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EXPLORING BEST PRACTICES OF TEACHING THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE TO
YOUTH

by

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B.F.A. Oklahoma City University, 2016

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2022

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ABSTRACT

What does it look like to have youth embody activism through theatre, and how do they take what they learned through theatre and implement it in their everyday lives? Many enter the field of Theatre for Young Audiences because they believe young people (that is, youth that are 18 and younger) have the power to change the world. While the Theatre for Young Audiences field often produces plays that teach young people about the power of change, it is also important to consider how we center and amplify youth voices in the conversations about societal change.

As a teaching artist and director of youth theatre, I have led two projects meant to teach young people about how they can create social change and to give them the tools to hone their own activist voices. In the first project, I directed *Guns in Dragonland*, a ten-minute play written by a youth playwright, with youth actors, that addressed gun violence; in the second project, I taught playwriting in school residencies to high school drama students with the intention of the students producing ten-minute plays about social change. This thesis explores these two projects compared to similar programs that explore gender and racial injustice through theatre with young people. I then ask the following questions: How much focus should be given to the process and the product? What is the role of the adult in a space of theatre for social change? What is the scope of theatre for social change that I am teaching, and how do I navigate student wellness throughout the process? This thesis will gather the best practices for teaching artist pedagogy as it applies to creating theatre for social change with young people.

Dedicated to my momma, who is my biggest fan and the best woman I know.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my cohort, Joni, Ximena, Morgan, Nathan, and Sage, for pushing through the weirdest three years a person could be in grad school with me.

Thank you to my committee, Elizabeth Brendel Horn, Emily Freeman, and Chloe Raë Edmonson, for being amazing role models and constantly inspiring me to be the best teaching artist I can be.

Thank you to Jennifer Adams-Carrasquillo and the Orlando Repertory Theatre for providing the opportunities to grow in my theatre for social change work.

Thank you to my mom, for always asking the exact questions I needed to figure this thesis out, and for the never-ending support.

Thank you to Courtney and Ali, for the much-needed mental breaks and game nights.

And thank you to Quigley, for providing the serotonin and the sunlight.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Growing Up with Theatre and Social Change

To this day, two aspects of my youth most clearly influence my aspirations as a Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) practitioner: one, the town I grew up in; and two, the theatre I engaged in as a young person. I grew up in Ardmore, Oklahoma, a location that is part of what is colloquially known as the “Bible Belt.” There’s a church of a different denomination on every other street. There is an actual set of railroad tracks that once divided the part of town inhabited by white residents from the part inhabited by black residents, and one of the two schools was founded as a school intended to stay segregated when the other was integrated. Politics were not discussed because it was assumed everyone believed the same thing, and children definitely had no place in political discussions.

My theatre, The Brass Ring, felt like a safe haven. It was the only theatrical outlet for young people for over a hundred miles, north or south. At the beginning, it was just a refuge for fun and creativity. Over time, it became a place for youth of color and for queer and questioning youth. Even as it was a place for us to grow as people, where we frequently listened to the most popular Broadway musicals that promoted diversity, the shows we performed rarely took risks. Instead of making a commentary on the society we lived in, our shows were beloved and familiar, like *Seussical*, *High School Musical*, and *Footloose*. The year that we instead decided to perform *RENT* - a show about young adults in New York City in the 1980s, with a cast of characters that are diverse in color (which we did not have the cast for), LGBTQ, and suffering from HIV/AIDS – the audiences resisted supporting the production, despite their love for our program. Getting to play a woman who loved women the same year that I discovered I was

bisexual was an incredibly impactful experience. Realizing how sparse our audience was in comparison to previous shows was equally impactful. I won't forget how even some of my closest friends felt unable to perform because they were afraid to introduce their family to *RENT*. Over the next two summers, we recovered with the audience-friendly shows *Legally Blonde The Musical* and *Godspell*. The stark difference with attendance and positive feedback sparked a mission in my heart. I loved *Godspell*, and I loved *Legally Blonde*, but performing in *RENT* inspired me as a human who wanted to see change in her community. The ability to explore the history of marginalized communities and feel myself represented on stage is something every youth performer deserves, whether they live in New York City or southern Oklahoma.

As I began my undergraduate degree, I sought out the skills and opportunities to be able to bring theatre to smaller communities. And not just theatre, but diverse theatre. Theatre that teaches young people about the world around us, the ups and the downs, and how we can have empathy and compassion for those different from us. Through a local children's theatre, I led a grant-funded program that brought theatrical residencies to Title I (low-income family) schools. In my first job after college, I got to partake in a similar program at a theatre in Connecticut. I remember how excited students were to explore their school subjects through action and dialogue, which placed them in the shoes of different characters and enriched their knowledge of the subject in ways they hadn't previously experienced. My second job did not have opportunities that brought theatre to marginalized students, a topic of which I was and am passionate; then, I lived in one of the wealthier cities in Kentucky, where the students I worked with had significantly more privilege. They didn't need anyone to bring them access—they found access to theatre through their guardians. However, I found that regardless of their background, these students had strong opinions about the state of society both in their city and in

the entire nation. This was one of the first times I worked closely enough with a specific group of teenagers that I heard their perspectives on social issues.

My contract for that theatre was relatively short, only a school year, and so when I was asked to create a lesson plan that focused on societal change for a job application, I reached out to my students. One student instantly recommended I write a lesson plan on the issue of the unhoused population in Kentucky. Prior to that point, I had been completely unaware of how rampant that particular issue was in that community, but the student, a teenager, knew. She told me all about the way they are treated and the lack of access they have to resources, and together, we brainstormed what an in-school residency where students combated the treatment of those who are unhoused might look like. This was exactly what I needed to submit for the job application, but I began to wonder: if the students are more knowledgeable about the cultural issues in their area, what is it that I, the teaching artist, bring to the table in such a residency or program? What do I need to provide for students to use theatre to explore a topic they are already passionate about?

Thesis Overview

Based on my experience with these students, I believe that theatre serves as an excellent outlet for young people to explore social change in their communities, especially when creating their own pieces. This thesis reflects on two projects I led involving theatre for social change with youth during my graduate studies at the University of Central Florida, then compares those projects to similar programs by published scholars in the Theatre for Young Audiences field to uncover what the best practices of creating theatre for social change with young people could be.

In each chapter, I ask essential questions about the development of this programming to guide the comparisons between myself and scholars.

In Chapter Two, I examine the value of the process of making theatre for social change versus the product that is then shown to audiences. I question whether my focus, as the facilitator, should be placed more on the process, which can more deeply enrich the participants' knowledge, or creating a refined product, so that the audience is more impacted and feels compelled to participate in social change. Chapter Three explores the role and responsibilities of the adult when creating a program for theatre for social change for youth. I question how much time a facilitator should spend instructing the students, how often the student should be left to create the theatre piece on their own, and how an adult facilitator's presence and feedback can impact a participant's experience. I then consider how to best facilitate conversations of social change with youth. Chapter Four considers the crossroads between exploring theatre for social change and mental wellbeing. I explore how to protect participants from trauma while also encouraging them towards activism in their work. In Chapter Five I conclude this paper by compiling the best practices of creating theatre for social change with youth and sharing how I hope outcome of this research will be incorporated into the field of Theatre for Young Audiences.

Before I ask these questions, I will define the term "theatre for social change" and introduce the projects that I led involving theatre for social change with youth and the projects of fellow practitioners in the field that I will analyze.

Defining Theatre for Social Change

Theatre for social change is a genre of theatre intended to explore the oppressive aspects of society and bring about discussion in a community. The methods for creating and performing this type of theatre vary, as there are multiple ways for theatre for social change to serve a purpose.

One of the most identifiable forms of theatre for social change is Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. The teachings behind Theatre of the Oppressed are inspired heavily by Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In his book of the same name, Freire analyzes the power structures that are in place when teaching students who are oppressed and challenges models of education that only distribute knowledge to students (Freire 48). Freire instead argues that the oppressed should have agency in their own learning and be allowed to collaborate alongside their teachers (Freire 69). Using Freire's pedagogy, Boal coined Theatre of the Oppressed, a form of theatre that engages audiences in the overcoming of their own oppressions (Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed 121). As the artistic director of the Arena Theatre in Brazil during a time of military dictatorship, Boal created theatre pieces and exercises meant to be performed in communities rather than on a traditional stage. In forum theatre, these pieces demonstrated a scene of oppression to which the audience could then suggest alternative action. The scenes were short and facilitated by a person titled the "Joker," who acted as the in-between for the actors and the audience. Boal called the audience "spect-actors" because he believed everyone, in some way, was a participant. For example, in another form of Theatre of the Oppressed called invisible theatre, where the audience does not know they are witnessing a piece of theatre, one is part of the scene whether they stand up against oppression or not because by allowing the scene to happen, their actions enable the oppression. To a victim of oppression, a bystander's silence

speaks just as loudly as words. Boal also created exercises meant for actors and non-actors alike that explore mental and physical connection to one's self and others, power dynamics, and personal desires for accomplishment. Boal's work has inspired many theatre practitioners, including those who will be analyzed in this thesis.

Theatre has also been used in more conventional forms to address issues of society. *The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Company, an example of verbatim theatre (theatre that uses dialogue quotes directly from interviews) is one that explores the aftereffects of the brutal hate crime against Matthew Shepard, a gay young adult, in 1998 and how the community of Laramie, Wyoming reacted. Another example, *Ruined* by Lynn Nottage, tackles the issue of sex worker trafficking in the Republic of the Congo. There may be some contention of whether these plays fall under the genre of theatre for social change because many conflate theatre for social change with Theatre of the Oppressed. Even if a play is not directly inspired by Theatre of the Oppressed, if a playwright wrote the play with the intention of starting a dialogue within a community about a social justice issue, then the play is therefore theatre for social change.

Organizations that devise theatre often fall into balance between Boal's theatre and conventional theatre. Devising is the process of collaboratively creating a piece, often through physical or creative writing exercises. Rather than rehearse a script that already exists, an ensemble will brainstorm and improvise together to explore story ideas. *The Laramie Project* is an example of devised theatre (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams, *Moment Work: Tectonic Theater Project's Process of Devising Theater*). Using Boal's exercises to create a production speaks to both the actor's and the audience's exploration of social change. This thesis will explore devising alongside playwriting methods for creating theatre for social change.

In crafting her notion of “theatre for youth: third space,” Professor Stephani Etheridge Woodson debates whether the nature of the work with youth explored in this thesis is actually theatre for social change. Etheridge Woodson seeks to create a youth-centered version of Cultural Community Development (CCD). CCD, first designed by Arlene Goldbard, has a “strong activist and social justice bent” (Etheridge Woodson 43). Etheridge Woodson argues that, while giving youth a platform in which to speak is a social stance in and of itself, the work she is doing is not teaching them theatre for social change. She writes: “I am not training young people for Boal’s revolution, but rather to engage as full and equal citizens within a democratic society in the present” (44). Etheridge Woodson expresses discomfort with applying her own political stances or the “adult voice” to the space (44). I share this discomfort because I want my own students to form their own political opinions through critical thinking rather than didacticism, but I do not think a facilitator’s lack of sharing prevents us from creating theatre for social change. How, in a world that has limited youth voices for so long, is engaging as full and equal citizens *not* revolutionary? It is especially revolutionary with Generation Z already being proactive with their desires and attitudes towards change. For example, noted youth environmental activist Greta Thunberg crossed the Atlantic in a carbon-neutral boat to make a statement as she attended a climate change summit (Baggs). Survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school shooting organized the March for Our Lives, a movement that continues to promote “civic engagement, education, and direct action by youth to eliminate the epidemic of gun violence” (Mission & Story). The TikTok user channel @GenZForChange collects and distributes political news for fellow teenagers who need sources to easily access (@GenZForChange). Young people are revolutionizing how we discuss societal needs and how we will make necessary changes.

So: is it more important to gatekeep the notion of theatre for social change to specifically the work practiced by Boal and his antecedents or work generated by adult practitioners, or to use “theatre for social change” as a broader term so that theatre practitioners of all experience levels have a category in which to refer to the whole scope of theatre that focuses on social justice topics? I have witnessed theatre practitioners utilize both definitions, and I prefer to use it as an umbrella term, because I value inclusivity as a part of social change work. If we are to make social change, we need to anticipate that our needs, topics, and methods will change along with us.

Guns in Dragonland

All of these questions led me to pursue a graduate degree in Theatre for Young Audiences and shaped my studies and projects. In the Fall of 2020, I was asked to direct a ten-minute play at Orlando Repertory Theatre (Orlando REP) for #ENOUGH, a sponsored project of the non-profit arts service organization Fractured Atlas that aimed to gather scripts from middle school and high school playwrights that focused on the impact gun violence has on American society.

I was assigned to the play *Guns in Dragonland*, which tells the story of Lilah, an elementary school child at recess, and her imaginary friend Toucan. Lilah wants to achieve her dragon wings just like Toucan, so she embarks on a quest to perform a “valiant action.” In the end, her quest leads her back into school, where a “Death Dragon” (in reality, an armed intruder) finds her and shoots her. This play was written by high schooler Eislinn Gracen, who not only spoke about her opinion on gun violence and accessibility in her piece, but also used her

platform along with six other winners to publicly discuss the state of gun violence in America and how they hope to make change using theatre as a tool.

The casting call for *Guns in Dragonland* sought out online submissions from Orlando teenagers, and the two actors I cast, Caroline and Hannah, were both twelve years old. We rehearsed for three hours per rehearsal, three evenings a week, for three weeks. Beyond the script and the casting of young actors, the project continued to center the teen voice: we interviewed Caroline and Hannah about why they believed the need for the #ENOUGH project existed at the very beginning of the rehearsal process, and that interview aired as part of the final presentation of all chosen plays. I was delighted to see teenagers speak their minds with eloquence on a topic that is so politically volatile where they live.

For the most part, the rehearsal process for *Guns in Dragonland* resembled other plays I have directed previously. The outline for this rehearsal process can be viewed in Appendix A. Due to the nature of the play, however, I needed to consider how to create a polished, impactful piece while also keeping my actors' mental well-being in mind. I wanted my actors to feel comfortable in the rehearsal room and to feel proud of the work they produced. I also wanted to create a piece that inspired both my actors and the audience to take action regarding gun violence issues. In this thesis, I explore the choices that I made as a director and facilitator to accomplish these goals and question which of those choices could become best practices for future facilitators.

#ENOUGH Residency

I knew my time with the #ENOUGH Project wasn't over yet. When the nationwide project leaders chose theatres to produce their plays for 2020, they also required the theatres to

have some sort of educational component accompany their showing. This could look like a talkback or a workshop. After some deliberation, Orlando REP and I decided I would write the lesson plan for an in-school residency where I would teach high schoolers in public school drama classes of varying sizes and grades how to write a ten-minute play for social change. The residency took place over five sessions in the spring of 2021, with one hour per session, and we met twice a week. One of the objectives was to introduce the #ENOUGH project and the opportunity to submit for the as-of-yet-unannounced next cycle. However, I did not limit students to writing about gun violence; they could choose to write about any social issue they wanted. I led this residency with three different schools, editing the lesson plans after they occurred the first time so they could be strengthened in the second round. For this curriculum, I drew on my own prior knowledge of playwriting and plot structure. I also utilized Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process, which prioritizes agency for an artist or creator as they share their work in progress (Lerman and Borstel 10). Lerman's process first asks responders to share neutral statements of what they observed in an artistic piece, then allows the artist to lead the conversation around what they would like to improve in their piece, then finally allows responders to share their opinions.

