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## Playing Back Spirituality: Using Applied Theatre Practice for Spiritual Exploration an Meaningful Community Building in College

Ann Kinnebrew  
*University of Central Florida*

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PLAYING BACK SPIRITUALITY: USING APPLIED THEATRE PRACTICE FOR  
SPIRITUAL EXPLORATION AND MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY BUILDING IN  
COLLEGE

by

ANN KINNEBREW  
BA English, Florida State University, 1977

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
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## ABSTRACT

Higher Education in the U.S. today is experiencing a theoretical and practical shift toward educating the “whole person” and to that end, is investigating ways to include spirituality in all facets of the academy. This requires focusing on the concept that “in addition to material knowledge, spiritual, emotional, and ethical knowledge is imparted to students” (Khan 2009). Many colleges and universities are searching for avenues to answer this call and better prepare students as business, political and social leaders in a new millennia that defines religion very differently than it did twenty years ago. Today, students are exposed to a much wider array of organized religions from all over the globe. Additionally, the very definitions of religion and spirituality have undergone a seismic shift making it difficult for colleges to incorporate a religious or spiritual focus into curriculum.

More and more people are cobbling together their own unique combinations of religious ideas, practices, experiences and core values from a variety of religious and non-religious sources. The term ‘spirituality’ is sometimes used to describe this new do-it-yourself faith...To be ‘spiritual’ understood in this sense, is to have deeply held convictions, and anyone can have those kinds of heartfelt allegiances. This new ambiguity about what counts as religion or spirituality makes it virtually impossible to keep religion out of higher education. (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012)

Research on the subject of religion and spirituality indicates that this is a point of major concern for many young American college students who are searching for personal and social significance. (Arnett 2000a; Astin, et al. 2011; Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012)

This study asserts that college students enter a unique stage of development known as emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000a) that calls for increased focus on meaning making and identity formation. In an effort to meet the individual and institutional need for spiritual exploration, this study will offer specific applied theatre practices that connect theories in theatre, psychology, student development and leadership designed to serve the emerging adult population as part of a holistic educational vision. This study confirms the feasibility of such a program by a detailed examination of specific theatre techniques and, in particular, the adaptation of Playback Theatre as the most viable form for inner life exploration and campus community building. A formal investigation into the efficacy of theatrical methods is called for as validation of theories and practices offered here. It is my hope that this research will encourage campus-wide awareness of theatre's utility and application to a wider range of students. By recognizing the need to educate the "whole person", institutions of Higher Education can give students the best possible preparation for a full and meaningful adult life through theatre practices uniquely designed for the purpose of inner life exploration and awareness.

Key Implications: new areas of application for Applied Theatre Studies; collaborative opportunities for college theatre departments and student services, expansion of campus wide-visibility and understanding of theatre arts, feasibility for attending to student inner life needs and student community building through theatre.

*To*

*TNK for the example of perseverance, passion and for loving the real me.*

*My strong and beautiful daughters, Abigail, Gwendolyn, Alison and Kelsey who have graciously allowed me to walk beside them in their own spiritual journeys as emerging adults and whose travels inspired this study.*

*My father, for his life-long example of community action and engagement, his passion for learning and his unwavering encouragement.*

*And To*

*Every emerging adult as they search for deeper meaning through their college experience.*

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I was once asked in a theatre workshop, “What is the most impactful or memorable moment of theatre that you have ever had?” A question such as that begged a variety of answers that ranged from productions on Broadway stages to intimate rooms with no stage. The names of illustrious playwrights and famous actors and directors were bandied about in the conversation along with some very impressive descriptions of human and technical feats. Participants were happily reveling in the opportunity to relive these singular experiences. As my turn to share neared, I suddenly was struck with the realization that my answer did not revolve around productions in which I was an audience member. My most memorable theatre experiences come when I am witness to paradigm shifts involving identity, capability and community building in young people.

As a classroom teacher and community arts advocate for many years and in a variety of settings, I have found myself drawn to youth and young adults who are struggling with big life decisions. This population is actively searching for meaning in themselves and in the world around them yet they have few tools at their disposal to help them unpack and identify their beliefs and worldview and then connect these to the wider world. Constant media and technological bombardment makes this introspection difficult leaving critical decision making to outside influences and factors without allowing for deep personal reflection on their own truths. One of my assumptions for this thesis study is that the population that universities and colleges serve is predominately young adults (later known as ‘emerging adults’) who are actively engaging in identity exploration on many

different levels including deep questions regarding faith, truth, spirituality and worldview. This assumption gives my research a singular focus for study with the caveat that programing developed from this and future research can have implications for other social and religious institutions.

As a theatre and teaching artist, I was compelled to find ways that theatre practice can be used to facilitate personal reflection in young adults as they navigate their own identity formation. I willingly admit that focusing specifically on spiritual awareness and exploration comes from my own belief that this is the best starting point to develop personal and social consciousness. I bring a unique perspective to this research but more importantly, I am cognizant of my place as subject of this research. This subject position creates a paradigm for research writing as an active way of knowledge construction, consistent with the constructivist theory that pervades this study. The over arching question that I am exploring in this research can be stated thus: *How can the process of teaching and learning applied theatre skills, and more specifically, Playback Theatre training serve the emerging adult as they engage in development of their inner life and self in a broad and inclusive spiritual context during their college experience?*

Several secondary questions arise as I seek answers to my guiding thesis question. First, who is the population that I serve and why would a theatre based personal inquiry be relevant to them? Second, what theoretical frameworks best validate and inform a practice of spiritual inquiry through theatre for emerging adults in colleges? Additionally, what are the best practices that can be utilized in this work that contribute and reify a

worldview that becomes part of their spiritual and personal identity quest? Third, how can my own reflections on personal teaching philosophy, experience, research and education lead toward a discussion of best practices in theatre based explorations of identity and spirituality with emerging adults that includes all beliefs and perspectives? Finally, what are the implications for further and more formal research? Certainly, this introspective search by young people is ongoing in all life stages since the essence of one's human nature is constantly evolving. But, it is in emerging adulthood that the process carries higher stakes since this quest determines future outcomes and decisions. It is in the nexus of their desire to belong, their need to forge their own path and their drive to make meaning of their world, that today's emerging adult begins their journey towards answering the universal questions of "who am I" and "why am I here?"

As I have already alluded to, much of my interest in this area of study is rooted in my career as a high school teacher, youth theatre director and producer, an arts and theatre community advocate and, more recently, a graduate teaching assistant. Since this study is not a formal one involving specific human subjects, I offer only anecdotal evidence from different personal experiences and observations. These experiences have caused me to deconstruct and examine my own and others' teaching methods and suggest ways to teach theatre as a self-reflective process and build a safe community within the classroom allowing the emerging adult a way to focus on deeper questions that will invariably shape them into an adult who possesses a worldview that includes sensitivity and acceptance of differences in "the other."

This study will focus on one small but important aspect of Theatre Education in a university setting with emerging adults that will open up possibilities for more in depth and formal study of using Applied Theatre methods for a wider range of exploration in identity formation, spiritual and religious questing and community building. Here, a brief explanation of Applied Theatre is in order.

Applied Theatre has emerged in recent years as a term describing a broad set of theatrical practices and creative processes that take participants and audiences beyond the scope of conventional, mainstream theatre into the realm of a theatre that is responsive to ordinary people and their stories, local settings and priorities...Frequently those who engage in applied theatre are motivated by the belief that theatre experiences both as a participant and as audience, might make some difference to the way in which people interact with each other and with the wider world. (Prentki and Preston 2013)

Several schools of thought converge in a study of this sort. It is necessary to weave together specific philosophies and ideas in order to grasp the full conceptual basis for theatre based spiritual exploration and inquiry that can assist emerging adults in post secondary educational settings in their quest for personal identity. The theories used as grounding and validation for my research include human developmental theories of emerging adulthood, identity formation and spiritual development rooted in the work of renown psychologists such as Jeffrey J. Arnett, Erik Erickson and Helen and Alexander Astin. Educational theorists beginning with John Dewy and later, Paulo Freire lend support for using drama as a basis for active, participatory and dialogic learning. J. L. Moreno's development of Psychodrama and Group Therapy (Sociometry) undergird much of Augusto Boal's later work in his Rainbow of Desire techniques. Both Psychodrama and Theatre of the Oppressed inform Jonathan Fox's theory and

development of Playback Theatre, which is integral to the program I propose through this study. Roger Grainger, an Anglican priest, trained actor and certified drama therapist has written extensively of drama and theatre's connection to spirituality in therapy but also "working with groups of people interested in exploring their own and other's spirituality" (Grainger 2004). Of course, Boal's theoretical basis for Theatre of the Oppressed is the thread that ties together applied theatre work of this kind.

My study seeks to validate the need for programs that assist in the exploration of one's core belief system and theatre's efficacy in meeting that need for the emerging adult student in college. Through this study, I hope to give a theatre-based option for colleges to address the growing demand to re-engage with religion and spirituality. Because religion is now conceptualized in extremely broad terms in our society, the lines of demarcation between what is and is not religion are difficult to decipher. The emerging adult necessarily searches for meaning, but today the options seem endless and the search is confusing. I believe that the theatre arts, with its vast arsenal of tools for meaning making, offer colleges and universities practical ways to meet the needs of students in this area as preparation to more analytical and critical studies in other disciplines.

The following is a brief overview that indicates the path of my research journey. Chapter one serves as an introduction as it poses the questions that compel my research and the path of that research. Chapter two defines and profiles the emerging adult by discussing current research and literature on the theory behind this human developmental



stage. I use this research to further discuss connections between identity formation, spirituality and worldview in the emerging adult by focusing on this exploration as a fluid process that requires space and time for self-reflection. Chapter three details important theoretical frames from philosophies in education, theatre, and psychology that are interrelated and create a solid foundation on which to build this work. Chapter four discusses the history and philosophy that is foundational to Playback Theatre. Chapter five deepens the examination of Playback Theatre by discussing practical ways to implement a program in a collegiate setting. Chapter six examines the role of the teaching artist as it relates to the context of spiritual awareness and inner life development in emerging adults. Finally, this chapter concludes the study with a call for a formal study of theatrical practices that are most effective for spiritual exploration in higher education.

By recognizing the need to educate the “whole person,” other departments and disciplines have the opportunity to partner with theatre departments to give students the best possible preparation for a full and meaningful adult life.

Colleges and universities have many roles. They expand the boundaries of human knowledge and introduce students to the search for truth. They train people for future employment. They provide skills and information that can empower them to become community leaders. They teach people to see the world in different ways that may differ considerably from the way they were raised. And they also provide opportunities for students to reflect on life in general, asking them to not only analyze reality as it is but to ponder the meaning of the world and what it could become in light of their own values and commitments. These roles point to the very “soul” of why colleges and universities exist: to educate students as *persons* and not just minds. (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012)

I find the transition to adulthood fascinating and have long held the belief that those navigating these troubled waters deserve special attention by the caring adults who serve

them. By definition, these emerging adults will face significant inner and outer conflicts as they seek to become their own person. Since theatre is the most “human” of all art forms, and part of our human essence is spiritual, important connections can be made between spiritual awareness and theatre making to offer emerging adults an avenue to plum the depths of who they are and what they believe.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE EMERGING ADULT

“Know Thyself” written on the forecourt of the Temple at Delphi.

“Who am I in the midst of all this thought traffic?” Rumi

“Know Thyself was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, “Be Thyself” shall be written.” Oscar Wilde

### The Emerging Adult: Perspectives in Higher Education

Since the tragedy of 9/11 nearly fifteen years ago, our world has become more and more fractured along ideological lines. The “ground zero” for these ideologies is essentially religious causing a worldwide struggle to understand deadly extremisms that are difficult to fathom. Many college students today have grown up in a world where the threat of terrorism is ever-present never knowing the perceived safety of an invulnerable America that their parents enjoyed. They live in a world that is hyper-vigilant where security and surveillance is the norm and even attending a movie theatre gives one pause. Growing up in the shadow of political and domestic violence creates a special brand of anxiety for young adults who must grapple with the feeling that their world is out of control and their future less secure (Eisenberg and Silver 2011). In addition, this age is necessarily fraught with the struggle to find their place in society as an independent, functioning adult. Much of this is an inward or “interior” (Astin 2004) struggle that becomes the basis for identity construction and will determine how the young person will respond to major events and decisions in their adult life.

The first “major event” for a young adult usually involves decisions concerning continuing education. Although not all young people make the decision to go to college, statistics show that of the 20 million new students more than 12 million are under the age of 25 (Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>). Many university and college student services departments are actively looking at ways to serve this young population as they make the first and probably most impactful transition from home to college life. New focus among institutions of higher education is being placed on both academic and personal development. The ancient axiom to “Know Thyself” has taken hold once again in academia. Although the wisdom of the quote above still holds true, new methods to accomplish self- knowledge are being developed and implemented across the U.S.

Higher Education in the U.S. today is experiencing a theoretical and practical shift toward educating the “whole person”. This requires focusing on the concept that while material knowledge is important, spiritual, emotional, and ethical knowledge should also be imparted to students (Khan 2009). The need for inner development is echoed in business leadership training with increased professional, academic and popular programs and literature calling for a return to spiritual awareness in workplace ethics (Fairholm 1997). Many colleges and universities are scrambling to find avenues to answer this call and better prepare students as business, political and social leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. American Higher Education is seen as some of the best in the world, yet criticism is often leveled at a system that fails to include opportunities for self-reflection in moral, ethical and spiritual matters. It is an educational purpose as old as the ancient belief that

education is the development of the mind, body and spirit. “When it comes to inner development, emotional guidance, moral advancement, and self-understanding on the part of its learners, critics argue it [American Higher Education] has failed miserably”(Fairholm 1997). Perhaps this and other statements like it have prompted the significant shift in colleges and universities to begin to include discussions on ethics, moral and values in their curricula and programs. Doing so in a way that recognizes student agency in the search for his own answers rather than blindly accept religious dogma.

In his article in the *Liberal Education Journal*, Alexander Astin makes a strong case for making spirituality central to a liberal education. He observes that, “a focus on the spiritual interior has been replaced by a focus on the material exterior” in higher education since the 1970’s (Astin 2004). He echoes the idea of a holistic education in his explanation of spirituality.

To begin with, spirituality points to our interiors, by which I mean our subjective life, as contrasted to the objective domain of observable behavior and material objects that you can point to and measure directly. In other words, the spiritual domain has to do with human consciousness—what we experience privately in our subjective awareness. Second, spirituality involves our qualitative or affective experiences at least as much as it does our reasoning or logic. More specifically, spirituality has to do with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here—the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to each other and to the world around us. Spirituality can also have to do with aspects of our experience that are not easy to define or talk about, such things as intuition, inspiration, the mysterious, and the mystical. Within this very broad umbrella, virtually everyone qualifies as a spiritual being, and it’s my hope that everyone—regardless of their belief systems—can find some personal value and educational relevance in the concept. (Astin 2004)

Clearly, using a “broad umbrella” to include spiritual awareness in the college academic experience means an intentional look at pedagogy and how each academic discipline can include connections to the more ephemeral aspects of life and learning. The arts and more specifically, theatre intrinsically offer pedagogy that “nurture(s) and cultivate(s) that mysterious, nonconscious part of the human psyche from which all of our inspiration and creativity emerges” (Astin 2004). Recognizing the significance of spirituality in the emerging adult’s development would mean providing opportunities for students to delve in to their own ideas of what this might mean to them. It is my contention that some of the needs stated above can be met through self-reflective workshops that encourage spiritual awareness taught through the theatre departments in universities and colleges.

Although concerted programs that focus on spiritual awareness and development would complete their mission of providing a more holistic educational experience, the benefits to the individual student are potentially life changing. First, the student will begin to recognize the importance of their beliefs as it relates to their response to the demands of college life. Once this inner awareness is initiated, the student can then look at how they can align their choices and behavior to best honor this core self-knowledge. In addition, providing time and space for inner self-reflection and care can set a life-long precedent for spiritual awareness and practice. Teaching or facilitating workshops in a classroom or extra curricular setting will encourage sensitivity to other’s beliefs and spiritual/religious practices and allow for building cross-cultural communities within the university context. Spiritual development is closely linked to moral intelligence and

cross-cultural sensitivity, all of which converge into creating a socially responsible leader in all aspects of American life and is a worthy goal of American Higher Education.

Understanding those we serve as a particular group and recognizing the unique personal challenges they face informs how faculty and student services can actively assist in developing ways and means to serve their needs. The last 20 years has brought needed research in human development that has resulted in delineating a new stage situated between adolescence and adulthood. Understanding the developmental implications of emerging adulthood, and recognizing it as a particular developmental stage that is distinct from adolescence and adulthood gives invaluable insight into the challenges of students on university campuses.

### The Emerging Adult: Who Are We Serving?

Psychologists and sociologists are now recognizing the age range of 18-25 (some experts extend this range to age 29) as a singular human developmental stage that is distinct from adolescence and adulthood whose hallmark is the feeling of ‘in-between-ness’ that causes its own brand of stressors. Jeffery Jensen Arnett, the leading researcher in the field, coined the term “Emerging Adult” to identity this unique stage of development (Arnett 2000a). Prior to this identification, these individuals were often caught in a sort of extended adolescence or young adulthood, neither of which truly captured the true nature of this stage. Because of societal changes over the last 50 years,

young people are delaying many of the milestones that most see as full-fledged adulthood.

So what is an “adult”? When has one reached adulthood? Psychologists constantly debate the answers to these questions often citing everything from biology to personal fiscal management. One thing is clear; the markers that identify a young person as an adult have changed in the last several decades. Princeton’s compilation of studies on the transition to adulthood in 2010 sheds important light on the changes in the American concept of what it means to be an adult.

Today, more than 95 percent of Americans consider the most important markers of adulthood to be completing school, establishing an independent household, and being employed full-time—concrete steps associated with the ability to support a family. But only about half of Americans consider it necessary to marry or to have children to be regarded as an adult. Unlike their parents’ and grandparents’ generations, for whom marriage and parenthood were prerequisites for adulthood, young people today more often view these markers as life choices rather than requirements, as steps that complete the process of becoming an adult rather than start it. (Settersten Jr and Ray 2010)

Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood recognizes the recent prolonged nature of this developmental stage and attributes this to a marked change in industrial societies (Arnett 2000b). In fact, his research shows that the characteristics of the emergent adult are unique to first world countries since youth in less technologically advanced countries mirror a more traditional trend toward adulthood by marrying early and being afforded little choice in work (Arnett 2000b).

Arnett has codified 5 features of emerging adulthood that require consideration for those who work with this population. According to Arnett, an emerging adult will



engage in *identity exploration*, will display *instability* in work, in love and in place of residence, will be *self focused*, will feel constantly in *transition* or “in-betweeness” and will communicate a great deal of *optimism* and hope for the future (Arnett 2000a).

These features have long been cited as characteristics of either adolescence or young adulthood, however, Jensen uses three indexes to validate the uniqueness of the developmental stage of the emerging adult: the emerging adult is more mobile and prone to demographic diversity, they self-report that they identify neither as an adolescent nor as an adult, and they are actively involved in identity exploration in the areas of love, work and worldview (Arnett 2000b). Simply stated, emerging adulthood is a period of exploration and change for young people between the ages of 18-25, particularly in the area of identity exploration.

The concepts of socialization and personal identity formation have changed completely since the post-war 1940's and 50's. During this period, most high school graduates expected to find a life partner by the time they reached their early twenties and to have settled in a career that would offer security and stability until retirement some 40 years later. Identity formation during this period was marked by exterior social expectations and constructs that required reaching certain “adult” milestones. There was little delay between these markers and so the adolescent high school graduate had a clear blueprint for who they would become. During the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, socialization measures and modes of identity constructs have changed drastically. Many socialization theorists agree that forming ones identity in our post-traditional world

requires the individual to be more self-directed. “Life course transitions are de-ritualized and the self must be explored and constructed in a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change. Contemporary self-identity, thus, differs from the traditional self which derived meaning from a continuous life course with implicit predictability across life stages” (Heinz 2002). The emerging adult in this post-traditional society is keenly aware that they face a lifetime of choices and change. The response to these eventualities will obviously affect how they construct their own identity. With 60% of high school graduates entering post-secondary education (Snyder and Dillow 2012) a closer look at this developmental stage is necessary to understand what today’s college student is facing as they construct their own identity.

### Worldview: Shaping and Forming

As our post-industrial society has evolved into a more global society through unprecedented growth in technological innovation, students today are much more aware of other cultures and therefore encounter diverse worldviews. This shift toward globalization means students today must understand both the world around them as well as the world within them. This metacognitive position necessitates an inward look at personal values and beliefs making the initial step in identity formation and the recognition of one’s worldview.

Worldview is often defined as “philosophical and religious beliefs about social and physical reality” (Gutierrez and Park 2014). Another way to understand the concept of

worldview is offered by the Worldview Literacy Project. “The simplest definition of worldview is: the ways in which we make sense and meaning of the world around us. Largely unconscious, individual worldviews are constellated from the scores of idiosyncratic relationships we each have to our bodies, our families, our communities, our culture, our time, and to the natural world around us” (Schlitz, et al. 2011). Awareness of and reflection on worldview is uniquely tied to identity formation and development (Arnett 2007), while simultaneously fostering connectivity to the wider world. Empathy and compassion for the “other” is engendered when students are encouraged to examine their worldview in relation to their neighbors.

The methods that young adults use to answer questions of identity and purpose are highly varied and individual. Because many are testing their newfound independence from parents or guardians, they will engage in a number of activities that will help shape their identity and solidify their personal worldview. Students should be encouraged to engage in activities where they encounter diversity and many colleges and universities offer some of the best ways to do this. It has been cited that Service Learning projects, Learning Abroad Programs and simply taking a class outside their field of study will broaden their view of the world, (Gutierrez and Park 2014). These activities coupled with ample opportunity for individual and group reflection will assist students in their independent development of a more complete worldview.

Prior to college entrance, it is likely that the college freshman will have little true understanding of the concept of worldview, nor will they have a working knowledge of

their own worldview. The developmental process requires deep reflective study covering a wide range of subjects. “A worldview combines beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, values, and ideas to form a comprehensive model of reality. In our worldviews, we construct complex conceptual frameworks to organize our beliefs about who we are and about the world we live in” (Schlitz, et al. 2011). Giving college students an opportunity to articulate their beliefs and ideals about the world with their peers seems a logical first step toward understanding who they are and what that means in their relationship to others.

Exploring personal worldview will necessarily cause the emerging adult to question his or her belief systems whether they are religious or non-religious. Worldview can include either religious or non-religious components, yet it can be argued that it is still part of a spiritual quest. Understanding one’s worldview means articulating beliefs and values that become an emerging adult’s moral construct. Sometimes these elements of a worldview are informed by a religious set of principles such as the Ten Commandments or Four Noble Truths in Buddhism. By the same token, deep and lasting values can be non-religious, as in the case of the ideal of Individualism and Collectivism (Arnett 2000b).

