Choreographing Closeness: The Effects of Intimacy Choreography Best Practices in Educational Theatre

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CHOREOGRAPHING CLOSENESS: THE EFFECTS OF INTIMACY
CHOREOGRAPHY BEST PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

by

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ABSTRACT

Power dynamics between teacher/director and student/actors in an educational theatre setting are inevitable and directly impact the way consent is viewed and given, specifically with youth performers. In response to the #MeToo movement within theatre and film, the role of intimacy choreographer emerged with the goal of creating a consent-based rehearsal process that ensured the mental, emotional, and physical safety of the actor (Pace 25) while conveying the intimacy required to effectively support the script. The use of intimacy choreographers is almost exclusively used in professional film and theatre settings. Applying the pedagogies created and taught by leading intimacy organizations Intimacy Directors and Coordinators (IDC) and Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE), this thesis is an exploration of the implementation of intimacy best practices during a rehearsal process in educational theatre. Furthermore, I will hypothesize additional applications beyond the rehearsal room into the classroom. Examining the following questions: How does the application of IDC’s and TIE’s best practices affect the rehearsal process? What are the effects of a consent-based practice in a rehearsal space? How can these best practices be applied to educational theatre outside the rehearsal space?
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis researches the effects of theatrical intimacy best practices as suggested by Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE) and Intimacy Directors and Coordinators (IDC) with undergraduate and graduate students, ages 18 and older during the rehearsal process for a single production at the University of Central Florida (UCF). I discuss the best practices proposed by both organizations, then analyze their effectiveness once applied to my practice, exploring the benefits and challenges faced in the rehearsal room. Additionally, I hypothesize how the same methodologies could be implemented with theatre students grades K-12, and its possible impact on young theatre practitioners.

Introduction to Intimacy Choreography

Theatrical intimacy choreography is a relatively new field emerging within professional theatres worldwide. The goal of the field and the intimacy choreographer is to choreograph and stage the movement for intimate moments on stage in such a way that honors the playwright’s intentions while protecting the actor’s mental, emotional, and physical boundaries (Pace). The term “intimacy director” is given in reference to those working in theatre, and “intimacy coordinator” refers to those in film. The field began to rapidly grow after the #MeToo movement, founded in 2006 by Tarana Burke (Burke), had a resurgence in 2017 with the hashtag #metoo circulating on social media as a way for survivors of sexual assault to come forward. Many celebrities came forward about negative experiences they had while working on film or other performance projects, indicating a clear issue within the industry and a need that up to that point had been grossly overlooked. After the movement, organizations began working towards
better practices when dealing with intimacy. The first published mention of intimacy choreography was in a 2014 article in Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) magazine *Fight Master* written by Tonia Sina, who would later go on to found the organization that is now known as Intimacy Directors and Coordinators (Hughes). In the article titled, “Safe Sex: A Look at the Intimacy Choreographer,” Sina discusses how she fell into the position of what she calls “intimacy coach” while she was in graduate school using her knowledge of movement and stage combat to inform what would eventually become her methodology. In the article she calls for the use of an intimacy coach in all productions with heightened emotions and/or intimacy, positing “An outside party simply aids in retaining the integrity of the scene by giving it an audience. Two actors kissing in a room are simply that: two actors kissing in a room” (Sina 14).

Since her initial article, Sina founded Intimacy Directors International in 2015, which has become Intimacy Directors and Coordinators (Intimacy), this organization claims “Intimacy Professionals are choreographers, advocates for actors, and liaisons between actors and production for scenes that involve nudity/hyper exposed work, simulated sex acts, and intimate physical contact” (Intimacy). IDC specializes in commercial work for intimacy choreography, working professionally in film, television and theatre. The company does offer workshops and a certification training, but they are known for their work on popular film and television series like *Bridgerton* and being the first intimacy director to work on a Broadway show. The second leading intimacy organization in the United States is Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE) founded in 2017 by Chelsea Pace and Laura Rikard. As their name suggests, their focus is education saying, “Theatrical Intimacy Education empowers artists with the tools to ethically, efficiently, and effectively stage intimacy, nudity, and sexual violence” (Theatrical). While other
smaller companies exist in the United States and internationally, IDC and TIE are the leading organizations at the time this thesis is being written and will be the two primary methodologies used in this research.

Intimacy Choreography in Educational Theatre

Beginning in film and television, intimacy choreographers are now slowly being utilized by professional theatres, both union and non-union, however the practice is not fully accessible to university theatre, and almost nonexistent in lower levels of educational theatre. The Chicago Theatre Standards (CTS) published in 2017 and since have been adopted by numerous theatres across the United States, is a set of guidelines for creating a “space free from harassment” and a “nurturing environment” (#NotInOurHouse 4). The CTS are a call to action specifically for non-union theatres but is encouraged to be adopted by any professional performing house. There are no such guidelines specifically for educational theatre environments and due to the nuance of educational pedagogy there may never be a unifying document universally used by all theatre practitioners.

The use of an intimacy choreographer removes any “realness” from the scene for the actors, and actions become character or story driven. This prevents the blurring of lines between show and reality for the actor that can lead to things like “showmances” (relationships between actors during a show due to their characters’ feelings and not their own) but also prevents the actor’s boundaries from being crossed in ways that could negatively impact them beyond the rehearsal room (Pace 15-37). While rehearsing/performing intimate scenes, it is important to remember that the term “intimacy” can be applied to a myriad of situations and that the
definition is highly subjective and will vary per individual. Performers are not always able to remove the reality from the moment and look at the scene solely from their character’s perspective. When this occurs, the actors confuse the feelings of the character with their own. It then becomes the performer falling in love with the actor playing Ariel instead of the character, Prince Eric; or the performer being assaulted at the end of Streetcar Named Desire and not the character Blanche. Failure to distinguish between the two while at developmentally crucial ages can be detrimental for young performers. Therefore, the role of the intimacy choreographer becomes critical for any theatre space that works with youth. The intimacy choreographer provides the separation between actor and character, reality vs play for the young performer who may not be able to do so for themselves. Using the techniques proposed by IDC and TIE, the intimacy choreographer is responsible for providing specific character-driven choreography that supports the playwright’s intentions but honors the actor’s individual boundaries and abilities while simultaneously creating a consent-based environment that allows actors to be vulnerable in the rehearsal room.

Power dynamics are inevitable in educational theatre between student and teacher/director. Despite efforts made by directors for students to feel comfortable speaking up or pushing back during rehearsals, the fact remains that the director is an adult, usually one who controls the students’ grades. IDC talks about five different power dynamics, first proposed by J. French and B. Raven in 1959, that are always present in a rehearsal space: referent power--based on respect that’s earned over time; expert power -- based on a person’s expertise in a specific field; coercive power -- based on penalizing individuals or group; legitimate power -- based on a person’s legitimate authority in a situation, and reward power -- obtained by giving and/or
withholding rewards (Kovach, Talbot). At any given moment, these five dynamics are at play between the teacher and students, and even with precautions and clear boundaries, it is possible for teachers to abuse their power in a rehearsal space unintentionally. The most commonly seen example of this is when time is of the essence and the teacher is rushing to completely block a scene and they ask the actors to do something that conflicts with their boundaries. In that situation, even if the director has told the students to stop the process if they have a question or concern, the actors are aware of the time-crunch and will more than likely not want to “waste time” by stopping to voice a concern for fear of angering the director. Therefore, the director has unknowingly abused their power in the room, the student’s boundaries have been crossed and the rehearsal environment has been permanently changed. As Susanne Shawyer and Kim Shively say in their 2019 article, Education in Theatrical Intimacy as Ethical Practice for University Theatre, “the actor’s need to understand boundaries and personal agency are complicated by educational and professional power structures that feed the pressure to please the teacher or director” (pg 96). Often for student actors, the pressure to be agreeable or easy to work with overpowers their need for self-advocacy or preservation.

