BRITISH
COUNCIL

BODIES IN
TRANSLATION:
ACTIVIST ART,
TECHNOLOGY, AND
ACCESS TO LIFE

RELAXED PERFORMANCE

Exploring Accessibility In The Canadian Theatre Landscape

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Glossary of Terms

Access Activator
An individual who has been trained in the Relaxed Performance method and training techniques who facilitates trainings.

Bodies in Translation
A research grant funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The grant supports disability and activist arts in Canada and asserts that access to art creates access to life.

British Council
The British Council Canada, an organization whose work in the arts "strive[s] to find new ways of connecting with and understanding each other through the arts, in order to develop stronger creative sectors around the world that are better connected with the UK" (British Council, 2019).

Chill-out space
A space designed to reduce sensory stimulation (e.g., loud noises, rapid movements, and intense visual effects) and allow theatre patrons to take a break from the main action of the theatre. Usually has a screen playing a live stream or recorded version of the performance.

Disability justice
A form of activism led by and for disabled Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. This form of activism focuses on experiences of disability and ableism from an intersectional perspective, which takes race, gender, sexuality, and class into account (Cripping the Arts Access Guide, 2019).

Environmental audit
A review of physical and/or digital space associated with the theatre venue to ensure that it is accessible.

Visual story
A document containing information about the venue and performance. A visual story typically includes logistical details (e.g., closest public transit, washroom locations, and whether the space is physically accessible) and information about what will be included in the performance.

Relaxed Performance (RP)
A performance in which there have been modifications to the theatre environment and performance elements, such as loud noises and light displays. RP usually includes a chill out space, visual story, and introductions to cast prior to and at the end of the performance.

Relaxed Performance Executive Summary

Introduction

Interest in curating accessible experiences is growing among many in the Canadian arts scene. The question of what this means has begun to drive conversations about how this might be accomplished, concretely: What is an accessible arts experience? How does it look different in different segments of the arts landscape? What are the policy implications of accessibility? How does accessibility in the arts relate to larger debates about accessibility in disability studies? What is access, and what is inclusion?

One key movement in the accessible arts landscape is Relaxed Performance. Relaxed Performance (RP) has been described as "the opposite of the quiet car of a train" (British Council, nd): it refers to the invitation for people to be themselves, including their movement and their vocalizations, in the theatre space. RP includes technical modifications, such as half-dimmed (rather than blackout) theatre lights, warnings about and/or reductions in loud noises and pyrotechnics, the ability to move freely and in and out of the space, a space outside of the main theatre with simultaneous or simulcast video (a "chill space"), and more. Increasingly, Canadian theatres are joining this movement, which began to take root in the UK in the 1990s.

As people become more interested in offering RPs, an increased need for specialized training has emerged. The British Council Canada (hereafter British Council), with the support of Canada Council for the Arts, has led this effort, training approximately 200 people in Canada since 2015. This report was commissioned by the British Council, in collaboration with a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded partnership grant (Principal Investigator Dr. Carla Rice with Co-Director Dr. Eliza Chandler): Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology, and Access to Life (hereafter Bodies in Translation). The British Council wished to find out more about the effectiveness of its programming through arms-length research, and to receive recommendations to inform the future of Relaxed Performance training in Canada.

Researchers and representatives from the British Council and Bodies in Translation collaboratively determined the following aims for the research:

1. Understand whether receiving Relaxed Performance (RP) training helps participants feel more prepared to deliver RPs
2. Determine what might help improve the effectiveness of trainings
3. Explore how RP trainings and RP might be sustainably integrated into the theatre and broader arts landscape in Canada
4. Evaluate RP and RP training in relation to the disability arts scene in Canada and beyond

5. Explore the impact of RP for audiences in terms of meeting varied access needs and desires

This report is comprised of research findings, as well as recommendations for training, and implications for policy and disability studies.

The report is organized into five sections:
1. Introduction
2. Representations of Relaxed Performance
3. Experiences and Impacts of Training
4. Audience Experiences
5. Recommendations and Implications

We invite you to explore each of these sections as relevant to your practice. In this executive summary, we provide an overview of each part of the report and outline our key recommendations. For more information on what we summarize in the executive summary, visit the relevant sections in the main report. We welcome questions about the process and products of the research. As you read this document, we encourage you to trouble the lines around who is audience, who is producer, who is artist, and who requires access. In that spirit, we begin with a question: What does accessible theatre mean to you?

Methods

To meet the broad aims of our research brief, we decided to gather data from a number of diverse and relevant sources. These sources range from popular media and academic literature, to experiences of people taking part in RP training, to the experiences of those participating in RP as audience members.

The data analyzed for this report are as follows:
- A scan of media and academic representations of Relaxed Performance (RP)
- Analysis of post-surveys completed by people who took part in RP trainings (n=37)
- Interviews with people who have taken part in RP trainings (n=24)
- Participant observation of one British Council RP training
- Case studies of audience members at 2 RPs (surveys and short key-informant interviews)

The environmental scan was designed to help us understand the *representations of Relaxed Performance*; it included Google searches, academic literature searches, and a scan of theatre websites. We compiled this data and extracted common themes from the literature to better understand how RP is represented in popular media and academic literature.

We drew on and interpreted three data sets to understand *experiences and impacts of trainings*. First, we used descriptive statistics to interpret quantitative survey data about experiences and impacts of training, including the percentages of participants who reported feeling a particular way about various aspects of the training. Next, we analyzed qualitative interview data and open-ended survey responses using a thematic analysis approach. This entailed exploring the data for broad patterns to reveal the big picture of RP and RP training as articulated by participants. Finally, one team member attended an RP training and took notes about her experiences, which we analyzed in relation to the qualitative findings.

We also explored *audience experiences* using a combination of qualitative (thematic analysis) and quantitative (descriptive statistics) approaches. These are presented as case studies as opposed to as aggregate data, in order to provide the background context for these two very different sources of data.

Summary of Findings

Representations of Relaxed Performance

We analyzed 26 media articles about Relaxed Performance from the UK and Canada, with the majority from Canada. Most depicted RP as being for patrons with Autism, with a smaller number discussing RP in the context of children and families, learning disabilities, and those who may experience anxiety or intimidation in theatres. Some referred to disability in general, and a few named a specific diagnosis.

Most articles focused on the technical aspects of RP, including house light dimming (rather than blackout) and sound adjustments. Many also mentioned that audiences were free to come and go. Other RP strategies, including chill-out space, warnings, and bringing in food, were mentioned in some but not all articles. A few articles noted the importance of training to ensure that RPs were appropriately delivered.

As a main takeaway, the articles described RPs as enhancing performances, rather than diminishing them. Critically, there was some concern within one article that RP contributes to the segmenting of society into disabled and non-disabled folks, with separate performances for each. However, articles generally referred to RP in a positive light.

Moving forward, it may be necessary to develop communications guidelines for media outlets that highlight the fact that RP is not only for people with Autism. Further, these guidelines could address how it might be problematic to suggest that children may be RP's main beneficiaries; while presenting RP to children can be a helpful way of breaking down the rule-boundedness of theatre at a young

age, it is critically important to move beyond a representation of disability, and, concordantly access, as childlike.

Similar to media articles, theatre websites emphasized the mechanics of Relaxed Performance, including lighting and sound changes. They variously mentioned different aspects of RP such as chill spaces, performer introductions, the ability to bring babes in arms, the free use of fidget devices and/or cellphones on silent mode, scent free spaces, standing room, visual stories, food being welcome in the space, and support available for audiences. Most included information on their accessibility tab. Notably, most (22 of 36) websites did not include a visual story on their website; those that did most commonly had both venue and performance specific visual stories. Most websites (20 of 36) provided at least some information about RP—typically this was general information. **Moving forward,** it may be important for venues to conduct an audit of their websites (given appropriate resources to do so) to ensure that they are communicating fulsomely with audiences about their RPs.

We found a very limited body of academic literature on RP, and we did not find any academic literature in the Canadian context. The literature that exists highlights the benefits of RP primarily for audience members with Autism. There is a possibly problematic tendency to conflate disability with child audiences, which is worth probing in future research. However, some critical literature highlights how RP can act as a first move toward socially just theatregoing experiences.

Experiences and Impacts of Trainings

In post-training quantitative survey responses, participants rated RP trainings very highly, with 80% of participants finding that the training met their needs. For those whose expectations were not met, suggestions included more opportunities for discussions as a group, concrete examples, and experiential exercises. Overall, trainings dramatically increased participants' confidence in interacting with people with disabilities, in developing a visual story, and in offering an RP production. After the training:

70.3% felt completely or mostly comfortable serving patrons with disabilities.

81.1% felt completely or mostly comfortable developing accessible training tools.

70.3% felt completely or mostly comfortable developing an RP for production.

86.5% felt completely or mostly comfortable creating a visual story.

78.4% felt completely or mostly comfortable conducting an environmental audit.

Most participants (72.2%) had plans to facilitate an RP in the next 4-18 months. Twenty-two percent (22.2%) were unable to answer this question as they were not the ones making these decisions, and 5.6% noted that they foresaw many possible challenges in mounting an RP.

Overall, whether in interviews or responses to open-ended survey questions, the vast majority of training participants described the RP trainings as *impactful, transformative, inspiring,* and *in line with their organizational commitments.* Participants (including theatre executive directors, artistic directors, and Access Activators) had several suggestions for sustaining gains made through training and facilitating even more impactful sessions, as well as recommendations for aligning RP with the broader disability arts scene. A broad sketch of themes is presented below, with quotes and detailed sub-themes presented in the main body of the report.

Relaxed Performance Invites Bodies to be Bodies

One of the main patterns throughout analysis of interviews and open-ended survey responses was the idea that Relaxed Performance is something that many people can enjoy, whether or not they enter into the space aware of their access needs. By *opening up theatre* – through breaking down physical, attitudinal, sensory, financial, and other barriers – the theatre space becomes an entirely different experience. Training illuminated specific steps that participants needed to take in their own practice to facilitate access, such as conducting an environmental audit and acting on the findings. For many, RP *returns to the heart of theatre*, meaning that RPs are not diminished performances. Rather, RPs are true to a democratic perspective on theatre that allows people to be themselves in a space and respond authentically to what they are seeing, hearing, and/or feeling. Through RP, participants were optimistic about *expanding the*

transformative potential of the arts, aiming to share the "magic" of theatre with more audiences.

Communication is Key

Participants discussed the importance of communication and language on a number of different levels:

- The importance of using language that speaks to Relaxed Performance (RP) audiences and disabled folks
- The challenge of articulating the value of RP to audiences and engaging in outreach
- The need to have clear intra-team communication in order to ensure that a RP is effective

Participants varied in their level of familiarity with disability justice[1] and disability arts. For this reason, the impact of training discussions of theories like the social model of disability (which highlights how environments and attitudes are disabling, and that people's bodies and minds are not the problem) varied enormously. Training highlighted how using accessible *language* is critical to the success of RP. Even more explicit background information in the training may be a helpful way of making people even more comfortable with language. *Outreach* was a major concern and challenge for participants: most emphasized that they appreciated how this was addressed in training; however, some noted that they would like more guidance on reaching out to audiences they had not yet been able to approach. **Moving forward**, facilitators may be guided by those with lived experience, who can express their needs and desires around language and outreach efforts. Communication amongst RP teams was noted to be a critical aspect of setting *expectations about what RP is, and can/can't be,* as well as the importance of *communicating within and beyond theatres* about RP.

Evolving Relaxed Performance Training

Training participants had several suggestions for taking training to the next level. These included:

Integrating disability justice
While the Canadian RP training model does incorporate some focus on disability justice, a number of participants noted that they would appreciate a disability-led training, to avoid the possible tokenizing of disabled people. This also includes, an awareness of the various identities of disabled people, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and more, and

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[1] Mia Mingus describes disability justice as "a multi issue political understanding of disability and ableism, moving away from a rights based equality model and beyond just access, to a framework that centers justice and wholeness for all disabled people and communities" (cited in Taormina-Weiss, 2013, p. 279)

how these interact with their experiences of disability (Mingus, 2013; Taormina-Weiss, 2013).

Tailoring training experiences
Training participants brought varied experiences to the training, sometimes based on geographically-specific familiarity with disability resources. For those who had connections with disability communities or were themselves disabled, the training sometimes felt too basic or repetitive. Some also noted a desire for specific days for specific types of staff. Making use of a pre-training survey may be a good way of tailoring training to meet these various needs.

Experiential exercises
Participants generally favoured experiences rather than didactic, presentation-style training. Many suggested that a way to improve training would be to bring in more hands-on work that gives participants concrete skills to take with them in their work.

Relaxed Performance, Disability Arts, and Canadian Theatre

Participants frequently came to training from *organizations that are strongly committed to accessibility*. Many of those who did not come from a background in accessibility wanted to bring this commitment back with them into practice. Importantly, access was not perceived as a burden or an add-on post-training, but as an essential practice to welcome patrons, students, and artists. Participants were cognizant of how far there is to go in entrenching accessibility in general and RP into society at large. At the same time, participants emphasized that *small movements toward accessibility* (e.g., increasing the number of RPs staged each year and continuing to talk about RP and other accessible practices with as many people as possible) can help increase the accessibility of the arts. Importantly, participants described how they gleaned both strong *skills and knowledge transfer* possibilities to other areas of their work from the RP training. These possibilities include bringing a focus on inclusive language into all organizational practices and considering the accessibility of spaces beyond the theatre (e.g., museums, classrooms, shopping malls, and businesses).

Expanding and Growing the Relaxed Performance Sector

In terms of suggestions for **moving forward**, participants strongly desired a set of *best or promising RP practices.* Importantly, these would not be prescriptive, but would rather be adaptable to the unique contexts in which theatre staff are working. Many also felt that the training built community. As a result, participants wanted to grow or sustain the *RP community* through efforts to collaborate, rather than compete, on RP related activities. The creation of a knowledge and resource exchange network might also be combined with the previous

suggestion to create an overall experience of connectedness and resource access within the sector and across provinces. Finally, participants highlighted the reality that in order for RP to be sustained and expanded, there is a strong need for *attracting funding and getting buy-in*. Buy-in is important on multiple levels: for securing the funds to facilitate this time and resource intensive process, for working with artists on knowledge translation around what RP is and why it is helpful, and for building audience attendance at RPs.

Audience Experiences

Case Study One:
Mysterious Entity's performance of Wreck Wee Em

The first case study took place in Peterborough, Ontario, where an independent, small theatre company (Mysterious Entity) put on a Relaxed Performance (RP) in September 2018. Of 22 total responses, all participants had attended theatre in the past but only 18.8% had attended an RP in the past. The fact that the performance was relaxed had a moderate impact on the choice to attend the performance, making a strong impact for 22.7% of attendees. The performance met the needs of 95.2% of participants, who noted that they enjoyed the following:

- A sense of ease, comfort, and support in the space
- Lessened anxiety, and less guilt around stimming, moving, fidgeting, or speaking
- Ability to move around and to have choice
- Reduced pretense and rules around the theatre space and performance
- Ability to respond in whatever way felt most appropriate
- Clear expectations
- Engagement with the performance

Ninety percent (90%) of participants noted that they would attend an RP in the future. Interview participants also stated that they would recommend RPs to others.

Case Study Two:
Young People's Theatre performance of Mary Poppins

The second case study took place at a medium-sized theatre serving youth and families (Young People's Theatre) in Toronto, Ontario. We received a total of 45 responses to the survey. Ninety-seven percent (97.8%) felt welcome at the theatre during the RP. Most (75.6%) of the participants had attended theatre in the past. Many (19.5%) were unaware of the RP prior to attending. Almost 96% were either quite (25%) or very (70.5%) likely to

attend another RP in the future. Reasons for attending the performance included:

- Coming to the theatre with children (41.4%)
- Desiring adjustments to the theatre setting (e.g., movement, and speech) (26.8%)
- Timing/scheduling (12.2%)

Recommendations and Implications

Together, RP research indicates the promise of RP training for improving theatres' ability to deliver accessible theatre. It demonstrates that theatres see the value in accessible theatre and have productive suggestions for increasing access. Further, the data sets illuminate the critical thinking and desire for change that exists within the theatre community. The data also shows how this might be leveraged for practical action toward expanding and advancing accessible theatre offerings and practices. Through interviews, survey analysis, audience feedback, and participant observation, we have gained insight into both the effectiveness of the RP format for facilitating accessible theatre experiences, and the value of RP training for those hoping to undertake actions that increase accessibility in their venues. While the responses were overwhelmingly positive in all of our methods of data collection, participants across the study shared insights that might enhance RP training and delivery. Here, we offer suggestions for training, community development, policy, and theory. Recommendations are oriented around implementing, sustaining, and growing RP in each of those areas. In this way, the recommendations help to ensure that RP flourishes in and pushes the boundaries of a world that is not always accessible and open to difference.

Training

In order to enhance RP trainings and make them even more effective, we recommend:

1. **Including more experiential and immersive exercises in training, such as:**

- Attending an RP and discussing as a group
- Creating a visual story together during the training
- Conducting an environmental and/or website audit

- Exploring communications strategies through critique of written and other promotional materials to reach different audiences
- Practicing grant-writing and/or other funding proposals, in line with the suggestion that funding is key to the survival and expansion of RP

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2. **Tailoring training to the experience, and/or roles of attendees, which may include one or more of the following:**

- Using the pre-training questionnaire to determine the training content, and specifically the extent to which introductory theoretical concepts and language should be covered (e.g. physical accessibility, social model of disability, and other emergent models of disability)

- Working with participants to co-design trainings to meet their needs
- Developing multiple levels of training, to provide an overview, a specific "nuts and bolts" training, an outreach-oriented training, or addressing other needs of participants
- Considering having role-specific training (e.g., for front-of-house staff, for producers, for executive directors, etc.)

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3. **Enhancing the focus on disability justice through leading with disability, by:**

- Inviting disabled artists and scholars[2] to be facilitators and compensating them for their time
- If the above is not feasible, working with an advisory board with diverse representation including people from disability arts communities, disabled and disability artists, activists, and scholars

other theatre employees, artists, researchers, funders, and more. Inviting people who take the training to explore how they are positioned in relation to disability
- Enacting "relaxed training" throughout the sessions, including modeling of the relaxed environment as facilitators
- Increasing font size on handouts and slide material and providing multiple formats of materials
- Considering the spaces in which trainings are held, and ensuring that accessibility standards are exceeded in those spaces
- Reducing the didactic nature of the presentation

4. **Enacting accessibility in the training itself, including:**

- Considering that disabled people may be among any of the following: audiences, trainees,

5. **Reaching out to new training audiences, including funders and decision-makers**

Community

In order to support and sustain RP and disability arts communities, we suggest the following:

1. Formalizing the community built through RP trainings, to build on the momentum generated in the trainings and to meet participants' desire for enhanced exchange of knowledge and resources.

   This may look like any of the following:
   - A web-based group (list serv, Google group, etc.)
   - A community of practice including open regular meetings supplemented by in-person meetings (as possible)

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[2] Also considering intersecting identities and ensuring a "multi-issue" (Mingus, 2013) and intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) focus when hiring trainers, exploring privilege, power, and oppression and the role these play in dictating who becomes involved in and representative of disability.

- A centralized scheduling platform to allow theatres to explore how schedules align or conflict

2. Developing a non-prescriptive set of best practices for RP to allow theatre staff to explore which elements of RP they are able to enact
   - The set of best practices would be non-static and ever-growing, and include contextual factors that may enhance or limit the possibility of including certain elements

Policy

Strong accessible arts communities are grounded in policies that support their growth and sustainability. In order to guide policy around RP and accessible theatre, we recommend:

1. Providing funding for Relaxed Performance, through one or more of the following mechanisms:

   - Development grants to cultivate RP in collaboration with community groups
   - Travel grants for theatre staff to attend RP training
   - Infrastructure grants to assist theatres with the expenses required to retrofit buildings and/or build new accessible buildings

2. Exploring alignment between RP and existing accessibility legislation, such as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Acts (AODA) and Bill C-81: the Accessible Canada Act

   - Provide guidance for meeting and exceeding accessibility legislation through RP and other accessible theatre practices
   - Create guidelines for accessible theatre to assist theatres in delivering accessible performances, including RP

Theory

Particularly given the lack of existing literature on RP, and in light of the need to ground RP in disability justice indicated by our participants, we are intrigued at the theoretical possibilities of work on RP. Accordingly, we suggest the following directions for future research:

1. Exploring how RP simultaneously challenges and reinforces norms through creating new kinds of theatre experiences

2. Troubling the distinction between audiences, actors, theatre staff, trainers and trainees in relation to accessibility: who is accessibility "for"?

3. Grounding this scholarship in intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and disability justice (Mingus, 2013) to focus on the ways in which disability, race, class, gender, sexuality, and other identities knit together to impact people's ability to become involved in RP, training, and disability arts in general.