College provides fertile ground for discoveries regarding a worldview. It is a given that young college freshman will encounter diverse worldviews, in fact, that is a desirable outcome of most college experiences. These encounters will likely result in questioning and/or struggling with personal spiritual and religious worldviews that can cause both a

negative and positive impact on student psychological well being. Most, students, however report that this struggle with acceptance of diversity results in personal growth (Bryant 2011). Giving students multiple opportunities to interact with different spiritual and religious perspectives is essential to the development of a personal worldview that connects strongly with the goal of educating the “whole person”.

### Spirituality and Religiousness through the Eyes of Emerging Adults

“Young adult Americans have been identified as the population most responsible for recent changes in the nation’s religious identification and patterns of religiosity” (Kosmin and Keysar 2013).

This quote begins the introduction to a “large-scale qualitative study of Worldviews and Opinions of American College Students is based on an online national survey. The Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture (ISSSC) conducted the survey during April-May 2013 from Trinity College” on emerging adults and their impact on religion in America (Kosmin and Keysar 2013). It is obvious that there is a culture change here that is being driven by the emerging adult. All segments of society are taking notice of the changing course of religious perception in the U.S. and realizing that that there are large-scale societal implications. As mentioned before, my interest has long been in working with young adults because of the transitional quality of their development. I started this study with only a vague inkling of the foundational changes in emerging adult ideologies. As I talked with students in my classes through activities and discussion groups, I began to understand the importance of further investigation into issues of values and beliefs.

Initially, I wanted to investigate the ways in which theatre can express faith and in doing so, encourage interfaith appreciation specifically with the emerging adult. After several discussions with undergraduates, I found the term “spirituality” much more universal than “faith” and more relative to a discussion of identity formation in the emerging adult context. In addition, it seemed that a study of spirituality rather than religion would be more broad and to some extent, more palatable. This may be because the concept of spirituality is difficult to define and scholars still cannot completely agree on a contemporary meaning of the word.

In 2002, Unruh, Versnel, and Kerr did a comprehensive survey of as many empirical and clinical studies as they could find which focused on “spirituality.” They discovered 92 definitions of “spirituality,” almost none of which seem to be concerned with social and historical contexts. Not only had the term “spirituality” become fuzzier rather than clearer over time, but the term had lost one of its moorings to its pre-1980s meaning: that “objective-subjective” structure retained by Principe. In other words, in the majority of the current definitions there is no sense of an individual appropriation of a “chosen ideal,” or anything that points us toward a public, visible reality beyond the self (Bregman 2006).

I believe that this is precisely why this term is so agreeable to the emerging adult. Many of characteristics of emerging adults’ spiritual development tie into vagaries of what spirituality is and how it is lived. It requires no doctrinal or institutional commitment. Basically, the emerging adult enjoys the idea of creating their own spiritual identity from the elements that suit them.

The diversity of beliefs and values and their connection to religion reflects the transitory nature of emerging adulthood. One unique feature of emerging adulthood is the value they place on individualism and thinking for themselves. Those that may have grown up in religious communities with regular attendance at religious services will often

reject any dogmatic practice in favor of creating their own individual set of beliefs and values. Concurrently, the emerging adult does not see the need to attend religious services and eschews any notion that institutional religion should inform what they believe. If the emerging adult reports that they do believe in God, it is a highly personal relationship that makes religious attendance unnecessary (Arnett 2000b).

Much of the literature on this subject retains the term ‘religion’ but with the caveat that the definition is vastly different than in years past. Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen, award winning authors on the subject of religion in higher education, agree that the term has a much broader meaning and continue to use it in their text. For them, ““religion” refers to all the ways in which human beings seek to understand the world and order their lives in light of what they believe to be ultimately true, real and important...Obviously this will differ from individual to individual and from society to society...but that fluidity of meaning itself as one of the key characteristics of religion as it exists in the world today” (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012) However, using the word “spirituality” obviates debate on the subject and so I use spirituality throughout this paper in the same way and with the same intention.

Recent research confirms the trend toward the acceptance of the broader use of the term ‘spirituality’. According to UCLA’s Cooperative Institutional Research Program survey, a frequent response among college students to the question of religious preference is “none”, a figure that has risen considerably in the last decade. This trend even extends to colleges that are religiously affiliated (Kingkade 2015). However, this

does not necessarily mean that students today have abandoned a spiritual mindset. In an effort to understand the “none” group, Trinity College conducted a nationwide survey of college students. The findings from this survey confirm a new trend in religious worldview emerging adults. “College-age Americans are divided among not two but three distinct worldviews: Religious, Secular, and Spiritual. Each of the three worldviews is attached to a distinct outlook on theological, philosophical, scientific, public-policy, and political issues” (Kosmin and Keysar 2013). These worldview distinctions relate not only to emerging adults concepts of beliefs and spirituality but also give evidence that the emerging adult is interested in more than a theological or doctrinal framework for belief but instead favors a belief system that has a cogent connection to contemporary issues.

My own experience corroborates this finding. In a recent informal group discussion on spirituality with college students in my Theatre Survey class, all ten participants articulated the difference between spirituality and religion, several identified as religious but all identified as spiritual and all acknowledged the importance of spirituality in their lives. Interestingly, two were self-identified atheists and one identified as “searching”. I continued to investigate this idea of spirituality as a separate and more palatable framework for exploring practical ways for theatre to reach a wide range of young people as they formulate identity through self-reflective practices. Although, there is a general decline in participation in religious communities, “7 out of 10 emerging adults responded in a National Survey that religion is important or very important in their lives (Barry and Abo-Zena 2014). Therefore, it can be concluded that the emerging adult is engaging in significant internal exploration that eventually results in identity formation that will



extend into adulthood. Because the practice of theatre often begins as a self-reflective exercise, it is incumbent upon theatre teaching artists to find ways to utilize the tools already developed as a means to assist college students in deepening their understanding of spirituality and how it relates to their way of living.

### Exploring Identity through a Spiritual Lens

Defining spirituality still remains a point of contention among scholars. However, as I have already alluded to, the emerging adult will attach his or her own meaning to the term through the process of self-reflection as well as seeking out their own spiritual models (Oman, et al. 2009). What is generally agreed upon by scholars and emerging adults is that spirituality and religion are not necessarily perceived as the same; they may or may not be interrelated but the emerging adult perspective is that one can be spiritual without being religious. Setting the problem of definition aside, my focus turns to the connections between spirituality and identity and how spiritual construction is a significant grounding for identity formation. My use of the term “construction” refers to the emerging adults propensity and desire to “think for themselves” as an overarching mode to create individual meaning for their life purpose.

First, a short examination of theories of identity formation is pertinent to understanding the ways in which spirituality informs identity. Leading Identity Development theorist Erik Ericson’s work in psychosocial development and identity is foundational to discussions of identity formation. Although his research predates

Arnett's Emerging Adult theories, it still holds value in illustrating a connection between spirituality and identity formation.

Erikson (1968) believed that, with advanced cognitive abilities (e.g., formal operations) and a new awareness of one's environment and relationships, opportunities for shifts in perspectives and beliefs arise, resulting in potential feelings of vulnerability. The alteration or transformation of beliefs and perspectives challenges identity in the philosophical sense since such alterations can mean that the person whose beliefs have changed has become a different person altogether (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003). Erikson (1959) believed that changes in perspective and beliefs coupled with felt vulnerability set the stage for identity exploration (McLean and Pasupathi 2012).

The emerging adult's "advancing cognitive abilities" and awareness of their environment and relationships describes well the college experience. As college students are exposed to new perspectives both academically and socially, their core belief systems are challenged in a way that advances their identity exploration. It was Erikson who first coined the term "Identity Crisis" as a normative term for identity exploration in adolescents and young adults. "Erikson used it to denote a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation"(Waterman 2015).

James E. Marcia expanded Erikson's research on Identity Development by recognizing two major components in the process of identity formation; *exploration* and *commitment*. In fact, Marcia's research of the "exploration" component succeeded in replacing Erikson's term, "crisis" and is accepted as more indicative of the process of identity formation.

The type of exploration Marcia ([1966](#), [1993](#)) described is an integral part of the process by which adolescents, emerging adults, and adults endeavor to find answers to the questions: “Who am I?” and “Who do I wish to become?” The very presence of those questions carries the implication that identity commitments are not yet present, or if they had been present, they have been found wanting and have been discarded. Not to have answers to such fundamental questions as what goals to pursue in life, what to believe, and what is worth valuing, and to be searching for answers to those questions is, as Erikson ([1968](#)) described, likely to be stressful and emotionally troubling (Waterman 2015) .

As discussed previously, today’s emerging adult views spirituality, with its highly subjective meaning, as integrally important to defining who they are. Part of identity exploration necessarily involves examining one’s beliefs and values and how they relate to their own definitions of spirituality and religiousness. The interconnectedness of identity and spirituality are difficult to ignore as we look at the formation of both as concurrent. Providing various ways and means for this exploration is essential to the growth and well being of the emerging adult in colleges and universities.

### Spirituality in Higher Education: The Active Pursuit of Meaning Making

Capturing the emerging adult’s perspective on spirituality has been the focus of numerous studies since the beginning of the new millennium. Arnett’s work on observing and defining this separate stage in human development allows colleges and universities to better assess the needs of students as they explore their inner life. UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute launched a major multiyear study beginning in 2003 on “Spirituality in Higher Education”(Astin, et al. 2011). The purpose was to examine the impact that the college experience has on the spiritual life and understanding of college

students. “Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Student’s Inner Lives” was published in 2010 and details the important findings of the research.

The study focused on measuring “Five Spiritual Qualities” and “Five Religious Qualities” of nearly 15,000 students in 136 colleges and universities nationwide. The findings outlined below give further strength to the importance of providing programs that will facilitate student’s spiritual exploration during college (Astin, et al. 2011).

- Students show the greatest degree of growth in the five spiritual qualities if they are actively engaged in “inner work” through self-reflection, contemplation, or meditation.
- Students also show substantial increases in *Spiritual Quest* when their faculty encourages them to explore questions of meaning and purpose or otherwise show support for their spiritual development.
- Most forms of *Charitable Involvement* during college—community service work, helping friends with personal problems, donating money to charity—promote the development of other spiritual qualities.
- Growth in *Equanimity* enhances students’ grade point average, Leadership skills, Psychological Well-being, self-rated ability to get along with other races and cultures, and Satisfaction with college.
- Growth in *Ethic of Caring* and *Ecumenical Worldview* enhances students’ interest in postgraduate study, self-rated ability to get along with other races and cultures, and commitment to promoting racial understanding.
- Educational experiences and practices that promote spiritual development – especially service learning, interdisciplinary courses, study abroad, self-reflection, and meditation – have uniformly positive effects on traditional college outcomes. (italics added)(Astin, et al. 2011)

Any programs directed toward spiritual development should look at ways to broaden the emerging adult’s personal understanding in all of these areas of spiritual development since they are all intertwined components of spiritual development.

Many universities use a variety of methods to address the spiritual quest that their students are engaging in. Creighton University has developed an online “Spiritual

Retreat” that centers on “Finding God” and is decidedly focused on the Christian quest. Many campus ministries offer Bible studies and prayer services while others have lectures and discussions on all different religions and practices. Most of the campus initiatives were passive in their modes of delivery. The most common nod to student spirituality was providing a place for meditation and reflection (Dalton 2001). UCF offers a quiet space to “just be” from 4-5pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays in the Knight’s Plaza (<http://events.ucf.edu/event/175969/meditation-room>). However, having asked many students, most are unaware of the existence of the Meditation Room. Offering a more interactive approach would help students to deepen their own practice of meditation and other centering activities. Although I formerly worked primarily in high schools, I found that allowing time to quiet themselves and relax met with great enthusiasm among my students. I have done the same with college students when working in small group settings. Guided meditation and relaxation has many benefits for any creative work but even more so as a way to focus on self-reflection. The sampling above are important ways to address the spiritual needs of students out side the classroom and largely independent of formal classroom study.

The distinction between spirituality and religion is a given, at least as far as contemporary understanding is concerned. It also fits well with an ethos of Higher Education that seeks to educate the whole person. Young people today readily accept the journey into spiritual exploration as a liberating and defining part of identity formation because it is focused on personal experiences and insight rather than bounded by the perceived rules and regulations of religion. “Spirituality is about self-discovery and self-

expression, about authenticity, compassion and respect for others, and the freedom to explore any number of potentially life-enriching ideas and ways of life” (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012).

This distinction marks an important cultural shift that cannot be ignored if Higher Education is to truly serve its millennial constituents. Institutions who recognize spiritual exploration are concurrent with educational and academic pursuits off dynamic educational experiences for the emerging adult. Students are constantly struggling to synergize academic, cultural and personal information in order to optimize their meaning making. In the deluge of information, the student’s college experiences usually privileges the academic and cultural (media and peers) information over personal knowledge. An institutional focus on meaning making through spiritual exploration may serve to balance an emerging adult’s college experience. Of course, this requires examination into teaching and learning that is far beyond the scope of this discussion. However, for my purposes, it seems to validate the need for a dedicated institutional space for self-reflection, which in the past century was marginalized by the “privatization of religion” and left in the confines of “personal concern” (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012).

As I delve deeper into the characteristics that define this distinctive developmental stage of emerging adulthood, I notice that at first glance, these young people are almost narcissistically self-focused. Yet, because of my personal experience does not resonate with that assessment, I must look deeper. The emerging adult today is just as committed to making a difference in this world and to being equipped to do so, yet

there is an innate need to understand his or her own “starting point” before launching into social action. If given the opportunity, they will make connections between who they are and their place in the larger world. This engagement in self-exploration is not for its own sake, but for a more global one. The problem stems from lack of space and time to reflect on their movement through the identity formation process and how their collegiate learning relates to what they know of themselves.

The arts, with its creative and culturally reflective focus, may provide some answers for universities’ attempt to address spirituality in today’s post, post-postmodern culture. Theatre’s emphasis on “doing” offers already embedded practices for multimodal spiritual exploration. A close look at basic theatre theories of Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal confirm theatre’s efficacy for this kind of work. This is the purview of applied theatre. In applied theatre,

[The] art form is central to storytelling, to healing, to teaching and to learning. Participatory theatre, interactive theatre, theatre in education, theatre of the oppressed, community theatre, outreach theatre, theatre of development-all are interested in the application of a reflective theatre, a theatre that is concerned with facilitating dialogue on who we are and what we aspire to become. (Kingkade 2015)

As I explore the idea of integrating drama into the emerging adult’s expression of spirituality, I am struck with the very *active* notion of meaning making which is the basic impulse that begins a young person’s spiritual journey. The potential for developing theatre activities from existing theatrical forms and practices that deepen an emerging adult’s self-reflection in college is a worthy goal and one that seems unique in Higher Education’s current focus on developing spirituality. The following chapters combine

theories from education, theatre and psychology that inform a theatre-based practice that supports active meaning making and spiritual exploration.



## CHAPTER THREE: MEANING MAKING AND THE THEATRE OF SELF

Every human being is an artist and in the moment of creation, we are at our most sane, most healthy and most fulfilled. When we share a piece of our vision of the world with others, we are better able to see ourselves to interact with others and to make our own choices” Robert Alexander, Founder and Director of Living Stage (Rohd 1998).

Theatre, rituals, and story-telling, has provided a way of “knowing” since ancient times and many cultures have long used theatre as a way to teach morality. “The comic poet Aristophanes thought that “the dramatist should not only offer pleasure but should, besides that, be a teacher of morality and a political advisor” (Boal 1979). In the past, however, theatre’s teaching model was performative, placing the learner (as audience) in the passive position to view the action rather than participate in the action. Even though new performance theories are exploring ways to revision the role of the audience as co-creators of performance, the traditional theatre audience is still a passive consumer.

Nineteenth century educational methods suffered from the same passive didactics. Facts and concepts were to be memorized for later expurgation on exams with little critical analysis or practical application. Students were basically told what to think leaving little need for reflection or application. As new philosophies emerged, the focus of the educational process changed to a process that engendered the important task of meaning making. John Dewey’s revolutionary educational philosophies of learning by doing and child-centered education places the student as the locus of the learning process and recognizes that each student will learn in their own way based on their own

historiography and knowledge base. As a product of Dewey's and other 20<sup>th</sup> century educational philosophies in my own teacher education, I was drawn to theatre as a way to teach the whole student. I continue to honor the *processes* involved in theatre education as much as the product of those endeavors. The quote below is from my own teaching philosophy that focuses my educational work with young people on identity exploration and formation.

Teaching is not about the delivery of knowledge nor is a child's brain a receptacle to be filled with facts that have little connection to their own experiences. For me, it is to create a safe dialogical space for interactive and reflective learning among students... Drama has long been my vehicle for igniting the minds and hearts of young people toward finding themselves in a world fraught with confusion and chaos. There is no greater joy or no higher compliment to be allowed to walk along side a young person for a little while in their journey toward personal growth and identity (Quote from author's Teaching Philosophy).

It is this philosophy that guides me each time I walk into a classroom, facilitate a drama workshop or direct a play with student-actors. At the heart of this philosophy is the idea that meaning making by the individual student is the goal of the educational process and as such, results in building his or her own framework of knowledge. Drama practice is perhaps one of the best ways to begin to build an awareness of inner life. The following pages will serve as both a theoretical frame for using theatre as the basis for spiritual awareness in the emerging adult college student as well as validating a program that moves these theories into practice in a university or college setting.

## Practice in Need of Theoretical Framing

It is no secret among secondary theatre and drama educators that theatre has often been integral for identity exploration among young people. There is considerable research on the positive affects of youth theatre on participants' personal and social development that centers on activities that directly and indirectly contribute to identity formation. "The whole activity of youth theatre is focused on providing young people with the skills and resources to develop their initiative, confidence, ability to express themselves and take risks" (Hughes and Wilson 2004). Many middle and high school students choose to participate in school based theatre programs that include curriculum in skill building toward performance, which often includes relating to a character through identifying themselves with that character's backstory, intentions and physical movements. To do this successfully, the student must undergo some level of self-examination. Many times, they are given opportunities for devising and playwriting and some school based theatre programs have educational components directed at theatre for social change. Many devising activities require students to explore their own feelings and relationship to social injustice creating a unique awareness of their own worldview. A student of theatre in secondary school often begins the journey of inner life awareness through theatre, yet few programs will focus directly on this process as a goal. The majority of those students will leave these theatre experiences behind to pursue other career choices. Yet it is in the university setting that theatre can offer the greatest benefit to continued inner development.

My work with undergraduate non-theatre majors confirms that many students who take theatre survey or appreciation classes as non-majors in college have had positive and, in some cases, life changing experiences in their high school drama program. Yet, for one reason or another they choose other areas of major study. Taking a Theatre for Non-Majors course allows the general student population to re-connect with their high school theatre experiences and deepen their understanding of the art form. In addition, it introduces students who have no prior experience in theatre, either as an audience member or performer, to appreciate the multi-faceted nature of the art. In some cases, students will decide to change their focus of study and pursue theatre as a major course of study. Even if this is not the case, those who decide to take the Acting for Non-Majors class will report through assigned reflections different degrees of positive self-reflection as well as a deep sense of community within the class. Many student reflections indicate that there is significant questioning of family religious traditions along with the desire to find their own individual and spiritual truth. As a teaching assistant in both of these courses, and instructor of record in Theatre Survey, I began to explore ways post secondary theatre classes could assist the larger student population in transitioning to college life and have a direct impact on student identity exploration that focuses on spiritual awareness.

Each semester, during the first week of classes, I usually conduct my own, very informal survey by asking my students to respond to a series of questions designed measure theatre's impact on many adolescent lives. Most respond with reflections on their friendships and the community that is built through working together on

productions. Others cite that performing in front of an audience built their self-confidence. In addition, many also enjoy the creative outlet and a sense of personal and artistic freedom gained through creating characters. Because of the variety of both cognitive and practical skills involved in playmaking, many students begin to understand their individual capabilities both artistically and socially. As a theatre and teaching artist, I believe that many applied theatre practices can have considerable impact on an emerging adult's process of self-discovery and development of their worldview. Over the past 20 years of teaching theatre, working with older teens and young college students, as well as observing other, more experienced theatre artists and professionals, I am more and more convinced of theatre's relevance in aiding young people's exploration and formation of personal belief systems and inner life development.

### Theoretical Connections: The Crafting of Meaning through Theatre

*"Theatre is the art of looking at ourselves"* Augusto Boal

Several philosophies, theories and ideas are helpful in validating the facilitation and work of exploring spirituality with the emerging adult university population. I believe that theatre in both performance and in applied practice offers one of the most effective means of knowing self and others. The deep and abiding purpose for both theatre and education is to create ways in which meaning making can occur. This chapter will examine specific theories that inform the practice of using theatre for deep personal exploration. These theories and their practices are interrelated in many ways. Through

this discussion, a strong thread emerges that weaves elements of three major applied theatre practices that are foundational to working with young people in their search for meaning. Understanding the history and development of Psychodrama (and related Drama Therapy practice), Theatre of the Oppressed, and Playback Theatre offers compelling theoretical and practical context for future college programs of this kind.

#### Active Education toward Social Freedom: John Dewey and Paulo Freire

First, John Dewey's philosophy of learning by doing gives an active frame for all educational work and certainly theatre education is and always has been a very active process. Dewey's philosophy ushered in theories of experiential learning or 'learning through doing' as the means of knowledge construction. "Pragmatic philosopher John Dewey, in his *Democracy and Education* (1916), defined education as a process to restructure the individual experience by reflective thinking through expanding one's present experience. Individual experience is the core of knowledge, not knowledge offered by others" (Kim 2005). Thus, the process of learning is active and involves the whole person, body, mind and some would argue, spirit or feelings. Active learning is central to the Constructivist Learning Model and is applicable when searching for methods for identity formation and spiritual exploration. A close read of the basic assumptions of Constructivist Learning Theory gives the first element of the framework in which to explore spirituality.

Firstly, learning is an active constructive process rather than the process of knowledge acquisition. Secondly, teaching is supporting the learner's constructive

processing of understanding rather than delivering the information to the learner. Thirdly, teaching is a learning-teaching concept rather than a teaching-learning concept. It means putting the learner first and teaching is second so that the learner is the center of learning. (Kim 2005)

The Constructivist Learning Theory then gives the overarching experiential, individual, process oriented focus for spiritual exploration. The classroom becomes a place of personal and community discovery through directed activity, focused inquiry and reflective dialogue. Freire, an equally influential educational theorist whose ideas were also predicated on the idea of education as an active, living, and transforming process. His connection to applied theatre work is evidenced by his strong influence on the development of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed.