Much like stage combat needs to be choreographed by someone with specialized training in order to protect the actors, intimate scenes also need to be choreographed for the actor’s protection. The dangers in combat are primarily external while those with intimacy are primarily internal. If a fight is choreographed unsafely, an actor could potentially be punched or hit with a weapon, all things that can be observed and corrected by outside observers; however, if the same lack of safety is applied to an intimate moment, actors will feel the pressure to be “easy to work with” and move forward regardless of the mental or emotional injuries that could occur or pre-
existing trauma that could be triggered. The internalization of a boundary being crossed or a traumatic moment in rehearsal remains invisible to the cast and crew but negatively impacts that actor for the remainder of the rehearsal process. Therefore, it is the role of the intimacy choreographer to prevent or mitigate these injuries through a consent-based practice. There is an intersection where staged combat can trigger internalized trauma, and intimacy choreography can cause external injuries, additionally sexual violence is present in many well-known works, so it is crucial for the choreographer to have proper training and an open dialogue with the actors.

While earning my master’s degree, I have worked on several productions with local public schools, which could have benefitted from an intimacy choreographer. When presented with the idea, the teachers have been hesitant and ultimately decide against it. Usually, this stems from their uncertainty of what an intimacy choreographer does and how it will impact their students. While the benefits of working with an intimacy director are indisputable to those who are familiar with the position, there is a fear of the unknown for most public-school teachers who are unaware of what that role is or what the theatrical intimacy industry contributes to theatre standards. In Chapter Five, I explore easy activities that can be incorporated into any classroom that can serve as an introduction to intimacy practices into daily curriculum.

Intimacy in Covid-19

With the outbreak of COVID-19 and the global pandemic beginning in 2020, the question “how do we stage intimacy safely?” has shifted. The concept of “safety” has moved from just protecting and preserving the actor’s boundaries to also keeping the actor healthy while adhering to the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) guidelines regarding the spread of the virus. The
challenge for the intimacy choreographer has shifted to, how do we choreograph a kiss without being able to kiss, and do we convey the same story of physical touch while remaining three feet apart? Currently, every theater’s guidelines vary in regards to proximity of actors on stage and levels of personal protection like masks and vaccines for actors and crew.

Since the start of the pandemic both IDC and TIE have switched to exclusively online workshops and have yet to offer in-person classes. In March of 2020, TIE called for a halt in rehearsing and performing theatrical intimacy to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but they specifically addressed the individual artist rather than the companies stating, “It is critical to remember that the power dynamics of production are such that actors are unwilling or unable to say no, even if the opportunity is presented to them. This is a result not only of those power dynamics but of economic realities and conditioning from years of being trained to say ‘yes’” (Theatrical). Professional productions both theatrical and film, now have “Covid Compliance Officers or Coordinators” (Noble) whose role is to ensure CDC guidelines are being followed by all involved; however, this position is not always accessible depending on the scale and budget of the project. In the two years since the pandemic began regulations and policies from theatres and the CDC have adapted as more information regarding COVID-19 has been discovered; but the role of the intimacy choreographer remains the same at its core: to protect the actors and tell the story. Only now the idea of “protection” spans beyond actor boundaries and into their health.
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Theatrical Intimacy Education and Intimacy Directors and Coordinators are the two leading intimacy organizations in the United States. While the two companies have varying techniques and best practices, their common goal is to provide education and resources for staging intimacy that supports the needs of the actors while also supporting the needs of the script. As IDC states in their mission, “We envision a world in which intimacy is a vital and joyful part of storytelling, and all artists are able to work consensually, bringing their whole selves to the work and honoring one another’s individual humanity” (Intimacy). For this thesis, I will be explaining the best practices proposed by IDC and TIE, then examining the hybrid method I created while in the rehearsal process of Welcome to the Moon and Other Plays by John Patrick Shanley. Combining the terminology and exercises established by TIE and the in-rehearsal approach of IDC, I will be exploring the effects of my own style of intimacy choreography in an educational theatre setting.

Theatrical Intimacy Education

Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE) specializes in educating not only aspiring intimacy choreographers but entire companies in their consent-based best practices. Unlike Intimacy Directors and Coordinators, TIE does not offer any certification training because they believe offering a certification indicates an endpoint for learning and will discourage those with less
training to promote whatever amount of intimacy knowledge they may have in the rehearsal space.

The main focus for all intimacy choreography including TIE is to de-sexualize the language being used in the rehearsal room. This allows the clear communication between actors and production team and also avoids sexually charged language that may be triggering. For choreographing intimate moments, TIE has created what they call “The Ingredients” (Pace 39-71). The ingredients are set terminology TIE suggests intimacy choreographers use in the rehearsal room to avoid sexualized language and to work towards a unified vocabulary among industry professionals. These ingredients are opening and closing distance, levels of touch, tempo and count, shape, destination, eye contact, visible power shifts, breath and sound, gravity and weight, and kissing. Similar to having the proper terminology to choreograph a ballet number, using The Ingredients, the intimacy choreographer is equipped with language to create and teach movements of intimacy. Instead of saying “now hump” the intimacy choreographer can tell Actor A to open and close the distance between their and Actor B’s hips three times. While this method takes more time in the moment, it creates a clear repeatable action for the stage managers to notate and for the actors to perform. The use of the ingredients prevents confusion or error that could later lead to a broken boundary of traumatic experience.

TIE suggests that boundaries are flexible and that actors have the ability to change their boundaries throughout the rehearsal process. To assist in articulating these boundaries TIE has created the terms “fence” (21-23) and “gate” (23). A “fence” refers to an area of the actor’s body they do not want any contact whatsoever. Similar to how an actual fence protects a yard, a “fence” is metaphorically put up around parts of the actor for protection. A “gate” refers to an
area of the actor’s body they would prefer not to be touched. Depending on the choreography the actor may be willing to make an exception (like how a real gate also protects a yard but can be opened and closed). For example, an actor may have a gate around their upper chest that would remain closed for hand to chest contact but would open for a front facing hug where their chest would come in contact with that of another actor. The actor themselves is responsible for establishing their fences and gates and communicating them with their scene partner and intimacy choreographer. When choreographing Welcome to the Moon, I attempted to utilize both the ingredients as well as the terminology involving “fences” and “gates.”