As well-intended as I was, five days of less than an hour of class time never felt like enough for the residency. There was always more that I wanted to cover. I had discussed how theatre was used for social change, but I did not have the time to give as much context as I would have liked of the history of theatre for social change. I could only introduce a few methods of structuring a plot or exploring dialogue, instead of enriching students with multiple strategies from which they could choose. I never got to read their finished plays; I never got to give them

professional feedback. Despite my good intentions as a facilitator, I did not truly feel like I got to hear the voices of young people, speaking out for change.

This thesis compares my experiences with similar programs that create theatre for social change with youth that were published by scholars in the Theatre for Young Audiences field. I learn from the trials and successes of these scholars, who have been producing this work for years. These scholars are vital to developing the best practices of creating theatre for social change with youth.

Critical Texts

As I explored the research that exists for theatre for social change with youth, I encountered two texts that spoke to the questions I had already formulated through my work with *Guns in Dragonland* and #ENOUGH. The first book I draw from is *Devising Critically Engaged Theatre with Youth: The Performing Justice Project* by Megan Alrutz and Lynn Hoare. Together, they write about their work with the Performing Justice Project, which is a recurring short-term residency that invites high-school aged young people to collaborate across 12-15 sessions to create a work of theatre for social change. The focus of the residency is to explore injustice specifically as it pertains to race and gender. Over the course of those 12-15 sessions, Alrutz and Hoare (or other teaching artists) first build ensemble, then prompt their participants to write about their experiences with injustice, then turn those pieces of writing into pieces of theatre, then rehearse the play for performance. The Performing Justice Project plays are typically several short pieces connected through a central theme. Alrutz and Hoare reflect on how the Performing Justice Project has grown and changed over more than ten years and even offer ideas to facilitators interested in creating their own theatre for social change projects with

youth. I saw the experiences I'd had in my work reflected in this text, and encountered new, challenging ideas for what else I could be as a theatre for social change facilitator.

In *Girls, Performance, and Activism*, applied theatre professor Dana Edell recalls her experiences with viBe Theatre Experience, which she co-founded in 2002, and SPARK Movement, which she began as executive director in 2012. Both viBe and SPARK Movement are organizations that offer opportunities for teenage girls to pair creative arts with activism. In comparing and contrasting her experience with two different organizations, Edell articulates the challenges she faced and how those challenges changed her perspective as a facilitator, which I sought to explore deeply in my research. As a personal tenet of her work, Edell states, "I wanted to incorporate more performance into activism and more activism into performance" (11). Edell's facilitation focuses primarily on performance art where participants would collaboratively create their own text based around a social justice topic of their choosing. Rather than detail what any specific process should look like, since each SPARK project varies in structure and objective, Edell articulates what should be included in the product, which impacts how a facilitator navigates the process.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I reflect on my facilitation of *Guns in Dragonland* and the #ENOUGH Residency to consider how my prior knowledge of theatre for social change and working with youth influenced my choices. I anticipate that in the future, I will craft new residencies of theatre for social change with youth that hold the outcome of a performance or sharing element, based on what I learned from my research. The following chapters uncover the best practices of teaching theatre for social change to youth through analysis of my own experiences and those of

published scholars. In this next chapter, I will explore the balance of process versus product when creating theatre for social change with youth.

CHAPTER TWO: PROCESS AND PRODUCT

There are two major stages in the life of a theatre piece: the process of creation, and the product that is performed for audiences. Both the process and the product are handled differently across different theatre productions. A professional theatre company might have a rehearsal process for three weeks, then perform the show for two months. A community theatre might rehearse a show for two months, then perform the show for one weekend. A facilitator (in the case of these examples, a director) leads the process to the point of the product, and their leadership typically stops once they have reached that final product. And often, the facilitator's focus is simple: to make the final product look good.

However, when a facilitator is working with youth creators, they need to diversify their focus. While a certain amount of focus should be placed on the quality of the final product, a facilitator should also consider the learning needs of their participants. Some may come with prior theatre experience and implicit knowledge, but others may be experiencing theatre for the first time. The facilitator must consider what type of theatre is being created—staging a previously written show, playwriting, or devising—and what terminology and techniques their participants will need to know before they can begin to create.

If the facilitator is leading the creation of theatre for social change with youth, they also need to consider what the participants know or don't know about the topic of the theatre piece, and what it means for a piece to be considered theatre for social change. This knowledge not only informs participants in relation to their creation but can extend into their daily lives. A facilitator—who now is taking on the roles of creator, director, leader, and teacher—must consider both their objective of the piece of theatre and their objective for the participants' overall learning.

As I directed *Guns in Dragonland* and taught the #ENOUGH Residency, I constantly questioned how to prioritize the learning process and the crafting of the final product. While guiding both groups toward a performed play or a written script, I also included discussions about the need for social change and activities that explored not only the final product but the basic technique of their craft, like movement or dialogue exercises. While I led a moment of exploring theatre for social change, I wondered if we should focus on rehearsal and writing; when we were rehearsing or writing, I wondered if the students learned enough about theatre for social change. Through my short times with both residencies, I found the balance between learning and refining tricky, as I have discovered many practitioners do.

This chapter explores the importance of the objectives of the learning process and the final product, how scholars have structured their residencies to support the balance between the two, what moments I found in my experiences that highlighted or disrupted that balance, and ultimately the best practices I have gleaned.

Literary Context

In the field of theatre, the analysis of process and product spans every type of program, from youth to adult, from classical to modern, from apolitical theatre to theatre of social change. Practitioners may recommend or implement different practices in their rehearsal room that guide their actors to a unified vision or accommodate the physical and emotional needs of their actors. For example, when directing a play about the Holocaust, a director may incorporate more discussion time or longer breaks to allow their actors more time to process the heavy subject matter.

When working with youth, a director or facilitator should anticipate that their young actors need time and guidance to learn the skills of theatre as well as how to portray their specific character in the production (Center for Education Development in Fine Arts 27). A director for youth, who is now also a teacher and facilitator, should also create moments for fun in their rehearsal process to foster creativity in their pupils (Etheridge Woodson 112). “Fun” could mean the ever-popular ensemble theatre games, which also build trust among peers that is vital when asking students to be so vulnerable as to share their fresh ideas. “Fun” could also mean allowing space for creativity based on the students’ skill sets and interests. Allowing participants to work in groups to improvise a scene, giving prompts to write songs or poetry, or even providing tools to create visual art that will inspire a theatrical piece can foster creativity (Brenner and Pitts McAdams).

While plenty of learning happens, rather than viewing the work as unit or residency, a facilitator should remind themselves and their young creators that what they are creating should “be understood as art; not education or blah blah” (Etheridge Woodson 144). Art creates an impact on an audience, and especially when creating theatre for social change, impacting an audience to create change is the desired outcome. Young people deserve the agency of knowing that their work has meaning that extends beyond their experience creating the piece.

Participation in a creation process for theatre for social change can inspire the young actors to pursue social change further (Bowles and Raymond-Nadon 217). A facilitator should incorporate education on social justice topics into their residency and rehearsal plan while also allowing their participants to speak to their own experiences. Simultaneously, a facilitator should guide their participants to a polished final product as they consider the impact that product will have on their audiences.

Wernick, Kulic, and Dessel conducted a qualitative study that examined a production promoting LGBTQ youth justice and the audience's intentions to advocate for their LGBTQ peers before and after witnessing said performance. The results of the study demonstrated that not only were the audience members overall more willing to advocate for their peers, but they were more able to identify homophobia and transphobia that already existed (Wernick, Kulick and Dessel 195-196). Therefore, the performance must speak to the audience, rather than only dwell within the preexisting knowledge of the performers; however, it is also important to note that audience members who willingly watch an advocacy performance are already more likely to advocate for social justice issues than those who are unsuspecting of the content or required to attend (Wernick, Kulick and Dessel 195). It is important to consider the product itself and who the product is being shown to, to create the greatest impact.

Program Analyses

Alrutz and Hoare address the question of process and product by creating a gradual balance of activities that explore ensemble, theatre basics, and reflection that can contribute to a theatrical piece, and refinement of previously written pieces (307). Their activities scaffold on one another, and the balance shifts from session to session, from process towards product. The Performance Justice Project (PJP) uses theatre as a platform to center young people's experiences with oppression (65); therefore, the creative process is a primary focus.

The process often begins with ensemble games and activities to create trust between participants with the added benefit of warming them up to theatre. Alrutz and Hoare state that the sessions include "warmups, games, or tasks that are physically engaging and hopefully feel playful and fun" (53). Despite the prevalent topic of oppression through each Performing Justice

Project residency, the idea of “fun” is vital to have in rehearsal sessions - Alrutz and Hoare even deem it to be an “act of justice” because “possibilities for change arise out of working with others to imagine and create something new” (58).

Like Alrutz and Hoare, Edell believes that “joy, hope, love, and fun” are vital to theatre for social change with youth programming (70). Edell states, “Through the creative practice of playing together and laughing together, we deepen our connections and feel bolder in our risk taking” (70). Richer, more impactful stories can be explored and therefore told when an ensemble feels comfortable enough to share with one another and get feedback from one another. Creating a sense of hope and joy also creates a sense of safety, which makes students want to return to the program over and over. Infusing fun into the sessions appears in ensemble games and basic conversations between peers, but it should also appear in the work the participants create. Edell states:

In our scene work and story circles, we’ll intentionally guide girls towards creating humorous sketches, playful and carefully exaggerating certain stereotypes for comic effect or sharing stories about “embarrassing moments” to infuse lightness and laughter into the space. (72)

Not only is it important for the participants themselves to have fun, but there should be fun in the stories they tell, for their benefit and for the benefit of the audience. Hope is inspiring, and seeing it played out on stage makes audiences and actors alike realize that there is potential for a positive outcome from their activism work.

Ensemble building and creative practice also build toward aesthetically fulfilling theatre for social change. Edell advocates for guided discussion that explore her participants’ interests, rather than choosing a social change topic for them (59). In Edell’s work, these discussions, and the subsequent works created, are not only about hardships and oppressions girls face, but also

the triumphs they achieve (70). She uses Freire's "problem-posing" model of education, in which participants begin with their prior knowledge to tackle an issue, then work collaboratively to imagine potential outcomes and solutions (Edell 59-60; Reed, Saunders and Pfadenhauer-Simons). Pairing reflection and imagination gives participants a problem-solving rehearsal of sorts before tackling the same issues they face in their daily lives. Boal also bases much of his Theatre of the Oppressed model in this line of thinking, which is why Edell uses Boal's TO games and activities to explore different issues within the topics suggested by her participants (60). Edell argues, "these interactive, performance-based strategies offer girls real tools to unpack the issues, understand how power plays out in their lives and utilizes the unique art form of theater to guide them to work together to find solutions" (62). Boal's activities explore power dynamics and combating oppression in daily lives, but some were also designed specifically for the rehearsal room, which make them an excellent resource for ensemble building and creation of a theatrical performance.

Once PJP participants start creating, Alrutz and Hoare recommend activating, or staging the material, early (67). This may not necessarily be refining the material for the stage, but it stems from the belief that any given material *could* be part of the final product. Performing a story, a poem, or even threads from a discussion, as part of the rehearsal process highlights how storytelling can impact an audience (67). Alrutz and Hoare then use these performances to encourage different characterization techniques through vocal and physical changes. This allows participants to imagine their pieces as something that could be performed for the public and make real change. While Alrutz and Hoare describe activation from devised material, these ideas could also apply to other forms of theatre creation; a young playwright could have their peers read their piece right after the first draft, and a director could begin blocking the first night of

rehearsal. To give young actors even more agency over their script, they could explore blocking a scene that speaks to them on their own, then perform for the director.

The PJP devising process focuses on the participants' lived experiences before exploring greater oppressive structures. The exploration scaffolds, including self-reflection, then discussion of interpersonal power, then finally how power and bias appears in greater society (71). This framework makes the theatre process critically engaged and can similarly be applied to discussions of social change regardless of the type of theatre that is created or explored. Chapter Three explores the adult's role in leading these discussions more fully, but it is important to consider how those discussions are factored into structuring the creative process. These discussions impact how a facilitator might balance their time per day or across the scope of the residency.

Edell describes the intended quality of the performances she creates as "engaging and innovative" (55). In her final products, stories cannot just be read off a paper; they should have an aesthetic quality to them. However, those aesthetics should not be prioritized over or distract from the messages that are told (55). Innovative techniques make a performance relatable and memorable to an audience, which is what makes theatre as an activist tool successful.

When generating a theatre for social change residency, a facilitator should create programming around what purpose they believe the residency will serve. Different scholars, including Alrutz and Hoare, led me to question what the intention or purpose of a theatre for social change performance involving youth should be - as in, is the purpose to have youth perform activist theatre and learn from their work, to get audiences to see activist theatre and be changed, or both?

My focus prior to this thesis was primarily on the knowledge the young actors gained and what they might do with that knowledge after the performance was over. This belief stemmed from the assumption that the audiences of a youth performance would be filled with parents and family who likely already held the same beliefs as their performer and were biased towards the performer's talent. However, my assumption is built on standard youth theatre, not theatre for social change, and even then, this does not always ring true. A high-quality performance that demonstrates a young actor's growth and puts attention to detail into the visuals and storytelling of the piece will encourage the families to return for more theatrical experiences. Moreover, the more refined the performance, the more likely a performance is to affect the audiences *beyond* their support of their given performer. A high-quality performance about sexism, racism, or the intersectionality of the two may awaken an audience member from complacency towards the issue to action. A well-written and well-acted piece does the work that theatre intends to, which is to immerse an audience in what they are seeing, relate them to characters, and encourage them to empathize with problems outside of their own worldview. Alrutz and Hoare advocate for the transformative aspect of theatre:

PJP is built on the belief that arts-based social justice work has the potential to make systemic and long-term impacts on society; however, rather than focus on grand goals of societal or individual transformation within short-term performance residencies, we aim for what Megan refers to as opportunities for "transgressive transportation." Which means "critical pedagogies or performance practices might in fact plant seeds of change or moments of perspective-building with and for participants and their audiences. (27)

Creating a theatre piece that is transgressive, that breaks boundaries, that transports its audience to a new viewpoint or a different world, requires skill. Teaching this skill informs the process and directly affects the product. Likewise, rather than separating the teaching of art techniques from the teaching of activism, Edell views the performance of art as *a part* of activism (16).