Augusto Boal's extensive work in creating Theatre of the Oppressed is the theoretical cornerstone on which many applied theatre practices are based. His is a theatre of process that centers in a dialogic space. Two theorists influenced Boal in the development of his philosophy and the evolution of his work. First, Paulo Freire introduced Boal to an educational philosophy that gave precedence to those whose voices had been silenced by social and political oppression. Boal used Freire's "liberatory" education as a philosophical foundation for his new participatory theatre that developed into what we now know as Forum Theatre. Later, Boal's extension of the term "oppression" to recognize individual oppressions gave Theatre of the Oppressed new dimension. His study of J.L Moreno's work in Theatre of Spontaneity, Psychodrama and Sociometry served to ground Boal's techniques used in his Rainbow of Desire. Jonathan Fox, Playback Theatre's originator also would draw on the influence of both Freire and

Moreno. “I was influenced early on by reading Freire and Boal. I did not take a Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) workshop or meet Boal until much later. Both approaches, psychodrama and TO, valued a nonscripted approach, which was close to my heart. As it developed, with input from many collaborators, it became clear, however, that playback theatre was its own approach, diverging significantly from both Boal and Moreno” (Fox 2007b).

Although they were contemporaries, Boal thought of Freire as a progenitor of the theory that he would formulate into a new and practical way of using theatre in a social context. Boal was intensely influenced by Freire. When Freire passed away shortly after they appeared together in 1996 at The Pedagogy of the Oppressed Conference, Boal was quoted as saying, “I am very sad. I have lost my last father. Now all I have are brothers and sisters”(Paterson 2005) A brief overview of Pedagogy of the Oppressed will reveal a through-line for understanding the wide range of Boal’s concept of oppression and how it relates to both a social and personal context.

Paulo Freire’s social educational philosophy, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, emphasized this idea of mutual exploration as “problem-posing education”(Freire 2000). “Problem-Posing education affirms men and women as being in the process of becoming...it bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality” (Freire 2000). This idea of “becoming” carries with it images of transformation through awareness of self and the world. Freire believed in the education as an active, moving force with its purpose to create social action. Knowledge construction was based on focused inquiry.



“Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through relentless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world and with each other.”

(Freire 2000) His revolutionary theory on dialogical and liberatory education profoundly influenced the world of theatre through Augusto Boal’s extensions of Pedagogy of the Oppressed into one of the most widely recognized theatre methodologies, Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). And so, again, the connection between education and theatre cannot be denied and thus becomes an inextricable basis for a program that can facilitate meaning making and identity formation in emerging adults.

### Theatre of the Oppressed: Augusto Boal

Augusto Boal’s keen adaptation of Freire’s dialogic model of knowing and becoming to a theatrical model has become a powerful vehicle for both social and personal change around the world. His techniques created an empowerment model based in autonomous group dialogue that has been used worldwide and has encouraged a non-violent response to oppression. While it is not my intention to diminish the work of social activism, it is beneficial for young people to first recognize and analyze their own core beliefs on which the impetus for future work in social justice should stand. Using Boal’s methods for individual and personal meaning making and transformation in a group context is a powerful precursor to introducing students to social activism. Many universities are currently involved in developing ways to raise the social and global consciousness of its student body. I believe that social consciousness begins first in the individual and is most helpful in a small group context. These connections will begin to emerge as I further

gather theories that are integral to the practice of self-reflection as a precursor to social activism.

Boal's central frame for his theory and practice is that theatre is "the art of looking at ourselves" (Boal 2002). His grounding metaphor of 'theatre as life' has informed an entire branch of the theatrical world; Applied Theatre. "There are altogether seventeen different genres of drama and theatre (of how to use drama in various educational and therapeutic contexts). All of them are "celebrations of human interaction and creating and sharing meanings together" (Schonmann 2005). Many of these theatre practices make liberal use of Boalian techniques. Understanding the underpinnings of TO through both Freire's educational philosophy and Moreno's psychological theories can serve to validate the core of the work this study proposes. A closer look at Theatre of the Oppressed foundational philosophy and its evolution toward Moreno's development of Psychodrama and Sociodrama illustrates the interconnectedness of education, psychology and theatre in the individual process of meaning making.

The foundational mode for TO is improvisation and spontaneity. These two concepts grounded Boal's development of his Forum Theatre. The dramatic arts, with its focus on the actor's instrument that encompasses body, mind and emotions, gives this work a holistic vocabulary that goes beyond vocal discourse. Boal's theoretical lens for social and individual transformation began with drawing analogies through theatrical vocabulary.

“The theatrical language is the most essential human language. Everything that actors do onstage, we do throughout our lives, always and everywhere. Actors talk, move, dress to suit the setting, express ideas, reveal passions-just as we all do in our daily lives...we are all human, we are all artists, we are all actors” (Boal 2002).

Boal was a master at applying theatrical arts to human activity and activism. The development of Forum Theatre gives audience members agency to create a solution to a social problem by actually inviting them to participate in the scene. Boal’s belief that “we are all actors” gave rise to allowing the oppressed to act in ways that can affect and change the outcome of a problem. Forum Theatre became his form of activism against the oppressions of traditional theatre. (Boal 1979; Boal 2002) Forum Theatre is active and participatory thus honoring Freire’s influence from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

There is a kind of knowledge or perhaps, better, a will to knowledge and power which is apprehended in such circumstances and which is qualitatively different to knowledge acquired from sitting in your seat as silent witness. It is probably also fair to claim that spectators who see a fellow audience member taking to the stage are likely to be more engaged and critically conscious observers. (Dwyer\* 2004).

Although Forum Theatre is the theatrical form that Boal is most known for, his development of Image Theatre and Rainbow of Desire are particularly useful in exploring inner life and serve as way of providing multi-dimensional perspectives of self and others.

The development of the Rainbow of Desire technique marked a significant departure in focus for Boal. Because his initial work was in the third world, Forum Theatre dealt exclusively with “external” oppressions and exploring social solutions with populations where basic needs were not met. Boal’s perspective changed, however, when his work

took him to more advanced European countries. The oppressions had changed. “In Latin America, the major killer is hunger; in Europe it is drug overdose, but whatever form it comes in, death is still death. And thinking about the suffering of someone who chooses to take his own life in order to put an end to the fear of emptiness or the pangs of loneliness, I decided to work with these new oppressions, and considered them as such” (Boal 1995). This marked Boal’s foray into the world of ‘theatre for individual change’ that created a more therapeutic focus related more to Psychodrama and Drama as therapy; practices first proposed by J.L. Moreno more than five decades prior to the development of Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal had previously distanced himself from the theory and practice of Psychodrama but his development of the Rainbow of Desire techniques places his theories closer to Psychodramatic practice than he was initially willing to recognize (Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman 2002). Boal’s theatre was ever evolving. “Viewed over its forty-year history, the work glides naturally, organically from the socio-political to the socio-individual to the individual-political and back again-but it was always rooted in practice, and it was always theatre” (Boal 1995). Theatre of the Oppressed, in its final form, constituted three separate but intertwined practices; the educational, the social and the therapeutic. Each borrowed from the other to complete Boal’s theory based on the idea that, “the a human being not only ‘makes’ theatre: it ‘is’ theatre” (Boal 1995).

Inherent in Boal’s Rainbow of Desire is the justification for using theatre as therapy. My proposed work with university students on spirituality is not intended as therapy but has some therapeutic properties that can inform work of this sort. Boal’s integration of the three arms of TO speak loudly to a theatre practice that centers on the struggle

emerging adult's toward self-knowledge. Examining the three arms of education, therapy and social activism gives self-reflective theatre work a purpose and goal. Participants are encouraged to learn about their deeper, inner selves and actively work toward recognizing what motivates them to be part of a larger society that exists beyond themselves.

Boal had similar goals for his theatre but perhaps had a different starting point. I think here of the image of concentric circles. Boal drew his outer circle first by focusing on changing societal oppressions socio-political theatre. The second circle is inscribed within the first and represents the therapeutic theatre of Rainbow of Desire that calls for an end to individual (inner) or self-oppressions. His third circle empowers the individual to affect policy change for the greater good through Legislative Theatre. The techniques in each of these theatrical frameworks are fluid and useful as they are employed in each of Boal's TO. Developing a theatre of self-reflection would draw the inner circle first emphasizing the importance of self-knowledge and strong core beliefs. From the discoveries made through self-reflection, students would be empowered to work toward community/global change through social and political means. The starting points might be slightly different but Boal's work and techniques give a solid base from which to work.

As theory emerged from Boal's study of theatre, the concept of "spect-actor" also became central to Theatre of the Oppressed. "An actor, acting, taking action, he has learnt to be his own spectator. The spectator (spect-actor) is not only an object; he is the

subject because he can also act on the actor” (Boal 1995). Actor and spectator can be two people or they can exist simultaneously as one within the aesthetic space creating the opportunity for self knowledge as well as knowledge gleaned in groups. Boal concludes that theatre can be seen as “knowledge enhancing” because of its three distinct properties: (1) the ability to move between past and future through exercising memory and imagination; (2) the dichotomy created when the actor is on stage and observes both self (as actor) and not self (as character or past/future self); (3) the property that allows both actor and spectator to magnify or focus on something that would otherwise escape close examination in the larger context of life (Boal 1995). And so, Boal’s development of the Rainbow of Desire technique confirmed that theatre as a viable way of knowing about oneself. Boal’s theory makes a convincing argument for therapeutic theatre yet he was not the first to theorize about theatre’s affect on individual self-knowledge and emotional well-being.

#### Psychodrama and Sociometry: J. L Moreno

Jacob Levi Moreno, MD (1889-1974) was first drawn to theatre as a way of understanding human interaction through “socially activist improvisational drama in Vienna” called the “Theatre of Spontaneity”. He was one of the first theatre practitioners to see drama’s potential for use in other contexts (Blatner 2007). Much the same as Boal, his impetus for his theatre work came from his desire to revitalize theatre by making it more participatory and interactive, thus becoming more socially relevant. “As a result, there has been an increasing convergence as theatre artists have been applying drama in

the fields of education, community building, personal development, business, religion, and other nonclinical areas” (Blatner 2007). His training in medicine gave Moreno the perspective to use theatre in a more therapeutic context. Moreno is most known for his development of Psychodrama and Sociometry yet his work spans many facets of psychology and sociology. Moreno’s therapeutic approach to groups and group therapy spawned a new revolution in psychological treatments. However, he advocated for group work in non-clinical settings as well. Fundamental to Moreno’s development of psychodrama and sociometry was the emphasis on action and role-play both focused on the individual and also in groups. “Moreno’s active, highly personalized, group-oriented focus was a radical turn for psychiatry in the 1920’s and 1930’s”(Moreno and Fox 1987). Moreno’s fundamental beliefs were the cornerstone of his work: the importance of living one’s truth in action; the validity of subjective reality; the premise of living a here and now encounter between individuals (including patient and therapist); and a deep egalitarianism (Moreno and Fox 1987).

These ideals are echoed in each stage of Boal’s work also and further serves to connect psychology and theatre as a way of deepening personal knowledge and truth. In fact, Boal was motivated to write his book, *The Rainbow of Desire* as a result of the invitation to address the International Association of Group Psychotherapist in 1989 regarding his work in theatre and therapy. The conference was held on what would have been Moreno’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday with Zerka Moreno (his widow and editor) in attendance. “His (Boal’s) ideas of spontaneous action, aesthetic space, staged action and catharsis place Boal well within the Morenian tradition” (Landy 2008).

What drew me to look more closely at Moreno's work was how much his ideas on spontaneity influenced Jonathan Fox's development of Playback Theatre, which I purpose as the heart of a self-reflective theatre-based program focused on spirituality. Moreno believed that spontaneity and creativity were inexorably linked and that these concepts were the key to psychological and sociological expression. Moreno believed that creativity and spontaneity are essential to mental health.

Spontaneity is the arch catalyzer, creativity is the arch substance...If there is any primary principle in the mental and social universe, it is found in this twin concept which has its most tangible reality in the interplay between person and person, between person and things, between person and work, between person and society, between society and the whole of mankind, between mankind and the physical world around it (Moreno 1955).

In conceiving a spiritual awareness program, these concepts should take center stage as students explore their hearts and minds. Theatre becomes the obvious vehicle for such a program. As I examine Playback Theatre more closely, Moreno's ideas on these "twin principles" and how they influenced Fox further validate the use of playback as a means to explore spirituality as part of the college experience.

#### Drama Therapy and Non-Therapeutic Groups: Roger Grainger

Moreno's influence on two other practices complete the theoretical container for this work. First, British actor, registered drama therapist and Anglican priest, Roger Grainger (1933-2015) gives insight into using drama in a spiritual context. Because of his unique skill set, he is able make salient connection to exploring spirituality through drama.

Finally, the next chapter is devoted to a discussion of Jonathan Fox's Playback Theatre



with its emphasis on theatrical interpretation of personal story gives a template for developing a community conversation on personal spiritual understanding and experience.

As a drama therapist, Roger Grainger distinguishes his work from psychodrama and psychoanalysis as preferring an indirect approach to a client's issues. "Modern Dramatherapy makes use of a range of insights and techniques of psychodrama, but is more genuinely dramatic in its use of metaphor and in preferring fictional plots to straight autobiography...it concentrates on mirroring our condition, not directly reproducing it" (Grainger 1995). These ideas of 'mirroring' and 'metaphor' open the door to a therapeutic process that is more creative in nature. It is not merely another theatre-based technique accessed to be included in a full range of psychological techniques, but rather, the *act* of creating drama is the therapy. It is in the act of creation that Grainger connects the spiritual qualities inherent in drama therapy. Grainger also references theatre's distancing affect for the client and the therapist; "we are both distanced from and involved in, other people' experience of living...because it is a form of theatre, drama therapy allows us to look at other people 'through their own eyes' instead of from the outside" (Grainger 1995). The power inherent in the act of creating drama is in its ability to create new meaning for the client; a power that should be and can be harnessed in non-therapeutic settings.

Grainger's work as an Anglican priest extended to spiritual exploration in non-therapeutic groups. His work with group spirituality is especially pertinent to this study

since he makes a case for the effectiveness of the exploration of this very personal human process in a group or corporate setting.

Working in groups serves as a powerful reminder both of our corporality-the things we share both as bodies and as *a* body-and out individuality, or what we think of as unique to ourselves. Logically speaking, of course, this is a paradox, because we usually think of these things as opposites. In practice, however, it turns out to be quite straightforward: when we are aware of the presence of others we are also conscious of ourselves as distinct from the rest. Crowds tend to prevent people from speaking up for themselves. Groups on the other hand, encourage them to do so. (Grainger 2004)

The group necessarily bonds and becomes its own entity and, in the case of spiritual exploration, forms its corporal expression of spirituality. The group then becomes a reflection of the individual reality and is similar to the relationship between an audience and the actors in performance. “Relationship and reflexivity go together; personal reality cannot exist out of context.” (Grainger 2004) Groups can offer both risk and protection to each member. Considerable attention to group building and bonding activities is extremely necessary for successful group exploratory work especially when making spiritual discoveries.

Moreno’s work also informs how groups function. He codified group communication as ‘tele’, a kind of reciprocity among its members that creates a corporate ‘wisdom’ (Moreno and Fox 1987). “Group experience constitutes its own unique kind of purposeful action, the creation of meaning from confusion, community from individual isolation. This is not simply wisdom *in* the group, but the wisdom *of* the group; knowledge that the group bestows and each member receives personally, as a gift from elsewhere” (Moreno and Fox 1987). Grainger goes so far as to say that the very

interworking of groups as they strive for corporate wisdom is itself a spiritual act that rises out of the corporate creative force as dramatic action occurs (Grainger 2004). Certainly, with spirituality as the group focus, it is easier to see the propensity for something mysterious and mystical to happen within group dynamics.

There is no denying that Grainger draws very heavily on the roots of drama therapy, but he is careful to craft his work with a non-therapeutic focus making work of this kind accessible to a wide range of individuals. Although Grainger's workshop prototype is focused more for adults from various walks of life, many of these ideas can be adapted to serve the emerging adult college student. Grainger places his unique workshop approach to spiritual exploration as an artistic endeavor rather than "instrumental" in the sense that it has a set agenda and prescribed outcomes. His workshops "will not teach anyone here 'to be spiritual' or even, in precise terms, what spirituality actually is" (Grainger 2004). Implicit in his work and in my own proposal of similar work is that *spiritual exploration is a search for questions over answers, for meaning over dogma, for human connection over isolation*. This idea is an imperative for spirituality exploration on college campuses.

The theories discussed in this chapter progressively validate techniques that could be employed in a spiritually focused theatre based workshop. Both Freire and Boal remind me as a teaching artist that developing this program should be rooted in active dialogue that begins with questions posed by participants not by the facilitator. Each workshop should be approached as a singular experience that grows organically from within the group. Boal's Rainbow of Desire is instrumental in remembering the influence of

environmental factors that impact perceptions of religion, faith and spirituality. Emerging Adults actively question their family religious paradigms as they consciously form their own, individual spiritual identity (Barry and Abo-Zena 2014). The games and activities developed by Boal to rid individuals of their personal oppressions are an important component of this proposed work. The realization that Moreno and Fox place such high value on spontaneity and creativity validates the use of theatre as the basis for an effective collegiate program of this kind. More than that, these two principles make up the essence of self-reflective theatrical practice. Spontaneity and creativity allow the participant to see their inner life with new eyes and set patterns to navigate the transitions inherent in emerging adulthood.

As a teaching artist and theatre maker, it is my deepest hope that I foster an atmosphere of acceptance, respect and love in all that I undertake. Never is that perspective more important than when I am working with the vulnerable population of emerging adults. Grainger's "group spirituality" mindset and strong argument for working in groups with this sensitive subject gave me substantial encouragement that this could be done. His emphasis on artistic expression seems to be the cornerstone of the practice and one that insures an atmosphere of equanimity. I reserve the discussion of Playback Theatre and the theories behind its development for its own chapter. Because of its grounding in personal story, artistry, spontaneity and visual language, I suggest that this Playback Theatre training would work best as a framework in which college students can explore their inner life in a safe, active, accepting environment.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PLAYBACK THEATRE

### Merging Theories into Practice

*“For me, what is most important is to create a theatre that is neither sentimental nor demonic, hermetic not confrontational, but ultimately a theatre of love” (Fox 1994).*

One final and perhaps most important theatrical structure is worth exploring in more depth in order to make a complete theoretical justification for working with groups of emerging adults as they explore their spiritual lives. Because of its theoretical roots in theater, ritual and psychodrama, Playback Theatre provides a practical construct from which to explore spirituality. Playback Theatre is born out of a desire for community connection through personal stories from the audience. It is highly improvisational, interactive, spontaneous, and holistic. It requires special training in the forms but does not require professional theatre training therefore its “citizen actors” come from a broad cross-section of occupations (Fox 1994). In this examination of Playback Theatre, I give evidence of its suitability as the foundation for a theatre –based program that explores spirituality as it relates to identity formation for emerging adult college students.

Although at first glance, the basic premise of Playback Theatre is quite simple, a closer look reveals ways it addresses many complex human needs and experiences. From simple, personal story emerges universal messages and values that say to those that tell their story that they are heard and that their life can be translated into an artistic expression. Playback sends the message that theatre is not always the purview of the

professional performer and echoes Boal's belief that 'we are all theatre' and that theatre is not always situated in a play script. Playback honors the artistry and profound meaning in everyday life (Salas 1993). What is unique and perhaps most powerful in Playback is the focus on the teller's inner story; the deep listening of the actors to creatively express the feelings of the teller through exclusive use of sound, dialogue and movement. Its focus is on one story at a time and one person in that story with no predetermined purpose except to honor the teller. "In order to support acts of collective remembrance within a culture of separation, PT grounds its practice in a theatre whose currency is not well-rehearsed prose but the emergent narratives that comprise the cultural knowledge of a people" (Sajnani and Johnson 2011).

Jonathan Fox first began developing Playback Theatre (hereafter referred to as PT) in the early 1970's in response to his interest and experience with non-scripted theatre, indigenous, ritual storytelling and Psychodrama. His vision for PT was for "people to see their stories acted out and share with neighbors aspects of their daily lives and deeply felt concerns" (Fox 1994). He saw this theatre form as a way to "sing about ourselves", to "elevate", to "cohere" (Fox 1994). His creation of PT honors the transformative and healing power through the ritualized storytelling of everyday lives "We are trying to create a context similar to that of traditional society, where there is no clear separation between art and healing." Co-founder of PT, Jo Salas, articulates the ways in which PT is a source of healing and transformation. First, she speaks of the human "need" to tell our stories. "From the telling of our stories comes our sense of identity, and our place in the world and our compass of the world itself" (Salas 1993). Secondly, Salas sites the

healing power of art and aesthetic. “Our [playback theatre] aesthetic attention allows the story to become a testament to an ontological meaning and purpose” (Salas 1993)”

Schechner echoes the recognition of the transforming power of theatre as he explains how theatre is situated in society.

I locate it [performance] in transformation-in how people use theatre as a way to experiment with, act out, and ratify change. Transformations in theatre occur in three different places and at three different levels: 1) In drama, that is, in the story; 2) In the performers whose special task it is to undergo a temporary rearrangement of their body/mind, what I call transformation. 3) The audience, where changes may be either temporary (entertainment) or permanent (ritual) (Schechner 2003).

Out of Fox’s vision, a theatrical form emerged that is situated in ritual and spontaneity that honors both the individual storyteller and the community they represent. Playback Theatre has grown to be a world wide theatrical practice with an international organization and special training arm that offers classes internationally on several different levels.

Throughout its development, Playback Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed have been closely linked. These two theatre practices share many common characteristics. “As mentioned earlier, PT and TO are similar yet distinct. They both use personal story to illuminate the social connections and issues of a community. They both use image theatre. Both rely on audience participation. Both forms emphasize the citizen actor. Both Boal and Fox were influenced by the teachings of Paolo Freire” (Fox 2007a). Fox is careful, however to emphasize that the two theatre practices have differing intentions. “TO looks for solutions, but playback theatre enactments do not. Playback Stories instead become the vehicle for deep dialogue that does not demand an answer” (Fox 2007b).

Perhaps this is why Playback is especially useful in exploring spirituality and identity. The story remains situated in the teller's reality rather than oral text to be analyzed for social or psychological empowerment. The subjective perspective of the teller is celebrated and rendered as theatrical art. Although Fox and Boal did not meet until late in the developmental stages of their respective theatre practices, TO and PT are very complimentary attending to the ethos that theatre with its emphasis on human story can frame an understanding and process by which we live and grow in the world.

Equally as influential to Playback Theatre's conceptual development was Moreno's therapeutic method of Psychodrama. Fox was drawn to many of the elements of the practice yet is careful to delineate what aspects of the practice he incorporated into his theatre.

What I saw there [A Psychodrama Retreat Weekend] was close to my deepest vision for the theatre: it was intimate, personal, communal, intense. Psychodrama was built on a paradoxical equilibrium of respecting the individual and valuing the group. In contrast to typical hierarchical social structures, psychodrama, with its concept of spontaneity, allowed any participant to take the creative focus at any one moment. Psychodrama also invited deep emotions. I wanted such balance, flexibility, and catharsis for the theatre... I feel more allied to that tradition than what developed later (Fox 2007b).