To establish the fences and gates that exist between scene partners, TIE recommends actors beginning each rehearsal, when possible, with what they refer to as “boundary practice” (24-25). In this, actors pair up and physically show their fences and gates by either using their own hand or guiding their partner’s hand along their body, stopping when they have a fence/gate and lifting the hand over that area on the body. The scene partner also has the agency to put up a fence/gate during this exercise while their hand is being guided. TIE recommends actors participate in boundary practice at the top of every rehearsal as actor’s boundaries may have changed from the initial boundary practice at the start of the process. When choreographing, it is required of the actors to inform the intimacy choreographer of any fence or gate, which the choreographer will then honor while creating the movement.

The final technique TIE suggests for choreographing intimacy is what they call a “self care cue” or “Button” (17-21), which was offered to the cast of Welcome to the Moon. This is a word similar to “hold” that actors can use in the rehearsal room when they need to pause the action. The word does not have to be “Button” but TIE recommend the word be something
outside of the world of the show that is not loaded in any way. However, TIE does recognize that if the word “Button” is continuously used by industry professionals, it will work towards unifying the practice in the field of intimacy (Pace). “Button” can be called any time the actors have a need specifically related to a boundary. It can be used to clarify the choreography or as an indicator that they need to step out of the room for a moment. In the instances “button” is called, it is not the intimacy choreographer’s job to find out why it was called, but rather how they can help the actor with whatever they need next, whether providing personal space or answering a question or re-choreographing a moment because an actor’s boundary has changed.

In addition to their techniques, TIE recommends the intimacy profession refrain from asking close-ended questions with an implied “yes” answer. This may include questions like: “is it alright if I touch your shoulders?” or “you two are comfortable with that, right?” In the effort to be easy to work with, actors will automatically respond to the implied yes, whether or not that is their genuine answer. Instead, TIE suggests asking open-ended questions, beginning with “would it work for you if…” or “how would you feel about…” Removing the implication of a correct answer allows the performer time to process the question and give a response that more accurately reflects their boundaries. As a practitioner prior to my intimacy training I would pride myself in always asking permission before touching an actor or giving them direction. However, through TIE’s training, I realized I almost always had that implied yes in these questions and since have tried to eradicate them from my practice.
Intimacy Directors and Coordinators

Intimacy Directors and Coordinators (IDC) serves as a hiring agency for organizations in need of a trained intimacy professional for a theatrical production or film as well as a training organization for those wishing to be certified as an intimacy choreographer. While IDC facilitators offer a variety of online courses and workshops, they do not have resources regarding their methodology available to the public outside of those enrolled in their certification classes.

IDC’s methodology is founded on what they refer to as the Pillars of Intimacy: context--what is the context of the intimacy within the show; consent—acknowledging and agreeing on what will be requested of the actors and their scene partner; choreography--the creation of the intimacy itself; communication--talking through each choreographed moment before, during, and after it is set; closure/de-rolling--allowing for the actors to separate themselves from their character; and care/support system--establishing means for the actors to seek help if needed (Black). They categorize intimacy in four branches: emotional, physical, psychological, and social. Their methodology is less pedagogical than TIE’s and focuses less on the specifics of language but rather on clear communication throughout the process with all involved (Talbot). Similar to TIE, they recommend de-sexualizing the language used in the rehearsal room and having some form of “check out” for the actors to separate themselves from their character after intense staged moments that they refer to as “closure/de-rolling.” Additionally, they have a practice similar to “Fences/Gates”, which is the idea of “Containers.” A “container” is a space on the performers body where there is consent for contact to be made with their scene partner. Establishing “containers” on the body allows for consensual touch during a scene without having to constantly check-in with the partner regarding their boundaries. While the actors are working
within the “containers,” it is the responsibility of the intimacy choreography to observe what is happening organically and finesse and finalize as needed. IDC also suggests the intimacy choreographer familiarizes themselves with care/support systems available to actors working on the project. This could include local organizations that specialize in trauma/mental health or union resources that advocate for performers in case they are in need of medical attention both physical and mental.
CHAPTER THREE: WELCOME TO THE MOON

*Welcome to the Moon and Other Plays* by John Patrick Shanley is a series of brief one-act plays with no connecting throughline or plot that explore the concept of love and relationships. When performed in total, there are six stories being told; the titular “Welcome to the Moon” is about high school friends now grown grappling with long term feelings for each other they had been too afraid to reveal until now resulting in one couple coming together and another remaining apart. “Out West” is a western story of a young girl who falls in love with a wandering cowboy. Her boyfriend grows jealous and challenges the cowboy to a duel, during which the boyfriend and the cowboy shoot at the same time, but the girl jumps in front of the cowboy, sacrificing herself to save him. “Red Coat” follows two high school students outside of a party falling in love for the first time. “Let Us Go Out into the Starry Night” is about a man externally surrounded by his inner demons who meets a woman that helps him move forward. “Down and Out” is about a poet and his love struggling to survive with a hooded figure constantly plaguing their existence. And finally, “A Lonely Impulse of Delight” is about a man trying to introduce his best friend to the mermaid he is in love with; it is also implied that the two friends also used to be in love (Patrick). Majority of the plays lean towards absurdism, with “Welcome to the Moon” and “Red Coat” being the two exceptions; however, those too have extremely heightened circumstances for the brevity of the story.

University of Central Florida (UCF) produced this work in Fall 2021 in honor of a professor that passed away the previous semester who had originally held the role of director for the show. The six pieces were divided between three guest directors who were alumni of the
university, and the cast consisted of 23 undergraduate and graduate students, half of who were cast in multiple pieces. During the rehearsal process for *Welcome to the Moon*, I served as intimacy choreographer, working with all six one-acts; but primarily focused on “Welcome to the Moon,” “Red Coat,” and “Out West” due to the intimacy required from the script. For purposes of this thesis, I will be referring to the director of “Welcome to the Moon” and “Out West” as Director A, the director of “Red Coat” and “Let Us go Out into the Starry Night” as Director B, and the director of “Down and Out” and “A Lonely Impulse of Delight” as Director C.

Preparations for rehearsal

Prior to beginning rehearsals, I had trained primarily with TIE through virtual workshops, learning and exploring The Ingredients and their application in the rehearsal room. Additionally, I studied their book written by the co-founders. My training with IDC consisted of select one-off virtual workshops involving working with minors and exploring consent in the classroom, as well as researching their few published resources. The rehearsal process for *Welcome to the Moon* was not only my first experience exploring intimacy direction, but it was the first time working with actors in person.

To prepare for rehearsals I analyzed the script, finding the moments of intimacy that stood out to me and took note of any character development supported from the script alone. Then, I met with each director to establish what intimate moments they found in each of their pieces and how they connected with or challenged mine. We discussed questions such as “what is intimacy?” and “who defines it?” We also pondered various forms of intimacy, such as that of
young love compared to the intimacy found in a mother/son bond and how those stories could be conveyed on stage. Once we decided what moments would be considered “intimate” within the script and therefore needed my choreography, with the Covid-19 safety parameters set for the production by the University of Central Florida, the questions ventured from: how do we accomplish these moments, to what does this moment represent and how can we safely convey that? The answers were explored by considering the motivation behind the action--the kiss or hug or lift--and finding a substitution that embodies the moment in the same way, while also protecting the actors.