Activism is always the goal; theatre performance just so happens to be the medium Edell uses. Edell states that the girls she works with “[use] performance tactics to chip away at the structures that attempt to silence or simply ignore them” (16). Theatre is one vehicle of activism that makes oppression abundantly visible to its audience, and it is unique in its portrayal of “emotional urgency...so people do not easily forget what they’ve seen” (37). Additionally, activist performance does not only affect the audience: according to Edell, the mere opportunity for girls to perform is inherently activist. She states:

Performing their own words live on a stage in front of their community is an expression of defiance to a culture that often dismisses them. The content does not always need to include politically charged issues, though I have found girls will naturally gravitate towards them (...) stories of injustice and demands to be taken seriously often float to the top of the scripts. Because they are so often silenced, or not taken seriously, just speaking their truths can be a radical act. (37)

If facilitators view the act of performing one’s own truth as a radical act, then the focus does not need to be on either the learning process or the final product, because the learning happens simultaneously to the refining of the product. There is no balance between two elements; they are one and the same. When a facilitator teaches a student how to perform, they are teaching activism.

Because of this, it is important to facilitate theatre for social change with youth with a good quality final product as a goal, not only for the effect the product will have on the audience but for the benefit of the participants. Edell argues that participation in a high-quality theatrical performance will instill “genuine pride and faith in their abilities as artists” (55). As facilitators, our primary interaction is with our participants, rather than the audience. Therefore, we must focus on the values we instill in our participants. Encouraging confidence instills pride in their work, which leads to re-engagement with theatre for social change, which will create people who

can advocate for themselves and for others. Through teaching good theatre, we can create future activists.

Alrutz and Hoare create a steady, scaffolded balance of exploring creativity and refining a final product that allows conversations around social justice to happen in each rehearsal. Their objective is to create a refined performance that cultivates activist participants and audience members alike, and they do so through personal conversations and conversations about greater social issues. Edell's work demonstrates how teaching social change and teaching theatre can happen simultaneously, rather than as two separate parts that need to be fit into a rehearsal process together. Her process is guided by student interest and finds a balance between the emotions one can experience when fighting for social change. The following section will explore my own process when facilitating two theatre for social change programs with youth, and what questions arose when trying to balance the creative process and the final product.

Guns in Dragonland

Prioritizing the process or the product for *Guns in Dragonland* held a different balance from any show I had previously directed. I typically direct fun, goofy, often Disney-esque shows with youth actors to perform for their parents, friends and family, and I prioritize the skills my actors will take away over the aesthetics of the final product, though I do consider both throughout the rehearsal process. However, *Guns in Dragonland* would be performed for a national streaming audience as a contribution to an organization speaking up about gun violence. The product of *Guns in Dragonland* went far beyond the experience of the actors Caroline and Hannah and the enjoyment of their families – their faces, skills, and message would be seen in living rooms, classrooms, and offices around the United States. Therefore, every choice I made

in the process needed to have a beneficial impact on the product so the audiences would be strongly affected by what they saw.

A typical rehearsal process is such: the creative team meets. They read through the script together. They *might* (hopefully will) talk about the script and any research surrounding the play in a process called “table work,” as to enrich their knowledge and develop their characters and relationships. There may be an exploratory stage where the director leads exercises to help the actors discover their character’s movement, voices, and so on. Then, blocking – the director and actors work together to figure out where the actors will stand and move on the stage to help tell the story. Once the show is blocked, the actors run the show again, stopping and starting to “clean” any moments that don’t work. Then they run the show non-stop, with the director taking notes to share at the end for the actors to change next time. Technical elements such as set, costumes, lights, and sound are incorporated through what is typically called “tech week” (though it could be shorter or much longer), and then the show opens for an audience once it’s either deemed “set” (no changes are made) or the cast has run out of rehearsal time, which often happen at the same time.

My process did not look dissimilar. I have already outlined the rehearsal parameters in the introduction, but I would like to reiterate that because the play is short, the rehearsal time was also short (see Appendix A). The show felt easy to block and we were not scrambling to finish the show at the end of the rehearsal process, but there is some value to letting actors take time to process what they have learned or rehearsed outside of rehearsals, which of course happens less when the rehearsal time is shorter. There were elements of the theatrical process that were standard: we read through the play together, we developed the characters together, and we spent time blocking and running the show. I also added elements to help us grapple with the content of

the play and the epidemic of gun violence, such as longer breaks than standard and time allotted for discussions about feelings. Despite these additions, I had less time than I would have liked to spend discussing the impact of what they were doing and the realm of theatre for social change they existed in, and we spent more time rehearsing the play again and again, keeping an eye out for physical or emotional fatigue.

When we could, we held conversations around the topic that needs social change – the impact of gun violence and why it needs to be stopped. However, we didn't view those conversations through the lens of theatre for social change or how *Guns in Dragonland* or the #ENOUGH Project fit into the canon of already existing theatre for social change. That is to say, we didn't explore the idea of our work being in its own genre of theatre, that some people exclusively pursue as a passion or as a career. I certainly viewed our work as a piece of theatre for social change, but never addressed it as such in our conversations. In an effort to give my actors agency over such a traumatizing topic, I allowed them to guide the conversations, in which they certainly had much to say. However, I wonder now how specifically teaching the history of theatre for social change and how theatre has made change previously could have further enriched my actors' knowledge and what effect that would have on the final product of *Guns in Dragonland*.

The activities I structured also came from my background in teaching acting, but not my background in teaching theatre for social change. We created tableaux (frozen images) of different beats in the story and used those as inspiration for blocking. We also practiced different character walks and voices and how those affected the other character. We didn't do activities that analyzed power dynamics or privilege, such as those Boal writes about in *Games for Actors*

and Non-Actors. Our activities explored through the lens of their characters, Lilah and Toucan, but not particularly through the lens of how their performance was theatre for social change.

As the rehearsal process moved forward, our collective focus turned toward the aesthetics of the show and its potential impact on the audience. In the end, Lilah stands up to a shooter and dies. Through this valiant act, she earns dragon wings and flies away. We explored how the moment of a child's death would devastate the audience, but also how we could provide catharsis through Lilah earning her wings. Hopefully, that catharsis, the relief from death, would take audiences from despair to willingness to act on gun violence. We wanted to create something memorable. The production image of the actor, Hannah, as Lilah with her dragon wings is still used in promotional materials for #ENOUGH. While our creative process focused on the final product, our final product focused on the audience that could go on to create social change, and on the people who might participate in #ENOUGH in the future.

Part of me wishes we had explored more of the genre of theatre for social change, because I wanted Caroline and Hannah to see beyond the scope of the one show they were producing. But another part of me wonders if it mattered. The product Caroline and Hannah created did reach beyond them to create an impact, so we achieved our goal. Caroline and Hannah want to continue acting, which is something a teacher always hopes for. They weren't worse off because I narrowed the scope of teaching theatre for social change to only what they needed to know to perform, but I still wonder, had we had the time and resources, if they would have been *better* off learning about a broader scope of theatre for social change.

#ENOUGH Residency

Most, if not all, residencies that I have taught have been in partnership with a school or other place for youth learning, such as a summer day care program. I am brought in as a teaching artist with theatre expertise to enrich the topic being taught in the classroom or to introduce a new concept. I align my lesson plans with state education standards. Most residencies have anticipated outcomes, but not necessarily tangible products. I plan with the creative process and the learning outcomes in mind.

As opposed to my previous residencies, the #ENOUGH Residency did call for the tangible product of a ten-minute play. Ideally, this play would be submitted to the #ENOUGH project the next time they opened a round. My goal setting out for the residency was to get them to a draft with feedback from a professional and from peers before I left. However, the time I spent in the classroom with the students had to be utilized wisely. I had so much to teach, and so little time, and playwrighting is typically a very individual experience. This meant that I spent the time I had within the classroom lecturing and leading activities when I could, and then asked the students to complete their drafts as homework between residency sessions. This was a big ask for some, because students were already overloaded with homework from all their other classes, and they were not getting graded for participating in the residency (at least by me—their teacher may choose otherwise as an added incentive). Ultimately, I could only control the process, and the quality of the final products was up to the students.

When I designed the lesson plans, I chose to open the scope of topics up to the students' interests. In doing so, I felt that I limited what information or feedback I could give. Because everyone worked individually, that gave me 15 to 20 different plays to potentially read, and just as many potential different topics to discuss and help students research. The COVID-19 safety

protocols at the time also limited me to virtually streaming into the class, which meant I had no way to work with individual students or small groups around the classroom like I normally do.

There was a potential incentive for these plays: if you submit to #ENOUGH, you could receive the chance to publish your play and win a cash prize. However, submitting to #ENOUGH would also mean the students were required to write about the topic of gun violence, which may not be something they are comfortable with or passionate about writing. What is more valuable—requiring students to write about a specific topic of oppression, or allowing them to write about an oppression that they are affected by or called to? Additionally, the topic of gun violence is contentious in its own way. It may be upsetting for some, who may have connections to past victims or are simply emotionally affected by the toll taken by multiple shootings per year and constant lockdown drills. It may make others defensive or conflicted if they and their family are against gun control limitations. It also may simply be too ingrained into the daily lives of the students for them to have anything specific to say about it. I wanted to craft a residency that would teach students *how* to write a play for social change and leave the specific topic up to them. Some may feel compelled to write about sexism in their schools, others, homophobia, and even more, the discussion around climate change.

From the beginning of creating the lesson plan, I knew I wanted to allow students to write about whatever compelled them, and if they were able to submit to #ENOUGH, great, and if not, there were other ten-minute play submission competitions out there. But knowing what compels you and fully grasping the conversation around that topic are two different things. A student would write a more interesting piece if they were able to understand the perspectives of multiple characters and build their conflict accordingly. I, as someone who has already studied activism, would be able to contribute my knowledge to social change topics such as feminism,

LGBTQ+ activism, and, to some extent, racism, although I would be looking through the lens of a white woman. But simply put, because there were so many students *and* because I virtually streamed in to these sessions, I was unable to talk to each student about their play. I felt like I was missing a key component of the process because of the lack of individual conversations.

Since I was limited in one regard, I focused my abilities elsewhere. Each session had its own topic or goal to accomplish. We began by discussing the history and uses of theatre for social change. In the first round of this residency, we did so by framing our discussion around the actual plays from #ENOUGH. We discussed our emotional reactions to the plays as well as how creating a play like *Guns in Dragonland* could impact our community. Then we explored Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed, and other genres of theatre for social change. However, time constraints meant this had to be taught in around ten to fifteen minutes, which was extremely limiting. I have taken an entire course on theatre for social change and am *still* learning new facts about Augusto Boal. But to accomplish the overall residency goals, we were required to move through content quickly.

More time is something directors and teachers often want. The amount of time I had to teach about playwriting felt almost at war with the time I had to teach about theatre for social change. I only had five sessions that were less than an hour long to cover the basics of both. The breadth of topics that could constitute social change would be too wide for me to cover even if I were teaching all day, every day. In my lesson planning, I decided to only focus on the resources I could present, both from my own research and from the #ENOUGH website. These resources focused primarily on gun violence, but also gave enough information that anyone who had faced a traumatic event could contact a mental health professional or find other mental health resources, if necessary. I had some other knowledge, from base-level to first-hand experience,

with some of the other topics students chose, but in the end, I directed them to do their own research instead of giving them those tools.

In my first lesson, I initially planned to focus on the history of theatre for social change (see Appendix B). My intention was to have the classes watch or read the two #ENOUGH plays that Orlando REP had produced, then discuss those with the framework of how they could be theatre for social change. Our conversations around *Guns in Dragonland* and *Ms. Martin's Malaise* were rich enough to fill the whole session. We were able to introduce the idea of theatre for social change, how these plays might link to social change, and what the effects of theatre for social change could be. We also addressed how we as a class might navigate the conversations around social change. One student brought up the fact that shows in the vein of theatre for social change made him uncomfortable, and we addressed how that can be a good and necessary thing because change only comes from a certain level of upset or discomfort with the current status quo. We talked about the use of metaphor and whether it was effective, and students were willing to bring up differing opinions, so we talked about how noticing those differences can make our theatre more effective.

However, we did not get to talk about the history of theatre for social change. That conversation was pushed back to session two and shortened in favor of discussing plot structure and necessary playwriting basics (Appendix B). I wonder, now, how necessary—or feasible—it was to fully uncover the history of Boal (and Brecht, Freire, the Federal Theatre Project and all other historical events of theatre for social change). There are plays with typical writing, plot structure, and production methods that act as conduits for social change. I might direct students to titles such as these so they have something they could emulate. However, Boal's work was not about playwriting and subsequently facilitating discussion after a communal viewing. Theatre of

the Oppressed involved improvisation and audience involvement in the piece itself, which was not what we were aiming to explore in the #ENOUGH Residency. Still, his theories and explorations of power dynamics and systemic oppression can be seen outside of even his own theatre styles. So, with the short class time and the youth attention spans, especially in an online setting, I considered what is best to focus on and how to merge the knowledge of Boal and other theatre for social change practitioners with the topic at hand. I do feel there is intrinsic value in taking the time to specifically explore Boal's context, theory, and exercises. As the adage says, "Give a man a fish, he eats for a day; teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime." Give young people the chance to write a play about a topic they already know about, they have a ten-minute play. Teach young people the groundwork and major functions of theatre for social change, and they have the tools to create more and more pieces throughout their lifetime.

In the next session of the residency, the lesson plan focused on the beginnings of brainstorming a story (see Appendix B). This is the point in the residency where I started to realize we drifted away from talking collectively about social change and focused solely on how to write a play, leaving the thoughts about individual topics up to the students instead of lead by me. I felt it would help students to be active in some way while they brainstormed or created their play. We often envision playwriting as a sedentary process, where one simply sits and writes until their hands and bodies cramp up. Playwright Suzan Zeder, however, asserts the need for extracting creation and allowing it to exist in spaces outside of the mind. Zeder states: "The act of creation involves feeling, sensing, thinking, and movement, all of which are active rather than passive. Understandings of tensional forces, movement, and balance are as important to the writer as they are the performer" (Zeder 42). Zeder encourages the use of child-like dramatic play (the "child space"), connection between the mind and the body ("psychophysical space")

and exploration with peers (“interpersonal space”) as methods to begin playwriting or other forms of creation (Zeder 23, 42, 65).

Even with Zeder’s encouragement, I am not a particularly physical person and tend to find inspiration elsewhere. Some of my students may be similar to me—and some may be the complete opposite. I often consider Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences as I design lessons. Gardner’s theory explores the different ways in which one can be smart, from language and puzzles to connection and introspection (Gardner). While Gardner’s theory has not been studied through neuroscience, it has made an impact in the field of education in the way it broadens the scopes in which students can be skilled. I can recognize in myself and in my students the ways in which different teaching styles and activities make something “click” for a student; understanding students’ multiple intelligences also helps me see where there are gaps to fill in their learning. Even though I am teaching playwriting—something that is perceived as so individual and contained to pen and paper (or, in 2021, laptops and Chromebooks)—I want to engage students who flourish through physical activity, as well as those students like me who struggle to visualize images without something directly in front of them. In the #ENOUGH residencies, I led familiar creative drama activities, where students could embody stories through frozen or moving images. While I had some difficulty since I was stuck behind a screen and couldn’t see the final effect of the activities on the students, I believe that physicalizing their ideas could make the ideas more concrete.