Playback Theatre owes much of its theoretical frame to both TO and Psychodrama yet it also is clearly its own theatrical entity. It is not discursive or analytical but instead relies on the free exchange of the story. The story becomes the object that is exchanged between the teller, the actors, the audience and finally back again to the teller with the intent of celebrating human experience and connection. Like TO, its theatricality centers



on image but the use of repetition gives PT the sense of ritual and gives the playing space a sense of the sacred.

Playback Theatre's most unique characteristic is perhaps its elevation of personal story as a way to convey value to the individual storyteller and its recognition of personal stories as a community-building construct. Stories have long been part of social and community life and as drama, were performed in pre-literary societies to express morals and traditions inherent in the community (Fox 1994). Playback theatre offers a performance that seeks inclusion, immediacy, interaction and inspiration as elements on which to build community. It is in the liminal space between the telling of the story and the enactment of the story that the room becomes a community or a "communitas" (Turner 1995).

Just as actors play stories back based on their interpretation of what they heard, audience members watch and listen to the enactment from their unique interpretive frame. This means that the enactment represents an alternative telling to the one they have already heard...Playback Theatre has facilitated connection through identification with the teller, identification with other characters in the story, empathy with the teller or empathy with others in the story (Dennis 2004).

Victor Turner's seminal work on ritual helps to explain "community" building in a playback performance. "I prefer the Latin term "communitas" to "community" to distinguish this modality of social relationship from "an area of common living" ... It is rather a matter of giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be *no* society" (Turner 1995). This "bonding" is built on an atmosphere of trust, acceptance and respect for the teller and the story itself. Both are

handled with extreme care by the conductor, a role that requires keen insight and sensitivity to the teller, the audience and the playback actors.

The two foundational ideas of ritual and spontaneity that are embedded in Playback Theatre are seemingly juxtaposed but they are paramount to the spirit of the theatrical construct. Ritual, in this context refers to a structure in space and time that serves to contain the unpredictable and unrehearsed expressions of the personal stories. The ritualistic structure of a playback performance is exercised mainly for the audience and teller; yet the artistic essence of the playback performance requires freedom and spontaneity from its actors who perform within the ritual. These seemingly contradictory notions of structure and freedom create a paradigm for the PT practitioner. A successful performance emerges when the troupe is adept and comfortable in the liminal space between the two.

Most theatre theorists would agree that theatre and ritual are strongly linked. Schechner devotes an entire chapter to the circularity of “ritual to theatre and back” (Schechner 2003). It is the ritual that “helps summon the heightened perception of experience that can transform life into theatre” (Salas 1993). PT rituals begin with transforming the space into a place where PT can take place; a place created by the troupe; a special space for a specific purpose; a sacred space. The conductor then is responsible for maintaining the ritual throughout the performance. The choice of language, the rhythm of the interview of the teller and the conductor’s strategic repetition of the story followed by the invitation, “Let’s Watch” all add to the playback ritual. After the interview, the actors enact the story for the teller and the audience followed by a

direct but silent refocus on the teller and the final check in with the teller by the conductor. These five stages; interview, setup, enactment, acknowledgment and check in, serve to ritualize the playback performance thus creating a safe space for the next audience member to volunteer another story.

Spontaneity in Playback Theatre is as equally important as ritual to the success of the performance. Fox's concept of spontaneity is rooted in Moreno's theoretical approach to psychotherapy and sociometry. Moreno placed great emphasis on spontaneity as a positive human characteristic "that propels the individual toward *appropriate* response to a situation and to a new response to an old situation" (Fox 1994). Moreno believed spontaneity was a creative force that is considered the matrix of creativity and the locus of the self (Moreno and Fox 1987). Fox cites spontaneity as the essential ingredient in playback performance. He says that spontaneity "requires that the senses be open to information from the environment" and that to do this "we must be *in* the moment" yet at the same time be "*outside* the moment to make sense of what is occurring". This liminal state allows the actor to "take action" which will "in turn create a new environmental condition" (Fox 1994). Thus, both Moreno and Fox agree that the essential characteristics of spontaneity are that it is sensory, free-flowing and responsive to change and most definitely resides both in the mind and the body allowing for both "quickness of action" as well as "choice of action" (Fox 1994). The playback troupe must diligently uphold the delicate balance between ritual and spontaneity and the freedom that comes from a community of sharing.

Why use Playback Theatre as central framework and method to explore personal spirituality with emerging adults? What do I expect to accomplish with Playback Theatre that could not be accomplished with other theatre techniques? Answering these questions lead me to the ideas intrinsic in self-reflection and theatrical methods that adequately capture the process as well as gives the participant agency over that process. What is needed is a method that taps into deep creative impulses that beg to be expressed and shared in community as a way of bonding through self and group knowledge. It should offer a freedom to “try anything” because there is certain safety within its flexible form and practice. This method of training should build community quickly to insure safety and equanimity despite participant differences. Because spirituality is often expressed through ritual and symbol, the theatrical practice should be grounded in those elements. The theatrical methods used in a course with spirituality as a focus must be multi-modal, highly active and rigorously artistic. I found that Playback Theatre and its training offers most of the elements listed above and as whole theatrical practice, presents a formidable framework for self-reflective theatre.

In my study and practice of Playback Theatre, I am always struck with the bond created by the troupe through the training and rehearsal process. I have spoken to many different troupes on this point and members consistently describe their involvement with Playback as “healing”, “transformational”, “life-giving”, or “belonging”. The experience of weekly rehearsal around personal stories of feelings and experiences about the intervening days, the inherent value of caring and knowing through shared listening and telling, the necessity of working together through an intuitive force that Grainger and

Moreno referred to as “tele”, are cited as the “cement” of this bond. Although this experience is often difficult to articulate, its fruit is the attitude with which the troupe members enter a performance space. It seems to become a “gift” of sorts that they wish to give in some measure to their audience. Playback Theatre through rehearsal and performance might well be an effective “incubator” for spiritual understanding and identity exploration.

Peter Wright, Associate Dean at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia, research into the sociological affects of playback performance gives scientific evidence for the reflective and reflexive nature of Playback Theatre in performance.

PBT (Playback Theatre), simply put, can be seen in E. Wenger’s (1998) terms as doing, becoming and belonging, where the doing is telling, witnessing and modeling, the becoming reflects the learning-healing continuum and growth of identity, and the belonging is the development of community as a result of the PBT experience. As a generative participatory process PBT reflects both cultural and social change where the affective, somatic and cultural possibilities of learning in and through the Arts are embodied. It is a way of enquiring into human experience, representing that experience, and reflecting on it with multiple interpretations, in short moving from absorption or a pre-reflective awareness towards reflective awareness and hence a greater sense of agency in one’s life (Wright 2011). In this way, PBT as a site for cultural learning is a powerful form of sense-making or meaning-making potentially taking participants from and through experience, aesthetically imbued, to increasing levels of transformational praxis. (Wright 2013)

Wright’s research conceptualizes the effects of Playback Theatre as “*Vectors of Change*” in three actions that engage a playback audience; *telling, witnessing and modeling*. He notes that relating to the story in these “vectors” fosters both learning and healing for the storyteller through a collaborative process with the players, the conductor and the audience. Wright confirms Playback Theatre performance as personal “arts-based enquiry” (Wright 2013) “This learning has a number of facets, including learning

about self, learning about others, and self in relation to others; this inter-subjective form of learning having a particular power through an aesthetic frame (Wright 2011). In addition, there is also the potential for instrumental, aesthetic and spiritual learning, where spiritual learning is associated with notions of wholeness (Driver 1991) and holistic education (Martin 1997).” (Wright 2013). Wright’s research confirms the efficacy of Playback as a theatrical form for spiritual exploration, community connection and artistic expression. The emerging adult is already pre-disposed to accept means that assist in identify formation and the college campus is an obvious place to situate programs of this kind.

The PT “text” is personal story, which evidence suggests that sharing them in an academic environment has profound affects. “Sharing spiritual stories can be invigorating personally and academically. As student from an elite liberal arts college explained to us why she thought religious views should be welcome into classroom discussions, and what she described was an attraction to individual narratives. “The idea that our personal stories have value is radical. To think that our stories have academic or moral significance is energizing. It helps us make sense of theories. It is liberating” (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012) This, combined with active, artistic expression leads towards a theatrical methodology that would include all the necessary components needed for spiritual exploration and reflection. Playback Theatre seems to deliver on most accounts. As I begin transitioning to the practical aspects of exploring spirituality through theatre practice, I look for ways “into” the work as scaffolding for Playback Theatre training. The games and exercises I choose should be grounded in the theories outlined in this and

the previous chapter. The following pages illustrate ways the theories examined in chapter three can be used in practice. I demonstrate how Playback Theatre offers a practical framework that could be used as a dedicated course through a theatre department or as an extra curricular semester-long program.

I draw from many sources whose work proves the efficacy of the methods outlined, some of which I have used or observed in a variety of workshops and classes. Relating personal experience and reflection as a teaching artist provides additional anecdotal evidence of their usefulness. The ideas put forth in chapter five are merely to help the reader envision modes and methods for future work in spiritual exploration through theatre practice. It is intended to illustrate ways this practice could be carried out and to, perhaps, “put legs” on the theories and ideas proposed in previous chapters. Although the following are suggestions for practical application, sufficient theoretical groundwork has been laid to warrant testing these ideas as a dedicated program in a real world setting with trained and qualified teaching artists. It is expected that these techniques would be adapted and modified to suit department and institutional needs. Nevertheless, detailing theatrical practices in this context should give ample validation for situating a program focused on spiritual awareness and discovery in college theatre departments.

## CHAPTER FIVE: PRACTICE AND ARTISTRY

### The Toolbox

Exploring the actual practice of work of this kind is not without reservations. Several questions and concerns arise as the practice emerges: How can we engender respect and acceptance of all spiritual perspectives and practices? How can we maintain the exploratory atmosphere? How can we allow for different skills and comfort levels within the group? How can we evaluate the work? What are the performance opportunities and why are they necessary? The answers to these questions lie in combining exercises and techniques developed from Theatre of the Oppressed, Drama Therapy and Playback Theatre. In essence, these practices were born from many of the same questions outlined above. As discussed, the focus of work that explores spirituality with college students is centered on self-reflection and discovery in a group context. Astin and Astin's seven-year comprehensive study on Spirituality in Higher Education suggests that opportunities that include these elements as the most effective practices for exploring spirituality. "Students show the greatest degree of growth in the five spiritual qualities if they are actively engaged in "inner work" through self-reflection, contemplation, or meditation. Students also show substantial increases in Spiritual Quest when their faculty encourage them to explore questions of meaning and purpose or otherwise show support for their spiritual development" (Astin, et al. 2011).



Ideally a program like this would be offered through several different channels. College orientation sessions might suggest this course or workshop as helpful in making the transition to college more meaningful. University programs that are focused on leadership training, or social justices could promote this program to strengthen the foundation of work in those areas. Theatre departments might find it useful to advertise to both theatre majors and to non-majors in their survey and acting classes as a way to explore both themselves and the art of theatre. Student life and service organizations could use a program that explores personal meaning in order to connect their mission of service to the campus community. The entry points for students are obviously varied giving the opportunity for a diverse group of participants. I have found that the group size is most effective when limited to no less than 10 and no more than 20 in order to maintain an air of intimacy and transparency necessary for successful personal exploration. Meeting twice a week for a full semester would give ample time to train a group for a dedicated Playback performance for invited guests. This, in turn, extends the sharing of personal stories to the wider campus community.

### Naming and Gaming: Identifying the Individual and Group

The first focus of a workshop or course on spirituality is to explore the concept both individually and as a group. Arriving at a group consensus can be done through a combination of individual and group image work, spoken word poetry, soundscapes, sociometry and group discussion. The primary effort at this point is to challenge the participant's preconceived notions about communication and connection within

themselves and the group; to give them new ways of seeing, feeling, speaking, sharing, hearing, touching. Boal's concept of "de-mechanizing" is especially appropriate in this first phase of work and serves to set the tone for the course as a whole. The focus of this process is that the actor "must re-learn to perceive emotions and sensations." (Boal 1995). Games and activities serve to heighten actor's senses and open the pathways for response and action.

Games are essential to the success of any theatre ensemble and often become part of the rehearsal ritual even after years of working together. Before any exploratory work can begin, it is important for the teaching artist to create a safe space where bodies, minds and hearts are free and flexible enough for expression. This is done through establishing a routine that involves various games and exercises designed specifically for this purpose. The importance of warm-ups cannot be overstated. Boal claimed, "actors must always work on their bodies to know them better and to make them more expressive." (Boal 2002) These exercises were never for the body in isolation; they were meant to involve mind, the senses and emotions. "Ultimately, these games serve to heighten our senses and de-mechanize the body, to get us out of habitual behavior, as a prelude to moving beyond habitual thinking and interacting. We also become actively engaged with other participants, developing relationships and trust, and having a very good time "(Paterson 1995). Viola Spolin, often referred to as the "American Grandmother of Improvisation" and originator of Theatre games, supports the notion that playing games help build relationships. "Theatre games do not inspire "proper" moral behavior (good/bad) but

rather seek to free each person to feel his or her own true nature, out of which a felt, experienced actual love of neighbor will appear” (Spolin 1983)

Additionally, games and activities that involve all the senses are equally as important especially in Playback Theatre training. Isolating the senses and creating vocal soundscapes prepare students to use a multimodal approach to self-expression. Experimenting with hand held instruments and rhythm give new dimension to many activities and challenges the group to work toward harmony in both sound and action and also prepares students to incorporate music into Playback training and performance. Theatre games can be utilized at any stage during the course of the work. The teaching artist should have a full arsenal of games on hand to bring fresh perspective and renewed energy to the workshop.

### Spectrograms: Group Action Identifiers

Spectrometry is a practice developed by J.L Moreno that is used in both Psychodrama and Sociodrama as a warm-up to different therapies. However, many group facilitators use spectrogram activities in workshops on leadership, business practices, education, career development and many other areas. “The Spectrogram is a technique that group leaders use to help give the group members and the group leader feedback about what the make-up of the group is about or how people are feeling regarding a given issue. The point is that things are not clearly this or that extreme, but often somewhere in the middle or along a gradient” (Kole 1967).. I usually include a

statement that places the student on the introvert/extrovert continuum. The result helps me to determine future plans for activities as well as expectations for both the individual and the group. It also gives students a non-verbal way to know and be known. After each spectrogram, the facilitator asks the two on the extremes if they would like to explain why they chose the place on the line and then elicit other responses from those in the middle. Spectrogram exercises are a quick way to introduce the subject of spirituality as well as allowing both facilitators and students a way to assess the composition of the group. I use spectrogram to model open consideration of all points of view and to encourage listening without judgment.

#### Poster Dialogues: Responding Anonymously

Active exploration with students requires several essential materials that should necessarily be available during all sessions. The first and most important are large pieces of blank paper that can be affix to the wall, such as the large “Post-It Note” pads or butcher paper and tape. A set of different colored markers, a pad of drawing paper, glue sticks, scissors and extra pens and pencils complete the materials list. These materials are used in nearly every preliminary session as a way to focus students’ thinking toward the work for the day. One or several questions are posed on the large pieces of paper and posted around the room. As the students enter, they are encouraged to respond to these prompts in one word or short phrase by writing directly on the poster. In addition, it gives direction for future activities by using their own responses to guide the plan for the course. In this way, the participant is given agency for the content of our work.

Using this format has several advantages for both the participant and facilitator. First it allows the participant to consider his thoughts before responding, as well as measure this response with others. Poster Dialogues lend an element of safety for the respondent, as their answers become part of a whole group response. The facilitator can use the responses as source material for image work, spoken word poetry, Playback training material and points of discussion. These posters also serve as a record of the “group wisdom” that Grainger alluded to in his discussions in Group Spirituality (Grainger 2004). Theatrically, they will become the script from which to express spirituality both personally and corporately. I often have students choose several words and ideas from the posters that are most significant to them as a means to identify themes or as a way to distill into definitions. Poster dialogues are an essential tool in this particular practice and can also be useful to the teaching artist in any group activity or workshop as they work toward discerning the most pertinent concerns of the group they are working with. (*see figures 3-7 for examples*)

### Blueprint for Coursework

In thinking about developing a course or workshop on Spiritual Exploration it seems plausible to think of this work as a way of mapping a journey; a journey that begins in the student’s inner core similar to maps that indicate with a large arrow, YOU ARE HERE. This means establishing a center or at least an area where we feel most comfortable with the idea of spirituality. It’s a starting point that carries the caveat that the point can change and expand within the course of the immediate work and also

throughout the course of one's life. The structure of this work begins with using several games and activities to gradually bring spirituality into focus. In the pages that follow, I describe in detail how the first few sessions of a course on spiritual awareness might take shape. The focus here is two fold; first it is important to address spirituality using several different modes and techniques so that the student can begin to articulate individual and corporate understandings of spirituality, through artistic and theatrical expression. Second, the student is becoming more and more aware and adept at theatrical expression that will become necessary as they learn the forms particular to Playback Theatre. In essence, this first phase is developing both content and skill simultaneously.

#### Session One: Building Community

Check In: All sessions begin with a one-word check in response to my prompt, which might be a random prompt that might relate to their day or week. "If I could eat my day, it would taste like \_\_\_\_\_". Then we might have a brief explanation.

1. *Stretching and Shakedown*: Participants are free to stretch parts of their bodies that feel tense or fatigued. This activity ends in a "shakedown" of the limbs. This quick warm-up is both fun and relaxing for most students.
2. *Name and Gesture*: Designed to attach a physical representation to each name and, when repeated by the group, helps participants to remember everyone's name.
3. *Moving Day*: This game helps to get the group moving and thinking quickly.

4. *Bombs and Shields*: Another great movement game. It becomes frantic and fun with lots of laughter.
5. *Two By Three*: This game involves pairs and gets the students improvising sound and movement.
6. *Recognition Walk (also called "Covering the Space")*: This activity is a segue into more focused and self-reflective work. Students move throughout the room first focusing on their movement and their bodies in the space. As the activity progresses, they are directed to connect with others, first visually, then through touch and then through sound.
7. *Spectrograms*: Often the opening spectrogram statement is benign and one designed to introduce the activity. For instance, "*My primary focus is on my studies and making good grades.*" As the activity progresses, the statements become more personal. : "Stand along the imaginary line that extends across the room to indicate the degree in which you agree with this statement; *I believe that there is an ultimate plan for my life.*" Or another more general question; "*I believe that someone can be spiritual but not believe in God or a transcendent being.*"
8. *Reflection*: At this point, it is good to assess the progress of the group. Perhaps a quick review of names is called for before the group reflects on the previous activities. I always like to ask; "What surprised you?" or "What did you see going on?" or "What activity helped you feel more a part of the group and why?"

9. *Ritual:* After reflecting, the group can begin to develop a ritual to end the sessions. Its important to create something that indicates the transition from this work back to their regular life. In doing so, a “sacred space” is created within the room and the context of the work. The ritual I use is the following. The students either link arms or put arms around each others shoulders in the form of a circle. We say in unison as we lean toward the center in a bowing motion, “We move in.” Next, we lean out with our eyes to the sky and say, “We move out.” Then, as we take two or three steps to the right, we say, “We move through.” This is repeated two more times but on the last round we do it all silently. This ritual gives a nice ending to each session and allows the needed personal reflection on the time together.

## Session Two: Building Community and Scenes

1. *Warm Ups:* Again, a series of stretches to music or perhaps a time of free dancing and movement to instrumental music get the group moving and creating shapes with their bodies.
2. *Games:* Tangles and Knots, Push Not to Win, Boal’s Ball
3. *Poster Dialogues:* Around the room are large pieces of poster paper attached to the walls. Students are directed to respond to the prompts with one word or with a phrase. Below are some ideas for these prompts.
  - What makes something sacred?



- What makes you feel significant in your world?
- Describe in a word or phrase how you felt when you were CHALLENGED about your beliefs, religious practice or worldview.
- Describe in a word or phrase how you felt when you were DISCRIMINATED against because of your beliefs, religious practice or worldview.
- Describe in a word or phrase when you feel most safe when sharing about your personal thoughts and ideas about spirituality or identity.
- What questions about spirituality or worldview do you most wonder about?
- Describe in a word or phrase how sharing with others about your religion, faith or your personal belief system is beneficial to you?
- Describe in metaphor or symbol what your struggle with the big life questions, or inconsistencies is like for you.
  - “Struggling with \_\_\_\_\_ is like \_\_\_\_\_”
- Use a word or phrase to describe how your spiritual life or worldview and values have affected your life choices so far. Think about your choice of college, relationships, career paths or considerations, etc.

*(These questions were derived from Astin and Astin’s 7- year study on Spirituality in Higher Education.) (Astin, et al. 2011)*

4. *Respond to Responses:* Students are then asked to read the responses and circle one on each poster that resonates with them. I take the responses that have the most reactions and use the words and phrases as “scripts” for the image work that follows.
5. *Infomercials:* In pairs, tell a short experience you have had in relationship to one of these words. Think in terms of “selling” this concept. Create a 30 second commercial that informs and entertains viewers. Include a slogan and jingle that explains the benefits of the ideas expressed. Be mindful of substance. Ex: Spirituality, Wisdom, Worship, etc.

6. *Performance:* Each Pair performs for the group
7. *Reflection:* Which of the scenes made you feel differently about the concept presented? Why? What was easy for you in this activity? What was more difficult?
8. *Ritual Closing:* *see above*

### Session Three: Image of Spirituality

1. *Warm Ups:* Again, a series of stretches to music or perhaps a time of free dancing and movement to instrumental music get the group moving and creating shapes with their bodies.
2. *Portraits Game:* In groups of 4-5, I call out a “group” such as “firemen” or “Family of Hippos” or “clown family”. Each group must create a portrait of that group using different images that express the group’s purpose or identity. Here, levels are encouraged, as well as physical connections.
3. *The Truth about Me:* One game in particular is effective with students when discussing spirituality and in helping them to arrive at their own definition. I call it, “The Truth About Me”. Basically, one person stands in the middle of the circle (participants can stand or sit) and makes a statement about herself, those that agree or associate with that truth step in the middle with the initiator. The facilitator calls, “Scramble” (or any word to signal disengagement) and everyone must find a new position in

the circle. The one left out of the circle must make a new statement beginning with “the truth about me.” As the game progresses, the statements get more personal of their own accord and begin to reveal student identities. At this point, the facilitator can turn the focus more toward questions of beliefs, worldview, or religion. Soon, the guise of the game has been dropped and students begin to reveal their thoughts on spirituality and how it informs their lives. This game is best attempted after several other community-building activities have been completed. As with all activities, this game is optional but rarely do students refuse to take part. The emerging adult is eager to talk about deep concerns and questions but rarely are they offered a chance to do so.

