


2018

The Power of Play: Creating A Theatre for the Very Young Experience

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THE POWER OF PLAY:
CREATING A THEATRE FOR THE VERY YOUNG EXPERIENCE

by

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B.A. University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2013

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

Spring Term
2018

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ABSTRACT

The opportunity to enhance the sense of fulfillment necessary in revolutionizing and liberating a person's daily life, regardless of their age, can be found in the manifestation of play. It is through the acknowledgment of instinct, nature, and discovery that play reveals its power. As a Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) practitioner, I utilize creative play to inspire exploration and innovation among students under the age of six. However, what are the ways in which theatre, specifically TVY, invites all generations of people to experience the power of play? This thesis documents the three-year development of *When Pigs Fly*, an original TVY experience that encourages audience members of all ages to engage in creative play through sensation, fellowship and discovery. This study explores the collective creation of *When Pigs Fly* as developed through research, education, and practice. In highlighting the cognitive and emotional benefits of creative play, this study seeks to legitimize TVY as a valued art form, and invites theatre-makers to utilize the research and practice shared to inspire future endeavors that will shape the outlook of TVY throughout the United States.

To Karen Garcia, my first grade teacher, for introducing me to the magic of theatre.

To Vandy Wood for challenging me to build the puppet that would inspire it all.

To Julie, Leah and Michelle for sharing in every day of this imperfectly, perfect journey.

To the creative team of *When Pigs Fly* for taking my small dream and making it a big reality.

To my pre-school students for reminding me what a happy talent it is know how to play.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my parents, the greatest teachers I have ever known.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is a culmination of the people, places, and good fortunes that wondrously aligned as my TVY aspirations took flight:

The creative team of *When Pigs Fly*-Kate Kilpatrick, Pat LoRicco, Mikey Reichart, and Jarett Poore. Your faith, talent, and love for young people, proved to ignite this story of exploration and discovery in a way that exceeded my wildest expectations.

My thesis committee- Dr. Julia Listengarten, Sybil St. Clare, and Emily Freeman. Julia, thank you for always challenging me to look beyond the surface and to explore the greater meaning of the world around me. Sybil, my “fairy god-mother,” your courageous spirit inspired me to conquer my own fears with confidence and pride. Emily, my colleague, mentor, and friend, you have been the most influential figure throughout my graduate career. Thank you for showing me that true leaders rise up from lifting others.

To my professors at UCF, Elizabeth Horn, Aaron Thomas, and Vandy Wood, thank you for supporting and fostering my creative ambitions.

To Gene Columbus, Jeff Revels and the staff of Orlando Repertory Theatre for your partnership. To Jenn Adams for the many opportunities to work with the most incredible young people, and to Stacie Perez for inviting me to play a part in sharing creative drama with classroom teachers.

To Pam Bandy, Ruth Garcia, and Suzette Carder, my partnership teachers for the 2017-2018 school year. Thank you for welcoming drama into your classrooms with open hearts and wild imaginations.

To my own teachers along the way, Karen Garcia, Betsy Bisson, Todd Weakley, Ed Wagensellar, Dr. Renee Vincent, Dr. Anne Berkeley, and Dr. Kathleen Schlicting, each of you inspire the educator I hope to one day become.

To the family surrounding me near and far. Shana, Annie, Caitlin, Emily, Alice, Elizabeth, and Marissa, my tribe of sisters that remind me to laugh through life with courage and graciousness. To Sean, for finding a way to make me smile every single day. To Yiayia Elizabeth, for always reminding me to let God hold my hand through this journey. To Mom, Dad, Vasili, and Philip, for never missing a dance recital or school play, thank you for always encouraging and supporting my decision to follow this crazy dream. You four are my everything.

Finally, to Julie, Leah, and Michelle- my Core Four. You three have become my greatest champions. You inspire me to be bold, zealous, and unapologetic. What an honor it has been to build this legacy alongside each of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND INSPIRATION	1
Project Overview	2
Research Methodology	4
Outline of Chapters	4
Theatre for the Very Young around the World.....	6
Experiencing Theatre for the Very Young.....	9
CHAPTER TWO: CREATING THROUGH DRAMATUGY AND DESIGN	12
Principles of TVY	13
Image and Emotion	14
Perception	17
Cognitive Development and the Audience	19
Participation	20
CHAPTER THREE: CREATING THROUGH THEORY	24
Frederich Schiller and Story	25
Pat Kane and Play Ethic.....	28
Stuart Brown and the Science Surrounding Play	29
Dada and Language.....	33
CHAPTER FOUR: CREATING THROUGH PRACTICE	42
EyePlay, You Play	43
Playing by the Rules	46
The Rehearsal Process	48
The Workshop.....	59
CHAPTER FIVE: CREATING YOUR OWN TVY	66
TVY Takeaways	68
From Playwright to Player	72
LIST OF REFERENCES	74