Because Welcome to the Moon had three directors, it felt as though I were working on three separate plays, rather than a series of one-acts. Each director had a specific and unique approach to working with an intimacy choreographer, all having never worked with one prior. Director A had two clear and specific moments, one from each piece and was very hands-off in the rehearsal room, allowing me to work with the actors and then present them with the choreography for feedback. Director B wanted the focus to be on the story and the connection between the two characters with safety being the priority. Director B was very collaborative, actively brainstorming moments with the actors. Director C wanted to hold tablework with me in the room so we could discover the intimate moments as a collective. During rehearsal, Director C had already decided what the intimacy would look like and asked me for approval, rather than to create with the actors in the space. TIE recommends the intimacy choreographer be involved in the rehearsal process beginning with casting and staying through the opening of the show. The time allotted for me to work with Welcome to the Moon, was much shorter, causing me to streamline my approach for the most effective results. I would only have one to two rehearsals
in the room with each piece, meaning I would not have the luxury of trial and error and would have to be fully prepared at the start of rehearsals. From the meeting with the directors, I created several options for actors to serve as a starting point for the choreography.

Not having been involved in casting, I was unfamiliar with the actors playing each role. I did not know their background, age, height, or their interpretation of their characters. I was challenged to find choreography that would be authentic to the character based solely on the script and then incorporate the actors once rehearsal began. I was also unfamiliar with the rehearsal environment created by each director and the existing power dynamics that would have been established prior to my involvement. Without this preliminary knowledge of the cast, I made assumptions about the actors’ potential boundaries and relied solely on the TIE and IDC best practices to create choreography that could be applied to the scenes.

Because the majority of my training has been with TIE, I focused primarily on their best practices when creating the initial choreography. TIE strongly suggests the use of specific language in order to create continuity and unity throughout the field, so I analyzed each stock piece of choreography I created, almost scripting out exactly what I would say in the rehearsal room, emphasizing the idea of using the “correct” language. While preparing, I was certain I would be able to create choreography that would serve the show and work with each actor. However, I was apprehensive on how successfully I would implement and facilitate the specific exercises and terminology.
Implementing best practices in rehearsal room

The Welcome to the Moon rehearsals I attended were specifically for the purpose of choreographing the intimate moments between two characters using a consent-based practice by combining techniques from Theatrical Intimacy Education and Intimacy Directors and Coordinators. Through trial and error in the rehearsal room, I found using the ingredients, “button,” and “boundary practice” from TIE along with the first four pillars of intimacy from IDC--context, consent, choreography, and communication, to create a hybrid method of approaching intimacy that effectively allowed for exploration within the rehearsal room while respecting the boundaries established by the actors.

At the top of each rehearsal, the actors paired off with their scene partners and participated in TIE’s boundary practice to familiarize each other with their fences and gates. The pairs were given the opportunity to do this practice in the rehearsal room or outside in the privacy of the hallway. This option was the first to be presented to the actors during intimacy rehearsals and therefore worked to establish the power dynamics in the room. The actors were able to step out into the hall, away from supervising professors, fellow actors, and production team members, to complete an exercise that required them to analyze their boundaries and be vulnerable with their partner, which provided them a sense of autonomy over the activity. Clear expectations were established: do the exercise, but by providing a choice, the actors had ownership of the exercise. All pairs of actors chose to perform the practice in the hallway, so I was unable to observe the facilitation of the practice. When surveyed, the actors strongly agreed that it was helpful. After the actors completed the boundary practice, I would lead a discussion of
characters, asking questions like “how long have the characters known each other?” or “why does your character want to make this connection?”

After the character discussion, the actors and I would examine the script, taking into consideration input from the director, finding the moments of intimacy that needed to be choreographed from the playwright’s perspective. Based on the conclusions from those conversations, I reflected on the initial choreography I had prepared prior and began to construct the choreography that would ultimately be used in the performance. Initially, my pre-planned choreography was not very dynamic with my primary focus being to follow the best practices exactly, which ultimately limited the creative process. I found myself trying to force a methodology because I felt that it was what the intimacy choreographer was supposed to do. However, this created a barrier for creative feedback or collaboration. Upon making that discovery, my approach veered from “what is correct” to “what best serves the moment and the actors.” I found myself less focused on using the specific terminology from TIE but rather the four pillars of IDC: context, consent, choreography, and communication, and letting the choreography come from the collaboration in the room. The four pillars provided larger abstract concepts within which I could find moments of success using the TIE terminology.

Throughout the process, there was a constant conversation with the actors and directors. While choreographing the piece “Welcome to the Moon,” I pondered a moment in the script when two characters, Vinnie and Ronnie, confess their love and then share what the director called “a physical depiction of the growing connection between the men.” There was no established choreography within the script. The actors and I had to create what the moment represented for their characters and then the intimacy choreography to match. We established the
relationship between the two characters: how long they had known each other; when they realized they loved each other, who was the one to take control: who was the most scared; and what were they thinking at this exact moment. We established the character Vinnie was always the leader in the group, so that actor would be the one to initiate any physical contact. Because both characters were thrown off by the sudden confession of love prior to the intimacy, we explored awkward and imperfect movements between the men. We discovered Ronnie was extremely scared at this moment in the script and therefore submissive, which informed the power dynamic of the intimacy and allowed for a visible power shift when Ronnie finally initiated a move. Combining these discoveries with TIE’s ingredients, I facilitated a choreographed moment where there was initial awkwardness between the characters as they were unsure how to advance, then Vinnie (as per our character discussion) initiated the first offering of his hand, Ronnie then accepted and the two closed the distance in front of them. From here we discussed the characters further and discovered Ronnie would be crying out of joy, leading Vinnie to wipe away the tear in a small moment of tender intimacy. “Welcome to the Moon” was the first piece I rehearsed with the actors, and this process of discussion/creation/discussion/creation became the outline for the remainder of the process.

After discovering the prescriptiveness of the TIE method and how it did not serve me in practice, I allowed myself to deviate from their methodology and a hybrid method of TIE and IDC began to emerge. As mentioned, beginning the rehearsal with TIE’s boundary practice proved beneficial for the actors. I then merged two IDC pillars, context and communication through the discussion of the characters and what this moment was for them in relation to the story. Finally, the actors and I would collaborate to create the actual choreography, which is
where I would utilize the terminology suggested by TIE. Were I to have created the choreography, I would then explain it by using the ingredients, for example; once Vinnie and Ronnie were holding hands, having Vinnie close the distance between his downstage hand and Ronnie’s downstage cheek on a slow count of two, wiping away a tear in a small arch and opening the distance again on another slow count of two. However, if a moment was created by the actors brainstorming and trying different things on their feet, I would reiterate the choreography using the same ingredients. Therefore, regardless of how the choreography came about the terminology was consistent and the stage managers were able to notate the blocking for consistency. This process was not linear, but rather occurred in cycles. Once we discussed the moment and choreographed it, we would then revisit the discussion and decide to either move to the next moment or re-choreograph the moment before.