4. *Creating our definition of Spirituality:* Returning to the posters, students look through words and phrases that might use in their own definition of spirituality. They write these words on an index card and keep them. In a circle, each participant will form an image of what that word or phrase means to them as each word is called out. Then they will be encouraged to put a sound to that image. EX: freedom is called out to group. Each person makes an image simultaneously of what freedom is to him or her.
5. *Group Definitions:* In groups of 3 or 4, complete this sentence:  
“SPIRITUALITY MEANS...on the index card. Now create a portrait that expresses your meaning; either have one person read your sentence or come up with another expressive way to read it.

6. *Perform for the Group:* Each group expresses visually and orally their definition of spirituality
7. *Reflection:* What made each group distinct from the others? In what ways did this activity change your understanding of spirituality?
8. *Ritual Closing.*

#### Session Four: Identity and Spirituality

1. *Warm Ups:* Again, a series of stretches to music or perhaps a time of free dancing and movement to instrumental music get the group moving and creating shapes with their bodies. At this point, students are encouraged to connect and create movement together to the music.
2. *Games:* Focus on Simultaneity- Group Clap, Group Jump, Walk and Stop, Mirror game
3. *What Am I? What do I want?:* Form a circle. Ask people to volunteer to share with the group one thing about themselves that they believe no one else in the group knows. Participants then walk around the space. On 'freeze' everyone stops, pairs up with the person nearest to them and sits down. I then ask them to discuss the four following statements in terms of beliefs, values and worldview: Three things about me that are the same as everybody else in the room; Three things about me that are the same as some people in the room but not others; Three things about me that I feel

make me different from everyone else in the room; Three beliefs or values that I feel other people in the room have that I do not have.

4. *Reflection:* How did it feel to do this exercise? Do your beliefs and values create difference between you and others? How is that difference felt?
5. *Defining Me:* I distribute the following response cards. The students do not write their names on them. The instructions are as follows: On one the green index card, respond in terms of your spirituality (this may or may not be in religious terms) to the following question with three answers:  
*What am I?* I collect these and then distribute a different colored card.  
The students then respond to the following question with three responses.  
*What do I want?* I collect the cards. Then I lay them out on the floor randomly for all to read.
6. *Reflection:* The group discusses what they read. What are the over-riding themes? What does this say about spirituality both individually and as a group? What surprised you?
7. *Tableau:* I then discuss the two questions posed above. We talk about how this might extend to our inner and outer selves. What am I? Indicates out outer selves-what others see. What do I want? Speaks to our inner selves. Students then are asked to create an individual tableau or image of their inner self. Once frozen, students are then encouraged to look at other's images. The same is done for the inner tableau.

8. *Reflection:* How were the two images different? What expressions did you see? Encourage one-word reflections with no commentary. Does the expression of the inner self reflect your spiritual identity?
9. *Spiritual Identity:* Make a new tableau that expresses your Spiritual identity.
10. *Reflection:* Discuss any connections made between Personal Identity and Spirituality. How were the three images similar? Different?
11. *Ritual Closing:*

#### Session 5: Making Space for Spiritual Practice and Renewal

1. *Warm Ups:* Extended stretching with basic Yoga Poses.
2. *Discuss Spiritual practices:* What does that mean to them? What activities do they do to connect to their inner selves and or to God or other transcendent being? Why is this important?
3. *Introduce Deep Breathing*
4. *Journey to my favorite place:* This is a time when students are able to relax and make space and time for themselves. I lead them through a series of physical tension and release exercises while lying on mats. Through guided relaxation techniques, I help them visualize the place where they are most relaxed and at peace.
5. *Reflection:* Students discuss share their experiences together. If comfortable enough, they describe their peaceful place in detail.

6. *Concert for peacefulness:* Participants are asked to make one sound represents peace to them. They repeat that sound as I ask for changes in tone, volume and dynamics. Once that is established, I ask them to make a sound that represents what they love the most. We experiment similarly to above and add in the sound of peace back in. The third sound is the sound that represents their inner life. As those three sounds are established, students then create a concert in three movements. I ask for a volunteer conductor to direct the concert. This is usually quite funny but it gives space and time for vocal expression.
7. *Instrumentals:* Since playback theatre uses a variety of instruments, I use this time to familiarize students with the instruments and how they can enhance expressions of movements and later, stories. Each student chooses an instrument. I let them experiment and familiarize themselves with their instrument. We talk more about tempo, duration and tone. Then we begin with a 'musical story'. The prompt is 'Playing a day in my life'. The idea is to express instrumentally how they go through a normal day. Ex. "It's Morning"-then I encourage them to think about what starts their day and make that sound and think through the pace of the morning and express that with their instrument for 30 seconds. Then we move to lunchtime, dinner time bed time. Then we do it all together. This activity has allowed them to experiment with musical expression in story form and prepares them for Playback Theatre rehearsal.

8. *Reflection:* This is more of a final “expression”. I put on music and ask them to physically express what they took away from this session. They then are to end as we started, lying on the mat and breathing deeply.
9. *Ritual Closing.*

#### Session 6: Deep Listening and Acts of Service

1. *Stretching and Warm-up:* This session begins the transition to learning Playback Theatre. We begin with some guided stretching and deep breathing.
2. *Sending Sound Out:* Then we move to the mats and lie down or sit in a comfortable position. I ask them to listen to the following sounds. Sounds in the room, sounds outside the room but inside the building, sounds outside, human sounds, animal sounds, mechanical sounds.
3. *Reflection:* Here we discuss how to listen. Also, what was a challenge in this activity and why. Is this an active or passive activity?
4. *Being “In the Moment”:* At this point, we focus on listening without judgment, which is integral to Playback Theatre but also part of being open and aware. This trains them to be aware of “The other” without focusing on their own response whether in conversation or in improvisation. Often we do this outside. The students are instructed to:
  - a. Sit stable and still, be relaxed and alert. Close your eyes
  - b. Listen to the sounds as they occur



- c. Do not imagine, name or analyze the sounds. If these arise, release them and return to the sounds
  - d. Listen with openness and awareness
  - e. Let the sounds come to you, do not strain to hear the sounds; let them touch your eardrums
  - f. Notice how the sounds rise and then fall away; notice rhythm, shape, tone
  - g. Do not grasp at or reject any sounds
  - h. If there are no sounds then just rest in the silence
5. *Telling and Listening:* Find a partner and a workspace, each of you tell a story about a time when you accomplished or discovered something that impacted you positively. Focus on the teller. Make sure you understand the story arc. What happened, what was the outcome? Retell the story to the teller. Now, enact the stories for each other. Now listen to the story again but share the emotions that were experienced. As you retell your own story, be active and animated, help your partner feel what you felt at the time. Reenact the story for each other but focus on the emotional story. You can use movement, facial expression and sound but no words unless its gibberish.
6. *Performing:* Perform the stories for the group.
7. *Reflection:* How did the two story telling experiences differ? Which one was more interesting, expressive? What was difficult about this exercise?

How can you use some of what you learned today in your own life outside the rehearsal room?

8. *Closing Ritual:*

Session 7: Playback Theatre Forms for Performance; telling our stories

This begins the formal training of Playback Theatre. During this second phase, the students will tell many different stories about their lives. Each story will be deeply heard and expressed through theatrical expression indicated by the forms they are trained in. Many of these stories may or may not have a focus on spirituality, however, the very act of telling, of seeing your life expressed artistically and being in an intimate and safe community usually evokes spiritual connections. As facilitator, I am always aware of opportunities to make those connections with students. The enthusiasm and anticipation of performance opportunities grows as the group becomes more and more familiar with Playback Theatre and its potential to build community within the college context.

Training and Rehearsal: Toward Spiritual Understanding

A clear picture of personal story telling as a means for spiritual inquiry and self-reflection emerges as the Playback rehearsal process begins. Throughout rehearsal of each of the roles in Playback Theatre, there is ample opportunity to share feelings, thoughts and experiences thus building a strong sense of belonging to a group whose strength is in their diversity of experience. No two stories are ever the same and each story carries as many meanings as there are people in the room. The spirit of Playback

Theatre defies judgment and closed mindedness. By situating the training and performance in individual stories of personal experience, there is little opportunity to challenge opinions and ideas. Tellers' stories are valued as part of the greater human story with the meaning comfortably sitting in the liminal space between performance and audience. Playback Theatre as a theatrical form generously celebrates the moments in each life that connect us to each other. "Playback Theatre has moments when it attends to collectivity, identity, and ritual using theatre as a way of life-making. The stories in playback are often the soul-journeys toward the "numinous" realm that hold the teller in their truths" (McKenna 1999).

Employing Playback Theatre as a methodology for Spiritual Exploration is based on personal observed experience in social action groups, classrooms, conferences and training workshops. My research has served to confirm my belief in its efficacy as a tool for self-education and self-knowledge. The construct of troupe training and formation gives the work structure and purpose beyond personal and small group goals. Playback training and group formation ultimately is to share with the larger community, in this case with the campus audience. At that point, the troupe would choose its own theme around which the public performance would be structured ostensibly dropping the spiritual frame.

The second phase of the work changes the focus from individual to the group and requires the participants to "act" for others through deep listening and responsiveness. PT is both art and community service. "We strive to hone our art in order to offer it as

service. Playback is a fusion, perhaps a unique one, of artistic and social phenomena. The more it can fulfill the demands of both, the more it can succeed” (Salas 1999).

Playback Theatre training requires that the trainees use their own stories as “rehearsal material”. Through the process of Playback Theatre training, actor-students are encouraged to tell their story for each other as they learn the forms. This means that within one training/rehearsal period, students may tell and perform as many as 3-4 different personal stories. PT is meant for public performance and the rehearsal space is one idea of ‘public’ that must be considered in this context. Grainger makes the case for non-therapeutic group exploration of spirituality. Yet, it is important to emphasize that there is an understanding of confidentiality within the rehearsal room.

We might say that this is the least ‘public’ of the performance spaces being discussed here, in the sense that the tellers do not feel so acutely that they are ‘going public’ with their stories. They can be fairly certain of the limited dissemination of their story since there is an implicit agreement of confidentiality that is not established in other, more public, performances of playback theatre. (Rowe 2004)

The facilitator is both in role as conductor and trainer. The telling, the enacting and the reflection on the process create a community based on real discovery and knowing of each person in the group. In the hands of a skilled facilitator/conductor, much of the reflection can be steered toward spiritual awareness and identity.

Spiritual knowledge of self can be gleaned through the telling of our personal stories, especially when story themes are directed in this way. The container of personal story allows the teller full agency over his own interpretation of the action. Because

Playback Theatre's intentions are not to provide therapy or analyze stories, each teller is free to attach her own meaning to the enactment. The intention of a Playback Performance, in this sense, is empathy and the "comunitas" of story telling, not therapy. A typical playback Performance often has an implied theme, one that is usually informed by the community, civic or social event, or is predetermined by the event organizer. However, in the context of the program I propose, it would be assumed that in the training process the focus would often have a spiritual, religious or inner life theme. Although this focus seems quite serious and heavy at times, it is important for the trainer/conductor to illicit stories that show all aspects of the search for meaning, even the ones where we laugh at ourselves.

Playback Theatre training has multiple advantages in the context of identity exploration on both a practical and metaphorical level. Through this practice: 1) Student trainees practice deep listening in order to create a visual and verbal language for the story. 2) They are able to share significant parts of their lives with the group, which leads to "communitas" and a bonding around shared experience. 3) The actors' creative expression required in the playback forms offer a multi-modal experience as a way to understand themselves and each other. 4) The innate nature of Playback Theatre is inclusive and non-judgmental which allows for freedom and vulnerability among its participant/trainees. 5) As Grainger indicated, the act of creating is therapeutic and self-revelatory and contributes to "group wisdom". 6) The Playback rituals create safety for the group and the future audience. 7) Honing the skills needed for performance engenders sensitivity to the "other" in a unique and non-verbal context. Central to

training in the context I propose is the theme of Spirituality and Inner Life. The first phase explored expressions, concepts and questions that pertain to the individual student's life as well as laid the foundation for expressing the spiritual life of others through Playback Theatre.

### Skill Building: Training Intuition of Body and Soul

After a brief explanation of the foundation and history of Playback, the facilitator should reiterate that the group is actually working toward performance as a trained Playback troupe. Showing a brief video of the basic forms used in PT is helpful unless there is a resident troupe that could offer a live demonstration for the group. Since it is assumed that most of the participants have little theatre training, a session dedicated to movement and vocal elements would be advantageous when facilitating the training of PT and a bridge to learning the specific forms of playback. This could be accomplished by different methods, but Ann Bogart's Viewpoints is perhaps the quickest way into movement-based theatre and sets the stage for self-inquiry and reflection through theatre arts. For non-actors, understanding and practicing Viewpoints is valuable primer for image work but even more so, many of the concepts found in Viewpoints gave new perspectives on our interactions with the world around us. One introductory session in Viewpoints can create an openness and awareness of body, senses, movement, and group dynamics. "The practicing of Viewpoints by the performers and the teaching of Viewpoints by the leader demands openness...Let go of all preconceived ideas and be where you are. Listen. Receive. Respond. *Use it.*" (Bogart and Landau 2004)

My own experience with using Viewpoints as a primer for personal expression and storytelling was as a teaching assistant in an acting for non-majors class taught by Professor Sybil St. Claire, MFA. In the class, Professor St. Clair introduced the nine Physical Viewpoints: Tempo, Duration, Kinesthetic Response, Repetition, Shape, Gesture, Duration, Architecture, Spatial Relationship, and Topography (Bogart and Landau 2004). St. Claire used exercises designed to physicalize these concepts of movement in space and time to give students a shared vocabulary of movement and a sense of using the body as language instead of words alone. Next, Vocal Viewpoints were introduced as a way to “generate an adventurous attitude to the voices potential through freedom, control and responsiveness” (Bogart and Landau 2004). The results of this abbreviated training in Viewpoints were dynamic. The students were energized by the discovery of new communication tools never before realized. They became aware of their bodies and its potential to create non-verbal language as well as bring interior thoughts and ideas to life. Through vocal viewpoints, students found inventive ways into dialogue through exploring pitch, dynamics, tempo, timber, shape, and duration (Bogart and Landau 2004). As the course progressed, Ms. St. Claire had established an important vocabulary that helped shape future playback and devised work. Using the principles and practices of Viewpoints early in training non-actors is an effective way to accomplish the “de-mechanization” necessary to fully express one’s inner life and gives invaluable tools necessary for artistic renderings of personal story required by Playback Theatre. Using Viewpoints and/or other established theatre pedagogies serves a way into the demands of expressive movement that may be difficult for some students.

Once the “actor’s instrument” is established, teaching the short forms of PT becomes easier. PT short forms are used to warm-up the audience and introduce them to playback ritual and intention. They are the precursor to the longer form of “stories”. These forms are image based with accompanying sounds, word repetitions or short phrases. They are designed to express the essence of feeling of short incident relayed from the audience. The basic forms are fluid sculpture, pairs, chorus, three part story, and narrative v (*See appendix for a complete description of Playback short forms*) Newer forms and variation of these are constantly being developed but training should focus first on those listed. A Playback Theatre performance can occur in just about any space but is ideally located within the community that the company is serving. Local community center, churches and other places of worship, schools, or open-air venues would all be acceptable venues in which to perform. Rehearsal spaces are usually the same, however, for the purposes of a collegiate course or workshop, I suggest using a theatre department rehearsal space or classroom so that the non-major can get a sense of a professional theatre space. After a short check in and warm-up game or exercise, 4-5 actors find their place in the playing space as the other participants occupy the space designated as the audience (*See diagram of a Playback Stage Set Up in appendix*).

Training begins when five actors volunteer to enact a brief offer, from the audience (students not currently acting) that has been prompted by the conductor, usually one that is centered on one or two emotions. These “offers” are brief stories or in some cases, quick reflections on how the audience member is feeling at the moment. The emphasis is on brevity but with enough details to enact the designated playback form.



Students are then coached to give a full expression of the feelings articulated in the story through a repeated action and sound. The facilitator coaches the group toward connection both physically and aurally. The trainer coaches and adjusts toward a dynamic, final “fluid sculpture”. Fluid Sculptures are used often in warming up the audience and as an introduction to the playback experience. After a few more fluid sculptures, the trainer should call another group of actors on stage and then repeat the training. After everyone has experienced both telling and acting, the group should reflect on their experiences in both roles. Training continues in a similar manner throughout the short forms (see appendix). As training progresses, stories become more personal and expressions become more dynamic as the group experiences the power of story.

One of the most interesting observations during playback rehearsal is the actors’ ability to move together in sound and motion without any prior conversation or signals. Deconstructing this phenomenon leads to conversations about sensitivity to each other, to the space around them, to the outward stage picture and to the essences of the story. Yet there is something that happens in the liminal spaces between audience and actor, actor and actor and musician and actor that might be described as an active and corporeal intuition. This phenomenon might be explained through the interplay of spontaneity and intuition, which is at the heart of improvisational theatre. Viola Spolin states that “The intuitive can only respond in immediacy – right now. It comes bearing gifts in the moment of spontaneity, the moment when we are freed to relate and act, involving ourselves in the moving, changing world around us” (Spolin 1983). This mysterious communication within and among the playback troupe and the audience relies on the

commitment to spontaneity and trust in individual intuition. Louise Larkinson calls this “attunement” and asserts that it is closely related to authenticity. Both of these aspects are goals for Playback Performance and are attained through the rehearsal process as troupe members move between the roles of actor, musician and audience (Larkinson 2010).

As the troupe becomes more proficient in performing the short forms of Playback Theatre, longer enactments are introduced. Here, the conductor becomes integral to the performance of the teller’s story. She must tease and shape the story as it unfolds through sensitive questioning and a sense of the essence of the teller’s experience. Actors must listen deeply to more than the words, but instead open themselves to images, symbols and form as well as subtext and meaning. They learn to trust their instincts and impulses but hold their ideas lightly, always remembering the spirit of improvisation implicit in performance. Through this, actors learn the essence of a good enactment, which is relatable to their lives. The entire room is filled with anticipation knowing that “anything can happen” in the upcoming enactment. The enactment of a story depends on attunement and intuition built on trust in the ensemble. In rehearsal, the actors are witness to each other’s stories and by extension to each other’s lives. A deep and empathetic bond is formed within the rehearsal room.

The facilitator/instructor of the course should act as the conductor throughout the training sessions to insure that the forms are learned and the skills are honed. However, some students may want to try their hand at the conductor’s role and so should be

allowed to in the practice setting but always with the instructor coaching them through the teller's story. The conductor's role can be instructive for students. As previously discussed, it builds leadership skills while requiring the student to engage in a level of multitasking necessary in their college life and beyond.

The overview of Playback training does not fully capture the spirit and the spiritual in the practice. As with all performance art, it is diminished in the telling or reporting of the event. "Theatre is a live event, taking place in the here and now. Attempts to preserve its 'liveness' run into significant difficulties...particular patterns of meaning that emerge during the performance cannot be preserved" (Rowe 2004). The detailed descriptions of the Playback forms found in the appendix to this document are meant only as a pedantic list of instructions for the reader to determine their theatrical validity. Intrinsic in the training of forms and rituals is the call to the ephemeral and unnamed nature of spirituality itself.

### The Roles: Linking Playback Theatre to Inner Life and Living

The core component of PT is improvisation so as with most improvisational work, we will deal in "ask for's" and "yes and's". Since these concepts are so embedded in PT training, there is no need to focus on any formal improv instruction. Students quickly integrate these ideas into practice with little instruction. As training progresses, students begin to understand basic improv principles such as, accepting all offers, trust your "team", embrace the unexpected and unknown, there are no mistakes only opportunities

and trust yourself and your instincts. These, ideas are not only important for a dynamic improv performance, but offers the teaching artist a salient “teaching moment” to apply these principles to living.

There are three primary roles in PT: *the actor, the conductor and the musician*. Each participant will have opportunities to perform in all three roles. The skills developed in training can and should be related to student life and ways of living. First, the playback *actor* searches for forms that embody the meaning in the teller’s experience. Ultimately playback actors are agents for transformation and re-visioning of everyday experiences and infuse the story with significance and value.

Most importantly, there is the quality of the actors’ performance. Good actors use movement freely and creatively. They know how to move and position themselves on stage in order to embody the story and to create an aesthetic, evocative stage picture at every moment. They use language with accuracy, economy and gracefulness. During scenes, they make imaginative and judicious use of the boxes and cloth props. There is a co-creative give-and-take between actors and musician. They have mastered the different demands of specific forms-fluid sculptures, pairs, etc. The ritual framing of the show and each segment within it is fulfilled with presence and dignity. (Salas 1999)

The facilitator/trainer should continue to coach the actor to stretch and expand their movements and expressions while connecting to other actors to insure that the teller is given the fullest possible image of his story. Reiterating Fox’s idea that the performance of a story is an act of service to the teller and the community helps the new actor refocus their efforts away from self-consciousness. The playback actor must become a deep listener and observer training themselves to capture the essence and meaning in what is shared; to go beyond the words; to interpret the subtext of what and how a story is told.

Playback actor training is “focused service” that is motivated by authenticity and empathy. It requires experimentation with both literal and symbolic representation of events and ideas presented in the story. In effect, the actor must be completely focused on someone else rather than self; a skill that is difficult to “train”, yet essential to developing social consciousness.

The second and most difficult role in PT is that of the *conductor*. This role embodies all the best attributes of good leadership. The conductor must possess the empathy and aesthetic of the actor but must also have the wider concern of the progress of the performance. The conductor acts, first as an emcee that introduces the performance and preps the audience for the Playback Theatre. They must quickly assess the audience and bring together any disparate elements by being aware of differences in age, ethnicity, race, and gender so that all stories in the room are represented. The conductor sets the tone for performance by lively interaction with the audience through question and response designed to build a genuine rapport between audience and players. As the performance progresses, the conductor’s role expands to sensitively shaping an audience member’s (teller) story for the actors to perform. They become the “conductor” of the story’s energy and meaning through a sensitive questioning with the teller. As the conductor elicits the teller’s story, they must also draw the audience in, looking for ways to insure that the story has universal resonance. Conducting requires a high degree of sensitivity and confidence; an awareness of the individual and the community. She must constantly be assessing the mood and cohesiveness of the gathering and lead the performance toward a fulfilling artistic and social connection. A conductor should

understand and have played all the roles in playback in order to hone his own skills and conduct with integrity and generosity. After a quick assessment of this role, it is evident that training in conducting is easily relatable to all the qualities of good leadership.