From here, the residencies focused on plot structure. When planning, I grappled strongly with my decision to include discussing plot structure basics. I knew very little about the background of either class I taught, except for that they were upper-level theatre courses. I could *assume* facts about their learning, based on what I learned and how I learned it as a student

myself. It's likely they would have learned some form of the plot structure of Freytag's Pyramid (see Appendix B) in elementary school and then had it reinforced in English Language Arts classes throughout different grades. But had they actually applied it to stories they were analyzing? Had they applied that structure to plays, specifically? Had they seen plot structure comparisons between two-hour plays and ten-minute plays? (I had one student realize how short his "act one" was and was shocked when I explained that plays used to be written in five acts, following this very structure.) And, furthermore, what about students who wanted to reject that plot structure entirely?

My outcome led me to expect too much of myself as a teacher who needed to include *every single thing I knew about playwriting*, instead of choosing one method to teach and zeroing in on that. The words of a former boss and mentor speak to me now, saying "Go deep, not wide." It's best that I remind myself that I did not expect to know everything about theatre when I was sixteen, and that I have had so much time to grasp the concepts such as "devising" or "hero's journey" that I need to consider it wasn't until college that I learned those terms for the first time. (Yes, it seems today's teens are savvier when it comes to technology, but they would not know to research something that has not yet been taught to them).

The final part of the process of this residency was letting the students give feedback to one another. I set out at the beginning for these students to have a whole draft by the last session so they could get feedback and make revisions. By the time session 4 rolled around, I only felt comfortable asking the students to create 1-2 pages of dialogue. This would hurt, because it's difficult to give feedback when you can't see the whole picture of the story, but it would also help because there would not be enough time for all students to share ten pages worth of a story *and* receive feedback. I first introduced a basic version of Liz Lerman's Critical Response

Structure (see Appendix B) to teach the students how to both give and receive constructive criticism, then had their classroom teacher divide them into small groups. This is where my limitation hits again—I was unable to float from group to group to hear their scene snippets *or* their feedback, so I have no measure of what product was achieved.

A few months later, I hosted a ten-minute play festival for high schoolers and college student playwrights on behalf of a university student organization. I invited the residency students to submit their work. We received one submission from my residency class, and we chose his play for our show. It was so exciting to see his final script, full of the elements we had discussed in my lessons. I could also see where I would have given him feedback for edits, had I had the time and ability. I consider this a success for the process that I led, but in analyzing this experience, I wonder if my conclusion on process versus product was because my hand was forced in one direction. I have learned a few elements of the process that I would include in a future curriculum, but, more importantly, I have learned that for this curriculum, I need to be very deliberate in how I choose to balance the process *and* the product for the good of my students.

Best Practices

This section considers the best practices of balancing process and product as they might appear in a specific theatre for social change program. I determined these best practices through the writings of Alrutz and Hoare compared to the experiences that I had with *Guns in Dragonland* and the #ENOUGH Residency, from what I thought went well with those experiences to what I felt was missing.

Ensemble Building

Asking anyone, regardless of age, to engage in social change, is asking them to open themselves to vulnerability. If they have the experience with the topic chosen, they are being asked to remember times in which they have been gravely hurt as a human. If they are present because they have empathy for others, they are being asked to listen and to consider their own privilege in the conversation of oppression. Theatre, too, asks for vulnerability when we ask people to share their opinions, make big character choices, or express strong emotions onstage. Because of this, the first step in a theatre for social change program must be ensemble building and trust exercises. It is vital that the young people are willing to share with and to learn from one another, and it is also vital for a facilitator to have the time to develop understanding of their students' personalities and interests so that their facilitation can play to their stronger points and strengthen their weaker points. Before we explore topics that have caused hurt and pain, we need to create a space that brings joy and invites the students to come back from rehearsal to rehearsal.

Ensemble building exercises might include games that introduce participants to one another by sharing their names, pronouns, and interests. A game that encourages finding similarities can open the door to creating bonds participants may not have created otherwise. Subsequent exercises could encourage problem solving or group work, such as Human Knot, which has all participants link hands across a circle at random then figure out how to untangle themselves without breaking their physical connection; or inspire humor, such as a game where one participant tries to make the others laugh while the others attempt to remain stoic. Exercises and conversations that bring joy and develop a trusting ensemble make us comfortable so that we can then be brave.

The transition from friendly ensemble building games to topics surrounding social change comes through integrating activities that explore power dynamics in the vein of Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*—for example, Columbian Hypnosis, in which one participant must lead another around the space by guiding them with their hand (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* 51). Part of meeting youth at the level of their lived experience is also allowing them to lead the conversation around what they are comfortable with and what they have already related to in their lives. When slowly merging with theatre for social change activities, I would introduce the activity as a warm-up, similar to any ensemble building exercises we have explored so far, then follow up with reflection questions. First, I would ask them what they observed about the activity alone. How did they feel about participating? What did they notice about the other participants? Spatial awareness and understanding of creative choices highlight factors that are necessary for a successful conventional theatrical production. Encouraging young actors to reflect on their own acting choices and the choices of others during these exercises builds their acting skills while also exploring topics of social change.

After working to build an ensemble through exercises, it is important to collaborate with that ensemble through the creative process of the theatre for social change piece. Even if the script is already written, rather than devised, or even if students are working on individual scripts, there should be ways for them to connect throughout the process, whether that is having input on what is included in the final product or giving feedback to one another. Part of creating an ensemble is giving each voice value, and that needs to be reinforced throughout the process.

Everything Created Has Value

When creating theatre for social change with youth, there should be a phase of experimentation, where the participants are able to brainstorm ideas through varying artistic

means. Experimentation should be messy and abstract, and ideas should not be settled on too quickly. However, like Alrutz argued earlier, a facilitator should treat everything that is created as though it will be part of the final product.

It should be up to the students to decide what the purpose of their final product should be. If they comment on a form of oppression in society that they may experience or empathize with, what actionable change can they imagine as a result of their performance? How do they engage their audience members in this call to action? Once the students decide what their final product should look like, they can then decide with their facilitator what level of quality to expect. A facilitator can then more comfortably determine where they should focus on the presentation of the product, and where they can give grace to what is being learned through the process. The two would also intertwine—learning how difficult theatre can be to produce is a valuable takeaway if only to give appreciation for the art form.

With both *Guns in Dragonland* and the #ENOUGH Residency, I carved out a block of time to discuss what theatre for social change is, then we focused on the skills that would lead us to the product. In future programs, there will certainly be time in which I simply talk about the history and context of theatre for social change as it is relevant to the rehearsal conversation, and even ask the students to do their own research based on what intrigues them. However, when creating theatre for social change with youth, I find it is a best practice to continue to facilitate activities rather than lecture, so that the students can both get a feel of different models of theatre for social change and continue to articulate and improvise those situations of oppression they are interested in combating.

This phase of creation focuses primarily on the process, with a distant eye on the product. As a facilitator, I am focusing on what skills the students can bring and will need for the final

product, but also what they are learning from this process that they can implement in their outside lives. Maybe they won't pursue theatre after this experience, but they will be more aware and able to identify systems of oppression and to advocate for themselves and their communities. As we begin creating, we are in the sweetest balance of process and product. We're formulating the final performance *and* we are embodying the activism against oppression.

The performance is, of course, the crux of a theatrical experience. I make it my goal for the students to have takeaways after the show is over, but in truth, everything we discuss, everything we devise and rehearse, whether it made it into the final script or not, was for the production. The audience may not see all the steps that the students went through to get to this final shared story, but because of the process work we did, they are able to leave the performance with knowledge about issues of oppression and what they as a member of society can do about it.

Find a Tipping Point from Process to Product

Devising intrinsically allows for the shaping of the play, the creation of the narrative and the development of the character, to happen simultaneous to the staging of the play. Kaufman argues that the creation and the editing of the final product should exist separately (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams, *Moment Work: Tectonic Theater Project's Process of Devising Theater* 125). However, Kaufman works with adult professionals who are well versed in the practices of devising and acting. Alrutz and Hoare, on the other hand, devise and edit the narrative at the same time with her students. They write:

Waiting until the end of a process to sculpt or begin to refine and stage the work can prove challenging when devising with large groups, preparing young artists to perform, and working on a restricted timeline. In [the Performing Justice Project], participants need to see examples of how the text and movements they are generating can move into small bits of performance in order to understand what they are working toward. (Alrutz and Hoare 62)

Both have an excellent understanding of their work and the groups with whom they work. For a creative process, I am more inclined to align with Kaufman, in the name of resisting censorship. I do believe that it can be my role to show how what is created in devising work can “move into small bits of performance,” and I also believe that part of the devising work can be utilized to teach performance practice, but I would not recommend editing—what I take to be cleaning and critiquing the show—until its own separate section of the process. Therefore, the focus of the rehearsal time, leading up to the final performance, would focus on synthesizing all the moving parts of the show. As a facilitator and director, my focus would be on giving the students the resources to get to the level of quality they expect of themselves or even beyond. Here, we clarify what the audience experience might be, and while I might give blocking or character notes, I would also explain the reasoning behind my suggested changes, incorporating process elements into what we learn for the final product.

Moments to Reflect

One element that I feel is vital to a theatre for social change program with youth that is not often utilized in youth theatre is a post-performance reflection. Creative teams (directors, designers, stage managers) might have what is called a “post-mortem,” in which they discuss how their production went in relation to each member of the team and to the company. Often, actors are not included in this discussion. The typical standard of youth theatre is rehearse to the performance, perform, then celebrate all of the hard work at a cast party where everyone breathes a sigh of relief. Of course I want my students to celebrate their work—but I also want to give them one last chance to reflect on the experience and connect it to what they can do as a young activist going forward. In the same vein, I believe it is important to have another opportunity to engage with theatre for social change lined up, so that the students can keep up their momentum.

Let everyone take a breath, celebrate the work they've done so far, and then get ready to do it again.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ROLE OF THE ADULT

In my previous experiences with theatre for social change for youth, I have been the adult in the room who is responsible for creating structure and content. If I have worked in a partnership, I would then request feedback from other adults involved with the residency. I have been the instructor and facilitator, guiding students through a pre-determined process. However, when asking students to create their own product, I must consider the input the young people give to the process.

One night directing *Guns in Dragonland*, I taught Caroline and Hannah about beats, or moments where characters change focus. I explained the arc of a scene and what makes beats strong, but Caroline and Hannah defined the beats themselves, then moved to make their own acting choices within those beats. Allowing these young actors to explore their own ideas organically inevitably made their characterizations and storytelling richer, and it made me wonder what other strong ideas young people bring to the table, especially in theatre for social change.

This chapter explores the role of the adult throughout the process of youth creating theatre for social change. Some topics considered are the balance of an adult's instruction versus the youth's creation and leadership in the process, how and when an adult inserts themselves and their opinions into the creative process, and how that presence might impact the youth's final product by refining or restricting their work. This chapter also explores the adult's facilitation as it relates to social change by considering how to navigate conversations and education about social change while also honoring the students' own lived experiences.

Literary Context

Regardless of whether a theatre program is teaching theatre for social change, it is important for the adult facilitator to set the tone of the rehearsals or sessions so that the students know what is expected of them and what to expect from their facilitator who they will listen to for the coming days, weeks, or even months. To build ensemble (as was mentioned in Chapter Two), setting the tone of fun can create a trusting environment (Gonzalez 36). It is up to the facilitator to establish an ambiance of fun and to then change the tone when necessary (for example, creating a serious atmosphere when the group needs to buckle down, or a calm atmosphere when the facilitator must mediate). Theatre teachers should also provide a space to explore all kinds of emotions safely, because so many teens face pressure from societal structures that prevent them from showing the emotions expected outside of their race, gender, or background (Gonzalez 38).

Community development scholars Christine Buzinde, Behrand Foroughi, and Josephine Godwyll discuss the need to create a sense of autonomy in a program so that youth can achieve “critical awareness with a perceived sense of agency” (683). According to Buzinde, Foroughi, and Godwyll, giving students opportunities to make their own decisions on the process and the product of their programming is a best practice. Autonomy can come from choosing when to meet, to choosing who they collaborate with, to deciding on the structure of their final performance.

To elaborate on the term “perceived sense of agency”: at first glance, it may seem as though giving youth the idea of agency is just a façade for them, when really the adults have the control. I believe it is vital for the facilitators to create a structure to follow, which takes a certain amount of choice away from the participants, but also gives them boundaries in which to expand

on their own choices. I also believe this is something that can be made explicit to the students so that they can have more trust in the power dynamic between them and their facilitator.

Creating opportunities for leadership and autonomy in youth is vital to youth development. Buzinde, Foroughi, and Godwyll describe the necessity of building critical consciousness in youth and offer facilitators tools for developing this critical consciousness.

They state:

“Facilitating critical reflection within an educational environment for youth leaders entails engaging participants in the process of identifying societal problems, everyday life contradictions, and social inequities through reflection and dialog [sic] followed by a collective structural analysis of how such disparities affect social outcomes” (683)

By actively leading conversation, an adult facilitator can inspire their participants to think about their prior knowledge and how that can transform into activist ideas. Leading these discussions paired with creating theatre can further form these ideas into something tangible and presentational. Students could hold these conversations themselves or even put on theatre themselves, but there is benefit to an experienced facilitator guiding those conversations and giving input on the topics discussed. Adults so often hold institutional power that is used to oppress students who cannot fight back; therefore, if an adult has the privilege, they should use it to instead fight against oppression by engaging these students in youth-centered work (Wernick, Kulick and Dessel 48; Duffy and Powers 48).

Applied theatre scholar Bethany Nelson argues that the role of the adult is to provide an outlet for students to work creatively (27). As adults create space for youth to create theatre and develop their activism, they must also encourage students throughout their work to “believe in the possibility of change” (Nelson 28). Adults should develop a relationship with youth participants by finding a common ground between them and navigating the lessons to suit the

needs of the students (Abraham 237). When teaching theatre, especially theatre for social change in a space where students must be vulnerable, adults must act as guides and motivators, but not dictators.

Critical Texts

Both Alrutz and Hoare and Edell have much to say on the practices they follow as adult facilitators when devising theatre with youth. At the crux, the facilitators create the structure of the program goals and sessions (Alrutz and Hoare 57), and the students do the creating. The ways in which students might contribute to the creative conversation are “opportunities for young people to shape the performance, influence decisions in the room, and offer feedback to peers and adults in the project” (Alrutz and Hoare 57). Alrutz, Hoare, and Edell agree that it is vital for students to have the ability to share what is not working for them, and that ability comes from creating a connection of trust between the students and the facilitator. As Alrutz and Hoare write about power dynamics, they state:

As directors, our major task becomes to listen intently to participants in order to inform the work and create a reciprocal process in the room. We work to disrupt top-down power dynamics between adults and youth in PJP by centering the experience and wisdom of young people and focusing on what it looks like for adult facilitators to actively create in alliance with young people. (58)

Listening intently can look like many things. It can mean observing the pieces that are created and giving feedback attuned to the individual person, because you understand their learning style. It can mean reading body language to understand when a student is uncomfortable but unwilling to speak up or has an opinion formulating but needs some time before they can share. It can mean reading subtext between what a student is saying and how the students interact with each other to determine what they might be comfortable performing and who they might be

comfortable performing with. It can mean formulating questions during reflection that digs deeply into a students' experience, without imposing the adult's opinion. Edell quotes one of her students saying "Well, you have to listen more than you speak, right? Because once you're not a teenager anymore, I feel like you never understand what a teenager is again. You have to sit there and really listen to what we have to say" (Edell 45). A facilitator should not only allow but advocate for their students to be the ones developing the final product, with the facilitator acting as support.

