators, NGO-based professional facilitators and experienced academics, participants articulated a reflective practice shaped not only by the familiar individual obligation to think critically about one's own professional decisions, but by an equally compelling communal ethical obligation toward the communities whose lives, vulnerabilities and social relationships are directly implicated in the TfD process.

This dual demand, as the findings reveal, does not operate uniformly across the TfD process. Its weight and character shift at each stage. During the pre-intervention phase, the dual reflective demand manifests primarily as anticipatory ethical deliberation, an extended and often difficult reflection-for-action in which experienced facilitators interrogate not only the artistic and logistical dimensions of the planned intervention but its potential consequences for community members who are simultaneously participants and subjects of the performative process. During facilitation and performance, the dual demand intensifies into a moment-by-moment ethical responsiveness, a reflection-in-action that requires facilitators to read community dynamics, manage emotional safety and make consequential facilitative decisions in real time without the luxury of pause or deliberation. In the post-performance phase, the dual demand extends into retrospective ethical accountability, a reflection-on-action that is not merely professional self-evaluation but a form of communal reckoning, asking not only what was learned but who bore the cost of that learning.

What the findings add to this theoretical picture, however, is a dimension of the dual reflective demand that Schön's framework does not accommodate, namely its temporal extension beyond the bounded encounter. Several participants described reflective obligations that persisted long after the formal conclusion of a TfD intervention, including ongoing ethical preoccupations with communities that had been activated, stirred or unsettled by the participatory process and then left to manage its consequences without the continued support of the facilitating team. This post-departure ethical reflection is qualitatively different from the reflection-on-action Schön describes, which concerns itself with extracting learning from completed experience for application to future practice. The reflection

described by our participants is not primarily about professional learning; it is about continuing ethical responsibility, a form of moral commitment that the bounded professional encounter model does not generate and that the existing reflective practice literature has not theorised.

This finding invites a proposed extension to Schön's tripartite framework in the TfD context, namely a fourth reflective mode which we term reflection-beyond-action, the ongoing ethical deliberation that community-based practitioners sustain in relation to the communities they have worked with and departed from, and which shapes their professional identities in ways that transcend the individual intervention. Reflection-beyond-action is distinct from reflection-on-action in both temporal structure and ethical orientation. Where reflection-on-action is bounded, concluding once the practitioner has extracted learning for future application, reflection-beyond-action is unbounded, persisting as an ethical preoccupation with communities to whom the practitioner remains accountable even in absentia. This structure resonates with what scholars of care ethics term relational moral responsibility, in which accountability is not discharged at the end of a discrete encounter but sustained through enduring relational commitments (Noddings, 1984). In TfD, this translates into longitudinal professional accountability, an acknowledgement that communities activated by participatory performance continue to live with its consequences long after the facilitating team has departed. This concept warrants dedicated empirical and theoretical attention in future research, particularly through longitudinal designs capable of tracking the sustained ethical commitments of experienced practitioners.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study examined how Theatre for Development facilitators in Ghana understand and practise reflection across the phases of community-based facilitation. Drawing on Schön's tripartite reflective practice framework and reporting on in-depth semi-structured interviews with twelve TfD facilitators across three tiers of professional formation, the study has argued that TfD facilitation imposes a distinctive dual reflective demand on practitioners, simultaneously requiring individual reflexivity regarding artistic and facilitative decisions and communal ethical accountability toward the communities whose lived realities constitute the raw material of the practice.

The study has illuminated this dual demand through two professional dilemmas, namely navigating community consent and managing the unintended consequences of participatory performance that emerged across all three tiers as central, recurring and insufficiently theorised features of TfD facilitation experience. It has demonstrated how Schön's three reflective modes map onto the distinct stages of the TfD process in ways that are analytically productive and pedagogically generative. More significantly, the findings have identified a dimension of professional reflection in community-based practice that Schön's framework does not anticipate, that is, reflection-beyond-action, the temporally extended ethical deliberation that TfD facilitators sustain in relation to communities they have worked with and departed from, which shapes their professional identities and ethical commitments in ways that transcend the individual intervention.

The study's empirical base is specific to the Ghanaian TfD context, and its theoretical propositions, particularly the dual reflective demand and reflection-beyond-action constructs, require further development and testing across different national, cultural and applied theatre contexts. Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs capable of tracing the development of reflective practice across individual facilitators' careers. Nevertheless, the study has established that the reflective facilitator is a concept whose time has come in TfD scholarship, and that the communities with whom TfD practitioners work deserve nothing less than practitioners who take their reflective responsibilities as seriously as their theatrical ones.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that TfD training programmes and university departments integrate structured ethical reflection throughout the facilitation process rather than limiting reflection to post-practicum reports. Reflective activities should move beyond assessment-driven writing to encourage honest engagement with ethical dilemmas, power relations and community accountability. Regular peer debriefing sessions, facilitated reflective journals and in-process ethical consultations can help student facilitators develop deeper and more intrinsic reflective habits before entering professional practice.

The study also recommends that community consent in TfD practice should be approached as an ongoing relational process rather than a one-time procedural approval obtained from community gatekeepers. Facilitators and training institutions should ensure that vulnerable groups and individual participants are actively involved in the consent process, particularly when sensitive community issues are being dramatized. In addition, NGOs and academic institutions should establish formal post-performance reflective structures, including peer supervision, facilitated debriefing sessions and emotional support systems, to help practitioners critically process the ethical challenges and unintended consequences that may emerge during and after participatory performances.

Finally, the study recommends further research into the concepts of dual reflective demand and reflection-beyond-action in other African and international applied theatre contexts. Future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches capable of examining how facilitators sustain ethical accountability to communities over time and across multiple interventions. Such research would help extend Schön's reflective practice framework to better account for the ethical and long-term dimensions of community-based applied theatre practice, thereby advancing theoretical understanding within TfD scholarship.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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