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Set rendering for <i>When Pigs Fly</i>	23
Figure 2: Poster dialogue, “What is TVY?”	35
Figure 3: Poster dialogue, “What excites you about TVY?”	35
Figure 4: Poster dialogue, “What hesitations do you have about TVY?”	36
Figure 5: Poster dialogue, “Why are you here today?”	36
Figure 6: Objectives for devising.....	38
Figure 7: “Flight” word wall.....	51
Figure 8: Invited workshop for <i>When Pigs Fly</i> : Welcoming audience members	60
Figure 9: Invited workshop for <i>When Pigs Fly</i> : Moments of interactivity.....	60
Figure 10: Invited workshop: <i>When Pigs Fly</i> production photo.....	61
Figure 11: Invited workshop: <i>When Pigs Fly</i> production photo.....	62
Figure 12: Invited workshop: <i>When Pigs Fly</i> production photo.....	62
Figure 13: Invited workshop: <i>When Pigs Fly</i> production photo.....	63
Figure 14: Invited workshop: <i>When Pigs Fly</i> production photo.....	63
Figure 15: Invited workshop: <i>When Pigs Fly</i> production photo.....	64

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND INSPIRATION

My fascination with Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) began with complete misfortune. As the University of Central Florida (UCF) requires all MFA candidates in the Theatre for Young Audiences program to successfully complete a course in puppetry, I dreamed up a hand and rod Pegasus-inspired puppet, finished with elaborate wings, to build as my final project. For a novice puppeteer, I was inordinately confident in my craftsmanship abilities. After three weeks of building, the cylinder-shaped foam piece that had been glued and stuffed with Poly-Fil was a far cry from the renderings that guided the execution of my process; my measurements failed me. The long and lean body I imagined was significantly rounder than anticipated, the arms and legs were inches shorter than needed to support the hefty body, and I was working tirelessly to remove cement glue that managed to find its way everywhere except where it needed to be; failure seemed inevitable. With a bruised ego and dose of humility, I came to the conclusion that I would identify what the puppet *could* become considering its current status and adjust my plans accordingly. The stout body and stubby legs instinctively led me to believe this unidentifiable block of foam had the potential of taking on the form of a pig. When I shared this dilemma with my instructor and classmates they asked if I still planned to use the wings I built as originally intended, teasing that pigs had been known to fly a time or two. Little did I know the popular idiom would come to serve as inspiration for my newest creation. Developing *When Pigs Fly*, an original TVY experience, became the driving force behind my graduate career.

This thesis chronicles my journey of crafting *When Pigs Fly*. The drive to define TVY led me to the realization that I was a frustrated researcher, practitioner, and artist because of the limited resources available to those looking to break ground within this subfield of Theatre for

Young Audiences (TYA). I was on a quest to identify the challenges that stem from the collaborative nature of this work, the various forms a TVY script could take, and the ways in which this intergenerational model could serve as a stepping-stone for community engagement and action within the American theatre canon. I was craving information that not only fed my hunger to pilot a TVY piece that was extraordinary and powerful, but that identified the logistical ways I could create an immersive environment where people of all ages would accept the invitation to play. This thesis documents the ways in which my own practice and research as a graduate student influenced the development of *When Pigs Fly*, and my desire to craft a best practices guide to developing a TVY production. My intent is to challenge my fellow TVY practitioners to continue to peruse, adapt, and modify the documentation of our individual processes as we collectively work to legitimize TVY as a valued component of theatre. I use this document as an opportunity to model the detailed workshop, rehearsal, and performance strategies that helped to guide my journey. The following research questions shaped this process: What happens when movement, gesture, and emotion take precedence over the dialogue in a work created for young people? In what ways does play theory challenge grown up engagement within a TVY production? How does the duality of serving as a playwright and player of a TVY experience inform my practice? What should a guide for best practices within TVY entail?