Instead of seeking moments of creativity versus instruction, allow the structure to feed the creativity. In the Performing Justice Project, Alrutz and Hoare "invite and encourage participants to respond to prompts and provocations through creative writing, embodied staged pictures, improvisational scenes, gestures or movement phrases, and other small bits of performance" (Alrutz and Hoare 61-62). This gives participants so many ways not only to create, but to create in a style that feels interesting to them. The participants would then view each other's work and collaboratively edit. My role as an adult is to navigate the feedback I give to enhance their theatrical work while also not stifling storytelling.

Edell explores an anecdote in which she asked a student who crafted a spoken word poem to change the term "wife beater" – referencing a white tank top – to something else. She writes:

As part of our commitment to trusting girls, we do not censor anything or change any grammar, spelling or language in the texts that the girls construct. But sometimes granting such boundless freedoms can create ethically challenging struggles and frustrations for us. As the previous example shows, through dialogue with the girls, we can encourage them to make changes, but these changes might be to appease the adults and avoid conflict, which is also antithetical to my first principle of negotiating power. Sometimes censoring is silencing and sometimes censoring is encouraging an edit in order not to offend or turn off an audience member. (Edell 69)

The argument Edell makes is that, if there is any censorship, it should be a dialogue with the student rather than an instruction. Rather than forcing the student to change the questionable term, she encouraged the student to think about why the term might be problematic. I believe, in cases like these, it is also important to consider cultural sensitivity. A term or reference a student writes might be problematic or uncomfortable to me as a white woman of privilege who has done this research but exist as a cultural norm to the student (as was the case in Edell's example). I certainly agree with Edell's assertion that any changes I ask of a student should be a dialogue, possibly led by a reflective question ("Why did you make that choice?") rather than a command. I also believe that any allowances or censorships I make as a facilitator must be viewed through my privilege as a white woman.

The work of theatre for social change cannot be taught if the facilitator is not willing to do the work of social change themselves. If the facilitator is not committed to examining their own ethics and privilege and how those come into the classroom, it will have an impact on the students' experience and their trust in the facilitator. From Alrutz and Hoare:

Facilitators must take on the personal work of actively reflecting on our own identities, privileges, and biases. How do racism, sexism, and other oppressive thinking/behavior show up in our ways of working, interacting, and creating? How does our access to power, based on our personal identity markers, inform how we collaborate, share leadership, and value youth voice? Gender and racial justice work necessitates that facilitators actively undo and (especially for those who benefit from white privilege) unlearn white supremacy in our daily lives, not simply in rehearsal with young people. Without this ongoing work toward self-actualization, we can damage relationships we are attempting to build and subconsciously – or even consciously – recreate oppressive structures and situations that impact the lives of young people. (Alrutz and Hoare 55)

And they continue:

In most cases, youth already see and understand many of the ways we, specifically as white adults, hold power and privilege in the world. As we acknowledge our own identities and privileges, we make an active commitment to

work toward gender and racial justice in our PJP practices and daily lives. (Alrutz and Hoare 56)

The work that Alrutz, Hoare, and Edell facilitate all center around racial and gender justice connected to the lived experiences of the students. I anticipate my students potentially having broader interests – wanting to create a piece about climate change, for example. The topic may not be anecdotally personal to them, which means I may do more to teach about the crisis they are discussing. Therefore, the responsibility to engage with that topic of social change, whether through examining external activism or internal reflection, falls to me. I will need to do more research and be able to understand and communicate my findings so that the students know I am committed to making change. Young people are so much smarter than many people in the world give them credit for. They know when a teacher is bluffing.

If I examine my own privilege and realize that I may not have experienced the level of oppression of some of my students, what do I do? How do I bring my introspection to the table without talking over what my students are trying to share? This question tracks back to “listening intently,” but there is also value in sharing my experiences as a form of building trust. Edell advocates for what she deems “radical transparency” and willingness to share (Edell 47). If everyone is sharing stories about themselves, and the facilitator remains quiet, the students will start to retreat, and a tenuous bond will be broken. In my practice, when we share stories I often share first so that I can show my students that I am willing to be open, to give the students time to think of their stories, and, most importantly, to establish a comfort level that the students can consent to.

Guns in Dragonland

The rehearsal process I was raised on at The Brass Ring did not leave a lot of room for creation or experimentation led by the student instead of the adult. The directors would give their specific, pre-planned blocking for every actor to follow, and the actors were then expected to bring those characters to life within those blocking parameters. I can see the value of this method of rehearsal – when one is working with 20 actors, as would be the case with high school casts, or even casts as large as 40 or 60 for the younger age groups, spending very little time on the bones of the show means having much more time to clean and give notes. I suppose the actors created through making their own character choices – but inevitably, those might still be corrected at some point in the process.

Imagine my surprise when I got to college and learned about other rehearsal structures where the actors had more agency. Even in my basic acting classes, I was told to choose my own blocking in my scenes as an actor, rather than having my teacher/director lead me to the answer. I would then get feedback on why my choice was effective or not, which informed my future choices. In one of my favorite theatre experiences of all time, the blocking was born of a tragedy. I was cast in a two-act play, and between the blocking for the first and second act, the director's mother passed away, which took him away from rehearsal for a week. While he was gone, our cast of ten or so worked through the second act bit by bit and developed blocking through collaboratively creating moments. My focus as an actor shifted from “where do I go” to “who am I connecting with?” The context for this experience saddens me, but I still dream of creating this type of work with a future cast. What happens when I, the director—or in youth theatre, the adult facilitator—not only steps back from the conversation but completely out of the room to let my cast create without my imposing presence? In contrast, this experience was also with collegiate

adult actors. What does this process look like when I am required to stay in the room for safety reasons, and am also working with students who are still developing their skills of spatial awareness related to their audience and grasping how to connect their characters to one another?

Admittedly, I still follow the process I grew up on at the Brass Ring, because pre-planning makes sense to me. I feel comfortable and prepared on how I want to communicate my vision to my actors. Pre-planned or given blocking can also be helpful to a young actor who is not yet comfortable with the conventions of theatre, because it takes one of many acting decisions off their plate. But I have also learned through my directing work that the choices an actor can make can often be stronger and more creative than I could have visualized. It is important to give breathing room in rehearsals for burgeoning actors to try different things to make the story stronger. If I *only* allow them to perform what I have told them to do, they have learned how to be an actor for me – not for themselves.

For the most part, this is the adult-to-youth power structure that I followed for *Guns in Dragonland*. As we worked through the different “beats” in the script—the smaller moments of action that build the story—I would give suggestions for what I wanted in the blocking. Some of this was pre-planned, but I also made adjustments as I saw the actual placement of Caroline and Hannah on stage and began to feel the need as an audience member to see a new stage picture from the previous. However, I offered several more moments of student actor exploration throughout the process than I had gotten in my youth. First, Caroline, Hannah, and I actually crafted the beats together. Before we got up on our feet to block a section, we ran through the script so *they* encountered the moments of action and tension and were able to verbalize their findings. We took the time away from script rehearsal to explore character movement and voice through exercises, where I gave them prompts but then asked them to choose what felt right for

them. During script work, I would ask for moments of action, like playing together, but I would then ask them to choose together what that play looked like.

As much space as I gave for creation and exploration, I still frequently interjected my voice as a teacher. These specific actors were reluctant to make big, bold choices. They were at the age where the level of vulnerability required by performing for an audience might mean bullying or judgment in a peer setting. They were still getting in tune with their bodies and understanding what might be required of them to create big movement or intense moments. And these are students who are interested in and have prior experience in acting! Asking for this level of confidence and experimentation in a cast who may never have partaken in theatre before could look totally different.

At the time, my role as an *adult* in the room felt very married to my role as a *facilitator* in the room. I knew I was the person in charge, and I knew I was the person that Hannah and Caroline placed their faith in to take them through this process as safely as possible. There was a certain power I held, even if I never intentionally wielded it or we never spoke of it. But in the case of *Guns in Dragonland*, my role as an adult and the instructions I gave likely influenced the level of creativity Caroline and Hannah were willing to reach. Were they making creative choices because they truly were willing to experiment, or were they making creative choices to impress or appease me? I didn't fully consider this issue in the rehearsal space or even after the show was over. After all, what we needed was to get to a completed product, and that is something we achieved through the choices they made. But now I wonder what disrupting that level of power could have looked like.

#ENOUGH Residency

This residency inspired the question of how much time to spend lecturing to the students versus how much time to allow students to create on their own. Since I was a guest in the classroom, my time had to be utilized differently. Students only had a limited time to connect with me and get information from me. While the knowledge I gained was valuable, I also acknowledge that the results from this residency may look different to a full theatre for social change program I might construct on my own time.

The limitations I faced when teaching a project with individual outcomes transformed into opportunities when it came to creative input from students. I only had the means to teach them the “how”: How *does* one write a play? How *does* one explore plot structure or create dialogue? But the creative choices—the topic, the plot, the characters, the scenes—that was all up to the student. When creating a new piece of theatre, as opposed to acting out a previously existing script, this is how it should be. I set the parameters that the students should meet (a roughly ten-page script) and then let them go free to create.

Are there downfalls to total creative freedom? There is certainly value. Allowing, if not pushing for, the students’ imaginations to go wild and try things outside of their comfort zone builds skills that will be valued in theatrical fields *and* the workforce. But that allowance may not be effective if they are not then getting feedback on what they have created. A facilitator could review a first draft then instruct the students to challenge themselves further or hone an idea, based on the facilitator’s worldly perspective. A facilitator could also create a dialogue with the students about the choices they have already made. It is one thing to make a choice, but another to think critically about *why* the choice was made. With instruction, and with reflection, the students could build critical thinking skills that will apply outside of the project.

Students may also struggle with having too much freedom and little direction when they are unskilled with the subject. As far as I know, the students in the #ENOUGH Residency had never written a play before, and the sheer amount of creativity they needed to have without instruction inhibited them. How many parameters should a facilitator give? Should they ask their students to create a scene, or create a scene with two people, or create a scene with two people arguing, or create a scene with two people arguing about ice cream? It may be better to begin at the narrowed end of the spectrum, to build the skill of playwriting, then broaden the scope to build the skill of creativity through the lens of playwriting. In the #ENOUGH Residency, I did include several improvisation activities to teach about dialogue, tactics, and story arcs (see Appendix B). These spanned from small groups crafting a story one sentence at a time together, to using different tactics to convince someone to give a stolen object back, to improvising the dialogue of a fairytale, then keeping all of these considerations in mind as the students sat down to write individually. I wonder now if it would have been more effective for the outcome if I had chosen just one or two activities and repeated them while scaffolding in new elements or taking away restrictions. I might have chosen the tactics game, where one person must convince the other to give a stolen object back. The two-person dialogue set-up can easily be framed with as many or as few conditions as necessary. Then, because I am not spending as much time setting up each new activity, the students have more time to explore and collaborate.

For the sake of time, and due to the struggle to create interpersonal relationships with my participants through Zoom, I only discussed one actual topic of social change with students—gun violence—and even then, I let the students guide the conversation to their comfort level, which meant I grappled with censoring myself and my knowledge. Part of me wished to explore several topics more deeply, so the students could learn about their passions from someone else’s

experience. However, in the role of adult I also hesitated to impose my beliefs on students, both because I wanted them to form beliefs themselves and because I was uncertain how my beliefs might compare to or contradict what they had learned from their parents or what the school allowed teachers to discuss. At the time, I did not want students to feel conflict over what they were told from different leadership figures, but now as I reflect, I realize that conflict is something many activists grapple with and guiding students through these feelings make them stronger activists in the end. Similarly, if I cannot talk through all the topics of social change my students wish to discuss, encouraging them to do their own research and formulate their own opinions creates critical thinkers.

Best Practices

My work with *Guns in Dragonland* and the #ENOUGH Residency allows me to articulate the best practices to follow as an adult leading a theatre for social change program with youth. These best practices have been tested by me as well as other adults in the Theatre for Young Audiences field, as I have explored previously.

Listen Intently

A teacher should practice active and intentional listening to their students no matter the subject. While teachers have the choice in their careers, young people often do not have the choice in the schoolteachers they have, the classes they take, or the activities in which they participate. Because students face this lack of agency, teachers should give them opportunities for agency whenever possible. This means offering opportunities for students to share their knowledge and opinions throughout the rehearsal process and then taking that information into account while facilitating. Listening intently also means opening conversations so the students

can share their state of being, or how they are doing physically and emotionally. It means observing even when students are not verbally sharing their needs but are showing their needs through their body language.

This is all especially true when creating theatre for social change with youth. Discussing oppression and the need for activism opens people to vulnerability, and they deserve more than ever to have their voices heard by those who hold power. As we raise young activists, we must encourage them to formulate their thoughts critically, rather than blindly follow what we are telling them. For a facilitator, this means letting students share those thoughts and engage in conversation with others. Like when I navigated the conversation about gun violence with Caroline and Hannah by observing their comfort levels through the information they shared, or when my playwriting students chose their own social justice topics, a facilitator should listen to the interests of their students and then provide deeper knowledge of the subject to further the students' activist education.

Denounce Censorship

As I facilitated *Guns in Dragonland* and the #ENOUGH residency, I realized that while I knew plenty about different social change topics, I was hesitant to share that with the students. I realize now that it is better to lean into those topics and give students more credit for their ability to handle heavy subjects. I need to be comfortable not only in my activism but in sharing my activist knowledge with young people. After all, they are observant enough to know when an adult is holding back, and when their leader holds back, so do they. Denouncing self-censorship is a method of forming trust between facilitator and student.

As for censoring the students' work, if any controversial or offensive phrase or opinion arises in the work, I think it is more important to start a dialogue about that phrase than to

immediately shut a student down. I did not see anything offensive included in *Guns in Dragonland* or the #ENOUGH Residency, but I do think back to Edell's "wife beater" example and consider what I would have done in that same situation. First, I think a facilitator should be prepared in the event that a student will write something potentially offensive, so the facilitator will know how to react. If the student catches the facilitator off guard, surprise or shock could lead to an adverse reaction that will do more damage to the student than good. In this event, I think it is best to talk about the choices made in the whole piece, which will give the student the skills to analyze their work with specificity. Then, before asking the student to change something, the facilitator should seek to understand the reasoning behind the controversial choice. The student may or may not be aware of their offense. The facilitator must be aware of their own privilege and culture and how that might differ from the students'. If it does differ, then is something that is offensive to the facilitator also offensive to the student's culture or upbringing? If it is not offensive in the student's culture but is elsewhere, or if the controversial phrase has become so ingrained in language that people no longer question its meaning (such as the "wife beater" example), then the facilitator could use the opportunity to guide their students through critical thinking so that the student should come to the conclusion that they need to remove the offending statement themselves. This denounces the act of censorship, encourages empathy for others, and reinforces the role of the adult as a guide for the student.