Finally, the role of musician and music in PT is equally as important as the other two roles because of its fundamental ability to evoke emotion in life and also in theatre. In Playback Theatre, “it has the capacity to create an atmosphere, shape the scene, and above all, convey the emotional development of the story” (Salas 1993). More established troupes have dedicated musicians who are trained in several different instruments and are especially attuned to musical improvisation. Often an actor may serve as the musical accompanist. Although this individual may not be a trained musician, they can still be quite effective because of their sensitivity to the emotional fabric of the stories. The collections of instruments range from tribal drums, to classical wind instruments. There can be children’s rhythm band instruments, keyboards and cowbells. Often the musicians will add their own voice to the scene creating. The variety is endless and can only be constrained by the space.

The musician is integral to the set-up and expression of a scene. As the actors arrange the props around the stage during their silent preparation, the music provides the background. As the actors finish their preparations, the music ends and the actors take their marks. The music shifts throughout the scene as the action and emotion rises and falls. Often the musician has the final “beat” as the actors freeze in their final positions. In this way, music not only underscores the action but also signals the direction of the

scene. Salas emphasizes that the musician is a “storyteller” as much as the actors are. (Salas 1993) There is a sense of co-creation between actor and musician that refers back to the idea of the group “tele” and is achieved through rehearsal of their own personal stories. The infusion of music into Playback is important for the specific work proposed because it offers another modality with which the students can engage. Those that have musical ability and sensibility are often enthusiastic volunteers for this role. Emphasizing the importance of the musician gives the actors another sensory experience by which to craft their performance.

Music can also be related to spiritual questing and perhaps has one of the strongest links to the goals of the work. In Playback performance, we experience music’s power in informing how we act in a scene. It informs beginnings and endings and underscores the emotional fabric of the performance. Often it can take center stage as actors freeze and give focus to the sound; at other times it whispers just above the audible. In this way, the facilitator can infer that the music in the playback rehearsal is like our spiritual lives, constantly in play, constantly changing but always present, dynamic and necessary for a full life experience.

### Performance Opportunities

Central to Playback Theatre’s “raison d’etre” is public performance. Since this study’s focus is on spiritual exploration, such a sensitive focus is most effective in a small group setting to insure safety for its actors. This is in and of itself a community.

However, it is important that students be given the opportunity to share their gifts with the larger community that invites new stories to be enacted. The cohesion of the newly formed troupe in training allows for the exciting success of performing for friends, family and peers. As most performers know, there is validation of hard won skill that can only be realized through public performance.

The performance for the campus community will take on a very different tenor than the work in the rehearsal space. The difference is likely seen in the types and depths of the stories, the space and set up of the stage area and the troupes relationship to the audience. The troupe will feel an immediate affinity to the campus audience and will have previously decided on the theme and general direction of the story telling. This natural affinity of students performing for fellow students creates a level of intimacy that a less homogenous audience might experience. Many factors make this Playback experience different than that of the rehearsal process. “This is a dynamic process: performers and spectators will be engaged in a constant negotiation and re-negotiation of what can be revealed in a public place.” (Rowe 2004). The negotiation of intimacy is an interesting concept in public performance of Playback Theatre and puts emphasis on the introduction of the form and the troupe. In large audiences where there is less familiarity, the “levels of personal disclosure and identification decrease” (Rowe 2004). It is important to remember that the intent of PT public performance is to celebrate ‘communitas’ and engender community belonging through the telling of personal stories. Sometimes this may produce poignant moments and some tellers may become emotional,



but more often than not, there is a sense of joy and humor in the larger public performances.

The introduction of the troupe is rehearsed as part of the rehearsal process. Usually the introduction makes connections to the community for which the troupe is performing as well as the theme of the show. Each troupe member enters the playing space with energy and perhaps musical accompaniment. Then the conductor segues with “ask for’s” that will be performed as fluid sculptures, pairs, or other short forms. In this way, the dual purpose of introducing the improvisational nature of the form and creating an intimate space where longer stories can be offered. The performance continues with alternating short forms and scenes. After each offering, the conductor checks in with the teller to insure their acceptance of the enactment. There is always an opportunity to “adjust” the scene if the teller indicates that something did not ring true to them. In this way, the Playback performance situates the teller’s story within her subjective frame always careful to bring honor to both the teller and the lived experience. There is one final concluding short form designed to sum-up the performance before the conductor wraps up the evening.

Throughout this writing, I have described ways that theatre can be used in as a self-reflective practice for spiritual exploration through personal story telling. I have purposely used specific theatrical theories and practices as a way to detail this concept in real-world ways. In doing so, I reveal my own personal philosophy on teaching, theatre and spirituality making no apologies for the subjective tenor of the thesis offered here.

Many questions and contingencies have arisen throughout the writing process that only a formal study of a pilot program can address. Although I have used all these techniques in actual classrooms, they lack cohesion and formal study as a dedicated practice on a college campus. Yet there are still constants within this work that inform how the facilitator approaches the development and implementation of a theatre-based program that explores deep personal truths. Admittedly, this work does take a level of commitment to the needs as presented. However, the following chapter examines more specifically the perspective needed to work with students in this context. I hope to demystify spiritual exploration in this pedagogical framework and encourage other teaching artists to consider this work. As this research shows, we can no longer privatize religion and spirituality in Higher Education; it is a social, educational and individual need that requires creative and compassionate thinking and questioning. The arts have the opportunity to make significant inroads into this field and significantly improve the ethos of the universities in which they are located. The following chapter concludes with questions for those interested in expanding the field that may serve as a personal and pedagogical measure of the teaching artists ability to successfully undertake facilitating spiritual exploration for college students.

## CHAPTER SIX: TOWARD HOLISTIC HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH THEATRE

“Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection”

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

### Teaching Soul Searching: The Skills of a Theatre Teaching Artist

As I write about the teaching artist and theatre maker, I am keenly aware of my position within the research. I bring a unique perspective to this research but more importantly, I am cognizant of my place as subject of this research. This subject position creates a paradigm for research writing as an active way of knowledge construction consistent with the constructivist theory that pervades this study. My research is then reflexive in the way that close observation of myself in different roles as a teacher, an artist and “play-backer” places me in an “ongoing, reiterative cycle of inquiry and learning that asks *what, so what and now, what?*” (Dawson 2014a). These different identities affect my assessment of issues going forward. However, as I have placed myself in this subject position predominately as an apologist, I am acutely aware of the need to formally examine the veracity of what I propose. This position also gives me a unique “in-role” position that the observant researcher does not understand. To balance my constructivist learning of playback and my concepts for a spiritual application of the practice, I draw from research in teaching artistry

Using the parameters established by reflective and reflexive teaching practices, I ask a series of questions of the facilitator who is interested in leading a theatre based exploration of spirituality. Dawson and Kelin, in their book *The Reflexive Teaching Artist* describe five “core concepts” of reflexive practice, which are especially pertinent to the discussion. They cite “Intention, Quality, Artistic Perspective, Assessment and Praxis” as foundational to the teaching artists practice” (Dawson 2014a). The concepts describe provide an excellent way to discuss salient elements of the teaching practice of theatre based exploration. I take the liberty of adding identity to this list.

IDENTITY: Situating an applied theatre program in the subject of spiritual exploration creates an opportunity for the teaching artist to reflect on her own values, beliefs and ideas about religion and faith. As I embarked on this investigation, I was constantly challenged to maintain my own personal ethos of love and acceptance for all people regardless of their religious or spiritual stance. In this way, the teaching artist is positioned as an explorer just as her students are and thus able to maintain the context of discovery for each succeeding session. The axiom that predicates this work, “Know Thyself” is constantly in play for the facilitator. .

Essential Question: Where do I fit on the spectrum between teacher and artist and how might my values and worldview and spirituality be expressed within that continuum?

INTENTION: “When intentionality is a part of reflective practice, the facilitator creates space and a place for all participants to consider, share and reflect on how past (and present workshop) experience shapes new action.” (Dawson 2014a) The concept of

inclusion is central to intention. The teaching artist must be vigilant to include all participants, their understanding of spirituality in it broadest sense, their faith traditions, and their spiritual practices.

Essential Question: How can I facilitate open exploration and reflection in the group context and honor each participant's spiritual experience without privileging my own?

QUALITY: Quality and intention operate simultaneously. The idea of co-creating permeates the practical work of self-discovery and theatre making. It implies an intention of value and excellence in performance but also rich in self-reflective experience. The value in this work stems from the devised and improvisational work based in the students' personal stories that seem to create a desire for excellence in theatrical expression. The group 'buy in' creates a desire to deepen their understanding of theatre practices. As a teaching artist, it is gratifying to see students working on their creative expression in order to serve the teller and future audiences.

Essential Question: How can I maintain a collaborative culture throughout the work of spiritual exploration and theatrical experience that results in artistic quality as well as quality in personal experience?

ARTISTIC PERSPECTIVE: "Artistic perspective promotes participants to think and act as artists, who value and seek out creative pursuits that encourage, risk, question pat answers and provide unique insight into their learning and personal artistry... specifically motivated to give voice to his insight or inspiration through his art form." (Dawson

2014b). The artistic process can and should be applied to any endeavor as a way toward insight and self-reflection. The teaching artist who encourages the artistic sensibilities in her students engages a variety of modalities for learning as well as adding new perspectives to student identity.

Essential Question(s): How can I teach artistic perspective and process as a life-skill and invaluable to personal insight and self-reflection? What specific activities apply to this learning?

ASSESSMENT: Assessment is always difficult when trying to quantify and qualify artistic learning yet it is even more problematic when applied to spiritual learning. Most teaching artists will use rubrics or learning scales as assessment tools to measure 'change'-either growth or regression. In this practice, I believe the only cogent method of measure is self-reflection. The teaching artist must be diligent to reflect throughout the teaching process noting student activity as well as gathering impressions from student self-reflection. In this way, the teaching artist becomes reflexive by finding ways to improve or alter the activities in the workshop. If the goal of a workshop in spiritual exploration is to make personal discoveries, then student reflections must be focused toward that end. The teaching artist models this through her own personal and professional process. Self-reflection as an assessment tool is truly foundational in constructivist learning and should never be devalued as non-quantifiable.

Essential Question(s): What verbal and written prompts lead my students toward honest, deep and insightful self-reflection. In what ways does this insight lead to a fuller learning experience and life experience?

PRAXIS: “Praxis is the embodied synthesis of theory and practice.” (Nicholson 2011)

Praxis is an “ongoing cycle of reflection and action on the world in order to transform it.”

(Freire 2000). Praxis and practice are not synonymous. Praxis is more of a ‘begetting’ process of the reiterative cycle of theory and practice. Praxis means the teaching artist is pushing the field forward through a specific practice that births and rebirths new insight through inquiry and reflection. Freire suggests that Praxis has a larger goal of

“transformation” in order to affect social change. This idea of a higher or larger goal than the specific work undertaken is applicable to the work proposed in this study.

Personal spiritual inquiry and self-reflective theatre practice in college has, as its highest goal, acknowledging and appreciating the ‘other’s’ core beliefs, spiritual life and practice through a deeper understanding those realities in ourselves. As praxis, it has both social and personal implications beyond the scope of the work. Acknowledging the further reaching applications of self and community reflective theatre based practice requires constant evaluation of the historical and existing narratives surrounding spirituality and religion in global, community, educational and individual contexts. Throughout the practical work, the teaching artist must include and privilege self (both hers and the students’) and group reflection as a way of navigating new emergent meanings as a means to action.

Essential Question(s): How can this project and practice change colleges' perceptions and, ultimately, culture of spirituality? How can applied theatre practice used in the context of spirituality give new understanding of the flexibility and utility of the art form?

The Teaching Artist must be both a teacher and artist. It is helpful to think of these roles on a spectrum and place oneself accordingly between the two poles. It behooves the instructor who undertakes delving into the realm of spiritual exploration to use that spectrum as a starting point. The teaching artist must stay in a reflective state noticing what is 'landing' and what is not. This requires an overall flexibility with the plan, the student and oneself.

### Therapy vs. Therapeutic: A Playback Perspective

Theatre practice and theory carries the obvious emotional lens. It's ancient symbol of the drama masks depict extreme and opposite emotions as recognition of the essential expression of the art form. Aristotle's theory of catharsis makes emotional connection the central goal of performance. Stanislavski's experiments with emotional recall, though flawed, arose from the need for authentic acting through intense emotional association with a character. Moreno's adoption of theatre as a therapeutic tool took theatre out of the performance frame altogether and immersed it in the world of therapy. Actors who reach emotional connections with characters that require space and time to personally process have interrupted many a rehearsal. Emotion and theatre are forever intertwined. As teachers and theatre artists, we will always be witness to emotional



expression in the theatre classroom. Good teachers know that empathy and care do not constitute therapy. However, PT rehearsal space should never devolve into a therapeutic session. In my experience in this and other rehearsal settings, it is best to keep the focus on honing the skills of the actor insuring that the PT performance will be centered on the audience and not the actor; Fox's paradigm for PT as an "act of service" should serve well as the lens through which to conduct both rehearsal and performance. The teaching artist who uses PT for spiritual exploration must understand the inherent distinctions and intentions of psychodrama and PT.

PT efficacy in this particular context lies in its commitment to the aesthetic in personal story and its singular intention of reflecting or 'playing back' the story as the teller has told it through an artistic means. The symbolic in PT is not archetypal, but rather an actor's artistic reflection of a story that exists in community. Psychodrama and therapy seeks to deconstruct a patient's experience as it unveils layers toward a problematic ego. The therapeutic process is steeped in scientific methods that inform pathology that is revealed through confession giving the therapist a methodological script to follow. "Some part of this psyche is being probed and taken apart. Hence, the drama builds through prodding further, penetrating through in one area only (the area of conflict, trauma, denial, etc.)" (Katzenbach 1999). In Moreno's Psychodrama, theatre is used as a means to take the patient more and more inward with the intent to analyze past events. Obviously, this is the purview of the therapist and not the teaching artist.

In sharp contrast, the ontology present in PT remains on the surface of the story with no intent to analyze or deconstruct the teller's experience. Keeping the story as the artistic focus insures that the story itself will be honored as the center of the enactment. In training, the actors are always cautioned to deeply listen and not embellish the story; to stay true to what the teller has offered leaving meaning making first to the teller and then to the audience and actors to reflect on their own individual meanings. Playback has lofty goals that are achieved through training. "We [the actor] reflect on our faces the inward face of the story she [the teller] has been seeing inside. We show her own aesthetic heart, brought out into the world for a moment and then returned to her. The face of the story is the face of her aesthetic heart as it faces her own soul, reflected in our faces, reflected in the faces around her." (Katzenbach 1999). The expectations are high for the teaching artist and require an in depth understanding of this theatre practice and the intentions that birthed it.

It therefore stands to reason that the teaching artist who undertakes the facilitation of a theatre-based program on spiritual exploration should have some sense of how spirituality is expressed in theatre practice. More importantly, however, the teaching artist must have undertaken her own spiritual journey recognizing that she, like her students, is a sojourner. He must be able to reflect on his own responses to the same questions he asks his students and seek out other perspectives as part of the quest. Keeping the focus on the process instead of the product is essential in this work, which may be a challenge for theatre/teaching artist well trained in performance practices.

While many theatre artists might avoid exploring subjects so personal as spirituality, religion and worldview, research confirms that these are subjects universal to this age group and are important to address. My contention is that we, as theatre artists should not shy away from this subject that often is viewed as taboo in an educational setting. Theatre has real efficacy in an area previously situated in religious studies or off site religious centers. The insightful theatre artist can find new avenues for using her craft in a practical and necessary way. The teaching artist can find nuances in her practice that enhance her skills as a facilitator, co-learner and community builder through this or similar work. Keeping the focus on theatre as a tool for inquiry, reflection, and community building, will thereby avoid any semblance of practicing therapy or counseling without proper credentials. The focus for this work should always be on aesthetics, process and inquiry thus allowing the emerging adult a myriad of ways to examine their own and other's belief systems as well as form a personal paradigm of spiritual practice.

As discussed, the challenge in delving into this educational focus is to avoid making the work into group therapy sessions but rather to allow for a community of emerging adults who recognize a need for personal exploration of deeper questions to gather together in a safe and supportive environment. This most certainly will have therapeutic value as most theatre practices do, but the goal is more driven by the need for community that transcends lines of demarcation like religion, ethnicity, race, gender or sexual preference. It necessarily augments established campus communities based on surface commonalities rooted solely in academic pursuits, social media and social clubs common in the college experience.

## Call and Response

The new emphasis in Higher Education on religion and spirituality means institutions, staff and faculty must search for ways to incorporate these elements into the pedagogies of diverse disciplines. This is a herculean challenge and one that universities struggle with now and will for many years to come. In their book, *Invisible No Longer*, Jacobsen and Jacobsen found a full spectrum of reactions to the idea of incorporating religion into the curricula. Both generational differences in faculty as well as the perceived status of the institution accounted for most of the dissimilarities. The inclusion of spiritual or religious references seems to be an easier task for younger faculty who are accustomed to the new thinking about religion and spirituality. Older staff and faculty may struggle more to detach from educational dictums that reject any religious perspectives or spiritual connections to their area of academia. (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012). “The more a college or university saw itself as being, or striving to be, elite, the more nervous the professors at that institution seemed to be about re-engaging religion” (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012). Anxiety is perhaps generated because matters of faith are often labeled as irrational, baseless and, more extremely, fantastical. To attend to feelings and emotions are trivial endeavors and do not inform knowledge. Perceptions of the extremes of the sensory and the rational are changing yet the legacy of suspicion remains in the academy.

The current focus of academic research in this area is becoming quite popular as it grapples with defining current understanding of spirituality and attempting to arrive a

consensus of thought. In some sense, this may be a disservice to the field at large and to the essence of the infinite nature embodied by our understanding of the spiritual life. What is perhaps a more salient academic pursuit, at least for this study is to arrive at “model of spiritual epistemology that can provide a frame to experience our common humanity and to help establish common ground, regardless of spiritual orientation or religious affiliation” (Gatmon 2015). This might provide validation for the utility of theatre and other arts in spiritual exploration and development.

Our American society has fully embraced the tenant of “separation of church and state”. Its affect is that religious beliefs and spiritual insight has been marginalized in every aspect of life, perhaps nowhere more than in Higher Education. In doing so, we marginalize students who have tightly held beliefs or those who are genuinely seeking ways to make sense of their place in the world, which could very well be most of the students on our campuses. The research shows that our college students are actively engaged in meaning making as part of the identity formation in this special developmental time. Developing educational practices that address this important process is necessary and timely for the emergent adult in college as well as for future reference in daily living. “Regardless of spiritual and religious beliefs, introducing a spiritual perspective to our private and professional life, to the political arena and to public discourse, can provide opportunities for innovative, creative, collaborative and heart-felt solutions to both individual and collective challenges.” (Gatmon 2015)

The arts are often marginalized in educational institutions as well as our society. Yet, as this paper asserts, the arts are uniquely qualified to contribute and perhaps lead the practice of incorporating religious and spiritual concerns into academic discipline. Perhaps this is largely due to the fact that artists are comfortable living in the liminal areas between the sensory and rational recognizing that both are necessary for excellence in the field. For the artists, they begin with the sensory but, in practice, they must attend to technique and theory to become their best selves and create their best work. As I have discussed, there is a third area of knowledge that educators must include as we seek to holistically educate our young people; one that houses the spiritual dimension of human interaction with our community and ourselves. Parker Palmer, noted educational philosopher, asks,

Why assume that sensation and rationality are the only points of correspondence with human self and the world? Why assume so when the human self is rich with other capacities-intuition, empathy, emotion and faith? If there is nothing to be known by these faculties, why do we have them? We ourselves are part of the reality we wish to know: does the multiplicity of our modes of knowing suggest a similar multiplicity in the nature of that reality? (Palmer 1983)

A focus on spirituality is not a departure from proven theoretical frames or a rejection of material reality, but rather an essential dimension of humanness that academia has a responsibility to address. "Providing students with more opportunities to connect with their "inner selves" facilitates growth in their academic and leadership skills, contributes to their intellectual self-confidence and psychological well-being, and enhances their satisfaction with college." (Astin, et al. 2011) Attending to spirituality would include those students who have strong faith traditions and choose to live by them. This

inclusivity eliminates the antagonism many students have felt as they attempt to express their spirituality and religious tradition. In a theatre based program similar to what is proposed here, those students would have important opportunities to interact with students with diverse ideas and faith traditions thus preparing them to better interact with a diverse local and global society.

Further, locating a spiritual exploration program in theatre adds another dimension to theatre's utility in everyday life. My experience as a university instructor of record confirms that the general college student's contact with theatre is minimal at best and those that do choose to take a survey course still struggle to see theatre's effectiveness in their everyday life. An offering of a theatre-based course on spirituality has wide reaching implications for collegiate theatre departments. Programs like this would extend to other disciplines represented on campus. Theatre's innate ethos of collaboration would enhance Theatre Arts' campus-wide presence as new ways of working together are developed. Many disciplines require students to study ethics, which necessarily should involve discussions on spirituality. (Astin 2004) Professors and administrators in these and other areas of study would become arts and theatre advocates as they see the results of a program of this kind.

The vast majority of Theatre departments focus on performance practices at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Although my own particular graduate degree program, Theatre for Young Audiences, teaches many applied theatre techniques and offers many off-site experiences, there is little campus-wide presence. This observation

and even, frustration does not come from a petulant desire to elevate my own or fellow applied theatre artists' practice. It comes from a deep core belief in the ability for theatre to influence a young person's life and the knowledge that theatre's power is truly felt as they interact, use and reflect on it as part of the everyday. Applying theatre to spiritual exploration is one way to acknowledge the importance of the soul and spirit in the emerging adult's educational process and provides multi-modal tools to explore and engage the body and the heart with the mind in the learning process. Theatre applied in this way and at this juncture in the emergent adult life, is a unique way to value students' inner life and to model the value of the "other". Boal's statement, "we are all actors" is a guiding principle in this thesis and in my own teaching practice. If nothing else, my writing suggests ways to weave the art and practice of theatre into campus life and proves its value in addressing a systemic concern in Higher Education.

My position in this research, as I have admitted, is highly subjective. As a dedicated applied theatre artist, I position myself more as an apologist for applied theatre practice in a variety of settings. From this position of a "believing insider", I am committed to discover contexts in which the utility and power of the art of theatre can be realized for the greater good in individual, local and global frameworks. The changing landscape of religion and spirituality in American culture provides a critical context for applied theatre and is another crucial field for inquiry into how theatre arts can facilitate spiritual insight, growth and identity for theatre artists with the courage to enter that domain. Implications to expand the field of applied theatre are redolent with possibility for meaningful interfaith dialogue, interreligious peace building programs, and diversity initiatives that



encompass faith as well as race, gender, ethnicity, other issues of equality. Spirituality is no longer just a private concern, but its influence on human action is increasingly more integral to our sense of personal identity and belonging to the global community. I began this thesis with the recognition of theatre's ability to shift paradigms of personal identity and belonging in young people through active participation in all aspects of theatre. Social change has always relied on the young adult whose future depends on their striving for a better world; a world first conceived in the heart and mind that searches for meaning. Although his sentiments are somewhat histrionic, I concur with Vsevolod Meyerhold's perspective on the power of theatre in our society and for the individual.