Main Report

Introduction

What does it mean to create truly accessible arts experiences? Access is about more than simply installing a removable access ramp; it is about more than checking boxes that guarantee compliance with governmental accessibility requirements; it is about more than stating that you welcome a variety of needs in your space. The question of how to ensure that arts patrons can be themselves in arts spaces—and how to open up arts spaces to those who have never considered themselves "arts patrons"—is a critical question for our time.

Relaxed Performance (RP) is a technique that contends with this critical question. RP's aim to open up the theatre space to welcome differences. Rather than needing to stay seated and listen silently, these performances invite attendees to move, speak, leave and return, eat, and more. Other modifications to the theatre environment are also often present in RP spaces: for instance, the house lights are often left partially on and sound levels reduced; strobing lights and flashes are reduced or removed; a "chill out space" for people to visit if they wish to take a moment out of the main theatre audience space is provided; actors come forward at the beginning or back at the end of the performance as themselves rather than their characters; and audience members are told what to expect both through the provision of a "visual story" describing the space and performance and through guidance at the beginning of the show. Ticket prices are also often reduced, to provide financial access. These measures are put in place to build a space where people can feel more at home in a theatre and go above and beyond standardized accessibility practices, such as providing accessible washrooms and ramps. In all, these practices remind those in the theatre field and prospective audiences that access is about much more than physical space modifications.

Originating in the UK in the 1990s, Relaxed Performances have begun to migrate to the Canadian theatre sector over the past five years. Originally, these performances were geared toward those with sensory differences (e.g. Autism) and were often referred to as "sensory-friendly." They have since been imagined as providing access to anyone who may feel excluded from "typical" theatre contexts, including people with learning disabilities, Tourette's syndrome, people bringing children to the theatre, people living with chronic conditions, people unfamiliar with the culture of contemporary theatre, and more. With the growth in interest in RP, there has been a push for more training around how to provide RP to diverse audiences.

One major effort toward deeper integration of RP into Canadian theatre spaces has been to provide training for those working in these spaces to deliver RPs. The British Council Canada has been amongst those providing training and has commissioned this evaluation research in collaboration with Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology,

and Access to Life (BIT), a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Grant co-directed by Dr. Carla Rice and Dr. Eliza Chandler.

British Council trainings began in 2015, and have been designed for cross-organizational appeal, including trainees from front-of-house staff through to executive and artistic directors, producers, and, in some cases, actors and directors of theatre pieces. At present, approximately 200 Canadians have received this training and many of those trained have begun to deliver RPs.

This evaluation and subsequent report were co-developed by the British Council and Bodies in Translation, who wished to understand: a) how well RP trainings prepare trainees to deliver accessible performances and b) what the impact of these trainings is on accessibility and inclusion practices in the Canadian theatre landscape. Collaboration with Bodies in Translation stemmed from a need for arms-length research, as well as a desire to situate this work within an understanding of what "access" and "accessibility" looks like in relation to the arts—and disability arts more specifically—in Canada. Together, the British Council and Bodies in Translation determined five broad aims for the research:

1. Understand whether receiving RP training helps participants feel more prepared to deliver RPs
2. Determine what might help improve the trainings to make them more effective
3. Explore how RP trainings and RP might be sustainably integrated into the theatre landscape in Canada
4. Evaluate RP and RP training in relation to the disability arts scene in Canada and beyond
5. Explore the impact of RP for audiences in terms of meeting varied access needs and desires

To address these aims, we collectively assembled a set of research questions:

Does Relaxed Performance (RP) training prepare members of the theatre sector (including directors, actors, access activators, and others) to deliver RPs?

Does RP change the way that accessibility is understood in the Canadian theatre landscape? What are the barriers and facilitators to enacting this kind of inclusive practice in theatre?

How might these be overcome to develop a commitment to ongoing accessibility?

What are the conditions that will allow for the sustainable delivery of RP trainings and, subsequently, RPs? How do the RP trainings and the delivery of RPs intersect with and/or enhance the broader disability arts scene in Canada?

What is the impact of RPs for audiences?

- How might who we think of as audience be extended?

- How can we engage more people through accessible marketing?

The evaluation research project consisted of a scan of the academic and popular literature on Relaxed Performance, as well as a suite of research activities designed to go deep into experiences of the training and of RP delivery.

These methods were:

- Analysis of post-surveys completed by people who took part in RP trainings (n=37)
- Interviews with people who have taken part in RP trainings (n=24)
- Participant observation of a British Council RP training
- Case studies of audience members at 2 RPs (surveys, short key-informant interviews)

This report highlights findings from the research. It includes an overview of the approach for each of the data collection elements described above, as well as results and recommendations for future practice. We situate this work in relationship to disability arts and legislation (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), Bill C-81: The Accessible Canada Act) in Canada and invite consideration for future research to better understand how the arts sector might make small, measurable movements toward broader accessibility.

Section 1: Representations of Relaxed Performance (RP)

Environmental Scan

Goals
We conducted an environmental scan to meet the following goals:

To understand the context for RP internationally, answering the questions: who is using RP? Who is reporting about RP? What are the key learnings about the use of RP that are included in this reporting? How does this apply to the Canadian theatre sector? What is the relationship between RP and accessible theatre, as described in this literature?

Methods

The first step in the environmental scan was to gain an understanding of the way that RP is described in popular media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, arts websites). This scan was designed to help us to understand the messages that the general public and arts audiences are getting about RPs. Another key aspect of this search was to document *how theatres using RP are describing these performances.* These two aspects of the scan provide a "picture" of RP as it is currently represented. We engaged in the following two-step process:

1: Scan of newspaper/magazine/website explorations of RP, including theoretical pieces, reviews of shows, etc.

Google search of the following term combinations:

Concept	Use/Implementation	Relaxed Performance	Sector	Type
Terms	Using OR "Use of" OR implementing OR staging	"Relaxed Performance" OR "Relaxed theatre" OR "Relaxed screening" OR "Sensory-friendly Performance" OR "Sensory-friendly theatre"	Canada OR "United Kingdom" OR England	Review OR article

These terms were assembled into various combinations to find as many relevant articles as possible; for instance, "using Relaxed Performance in Canada" or "Relaxed Performance Canada" or "review of Relaxed Performance in Canada." We were open to articles from Canada or the UK, given the exchange that these groups have shared around RP.

We documented search processes in an Excel sheet, and reviewed the first 3 pages of results for relevant articles. We used broad inclusion/exclusion criteria in order to review as many materials as possible. This step was focused on articles discussing RP, rather than theatre/venue websites describing their use of RP.

Inclusion	Exclusion
• Discusses RP (does not need to be called "Relaxed Performance," may be called sensory friendly or similar but uses adaptations to theatre techniques)	• Does not discuss RP • Does not give any details about how RP was done, where, or when • Is a description of an upcoming performance/RP/theatre

• Describes a performance or technique • Is a newspaper/magazine/website *article* rather than a theatre website description of their RP/upcoming performance, etc.	

We extracted data using the following questions as a guide:
- Who is RP for?
- What aspects of RP does the article emphasize?
- What other terms (if any) are used to describe RP?
- What difference does RP make?
- Are there any suggestions for improvement?

2: Scan of theatre websites discussing their use of RP

This step involved reviewing *how people discuss RP and their use of the technique*. It involved analyzing the websites of theatres who we know offer RP or have been trained by the British Council. We explored each theatre's website, guided by the following questions:
- What aspects of RP does the website describe?
- Where is RP housed on the website?
- Is there a visual story online? For the venue, the performance, or both?
- Is the RP information provided for the venue, the performance, or both?

Results

Articles

Using various combinations of search terms in Google, we had a total of 152,182,000 hits. After scanning the first 3 pages of each search (a total of 180 articles), we retained 26 articles for analysis. The results are presented below in relation to each of the questions. Note that values are not mutually exclusive categories—that is, articles may emphasize more than one element or aspect of RP and/or its audiences.

Who is Relaxed Performance for?

As figure 1 shows, most articles (10) discussed Relaxed Performance in the context of Autism, which is perhaps unsurprising given that RPs were originally designed for neurodiverse people. The next most common response was children and families (6). Other possible audiences ranged from disabled people in general to those who are intimidated by the theatre experience, to people with specific disorders such as Rhizomelic Chondrodysplasia Punctata (RCDP). When specific conditions were mentioned, this was often in the context of a

specific story (e.g., of a theatre patron with a particular experience that was highlighted in the piece).

Figure 1: Representations of RP audiences

Who is Relaxed Performance for?
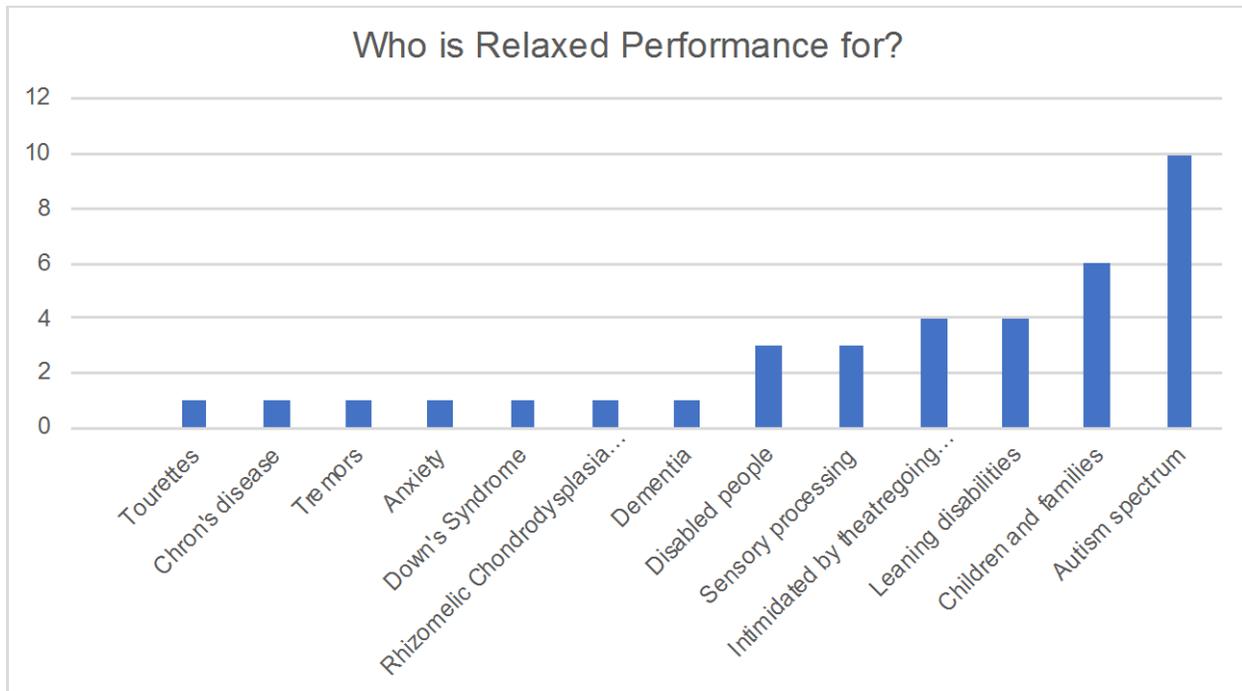
What aspects of Relaxed Performance does the article emphasize?

Most articles (17) discussed how RPs reduce house lights to only half (as opposed to full blackout) during performances, as shown in figure 2. The second most-mentioned aspect of RP (10) was the ability for audiences to move around during the performance. Five additional articles specifically referred to the ability to exit and re-enter the theatre space without fear of interrupting, such that a total of 15 articles mentioned movement in some way. As is evident in figure 2, the articles referred to a variety of different RP strategies, including the existence of a chill space for those who wish to leave the main theatre space; the chill space was described as featuring a video version of the performance. Notably, several articles (3) mentioned the importance of training.

Figure 2: Emphasized aspects of RP

What aspects of RP does the article emphasize?

Aspect	Count
Half house lights	17
Audience movement & noise	10
Chill space	9
Quieter sound or headphones	8
No (or warned) violent tech effects	8
Fidget devices/tech	6
Exit and re-enter	5
Visual story	4
"Meet the theatre"	4
Explaining what will happen/context	4
Training	3
Affordable	3
No single approach	3
Performer introductions	3
Extra space	2
Content warnings	2
Support	2
Food	1
Show synopsis	1
Resources	1
No strobe	1
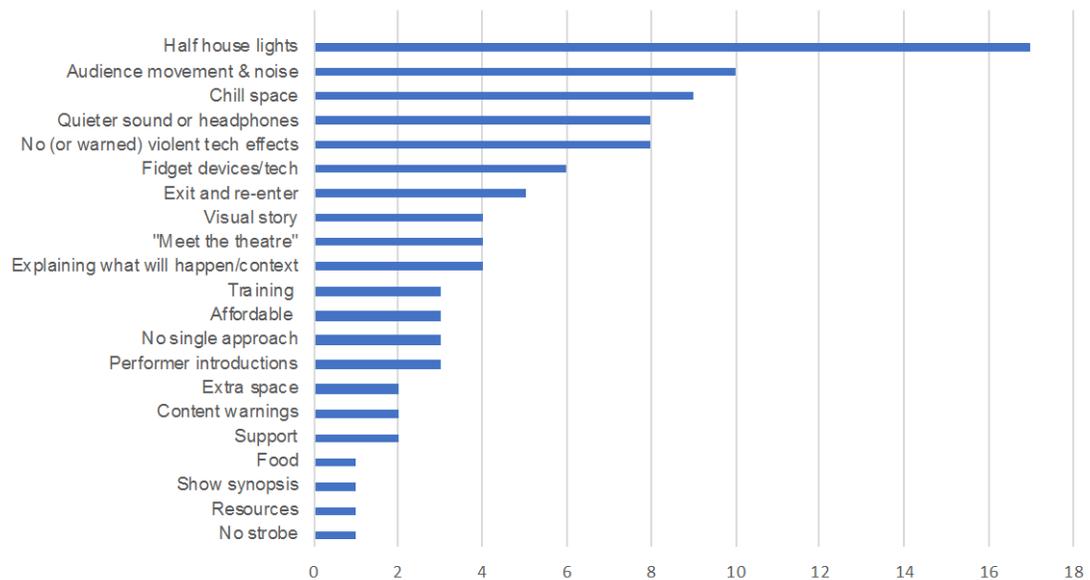
What other terms (if any) are used to describe RP?

Most articles did not mention other terms for RP. Five articles mentioned alternative terminology: three noted "sensory friendly" and two "extra live."

What difference does RP make?

Articles emphasized that RP is not a diminishment to performance, that RP is for everyone, that RP helps people to experience their differences as welcome, that RP makes theatre a shared experience, and that the benefits outweigh any detractions or distractions. As one article noted, "disabled access is not a work of charity, but rather a potentially stimulating and artistically engaged process of lifting previous barriers between patron and performance" (Bellwood, 2015, para 8). The modifications to the theatre process, by and large, were described as enhancing, rather than distracting from, the performance.

Are there any suggestions for improvement?

One article in particular noted the general critique of RP, and explained a critique from Vanessa Brooks in particular: "The idea that all people with learning disabilities need adapted lighting and sound, and a reduction in 'pulse-quickening content', Brooks warns, is creating 'a theatrical autocracy and lacklustre offer for adults with learning disabilities, who like their drama as well-buttered and ramped up as the next person. Relaxed Performances suggest this group of people is considered to be other,' she adds. '[They] also offer audiences who prefer not to

experience theatre in the company of groups of people unlike themselves an opportunity to elect do so and I'm not sure how comfortable we should be with that idea'" (Romer, 2017, para 11). Beyond critique, some suggestions for improving RP include careful consideration of which shows are a good fit for RP, ensuring staff have required RP training, seeking audience feedback and learning from it, and selling fewer tickets (e.g., not selling out for performances) to ensure enough space for patrons. Some also suggested considering whether the language of "Relaxed Performance" works for different audiences.

Discussion: Articles

These results provide insight into representations of RP; as described in trainings delivered by the British Council, representations intersect with the ethic of RP. As other sources of data considered in this report make clear (particularly interviews and survey responses), one of the most important things about communicating around RP is to recognize that RP is not only for individuals with Autism. However, a majority of articles covering RP refer to Autism in their descriptions. Given that these articles are likely many individuals' first encounter with RP, it is worth considering ways of educating those in media about the various populations RP can serve. Another notable pattern in the articles is the description of primarily technical aspects of the performance that are changed for RP: house lights, sound effects, etc. While there is also an emphasis on the ability to move around, fewer articles mention other embodied aspects of attending a performance. On the one hand, these descriptions highlight small movements that venues can undertake to *facilitate different experiences for patrons*. On the other hand, it would be interesting to see articles that present RP in its fullest expression and explore the embodied experiences of various audience members in relation to these technical and spatial modifications.

Theatre Websites

In total, we reviewed 36 websites. Of these, 23 websites described what RP is, and 15 described the specific adaptations their shows make.

What aspects of RP does the website describe?

Most theatre websites (12) mentioned adjustments to the sound in the shows, either through lowering sound levels or by providing headphones to patrons. Most (11) also mentioned adjusting effects or warning audiences about loud effects (e.g., bangs, shots, etc.). Eleven (11) websites discussed dimmed but not blacked out house lights, and ten (10) discussed the ability for audiences to move around. Nine specifically mentioned how audiences can exit and re-enter the space. Other adaptations discussed include the chill space, performer introductions, the ability to bring babes in arms, the free use of fidget devices and/or cellphones on silent mode, scent free spaces, standing room, the visual story, food being welcome in the space, and support available for audiences.

Figure 3: Adaptations to shows noted on websites

Adaptation

Adaptation	Count
Support	1
Food	1
Visual story	1
Standing areas	1
Scent free	1
Explaining what will happen/context	2
Fidget devices/tech	2
Babes in arms	2
Performer introductions	3
Chill space	7
Exit and re-enter	9
Audience movement & noise	10
Half house lights	11
No (or warned) violent tech effects	11
Quieter sound or headphones	12
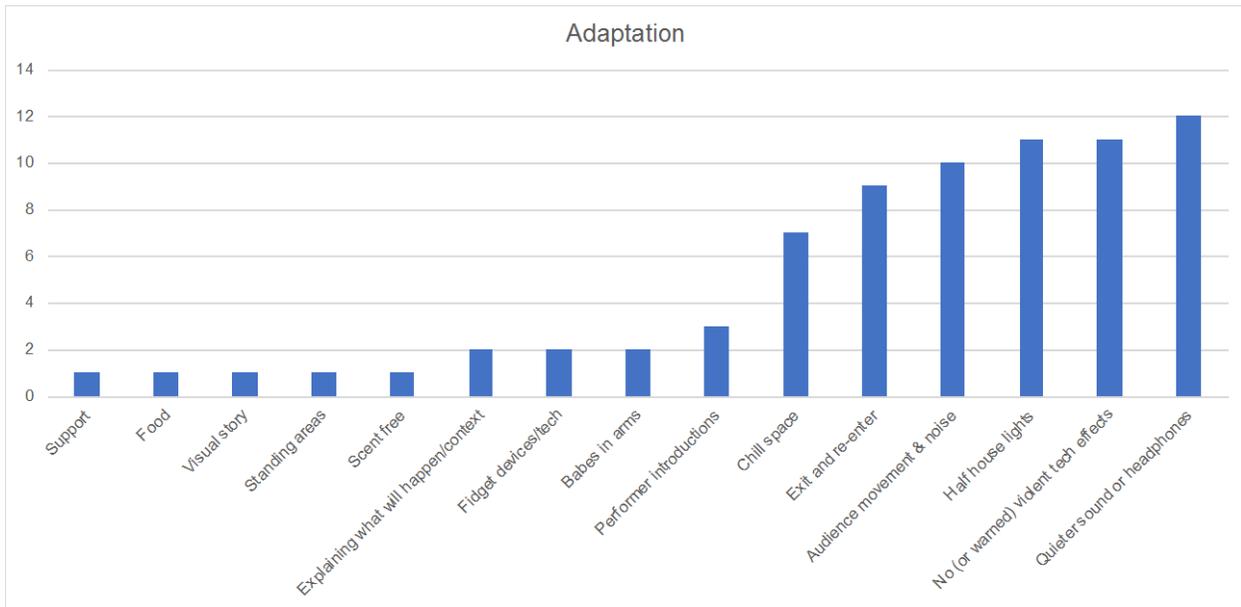
Where is RP housed on the website?

For those websites that described RP (23), most (12) described RP on the accessibility section of their site, as shown in the figure below. Some (5) placed their descriptions of RP on the general page for their performances, and some (2) on the "about" page. Other locations are displayed in the figure, and included special performances, standalone tab, engagement, and inclusivity sections.

Figure 4: Placement of RP on websites

Where is RP housed on website?