Project Overview

I worked beside a team of actor/facilitators, designers, and educators to craft a new experience for early learners shaped from elements of practice, research, and theory. I drew from various forms and models of TVY that allowed for me to create artistic goals within my play,

When Pigs Fly. I identify the ways in which the image and perception of very young people throughout the United States continues to influence the forms of art and leisure they are exposed to. I utilize my research in play theory to reinforce elements of play that are not only reflective of the cognitive abilities of a child, but that contribute to the social and emotional development of human beings as they grow. Finally, I reflect upon my work as a teaching artist with EYEPlay, “a creative drama-based job, and embedded professional development program for early childhood educators” (“EYEPlay”) funded by the Helios Education Foundation, created by Childsplay, and shared in partnership with Orlando Repertory Theatre, Arizona State University, and Orange County Public Schools. EYEPlay’s use of James Asher’s Total Physical Response teaching strategy, a method that utilizes movement as a tool in enhancing language development, informed the ways in which I released the impulse to create a script that was driven by narrative. This research, met with the talents of a creative team of TYA experts, resulted in a piece of sensation, fellowship, and fantasy.

The play is the story of a pig who experiences several forms of flight as he strives to make his way south for the winter. I first created the concept for a Research Methods course at the University of Central Florida in Fall 2015, before partnering with a design student and conceptualizing the visual aesthetics that would accompany the experience. A first draft of *When Pigs Fly* came to fruition from this initial project. I went on to re-visit the script during the Fall 2016, as I had become inspired by Dadaism, a revolutionary art movement born out of disgust for the social, political, and cultural values of the early twentieth century. By Spring 2017 I discovered play theory and allowed the methodologies of Frederick Schiller, Pat Kane, and Dr. Stuart Brown to inform my understanding of the intergenerational model of TVY that challenged

me to identify grown up engagement within this work. By late Winter 2018 we rehearsed to shape and refine the plot and physical performance before workshopping the piece at Orlando Repertory Theatre in Orlando, Florida for an invited audience of nine adults and six young people.

Research Methodology

In developing a new play for the very young, I found reflective practitioner research guided the execution of my process. As the creator of this piece, I kept a reflective journal inspired by Small Size, a European network of professional theatre and educational arts organizations that aim to expand the practices of TVY across Europe through “reflecting on the three categories: (1) production and artistic research; (2) training activities for artists, teachers, and children; and (3) dissemination activities, such as publications, multimedia, research, exchange, festivals, and showcases” (van de Water 127). In working to examine the assumptions, frameworks, and patterns of my own thoughts and behaviors of crafting a TVY piece, I am able to nurture the self-awareness, imagination, and creativity as well as the systematic, non-linear modes of thinking and analysis needed to spearhead this new movement of theatre forward.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter one documents the process of creating a best practices guide for a TVY production designed around the development of my own TVY work. Using practice, theory, and research, I examine the ways in which my graduate career informed the creation of a TVY

experience. I examine the artistic and educational processes that influenced this document, which I hope fellow TVY practitioners will continue to utilize and challenge. In this chapter, I outline the significance of this research and the value continued documentation of TVY in order to propel this field forward. In chapter two, I document the ways in which dramaturgy and pre-research served as a catalyst within the script development and describe the ways in which spectacle and multi-sensory elements came to influence and inform my process prior to sharing out my first written version of the script.

Chapter three is about the opportunity to enhance the sense of fulfillment necessary in revolutionizing and liberating a person's daily life, regardless of their age, through the manifestation of play. I reflect upon the ways in which acknowledging the instinct, nature, and discovery of play reveals its power. I utilize the philosophy, psychology, and biology supporting creative play to reinforce the ways in which TVY serves as an intergenerational model of theatre. I discuss play theory and Dadaism and how this research reinforced my understanding of how movement and gesture could guide my process. Chapter four showcases the ways in which I utilized my work as an EYEPlay teaching artist. I explore methods of expressive language skills and how they influence the form of a TVY script, while reflecting upon the process of implementing a team of actor/facilitators and directors in bringing the piece before an invited audience. Throughout the concluding chapter I examine the ways in which my intent of creating a best practices guide evolved as I made my way from playwright to a player within the production. I highlight specific practices that I found most useful with the hope future artists and practitioners will adopt, modify, and apply to their future work.