The piece “Red Coat” had five scripted kisses between the characters John and Mary. However, with the cast and crew agreeing to comply with CDC regulations asking actors to wear face coverings at all times, actual kisses were not possible, so the actors, Director B, and myself had the conversation of what each kiss represented for the characters and how it related to progression of the script. We discussed the character’s motivation behind each kiss, the desired outcome, and the actual outcome for the characters. Once we established the story behind each kiss, I then explored how we could demonstrate that same story without the kiss. The answer came in a myriad of techniques. Unlike “Welcome to the Moon” where there was one isolated moment, “Red Coat” had several that had to build upon one another. Constant physical contact between the two actors proved repetitive and did not convey the story surrounding each moment established by actors, so we found ourselves using the environment to imply intimacy. “Red
Coat” is set outside at night during a full moon. Using the discuss/create/discuss/create format, I therefore choreographed moments where the actors were holding hands looking at the moon or strolling down the sidewalk side by side and allowing the intimacy to stem from those actions, instead of a kiss. Similarly, “Out West” had a scripted kiss between Betsie the saloon girl and the Cowboy, which the actors decided was an invitation for the Cowboy to have sex with her after the duel. With the clear intention of the moment set by the actors, I was then able to choreograph the intimacy in a way that was character driven and honoring the actors input while respecting their boundaries.

During this process, all three directors were generally supportive and open to collaborating with me and the actors. Had they tried to rush the process or change the choreography without the actors’ consent, it would have been my responsibility to advocate for the actors and prioritize their safety. TIE and IDC both suggest that urgency is coercion, and while there is no suggested amount of time to choreograph intimacy, each piece of choreography for Welcome to the Moon took less than an hour. Were the directors to have rushed me or the actors, I would be responsible for stepping in and preventing any coercion. While it is not the responsibility of the intimacy professional to cause confrontation between the director, they should be the voice of concern for the actors.
CHAPTER FOUR: IMPACT

Incorporating intimacy best practices into the rehearsal space allows for actors to assume agency of their boundaries while performing intimate choreography. TIE co-founder Laura Rikard compares actor’s autonomy to a violinist, saying if a violinist were asked to destroy their instrument in the middle of a symphony to achieve a specific sound, the musician would be well within their rights to say no and would not be deemed hard to work with (Pace). Comparatively, if an actor was asked to destroy their “instrument” for a specific moment onstage and they said no, they could be considered difficult to work with. In educational theatre settings, the consequences of being hard to work with not only prevent students from being cast in future projects, but also affect their grade. While working on Welcome to the Moon, I was able to successfully serve as intimacy choreographer, creating moments that protected the actors’ “instrument” while still exhibiting the proper connections between the characters in each piece. I witnessed first-hand the effects the presence of an intimacy choreographer has in the rehearsal room.

Personal Discoveries

At the beginning of the process, I had planned to strictly follow TIE’s approach, using their terminology and methods, but when I began to work with the actors, I discovered that approach was very limiting for me as an intimacy choreographer. I struggled to remember exactly what to say and how to explain a move or concept according to their guidelines. The
provided structure from TIE, while educational, created more barriers than opening. During my first rehearsal with actors, I realized it was unproductive to continue to strive for perfection with TIE’s methodology and began focusing on the key goals of my position: to choreograph the intimacy, to advocate for the actors, to respect the actors and what they brought into the room including their ideas and their boundaries. With these three guiding ideas, I began to adapt the method to one based on communication. I found success through clearly communicating the choreography, collaborating with the actors and openly facilitating conversations throughout the process.

Through UCF policy and practices such as “Button” it was established that the rehearsal room was a safe space and that the actors were always in control throughout the process. Even with this goal, I was aware of the inevitable power dynamics in the room, I considered the question “can a space ever truly be considered ‘safe’?” Is it possible to guarantee an environment where all involved truly feel safe? In response to these questions the debate of “safe space” versus “brave space” has begun to emerge in theatres. Considering the argument that because it is impossible for a theatre to know what their actors or students are bringing into the space from their personal lives, it is then impossible to provide a safe space for everyone without first learning every aspect of their lived experience. The goal then becomes to create a “brave space” -- a space where actors and students feel supported and empowered to be brave within a rehearsal or class; a space that provides a metaphorically soft place for students to land when they make mistakes. As Arao and Clemens state in their chapter of The Art of Effective Facilitation; “by revising our framework to emphasize the need for courage rather than the illusion of safety, we better position ourselves to accomplish our learning goals and more
accurately reflect the nature of genuine dialogue” (Landreman). Theatre is inherently uncomfortable; most shows exist in a point of tension for the characters or in heightened emotional environments. Therefore, it is implausible to ensure actors are comfortable. By prioritizing courage from actors, rather than what we perceive as safety, we allow for creative exploration to operate within various states of discomfort. However, I believe we cannot create a brave space without first providing some sense of safety. During Welcome to the Moon, it would have been unrealistic to assume the actors would automatically feel safe in the rehearsal room and trust me as an intimacy choreographer, therefore allow themselves to be brave during the choreography session. Also considering the fact I was a foreign body in the space as rehearsals had already been underway weeks prior to my involvement, there was an inadvertently shift in the power dynamic of the rehearsal space. As an intimacy practitioner, I have to work to create a space that allows for both safety and bravery by providing clear communication, establishing clear goals and boundaries and allowing the actors to do the same. I also have to stand my ground when challenged and advocate for the actors. During Welcome to the Moon, Directors A and B allowed for this open collaboration and discussion. Director C had a clear vision for the intimacy moments and would choreograph it for the actors, look to me for approval, and involve the actors through closed-ended question with an implied “yes” as the answer. In comparison with the other rehearsals, those with Director C were less collaborative, and therefore the actors were not given the space to explore any sense of bravery. Additionally, from my subjective perspective, the rehearsals lead by Director C had less sense of community and comradery than the others. While I acknowledge this is not a requirement of any theatre creation, it is a generally more positive experience when the rehearsal room is filled with laughter and conversation,
instead of silence, which was the case with Director C. During those rehearsals, I initially tried to insert myself in their process, providing suggestions and attempting to build upon their ideas, but I was met with dismissal. Because Director C was not causing harm to the actors, I did not see the need to fully step in and cause confrontation. Upon reflection, were I to have the situation presented to me again, I would have set up a meeting with the director to address my concerns and problem-solve how to best utilize my position in future rehearsals.

Throughout the rehearsal process, I established the self-care cue “Button” with the actors and would constantly reiterate that it was a tool for the actors to use at any moment, but no actor utilized it. It would be naive to assume it was never needed during the intimacy rehearsals, which presents the question, why was “button” never called? Reflecting on the power dynamic present in the space, I believe the directors and myself did not do enough to disrupt the ever-present power dynamics that exist in educational theatre. We verbally tried to share the power with the actors, and actions like boundary practice enabled the actors to have agency over the rehearsal. However I had limited time with each piece and needed to complete the choreography within one to two rehearsals and the actors were aware of this. So, in addition to the inherent power-dynamics in a rehearsal space there was also the added factor of time. While I know that for Welcome to the Moon I did all I could to provide agency to the actors, more is needed to effectively dismantle the pre-existing dynamics in educational theatre. For example, exemplifying not only verbally but through my actions that the actors held agency in the room, Additionally, having the intimacy choreographer present from the beginning, as early as auditions, establishes them as a constant presence in the space, rather than one who arrives,
choreographs, and leaves. Being there from the beginning allows the actors to gain a rapport with them that is beneficial for building trust and communication.