I want to burn with the spirit of the times. I want all servants of the stage to recognize their lofty destiny...Yes, the theatre can play an enormous part in the transformation of the whole of existence. (Green and Swan 2010)

The ideas offered in this document are specific to the emerging adult in college and are intended to offer institutions of higher learning one way to approach the call to address the spiritual life of those they serve. Implementing ways to use applied theatre to explore the inner life of a young person is part of theatre's "lofty destiny" and a way to connect students to meaningful community life on college campuses.

### Concluding Reflection

My investigation into this work and the development of a program that centers on spiritual exploration has been both rewarding and challenging. What began as an illusive concept has since become integral to my practice and mission as a teaching artist and theatre maker in several ways. The idea that theatre can have a profound impact on youth

and young adults is not a new revelation for me. However, a clearer understanding of the life-stage of emerging adulthood and specifically the emphasis placed on identity formation has given me a sharper lens to view the students I serve. I feel that the gulf of years between my students and me has narrowed considerably and the research undertaken for this study has allowed me to speak to foundational issues that are universal to this present generation. I hope it has given me an “element of surprise” in the emerging adult’s world that will expand their perception of older people who are often dismissed as uninformed or uninvolved. Although I have always felt an affinity with older teens and young adults, this study have given me renewed agency to connect with their deeper concerns, encourage their questions and provide the needed space and time for exploration. As I work with students in a variety of capacities, I will be more aware of the characteristics of identity and spiritual exploration. This heightened awareness gives me another lens through which to develop my teaching and theatre practice.

Perhaps the most profound professional discovery is the efficacy of using theatre as a tool for inquiry and exploration for spiritual awareness. I believe that my focus on spirituality is unique in the context of applied theatre and gives a new and expanded utility for several different methods and practices. My research confirmed that spiritual concerns are evident not only in higher education, but also in a variety of business, medical and social contexts giving this work far-reaching applicability. In addition, my research into theories in psychology and education strengthened my own conviction of theatre’s efficacy and viability as a tool for personal insight and learning. As a teaching

artist, the ongoing challenge is to engender an atmosphere of openness and equanimity in the process. These seem to be essential elements to effective theatre based inquiry.

Using elements of Playback Theatre as the foundational methodology for spiritual exploration gave me both a theoretical and practical guide for creating a structure for this work. Playback's emphasis on personal story and non-scripted theatrical forms lends this work a focus on artistry through a variety of artistic practices. More than that, Playback Theatre's ability to quickly create community within the rehearsal room lent an atmosphere of safety and interpersonal connection that is essential to the success of group work centered on spirituality. I have gained a new appreciation for this little known form of non-scripted theatre. I am excited to explore other ways it can be used as a tool for inquiry in different contexts. In addition, my study and subsequent interest in Playback Theatre has motivated me to receive additional training in the form and, by doing so, has expanded my own artistic practice. The Playback world is peopled with many artists, counselors and community activists who share much of my same values and so has given me a personal sense of community that extends all over the world.

Many questions still remain and further study is needed to fully answer them. Although I suggested Playback Theatre as my primary methodology in this study, I believe that there are many other theatrical techniques and practices that would be effective in exploring spirituality. Elements of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed would add a broader element of civic discourse to the practice but could be adjusted to explore interfaith connections to social action. Using the Rainbow of Desire may help

participants to envision the kind of faith community that resonates with their spiritual frameworks. Much more can be explored in the area ritual. Bringing in elements of different spiritual practices like yoga, meditation, drumming, dance, chanting and singing would add new dimension to spiritual exploration while broadening the theatrical and multi-modal elements of the practice. Devised performances might also become a goal of this theatrical inquiry that might be performed at the end of each semester for the student body. Often digital stories are developed as a result of theatrical inquiry. A focus on spirituality could yield some compelling digital stories that might be disseminated over social media. The possibilities for presenting and performing the work that is generated by this inquiry is exciting and worth further exploration.

In the end, I suspect that spiritual inquiry can best be facilitated by a hybrid of practices found in theatre, literary arts, and visual arts as well as psychodrama and drama therapy. Formal study to determine best practices would advance this field and expand these ideas into other academic and social contexts such as religious studies, psychology, ethics studies and practice, leadership studies and many other interdisciplinary arts and sciences. In addition, religious institutions of all kinds might be able to use theatre practices for spiritual inquiry and growth with their own congregates regardless of age. Civic organizations might also find these methods helpful in determining the basis for civic action toward social change.

This study was birth from my own practice as a teacher, a youth director and theatre artist. Only after piecing together elements from different projects and practices

did I begin to see the potential for a more direct path to identity exploration for young people through a variety of theatrical methods. With each investigative step, stronger connections were made that served to validate my fledgling ideas. The ideas presented are a result of a circuitous (and somewhat unintentional) methodology of practice led research. The research exercise necessary to develop a program of this sort has broadened my understanding of how theory enhances practice and can often lead to new conceptual development that can advance the field. As a scholar, artist and theatre practitioner, I am reminded to listen to the voice inside me as I develop my career as an applied artist and to confidently experiment in order to push the field of applied theatre practice forward to serve communities in broader contexts.

My ultimate intention and concern in undertaking this study was to investigate the efficacy of theatre as a means to help young people connect on deep and soulful levels that are common to all and prompt recognition of their own inner life as well as and a profound appreciation for the inner life that exists in us all. In the process, I have developed a deeper understanding of the limitless ways that theatre can lend effective tools in community and in personal understanding. In doing so, I have been rewarded by the opportunity to explore my own intellectual, artistic and pedagogical capabilities and gained deeper insight into my place in the professional world of applied theatre.

## APPENDIX A: RESOURCES FOR WARM UP GAMES

## On the Web

<http://dramaresource.com/drama-games/>

<http://www.childdrama.com/warmups.html>

<http://www.dramatoolkit.co.uk/drama-games/a-to-z>

<http://improvincyclopedia.org/categories/Warm-up.html>

## Books

Zoomy, Zoomy by Hanna Fox

Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques by  
Viola Spolin

Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook 1st Edition By Viola Spolin

*This short list gives examples of resources for implementing the work of spiritual  
exploration with young people.*

## APPENDIX B: PLAYBACK SHORT FORMS



Reprint Short Forms from PNA Tool Kit (pp. 15-24)

*Used by express permission from Playback North America*

**A Playback Theatre Toolkit**  
*through the lens of one company's experience*



## Fluid Sculptures

### Artistic development

#### *Acting—Basic forms*

After a brief intake, 3-4 actors together capture the significant feelings of the teller, using sound, movement, and words to create a composite moving sculpture.

Basic skills

#### Conductor

□ Fluid Sculptures are often used to warm up actors and audience at the beginning of a show. Often the audience is asked something simple (e.g., “How are you today?”). □

Usually tellers stay in their seats. The conductor helps keep their comments or stories brief, and clearly names the key feelings. □

The conductor can shape the intake to capture nuances of one main feeling (e.g., shades of “excited”) or name several distinct feelings (e.g., “You’re excited and curious but also anxious”). □ **Actors** □

One at a time, in any order, the actors step forward with a repeated physical movement and sound (and possibly a brief repeated phrase) that captures one important element or feeling that the teller shared, and that has not yet been portrayed. □

The first actor steps into center stage and stays put to anchor the sculpture. Each additional actor steps in as soon as the previous actor has clearly established what she is doing. □

As each actor joins, the others leave sufficient (sometimes longer) pauses between their vocal offers, without losing emotional intensity, to

allow the audience to shift their focus to the new actor. Different actors' words or sounds then get interwoven. □

The ensemble appears to be one organism (visible together as different parts of the teller), typically close enough that people are touching. Actors seek a variety of physical levels, position, movement, vocalization, and tempo to increase dramatic interest. Colored cloths may be used as well as stage boxes (or chairs). □

Once the final actor has joined and made his offer at most twice, the group freezes. Either the musician or the actor in front initiates the freeze.

#### □ Musician

Start as soon as the conductor says, "Let's watch." □

Create sound/music until the first actor enters. You may offer a brief musical transition after □ each actor has made their offer one or twice. Signal the final freeze. □

Tone down your offers (or be quiet) if the actors offer a lot of words or sound. Have a strong musical presence if the actors are quiet. □

Sometimes it is easier for the musician to sense the right closing moment than for the actors. Signal the closing with a strong, clear, brief sound (e.g., a chime or drum). □

## Strengthening your work

### Conductor

If, when doing an intake in the opening of a show, the teller launches into a story far better served by a different form, feel free to suggest a different form to the actors or to ask the teller if you can return to their story in a few minutes (after the Fluid Sculptures). □

Fluid Sculptures can be used to help the audience after an emotionally strong story. "Who was moved by that story?" Help the audience members shift from comments about the teller or the performance to describing how the story relates to their own life experience. □

Fluid Sculptures can also be a hugely helpful way to process company issues (e.g., feelings after a challenging performance), either before or instead of a group discussion. □ **Actors** □

Your fellow actors must make sense of your offer from behind you. If you're making a wordless offer, add sound so they know which emotion you are portraying. □

Remember, your job is to add what has not already been expressed. Be ready to let go of what you thought you were going to offer. If you only remember one thing, step in first. □

Have the strongest or final offers express the heart of the teller's experience. For instance, if the teller feels some apprehension but mostly excitement, have only one actor express the nervousness and probably go first. □

As in all Playback, match your level of emotional intensity to the teller's inner experience: not too strong (e.g., if an expressive teller says "anxious," don't mistakenly portray terrified) or too mild (e.g., if the teller says "devastated" in a monotone, don't wrongly portray mildly disappointed). □

Common difficulties with Fluid Sculptures: □

- too busy (cacophonous, frenetic), or too monotonous (uniform in tone or intensity, especially from one sculpture to another appear "mugged" (actors pretend emotions rather than feeling them authentically)

Ways to practice:

- focus in turn on each of the artistic skills mentioned under "Common difficulties"
- use only sound and movement, or limit speaking to three words
- practice different rhythms (e.g., staccato, syncopated, flowing); learn different spatial or rhythm templates; take time for emotion to grow through each repetition.

### **Musician**

Your opening offer can be neutral (if you don't know which emotion the actors will portray first), or chronological (if there's clearly a first emotion), or aim to capture the heart of the story (if one feeling is clearly central). Singing is always an option. □

Making a different sound for each actor can feel too busy or random. It's usually better to stick with 1 -2 different instruments or musical textures and build on them. □

If the actors have all entered and a core feeling is missing, add this missing element from the music table, using your voice as an offstage actor or via a musical or sung coda. □

Current PNA members may copy this. Credit: Christopher & Anne Ellinger, © 2015. See: [PlaybackToolkit.com](http://PlaybackToolkit.com)



## **Pairs**

### **Artistic development**

#### *Acting—Basic forms*

After a brief intake, 1—2 pairs of actors together capture contrasting feelings or parts of the teller, using sound, movement, and words to create a composite moving sculpture. This is a type of Fluid Sculpture, so many of the guidelines are similar.

#### **Conductor**

Pairs are often used to warm up actors and audience at the beginning of a show. Often the audience is asked something brief and simple (e.g., “What are two feelings you have about the theme of the show?”). □

Usually tellers stay in their seats. The conductor helps keep their comments or stories brief, and clearly names two key feelings. □

The conductor can shape the intake to capture the context of the experience or nuances of the feelings, e.g., the relative strength of the feelings, whether there is inner conflict, whether the feelings are resolving. (See also “Pairs: Variations” for forms that can capture more nuances than pairs.) □

The conductor may signal one of the pairs to begin, or one actor can just start. **Actors** □

Two pairs of actors face the audience. In each pair, one actor is directly behind the other (or slightly offset, so each can be seen). The two pairs stand side by side about 4 feet apart. □

When the conductor says, “Let’s watch,” the front actor in one pair steps forward and begins, expressing one of the two feelings with a repeated gesture, sound, or short verbal phrase. □

After one or at most two repetitions, the second actor steps forward and joins in, with the first actor keeping the same intensity of energy but allowing the focus to shift (e.g., by leaving longer pauses between vocalizations). Typically, the two actors are physically close, often touching, conveying that they are two parts of the teller. □

When the front actor initiates a freeze, the second actor (who is watching for this) freezes at the same time. The pair holds the freeze until the second pair finishes their freeze. □

The second pair of actors looks to add something fresh artistically as well as adding something from the teller’s experience that has not yet been portrayed. □

Have the last actor’s utterance align with what the teller might most need to hear at the end. □

If the conductor plans on doing pairs with a series of tellers, before hearing from the next □ teller actors rotate one position clockwise (so actors are paired up differently). □ **Musician** □

Start as soon as the conductor says, “Let’s watch.” Your opening offer can be neutral (if you don’t know which emotion the actors will portray first), or chronological (if there’s clearly a first emotion), or aim to capture the heart of the story (if one feeling is clearly central). Singing is always an option.

Signal a clear closing for the first pair of actors. As soon as they have frozen, begin transition music for the next pair. When the second pair is finished, signal their closing with a strong, clear, brief sound (e.g., a chime or drum). □

Making a different sound for each actor can feel too busy or random. It’s usually better to stick with 1–2 different instruments or musical textures and build on them. Tone down your offers (or be quiet) if the actors offer a lot of words or sound. Have a strong presence if the actors are quiet. □

If the actors have all entered and a core feeling is missing, add this feeling from the music table, using your voice as an offstage actor or via a musical or sung coda. □ Strengthening your work □ See suggestions for actors in Fluid Sculptures on p.1. □

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## Cast Story

### Artistic development

#### *Acting—Basic forms*

This is a scene-based form to dramatize a longer story. The conductor invites the teller to a chair in front (visible to all). The teller is invited to choose an actor to play her. If there is a significant other character, the teller may select an actor for that role. The story is enacted in literal scenes complemented by other less literal dramatic tools (e.g., monologues, metaphor, song, Chorus).

After “let’s watch,” the musician plays while the actors set up. Once everyone is frozen, the musician stops. Often the teller’s actor begins the action, although sometimes the supporting actors start by creating the environment. The enactment evolves fluidly, often (but not always) chronologically, with actors entering and leaving the stage until the key moments, themes, and emotions have all been reflected. (See also Scene openings and closings on page 53.)

#### Tips for the conductor

Cast Story is a solid basic form for longer stories. It is the most accessible form for audiences (e.g., children, seniors) that may find it harder to follow more abstract or complex forms (such as Uncast Story or Song and Movement). □

Aim for your intake to be no more than five minutes. Time yourself in rehearsals. □

Relatively early in your intake, invite the teller to pick the teller’s actor. □

Draw out the backstory, heart of the story and any other key beats of the story. (See also “As you listen to the teller” on page 47.) □

At the end, help your actors by summarizing the story in a phrase with the teller's name.

**Cautions** □

Don't lose sight of your goal: Get to a story's essence and effectively frame its meaning. □

Keep it simple. Often more detail only dilutes the core story. □

Remember to pay attention to the performers and audience as well as to the teller. □ Tips for the teller's actor □

Listen for both the backstory (context) and heart of the story during the intake. □

Relax and know that you will be carried along by the team effort. Respond to all offers. □

Use your personal strengths. (E.g., Do you like to sing? to dance? to monologue?) □

When you're done with a scene, remember you may leave the stage. □

Take your time with the emotional heart of the story. Slow it down. Feel it in your heart and show it on your face and in your body. Let your feelings evolve and be complex. □

Use metaphors and physicalize them. (E.g., Step inside a box and cry: "I've lost the key.")

**Cautions** □

Stay alert to supporting actors' offers (even when you have something in your mind). Don't be attached to your own ideas. Let yourself be surprised by what happens.

Know that a scene might happen without you. Surrender stage focus as appropriate. □

Avoid narrating (most of the time). Be present with the experience. □ Tips for supporting actors □

You can be anything: □

- other people, whether named(e.g., mom)or not named(e.g. a passerby)□
- animals (e.g.,the teller's dog, a lizard watching the scene)□
- inanimate objects important to the story (e.g.,the teller's toothache ,a big check)
- the physical environment (e.g. a snowstorm)□
- social forces(e.g., the federal government)□
- a narrator(e.g., "once upon a time, there was a wise man...") □

When you come on stage, quickly make it clear who or what you are, especially if you are using a cloth. To change roles, go off stage and then re-cast yourself when you re-enter. □

Help create essential scenes. When the teller or a supporting actor starts a monologue, quickly enter and engage (except for teller's beginning and ending moments). □ **Cautions** □

It's easy for the stage to get cluttered. Only go on if you add something useful. It's fine to wait out a scene or two. Clear the stage often so fresh things can start. □

Use cloths sparingly with clear intent. □

When in doubt, don't sit down; sitting down typically slows scenes too much. □

Get right into the consequential heart of the scene. Don't make up details. □

If your offer is not heard or not responded to, don't give up. Move upstage or to other actors where you can be seen, or wait until a pause and make it again, more strongly. □

Generally avoid being the teller's "inner voice" or "double." Play a supporting actor that allows for interaction—perhaps offering a provocation for the teller to reveal more feelings. □ Tips for musicians

Use the initial set-up time to make a strong, melodic offer. You can capture the initial feeling or reflect the heart of the story. It can be powerful to return to this "theme song" at various times, especially at the close of the story. □

Remember you can be an offstage actor, using your voice to be the environment (e.g., news broadcast or airport announcement) or an important character not on stage. □



Often, you can see what's going on more clearly than the actors. Help scenes move along with strong offers, both musically and as offstage actor. □ **Cautions** □

Quiet down when there is talking onstage. □

Don't be the inner voice of the teller. Speak sparingly to give voice to a character not on stage or to a social force, to advance the story, or to fill in something key that other actors missed. □

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## **Chorus**

### **Artistic development**

#### *Acting—Basic forms*

In Chorus (as in the classic “Greek Chorus”) all the actors mirror each other to play the teller’s actor. Chorus can be used as a short form or a longer story form. Once fluent in it, actors can also integrate Chorus work into longer stories. Chorus can be an impactful and entertaining form, especially useful to show strong feelings or humorous situations.

#### **How it works**

The conductor names 2–3 emotional parts of the teller’s story before saying, “Let’s watch.” □

Four actors stand either shoulder-to-shoulder or clustered, facing forward, seeing each other □ through soft peripheral vision. Breathe and tune into each other. All are the teller’s actor. □

An actor makes a sound and movement based on the teller’s feelings at the start of the story. Everyone in the group mirrors the offer as simultaneously and closely as possible, tuning into the nuance of expression. □

Each physical and vocal offer is built upon—extended, made

stronger or more nuanced— until a next offer that moves the story along emerges and is echoed. Continue in this fashion until each emotional beat of the story has been expressed. □

Once or twice during the story, one actor can jump out of the group, face the Chorus, and cast himself as another key character. He makes a verbal and physical offer that makes clear who he is (e.g., “Daughter, you are SO UGLY!”) The Chorus responds strongly to this offer, at least physically. Make the exchange emotionally meaningful. Then the “other” re- absorbs themselves into the Chorus and again is the teller. The music table can also give vocal offers as the “other,” but it’s stronger when shown on stage. □ Chorus can be surprisingly tricky to do well. Don’t be discouraged if your group needs to practice it a lot. It can be hard for actors to let go of autonomy and blend with others for an extended period. □ Ways to add artistry to Chorus □

Pay attention to space:

- Use different levels □
- Use the space on the stage (don’t huddle in one spot) □
- Change the arrangement of your group. For instance, actors scatter around the stage to represent chaotic feelings, or follow each other in a line.

Change the energy:

- Vary movement styles (e.g., sharp vs. smooth, quick vs. slow) □
- Vary how closely or loosely actors mirror each other. □
- Change energy level and tempo as the offers change. Add pauses. Seek a crescendo for an emotional beat of the story.

Tips

Keep each offer simple and bold. Make it easy for your fellow actors to follow you. Repeat your offer if your team misses it. Make it easy for the audience to understand.

Use few words: Keep verbal offers to an essential word or two. E.g., don’t make one long verbal offer: “I’m so scared, I’m not going to be able to breathe without my inhaler!” Instead make three brief offers such as “(1) “(gasping sounds)” (2) “Help...” (3) “Need inhaler!” □

Build: Take time to develop each offer. Stay longer with interesting offers. Make a series of offers to build on the same important moment of

the story, especially if that part is strongly emotional or complex. □

Be authentic: Take time to get into and express authentic feelings of the teller. Slow down. □

Be relaxed and have fun. Let yourself and the audience be surprised by unexpected offers. □

End clearly: Listen for when it's time to end... and then end.  
□ Common difficulties with Chorus □

Hesitant: Being too quiet vocally, or uncertain in movement. □

Over-detailed: Trying to capture all the story details instead of the emotional state of teller. □

Mugged: Broadcasting an idea of a feeling rather than expressing genuine feeling. □

Cluttered: Making too many offers (especially verbally) instead of building on each one. □

Confining: Insisting that actors must follow every detailed movement and expression of each offer (rather than simply capturing the same emotional beat). □

Too many "others": Creating multiple inconsequential scenes with other characters. □

Forgetting you're all the same person: Saying "we" instead of "I," or addressing your fellow □ Chorus actor as "you" (meaning someone else).  
□

Using cloths vaguely (e.g., unnecessarily waving colored cloths to signal a social force). □

Dribbling ending (not knowing when to end). □ Advanced options

Make physical contact with each other: If two people interact, everyone interacts in the same way. You are still all the inner experience of the teller. (E.g., if the teller is in turmoil at that moment, the actors could all pull on or push each other.) □

Make eye contact: As with physical contact, remember you are all part of the teller, looking at herself (e.g., look at each other with shock saying, "I look so old!" "So old!") □

Step beyond the literal: Add metaphor or nonhuman elements. (E.g., if the teller felt “underwater” the Chorus could swim in a line as a school of fish.) □

Use a cloth as metaphor: If one actor uses the cloth, all actors engage with it. (E.g., teller is tangled in confusion—all the Chorus actors struggle to get out of a big cloth.) □

Add singing: Actors can sing just during the story, or just at the ending. If one actor sings, all will sing, so make it easy to join—just one tone, a familiar song, or repeated phrase. □

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## Other basic forms

### Artistic development

#### *Acting—Basic forms*

We have learned all these over the years at workshops of the Playback Centre.

#### Tableau (or Slideshow)

After hearing the teller’s story, the conductor re-tells the story. The conductor will give a title for each of four or five scenes, with the teller named in the third person, and naming at least one image and one feeling (e.g., “Ella raced home terrified). After each title, the musician begins and actors step out quickly one at a time to embody a visual scene, freezing within a breath as they get into place. They can be anything: other people, objects, environments, or the feelings of teller or others. It is lovely to use cloths and boxes. But the actors use no words. The music continues through a few breaths after the actors freeze. The actors move back to neutral before the next sentence.