Theatre for the Very Young around the World

As Manon van Water, a TYA scholar and practitioner, shares in her text *Theatre, Youth, and Culture*, “What is positive is that theatre for children and youth is opening up, boundaries are destroyed, and from a research perspective this broadening opens up new lenses of analysis” (van de Water 40). This profound notion contributed to my desire to document the development and sharing of an original TVY production in a location where TVY has yet to be realized. How would my own perspective as a graduate student come to challenge expectations of the very young? As it stands, TVY remains in an exploratory phase of development that the field of TYA is working to define. Using the practices of others to propel future endeavors appears to be the general consensus as to where TVY is currently living in the United States. My research reinforced the ways in which TVY is feted for honoring very young audience members by creating art for art sake. Meaning TVY celebrates the ambiguity of art and honors the self-expression of the artists creating and the audience members experiencing. However, as an educator I also understand the desire to instruct through a given art form. I value the need to create art that speaks to the specific cognitive, developmental, and social needs of very young audience members. It was in linking these two schools of thought through the history of TYA that I became inspired to create my own definition of TVY.

Created specifically for children zero to six years of age, TVY originated in Europe as a crusade intended to honor the rights of young people as human beings who have the ability to experience all forms of art and leisure. Instead of merely amusing young people, the TVY movement challenged the ways in which the arts could serve as a tool in “educat[ing] from the beginning, to accompany the new generation in aesthetics, to understand the signs of the time, to

make a more globalized world transparent” (Schneider 10). La Baracca, an Italian youth theatre, began one of the first organized efforts to utilize “the [wide] range of educational, social, and cultural services in Italy” (van de Water 123) to establish TVY as legitimate component of TYA. Founded in 1976 in Bologna Italy, La Baracca made it their mission to utilize their surrounding territory in working to enhance the accessibility of theatre for people of all ages. According to their company brochure, La Baracca began these efforts in 1983 by beginning “...to administer the Sanleonardo Theatre, in agreement with the Municipality of Bologna. It was the first agreement between a public body and a theatre company for children and young people” (“La Baracca”). The company’s production of *Aqua*, a piece created specifically for zero to three-year-old audience members, not only helped La Baracca gain notoriety for the innovative work they were creating, but it is thought to be the first fully produced production geared toward this specific age group. Their approach to education reinforced play and creativity as key components in developing an appreciation for the aesthetics of the surrounding world. La Baracca not only dedicated time to crafting TVY experiences, but to fostering a relationship between artists and educators that went on to inspire collaborative TVY efforts such as the Glitterbird project. This collaborative effort between the Oslo University College in Norway and theatres in Norway, Finland, Denmark, France, Hungary, and Italy” brought together artists, art specialists, child psychologists, and scholars in childhood” from all throughout Europe to “exchange performances, research, and lectures in order to stimulate artists to make art for the very young” (van de Water 124). The initiative led to the first TVY international forum in Bologna, Italy in March of 2009. Over 100 practitioners, researchers, and educators gathered to share new works/research, define what makes TVY so extraordinary, reflect upon the social impact of this

work, and explore the ways in which an individual's childhood could come to affect their perspective of TVY (van de Water 124). The forum inspired questions that have plagued TYA practitioners for years: are we working to primarily keep the audience in mind, or are we creating art for art's sake? Through this conversation the panel came to the conclusion that "art is a communication of ideas... [a] confrontation..." that should be embraced (van de Water 131); not only should the audience and the aesthetics remain central components of TVY, but this innovative platform should celebrate the pure experience of art as well as the perspectives of its audience members.

Rooted in exploration and discovery, TVY falls under the umbrella of devised theatre. Allison Oddey, author of *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, defines the process of devising as:

...the fragmentary experience of understanding ourselves, our culture, and the world we inhabit. The process reflects a multi- vision made up of each group member's individual perception of that world as received in a series of images, then interpreted and defined as a product. Participants make sense of themselves within their own cultural and social context, investigating, integrating, and transforming their personal experiences, dreams, research, improvisation, and experimentation. (Oddey 1)

Theatre companies throughout the United States have developed and produced devised work since the 1960's, with improvisation and commedia dell' arte serving as inspiration. With devised work having showcased a model that differed from the traditional hierarchal theatre, it would appear that TVY would easily find its place within the TYA canon. However, despite the fact this global trend has generated great interest amongst artist and playwrights within the U.S., the lack of documentation complicates the overarching vision of TVY. Education director of Oklahoma Children's Theatre, Roz Grisby, shares "For some unfortunate reason, things that are becoming taboo in the world of TYA (acting down to children, sugar-coated or meaningless

plots, gratuitous audience participation and ridiculous animal characters) are still ok for children under four “ (Alrutz 132). Given the newness of TVY, it remains imperative for artists not only to document the work that is being produced, but explore and record the collective creation behind the process. This information allows future practitioners within the U.S to address the cultural notions that unintentionally keep the field from advancing, and identify the ways in which TVY challenges the stereotypes that plague this exploratory field.