Category	Value
Accessibility	12
Main performance page	5
About	2
Inclusivity	1
Engagement	1
Standalone tab	1
Special performances	1
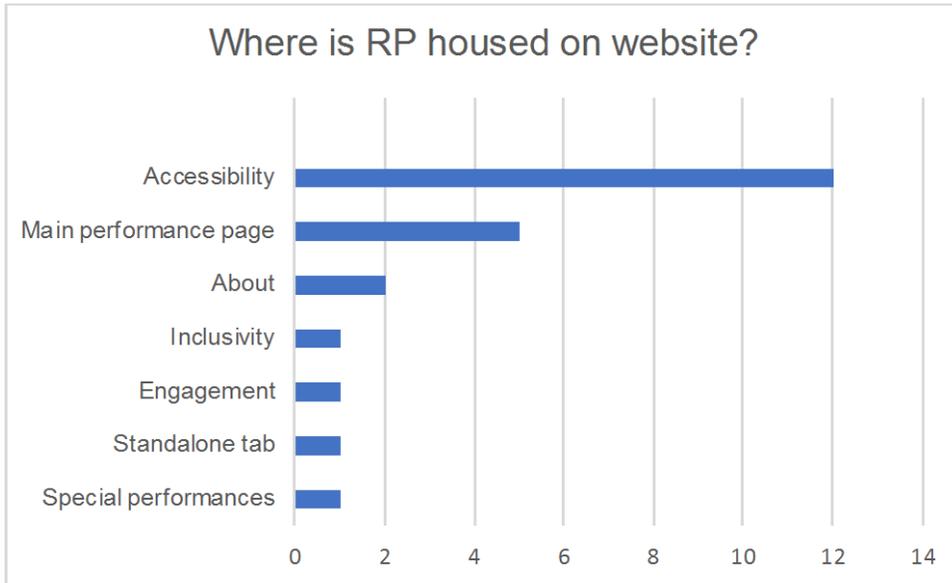
Is there a visual story on the website?

Most websites (22) did not have a visual story on their website. For those that did, six had both venue and performance visual stories, four provided performance-specific visual stories and three venue-specific visual stories. One previously had performance-specific visual stories.

Figure 5: Visual stories on websites

Is there a visual story?

- Yes-Performance specific — 11%
- Yes-Venue — 8%
- Previously — 3%
- No — 61%
- Both venue and performance — 17%
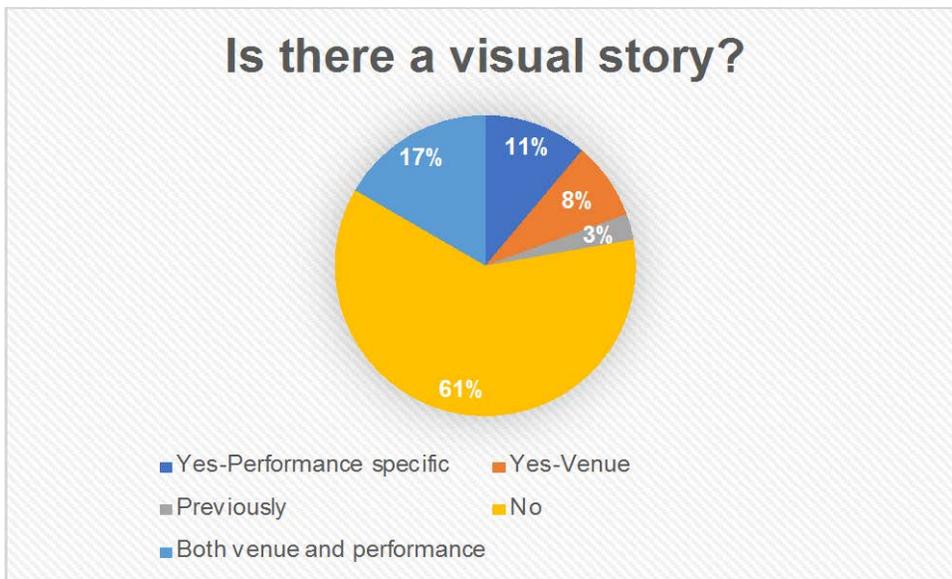
Is the RP information provided for the venue, the performance, or both?

Most (20) websites provided general information about RP, and one provided only performance-specific information. Two provided both performance-specific and general RP information. Thirteen websites did not include information about RP.

Figure 6: Type of RP information provided on websites
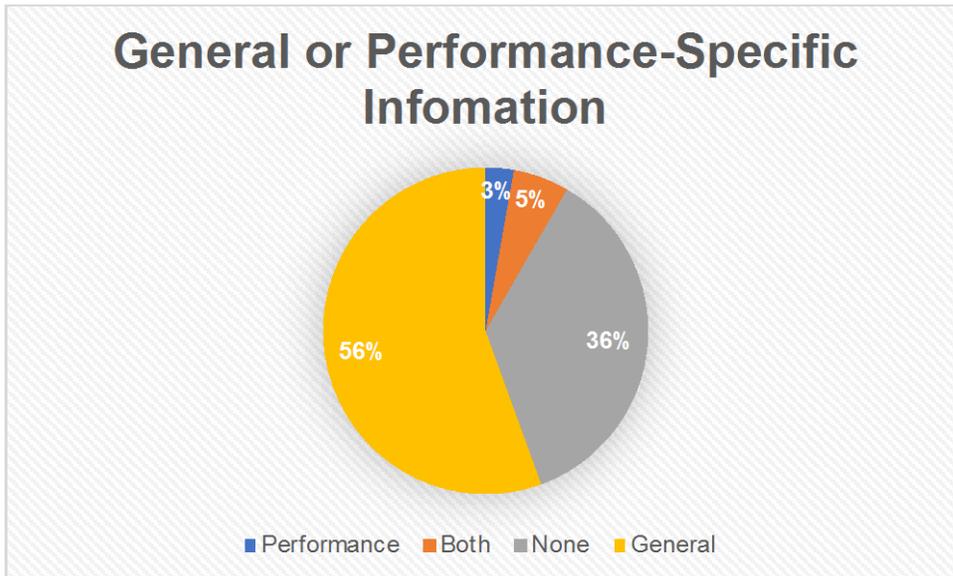
Discussion: Theatre Websites

It is worth noting that these results are likely constantly changing given the dynamic nature of websites. Theatres, particularly those that experienced the training more recently, may not have had time to update their websites with information about RP. These results are not intended to suggest that those who do not yet have this information available are "doing Relaxed Performance wrong" but rather to suggest some possible areas for increasing clarity in communication. In line with the recommendations from the interview and open-ended survey responses, it may be worth theatres conducting website audits to explore how and whether they describe RP and if they are practicing digital accessibility on their websites and social media pages.

Academic Literature Review

We searched Primo via the University of Guelph library for relevant articles on RP using the search terms "Relaxed Performance," "Relaxed Performance + theatre," "Relaxed Performance + disability" and "Relaxed Performance + autism," as well as mining the reference lists of relevant retrieved literature. Many articles were irrelevant, focusing on scientific experiments rather than RP as it relates to theatre. Only five articles/chapters were directly relevant to our purposes. None of these took place in the Canadian context. The following summary outlines the major research contributions to this field. In future, the research detailed in this report could be linked to the broader academic literature on disability arts. Specifically, the report can make a contribution to the disability arts literature through exploring themes such as the audience/performer divide, the reproduction of binaries or splits between disabled and non-disabled audiences and artists, the conflation of disability and children, and more.

There is a limited body of research on Relaxed Performance. The small body of research that does exist tends to emphasize the link between Autism and RP, while also acknowledging that spaces designed to facilitate comfort for persons with Autism may also be comfortable for those with other conditions or relational configurations (e.g., Fletcher-Watson & May, 2018). Fletcher-Watson and May (2018) described research undertaken as a part of the Autism Arts Festival (AAF). They gathered data using mixed-methods, including interviews and surveys with prospective RP audience members, observations at RPs, interviews and reflective writing with audience members, and a survey for those who attended the festival. They found that there was a strong desire to engage with the arts amongst participants, as well an awareness of the lack of opportunities to do so in a comfortable and flexible way. Interestingly, Fletcher-Watson and May (2018) found a disconnect between alterations their participants proposed and alterations currently on offer at UK and US theatres: participants most frequently desired quiet areas, an introduction to the performance, content notes, and video introductions. Less frequently, participants desired lighting alterations and "touch tours" (e.g., getting acquainted with the theatre). Further, not all participants desired alterations to the performance experience at all (Fletcher-Watson & May, 2018). Moving forward, suggestions for increasing accessibility include online discussion groups and live-streaming (Fletcher-Watson & May, 2018). This literature invites us to consider whether RP changes the performance itself, or only the norms around theatregoing (Fletcher-Watson, 2015).

The literature indicates that a majority of RPs are aimed toward children; up to 54% of all RPs recorded by Fletcher-Watson (2015) were children's productions. Some authors explore RPs as a means of "developing social skills" amongst children with Autism, focusing on how RP can invite families into a space that previously felt off-limits (Kempe, 2014). This framing, together with the common reflection on the appropriateness of RPs for young children and families, requires us to consider the extent to which disability may continue to be infantilized by this uptake of RP. Opening up theatre to diverse audiences likely does provide benefits for children, who may not wish to or be able to sit still and be quiet during performances. Likewise, this space

might invite bodies to be bodies, regardless of their verbal, processing, and ambulatory ways of being in the world. However, we must tread lightly when exploring these types of adaptation as simultaneously appropriate for diverse groups. As such, the diversity of programming must reflect the diversity of cultural needs and desires of disabled folks, who may also be themselves cultural producers—those who create, rather than simply consuming, arts and culture (see Chandler, Changfoot, Rice, LaMarre & Mykitiuk, 2018 for more on disability arts and cultural production in Canada).

The first RP reportedly occurred in 2009 (Fletcher-Watson & May, 2018); since 2009, there has been a significant increase in the number of RPs taking place in the UK and around the world (Fletcher-Watson, 2015). As Fletcher-Watson & May (2018) note, the implementation of RPs "challenges clichéd assumptions about autistic people's 'special interests' tending to centre around transport, science, and technology" (p. 407). Fletcher-Watson and May (2018) draw on the work of disability scholar Rosmarie Garland-Thomson (1997) around relationships of looking and being looked at that render bodies "normate" or "extraordinary" to describe how some theatres and individuals engaging in RP prefer alternative terminology, for instance "extra-live" (Thom, 2015) or "not uptight" (Roundhouse, 2015)(both cited in Fletcher-Watson, 2015, p. 63). Regardless of the terminology used, authors note the importance of clearly and transparently marketing RPs (Kempe, 2015).

The importance of not binarizing (e.g., separating into distinct, non-overlapping groups) audiences and those involved in putting on RPs cannot be over-stated. As Fletcher-Watson and May (2018) note, in order to ensure that providing RP is itself accessible, there is a need to "ensure that [the] extra work [of mounting a Relaxed Performance] is not simply transferred to artists, and that more support is provided to artists for this" (p. 415). Further, when disabled people are positioned only as consumers or patrons, there is the possibility of forgetting the cultural production of these "audiences" and disabled artists' contributions to art (Fletcher-Watson, 2015). It is important to acknowledge the cultural contributions of disabled people; for instance, Jordan and Caldwell-Harris (2012) note no significant difference between the engagement of people with Autism in creative arts versus neurotypical people (Fletcher-Watson & May, 2018). The power of disability arts must not be understated or ignored; as Chandler et al. (2018) remark: "the power of Deaf and disability arts is twofold: art produced by D/deaf and disabled people about the experience of disability and deafness creates new and multiplicitous representations of embodied differences which challenge stereotypical understandings and, at the same time, the making of art by D/deaf and disabled people disrupts the cultural myth that we are passive and non-agentive"(p. 251-252).

These critiques echo concerns identified in the media environmental scan from authors such as Vanessa Brooks (in Romer, 2017). She suggests that we must be wary of the possible parsing out of disabled and non-disabled audiences, a separation that might actually shore up boundaries between normative and non-normative bodies and minds. Even when hearing participants describe how "Relaxed Performance is for everyone," we might question how much more we need to probe questions around who RP is for, how access is provided, who is included in the cultural imagination around arts

production and consumption, and how to keep the onus of adjustment on systems, rather than individuals. Access to the arts in general, and RP in particular, is a social justice issue, opening the conversation around who is excluded from cultural production and consumption (Kempe, 2015). Continuing to spread RP and to make systems change will require a framing of RP as something that is co-created by and open to, rather than imposed on, disabled people. As Fletcher-Watson (2015) writes, "the intrinsic benefits of attending cultural events are significant, but equally, theatre professionals should recognise the right of a person with Autism to visit the theatre for pleasure" (p. 81).

Section 2: Experiences and Impacts of Training

Training Surveys: A Snapshot of RP

Participants in RP trainings delivered by the British Council have the opportunity to fill out a survey after training. The British Council developed this survey to guide adaptations to their training after each iteration. It was evident from interviews (reported on in the next section) that trainers, also called Access Activators, had indeed adapted the content over time in light of participant survey feedback. For the purposes of this research, we sought re-consent for 48 post-surveys from those who had agreed to be contacted. Of these, 37 people re-consented and agreed to be included in the research (response rate of 77%). Findings from our quantitative analysis of the survey questions are presented here, followed by findings from our analysis of participant interviews and responses to the open-ended survey questions, as well as insights from a participant observation of an RP training session. Together, these sources of data highlight how participants appreciated the opportunity to receive training, which they found to be integral to their delivery of RP. Participants also had suggestions for improvement to help the trainings satisfy even more trainees in the future.

Training Impressions

Participants rated the trainings highly, with no responder reporting that the training was less than a 3 (out of a 5-point Likert scale) in terms of overall effectiveness. Responses were fairly evenly split between 3 (21.6%), 4 (37.8%), and 5 (40.5%), as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Overall training ratings (5-point Likert scale)**

21.62%

40.54%

37.84%

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5
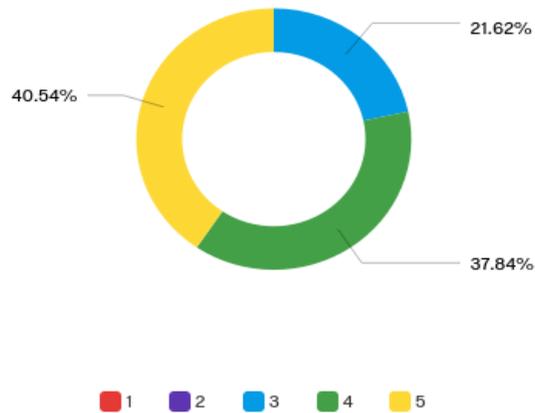
Figure 2: Expectations fulfilled by RP training

20.00%

80.00%

■ Yes ■ No
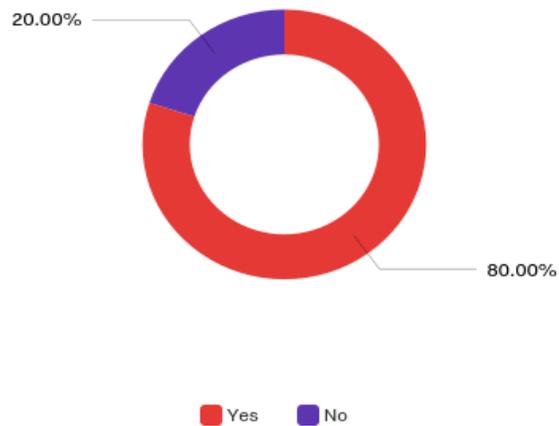
Overall, most participants (80%) felt that the training had met their expectations (see Figure 2). Even when their expectations had been met, participants had some suggestions for improvements. Many of these are echoed in the interview and open-response survey data that follows. Primarily, participants wished for more actionable elements that would tie to their work, more workshops and exercises, and more opportunity for group discussions. Some participants also wanted more resources. These findings match identified themes from interviews

and open-ended responses, which indicate that one of the main areas for improvement in RP training is the need to move beyond didactic (lecture-style) models of teaching and learning, toward more experiential and interactive modalities.

Figure 3: What was missing from RP trainings
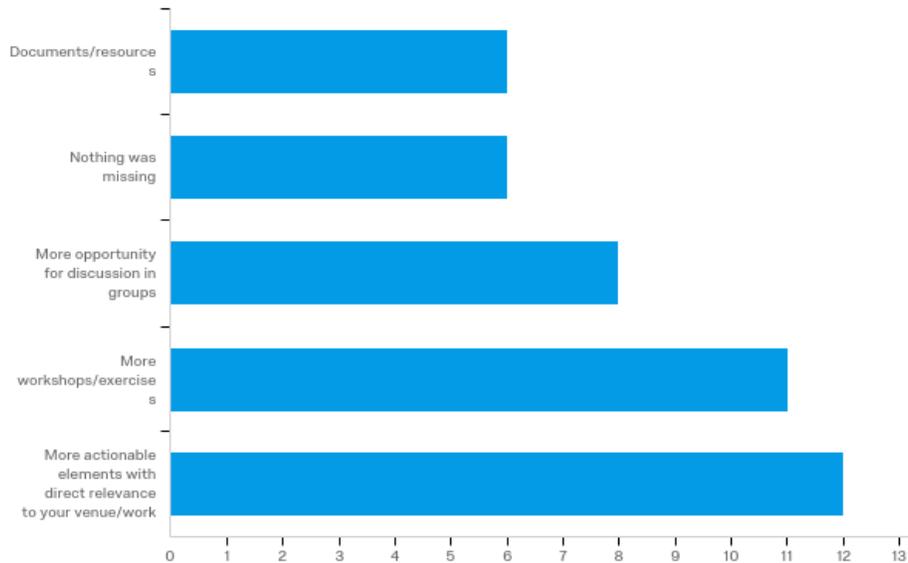
Confidence
Following training, a majority of participants (51.4%) felt mostly comfortable welcoming patrons with disabilities and 18.9% felt completely comfortable doing so. In total, 70.3% felt mostly or totally confident. Some participants (2.7%) felt only somewhat confident, and a further 27.0% felt moderately comfortable.

Figure 4: Confidence serving patrons with disabilities
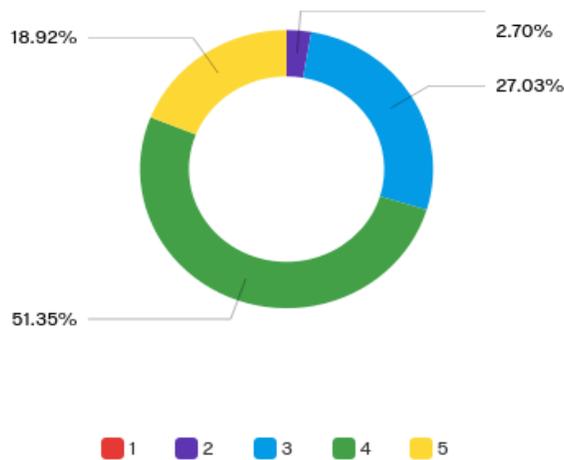
Most participants felt either completely (29.7%) or mostly (48.65%) comfortable conducting an environmental audit of their space after the training, totalling 78.4%. This finding is in line with data from interview and open-response survey questions; participants indicated that one of the highlights of the training experience was the accessibility or environmental audit, and many noted a commitment to doing and continuing this practice in the future.

Figure 5: Confidence conducting an environmental audit
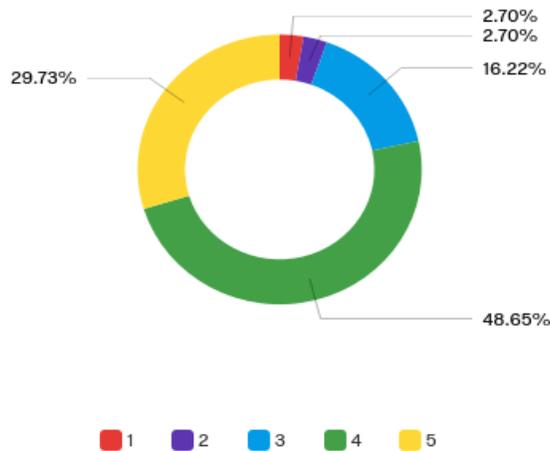
Even more participants felt confident that following the training they would be able to develop accessible communication tools: 81.1% felt mostly (59.5%) or completely (21.6%) comfortable. This finding is encouraging given the interview and open-response survey data, in which participants noted the importance of and focus on language and communication for RP. That some participants felt moderately (16.2%) or not very confident (2.7%) may correspond with the finding from interviews and open-ended survey responses (to follow) that there is still work to be done on fully exploring ways of reaching out to various audiences and communicating effectively about what RP is and who it is for.

Perhaps the strongest area of confidence was in developing visual stories. This finding is echoed in the qualitative data where many participants noted the importance of the visual story and the ways in which the training enhanced their ability to create visual stories. Over 35% of participants felt completely confident creating visual stories, and a further 51.4% mostly confident for a total of 87%.

