



The Butterfly Affect: Eco-Puppetry

for Envisioning a Joyful Environmental Praxis

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Introduction

The Butterfly Affect is a performance-based experience that uses the stages of a butterfly as a symbol for change to encourage individuals to self-reflect on their personal growth and transformation. This research investigates how eco-theatre and eco-puppetry create a catalyst in the minds of people to encourage their self-reflection on their involvement in the Anthropocene, and mobilize activism and cultural change. The connection between the puppet and touch in eco-theatre has been seen to have great effects on the person's ability to want to start the change themselves. We explore the theoretical and creative aspects of eco-puppetry. First, we analyze the existing literature to understand what eco-puppetry is, its potential psychological effects, and how it impacts people's engagement with environmental justice. Second, we reflect on our process of creating the various puppetry components of the project, such as The Butterfly Care Deck (for adults, children, and Spanish-English speakers), and the Paper Dolls. This research demonstrates how small actions or events can spark larger societal, political, and cultural movements, shedding light on the role of theater as a vehicle for social change.

Methods

- The Butterfly Affect includes three performance-based methods: (1) The immersive performance: a site-specific, guided experience that offers participants a contemplative invitation to reflect, dream, and imagine by wearing large-scale puppets to co-metamorphose alongside a butterfly. (2) The Care Deck: an open-access digital self-guided resource featuring creative prompts to ignite our imaginations and inspire our bodies to rest, move, and emerge transformed. (3) Paper Doll Puppets: an interactive guided chance to play and experience transformation through hand-held puppets as conduits for their transformation, offering a nature-based, ecofeminist approach to systems of care towards women.
- It uses various types of puppetry that range from hand-held to human sized puppetry.
- The puppets are used in a thirty minute experience and walkthrough of the simulated states of the butterfly's metamorphosis. This simulation is aided with other sensory components like music and a guide to follow participants through the different stages. The guide reads a script which is written in a manner that allows for reflection and inward thinking.
- In a different form of this project, paper dolls are cut out of laminated paper to simulate this process on a smaller scale. The paper dolls are composed of cutouts of many different versions of girls and women along with sets of butterfly wings from monarch, blue morpho, and western tiger swallow butterflies and their corresponding eggs and caterpillars.
- Digitally, this process is also available virtually in the form of an online deck of cards that embodies the phases of this change in the form of manifestations and embodied movements. The deck of cards are also accompanied by a set of videos that can be followed and serve as a guide to those who are following and looking at the cards. We added and edited to the deck of virtual cards to coalign with the ecofeminist structure to the project.

Literature Review/Background

Three literature reviews sections were created to analyze their respective topics pertaining to this research: eco-puppetry, its potential psychological effects, and how it impacts people's engagement with environmental justice.

Eco-theatre and Puppetry

- Theatre and puppetry have been encouraged as an alternative way to convey societally controversial messages such as climate change and feminism.
- "‘Humanity's relationship to the environment is an issue of urgent concern, and one that can and should be addressed by anyone engaged in critical and intellectual pursuits, including theatre artists and scholars' (93)." (Woynarski, 2015, p. 9) .
- Eco-theatre and puppetry can help one become educated in climate change while also building the individual up, giving them the confidence to "creatively identify[ing] problems and solutions through reflection, which in turn produces an appropriate course of action (Camnitzer et al. 2014)." (Bentz, 2020, p. 1609).
- Effective eco-theatre "should awaken your senses and connect you with the more-than-human living world or offer an experience of ecological intimacy." (Woynarski, 2015, p. 14) and look at issues from a new perspective to create "creative solutions to incipient problems and create a more optimistic outlook for the future." (Miles, 2014, p. 4)

Psychological Effects

- A particular point of interest is the relevance of applied theatre programs into the contexts of well-being and if they can have an influence in one's thinking and self reflection.
- Prior research has shown that being involved in theater performances have shown signs of reduced stress, anxiety, and isolation in war veterans (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). This can lead us to wonder if our own self evaluation could also be influenced.
- In a study done to reduce healthcare provider stigma through narrative based theatre showed that healthcare providers reduce their biases towards patients who carry stigmas and are more mindful moving forward with future patients (Wilson-Menzfeld, 2023).
- This gives us an inclination that our actions can be changed and influenced by simply observing theatre performances.

Environmental Justice

- Play is a tool for social activism, fostering engagement and motivating change (Tavanier, 2017). Eco-puppetry, combining symbolism, play, and physicality, allows individuals to address complex issues like climate change in a personal way.
- Colonial ideologies affect society's relationship with nature, and decolonization emphasizes indigenous knowledge systems, which offer a sustainable and just approach to ecological issues (Todd, 2017; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).
- Decoloniality challenges Eurocentric dominance and advocates for climate justice, empowering marginalized communities.
- Puppetry can promote self-reflection and action, connecting individuals to environmental issues.

Findings

- Eco-theatre and puppetry are effective tools for fostering agency and encouraging change, especially when used in group settings with an emphasis on inclusivity, particularly for marginalized groups.
- These art forms have potential to help increase confidence and amplify the voices of women and marginalized communities, enabling them to take action on environmental issues.
- The findings have influenced the approach to editing the script of the card deck for the Butterfly Affect, emphasizing their potential to create meaningful, empowering experiences for participants.
- The research is ongoing, with a call for further exploration into how eco-theatre and eco-puppetry can be improved and evolved to enhance their impact on environmental and social change.
- The study emphasizes the significance of fostering personal responsibility, self-reflection, and agency in addressing global environmental challenges.
- The research highlights the importance of using art and creative expression to challenge colonial legacies, empower marginalized voices, and inspire both personal and collective change toward ecological justice.
- Future research can further explore the impact of eco-puppetry and eco-theatre and its involvement in social and environmental activism and how participants can be empowered to reach eco-feminist justice.



The life-size wearable puppets from the final stage of The Butterfly Affect experience.



Two stages of the care deck: the egg and butterfly, which showcase what is yearning inside of us that be released to take flight.



Paper dolls and accessories for each stage of a butterfly's metamorphosis.

Butterfly Affect Website



References