Experiencing Theatre for the Very Young

Modern technology provided me the opportunity to first experience TVY through a digital lens. Oily Cart, a U.K. based theatre company internationally known for the multi-sensory and non-verbal techniques that are utilized throughout their productions, was my primary resource for TVY. As a reviewer shared on their website, “There are good theatre companies, and there are great theatre companies. There are great theater companies, and there is Oily Cart. I’m reminded of that every time I go and see the company’s work because they never fail to surprise me. An Oily Cart show is like falling down a rabbit hole and finding yourself in a Wonderland” (“Oily Cart”). Their production of *In a Pickle* reinforced this reviewer’s sentiments, as I came to witness the musicality and imagination of Shakespeare’s *A Winter’s Tale*, brought to life through this immersive piece of theatre. The elaborate set pieces, costumes, and props that transformed what looked to be a relatively neutral space into a majestic garden lost me in awe and utter intimidation. I later learned that this piece was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company for the World Shakespeare Festival in 2012. I knew as a graduate student I did not have the proper resources or funding to replicate the extravagance I observed

through a computer screen. Still, I found myself doubting my ability to execute a piece that would compare. Did a TVY show have to be grandiose to keep audience members under six engaged in the performance?

I was met with these same frustrations upon attending a workshop at One Theatre World, where a presenter, a scenic designer and puppeteer, shared puppets and set pieces built for commissioned TVY productions he designed. His pieces were exquisite. Though I had been witness to a plethora of devised pieces that required minimal technical elements, I was trapped in a space of obsessing over the idea that the aesthetics of the piece needed to remain a central component. I was losing why I was driven to this work, and instead overanalyzing what it was that made up a “successful” TVY production. Then I attended the Alliance Theatre’s production of *Lizard y el Sol*, which was shared at One Theatre World. The production brought me back to a place of celebrating simplicity. It reminded me that TVY is admired for ridding itself of any conventions that *must* be followed. Instead, the resilience of one actor in a green leotard and plush lizard tail used vibration, physical gesture, and instruments to evoke innovative moments of discovery and play. This epiphany was reinforced through my attending the Alliance Theatre’s 2017 Toddler Takeover in October 2017, where I experienced performances of *Roob and Noob*, *Waiting for Balloon*, and, *Beautiful Blackbird*. There I took note of the ways in which each piece worked to build community amongst intergenerational audiences, and from that experience, I walked away with an understanding of the ways in which the audience plays an integral role in the dramaturgy of a TVY production. I had the tools necessary to build a TVY experience, it was just a matter of reflecting upon these practices, continuing my research, and following my instinct to use my experience to assemble advocates of TVY within my own community. My

research surrounding child specialist, Ivar Selmar-Olson, whose passion for TVY stemmed from the death of his 8-month-old son, allowed me to release the pressure I felt in defining the success of a TVY production. He shares,

They [small children] have the right to experience the extraordinary, to experience powerful, pleasure-giving, and challenging art. As with adults, this experiencing of performance transgresses notions of 'liking' or 'not liking'. Like adults, children are able to perceive art as expressing ideas that have not yet been expressed, as well as experiencing the mystery of aesthetics. As all art, theatre for the very young should not shun ambiguity and hard questions, because 'we will never be able to control the way that art will be understood,' whether by children or adults. (van de Water 125)

I was dedicated to creating an experience that honored my subconscious desire to educate, while engaging audience members of all ages with its ability to negate any stereotypes that undermine the power of creating theatre for young people.

CHAPTER TWO: CREATING THROUGH DRAMATURGY AND DESIGN

The syllabus for the Research Methods course I was enrolled in Fall of 2015 began with the following quote from an unknown author: “There is an intellectual component to every artistic passion, just as there is the fire of creation in every intellectual pursuit” (Listengarten). This quote emphasized our professor’s intent to utilize this course as an opportunity to explore various types and modes of research that would go on to inform the conception of a production each member of my cohort would develop for our final project. A supplementary component of the project was that our class would merge with an undergraduate Advanced Scenography class. While I would be responsible for creating a dramaturgy binder that incorporated the script we planned to utilize, an analysis of the script, production concept, inspirational images, and any supplementary material that a director would find useful, my partner would use that information to create an accompanying visual element to share out. This assignment felt preordained; I was vehemently looking for the opportunity to build a story around the puppet I created, while also working to craft my own definition of Theatre for the Very Young. As opposed to utilizing a pre-existing script, I proposed to my instructor that I allow my research surrounding TVY to guide the execution of an original TVY script for this project, to which she kindly obliged.