Figure 6: Confidence creating visual stories

5.41%
8.11%
35.14%
51.35%

1 2 3 4 5
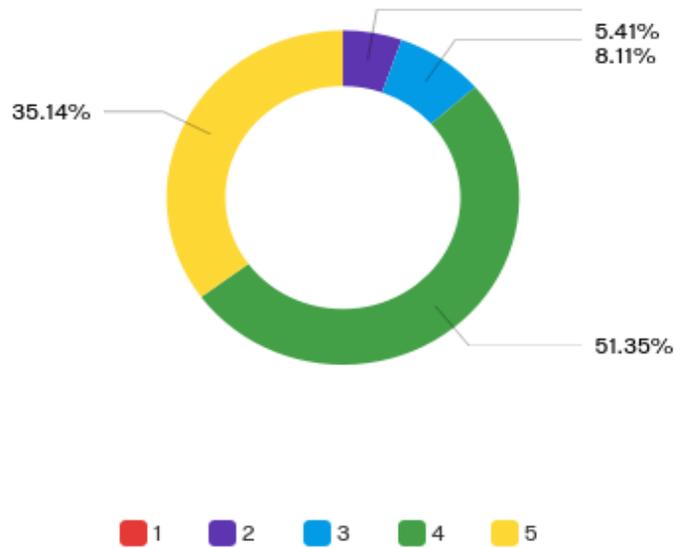
In terms of the overall development of an RP, again most (97.3%) participants felt mostly (43.2%), completely (27%) or moderately (27%) confident, with only 2.7% not feeling very confident in doing so.

Figure 7: Confidence developing an RP for a production

2.70%
27.03%
27.03%
43.24%

1 2 3 4 5
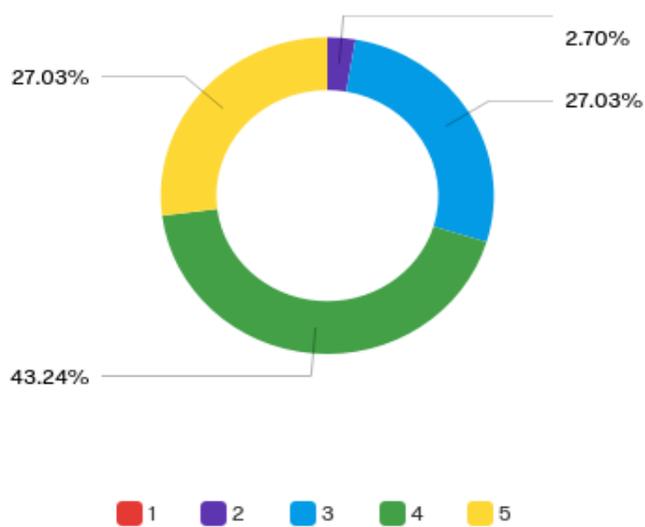
RP Delivery Plans

A fair percentage of participants (22.2%) were unable to determine whether or not they would deliver an RP soon, given that they do not make the decisions around this. There was an even split between those who planned to undertake an RP in the next year (25%) and the next four months (25%). Of these, some participants specified that their RPs were very soon and this was a primary driver behind undertaking the training. A further 11.1% were planning RPs in the next 6 months, and 11.1% indicated that they had plans to produce RPs in the next 18 months. Some (5.6%) foresaw too many challenges in conducting RPs to commit to this at the point of the training.

Figure 8: Plans for RP
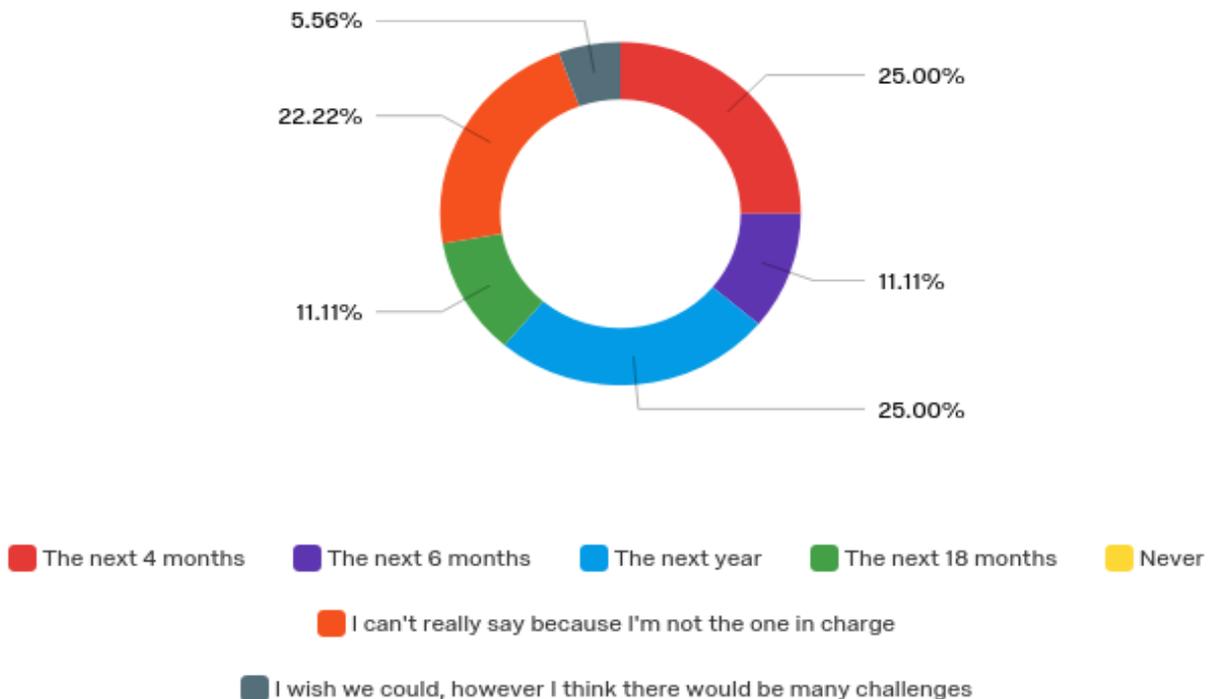
Figure 9: Barriers to implementing RP
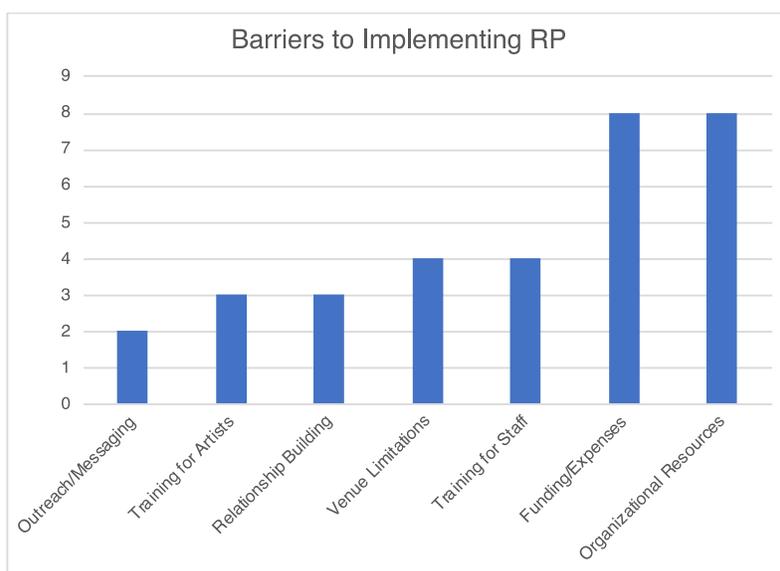
Participants noted a number of barriers to implementing RPs that need to be considered in terms of providing support; primarily, theatre staff noted that time, human, and financial resources were lacking. Despite these challenges, post-training survey participants made commitments to various measures designed to promote RP. Notably, the most common commitment was to deliver or assist in RPs at their venues. Many respondents also noted a desire to advocate for the value of RPs with various groups, including their own staff, the broader community, funders, and artists. Practically speaking, there was a strong commitment to making visual stories, as well as a desire to collaborate with community groups that are disability-led. The figure below demonstrates commitments made in the post-survey.

Figure 10: Commitments following training
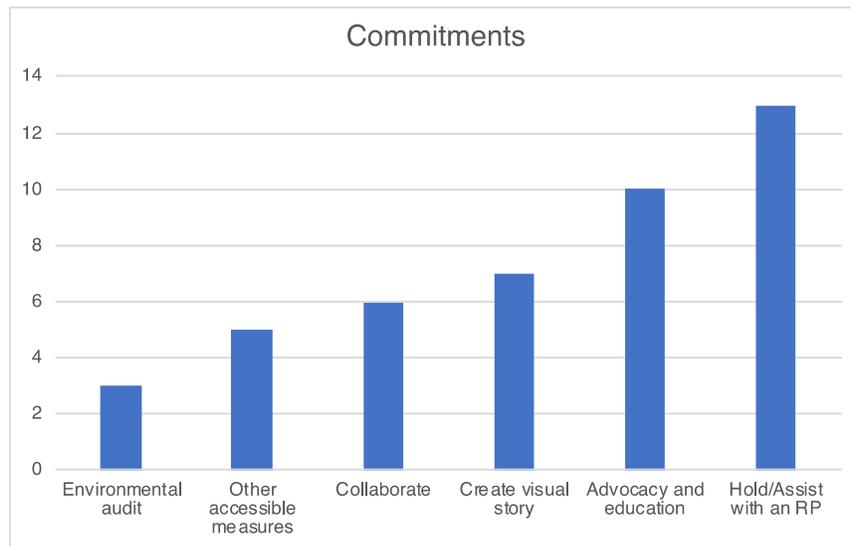
Summary

In all, participants found the training to be helpful. They indicated a desire for more experiential activities, which would help them to develop more confidence in serving patrons with disabilities, and to engage in the time-and-resource-intensive mode of performance they were learning about. This desire for more experiential exercises, and support for the effectiveness of concrete examples, is underscored by the confidence most participants demonstrated around environmental audits and visual stories, which were standout pieces of learning from RP trainings. In order to improve these already strong experiences, the British Council may wish to enhance their training by increasing the number of experiential exercises. Doing so may also bring accessibility into the training itself by minimizing the didactic nature of training.

Participants articulated barriers to RP, as well as their commitments. These responses demonstrate the importance of balancing the "ask" and the "give" of trainings: participants were prepared to enact RP, and identified some practices they hoped to engage in immediately, and yet they were also lucid about the barriers and challenges they will need to consider in order to continue offering RPs. Most notable among these are funding and other resources (time, human) required to put on an effective RP. To summarize these responses, we might look to one participant's summary: "Everyone supports the initiative - learning from our experiences and especially finding the ways in which we flex our budget to make it all come together will be the biggest balancing act."

Thematic Analysis: Communicating, Planning, and Evolving RP

The survey data provides a useful 'broad strokes' picture of participants' experiences of Relaxed Performance training. To develop a thicker and more nuanced portrait of the experiences and impacts of RP training, we analyzed and wove together participants' accounts in qualitative interviews with their responses to the survey's open-ended questions. Though a few survey respondents also participated in interviews (N=10), most did not (N=27), adding to the overall sample size and analysis. As a result, the experiences and insights of a total of 51 participants contributed to this analysis.

Goals

We wanted to understand in detail the experiences of those who have taken Relaxed Performance trainings delivered by the British Council. We wished to gain insight into:
1. What is the value of RP?
2. Are RP trainings equipping trainees to deliver RPs? What is going well, and what might be improved?
3. How does RP relate to disability arts and accessible theatre in Canada in general?

Methods

We undertook a thematic analysis of 24 phone or Zoom (online teleconferencing software with video) interviews with key informants who had participated in RP trainings sponsored by the British Council. We also analyzed 37 surveys completed by participants following their training, for which we obtained consent to use in this report. We used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, exploring themes as participants discussed them in these data sets. In the future we will link these responses to theoretical currents in disability studies to deepen our analysis of the themes. As the thematic analysis is intended to guide future RP trainings and the extension of RP practices into theatres across the country, we opted for a semantic thematic analysis—an interpretation of the most explicit or apparent meanings of participants' words—as this approach allows us to identify broad patterns in interview interactions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interviews were professionally transcribed and coded inductively (i.e., from the ground up). We then sorted codes into broad patterns. Notably, themes are not simply counts of how frequently responses occurred in the data but rather meaningful groupings or patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Analyses

In our analysis of the interviews and written responses to open-ended survey questions, we identified five broad themes. The first two themes are focused on Relaxed Performance itself, collectively engaging with how theatres are taking up RP and the benefits and challenges of doing so, as well as their creative ways of solving possible barriers and issues associated with implementing RP. The third theme is specifically oriented toward participant-suggested methods for enhancing RP training to better equip participants to pursue RP. Finally, the fourth and fifth themes situate these responses in a broader context, exploring how RP relates to the theatre context (theme four) and next steps for RP in relation to accessible theatre (theme five). A brief description of each theme and subthemes is offered below, with detailed descriptions and quotes following this summary.

1. The main theme "Relaxed Performance Invites Bodies to be Bodies" refers to how RP *opens up theatre* to those who may not otherwise be able to engage, reflects an underlying valuing of accessibility at the *heart of theatre,* and offers pathways for *expanding the transformative potential of the arts.*
2. "Communication is Key," is a main theme that refers to the importance of *language* when describing people and accommodations, clear communication in *outreach* about RP, the importance of setting clear *expectations* about what RP can achieve, and how to *communicate within and beyond theatres* about RP.
3. The main theme "Evolving Relaxed Performance Training," highlights how *integrating disability justice* into training will help RP trainings achieve greater accessibility, the ways in which *tailoring training experiences* can lead to the development of role-specific skills, and how more *experiential exercises* can help RP come alive for training participants.
4. Looking to the way RP relates to the broader accessible theatre scene, the main theme "Relaxed Performance, Disability Arts, and Canadian Theatre" underscores the importance of *organizational commitments to accessibility, small movements toward accessibility,* and *skills and knowledge transfer.*
5. The theme "Expanding and Growing the Relaxed Performance Sector" focuses on how *developing a set of best or promising practices for RP* would help theatres to be clear about RP requirements, the importance of fostering *the RP community,* and the need for *attracting funding and getting buy-in*.

Theme One: Relaxed Performance Invites Bodies to be Bodies

Participants described RP as opening doors—sometimes literally—to patrons who have a variety of access needs and desires, including disabled folks. While the focus of RP has traditionally been creating an accessible environment for disabled people, participants also commented on how RP invites all people to be themselves in the space. Often, this reveals access needs that patrons previously may not have realized. Several participants commented on how much

they had enjoyed RP themselves, even when they did not consider it to be something they "needed."

As participant 1 describes, their theatre decided to keep the definition of RP broad because of the way in which RP can allow all patrons to be themselves in a space (i.e., the theatre) not always seen or experienced as welcoming.

> We've been playing around a bit with the idea of: 'Oh, like we should mention that they're great for people on the Autism Spectrum or they're great for people with sensory sensitivities or first-time theatre-goers, or arts experiencers.' But actually, they're just for everybody. It's not the performance itself that is relaxed or lessened, it's the experience around it and the supports you're able to provide before, during, and after that that make it relaxed. So, that's sort of how we're, we're framing it here (Participant 1).

Participant 3 explores how the invitation to honour the body's needs felt important in the space; the idea of "knowing you can" do certain things felt freeing (e.g., going to the bathroom mid performance without feeling like you are being disruptive):

> Oh definitely. I think the broadness that we use it as, so even if you have no one with Autism in the audience... I like going to them because I like the little pre-show speech, gives me a bit more information. I like knowing that I can go to the washroom whenever I want (laugh) even though, I don't have any reasoning behind that, other than I like knowing that I can [laugh].

In fact, some participants had begun to explore ways of changing the wording in their theatre's descriptions over time in order to gesture at the broad nature of RP's appeal. Participant 8 reflected on their previous way of advertising, and what they might change.

> But, it's from last year's website. It says: 'Relaxed Performances are designed to welcome audience members who might benefit from a more relaxed environment, including those on the Autism Spectrum. It's not even the right word. 'These performances have less intense sound and lighting events, low light in the audience, the ability to come and go and a visual story delivered in advance, to prepare for the show.' […] I would just cut out the part about including those on the Autism Spectrum.

This self-critique was evident throughout many of the interviews, as those who had been trained in the method continued to explore ways of making RP more accessible. This awareness may also help to attend to the critiques that have surfaced around RP, including the idea that RP may segment off certain people into 'those who attend RPs' and 'those who do not.' The following subthemes

delve into more detail about the various ways in which RP invites bodies to be bodies: *opening up theatre*, *returning to the heart of theatre*, and *expanding the transformative potential of the arts*.

Subtheme 1A: Opening up theatre

One of the key values participants expressed in relation to RP was its ability to "open up" the theatre experience: to break down physical, attitudinal, sensory, and financial barriers. Importantly, RP training helped participants to be able to identify *what the barriers were*, and thus how to start to make change. The environmental audit—the assessment of a venue for its physical accessibility— was noted to be a critical step toward opening the physical accessibility question. This was particularly salient for older venues, which were not often built with accessibility in mind. Some participants working in newer venues commented on how the training made them think differently about their venues as well, indicating that the issue is not unique to historical theatre settings.

> coming back from the training, obviously I work in a historical building. It's quite shocking to see how we're not accessible just to the general public or anyone that wants to come to school. So just the physical barriers … it's impressed into what level it's not accessible. And that in some way wasn't… I'm doing those little air quotes, but "a priority." So that was one of the things that was very – a shock to me being an able-bodied person having that chance of moving around freely. So that was very eye opening. We actually had the members of the team do the space audit with us, just to be in our renovation programs, like what can we implement that will be a lot easier and having other people come to (Participant 20).

Participant 20 noted how the training made them think about what they had not realized before: that their venue was physically inaccessible. The training and/or the environmental audit helped to identify areas of inaccessibility that may have been imperceptible previously. Environmental audits revealed venue challenges such as heavy doors, a lack of "chill out spaces" during performances, no accessible washrooms, stairs without the option of an elevator, and more. Sometimes participants were doing significant work to integrate an awareness of and attention to accessibility within their workplaces, as Participant 21 illustrates:

> We now have non-gendered bathrooms, we'll have an elevator in December, and I'm always speaking about it. I would say I'm the one bringing it up every time I can. But you know, it's on the third floor, and the third floor isn't accessible, the first and second floor is … I also wrote an accessibility statement for my department and I'm trying to get the school to want to [do the same] and perhaps have accessibility in action and time and metrics.

Participants noted that something that stood out to them in the training was that opening the theatre to difference is not only a question of physical access. Environmental audits often revealed areas of inaccessibility beyond the physical: a lack of signage and/or accessible signage (e.g., braille or clear printing), for instance, can contribute to patrons' confusion and/or anxiety. Participants also noted that they learned about what "opening up theatre" truly meant in the trainings through an exploration of the conditions necessary for accessibility. Participant 4 commented on how they learned about the history of exclusion of disabled patrons from arts spaces:

> The Relaxed Performance is an interesting way of looking at the audience development issue, not just seeking new audiences, but looking at your own process, and how it does create exclusion. And so by working on the process, and through the Relaxed Performance model, then you're opening up your venues, audiences that were banned from attending. They're plainly banned from being able to attend, cause they would not fit in to the traditional performance context. That, it was really an eye opener for me, when I found out about this.

This participant's words speak to how norms built out of oppression continue to be perpetuated through exclusionary theatre practices. There was a strong sentiment amongst trainees that RP offers an opportunity to open up theatre and begin to rectify some of these historical legacies of exclusion.

RPs fit within participants' articulated priorities for the future of accessible theatre; sometimes participants described it as "radically inclusive":

> I think it's the most radically inclusive form of accessibility that we have now. When we talk about accessibility, we often think about physical barriers and including not having vision and including, being deaf and not understanding the language on the stage. But there's so many more. I guess people are often concerned about the visible barriers, that people can identify easily, and what I love about Relaxed Performances is that it addresses such a wide variety of people and with so many different potential reasons. You might not be comfortable sitting still because you have Tourette's syndrome, or because you're on the spectrum or you have a developmental disability and you just don't have that understanding of sitting still. But you might just as well have a very mild form of ADHD, where it's just really annoying to sit still. Or you might have sciatica and sitting still for a long time becomes really painful and you just need to be able to stand up and stretch your leg. Or you've got a jumpy toddler who actually really enjoys shows that usually are for adults, and he just wants to be able to bounce around. I mean, I took my five-year-old to a show about quantum physics yesterday [laugh] (Participant 2).