#### Variations

One actor is named as teller’s actor. □

After the freeze, the teller’s actor “comes alive” with a phrase and

gesture. □

Actors stay frozen until the next slide title instead of moving back to neutral. □

All the actors are the teller's actor. Instead of layering on, they simultaneously embody the teller's feeling in each sentence, in their own way, staying roughly in place. □ **Three Part Story** □ The conductor helps to shape the teller's story into three main parts, and names each part in a sentence. Three actors stand facing the audience. After hearing all three sentences, the actor on stage right uses words, voice, movement, and props to enact the essence of first part, and then freezes. The second actor does the same for the second part. She may refer to or interact with the body of the first actor, who stays frozen. The third actor does the same with the third part. Actors can play any character or aspect of their part of the story, in whatever style they wish (e.g., with or without words). Each solo is a minute or less. □ **Variation: Three Sentence Story** □ The conductor helps shape the intake into three sentences (or even asks the teller for three sentences). Each actor then does a solo embodying the essence of one sentence, in chronological order. □ **Narrative V** □ The actors stand in V-formation. The person in front narrates the teller's story in the third person, using gestures but not enacting story. Other actors echo the front actor's gestures and occasionally sounds without looking at the narrator. If you have an actor with spoken word skills she can add □ much to the artistry of the enactment. See the Performance skills section page "Openings and Closings" for how Narrative V can be adapted as a satisfying closing for a show.

## Collage

Actors stand facing the audience across the back of the stage (or half of them stage right and half of them stage left). One actor steps forward to center stage and enacts a moment or image from the story. Others may join in to create scenes. The actors return to the line and another actor steps forward with another moment. The moments are not necessarily chronological. Actors continue until they feel the story is complete. Useful as a medium-length form to give more content than fits readily in a short form.

## The Rhapsody

Actors stand in a line with their backs to the audience. After "Let's watch," one actor will turn and offer a brief monologue from the voice of the teller or any perspective in the story... until another actor turns around and interrupts with another piece of the story. Actors can interrupt each other in different rhythms.

When nearing completion, an actor will stay facing forward until each actor turns and completes her final offer and all actors are facing forward.

## APPENDIX C: EMAIL PERMISSION

On Feb 23, 2016, at 11:31 AM, christopher ellinger  
<[christopher@playbacknorthamerica.net](mailto:christopher@playbacknorthamerica.net)> wrote:  
Hi Ann,

1.  
Our training in Tampa was wonderful and Living Mirror Playback expressed an interest in us coming back to do more.

Tampa contacts:

Sandra Seeger <[sseeger.sandra@aol.com](mailto:sseeger.sandra@aol.com)>

Tonya Quillen <[quillenconsulting@gmail.com](mailto:quillenconsulting@gmail.com)>

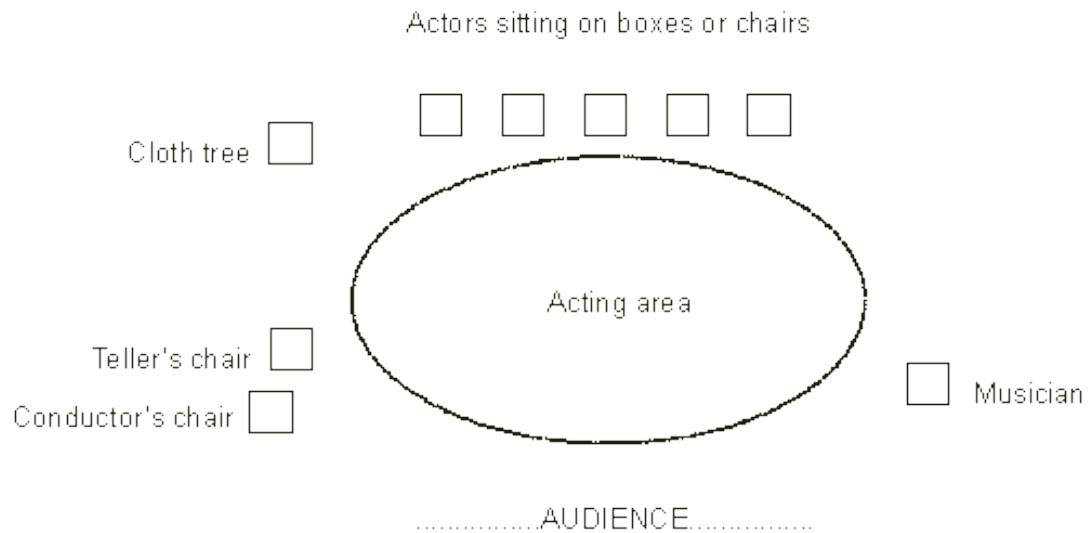
2. We're delighted you find the toolkit forms descriptions clear and helpful. You may reprint pages Basic Forms descriptions. Include book title and subtitle, our names, and reference [www.PlaybackNorthAmerica.com](http://www.PlaybackNorthAmerica.com). Also please encourage people to get training before attempting to do Playback. Note that we have revised some of them slightly in our updated 2016 version).

3. If you join Playback North America for 2016 I'll send you the [updated 2016 version of the Toolkit](#). Let me know if you are interested.

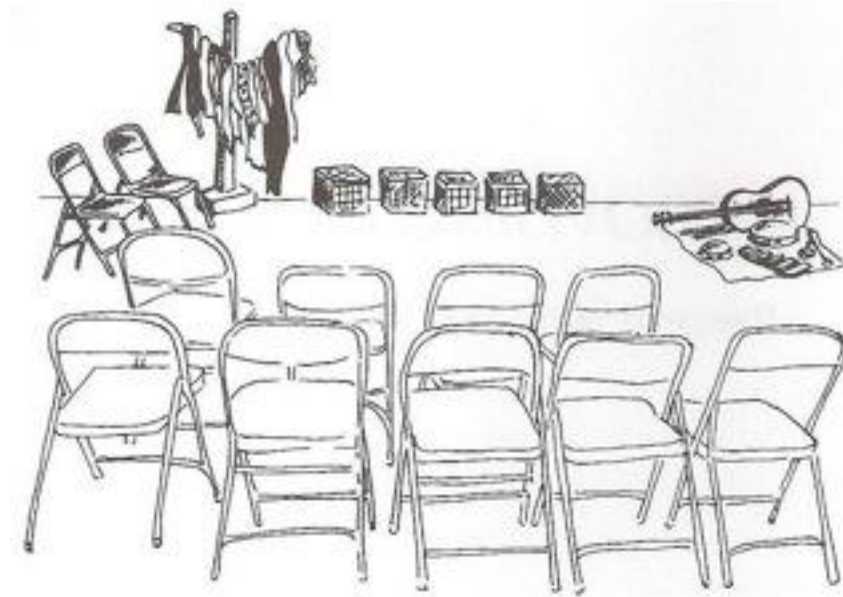
Warmly,  
Christopher



## APPENDIX D: PLAYBACK STAGE SET-UP



*Figure 1: Playback stage set-up, top view (Reprinted with permission from Veronica Needer)*



*Figure 2: Playback stage set-up, side view (Reprinted with permission from Veronica Needer)*

## APPENDIX E: POSTER DIALOG EXAMPLES

The following pages are examples of poster dialogues used in a workshop that the author presented at SETC 2016. Title: "Safe Spaces: Exploring Spirituality through Applied Theatre"

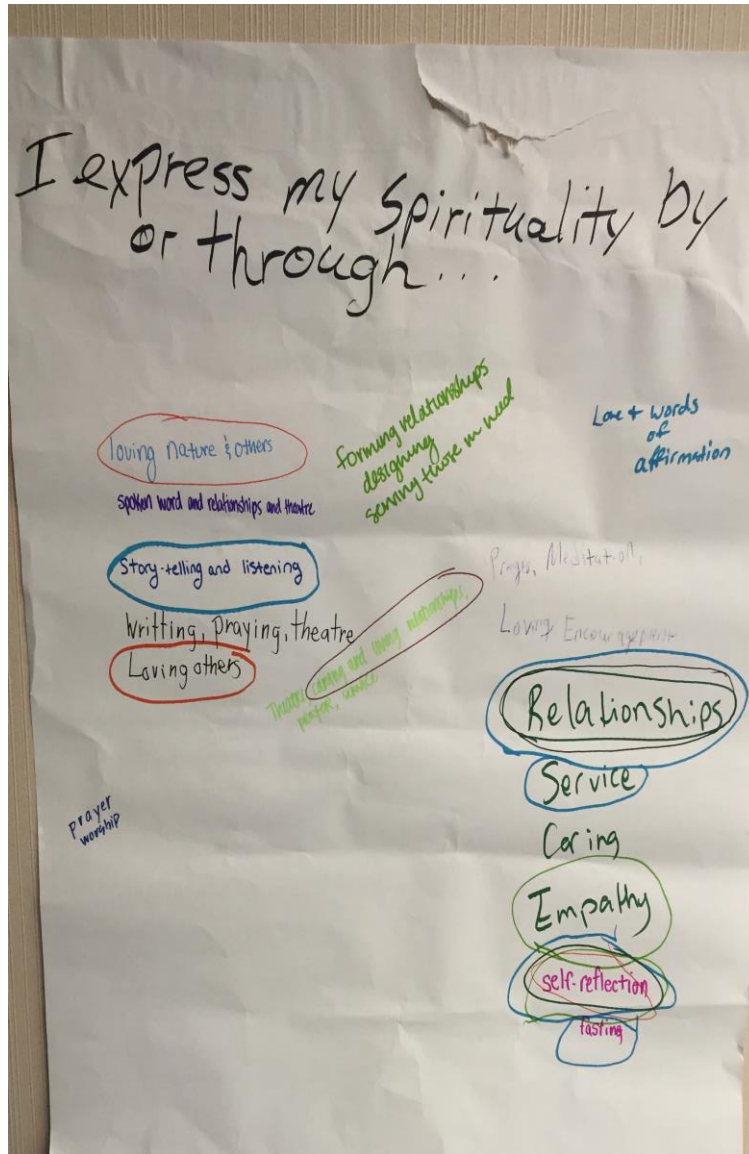


Figure 3: Poster 1

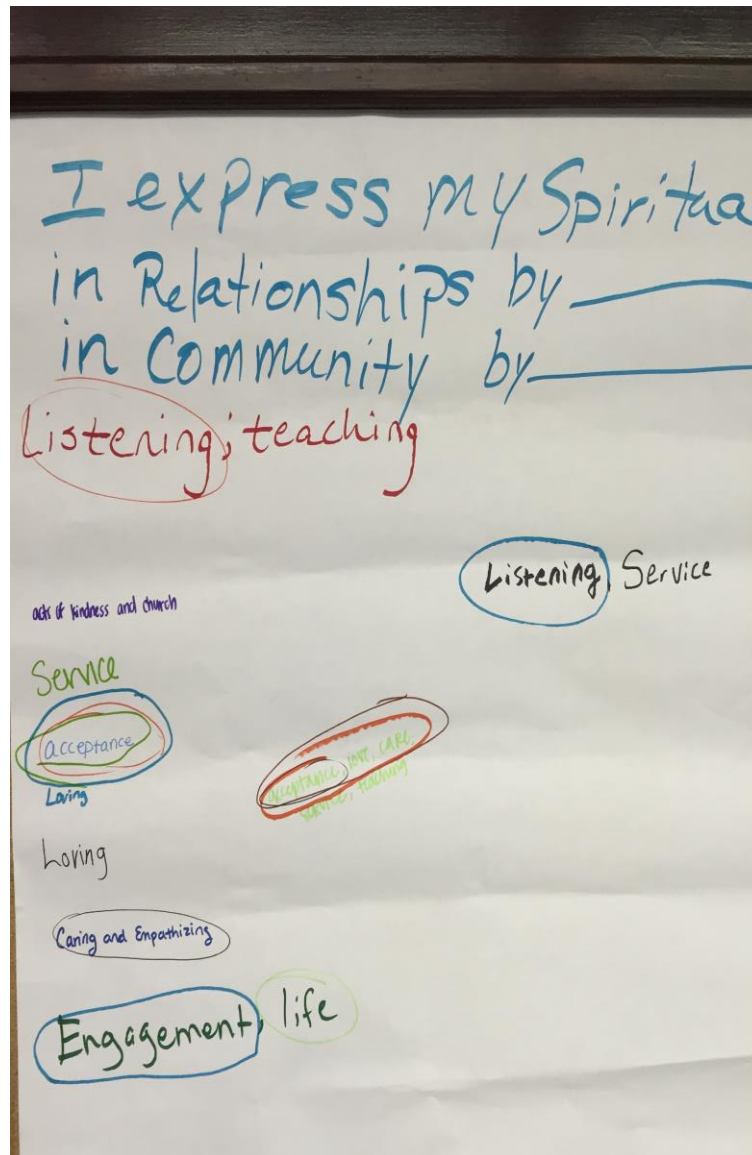


Figure 4: Poster 2

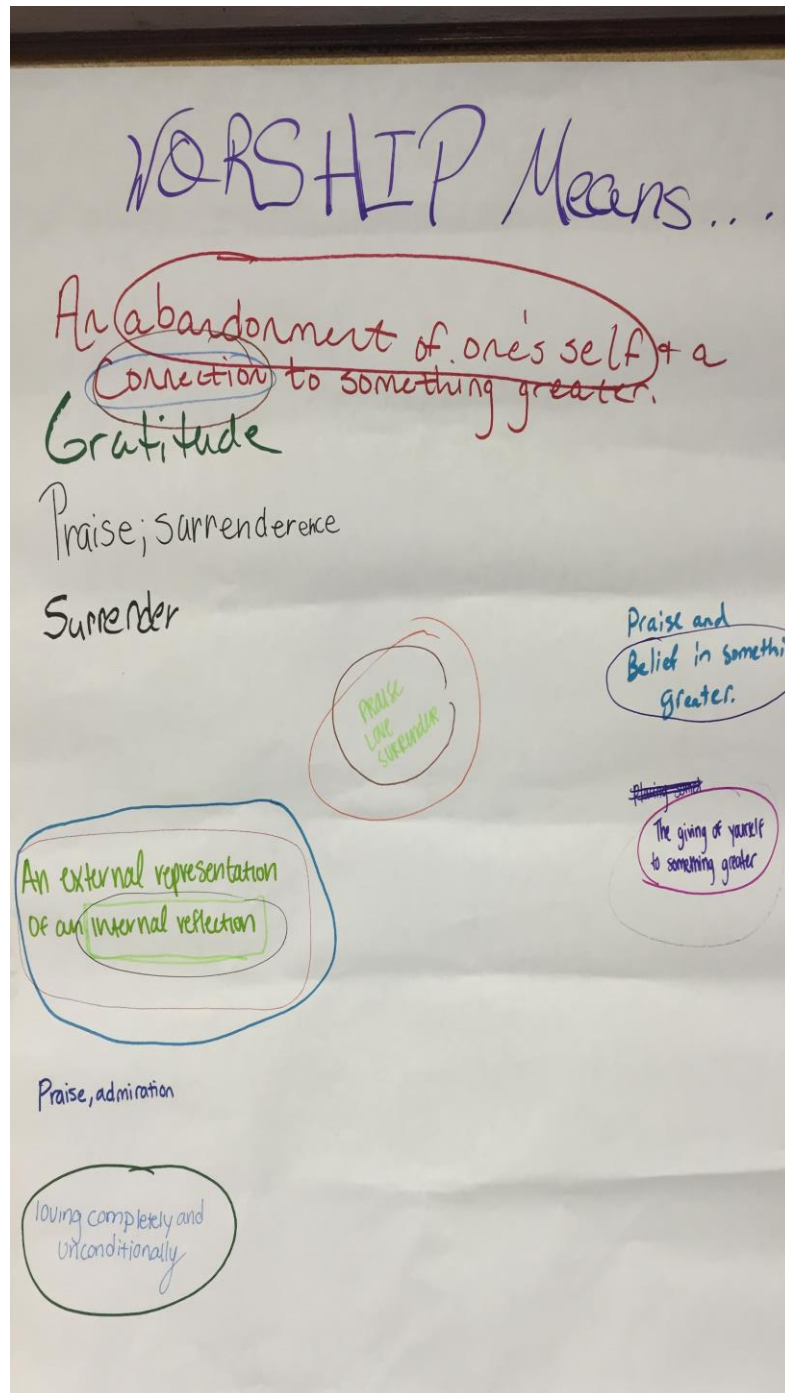


Figure 5: Poster 3

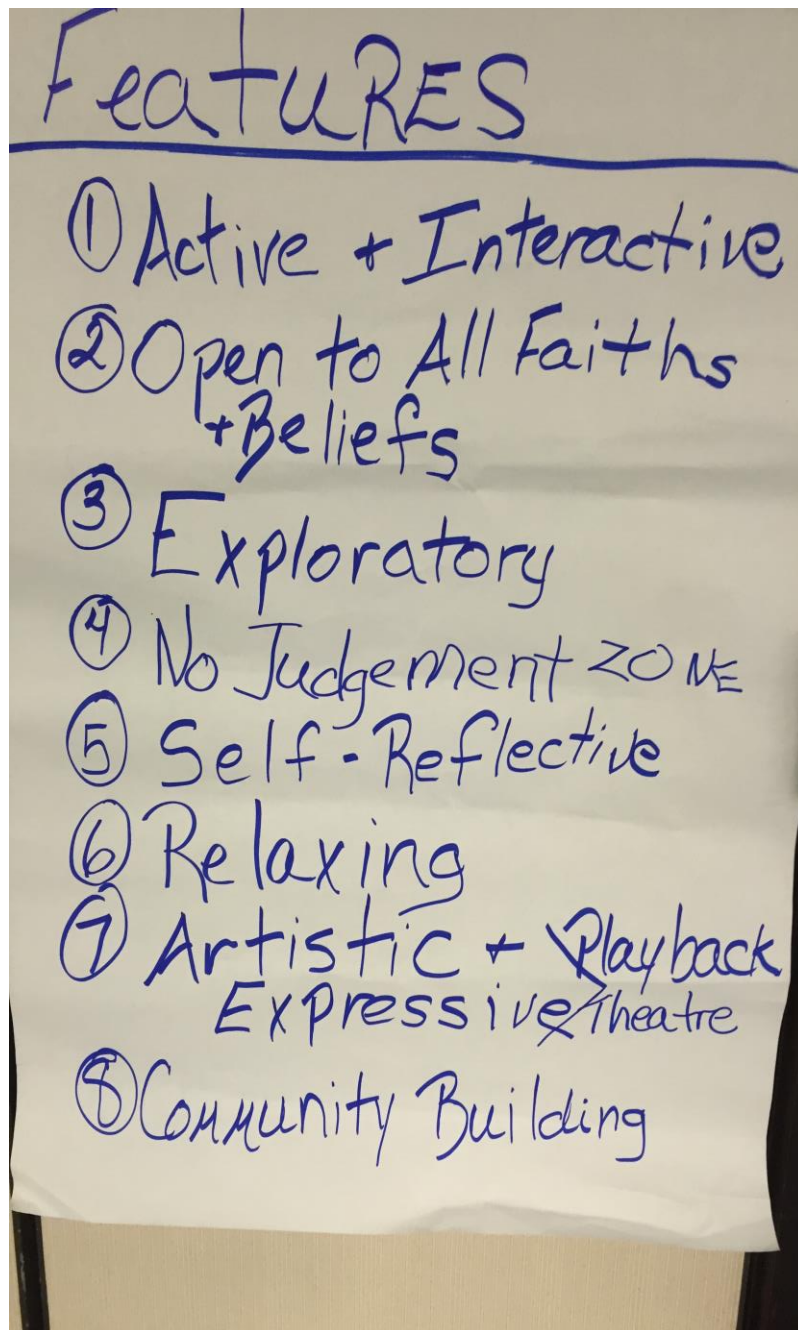


Figure 6: Poster 4

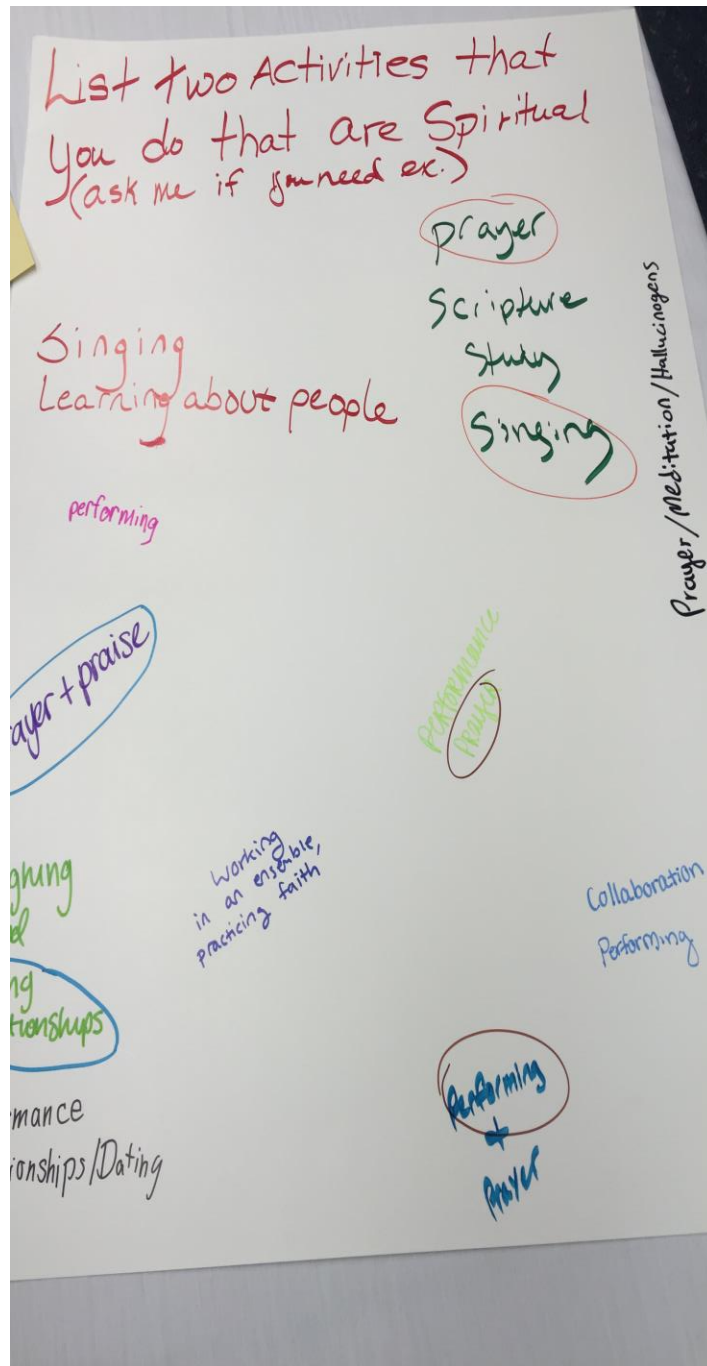


Figure 7: Poster 5



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