Practice Radical Transparency

In the previous section, I discussed the need for a facilitator to denounce self-censorship. Scaffolding from this idea, a facilitator also needs to practice openness in conversation with their students. In a positive teacher-student relationship, the students are excited to learn from their teacher, and therefore the teacher should be willing to share their knowledge about theatre and

social change freely. In my discussions with Caroline and Hannah in *Guns in Dragonland*, I worried about sharing too much information about gun violence that might overwhelm them or scare them. However, I still shared facts about gun violence in America as well as my own opinions on gun control as they related to the #ENOUGH project, and while it was not my goal to convince my actors to share my opinion, I found that being transparent with them led to richer conversations and invited more questions. My transparency led to an opportunity for my actors to learn.

I am white and cisgender, and as I lead theatre for social change with youth, I am aware of the privileges those qualities include. I encourage other facilitators to be aware of their privilege and to be unafraid of sharing their awareness with their students. It is okay to say to a student, “I haven’t been through what you’ve been through, but I want to help you all the same.” Facilitators should also share the experiences they *have* been through, even if they feel they don’t compare to the students’ experiences. The students will see the facilitator’s honesty, which will lead to a trusting relationship.

Beyond creating structure for creative transparency and even beyond radical transparency, the adult in the room must choose how to create space for the considerations of their students’ mental wellbeing while engaging in contentious topics. These considerations will be discussed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: MENTAL WELLBEING

This thesis has so far considered the best practices of how to teach theatre for social change to youth and my role as an adult facilitator. The topic of theatre for social change as well as the topics discussed through theatre for social change can weigh heavy on anyone, especially young people. In programs like these, the participants may have previously been affected by issues of injustice; they also may learn about issues for the first time from their peers, which can lead to shock. This chapter explores what considerations I need to make for the mental wellbeing of my student as they explore theatre for social change.

For the second round of the #ENOUGH Residency, the class watched the two plays produced by the Orlando REP on their own time so we could use our classtime for discussion. They watched *Ms. Martin's Malaise*, the play I did not direct, first, then watched *Guns in Dragonland*. *Ms. Martin's Malaise* explores the effect gun violence can have on mental stress, but there are no deaths. *Guns in Dragonland* does end in a child's death, and I had been so immersed in that project for so long that I forgot to consider how it would affect an unsuspecting class. However, even with their shock, the class held a rich conversation expressing their emotional reactions to the play and how it inspired them to write their own pieces. I winced at my forgetfulness, but also considered how a facilitator can lead students through difficult conversations both safely and bravely.

There is no one conclusive definition of either "mental health" or "mental wellbeing" (Rose, Joe and Williams 2350). The World Health Organization defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community" (World Health Organization (WHO)). There are many organizations and

programs that focus on improving youth mental health. Some of these organizations may even include drama therapy, a psychotherapy technique used to explore conflict (The British Association of Drama Therapists), as a method of improving mental health. A theatre for social change program could partner with a youth mental health or drama therapy program, but as it stands on its own, theatre for social change for youth is not intended to be a therapeutic technique to improve mental health. As I consider the mental wellbeing of my students in this chapter, I am not questioning how to use this programming as a method of improving mental health. Rather, I am questioning how a facilitator can keep their students' mental wellbeing in stasis at a positive level and avoid triggering detrimental mental health issues.

Literary Context

Psychiatric scholars Gabriela Pavarini, Lindsay M. Smith, Nicola Shaughnessy, Anna Mankee-Williams, Natalie Russell, and Kamaldeep Bhui discuss necessary considerations when working with young people with “adverse childhood experiences” (ACE) to create art, including theatre. An adverse childhood experience can mean facing abuse and neglect, mental health stigmas, or community risks such as poverty or bullying. Young people who face stigma for their race, gender, or sexuality can also have adverse childhood experiences, and those students are often the same that participate in theatre for social change programming. For instance:

Young people often arrive at participatory arts projects having experienced continued disempowerment, exclusion and scepticism of their capacity by adults or other youth in their lives. Meeting children's right to a voice, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, means more than providing space – it requires taking a number of steps to foster adolescents' sense of agency and ability to participate meaningfully. (Pavarini, Smith and Shaughnessy 1563)

Pavarini et. al. advocate for frequent adaptations to suit the needs of the specific young people involved in the programming. A facilitator should consider the home life and held values of different families and how that may affect differences in their students. They should also practice cultural sensitivity, which goes beyond considering how to talk to people from different cultures to incorporating interpreters into the leadership team, choosing locations based on comfort level for people of different cultures, and specifically training for the health needs of different communities. They also advocate for training youth participants to be a first point of contact for concerns amongst their peers, because peer-to-peer conversation can often feel more supportive (Pavarini, Smith and Shaughnessy 1563-1564).

Applied theatre researcher Rachel Rhoades further examines the considerations that youth themselves make when devising theatre based around social topics. Rhoades writes of her attempts to create theatre with youth that forms a hopeful look towards the future and her realizations that, despite her best efforts, the youth of today have a very fatalistic outlook on the future of the world. She states:

The narratives the youth reported about the future take on an air of ‘mythology,’ perhaps as a distancing mechanism similar to that of theatre. Their conceptions seemed almost fictional in form and content, perhaps as a means to cloak the despairing affect that inspired the stories. (Rhoades 342)

Therefore, it is vital to push for a futuristic rather than fatalistic outlook by instilling a call to action, meaning encouraging the audience to do something specific to make change, in a devised theatre piece. Rhoades specifically advocates for theatre as a means of “imagining, collectively creating, and supporting the life of new sociopolitical institutions,” because theatre “may illuminate inter-dependence, magnify the importance of subjectivities, uncover/reveal nuances of injustice and social relations, mobilise collective political agency, and provide space to enact the

futures envisioned by the ensemble” (337). As I explored in Chapter Three, to benefit the mental well-being of youth participants, they don’t always need to stay positive, but they do need to remain hopeful.

Critical Texts

In their devising lesson plans, both the Alrutz and Hoare team and Edell choose activities that will support a participant’s mental wellbeing while also exploring themes of power and social justice. Augusto Boal’s activities are a particular favorite, because they explore status and oppression and spark conversation while also giving the participant agency to engage as little or as much as they feel comfortable (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*).

After exploring social justice through these techniques, Alrutz and Hoare task their participants with creating performance elements, beginning with creative prompts. The prompts used to create these performance elements are intended to inspire autobiographical story-sharing, though once the story is shared the piece that comes out merely “speak” to the topic of the story in the final performance (Alrutz and Hoare 64). In my work, I personally have no problem with students choosing to share stories that are autobiographical with one another, but to make that the intention or requirement of an assignment may be problematic. Alrutz and Hoare advocate for the autobiographical nature of their story: “While we focus on the relationship between personal experiences, histories, and statistics in PJP, we also emphasize a practice of sharing and learning of experience among participants in the room” (65). Sharing stories gives young people the opportunity to realize they are not alone in their experiences and can give them a greater cause to fight for. Connection and empowerment are important to mental wellbeing in a classroom or

rehearsal room. However, when putting this notion into practice, Edell began to notice something happening with her students. She writes:

On the one hand, sharing their stories was liberating. It built confidence, fostered community, and contributed to their healing. Through articulating their dreams and struggles on stage, re-embodying their lived experiences and performing their own words for an audience, girls would begin to counteract the lack of confidence, poor body image, and the disenfranchisement of young, “unlistened-to” women. But on the other hand, there was an inadvertent perpetuating of stereotypes related to race, class, and gender taking place as too often, it was the sensational stories of abuse, sexual violence, attempted suicide, pain, and trauma that brought girls so much attention, and consistent applause. (Edell 8)

Witnessing this issue inspired Edell to require a call to action in her pieces, as I would like to do in future work involving theatre for social change with youth. But even so, before the call to action, we are asking students – or students are volunteering themselves – to perform traumatic events, sometimes their own. After they do, they might feel rewarded for doing so because they were brave and the audiences give them applause for creating empathy and inspiring them (Edell 63).

One way to avoid the issues that Edell cites is to have the creator of the piece and the actor of the piece be two different people (Edell 63). Alrutz and Hoare give the creative control to the authors, whether their piece is autobiographical, anonymous, or fictionalized, and this means that they allow the author to be the actor as well (Alrutz and Hoare 66). Edell also gives recommendations for her students who want to perform their own pieces by suggesting that there be a form of distancing through artistry rather than elaborating on specifics, so that there is a “barrier between the story, and the survivor” (Edell 63-64). If part of the scope of this project is to learn skills to creating theatre, I can think of nothing more fitting than to turn stories into metaphors, into poems, into choreography, or into songs. This also may be effective to the audience, since part of our job is not only to make them see, but to make them *feel*.

Still, even when creating these artistic pieces, or sharing the stories they stem from first, I worry about an event where a student becomes overwhelmed with the story they are trying to share and needs to pull themselves away from that space. I have attended some workshops and read studies around being trauma-informed, but I am in no way certified to completely handle a young person's trauma. Alrutz and Hoare write, "practicing adaptability also means attending to longer-term or systemic needs for program changes, such as putting more resources toward trauma-informed pedagogy and 'healing-centered practices'" (57). Whether at the beginning or at the peak of a program, a facilitator needs to have an eye on trauma-informed pedagogy to lead this type of programming in the safest way for young participants.

As Edell explores the emotional states of her students, she writes:

Talking about injustice, racism, violence, and so many of the other broken parts of our world that need fixing, can easily bring you down. Our core organizing principles have always included finding the balance between rage and struggle with also exploring the joy, hope, love, and fun in our process and productions. If we can't imagine positive solutions, then we will never achieve them. (71)

I cannot describe how many times in a classroom that, once off-topic, students want to dig deeper and deeper into the new topic of discussion rather than return to the subject at hand. Especially once one student shares their opinion, multiple students then clamor to reiterate and double down on that opinion. This happens even more frequently when students are given the chance to be negative or angry about something they have suppressed for a long time. Given the chance, it is likely that youth participants will want to dig deeper and deeper into their problems. I want to validate them, and at the same time, I want them to have joy in their experience. I want them to find the ways to fight for justice rather than sit in the injustice. By weaving fun games, healthy ensemble relationships, and stories of success into future lesson plans, as I mentioned in

Chapter Two, I believe students will lean into the power they have and walk away from the project with a fire in their heart.

Guns in Dragonland

In *Guns in Dragonland*, Hannah and Caroline performed a tragedy in their piece for the sake of getting audiences to not only empathize, but to take action and stop wrongdoing. In programs such as Alrutz and Hoare's, or Edell's, the students may perform autobiographically, but Caroline and Hannah performed something they had no personal connection to, though they felt strongly about the topic. At the very end of the play, Hannah's character Lilah faces down the shadow of a school shooter (who is intentionally not portrayed in the play) and is killed for doing so. This twelve-year-old had to portray a seven-year-old dying. The other twelve-year-old actress had to portray watching her friend die and being helpless to stop it. That is so much to ask of any actor, much less children. To some extent, Hannah and Caroline knew what they signed up for when they auditioned, but I still monitored them closely during discussions and rehearsals to make sure they were okay. Sometimes, that meant trying to read between the lines – both girls wanted to be (and *were*) brave in these roles and may not have known their boundaries between bravery and trauma until they were crossed. The steps I took as a director were slow and student-led—I would let them tell me what they wanted to discuss and when they were ready. We had longer blocks of rehearsal than might have been typical for a ten-minute piece specifically so I could work in break times for emotional release or resetting. During rehearsal, there were never any moments of truly overwhelming, rehearsal-stopping emotions, like I have seen happen to others when I was young. This may be because of the considerations I made, it may have been because of Caroline and Hannah's bravery, or it may just have been because we were lucky.

As we reached the end of the piece, in which the characters encounter a school shooter, we had to carefully navigate portraying traumatic experiences without traumatizing the actors themselves. We had a conversation about different methods of communicating when they were uncomfortable, both with me and with each other, so that they could articulate their own well-being. Caroline was always quick to jump in head-first to every conversation about gun violence and to the emotions portrayed in her scene, and at the time I felt a responsibility to protect her from getting too overwhelmed with the feelings her own thoughts or acting choices could create.

Hannah was very reserved in our conversations, and it was difficult to gauge her emotional state. At one point at the end of a run of the show, while I was giving notes, I saw what I interpreted to be distanced, disengaged behavior from her. She closed off her body language and was not as attentive in the conversation as I normally saw from her. I immediately called for a break, which allowed both students to retreat to their dressing rooms (which were individual, because of COVID-19 policies). I gave them a few minutes, then went back to check on them. Hannah, previously “disengaged,” was happily checking her texts and munching on a snack. I asked if she was okay, and she responded chipperly. Perhaps she had just been tired – but I believe that whether she was tired or upset, providing time to process feelings was the right choice. In both cases, I also let the young actors lead the conversations, rather than imposing my thoughts about the topic at hand (gun violence), their character or acting choices, or their readiness to return to rehearsal.

#ENOUGH Residency

If preserving mental wellness means perceiving the body language and words of a participant to understand their current emotional state, then it is first important to establish a

relationship with those participants so that one can read their social cues. When I facilitated the #ENOUGH residency through virtual streaming, I truly felt the lack of interpersonal connection between my students and me. This lack of connection meant that, if they had any concerns about what happened during the residency, they would not utilize me as someone they could trust. I strive to foster a better connection with students participating in theatre for social change for youth going forward, whether I work with them for five hours or fifty.

However, the residencies had something that a sign-up program such as Alrutz and Hoare's or Edell's work might not have at the beginning—community. These students already had trust in one another and could confide in each other when they felt uncomfortable or lift each other's spirits with humor. They also had access to their classroom teacher, whom I had collaborated with closely to create the residency curriculum. If any issues arose from the students, they did have someone to whom they could turn. Having this safety net allowed them to explore their theatre for social change pieces freely. In this safe classroom, that was so willing to explore theatre for social change that they brought in an outside artist, the students could take risks they might not otherwise be able to take.

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, I felt uncomfortable imposing any one social change topic on all the students. While this made navigating both the process and the product tricky, allowing students to choose and share their own stories was beneficial to their mental wellbeing in multiple ways. First, they had the agency to decide what they could and could not handle. They knew which topics were important to them and either already had a story to share or want to explore that topic more. Second, by letting them tell their chosen stories, they felt pride in their work and in their creativity, which in turn boosted their self-image. By learning the skill of

playwriting, they also gained a form a self-expression or a new outlet to share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

Best Practices

As a facilitator leads a theatre for social change with youth program, they should keep in mind the best practices for their facilitation. These best practices influence the structure of the program, the content the facilitator might ask the students to create, and the attitude a facilitator should have throughout their work.