Subtheme 1B: Returning to the heart of theatre

While many participants were cognizant of the historically exclusionary legacies in theatre, several also noted that RP returned to theatre's "roots." That is, RP reminded some participants of a kind of theatre where patrons were invited to eat, make noise, and respond to the piece. Shakespearean theatre, opera, and stand-up comedy were offered as examples of performances that might be framed as "relaxed." Participant 2 articulated this perspective:

> A lot of people see it as a huge dramatic shift, and I don't see it like that. I see it more like going back to what theatre really is. Which is a welcoming space, where something is being communicated on a stage, but in a Relaxed Performance, it's done in a such a way that it just is a welcoming opening space, which, looking at historical books, theatre really used to be. It didn't used to be that people had to sit still and shut up—it didn't used to be like that. There's a reason why in, in operas, the same lyric gets, repeated and repeated and repeated. And it's because they used to be like rock concerts. There would be chatting in the meantime. That's, to me, more like, what I would describe a Relaxed Performance as.

In this way, RP might not necessarily be framed as a departure from the historical ethic of theatre practice or in any way a diminishment of the performance. In fact, for many participants, RP was an enhancement to, rather than a detractor from, theatre performances. The training clarified for participants how the performance itself was not necessarily altered; alterations are designed to modify the *theatre environment.*

> I think one of the most exciting things to come out of the session was the idea that Relaxed Performances don't necessarily change the content or the level of the content, but what they change is the environment for the audience. So, creating opportunities for audience members of all abilities to shift the traditional theatre attending roles, so that there's more opportunities to move around, to come and go, to vocalize, to do what, the audience needs, so that they're able to fully participate (Participant 6).

As participant 6 describes, a key element of RP is that it does not reach for a "lower" common denominator, but rather raises the performance up to consumption by a broader public. Another participant described RP as "maintaining the integrity of the artistic creation" (Participant 18), which succinctly summarizes the idea that rather than being a deviation from "true" theatre, RP is a technique designed to increase the reach and enjoyment of theatre.

The idea of theatre's "rules" re-entrenches an idea that one must attend theatre and be silent and "well-behaved," an idea with which many participants took issue. For instance, Participant 22 described how an experience teaching made their desire alternative ways of imagining theatre and theatre audiences:

Because I am such a drama fiend, I wanted to take my class to a play. They were doing a showing of Macbeth and I wanted to take my class there. And my head teacher told me that I was not allowed because he was worried that the behaviour of the students would reflect poorly upon the school. And that kind of lit my fire and that's when I started doing a little bit of research about it, and because I feel very passionately about theatre and the arts in education, I was hell-bent on finding a way to get theatre – not just theatre to them – but taking them to the theatre. Because I think that's a whole other experience.

Participants like Participant 22 valued theatre and demonstrated a belief in the capacity of show formats like RP to alter the "rules" that have come to be—but do not necessarily need to be—associated with theatregoing.

Subtheme 1C: Expanding the transformative potential of the arts

Many participants noted that arts are transformative, and that all people should be able to have access to the arts, including through the use of RP. They also remarked upon how the arts might be made *more transformative* through the use of techniques that challenge all involved to work differently and invite more participation into the process of creating and consuming art. Participant 22 described theatre as an escape, and a journey on which more people should be invited:

It gives people the chance to escape which is one of the reasons I love theatre in the first place. But Relaxed Performances let the audience members take a journey to somewhere else. And go on, follow a story, and lose themselves in their imagination. And I think it's extremely precious and everyone should have that opportunity.

The "magic" of theatre was at the forefront of several participants' reflections on the value of theatre in general and providing more access to theatre in particular. As Participant 17 described:

Theatre is a rare thing. Theatre is magical, and transformative… at its best anyway. And at its worst it is a bit of escapism from regular life. I think this combination can be both transformative and escapist and thought provoking part of each of those things

In order to spread the magic, this participant noted the need to expand RPs to large, high-profile theatres. An example of a theatre of this kind implementing RPs in the UK is Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, which this participant used as an example of how RP might be taken up even more broadly.

The idea of the arts being transformative, and seeking ways to extend this transformation, was something many participants were exploring. Participant 14 noted that believing in the transformative potential of the arts was a primary reason for attending the RP training:

> In general, the notion of the performing arts, to transform people, but also society. And so, we've been putting a significant part of our resources, over the years, into inclusive practice, and that includes also working with [people with] disabilities.

Several participants noted that their organizations had embedded a commitment to accessible practice into their work, with an eye to expanding the transformative potential of the arts to new audiences or "publics." This organizational commitment often led to large groups of staff taking the training together. Participant 11 described the vitality of the arts as critical, and as informing their organization's approach to their programming and practice.

> We truly believe that art being part of a person's life, whether it be, ah, art making, art viewing or a combination, is, is integral to wellness, for everyone. It's not a frill for us. It is absolutely as integral as water and food, for someone's well-balanced life, and for their wellbeing, and every diverse group deserves that. Deserves to be able to interact with that, which is going to increase their wellness.

Evidently, those organizations and individuals who were interested in participating in the pilot phase of RP trainings led by the British Council and, moreover, who participated in these interviews were a group who were inclined to value accessibility, and as such this finding might not be surprising. Nonetheless, the findings reflect an enthusiasm for this work. It also gestures at the need for increased access within the Canadian theatre sector, and between individuals and organizations who come to RP with different levels of pre-existing capacity for enacting access.

Theme Two: Communication is Key

The importance of communication and language was a strong pattern throughout interviews. This operated on several levels, which are explored in subthemes below. First, participants identified the focus on language when referring to RP elements and disability as a key outcome of the training. Second, participants articulated learning about, but also struggling to find, the most appealing and accurate way to describe what they were offering and how they were offering it. Third, participants engaged in a continual exploration in how best to reach out with marketing materials and appreciated when this was covered in training while also wanting to continue those conversations. Fourth, in relation to putting on RPs, participants articulated the paramount importance of communication within and beyond their teams as they strived to attend to balancing accessibility needs

and be attentive to the unique needs of each RP. Participants learned about—and suggested that all theatres doing RP were clear about—what they could and could not offer as a part of RP. They also emphasized the need for clear communication within their teams, as well as clear communication with artists and other creatives with whom they work.

Participant 3's comments summarize the importance of communication, which is explored in relation to the three areas described below:

> The logistics to me is a big one, and communication to everyone that's involved in being part of it. Because we are a theatre that works with a lot of different companies, and we are often co-producing—we don't just produce our own plays. We support other people's work we present. So making sure that people know what they are, and not just producers or the, the directors, but the design team, the actors, everyone who we're in contact with, because sometimes, that information gets left out to certain people, and then that creates issues. Communicating what's happening to everyone and letting them know that it doesn't actually change a whole lot.

As participant 3 emphasizes, communication cannot take place only at the level of theatre-to-audience, but must become an integral part of the practice of RP from the start (i.e., when first envisioning the possibility of a performance) through to putting on the performance. The following subthemes add detail to these remarks on communication: *language, outreach and inreach, managing expectations*, and *communicating within and beyond theatres*.

Subtheme 2A: Language

A training standout for many participants, particularly when they were newer to exploring disability arts, was the importance of language and framing of disability. For those who were more familiar with disability art and disability justice[3], the content around the social model of disability was "too basic". As described above, the social model of disability is the idea that disabilities are generated not by a problem internal to a person but rather by disabling societal conditions that make a false "norm" and create exclusion by, for instance, making some spaces not navigable by those whose bodies differ from this norm. However, this same content was described as entirely appropriate and even eye-opening for those who were beginning their work in this realm. Participant 11, for instance, noted:

> The main thing that really struck me was the very first day, one of the very first things, and it was the definition of disability—[the] medical definition versus the social definition. And it just kind of rocked my world, to think that really, the only thing that's causing disability in our culture is the fact

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[3] Including the impact that various spaces of belonging may generate experiences of further marginalization for queer, trans, Black and Indigenous persons of colour (BIPOC) and otherwise marginalized disabled people (Mingus, 2013; Taormina-Weiss, 2013).

that we don't allow for it. It's our structures, our social construct, our buildings, those are the things that are disabling people. And that sort of turnaround in thought was really big for me.

While these concepts might have already been aligned with participants' values, having the language to refer to disability differently was essential to being able to move forward in their practice. Even those who considered themselves to be thoughtful around language could have learning to do, as Participant 23 noted:

> You know, I thought I was pretty sensitive and aware of what type of language to use but language is ever changing so I don't think anyone could ever feel confident that they know the proper terms to use. So that was great to know and to learn and to have those resources that, what is current now, and having discussions around that.

In general, participants were impressed by the way that facilitators addressed the training material.

> I would say the thorough and considerate and professional nature of the content. I really appreciate that it was a little bit academic. Because they can't be presented as a corporate project. Or a PR move or something like that. So I appreciated that it was very humanities driven or people-centric or empathetic or something in its delivery and language. There was a lot of good time and good language spent around like, people who identify as, or people who—just trying to pass on some of that language (Participant 17)

As Participant 17 noted, the way that facilitators approached content reflected how RPs are more than "a public relations move". RPs are part of the difference between doing an RP for good PR and because it is integrated into an organization's social fabric rests in part on language.

Participants also commented on how the training helped them to feel confident about how to refer to RP and elements of their performances in their visual stories—something that was also evident in the quantitative survey findings described above. As Participant 10 noted: "the other thing that sticks out for me is language, and the impact of using very accessible language within the visual stories." Here, resources provided in training were particularly useful as participants could refer to these resources when they were in the process of constructing their visual stories. Participant 13 noted the helpfulness of training resources with respect to language: "they had a work plan sample. They had a list of definitions, a list of preferred language. All of that was helpful." Participants in earlier trainings noted that they had not received as many resources; as the trainings evolved over time to integrate learning about trainee preferences. For instance, those conducting later trainings integrated a focus on providing resources around visual story development.

Some participants noted that it would be helpful to explicitly take stock of language at the beginning of trainings, to allow people who are coming into the space with very different perspectives and levels of experience, to develop a sense of comfort and confidence:

> I think part of it too is everyone, and I could tell very much on our first day training, nobody wants to say the wrong thing or offend somebody. So, I think there almost kind of needs to be some time to explore a little bit and try to get people talking about the language and about the assumptions that people make (Participant 22).

As Participant 22 notes, language is underscored by assumptions, an important consideration when trying to get everyone "on the same page". Most participants saw the trainings as a space of learning around language, but there may be room for some extra background when it comes to language and assumptions.

Several French-Canadian participants noted that they would appreciate more French-language training and resources. The live translation during sessions was helpful, but they indicated wanting more around French RPs. They have coined the term "representation décontractée" for their RPs. As Participant 4 noted: "for us, the key, one of the key aspects, to make this sustainable in the long term will be to have trainers and trainees in French."

Subtheme 2B: Outreach and inreach

Alongside the resources provided about language in general, participants from more recent trainings also noted a focus on outreach and how to work with various audiences. Participant 16 noted:

> It was very helpful. Especially in terms of timeline and thinking about just logistically things that would need to be done and it's very helpful in terms of started thinking about outreach and language and promotion and lots of things like that. It made it more clear and more helpful, exactly what kind of steps to take.

While most participants were very positive about the training's emphasis on and preparation for outreach, several participants, particularly those who work specifically in marketing and outreach, noted that they would have appreciated more materials and training focusing on outreach and ways of reaching a wide variety of audiences. Many participants suggested that one of the biggest challenges they encountered or anticipated encountering during their RP work was reaching the people they hoped to reach. These audience members may not yet be "plugged in" to the theatre scene.

Community outreach, so the way that they conventionally do outreach in their venues, doesn't really apply when you're trying to sell tickets for a Relaxed Performance because you're really speaking to a different community, a different demographic, who are accessing information in a different way, or they don't even know about theatre, or, because they haven't—for so long, they haven't been included in theatre, that they don't even pay any attention to that. So one of the biggest challenges is the outreach, and getting people to see the performances (Participant 5).

Some participants also noted that outreach to *artists*, and how to effectively communicate both the ethic and practicalities of RP, would be an excellent next step for training. Training on artist outreach would help participants overcome some current or perceived challenges.

While getting buy-in from artists was sometimes challenging, a few participants (such as Participant 24) had actually been approached by companies that wished to carry out RPs:

Alors, ben écoutez, c'était beaucoup de preparations. C'est pas un public qu'on n'est pas forcément habitué à recevoir. Donc, ça demandait beaucoup de travail en avant avec la compagnie pour qui est spécialisée là-dedans parce qu'ils ont… ils ont une démarche appuyée depuis quinze ans maintenant. Et en gros, ils faisaient des représentations décontractées avant même de savoir que ça existait des représentations décontractées. Donc, c'est quand ils ont vu qu'il y avait tout un système institutionnalisé avec… avec les mots derrière et puis une réflexion aboutie. Ils nous ont proposé de mettre cela en place, donc la compagnie a proposé de mettre cela en place lors de leur suivi de représentation.

(So, it was a lot of work. It's not an audience that we're accustomed to serving. So, it took a lot of work with the company who specialized in this kind of performance. They had been applying this approach for 15 years. They were doing Relaxed Performance without knowing it was Relaxed Performance. So, when they learned that there is a system around this, with words behind it and that was successful… they asked us to put this into place; the company suggested that they run a Relaxed Performance for their next performance).

Insights such as these can help to inform discussions of artist outreach in future trainings. For instance, exploring how some artists may appreciate knowing about the history and set of specific practices around RP as they seek to make their work more accessible.

Exploring outreach and continuing to find new ways of engaging with audiences and artists alike were noted to be important parts of moving forward with accessible theatre in general, and RP in particular. As Participant 3 notes, one of

the main "ways forward" is simply to keep doing RPs and exploring outreach around them until RP becomes a part of the way theatre is delivered in a meaningful and sustainable way.

> I think just everyone continually creating the work, and making the opportunities, and getting people with disabilities involved in the art as well, I think is really important. I think just continually creating the opportunities for those shows, so that people can go to them. It's not going to be good if you just try one year of ASL and then no one comes, and you just stop doing it. You just have to keep, keep putting it out there, and keeping trying to access those groups, and get them involved, as well as getting involved in the art, which I think is important too.

Participant 3's comments also speak to the importance of involving those with lived experience in outreach efforts, a theme that was evident across the data set: asking people what their needs and preferences are is often the best way to know how to reach out.

Subtheme 2C: Managing Expectations (about what RP is, can/can't be)

Communication also featured in relation to expectations around what Relaxed Performances can and cannot be, within and beyond the theatre. Here, participants explained the importance of setting clear expectations for their theatre staff. This included having all theatre staff trained on the method:

I think a Relaxed Performance is, is one of those, um, kinds of experiences that would challenge almost all aspects of the theatre. And, and the reason I say that is because it has an impact with front of house, and box office, and with the artists and with the technicians, and, and all of it. You know, all of those people need to be working together, on the same goal and, and have the same understanding of, of what the experience is going to be like (Participant 2).

Evidently, all theatre staff need to work together in order to make an RP a success. Participants were clear about how setting expectations had been or would have been helpful to them in delivering successful RPs.

Participants also commented on the need to make clear what is and is not possible for their venue and performances. Participants commented on expectation-setting as a method of exploring creative ways of balancing multiple and sometimes diverging access needs. This often went both ways for participants—communicating what their RP can and cannot be, and also inviting patrons to communicate their access needs to ensure that they could met (or confirm if they could not).

> I think the most important thing is trying to get people to communicate beforehand. Even though you want people to just be able to come and buy

a ticket, any ticket, I think if someone's accommodation need, or access need is likely to be one that conflicts – like if you're triggered by animals or afraid of animals or allergic to animals, that's probably something that we need to ask you about, in advance. So just communicating in advance as much as we can. I think if you have a service animal, you don't necessarily need to let us know. But if you're not able to be in a space with a service animal, please do let us know and we'll try and find a way to accommodate. I think there's always going to be tensions. There's, there's just, you know, somebody's hyper sensitive to sensory stimulation. Someone else is hypo sensitive—it's a tough balance of things (Participant 6).

Of course, it is not always possible to balance multiple accessibility needs—and this is something theatres need to explore and be clear about. As Participant 24 notes, "Je pense que les représentations décontractées, il faut être très honnête sur ce que c'est et comme ça, on va toucher les gens qui sont vraiment intéressés et pour qui c'est pertinent. » ("I think that we need to be honest about what they are and in this way we can reach those who are really interested and who it works for"). Participants expressed a desire to continue the conversation about ways to tailor performances to audience needs. Further, they noted an openness to more integration of complex scenarios in subsequent RP trainings.

Trying to be "all things to all people" sometimes acted as a barrier to inclusion, or to a lack of clarity around what is being provided. Participants discussed how RP can work toward a balance between multiple and sometimes conflicting accessibility needs, but that some needs will inevitably be in conflict.

I mean, that, that's one of the things that, that you, that you learn really quickly, when you're trying to make things accessible to people is that you can't please everybody. Something that's great for one person is actually going to be the thing that stops somebody else from coming. I find that Relaxed Performances provide a really great balance in everything that it brings. The truth is that that balance comes more from who shows up. You know, in my experience, from Relaxed Performances that we've had, one of the things that people are amazed about is like 'Oh, it felt like a regular performance' (Participant 2).

As Participant 2 notes, you cannot please all people at all times in any performance. The important parts of balancing needs included being sure to communicate which aspects of performance spaces will be modified and how, being flexible and open about identified needs that may be unanticipated and providing various spaces for patrons to visit should they desire or require. One way that artistic directors balanced audience needs was to invite audience members to become a provisional community during performances. This was perhaps paradoxically achieved through being encouraged to recognize/express

their own needs as opposed to trying to control others' needs and forms of expressions.

> I mean, we've had a lot of Relaxed Performances and I don't think we've ever had any issue of someone coming up and telling us, 'Hey that person's really annoying me.' I guess that could happen, but I think the percentage of that kind of instance happening is probably very, very low. […] I think, it really can work well together. And I think one of the things that our artistic director does is when he does his pre-show speech, he talks about the audience working together to allow [people to be themselves]. You don't have to shush anyone. You don't have to worry about anyone but yourself. And I think like, he's giving you the permission to just, kind of, do your own thing, and not worry about other people. And I think that really helps people get into the mood of it. Cause they don't feel like they have to, like 'Oh, someone's making noise. I have to, like, say something.' or anything like that. So that, that we found really helps (Participant 3).

This could also serve to bring audience members into the experience, as Participant 16 notes:

> Yeah, I mean, even as a performer, something different ... there's something different that happens between audiences and the artist, where it's supposed to be an exchange, right? I'm talking in the theatre context anyway, […] we had an informal Q&A, which is an element of, as I understand, most Relaxed Performances and even that element of exchange, it's like there's an exchange happening that makes something more accessible.

The audience community enters into the RP space in a unique and involved way, which presents opportunity for audience members, performers, and venues alike to consider the confluence of access needs and desires.

Subtheme 2D: Communicating within and beyond theatres

Participants commented on the unique nature of each Relaxed Performance, and the need for within-team communication to allow for RP to be built in from the beginning of the planning process. One layer of this was communicating about whether shows would be a good fit for RP. As Participant 12 notes:

> One of the big pieces for me is to kind of, to have a conversation about the kinds of Relaxed Performances experiences that you think are going to be a good match in terms of the work that you do at your particular venue, And what might be a good match.[…] I think, what we, we kind of get ahead of ourselves a little bit, where we start talking about Relaxed Performances and 'We'll do this for everybody and we'll do it for

everything.' And I just don't think that's a reality. I think you'd have to be specific, in terms of what programming you're going to offer a Relaxed Performance -Because I don't think, you know, for us, we do very contemporary work. And there's some pieces that I would just go, 'I don't think, you know, this is a very particular piece of work. And I'm, I'm not sure that this would be something that a Relaxed Performance, that people would be intrigued by, if they were to come to a Relaxed Performance.'

The uniqueness of different performances presents logistical challenges that participants did not underestimate. This was another area in which clear communication about the time and resources required to mount meaningful and impactful RPs was needed. Participants generally felt that the training equipped them to do this, though some noted wanting even more "nitty gritty" details about how others have mounted or might mount different shows using PR principles.

I think these various challenges we will just sort of continue to figure out. Also, another challenge is every type of performance we bring in is drastically different. So, every time we're thinking about Relaxed Performances, it's a whole new… which sort of makes it exciting. But even though the principles of Relaxed Performances themselves, those core principles [don't change] how they integrate or manifest in any given performance will look quite different. So I think that that's probably the challenge is the customization every time (Participant 10).

To address challenges, participants recommended that theatres wishing to put on RPs talk with others who had done RP to learn about it. This will be taken up in the "RP Community and Best Practices" section but here it is worth a brief nod in relation to the challenges of implementing RP and the importance of communication within/beyond individual theatres. As Participant 22 states:

I would say that if they're thinking about it and feeling overwhelmed by it, about implementing it, is to talk to somebody who's done it first. Because just looking at kind of the paperwork and all the various steps can be a little overwhelming.

Consultation with those who have already implemented RPs, can help theatre artists and professionals move beyond the resources that they may have and help them to consider the unique context of their own proposed RP.