Feedback from Students

At the conclusion of the rehearsal process, while the show was being performed, the cast received an optional survey with questions regarding the process of working with an intimacy choreographer and me as a practitioner. They had until the following semester to complete it. Of the fifteen actors I worked with 53% completed the survey. The goal of the survey was to receive feedback from the actors’ perspective about the rehearsal process. I asked questions regarding the power dynamics they experienced between actor, director, and intimacy choreographer, as well as questions pertaining to the processes in general and my specific approach. The survey results were almost exclusively positive, the only negative being reflection the actors had for themselves and not about my work. While it is amazing to know the actors only had good things to say about the process, it is unrealistic to think there were no moments of tension or conflict. Only 25% of those surveyed said they had worked with an intimacy choreographer prior to Welcome to the Moon, meaning that many of the actors had no prior experience with an intimacy professional. The lack of constructive feedback is less a reflection on my work in the rehearsal space, but rather evidence that working with an intimacy choreographer is such a foreign concept that the actors lacked the knowledge and vocabulary to critique or respond to my work.

When surveyed, 100% of actors said the presence of an intimacy choreographer was comforting/helpful in the rehearsal space. When asked to expand two students responded:
“I felt very comfortable throughout the entire process. The work was treated as actions that we had to play, rather than emotions we had to feel which left a lot for us to play around with while still acknowledging boundaries.”

“I really enjoyed being asked consistently how I felt about each part of the choreographing process. It was comforting to know that it wasn’t a one-time question and if I felt uncomfortable after I would just have to deal with it. I also appreciate being told to go over my fences and gates with my scene partner prior to starting. I was cast as an understudy and therefore was crazy nervous about if I would even get a say in the intimacy choreography but [Morgan] made me feel extremely welcome especially with letting me go through the choreography and making sure everything worked…”

Similarly, every student surveyed reported they were happy and comfortable with the final product of their scene, and when asked what they would have changed they responded with the CDC guidelines due to the pandemic, they wished they could perform without masks. An open-ended question asked the students to discuss the power dynamics they experienced in the rehearsal space during the intimacy choreography, one student noted it was “a healthy environment.” Some additional quotes were:

“Everyone’s opinion was respected. Since intimacy can be perceived differently by everyone it was good to have a lot of voices and opinions in the room, and to have created a space where people feel comfortable voicing those opinions”

“I felt the space was very positive especially since everyone else in the scene who was not involved with the intimacy was excised from the room. I felt like that really helped me to be more comfortable and not feel guarded.”

When asked to reflect on the effectiveness of the boundary practice and “Button” the actors said:

“Setting the boundaries was the easiest way to “break the ice” with a scene partner and immediately know what choices you can and can’t make in the scene.”
“[Explaining what they felt the agency to use “Button”] Because it was very clear that everyone was there to support each other, and that with work like this we all need to be happy with our level of comfort.”

“I think it is a personal block I have to get over. It was nothing that [Morgan] did. I, myself, have to learn to be comfortable and know my right to call “button” if needed.”

Finally, when asked to reflect on their perception about the efficacy of my approach, they said:

“[Morgan] stayed honest to the character we were playing and immediately took the character’s thoughts we just introduced into the actual movement she blocked.”

“She asked questions and gave us reassurance that we are allowed to feel how we feel, whether we were comfortable or un comfortable”

“Really going step by step and making sure each step was clear before moving on to the next.”

“[Morgan] was fun, communicative, comfortable and constantly making sure we were okay.”

While it is beneficial to know the actors I worked with had a positive experience throughout the rehearsal process, the intention of the survey was to hear not only the successes, but also the challenges that manifested in the rehearsal room. Again, the lack of negative feedback exemplifies that actors are so new to working with an intimacy professional that they had no comparable experience and therefore they could not critically analyze the process. Were I to resend the survey, I would include questions that specifically ask the actors to reflect on a negative moment or situation from rehearsal if they experienced one. This would allow me to unpack these moments and learn in my own practice, but also propel the actors to truly examine the process and respond accordingly.
CHAPTER FIVE: MOVING FORWARD

With the cultural shift that preceded the start of the pandemic, there is a global awareness of existing structures that are not as effective as they once were perceived to have been. There is a call for better methodology in the theatre classroom and rehearsal space that centers the student and their well-being and growth over their success or the success of a production. There is no need for the director or teacher to abuse their power over students to accomplish a certain moment onstage or in rehearsal. There are too many emerging methods and trainings available for teachers to ask a student to cross an emotional boundary in order to understand the suffering of their character or for two students to be left on their own to figure out a sexually charged moment within a play. However, teachers are responsible for so much in their jobs, with majority working 50 hours a week and 25% of teachers working 60 hours or more (Morrison), so expecting them to extensively train in intimacy to then apply it into their classroom is unrealistic. Through a basic knowledge of theatrical intimacy best practices and the goal of protecting students and their mental, emotional, and physical boundaries educational theatre practitioners can expand their pedagogy towards a consent-based practice in rehearsal spaces and classroom. This chapter is to propose small modifications to a teacher or director’s pedagogical approach that are accessible for all educators. The chapter also provides introductory activities that can begin the conversation of consent and boundaries with students and teachers in the classroom.

Incorporating Intimacy Practices in Educational Theatre

While it may seem a daunting feat to incorporate intimacy best practices into the classroom and rehearsal spaces of educational theatre, any improvement, no matter how
inconsequential, towards creating a consent-based classroom, is a beneficial for the students and facilitators. TIE is known for saying “better is better.” As I found through Welcome to the Moon, immediate perfection as an intimacy professional is unrealistic and unattainable. Any efforts towards acknowledging the existing power dynamics in the room and striving for a consent-based practice is beneficial to not only production being worked on, but the industry overall. The same ideology can be applied to an educational theatre setting. Teachers are hesitant to adopt any intimacy best practices for a myriad of reasons: one being the fear of the unknown, thinking that this new training will force them to re-imagine their entire curriculum, or because they feel unqualified to call themselves and intimacy director. However, TIE suggests, and I agree, a teacher/director does not have to have extensive knowledge or training in theatrical intimacy best practices to honor a student’s boundary or to allow for open communication in a rehearsal space.

It is suggested that there is no clear definition of “student agency.” In her research as a Center for Innovation of Education Fellow Jennifer Davis Poon suggests there are four components to consider: setting advantageous goals, initiating action towards those goals, reflect and revise, and internalize self-efficacy (Davis). While these components were created for a standard classroom, their principles can be applied to a rehearsal space while tackling intimate moments with young actors. Before choreographing any intimate moment, together, the teacher/director and students should set a goal for the scene, considering questions like “what do we want this scene to accomplish?” or “what storytelling elements are at play here?” From there action can be taken towards achieving the already established goals. At this step, the intimacy choreographer would be necessary, but in most public school it would not be possible to hire one. In this event, it is the responsibility of the teacher/director to fill the role. Based on the
goals the students created, the teacher/director would create choreography that met the goals and supported the scene. The third step, to reflect and revise, would be the actual rehearsal process with the students and the teacher/director as the intimacy choreographer, reflecting on the actor’s boundaries and the choreography and then revising their methodology. The final component, internalizing self-efficacy specifically applies to growth students experience when their grades improve. When considering “self-efficacy” from a young actor’s standpoint, it could refer to the actor’s ability to analyze and articulate their needs and boundaries or their positive contribution to the rehearsal process. Ultimately it will be for the student to decide, but it is the role of the director and intimacy choreographer to consistently and effectively establish the first three components of “student agency,” so that the student is then empowered to have that self-efficacy realization.