Sharing Stories on Own Terms

To preserve a student's mental wellbeing, a facilitator should provide space for the students to share their personal stories as they relate to the social change topic at hand while also making it known that sharing is not mandatory. The facilitator should make the space comfortable enough for a student to say both "yes" and "no" to exploring social change topics that relate to their personal experiences. The student's comfort level may change from day to day depending on their emotional state and the external forces from their personal lives, and the facilitator should be prepared to adjust accordingly. I found this in the discussions I led for both *Guns in Dragonland* and the #ENOUGH residency, and it is something for the facilitator to be aware of especially as the participant size of their program fluctuates.

If a student is uncomfortable sharing their personal stories, a facilitator should provide alternative prompts that invite students to imagine fictional situations or explore the stories of others that have been shared through media. The facilitator could also suggest that the uncomfortable student explore a story shared by another, more comfortable, student, in a creative partnership. This could be a method of practicing different leadership structures and enabling the

agency of students while also creating a protective space of exploration. While a facilitator should not force anyone to share, they should remain aware of the students who are more reserved and may not immediately share their thoughts. Students may wait for an invitation or have anxiety about speaking up, and a facilitator should extend an invitation to those students, because their voices are equally as valuable.

This best practice is linked closely to “listening intently” (explored in Chapter Three), and the following best practice, “creating an aesthetic distance.”

Creating Distance Between Author and Piece

Edell spoke specifically of the problem of students performing their own trauma (Edell 8). In her work and in the Performing Justice Project alike, students are invited to share their own autobiographical stories, if they so choose. In *Guns in Dragonland*, the actors performed a fictionalized piece, and to my knowledge, the students in the #ENOUGH residency wrote fictional stories as well. Performing fiction allows students to create a distance between the trauma of the story and their personal experiences. The students are not re-performing traumatic events that happened to them. In the case that students do create autobiographical pieces to perform, the facilitator should teach methods of creating an artistic, aesthetic difference so that the audience is not merely witnessing a recreation of trauma.

The theatre genre “realism,” in a simplified definition, depicts stories that are reflective of the typical daily experience using natural dialogue and exploring events that could happen to any human (Price). There is certainly purpose to realism in theatre, especially for representing stories of marginalized people. However, even realism must follow theatrical conventions to differentiate itself as a piece of art. The dialogue in realism is focused on a story, and the action pushes the narrative forward. The purpose of theatre is to create art that engages an audience and

makes them think critically about what they saw. There is space for the creation of realism scenes in theatre for social change with youth, but a facilitator should not rely solely on realism. Students could also create poems, songs, monologues, or scenes that explore emotions or events abstractly instead of realistically. Their work should avoid being literal recreations of events that happened. I believe that the work is more effective when it is an artistic interpretation.

An additional method of creating an aesthetic distance between the author and the piece is to allow someone else to perform the piece. In standard theatre, playwrights do not often perform their own work—they are writing for someone else. A facilitator could also teach this skill. A student will then avoid re-performing their own trauma during rehearsals or performances and would be able to observe the work they created as it is performed by someone else so they can critique and refine the piece.

Imagine Positive Solutions and Include a Call to Action

It is vital to set an intention of change in the rehearsal room that is then included in the final product. The purpose of creating theatre for social change is to inspire both the actors and the audience to take action after the theatre piece is over. One cannot make change if they do not believe that there is a positive outcome to their work. A facilitator should inspire their students to consider how their work will positively affect others. They should remind students that there is hope in the world. One theatre performance will likely not change the entire world immediately – but it may change one person’s mind, or enlighten another to a problem they did not know existed, and the gradual changes of minds and hearts will affect societal change like dominoes falling.

That being said, an audience may not know what to do with the social change information they have been given through a theatrical piece. Therefore, it is important that the student

creators include a call to action in their piece. This call to action is a suggestion of what the audience could do quickly and easily in the time following the production. A call to action could be something stated or shown in the theatre piece itself, or it could be resources given in a handout like a theatre program or a flyer as the audience leaves. By giving a call to action, the students can immediately see how their work can affect change, which will increase their ability to imagine positive solutions instead of remaining in despair.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explored the best practices a facilitator should keep in mind as they conduct a theatre for social change program with youth. The intention of this thesis is for facilitators to consider their mindset as they navigate work with young people and the objectives of their programming. I will restate my best practice findings here so that a reader can observe how the practices interact with each other so the facilitator can best support their participants.

Summary of Best Practices

1. *Build Ensemble*: Strive to create a trust between facilitator and participants by building an ensemble through communication and joy.
2. *Assume Everything Created Has Value*: As the participants create, treat all work as though it is part of the final product so that participants believe in themselves and their work.
3. *Find a Tipping Point from Process to Product*: Allow time for creation and brainstorming before beginning to refine for the final performance. Find a time in the rehearsal process where everyone's focus should shift from generating new ideas to refining ideas.
4. *Find Moments to Reflect*: Encourage students to process the work they are doing through individual reflection or group conversation. Include reflection at the conclusion of the process as well.
5. *Listen Intently*: Offer participants more opportunities to speak than time spent lecturing. The facilitator should remain constantly aware of the needs of their students.

6. *Denounce Censorship*: Allow students to speak and create freely, and encourage reflective discussions if divisive material arises.
7. *Practice Radical Transparency*: Share knowledge, privilege, and experience with participants. Withholding thoughts will only cause distrust among participants.
8. *Allow Participants to Share Stories on Their Own Terms*: Create space for sharing personal stories and allow participants to pull inspiration from their experiences, but do not require it and provide alternatives for those who are less comfortable.
9. *Create Distance Between Author and Piece*: Encourage telling stories using different creative methods, or cast one participant to perform another participant's piece.
10. *Imagine Positive Solutions and Include a Call to Action*: Maintain hope for change throughout the process and give the participants and audience an actionable way to make change.

Theatre for social change with youth facilitators should ultimately act as a guide for students, not only as someone who gives instructions. They should be a resource who educates young people about theatre, social change, and the combination of the two; they should be a trustworthy adult figure; and they should inspire hope in the next generation of activists they are cultivating.

Next Steps

Even though I have formulated ideas and objectives as best practices, my experience and the writings of Alrutz, Hoare, and Edell have taught me that those ideas may change as soon as I begin new practical work. Through this reflection and reading process, my research has taught me that above all, I need to be an intense listener, a fluent adapter, and a radically transparent

adult. Then, and only then, will the work I am doing with young people create social change for *them*. I hope that the explorations made through this thesis have a similar impact on the reader. Even if one is not planning to lead a theatre for social change project, I believe these reflections contain valuable insight on how a practitioner could work with youth who are creating theatre of any kind, as well as analyze their role as an adult and navigate difficult conversations with youth in actor training programs. I think the most important consideration above all of the questions I have reflected on is, “what is best for the young participant?” and I hope the outcome of this thesis sheds a light on that very topic.

These best practices should influence how a facilitator structures their program. The next step is starting a theatre for social change with youth program and getting it off the ground. I hope to take what I have learned through this research and continue to partner with theatres to facilitate theatre for social change programs. Through my work, I will consider the best practices I have found while creating a curriculum and while facilitating, so that I can test their efficacy. My experiences will change based on group makeup, age, and location, and I am excited to see how more extensive research influences my determined best practices. I also hope to serve as a resource for other facilitators to turn to when they have questions about theatre for social change with youth.

Throughout the arc of my time with theatre for social change, from my teenage years to the conclusion of this thesis, the world (or at least the United States) has changed drastically in regards to social issues. Our political climate is contentious, which leads to extreme reactions from both sides of the political spectrum and even incites violence in certain groups, such as the insurrectionist group on January 6th, 2021. This rapidly shifting world makes me wonder how different the world will be as I continue to lead theatre for social change with youth. Some states

are already hindering their educational curriculums to censor what students learn and discuss in class. Florida has passed the Parental Rights in Education Act, dubbed the “Don’t Say Gay” bill by critics, which prevents teachers from discussing sexuality when it is “not appropriate” for the age group, a term which is deliberately vague. Several states have also fought against Critical Race Theory (CRT) inclusion in their curriculums. Though their laws demonstrate a misunderstanding of the use of CRT, which is typically a lens used by academic scholars, it allows these states to force schools to remove content that displays the joys of diversity in their curriculums and textbooks. These laws are perfect demonstrations of oppression for students to fight against; but can I help lead the fight if these topics are illegal to discuss in classrooms? As for my own teaching, I try to stay as socially conscious as possible, but what might seem forward thinking now could come to light as hurtful to marginalized communities in the future. When I teach young people, I consider what I needed to hear as a student. Are those things what students still need to hear? Or are there changes I will need to adapt to in my teaching methods? These considerations will continue to challenge me as a teaching artist and facilitator to critically think about how to provide the best work for my students.

I encourage any potential facilitators reading to find opportunities to create theatre for social change programs with youth if possible. Young people in 2022 are more connected to information about marginalization than ever and are seeking methods to fight against oppression. Depending on where the young person is located, they may not be able to speak out against oppression against the local government, in their schools, or even to their guardians. Still, we must strive to provide access to fighting oppression to teenagers now, not merely wait until they are adults. Alrutz and Hoare state:

We work from the belief that young people are not simply future assets or contributors to society once they reach adulthood. Rather, we understand and prioritize the notion that the young people are necessary members of our communities now with critical perspectives on the world. (Alrutz and Hoare 54)

Young people need all the support they can get now, and they will continue to need support in the coming years. If they have the creative outlet of a theatre for social change program, they learn to express themselves creatively and enter a community that is fighting for what is right, guided by a skilled facilitator who will give them hope for the future.

APPENDIX A: *GUNS IN DRAGONLAND* REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

**Guns In Dragonland
Rehearsal Report #1
Monday, October 19, 2020**

Timeline and Agenda

Start:	5:30pm	Stop:	6:15pm
Start:	6:20pm	Stop:	6:55pm
Start:	7:05pm	Stop:	8:00pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions/Games • Read Through • Discussion/First Impressions • Table/Character Work 			
Total Rehearsal Time:	2 hours and 10 mins	Total Break Time:	20 mins

**Guns In Dragonland
Rehearsal Report #2
Tuesday, October 20, 2020**

Timeline and Agenda

Start:	5:30pm	Stop:	6:45pm
Start:	7:00pm	Stop:	8:00pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm Up Games • Character Work • Beats in Script/Dramaturgy • Explore/Play around with Pages 2-6 			
Total Rehearsal Time:	2 hr 15 mins	Total Break Time:	15 mins

Guns In Dragonland
Rehearsal Report #3
Thursday, October 22, 2020

Rehearsal Information

Rehearsal #	3	Production	#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence - Guns In Dragonland
Location	Rehearsal Hall	Day	Thursday
Report Prepared By	Morgan Polodna	Date	10/22/20

Timeline and Agenda

Start:	5:30pm	Stop:	6:30pm
Start:	6:45pm	Stop:	8:00pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm Up Games • Blocked Pages 2-14 • Run through show 			
Total Rehearsal Time:	2 hr and 15 mins	Total Break Time:	15 mins

Guns In Dragonland
Rehearsal Report #4
Monday, October 26, 2020

Rehearsal Information

Rehearsal #	4	Production	#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence - Guns In Dragonland
Location	Rehearsal Hall	Day	Monday
Report Prepared By	Morgan Polodna	Date	10/26/20

Timeline and Agenda

Start:	5:30pm	Stop:	6:45pm
Start:	7:00pm	Stop:	8:00pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm Up Games • Fine-tuned pages 2-6 • Projecting exercise 			
Total Rehearsal Time:	2 hr and 15 mins	Total Break Time:	15 mins

Guns In Dragonland
Rehearsal Report #5
Tuesday, October 27, 2020

Rehearsal Information

Rehearsal #	5	Production	#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence - Guns In Dragonland
Location	Rehearsal Hall	Day	Tuesday
Report Prepared By	Morgan Polodna	Date	10/27/20

Timeline and Agenda

Start:	5:30pm	Stop:	6:45pm
Start:	7:00pm	Stop:	8:00pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm Up Games • Fine-tuned pages 6-11 			
Total Rehearsal Time:	2 hrs and 15 mins	Total Break Time:	15 mins

Guns In Dragonland
Rehearsal Report #6
Thursday, October 29, 2020

Rehearsal Information

Rehearsal #	6	Production	#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence - Guns In Dragonland
Location	Universal	Day	Thursday
Report Prepared By	Morgan Polodna	Date	10/29/20

Timeline and Agenda

Start:	5:30pm	Stop:	6:40pm
Start:	7:00pm	Stop:	7:22pm
Start:	7:25pm	Stop:	8:00pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walked the set and tested out dragon wings • Fine-tune pgs. 11-13 • Listened to sound cues • Run-through the show 			
Total Rehearsal Time:	2 hrs and 7 mins	Total Break Time:	23 mins

Guns In Dragonland

Rehearsal Report #7

Monday, November 2, 2020

Rehearsal Information

Rehearsal #	7	Production	#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence - Guns In Dragonland
Location	Universal	Day	Monday
Report Prepared By	Morgan Polodna	Date	11/2/20

Timeline and Agenda

Start:	5:30pm	Stop:	6:40pm
Start:	6:55pm	Stop:	7:57pm
Start:	8:10pm	Stop:	8:30pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up • Get dressed/mic'd up • “Designer Run” and First run through with lights and sound • Break/Tech Notes • Working on notes • Run through show, with holds for acting notes. • Break/Tech Notes • Run through show 			
Total Rehearsal Time:	3 hours-(15+13)	Total Break Time:	15+13

Guns In Dragonland
Rehearsal Report #8
Tuesday, November 3, 2020

Rehearsal Information

Rehearsal #	8	Production	#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence - Guns In Dragonland
Location	Universal	Day	Tuesday
Report Prepared By	Morgan Polodna	Date	11/3/20

Timeline and Agenda

Start:	5:30pm	Stop:	7:00pm
Start:	7:05pm	Stop:	8:30pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up • Get dressed/mic'd up • Receive/work through acting notes • Run through show (3x) • Technical Notes/Acting Notes 			
Total Rehearsal Time:	2 hrs and 55 mins	Total Break Time:	5 mins

Guns In Dragonland
Rehearsal Report #9
Wednesday, November 4, 2020

Rehearsal Information

Rehearsal #	9	Production	#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence - Guns In Dragonland
Location	Universal	Day	Wednesday
Report Prepared By	Morgan Polodna	Date	11/4/20

Timeline and Agenda

Start:	5:30pm	Stop:	7:03pm
Start:	7:13pm	Stop:	8:30pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get dressed/mic'd up • Warm up/acting notes • Run through/Record show (4x) • Technical/Acting Notes 			
Total Rehearsal Time:	2 hrs and 50 mins	Total Break Time:	10 mins

Guns In Dragonland
Rehearsal Report #10
Thursday, November 5, 2020

Rehearsal Information

Rehearsal #	10	Production	#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence - Guns In Dragonland
Location	Universal	Day	Thursday
Report Prepared By	Morgan Polodna	Date	11/5/20

Timeline and Agenda

Start:	5:30pm	Stop:	6:50pm
Start:	7:00pm	Stop:	7:15pm
Start:	7:25pm	Stop:	8:00pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion/warm ups • Get dressed/mic'd up • Record Show (3x) 			
Total Rehearsal Time:	2 hr 10 mins	Total Break Time:	20 mins

APPENDIX B: #ENOUGH RESIDENCY LESSON PLANS

#ENOUGH Playwriting Residency Lesson Plan 1

Today's Learning Goals:	Students will share critical observations about two previously read and seen 10-minute plays Students will learn a brief history about theatre for social change and develop their own interpretations of what that means to them
Today's Vocabulary:	Compare and Contrast, Theatre for Social Change
Standards Addressed:	National Core Arts Standards: HS Proficient TH:Cr2-1: Explore the function of history and culture in the development of a dramatic concept through a critical analysis of original ideas in a drama/theatre work. HS Proficient TH:Re7.1.I: Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices. HS Accomplished TH:Re8.1.II: Apply concepts from a drama/theatre work for personal realization about cultural perspectives and understanding.
Materials:	Scripts and videos of <i>Guns in Dragonland</i> and <i>Ms. Martin's Malaise</i>
Teaching Artists:	Samantha Reser

Introduction: (5 min)

- The teaching artist will introduce themselves and briefly discuss Orlando Repertory Theatre's work and collaboration with the #ENOUGH Project. The teaching artist will also introduce the work of the #ENOUGH projects and facts about what they have accomplished in 2020.
- Collectively, teaching artist, classroom teacher, and students will create protocols for teaching synchronously. Discuss needs for sharing thoughts, talking speed and volume, and small group conversations.
- Preface with standards for mental health needs.