Given the customization noted above, the importance of communication and language, and the investment of time and resources, RP cannot be simply tacked-on at the end of a planning process. All participants recognised a need for thoughtful consideration of how best to include RP, and to think through the logistics of doing so from the beginning. RPs require a fairly large investment, in terms of time as well as human resources and organizational commitment.

Participants noted that in many cases it would be preferable to not do a RP at all to doing a less-than-thoughtful RP.

> Number one, I would say: don't do a half assed job. Either do it, or don't. If you're not able to do… there's a balance between, you know, we didn't have a chill out room, but we created a chill out area in the lobby, of the theatre last year. But if you can't really, at least, to a certain degree, hit all of the points on the bullet list, then I would say don't do it. Or if you don't have the resources to fully do it, don't do it. Wait until you do. Apply for a grant so that you can do it properly. Because nothing is worse than, doing something bad the first time is way worse than not doing it at all (Participant 2).

Issues around determining the "bullet list" of items involved in an RP and around funding will be explored shortly. This quote exemplifies the importance of honestly exploring what is involved in mounting RPs and ensuring that the time and resources exist. Other participants commented on the importance of time and resources, including Participant 7, who said:

> It's not as simple as being like 'Oh well, we'll just kind of open the doors and turn up the lights.' There is a lot to expect, especially if you have ushers who aren't experienced, or volunteers who will be helping out. I think any other advice I'd give them is that, just to be ready to, be ready for an environment they've never seen before. You can't know to what to expect until you actually are there. I think everyone on the staff who was helping out on that day, we were totally blown out of the water with, um, the level of energy that was in the room - and ah, the positive energy that was in the room. I think a lot of the kids still had a lot of fun, even though some of them couldn't even watch part of the show, because they were a little too overwhelmed.

This messaging might be given as advice to those interested in pursuing RP. Notably, participants suggested that taking RP training was one way of beginning to integrate RP from the start of the planning process.

Theme Three: Evolving Relaxed Performance Training

Responses to the Relaxed Performance training were overwhelmingly positive, including as the training relates to the areas described above. On the whole, participants described facilitators as being competent, courteous, and often inspiring. They spoke positively about the resources they received, about the welcoming atmosphere created, and about the strength of the communities built through RP trainings. Participants also had several ideas for strengthening RP trainings to continue to meet the needs of those seeking to deliver RPs in diverse contexts. These suggestions can be organized into several different categories:

integrating disability justice, *tailoring training*, and integrating more *experiential exercises* to bring RP to life.

> My overall impression was it was so great to see something like this happening. It was great to see something like this happening, and overall it was really well done. But I could also see a number of areas improvement (Participant 2).

The subthemes *integrating disability justice*, *tailoring training,* and *experiential exercises* offer insight into the specific areas of improvement that might be integrated into future RP trainings.

Subtheme 3A: Integrating disability justice

The Canadian model of Relaxed Performance training built on trainings originally provided in the UK. One Access Activator (trained facilitator) interviewed for the research noted that one of the modifications made in the process of adapting RP trainings for Canadian audiences was to integrate disability justice into the training.

> Language was a big [change we made]. Minor changes to language and how they presented the content, the words that they were using. A lot of the changes were really around a disability justice framework. We integrated it, it wasn't there before, we integrated education and awareness around the medical model of disability and the social model of disability. Cause that was really missing in the UK training model. So, we thought that it was important that the training be ideally led by disability educators, but right now, that's not happening. But at least, we could try to make the content come from the knowledge and legacy of disability justice (Participant 5).

As Participant 5 notes, the integration of a disability justice framework was not fully realized, as the trainings have not yet been fully led by disability educators. Other participants commented on how integrating lived experience more deeply into the fabric of the training would be a helpful way of ensuring that the training itself was more accessible and also that the lessons learned meet lived realities of disabled artists and art patrons.

The significance of an approach that meaningfully attends to a diversity of accessibility needs by engaging with those with lived experience—and in a non-tokenizing way—was highlighted in this exchange between Participant 17 and the interviewer:

> P: I think I will remember that—it was very good effort to have some people in the room who have firsthand experience with people with disabilities or people with Autism or people with various barriers in their

lives and I thought that was so important because I find some meetings you go to are about others that are not in the room.

I: Yeah, there's a saying that comes out of disability justice, 'nothing about us without us'.

P: Yeah, I think that's great, and you know – you could always do more but at least the effort was made, and a lot of respect was given to those people, who represented those communities.

In general, participants were eager to integrate lived experience not only into the training, but also into RP in general. For Participant 10, a key next step for accessible theatre is "the integration of accessibility or people living with disabilities, at all levels of creation: presentation, delivery, et cetera." Several participants had already been doing this before the training, through connections with the disability arts community, and several began to do this after the training. For example, Participant 13's organization formed a RP advisory committee comprised of people with various types of lived experience, in addition to taking the RP training:

> In addition to our training, we had formed a Relaxed Performance advisory committee, comprised of our staff, Relaxed Performance folks, our education team, our cultural creative consultant, and people from the community who are advocates of people with disabilities, and people who are self-advocates. So that was really great at connected the community, and they really helped give us some ideas.

Working with community is a way to make it more likely that RPs will actually meet the needs of those attending them, as a survey participant noted in their commitment "to mak[ing] connections with local community groups to see how we could best serve their members and encourage them to feel welcome at our theatre."

The importance of ensuring that the RP trainings were themselves accessible was paramount for participants—this will be explored in the participant observation section, as well. While some found the training to be quite accessible, there were some notable concerns about certain aspects of the training which might be more well-aligned with the ethic of RP in general. Making trainings more accessible was noted to be a shared responsibility between the British Council, Access Activators, and local hosts. As Participant 9 noted: "we could have taken some responsibility for this, but it wasn't suggested to us. But again, in principle, we should have had a sign language interpreter there."

Other suggestions for increasing the accessibility of training included being thoughtful about the size of print on handouts:

> I think the, the ones we received were a helpful starting point. They were, they were actually a little hard to read in terms of basic access. (laugh)

They were photocopied with small printed stuff. So, that could have been more helpful (Participant 6).

Participants also described the trainings as being too didactic, or too much like a "university lecture." Some had tried to negotiate structure and not been successful, such as Participant 9:

> P: We found the overall presentation kind of stale and, and interestingly, would not be accessible to anybody with the challenges that are talked about in the workshop.
> I: That's interesting. Could you say a little more about in what ways it was inaccessible?
> P: They absolutely demanded a traditional setup, a very traditional setup, with two speakers at the front of the room and long tables for people to sit at, in front of them. And we requested a change. We wanted to have small round tables, cause we've found that really stimulates conversation among people. And also, if there are people with challenges, there can be other people there to assist. And we were told no, it has to be this long table set up. Everyone facing the front of the room, just very rigid and formulaic, and no group work, no creative approaches, nothing.
> I: Right. So, it was just kind of didactic
> P: It was like a university, big university lecture situation.

A participant in a later training appreciated how the training embodied RP on the first day, and desired that this continue throughout:

> I'm a big fan of the first day, how it was, sort of a relaxed presentation? Where people could get up and come and go, and stay in if they wanted to. I thought that lent itself well to both the content and the long form kind of very school model style of the workshop? I found the second day a little harder to maintain concentration and I could've used maybe a longer lunch or more breaks or some more standing options. [It may have had] something to do with the room that it was in? But that could have been reinforced the second day, like hey, get up and leave, walk around get water, whatever you want, because it felt a little more static (Participant 17).

Making training accessible is one way of breaking down divides between those putting on trainings, those putting on RPs, and those attending RPs. It helps to acknowledge that there is significant overlap within these categories: patrons, RP oriented theatre staff, artists, and trainers may also identify as disabled.

Subtheme 3B: Tailoring training experiences

As noted earlier, participants entered into the training room with a variety of different levels of experience in relation to Relaxed Performance and to disability

arts. While some were encountering disability arts for the first time, others had spent years working in this field. As noted earlier, for those who had more experience, the coverage of topics like physical accessibility and the social model of disability sometimes felt basic and/or repetitive.

Providing broad accessibility information was certainly noted to be important, but some participants indicated that if this content is going to be covered, it might be better integrated into the specifics of RP.

> There was a lot of emphasis on physical accessibility. And I think physical accessibility is incredibly important. But, because it is something that, for most venues, is something that's important year-round, to me, that should just be a separate training. And to spend a whole day on it, in the three-day training, and also because there are a lot of other resources around, I would spend a bit less on that physical accessibility. It definitely needs to be a part of it, but maybe focus more on the effects of like, a visual story for the venue. […] at one point, I was like, 'Wow, we are spending a lot of time talking about wheelchair accessibility and such.' And that is absolutely important. But it's something that a lot of venues are already dealing with, whereas a visual story for the venue is something that's new for most people, and, I think an incredibly useful tool, just year-round, for any organization to have (Participant 2).

Participants noted the *importance* of having access to broad material, particularly when attendees might not have much knowledge of disability arts prior to attending. Finding a balance between the general and the specific is a challenge in any training context, and this is no exception.

> The training had to adapt itself to be very, very general and the only … so I really did enjoy it, but the only thing I do remember is feeling, like oh, I know that. And so I wanted to get more specific about … because I was about to put on a show and really wanted to ask all sorts of questions about, like the ins and outs of putting on this performance (Participant 16).

Some participants who brought a strong history and knowledge of disability noted that they enjoyed seeing others have "light bulb" moments around disability and access. As Participant 8 noted:

> I mean, I think the very fact that the conversation is happening is breaking down how traditional performance conventions have made some people feel like the theatre is not a place for them. And really talking about that is probably the most important part. Cause I get really… it's very eye opening. It happened to me, and I see it happening in all of the Relaxed Performance trainings that we deliver. People come, with the idea that you know they've been sent by their managers because they work in the theatre. And then I mean, actually, just say that front of house people tend

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to be probably, almost the most receptive, because they have the most contact with the general public, but you know, it's just watching people… their eyes open [laugh].

Given that many participants described the social model of disability information as transformational, it would appear that the solution to the identified issue of broadness may not be to do away with that framing entirely. Instead, training might be tailored to appeal to the audiences who are attending, perhaps through the use of the pre-training survey which could assess levels of familiarity with basic accessibility and disability arts experiences.

Subtheme 3C: Experiential exercises

Participants appeared to favour experiential activities over didactic presentation moments within the Relaxed Performance trainings. Several noted that the best way to learn about RPs was to experience them. Thus, they suggested that more experiential exercises be brought into the RP trainings.

Participant 6 integrated the focus on lived experience-led trainings with the need for more experiential exercises, noting:

> Just more experiential and centring people with lived experience a little more. And it might have been, ah, interesting to see some videos of Relaxed Performances or clips. I know we did have a clip of Jess Thom, but it was more her talking than actually seeing… I know there's video available of some of her shows. So that, that could have been an interesting entry point.

The main reason for desiring more experiential exercises was that "there's always going to be that divide between factual written information, and a live experience. We're talking about live work and live experiences and that sort of thing" (Participant 10). Further, Participant 4 articulated how "[RP] is a concept that is hard to envision, if you haven't experienced it." Again, working with people entering into the RP training space with varied levels of experience and intersection with disability arts communities raises the question of how to meet needs within a protracted period of time and in a way that meets various needs. Once again, the RP training experience mirrors the RP experience itself in the need to thoughtfully consider ways of balancing multiple accessibility needs.

Theme Four: Relaxed Performance, Disability Arts, and Canadian Theatre

One of the objectives of the research was to explore how Relaxed Performance fits within the disability arts landscape in Canada. Participants differed in their level of familiarity with disability arts. While some participants were disability artists or had been working with disability artists for quite some time, others were new to both RP and disability arts. However, many organizations represented

among participants either had organizational commitments to accessible theatre practice prior to the training or explored how their organizations would now commit to accessibility in a deeper way. Participants noted that a key area of alignment between RP and accessible theatre in general was how RP represented a step toward accessibility that could act as a catalyst for more work in that direction. Further, many participants noted that the skills and knowledge that they learned in RP accessibility training were applicable beyond their immediate RP application. For example, RP knowledge and skills were relevant to their work as a whole, and participants articulated more spaces in which they saw relaxed practices having a possible impact. The following subthemes offer more detail on the relationship between RP and accessible arts in general: *organizational commitments to accessibility*, *small moves toward accessibility*, and *skills transfer*.

Subtheme 4A: Organizational commitments to accessibility

As previously noted, several participants' organizations were oriented toward providing access to the arts. This makes sense given the focus of the trainings and of the research; those already interested in accessibility might be more likely to engage in such a training and subsequent research about it. Here, we explore these commitments in terms of what it means for the expansion of Relaxed Performance and advancement of accessible theatre practices.
The ways in which organizations enacted their commitments to accessible practice varied from working closely with disability organizations, to performing retrofits on their buildings, to considering new and innovative ways of working. Another way that organizations in the Canadian arts sector demonstrated their organizational commitment to accessibility was through the inclusion of access within strategic priorities, as was the case for Participant 4's organization: "we have four priorities, and one of them is the inclusion. And so that's where we segue to the Relaxed Performances, within the inclusion strategic priority." Similarly, Participant 7 noted their organization's strategic inclusion of access. For this participant, attending the RP training felt like a natural way to extend the codified commitment to access into action:

> When I was hired for the position, I knew that we were going to be doing access work, so, try to have ASL interpreters and audio describers. And when I heard there was sort of a third prong, my supervisor had told me about it. It made sense that we would attach another element to add, to try to make access for the theatre. So, I would say we sort of had it in the works before I was hired for it, but as soon as I heard about it and heard that the training was coming up, that's sort of what made me want to do it. I knew it had to be done.

Many participants described access not as an add-on or as burdensome, despite being a process that requires a significant time investment. Instead, they framed access as essential to doing good work, and as a process to consider in all work.

RP trainings crystallized this for participants, as well as provided additional knowledge to help them "know what they don't know."

> It gave me a bigger scope of how the accessibility of the space –it gave me better insight into how I don't have an understanding of things that are not accessible to others. So, I guess it sort of showed me the scope of how you can't know, without having a consultant, about things that are and aren't accessible (Participant 7).

> I didn't know what I didn't know. I am so grateful for this comprehensive course which will help me make theatre more accessible (Post training survey response 1).

Several participants noted that performing an environmental audit encouraged them to deepen organizational accessibility practices.

Another notable way the RP trainings enhanced organizational commitment to accessibility was the inclusion of access considerations in theatre school curricula. A few participants were involved in training future theatre professionals and committed to embedding access into the way they teach and the assignments students encounter. Participant 20 described their desires for bringing RP into the adolescent school setting:

> Eventually this is something we would love to implement in our festivals. To have teachers know about Relaxed Performance and I think children are in my opinion, like, they're sponges for information and they're super open! I mean, I've seen different performances in these dramas and they are a million times more open than adults are. And they want to help basically and encourage different…

Participant 18 emphasized the success of bringing RP into the university context through embedding RP assignments, training, and practice in the curriculum. They described the students' work as essential to carrying accessibility through into the future of theatre.

> We wouldn't have been able to do this without a group of students who are incredibly committed to this kind of work. And see it as that they've grown up with a different conversation around accessibility in high schools, and so coming into university they're expecting you know, more, better. From our department, from our faculty and from our staff. And so, they are really kind of leading this conversation. They're really central to helping to carry this forward. And I'm also hopeful that when they leave their training here, their education here that they'll be able to continue implementing that wherever they go.

In all, RP training either confirmed, deepened, or moved accessibility commitments forward—not without an awareness of the challenges, but with an eye to considering movement toward a world in which the arts are more open to difference.

Subtheme 4B: Small moves toward accessibility

When we asked participants about the next steps for accessible theatre, many remarked on the need to make small moves toward deepening accessible practice. Participants firmly situated Relaxed Performance within a larger scale of work required to remake theatres and other arts spaces into places that people feel comfortable in. As Participant 10 noted: "[The value of RP is] huge, immense. And I honestly think we're just barely scratching the surface. This is the top of the iceberg. It goes all the way down, and we have so much work to do." Similarly, Participant 13 remarked upon the importance of taking small but deliberate moves toward accessibility: "the whole point is inclusivity. And if you're making any step in that direction, then that's a great thing. You don't have to change the world in a day."

Theatre representatives also noted that they were invested in making small moves within their own work to gradually increase the scope of both RPs in particular and accessibility in general. Participant 9 reflected on the movement their theatre had planned over the next few years to scale up:

> The festival won't be again till two years from now, but we'll try to up the ante and see if we could do two Relaxed Performances next time. And we'll continue the work to make each of the individual sites as accessible as possible. And that was a great experience for us, because the Council for Persons with Disabilities here, they're also really creative people […] we would, could talk together about what could we do to ameliorate any of these things, and what would be the best way to enter the site; have the least impediments. And you know, there were lots of things that we, we could, small things that we could do to improve accessibility to the sites.

Extending RP training was sometimes described as something that contributes to the expansion of accessible practices throughout the country, to get people interested in and thinking about access. Participant 15, who was based in a smaller town, reflected on the particularity of working outside of a major urban centre and what this means for accessible practice over the next few years:

> I think if you come back in five years, it'll be much more common here than it is now because we're outside of major centres of arts culture in Canada. Sometimes it takes just a little longer to arrive here. It means so much that that many people wanted to be in the room and wanted to be learning in a smaller space. It's huge because it starts a ripple I think.

Subtheme 4C: Skills and knowledge transfer

Relaxed Performance training impacted not only the way that theatre staff delivered performances, but also how those in the arts sector approached the rest of their work beyond performance day. One notable place in which RP was already reaching beyond the theatre was the example brought to the interview by a participant working in a museum space, involving a "relaxed tour" which takes the ethic of RP and extends it into the museum:

> Our general tours that happen during general open hours are usually an hour and a half. That involves an hour in the gallery spaces talking about the art. And then a half an hour in the studio, making art. So, what we've actually been thinking about is offering Relaxed Tours, on our day off, when we're closed to the general public. And again, the digital screens that are all over the place, flashing all kinds of information will be turned off, um, to reduce that kind of stimulation. We would get the visual story, online, so that those who were visiting on those days, for Relaxed Tour will be able to see, visually, what they're going to encounter when they come to the building.

This is one example of how the training holds utility for those working in the arts who may not typically be targeted by the training, and whose practice might be enhanced by learning about access.

RP infused practice in other, more subtle ways. This ranged from considering the use of language in all interactions, to using visual stories for meetings and events, to considering wayfinding within venues, to discussing access with colleagues and patrons. For some, it was hard to disentangle which skills were specifically from the training, because of the extent to which they have become entangled in practice: "It's funny, they've become so much a part of my practice that it's hard to identify which ones are from there, or which I've learned. I think, there, it's definitely a huge foundation of my practice" (Participant 1). Participant 5 described working toward integrating visual stories into the work they are doing on a large Canadian grant:

> The third thing that most stuck out for me, is like the, what I actually took from the training and use it now in everything I do. The visual story is a big one. Right now, we're working on a big grant, [organization name] with an [organization name] to look at business strategies around the visual story format. How we can build that; it's a tool.

A post-training survey participant also commented broadly about the integration of visual stories elsewhere in their organization: "We're integrating the learnings such as the visual stories into our other organizational work."

Participants had ideas for other spaces in which RP-like techniques might feature, ranging from classrooms (elementary to university), to businesses, to shopping malls. Participant 17 explains:

> I think even if you can't put on a Relaxed Performance, you can apply many of the ideas and the theory of the whole piece to maybe other areas of how you work and how your business operates. And you might be able to start with a performance that just is altered in a half a dozen small ways. And maybe start with the visual story, you know? So it doesn't have to be, you know, everything at once to all people.

Participants by and large observed the possibilities and benefits of RP as extending far beyond the theatre space, thoughtfully planting seeds of where and how RP training might be used in future.

Theme Five: Expanding and Growing the Relaxed Performance Sector

Participants' eagerness to dive into Relaxed Performance and to extend its reach led to several productive suggestions about what conditions were necessary for RP to continue to expand and take root. Participants' suggestions also address how to sustain the gains made through training and subsequent performances. These are organized into three key areas that represent some of the larger movements toward ensuring that these practices are taken up and continue to expand possibilities for different bodies in arts spaces. First, participants wanted to explore the question of establishing (non-standardized and flexible) *best or promising practices for RP* to help guide them and their partners/collaborators. Second, participants spoke about the valuable *communities* they built as a part of training, and how they wished to continue to collaborate with other venues. Finally, participants noted that perhaps the single strongest determinant of whether this work would be sustainable was the ability to *attract funding and to obtain buy-in from funders, policymakers, artists, and audiences.* Three subthemes provide insight into the specific actions for moving forward: *developing a set of best practices for RP, the RP community,* and *attracting funding and getting buy-in.*

Subtheme 5A: Developing a set of best practices for RP

The question of RP "best practices" responds in part to the previously mentioned desire to avoid the delivery of RPs that lack the integrity and thoughtfulness required for accessible practice. While the training provided a strong grounding in the elements of RP, some participants still felt that they would like a list of elements that comprise RPs in order to be able to communicate about what they are and are not able to provide.