The drama educator will not always find themselves producing a show with young actors that has intimate moments; however, intimacy best practices can be applied in every aspect of educational theatre. Teaching artists facilitating a creative dramatics course or improv class can utilize techniques suggested by TIE and IDC. The introduction of “button” can be utilized for students feeling overstimulated or overwhelmed by an activity or subject matter. It can also be used as a pausing mechanism for students who need assistance before continuing in the class. This allows the students to have a resource in the moment and throughout the class to advocate for themselves. Within a lesson, the teaching artist should set an objective either independently or with the students for the class and then provide options for how the students can achieve this goal, openly communicating and prioritizing the needs of the individual over the activity itself. Additionally, the avoidance of instructional touch and the incorporation of open
ended questions is crucial for all teachers but especially in the kinesthetic field of the performing arts. Instructional touch refers to any form of physical contact between student and teacher with the goal of helping the student. This could be adjusting a student’s shoulders to have them face a specific direction, moving a student’s hips for a dance pose, or demonstrating a romantic gesture on a student so their scene partner understands the director’s vision. With the best intentions and occasional benefits, the use of instructional touch by even the most well-meaning of teachers is an abuse of that teacher’s legitimate power in the space, especially when working with minors, and can have unknown effects on the students. Even if a teacher were to ask for consent and the student were to give it, it would be unknown if the student agreed because they truly consented or because they did not want to say “no” to their teacher. While there is no negative connotation to a teacher moving a student’s arm into a specific pose, the students may have a boundary or trauma associated with their arms and may be triggered by the touch. Should a teacher or director feel the need to utilize instruction touch in the classroom or rehearsal, they should consider why. Why must I touch this student in this moment? What do I hope to accomplish? Alternative methods to achieve similar outcomes may be for the teacher to demonstrate by showing on their own body, by partnering with another adult in the space, or by using a model like an articulated joint doll used in art.

When a teacher utilizes instructional touch in rehearsal, the line of reality and character are crossed: the teacher/director is demonstrating the move on the actor, who now has to replicate the move in character. The separation of character and self are blurred or destroyed. While instructional touch is common in dance and occasionally in stage combat, both IDC and TIE’s methodology refrain from using actors to demonstrate any choreography. At the
beginning of my theatrical intimacy journey, prior to any official training, I would use instructional touch accompanied by an implied “yes” question of consent with the intention of providing student agency. With training from both TIE and IDC, I am reflecting on the true necessity of each time I touched a student to demonstrate a moment of choreography and the effect it had on the students involved. In my practice, I have eliminated touching students by partnering with another adult in the space, usually either the assistant director or the director. With the two of us demonstrating the desired move or pose, the students are able to copy us and create the stage picture. If there is not another adult in the space, I simply communicate with the students, asking them to move their hand a little to the left or to adjust their legs to a specific stance. I also may demonstrate with an invisible scene partner and have the students copy my movement.

Since removing instructional touch from my practice, I find it very feasible to find other means to articulate choreography and I am left to consider the challenges of not using instructional touch—which only pertain to me, and the benefits—which are for both the students and myself. Connecting this to the main goal of the intimacy practitioner, to advocate and protect the actors, the abuse of power is evident when a teacher/director touches a student, regardless of their intention, causing for a shift in approach when staging or teaching. On my journey as an artist, I have come to a conclusion that instructional touch is never necessary. I do acknowledge and respect there are other schools of thought on this subject but urge other practitioners to recognize this subject is complicated by existing power dynamics and ethics.

Through adjusting their approach to instruction by incorporating intimacy best practices, teachers can provide students agency in the classroom and body autonomy during instruction that
promotes self-advocacy and vulnerability while protecting student mental, emotional, and physical boundaries. Since integrating these practices into my own practice, I have found the students in my classes are more willing to participate in dialogues and have more confidence when to step out of their comfort zones for activities.

Activating Intimacy Best Practices in the Classroom

Even with training, the practitioner is responsible for adapting their approach in facilitation to establish brave spaces that encourage student agency. However, there are many simple activities that can be incorporated into any lesson to introduce and explore consent, boundaries, and advocacy. This section will explore two activities, one focused on consent and one on boundaries, and unpack how they can be adapted to all age ranges.

The first activity, known as the “Yes Game” (also known as “Spot?”), explores the concept of saying “yes” and “no” and can double as a name reinforcement game. Recommended for students in middle and high school, to begin, the teacher will invite the students to gather in a circle (or whatever shape is accessible for the space with the goal for all students to see everyone). Either someone volunteers or the teacher then selects one student to begin. This student (Student A) points to another student (Student B) in the circle and says their name. The Student B can either respond with “yes” or “no.” If they respond with “yes,” Student A who pointed begins to move towards them with the intention of taking their spot in the circle. If they respond with “no,” Student A must then point to another student, say their name and wait for a response. If that student also responds “no,” then Student A must continue pointing and naming until they receive a “yes.” If Student B response with a “yes,” then they name become the next
to point and name students, again waiting for a “yes” before they begin moving to take the spot of the student who said “yes.”

Challenges arise when Student A received a “yes” from Student B begins moving to take their spot, but Student B has yet to begin moving towards a new spot because they keep receiving “no.” Another challenge is the students remembering to receive the verbal “yes” before moving across the circle. To modify the game for elementary students, instead of waiting to receive a “yes” before beginning to move, have Student A point and say a name until they receive a “yes,” then the two students can simply switch places in the circle. The game will continue with the student whose name was most recently called.

After playing the game, teachers should facilitate a discussion with the students exploring questions like, “what did it feel like to respond “yes”? how about “no?” and “how did it feel to receive a “yes” or “no” from your classmates?” The class can also explore what is felt like to be the second person in a row to say “no,” or the third or fourth, and if they felt pressure to respond “yes” at a certain point and why. After discussing these questions, the teacher can shift the conversation to the concept of consent, explaining how the “yes” response in the game is explicit consent. The teacher can then unpack how consent is applicable to their students depending on age. Teachers of elementary students may wish to connect consent to playing together or sharing their toys. Middle and high school teachers may connect it to taking pictures and sharing them on social media. All teachers should also discuss how they plan to incorporate consent in their own practice with their students.