Activities:

#ENOUGH Play Reflection (25 minutes)

- Think, Pair, Share: students will pair (or group) to discuss their initial observations of *Guns in Dragonland* and *Ms. Martin's Malaise*. What message did they get from each story? What significant moments in the plays stood out to them? (5 min)
- Gather back as a group and share the standout moments of these thoughts. Allow room for students to respond to others.

- Reflect on the purpose of these plays and how they can be used to make an impact in a community. We are currently living in an age where we can both do actions via the internet that can have a large reach, but also cannot collectively gather or plan large events. How can we take something small, like a ten minute play, and use it to change society for the better?

Theatre for Social Change Discussion (10 min)

- Using the chat function: Gather knowledge through small phrases of “What is theatre for social change?” Teaching artist will read and discuss what the students bring up.
- Using the chat function: What are some basic needs for playwriting?
 - How do these two things intersect?

#ENOUGH Dramaturgy (10 min)

- Teaching artist will give an overview of how the #ENOUGH project came together and what they hope to accomplish.
- While this project has given us some lovely resources, the writing we are encouraging you to do through this residency should be inspired by your own interests. What do *you* want to see change in the world?

Closing: Teaching artist introduces the homework for next class.

For Next Class:

Students and classroom teacher will review #ENOUGH resources of “Submission Guidelines” and “Writing Prompt 1: Statistics into Story”

#ENOUGH Playwriting Residency

Lesson Plan 2

Today's Learning Goals:	Students will consider the elements of plot, conflict, and character in their play ideas. Students will use peer groups to further develop initial ideas.
Today's Vocabulary:	Plot, Conflict, Protagonist, Antagonist
Standards Addressed:	National Core Arts Standards: HS Accomplished TH:Cr1.1.II.c: Use personal experiences and knowledge to develop a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work. HS Accomplished TH:Cr2-II.b. Cooperate as a creative team to make interpretive choices for a drama/theatre work. HS Proficient TH:Pr4.1.I.a. Examine how character relationships assist in telling the story of a drama/theatre work. HS Proficient TH:Cn11.2.I.a.: Research how other theatre artists apply creative processes to tell stories in a devised or scripted drama/theatre work, using theatre research methods. HS Accomplished TH:Cn11.2.II.a.: Formulate creative choices for a devised or scripted drama/theatre work based on theatre research about the selected topic.
Materials:	Scripts and videos of <i>Guns in Dragonland</i> and <i>Ms. Martin's Malaise</i> Plot/Conflict/Character PowerPoint Road Map to Writing a Play Worksheet
Teaching Artists:	Samantha Reser

Gathering: (5 min)

- Brainstorm in chat - what elements do you need to have for playwriting? ● What elements do you think you need to include or consider for playwriting for theatre for social change?

Activities:

Plot Structure, Conflict, and Character Discussion (30 min)

- Classroom teacher will share a PowerPoint created by the teaching artist to help discuss plot structure knowledge.
 - First discuss the typical roadmap that most students will follow. Freytag's Pyramid: Exposition -> Inciting Incident -> Rising Action -> Climax -> Resolution.

- In a ten minute play, where do these points exist? Think about how they were used in *Ms. Martin's Malaise*.
 - What are other story structures that can possibly exist?
 - Episodic
 - Time Jumping
- Show a few ways to explore these story structures when brainstorming. ■
 - Pixar Story Structure.
 - In a world of [description] and [description], a [character] must use [adjective] to [verb] [conflict].
 - Fortunately/Unfortunately, What If?
 - Character: Protagonist/Antagonist, Objective
 - Have students give examples of protagonists vs antagonists in *Ms. Martin's Malaise* and modern culture.
 - Show slide with Doctor, Mother, Batman, Dog and brainstorm potential antagonists for each character
 - Discuss objective - every character has an objective; objectives must conflict/be mutually exclusive; every antagonist thinks they're the protagonist
- In theatre for social change, how do we address the conflict/antagonist in our own world? What are considerations we need to make?

Brainstorm Circles (Small Groups, 10 min):

- Students will be put into small groups. One student will begin a story plot with "Once upon a time" based on an idea they've had for their play topic, and the other students will use "Fortunately/Unfortunately" to develop these ideas. Go around the group twice per person to give enough time for everyone to share. You do not have to take every idea with you, but keep your mind open to inspiration.

Closing (5 min)

Fill out the Road Map to Writing a Play worksheet, parts 1-4(½)

Start writing your play. We'll talk more about dialogue and formatting, but we're hoping to get to a complete rough draft by session 5 (February 12th) to give feedback.

#ENOUGH Playwriting Residency

Lesson Plan 3

Today's Learning Goals:	Students will understand the relationship between objectives and tactics, and how those play into theatre for social change. Students will be able to improvise and write dialogue for characters. Students will relate playwriting elements to stories they are already familiar with.
Today's Vocabulary:	Objective, Tactic, Dialogue
Standards Addressed:	National Core Arts Standards: HS Accomplished TH:Cr1.1.II.c: Use personal experiences and knowledge to develop a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work. HS Accomplished TH:Cr2-II.b. Cooperate as a creative team to make interpretive choices for a drama/theatre work. HS Proficient TH:Pr4.1.I.a. Examine how character relationships assist in telling the story of a drama/theatre work. HS Proficient TH:Cn11.2.I.a.: Research how other theatre artists apply creative processes to tell stories in a devised or scripted drama/theatre work, using theatre research methods. HS Accomplished TH:Cn11.2.II.a.: Formulate creative choices for a devised or scripted drama/theatre work based on theatre research about the selected topic.
Materials:	Scripts and videos of <i>Guns in Dragonland</i> and <i>Ms. Martin's Malaise</i>
Teaching Artists:	Samantha Reser

Gathering: (5 min)

- Open discussion for a short reflection on *Guns in Dragonland*

Activities:

Objectives and Tactics (15 min):

- Reintroduce the idea that every character needs an **objective** - an overarching goal. Objective vs. Superobjective - short term vs long term.
- Objectives activity: "Give me back my phone!" from TYA/USA and AATE's "Dramatic Change Curriculum: Introduction to Playwriting"
- The teacher will sit in a chair, playing the character of a teacher. One student volunteer will play the role of a student who has had their phone taken away because they were using it in class. Their objective is to get their phone back from the teacher.
- Begin the scene and let the student try out a tactic. The tactic doesn't work. Freeze the scene.
- Discuss: So, what did this character try to do to get his/her phone back? These are called tactics.

- In small groups, play out 2-3 more times. Have other students observe which tactics were used, using active verbs to describe.

Dialogue (20 min):

- Now that we understand the need for characters, objectives, and tactics, let's begin plugging that in to dialogue.
- Let's consider a familiar fairytale. Allow students to choose. Now, what is a moment of high stakes in that fairytale? Who are two characters that are in conflict? What are their objectives?
- Two students will improvise dialogue for these moments of high stakes. Allow the scene to either play out until one person has reached their objective or they have come to an impasse. Switch out performers, and note the differences in dialogue between groups.
- As a whole group, what are some observations you made?
- Why is considering dialogue for T4SC important? Last week we asked the question: In theatre for social change, how do we address the conflict/antagonist in our own world? What are considerations we need to make?
 - How does dialogue for T4SC change? (Answer: these characters should be as real as they would be in any other story using the same format. It's their objectives, tactics, and stakes that change.)

Script Formatting (15 min):

- Students will use the time between the next class to begin writing their scripts. They will come to class with a page of dialogue. Let's look at the formatting of some scripts to know how we should structure our own.
- Pull up *Guns in Dragonland* and *Ms. Martin's Malaise*. Observe the formatting. Teaching artist will point out how these elements of formatting can be achieved in a word processor.

For Next Class:

Write (at least) one page of dialogue from your outline. Be prepared to have this page of dialogue read in small groups next class.

#ENOUGH Playwriting Residency

Lesson Plan 4

Today's Learning Goals:	Students will draft dialogue and understand the use for a draft Students will utilize a critical response structure to support their peers Students will consider the future of their projects
Today's Vocabulary:	Dialogue, Feedback, Critical Response, Liz Lerman
Standards Addressed:	National Core Arts Standards: HS Accomplished TH:Cr1.1.II.c: Use personal experiences and knowledge to develop a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work. HS Accomplished TH:Cr2-II.b. Cooperate as a creative team to make interpretive choices for a drama/theatre work. HS Proficient TH:Pr4.1.I.a. Examine how character relationships assist in telling the story of a drama/theatre work. HS Proficient TH:Cn11.2.I.a.: Research how other theatre artists apply creative processes to tell stories in a devised or scripted drama/theatre work, using theatre research methods. HS Accomplished TH:Cn11.2.II.a.: Formulate creative choices for a devised or scripted drama/theatre work based on theatre research about the selected topic.
Materials:	Scripts and videos of <i>Guns in Dragonland</i> and <i>Ms. Martin's Malaise</i> Writing materials: pencil and paper, or laptops.
Teaching Artists:	Samantha Reser

Gathering: (5 min)

- Music Based Quick Write
 - How do I feel?

Activities

Writing (10 minutes):

- Students will be given prompts to write for quickly. Don't revise, just write. Use pencil and paper if you can. Between each rep, stretch and breathe.
 - Sensory: What do you see, hear, smell?
 - Same, but now your play setting
 - You and your character
 - Your character and another character - address the problem

Reflection (10 minutes):

- Go through your writings and circle or highlight the things that you like. Don't be stingy!
- What popped out for you? Three things in chat, then vocalize if you feel comfortable.
- What frustrated you about these writings?
- Pair and share what you liked.

Feedback (20? minutes):

- In groups of four (pairing the pairs), two students will read out one artist's writing. This can be either the piece that they just wrote, or the page they wrote over the weekend.
 - Share what was impactful. "It made me think..."
 - Artist asks questions.
 - Responder asks questions. "I have an opinion about..."
- Go through all four pages.

Use any of the rest of the time to keep writing!

End of class: check with Teacher for next deliverables.

#ENOUGH Playwriting Residency Lesson Plan 5

Today's Learning Goals:	Students will draft dialogue and understand the use for a draft Students will utilize a critical response structure to support their peers Students will consider the future of their projects
Today's Vocabulary:	Dialogue, Feedback, Critical Response, Liz Lerman
Standards Addressed:	National Core Arts Standards: HS Accomplished TH:Cr1.1.II.c: Use personal experiences and knowledge to develop a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work. HS Accomplished TH:Cr2-II.b. Cooperate as a creative team to make interpretive choices for a drama/theatre work. HS Proficient TH:Pr4.1.I.a. Examine how character relationships assist in telling the story of a drama/theatre work. HS Proficient TH:Cn11.2.I.a.: Research how other theatre artists apply creative processes to tell stories in a devised or scripted drama/theatre work, using theatre research methods. HS Accomplished TH:Cn11.2.II.a.: Formulate creative choices for a devised or scripted drama/theatre work based on theatre research about the selected topic.
Materials:	Scripts and videos of <i>Guns in Dragonland</i> and <i>Ms. Martin's Malaise</i> Writing materials: pencil and paper, or laptops. Drafts of scripts. Liz Lerman Feedback Structure https://lizlerman.com/critical-response-process/
Teaching Artists:	Samantha Reser

Gathering: (<5 min)

- Open space for students to reflect on anything they have discovered throughout the week.
 - What have you gotten to write so far?
 - What have you shared with others?
 - How many people are comfortable sharing their works with the whole class?
 - How many are comfortable sharing in small groups?

Activities

Feedback:

- Hearing your words out loud and getting feedback from others is a vital part of the playwriting process.
- Teaching artist will introduce the Liz Lerman response structure: (<https://lizlerman.com/critical-response-process/>)
 - Roles
 - Artist: offers work-in-progress for review

- Responder: Engages in dialogue with the artist, with a commitment to the artists' intent to make excellent work.
 - What does that latter part mean?
- Facilitator: Initiates each step, and keeps the process on track.
- Steps:
 - **1. Statement of meaning:** in the dialogue, what stood out to you as meaningful? Evocative? Interesting? (Positive affects.)
 - **2. Artist as Questioner:** The artist gets to ask questions about their own piece of the responders.
 - **3. Neutral Questions:** This is the trickiest step. Responders are asking questions without bias or opinion. Asking things about like what's going to happen in the story, what the meaning behind a certain phrase could be, etc. (For example, if you are discussing the lighting of a scene, "Why was it so dark?" is not a neutral question. "What ideas guided your choices about lighting?" is.)
 - **4. The responders offer opinions.** The artist may refuse an opinion. Phrase the beginning of the statement as "I have an opinion about _____, would you like to hear it?"
- Have students who are comfortable sharing with the whole class share first. Facilitate the feedback process.
- Break students into small groups. They will read dialogue together and offer feedback through the Liz Lerman critical response structure. With the time we have, it's likely you won't get to all groups - however, you have contact with one another. Use your group as a constant feedback source throughout your writing process.

Closing

The teaching artist will close with possibilities of what to do with the script once it is done.

APPENDIX C: IRB NRHS DETERMINATION



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board
FWA00000351
IRB00001138, IRB00012110
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

NOT HUMAN RESEARCH DETERMINATION

April 8, 2022

Dear [Samantha Reser](#):

On 4/8/2022, the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Exploring Best Practices of Teaching Theatre for Social Change to Youth
Investigator:	Samantha Reser
IRB ID:	STUDY00004164
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRP-251- FORM - Faculty Advisor Scientific-Scholarly Review fillable form (1).pdf, Category: Faculty Research Approval; • IRB Reser 4164 HRP 250 Request for NHR Updated.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations.

IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. 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 activities are research involving human in which the organization is engaged, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination. You can create a modification by clicking **Create Modification / CR** within the study.

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,

Kamille Birkbeck
Designated Reviewer

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