> It didn't feel like, at one point, there was a time where it was like, 'Okay, so this is, in order to call something a Relaxed Performance, what we

recommend is that you have these and these and these and these and these things in place.' like, a bullet list. And very clearly defined what is this; what is that; what is that. Everything was covered, at some point. But, um, it felt to me like people could go out of there, and different groups could start making something completely different, and call it a Relaxed Performance - just because they weren't quite paying attention to the one part, like, they kind of like, 'Oh, I forgot about no pyrotechnics.' [laugh] Like, [laugh] and it is, you know, it's like, I think some kind of like, an overview would have been really good. (Participant 2)

Of course, it would be important that any list of best practices not become prescriptive—indeed, participants were clear that RPs did not always comprise all elements. However, they noted that some kind of touchstone would be an important way of determining how well their work aligned with the aims of RP. This could also provide goals for theatres working to implement the smaller moves toward access previously noted in this report. Participant 3 outlined how discussion and deliberation would likely occur within each company about how RP fit into their capabilities. For their company, this occurred in the context of exploring "the line" between what was and was not RP:

> I feel like each company will do it probably a little bit slightly differently. And we're trying to find out for ourselves, like, what is the minimum that we will allow. If a company's like 'We want to do this. But we don't want to do that part of it.' Where's our, where do we draw our line of, like, 'Hmm, you can't really call it relaxed if you're not going to do that part of it.' So, that's a conversation as well.

Similar to interview Participant 3, another participant noted in the post-training survey that there is a need to avoid one-size-fits-all approaches, in keeping with the approach of the training itself:

> [The training was] a complete eye-opener. No amount of googling could have replaced this workshop—the world of accessibility is so rich and diverse, it needs our careful attention and an on-going dialogue, not a one-size-fits-all answer.

In all, participants recommended that any development of best practices should be done conversationally and, ideally, collectively.

Subtheme 5B: The RP community

The idea of collective work on Relaxed Performance was commonly mentioned as a way to move forward in the RP field. Most participants observed how the training itself built community, allowing them to meet others with similar values and commitments. The RP training space became one in which people interested in access could play around with ways of infusing techniques of access into their

work, work through the kinks and challenges of implementing RPs, and discuss ideas for moving forward. Some sought out this community deliberately, like Participant 2:

> I was also there to see what other people's interest in it was, and how other, cause there was other organizations from [city] And that was something that I was, in part, really interested in. Um, I knew, if it was purely for the information, maybe might not have, um, I mean, I still probably would have wanted to do it. But, the more interesting thing for me was to see the other people at the table.

Others found this community in the RP training space without necessarily having sought it out, building or maintaining relationships with others in their areas that were engaging in similar practices.

> P: we actually had a meeting about, ah, a couple weeks ago. So yeah, ah, me and three other participants got together for coffee and discussed, um, how we were going to move forward, and how our Relaxed Performance went.
> I: Awesome. Was that helpful?
> P: I think so, yeah. It also helped ah, talk about other kinds of goals, so outside of Relaxed Performances. So, we have a meeting, we're hoping to have one each month, moving forward (Participant 7).

The RP community did not end with the training; many participants were still in touch with those they had met in the training. Some participants noted a desire for a more solid network of RP trainees, which would allow for sharing resources, collaboration, and discussion. This was framed as particularly important for those delivering RPs in the same community: some participants expressed how they would like to collaborate with others to align dates of shows such that they could avoid delivering all RPs on the same day. Not only would this allow each theatre to flourish and deliver accessible performances, but it would also increase access through the provision of many performances that meet many different access needs.

> I feel like there's gotta be, some, I don't want to say formal, but some kind of, maybe work that needs to happen around connecting the people who are doing this kind of work, like me, with other performing arts, or arts organizations. Where we can all meet, ah, maybe, you know, three times a year, and chat about the things that are working, that challenges that we're having, and just, like, work together, to sort these out - to elevate the initiative. I also think, um, ah, and I know there's some work being done and it's like, ah, just connecting the dots, like, I'd also make sure we're not like, competing. You know? Cause we don't want this to be a competitive thing. But, we don't, you know, if I schedule a Relaxed Performance and so does [organization name], for example, on the same day, then, we're

doing all this work […] even in terms of scheduling Relaxed Performances, I think there's some kind of resource that we can all look at, you know, what's happening when. (Participant 1)

Those smaller communities and outside of Ontario in particular wished for a network to allow for more interconnections and knowledge exchange to occur post-training. As Participant 22 noted: "having more of a network around these things would be helpful. Especially when you're outside of Toronto, outside of Ontario." Such suggestions anchor the need for continued explorations of how to facilitate communication and, ultimately, help theatres to deliver strong RPs.

Of course, it is important to consider the demands of theatre schedules when designing such a network/community. As Participant 23 notes, regional and geographic disparities can combine with time limitations to create situations where it is challenging to stay in touch:

> I've been quite busy since I got back from it. The one great thing about [city] is that our theatre community [has] professional, amateur and everything in between, and outside of that, is quite small so everyone seems to know everyone on some level. I live in [city] and it took place in [other city] and the people of [other city], have worked to keep in touch with each other but they've put us on the email chain so we all have each other's emails and I think it's something that I definitely will take more advantage of once my festival is done and I have a little more time to pursue what interests me. Meaning Relaxed Performances.

Subtheme 5C: Attracting funding and getting buy-in

As is the case with most arts initiatives, one of the key challenges in ensuring that gains made are sustained is the need to attract funding. One participant who has led the charge toward providing funding for Relaxed Performance, presented an example of a model that has allowed more people to be trained in RP and also reduced the cost of delivering RPs. The model shows that incentivizing RPs could be an interesting way to fund and sustain RP. In this case, as a participant describes, the incentivizing also integrated a community-based, collaborative element:

> Last September, we had a board meeting, and we had some discussions with the British Council on the follow-up of the training that was done in the summer time. And we're trying to find a way to keep the interest alive. And so we decided to do a survey on those who attended the training, and to survey those who are really committed to having Relaxed Performances this upcoming season. And so there's six or seven organizations that are doing it. And so we decided to fund them. We gave them twenty five hundred dollars each. To incentivize it, because we usually get some feedback, you know, when there's some changes that are required, that

they will stop at some very basic needs, you know, like, 'We don't have the money to do the training.' Or 'We don't have the funds to, to spend time on this.' But there's a catch, because we want them to collaborate within each other and to act as a group.

Some participants noted that they had appreciated this funding, and were interested in finding sustainable funding to continue to implement RP:

> Alors, on essaie de trouver des fondations, on est soutenu par le [organization] mais, je pense qu'on est soutenu aussi parce qu'on est pionnier à Montréal et qui veulent encourager ces pratiques. Donc, il va falloir que l'on se développe nous-mêmes nos outils pour l'instant, mais c'est vrai que, pour ce qui est du prix et des tarifs, là, on est aidé, donc, on va vivre avec des aides ponctuelles (Participant 24).

> (So, we try to find funds, we are supported by [organization] but I think that we have that funding because we're pathfinders for the method in Montreal and they want to encourage these kinds of practices. So, we will need to think about how to support ourselves and develop our resources. For now, we have help with rates and prices, and this is helpful for us right now.)

Related to the aforementioned challenge of the time and resources required to deliver effective RPs, most participants noted funding to be one of their major hurdles in the path to RP. Some suggested that involving funders in training, and increasing awareness about RP and what is involved, as well as the benefits, could be an interesting model.

> P: I think it would be helpful, it might have had maybe a deeper impact if we had some of the local and federal funders attend. Because I find that the funding bodies expect us to implement, and extend our reach, and at the same time, are not adequately supporting these developments - because of resources… in terms of money, and access to that, financial resources to hire people. But also, for example, on the federal level, like, in our example, we were encouraged for twenty years to invest into outreach and community engagement. And then [organization] cancels community engagement as a practice to support […] because now we're labelled as a service organization, 'Oh, we're not supporting your outreach' 'and your audience development efforts' and yet, we're the best positioned organization to do so. So our efforts in any type of this development really rests on us fundraising for it. And that just means more labour -
> I: for everyone involved, and -
> P: Exactly. More pressure points. But, if the funders actually heard - from the sector, through these types of workshops, people are more relaxed. [laugh] Sorry for the pun. But (laugh) you know, I think, it feeds, to the funders, message that 'Okay, this really important," (Participant 14)

Beyond funding, participants noted the importance of getting buy-in in general, including from artists. While some had worked with artists who were eager to explore RP, several noted some hesitancy around RP that might be at least partially assuaged by involvement in training and awareness activities.

> But when you're, I mean, you're actually asking them to rewrite their scripts […] depending on if their performance has, let's say the performance has guns in a scene that go off. And you go to ask the director, 'Can you take out the sound of the guns?' […] I'm an artist, so that is the part that I found the most terrifying of having to do is to work with an artist and as them to change their art (Participant 5).

Finally, circling back to the first theme, getting audience buy-in continues to be a key issue for RP. Ensuring that communications are clear about how RP is not a diminishment of the performance may be a key step against these last two areas of concern. This may lead to a greater appreciation of what difference *gives*, rather than a framing that focuses on what it *takes away*—much like a shift from a problem framing of disability and toward a celebration of difference.

> I think there might be more work that we need to do around educating the public, or members of the community coming to the performance may not be aware of what a Relaxed Performance is. And why, I know, that usually for Relaxed Performances, one of the accessibility team, one of the students does make an announcement and talk about what that means and, for them, the summary is, just, here are the things that you will encounter and so forth. And there's different approaches to that. But I think there's just some more groundwork to be done around educating people. (Participant 18)

There was a hopeful optimism in several participants' accounts of the need to spread the word, worth considering in relation the need to continue outreach efforts around RP.

> P: [The most important step for accessible theatre is] knowledge that it's there, and that there are tools available to help make theatre accessible to everyone. Because I think a lot of people … they don't know what Relaxed Performances are, they've never heard of them and like anything, if people don't understand something than they are afraid of it. So just getting the word out, or, or making the word understood I suppose.
> I: And that value understood. And I hope that …
> P: Yeah, I think that information is … is powerful. And it's also comforting. (Participant 22)

Participant Observation: Charlottetown RP Training

One of the researchers (Kayla Besse) attended a Relaxed Performance training at a Canadian arts venue from a participant-observer standpoint. The following is a summary of her notes from and our analysis of the session, separated into "Successes," "Opportunities for Growth," and "Future Directions."

The primary successes of the training include: the openness to learning demonstrated by participants and facilitators, how training represents a value-add beyond what exists in the literature, and how training situates RP in the context of accessibility more broadly. Opportunities for future trainings include: ensuring that the *ideological* commitment to accessibility carries through all aspects of the training (e.g. turning on captions during videos, thinking about location and sound), integrating activities that invite participants to do the work of enacting aspects of RP (e.g. visual stories) around their own venues, and ensuring that disability is not presented in a tokenizing way in activities. Finally, to move forward, trainings might integrate questions around who RP is for and who is delivering RP/attending trainings, how to sustain RP, and how to situate RP in relation to disability legislation. The following reflections add to and confirm accounts of RP training offered by other trainees demonstrated in the analyses of interviews and survey responses and offer directions for future iterations of the training through the lens of a first-hand participant.

Successes

"This session is also relaxed," the facilitators noted as the session began. There was an invitation to move around, to get a drink, and to exist however you need to be as a participant. This was a promising start, as this attitude is the cornerstone of a Relaxed environment. Most participants had not been involved with RPs before, and it was encouraging that so many people working at a prominent Canadian arts venue wanted to come together to learn about RP. Snacks and drinks were provided throughout the training, and the timing of the schedule and breaks were outlined at the beginning of the day, setting clear expectations for everyone involved.

Trainees spent the majority of the first day discussing disability language uses across different sectors and contexts. The participant-observer reported that people seemed generally open and happy to learn. Immediate questions demonstrated insight into some of the challenged of RP, such as: "How do we handle so many competing needs?" In responses to some nervousness about saying "the wrong thing," the group decided that checking in with people and having community leaders is a good way to address language issues, that disability language has a lot in common with gender fluidity, and that it is important to honour individual preference in identification.

On the first two days of training, the host venue invited a person with multiple visible disabilities to speak about his experiences with the theatre. He spoke about how the host venue had improved their physical accessibility over his years of being a patron

there. He noted that RP and accessible theatre are important in the way that they facilitate *less self-consciousness* for patrons.

The participant-observer reflected that it might be quite challenging to have little to no disability consciousness upon entering training, and then be expected to effectively implement something like RP that has disability justice at its core. One of the facilitators did an excellent, continuous job at stressing the specific needs of disability *justice*, grown by disabled people of colour, helping to bridge this gap.

Participants identified physical barriers in their workspaces even before the environmental audit activity (activity designed to get people thinking about accessibility in their venues) was formally introduced. For example, one participant noted that the box office is itself inaccessible: there is a lower window apart from the main high ticket counter, but none of the screens are accessible from the lower window. This means that wheelchair-using audience members have no independence as consumers. They also thought of creative ways of working around barriers in a way that adds value rather than infantalizes or tokenizes patrons. One way of determining how to do this would be to ask about access needs, as noted by a facilitator who said:

> We should apply the same care and knowledge to new disabled audience members in the same way that we would keep track of 'VIP' clients who have been coming to the theatre for 20 years. We can keep track of access needs with the box office, so that we don't need to keep asking people what their needs are, and/or so that we can accommodate competing access needs, maybe on different performance days.

The RP training included information about aspects of RP not always included in the literature. For example, facilitators noted that RP may involve specialized pricing, which might look like a free or reduced-price ticket for a support person. Workshop participants who work in marketing and communications found this particularly interesting, and this could also be emphasized as a cost-recovery measure to any potential funders interested in supporting RP. Another insight that went beyond what is written about RP was that it is good practice to note adult/sexual content in pre-show talks, as this can make some people very uncomfortable.

In all, the training connected RP to accessibility—and to the experience of being human—more broadly. This is summed up in a facilitator comment:

> You're offering a larger human experience – it integrates everybody into that performance – RP is like the difference between a high Anglican and a gospel church experience." It's participatory in a no-pressure way. Someone else follows up, regarding shifting perceptions of RPs being 'disruptive': "Some days you WANT the version of Rocky Horror where you're throwing the toast [laughs].

Of course, and as some participants noted, not everyone *wants* to attend an RP. Facilitators noted that this comes down to a question of consent, in terms of making

sure that everyone knows what they are signing up for (through marketing, for example). Some audience members desire anonymity, as a training participant noted; however, actors and audiences being able to see each other may also foster an opportunity to create a greater sense of community, eye contact, or belonging. Ultimately, whether or not to attend an RP should be grounded in consent and open communication—again, data across this research scaffolds this note, highlighting the critical importance of open communication about RP.

Opportunities for Growth

It will be important, moving forward, to more fully integrate what is being *said* with what is being *done* in the training. This echoes our other findings, highlight how while trainings moved toward being relaxed, this is not always fully realized. Leading and guiding with difference and integrating accessibility throughout the training,

One way of delivering a disability justice-informed relaxed training might be to follow interview/survey participants' and the participant-observer's suggestion of ensuring that the trainings are disability-led. Another way of leading with difference and integrating disability justice might be to set up an RP training advisory committee consisting of advisors with varied experiences of disability. Not many trainees self-identified as disabled in this training, perhaps because few people with disabilities signed-up or perhaps because few felt comfortable disclosing. As noted elsewhere, it may be be important, moving forward, to think about who trainings are designed for, who is imagined to be an RP audience member, and how there may be more overlap between these groups than generally imagined.

Involvement of disabled facilitators and advisors might also help to avoid any possible tokenizing. The participant-observer reported how during an environmental audit activity, the facilitators told one group to imagine they were with a wheelchair user who needed to find a washroom. For this activity, a member of that group decided to use a wheelchair that the venue had on hand, leaving the participant-observer feeling uncomfortable with the 'playing disabled' that the exercise invited. One way of thinking about whether an activity is tokenizing is to consider the question: how would this activity go if there was a person *with* that experience in the room? Having wheelchair users in the room as facilitators and as trainees might not only transform the kind and quality of information gleaned from this activity, but it would also prevent non-wheelchair users from assuming they can know the experience simply by using a wheelchair for an afternoon.

Integrating accessibility throughout the trainings: accessibility might be more deeply integrated into all aspects of trainings, such as through turning on captions during videos, using microphones consistantly, and using accessible print materials. Facilitators showed a helpful video on the social model of disability, which opened up conversation about barriers to access. However, by not ensuring the video was captioned, they limited its accessibility. Facilitators might also commit to consistent use of microphones, especially when involving participants in sharing. They also have opportunity to rework the training materials for enhanced accessibility; sometimes,

facilitators noted that they were aware that they were not presenting accessible material. Making these accessible is are relatively easy fix.

Considering venue is another important aspect of integrating access in the training. For the first day of the training, participants sat in chairs around small round tables. The small, cabaret-style theatre venue was a dark and echoing space, which made it challenging for some to hear and see each another. Even if it is not possible to have a fully accessible training venue, it would be helpful for limitations to be made known to participants before they arrive. This echoes one of our broader training recommendations stemming from interview and survey responses, which stresses the need to be clear about the access elements that your venue *doesn't* have – this too is a form of access, because it gives people the power to make their own choices.

Future Directions

Key questions for moving forward include: who is RP for, who is putting on RPs, and how these roles might or could overlap. When opening up theatre, we might also explore questions of representation and staffing: who are theatres hiring? Who do audience members see when they enter a venue, and how does this reflect the broader community? These questions call us to consider the relationships between RP audiences and patrons, producers and consumers.

With respect to trainings in particular, building out even more aspects of RP that have not yet been considered in the literature and in trainings might help take training to the next level. For instance, digital accessibility has had little airtime in discussions of RP to date. Integrating an awareness of barriers that exist to digital access, such as making ticket purchasing accessible and formatting visual stories for mobile phones, can extend the net of what is considered under the umbrella of accessibility and RP.

A continued question related to the opportunity for growth in *enacting RP in trainings* is how to truly invite trainees to "relax" in the space. In this particular training, the second and third days of training took place in a more accessible space; still, the space did not feel fully "relaxed" in terms of people occupying the space in non-normative ways. Perhaps because of long-ingrained ideas about what it means to be a learner in a space, there may be a need for intentional (and perhaps modelled) invitations to relax. Some of the exercises from the third day of training might be moved up to the first day of training to model access, challenge the boundaries between trainees and audiences, and bring the ethic of RP into training. For example, the exercise *"What you can't tell just by looking at me,"* aims to spark thinking about invisible disabilities and challenge assumptions trainees might have about people and their needs or experiences based on their appearance. In order to set this up appropriately earlier in the training, facilitators would need to create safety around disclosure and invite people to share only what they feel comfortable sharing. This exercise is, at present, on the third day of training. It presented an opportunity for dialogue about passing privilege when the participant-observer disclosed that she has cerebral palsy but that this is not obvious if she is sitting down. This opened the door for others to share experiences they have that

are not visible but that impact how they show up in the world. This is one example of how modelling behaviour can help to "relax" the training. The participant-observer's disclosure sparked active listening and reciprocity in ways that weren't happening during the first two days, leading to a discussion of what "proper theatre etiquette" looks like.

Moving forward, it will be worth exploring varied sustainable methods of delivery for RP. Thinking about sustainability will allow RP training to reach more people and extend to new groups. For example, technical staff might be trained to relax a performance themselves. RP might also be integrated into theatre curriculums; our interviews also raised this possibility as a participant discussed attempts to do this.

Finally, to extend on considering RP in the context of accessible theatre noted in the "successes" section, moving forward entails considering RP in the context of access and disability laws. In the future, trainings might situate RP and accessible theatre in relation to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and other relevant legislation to talk about what official laws offer, what they lack, and what adherence to or exceeding these standards might mean.

Reflective Piece

Following the training, the participant-observer was left with some unanswered questions: What does truly inclusive marketing look like? How do we move beyond canned accessibility statements? Who is being represented in photos, branding materials, and/or testimonies for RPs? Considering these questions and others raised in this section in relation to the other sources of data considered in this report, we might conclude that RP training is an important movement toward accessible theatre and needs to be supported by ongoing conversations about access, representation, communication, arts, audiences, delivery, and more.

Given these reflections and these unanswered questions, she wrote a reflective word association piece to explore her experience at the training.

Relaxed.
Performance.

Two words that seem in contrast to one another, in conflict, even. A performance being necessarily contrived, a scripted event that is by most contexts rigid in form if not structure. Perhaps only by rehearsal might we relax into our roles as performers and/or audiences. Relaxed performance implies that to be a 'good' audience there is no prerequisite, and we do not have to rehearse. We can bring our bodyminds as they are.