The second activity, called “May I Touch,” explores boundaries and can easily be played by all ages. This activity can be done in pairs, small groups, or as an entire class. In their pairing
one student, Student A asks Student B, “may I…” and can fill in the blank with whatever they like. This could be “may I give you a high five?” , “may I try on your jacket?”, or “may I play with your glasses?” I recommend establishing rules for the types of question the students should ask to avoid any inappropriate requests. Student B can then either respond “yes,” in which Student A may then perform the action, “no” where Student A does not, or “No but…” where Student B provides an alternative action which Student A can choose to do or not. An exchange may look like, Student A--“May I try on your jacket?” Student B--“No, but you can untie my shoes.” Student A may now choose to untie the shoe, or not. In a pair the students can go back and forth as long as the teacher decides or can continue to find new partners. To play as an entire class the students will move around the space at random until signaled. This signal could be when a song is paused, when the teacher says “now,” or any other indicator established by the group. When signaled, the students will find someone near them and become a group of two. After they have performed their exchanges, the students resume their movement around the room. For some classes, especially elementary students, teachers may choose to have the students carry a stuffed animal or toy with them and the “may I…” requests are directed at the toy, like “may I hug your teddy bear?” or “may I trade toys?”

After playing the game, teachers should facilitate a conversation similar to the previous activity, exploring what it felt like for the students to ask to perform actions with their classmates, and what it felt like to have the agency to accept or decline. Teachers can ask questions like “Did you feel pressured to accept or decline the requests? Why do you think that is?” and “How did it feel to receive a “No, but..” response?” Once the class has discussed the activity itself, the teacher can shift the conversation to the idea of boundaries, making
observations from the class’ response during the discussion. They can explore how boundaries change depending on who they are with or what the request is. The teacher can also explore the boundaries created for the class or by the school.

Both of these activities are crafted specifically for the purpose of exploring consent and boundaries. However teachers can adapt activities and games they already do in their classroom. Adding open-ended questions or allowing space for “no” to be a valid answer are minor changes teachers can incorporate into their daily practice to begin shifting their pedagogy to be a consent-based practice influenced by intimacy best practices without having to undergo extensive training. With the goal of advocating for the students, teacher can adapt their daily practice to honor student’s consent, respect boundaries, and provide brave spaces of exploration.
CONCLUSION

Current industry best practices are being gate-kept somewhat by leading organizations. As I mentioned before, IDC has almost no public information on their methodology and TIE has the published book that serves as an introduction to the work. Understandably, they encourage those interested to enroll in their workshops and classes; however, this severely limits who is able to access the knowledge. As I mentioned with my survey, students perusing a degree in theatre have little to no experience of the work, and most drama educators are similarly unfamiliar with the principles of intimacy choreography. There is a clear gap that needs to be bridged between the two spheres of professional intimacy direction and educational theatre.

While the field of theatrical intimacy is still considerably, in its roughly six years of existence it has permeated beyond professional film and theatre to higher educational institutions, with an ideal goal being lower levels of education and community theatres. As explored in Chapter Five, simple activities can be used to explore intimacy best practices in the classroom with students, unpacking concepts such as consent and boundaries. As the field of intimacy evolves, there will be more points of intersectionality between it and education, so the question becomes: how can we continue to evolve the practice to include all levels education, not just collegiate, and how can we support teachers in adapting these practices? Ideally, organizations like TIE and IDC would begin modifying their materials for K-12 teachers. It is also possible for teachers to enroll in intimacy workshops and trainings. Rather than placing the responsibility on the two sides, to find ways of coexisting, there should be a new category of practitioners, similar to myself, who work in both intimacy and education and begin to mold the two fields together. Practitioners working with youth in theatre who work towards a consent-
based practice can serve as resources for teachers and intimacy professionals alike. This may manifest into an organization or a specific methodology but may also limit the possibilities of what the work could become. Furthering the field should be explored by conversations and exploration, by learning through practice and sharing the findings with others. An open dialogue between practitioners about discoveries and failures in the rehearsal and classroom prevents the limitations of prescribing a methodology, but allows techniques and practices to be shared beyond what is currently accessible.

Based on the student feedback from the *Welcome to the Moon* survey, the positive impact of a consent-based practice in an educational rehearsal setting is clear. Through my own practice I analyzed and applied best practices as proposed by leading industry organizations and synthesized their methodologies into a hybrid method based in communication, collaboration, and consent. With those key goals at the center of any educational theatre pedagogy, it is possible to incorporate intimacy practices and techniques into any rehearsal space or classroom regardless of the experience level of the educator.
APPENDIX A: SURVEY EXEMPTION
EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

February 1, 2022

Dear Morgan Cobb:

On 2/1/2022, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>The Effects of Intimacy Choreography Best Practices in Educational Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>Morgan Cobb</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
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<td>Funding:</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>Grant ID:</td>
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| Documents Reviewed: | • Cobb-HRP-251- FORM - Faculty Advisor Scientific-Scholarly Review fillable form.pdf, Category: Faculty Research Approval;  
                  • IRB Cobb 3800 HRP-254-FORM Explanation of Research 2.1.22.pdf, Category: Consent Form;  
                  • IRB Cobb 3800 HRP-255-FORM - Request for Exemption 2.1.22.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;  
                  • UPDATE Cobb Research Survey 2.1.22.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;  
                  • UPDATED IRB Cobb 3800 Recruitment Materials 1.24.22 (1).docx, Category: Recruitment Materials; |

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

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Kamille Birkbeck
Designated Reviewer
APPENDIX B: SURVEY
Intimacy Choreography Feedback

1. I have been in a theatrical scene with intimacy prior to being cast in "Welcome to the Moon"
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure

2. I have worked with an intimacy choreographer prior to "Welcome to the Moon"
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure

3. I had heard the term "intimacy choreographer" prior to being cast in "Welcome to the Moon"
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure

4. I found the presence of an intimacy choreographer comforting/helpful in the rehearsal space.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure

5. Overall, I'd rate my experience with Morgan (intimacy choreographer) out of 10. (1 being poor, 10 being great)
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
   5.a Please explain your rating.

6. I am HAPPY with the final product created for my scene(s).
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

7. I am COMFORTABLE with the final product created for my scene(s).
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neutral
d. Disagree  
e. Strongly Disagree

8. If I were to change anything about the final product of my scene(s) it would be...

9. Please discuss the power dynamics you felt in the rehearsal space during the intimacy choreography rehearsals. Was it positive/negative/neutral?

10. I truly felt I had the agency to call "button" or give my opinion/feedback in the rehearsal room while choreographing the intimacy.
   a. Strongly Agree  
b. Agree  
c. Neutral  
d. Disagree  
e. Strongly Disagree

10a. Please explain your above answer. What about the process made you feel that way?

11. I found that boundary practice with my scene partner was helpful and/or comforting during intimacy rehearsals.
   a. Strongly Agree  
b. Agree  
c. Neutral  
d. Disagree  
e. Strongly Disagree

11a. Please Explain your above answer.

12. What about Morgan's approach/style/blocking worked for me as an actor?

13. What about Morgan's approach/style/blocking did not work for me as an actor?

14. Any addition feedback/thoughts?
LIST OF REFERENCES


Black, Alexis, et al. “Foundation of Intimacy: Level 1”, March-April 2022, Intimacy Directors and Coordinators


Hughes, Colleen and Rawling, Cara. “Consent for the K-12 Classroom,” May-June 2021, Intimacy Directors and Coordinators


Noble, Alex. “Working with Underage Performers: Methods for Approaching Intimacy with Minors,” 6 April, 2021, Intimacy Directors and Choreographers


Pace, Chelsea and Rikard, Laura. “Working with Minors,” 20 March, 2021, Theatrical Intimacy Education


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