To bring relaxation into the picture implies a breaking of tradition, an eschewal of theatre convention. Even contemporary cinemas may scold us with a cartoon pre-show announcement to "let everyone enjoy the show," which means not talking, moving, or using electronic devices. The performance space may be widely understood as a space

of biocontrol (which uses living organisms to oppress an invasive species or pest), with the wish that the 'perfect' audience will melt into silence and darkness, punctuating the theatre with a laugh or a gasp at predetermined moments, as if from a televised track. To be a good audience is to emote 'properly.'

Karen Nakamura says that "disability is a noncompliant way of being in the world." What might our theatres look like if we welcomed noncompliance? If we invited audience members to truly come as they are, without self-consciousness or fear of being scolded. In a perfect world, this empowers audience members to make their own choices about their participatory potential and offers exciting futures for creative audience collaboration.

Section 3: Audience Feedback

In addition to exploring the impacts of RP training on those trained in the method, we wished to understand the impact of RP on audiences. Our original intent was to pursue audience feedback surveys with six different theatres. However, given the short period of time over which the research took place, we opted to change to the research protocol of conducting two case studies: one with a small community theatre in a smaller city, and the other with a larger theatre in a large urban centre. The first consisted of a 7-question pen-and-paper survey distributed to all audience members, accompanied by a verbal consent script. Participants were invited to share their email addresses if they wished to provide feedback via an interview.

Following the first case study, several respondents indicated that at least one question on the survey was confusing. Further, we wished to make the survey more accessible to young audiences, given that our second theatre case study serves children and their caregivers. We worked with the British Council and the theatre to edit the survey to be more accessible. We also offered the option of circulating with iPads to record answers should audience members prefer to discuss their answers with researchers and volunteers instead of writing them down. Given our condensed timeline, we also eliminated the interview option for the second case study, with the intention of pursuing more audience feedback research at a later date.

These modifications illustrate two important aspects of community engaged research: (1) researchers must be flexible to meet community partner needs, which may not always be anticipated, and (2) the importance of working collaboratively to determine data collection strategies and approaches that work for community partners.

Audience Feedback Case Study 1: Mysterious Entity performance of Wreck Wee Em

Our first case study took place in a mid-sized city (Peterborough, ON), with an independent theatre company (Mysterious Entity) where the director also acted in

the play. The theatre director agreed to participate in the audience feedback research, and a researcher affiliated with the project assisted with data collection. Twenty-two (22) participants completed the survey, and half of these (11) provided contact information. Three (3) participants were interviewed, after contacting all participants who volunteered their information. Because of the small sample size for both audience surveys and interviews, results should be interpreted with caution.

All participants had attended theatre in the past. Some (18.8%) had attended Relaxed Performances in the past, whereas this was the first RP experience for 81.2% of the participants.

Indeed, some participants had been attending theatre for a long time, but had not experienced an RP, as one interviewee shared: "I'm almost seventy so I've attended lots of theatre over decades, and yeah, no, this was my first Relaxed Performance."

Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who have attended RPs

18.18%

81.82%

☐ Yes   ☐ No
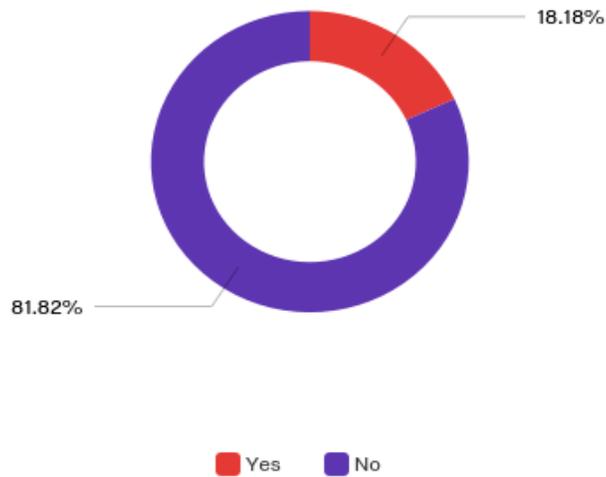
Responses were varied in terms of the extent to which the fact that this was an RP impacted their decision to attend. For 22.7% of participants, RP "completely" impacted their decision to attend—that is, they would not have attended if it were not an RP. The fact that it was an RP had no impact on the decision to attend for 31.8% of participants, very little impact for 22.7%, a moderate impact for 4.6% of participants, and a moderately-strong impact for 18.2% of participants.

Figure 2: Impact of format on decision to attend

22.73%

31.82%

18.18%

4.55%

22.73%

☐ 1 (Not at all)   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 (Completely)
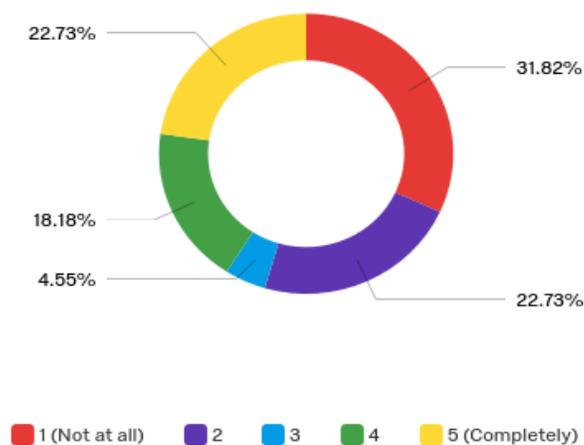
Some did not know it was a RP before arriving; for those patrons this was simply the most convenient performance to attend. As an interview participant noted: "that happened to be performance I was scheduling to go to as it happened. And then I saw the Relaxed Performance, to be honest, I didn't know what it was."

Despite the RP format not having very much of an impact on the decision to attend, the format appears to have been effective for the majority of audience members: the RP met the needs of 95.2% of audience members.

Figure 3: Percentage of participants for whom RP met needs
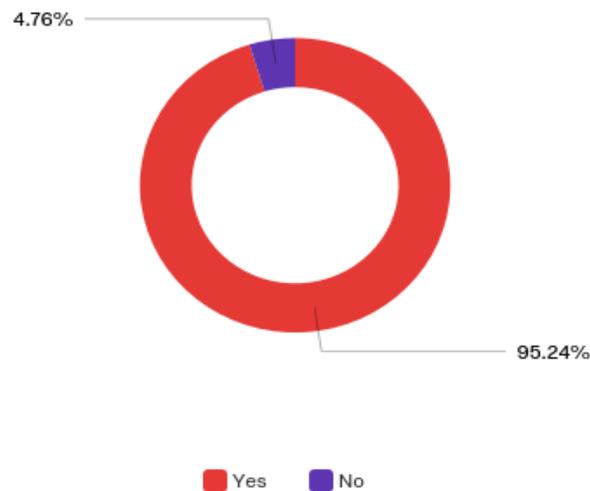
Specifically, participants suggested that the following factors impacted their enjoyment and ease in the theatre space:
- A sense of ease, comfort, and support in the space
- Lessened anxiety, less guilt around stimming, moving, fidgeting, speaking
- Ability to move around and to have choice
- Reduced pretense and rules around the theatre space and performance
- Ability to respond in whatever way felt most appropriate
- Clear expectations
- Engagement with the performance

Most participants did not have any suggestions for improvement; some noted that they had trouble hearing or seeing the show due to venue limitations. For this particular show, participants were given information up front, but not a full visual story. Interviewees suggested that having a more detailed visual story might enhance the information provided to audience members before the performance. At

the same time, they appreciated the information given in advance about the venue's limitations, for instance the lack of accessible washrooms.

Ninety percent (90%) of participants noted that they would be very likely to attend a RP in the future, and a further 10% noted that they were quite likely to attend a RP in the future. Interviewees were clear that they would also recommend RP to others, and seek them out themselves:

> Yeah, I would generally recommend Relaxed Performances. Especially for the younger people. Well, actually people of all ages. And I think especially, parents of younger children. So that they can just kind of adjust […] I can't remember, do you remember going to the theatre, and it was exciting right, and all this stuff is happening that's so very different, and then just – kind of accepting it? You know, like, if I was a very compliant kid [laughs] … I think that culture is changing and so yeah, I think it would be very cool.

As this interviewee noted, RPs can provide an opportunity to shift the culture around theatergoing. The idea of having RPs for children is not necessarily because the performance is in some way diminished—quite the opposite, participants noted that RP enhanced the theatergoing experience and represented an important intervention into "typical" and rigid theatre practices.

Figure 4: Percentage of audience members who would attend an RP in the future
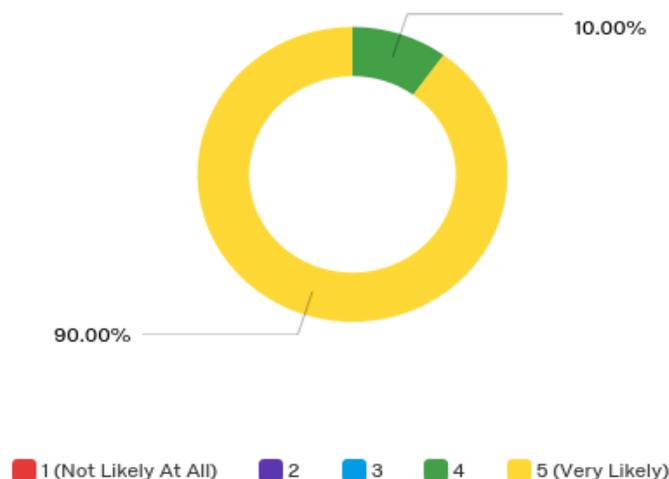
Overall, Relaxed Performance met audience needs extremely well and audience members noted a particular alignment between this performance and the format. The audience built community, and clear expectations and instructions led to a strong sense of comfort in the space. As an interviewee noted:

It was a really collective community type of feel for performance. I was very aware that I was sharing the performance with other people in the room and their natural responses and how they would respond to certain aspects about the performance, which at times was quite serious, at times was quite charged, at times was quite funny.

Particularly for shows that challenge norms and invite audiences to consider challenging themes, RP appears to have been a natural and exciting fit.

Audience Feedback Case Study 2: Young People's Theatre performance of Mary Poppins

The second case study took place at a medium-sized theatre (Young People's Theatre) in a large urban centre (Toronto, ON). The theatre holds performances specifically oriented toward families and children of various ages. The performance at which the data collection took place was designed for children aged 5 and up. The audience was invited to fill out one survey per family. Of an audience of approximately 300 people (approximately 100 families), we received 45 responses.

Most attendees (75.6%) had attended theatre in the past. Forty four (44) out of 45 (97.8%) respondents noted that they felt welcome; no respondents noted that they felt unwelcome or neutral, but one respondent did not answer the question. Participants used a variety of positive adjectives to describe the performance and the most commonly-used words are shown in the chart below.
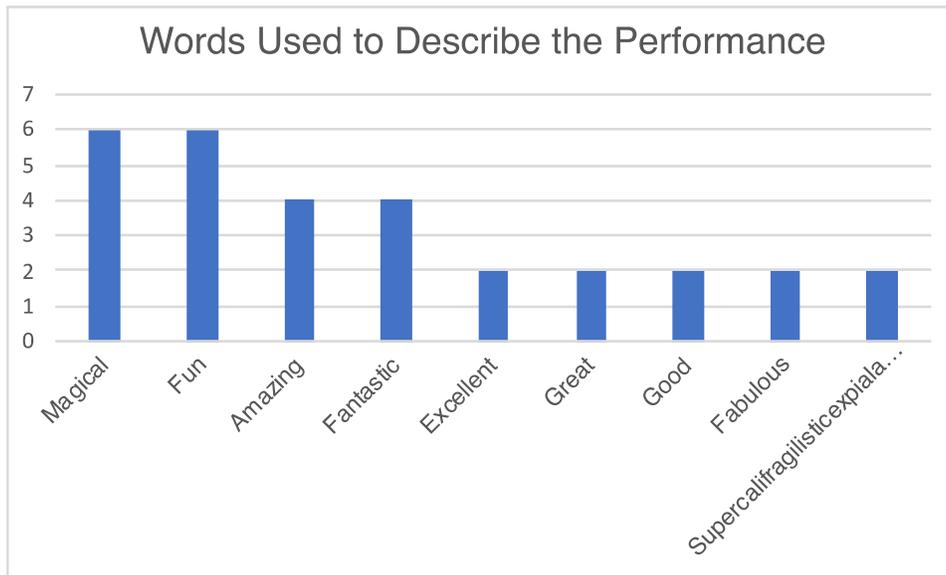
A fair number of participants (19.5%) did not know that the show was a PR prior to attending. Of these individuals, most noted that they enjoyed the modifications regardless. One participant noted that they did not find the format worked well for them and would be unlikely to attend in the future, but did appreciate the value of learning about accessibility, especially for children. Some participants (12.2%) attended knowing it was an RP, but only because it fit their schedule.

Many participants (41.4%) selected an RP because they were bringing children; often they had several children in attendance. Several participants (26.8%) also noted that they had attended with the adjustments in mind, such as the ability to speak and move during the performance. The figure below shows reasons for attending a RP.

Figure 2: Reasons for selecting an RP
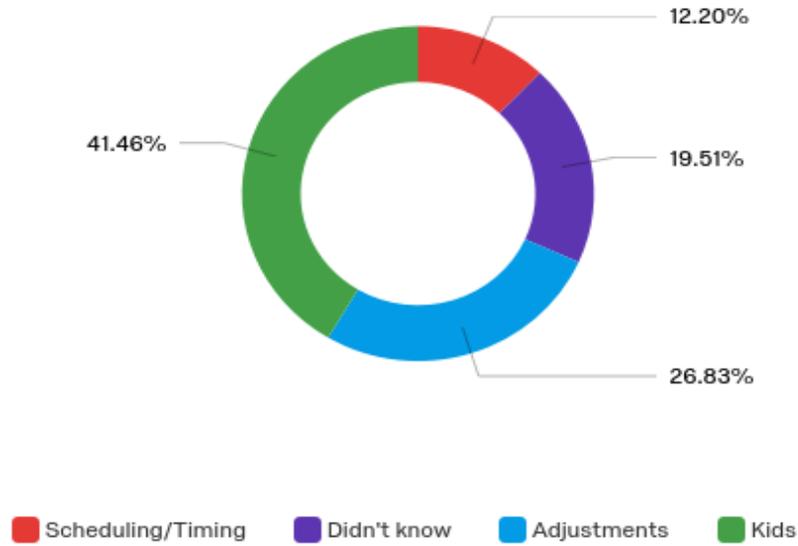
Most participants (95.5%) noted that they were either very likely (70.5%) or quite likely (25%) to attend an RP in the future. Only one participant noted that they were not likely at all and another quite unlikely to attend an RP in the future.

Figure 3: Likelihood of attending an RP in the future
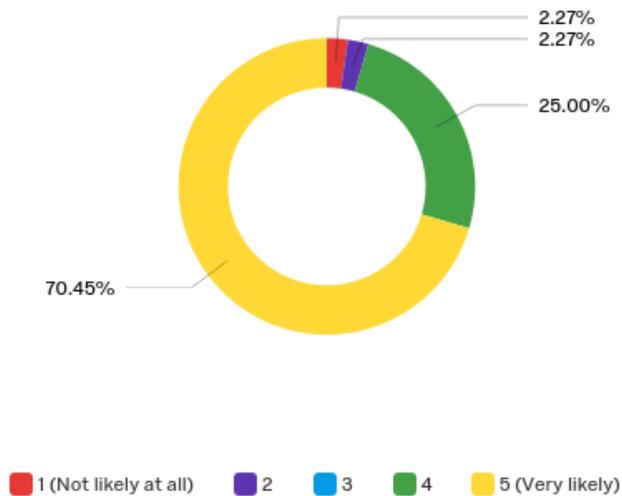
Additional comments included participants expressing gratitude for the production itself and/or for the modifications. Many of these comments were about the actors and show overall, indicating that the modifications did not

detract from the overall performance. Of course, it is not necessarily possible to meet all accessibility needs at once: a few participants noted that they found that the show had too much movement or that they did not find the RP setting necessary. On the whole, however, audience feedback was resoundingly positive. For example, one participant wrote:

"Really well done. Makes these events possible for people who might find it too hard otherwise. Email before was fantastic too, and the intro. Thank you."

Section 4: Recommendations and Implications

The data presented in the above sections comes together to present a Relaxed Performance landscape in Canada that is emerging and extremely promising. Participants' insights reveal a number of directions for training, community building, policy, and theory. These insights are distilled here as a starting point for future training adaptations, policy movement, and research.

Training

Participants expressed satisfaction with the Relaxed Performance training, though they did recommend several areas for improvement. The trainings that have taken place in Canada have been adapted from the UK model, notably to increase a focus on **disability justice**. Results from this research indicate that this focus might be taken even further; several participants noted that having the **trainings led by disabled trainers** would be helpful. This may also help to contend with the environmental-scan-identified problematic of assumptions about who is leading and taking trainings *and* RPs themselves. If it is not feasible for all trainings to be **disability-led**, the British Council might consider **hiring a paid advisory board** comprised of disabled activists, artists, and scholars.

Other commonly-suggested adaptations included having **more concrete exercises** and **less didactic delivery** of trainings. This would (a) help those taking the training learn how to apply what they have learned **by doing**, and (b) **make trainings more accessible** to different bodies and minds. Examples of concrete exercises include attending and debriefing RPs, generating visual stories and environmental/website audits, critiquing outreach material, and group grant writing.

Trainings might also be **tailored to the level of experience** of attendees, as well as their roles. This could mean **using the pre-training questionnaire** to design activities, **involving participants in co-designing the training**, **providing**

different levels of training and/or **having role-specific training** for people who occupy different roles within an organization.

Enacting accessible training also includes considering **font size** on handouts and other materials, **providing different versions/types of materials,** considering **where the training is held** and how accessible those spaces are, and enacting **relaxed training** through facilitators modelling what it means to be in a relaxed space (e.g., taking breaks, moving around, etc.). Enacting relaxed training also means captioning videos and films used in training and ensuring that all involved are in the practice of using a microphone.

Finally, participants emphasized the importance of getting multiple types of people involved in making RPs, including through **outreach to new training audiences** such as **funders** and **decision-makers** such that those audiences might learn about the importance and challenges of implementing RP.

Community

A key finding within this work was the idea that Relaxed Performance thrives on community, and that building connections has been a boon to those involved in the trainings (and audiences). Building mechanisms for maintaining communities and extending their reach may help RP to not only take root, but to flourish in the Canadian theatre community and beyond.

One of the key recommendations from participants was to **formalize the community that RP trainings begin to grow.** This would allow for the continual exchange of knowledge and resources amongst those who are interested in and actively delivering RPs. This could be a **web-based group,** a **community of practice**, and/or a **centralized scheduling platform** to help theatres collaborate rather than compete for audiences. This kind of community might be especially helpful for those who work in more rural settings, who may not have the same access to community as those working in urban centres.

This group or community might also **develop a (non-prescriptive and evolving) set of best practices for RP.** The list would include acknowledgment of the time and effort involved in mounting an RP, such that it is not a prescribed set of "must dos" but rather a tool for understanding what is possible and what is not— and when something is not possible, how to communicate about this. This would be a dynamic set of practices rather than a static and prescribed list.

Policy

Without concordant policy movement, and particularly funding, Relaxed Performance may not be a sustainable option. Given the alignment between RP

and accessibility legislation, considering policy and funding movement that can assist RP to become more common and to support existing efforts is sorely needed.

One of the primary recommendations around how to move RP forward is the strong need for **funding for RP**. Funding might be leveraged through **development grants** which would allow theatres to develop RPs together with relevant community groups. **Travel grants** would also be helpful to provide theatre staff with the possibility of attending RP trainings. Due to the identified limitations of venues, there is also a strong need for **infrastructure grants** that could be used for building retrofits and/or the construction of new accessible buildings.

RP is taking root alongside a push toward more accessibility legislation at the provincial and federal levels. **Exploring alignment** between RP and legislation such as the **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)** and the newly introduced **Bill C-81: The Accessible Canada Act** is a key next step. Alignment may include the creation of guidelines around accessible theatre that could help theatres meet and exceed accessibility requirements.

Theory

Finally, Relaxed Performance exists within a broader field of disability arts. The disability arts field has been growing over the past thirty years. Exploring theoretical and practical alignment, as well as shared questions and concerns, presents an excellent opportunity for dialogue, scholarly and artistic debate, and movement.

As identified in the academic literature review, there is a significant lack of literature on RP from a **critical, disability-studies-informed lens.** Key areas for exploration include consideration of how RPs open up possibilities for access to the arts, while also potentially **reinforcing norms** about who is considered a "typical" theatre attendee and who requires accommodation, as well as **distinctions between audiences, actors, theatre staff, trainers, and trainees** that may reinforce assumptions about who creates and who consumes art.

Authors' Note

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