My cohort met with the Advanced Scenography students and shared out what plays we intended to utilize for this project. Christopher McKinney, a self-proclaimed problem solver, nonchalantly expressed interest in collaborating alongside me and developing what would become *When Pigs Fly*. His background in scenic design, projection design, model making, and carpentry only scratched the surface of where his talents lie. After he revealed that he identified

as a “themed experience designer” I knew he would make the quintessential partner. This chapter outlines my journey of moving *When Pigs Fly* from an idea in my head to a script. I analyze the ways in which current TVY practitioners informed my understanding of TVY and how their cogitation of TVY influenced the development of my script. I reflect upon the image and perception of young people within our society and the ways in which the status of our current educational system is reflective of the how we devalue young people within the U.S. I also utilize Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development to better understand the role of the audience within a TVY production.

Principles of TVY

Theatre for Early Years: Research in Performing Arts for Children Under Three, a collection of articles reflecting upon the observations and perspectives of established TYA/TVY practitioners, shares a worldly view of TVY as a “work in progress” intended to “...renew the language of theatre, to establish an art of simplicity for the complexity of theatre” (Taube 16). Through the trajectory of his career Dr. Gerd Taube has served as the director of the Children and Youth Theater Center in the Federal Republic of Germany and chairman of the Federal Association of Cultural Education for Children and Youth, propelling conversations of TVY throughout Germany from being solely descriptive and reflective to analytical and systematic. His article, “First Steps” activated the pre-writing portion of my process by underlining nine fundamental elements of TVY: image, perception, communication, participation, player, language, rules, story, and time. The text, which is specific to Taube’s country of origin, Germany, currently serves as one of the few published resources guiding the execution of TVY.

His frustrations lie in the fact that: “Different from many other discussions about (children’s and youth) theatre, it [TVY] should not be distinguished between the discourse about social condition and aesthetic aspects because they are dependent on each other” (Taube 16). I would come to reference the many questions that Taube poses surrounding the field of TVY at various points throughout my own creative process.

Image and Emotion

Taube asks that TVY practitioners first challenge the value of very small children within society. He poses the following questions:

What does a small child figure? The answer to this essential question is a key to the attitude towards theatre for the youngest. Are they ‘human beings’ or ‘human becoming’s’? The perceptions are lying between these two poles. Are they regarded as premature being, as good because ingenuous humans, as human beings on a certain level of development or as human beings with a special expertise? What do we expect of small children? When are they taken as ‘human becoming’s-what or how shall they become. (Taube 16)

Taube alludes to the idea that the educational opportunities made available to small children serve as a reflection of their social value. He speaks to the “the status of infantile educational institutions” (Taube 16) and the impact that these establishments have on the legitimizing of TVY. For example, European countries spearheading the TVY movement emphasize nursey schools and pre-schools as the beginning of a child’s educational career. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), the number of publicly funded pre-schools within the United States is at an all-time high:

In 2016, the report found, 43 states, plus the District of Columbia and Guam, provide publicly funded preschool. They serve about 1.5 million children across the country — mostly three and four year olds. Total state spending on preschool is now about \$7.4 billion,

an eight percent increase over last year. That increase has pushed spending to nearly \$5,000 per child. (Sanchez)

While this inflation of numbers is promising, the inequality of programming within preschools continues to afflict the system as a whole. Research shows that children who participate in high-quality preschool programs have better health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes than those who do not participate, however “nearly half of states with state pre-K programs, limit enrollment to low-income children. Furthermore, many state pre-K programs do not serve all eligible children. In 2014, the 41 states with state-funded pre-K programs, only nine served more than half of all 4-year-old in the state, and 11 served less than 10 percent” (Mead). Additionally, the Common Core State Standards kindergarten guidelines have shifted the pedagogy and curriculum that classroom teachers (and in turn pre-K instructors) are implementing toward direct instruction over active learning. This shift is negatively impacting the success of our young people:

A major evaluation of Tennessee’s publicly funded preschool system, published in September, found that although children who had attended preschool initially exhibited more “school readiness” skills when they entered kindergarten than did their non-preschool-attending peers, by the time they were in first grade their attitudes toward school were deteriorating. And by second grade they performed *worse* on tests measuring literacy, language, and math skills. The researchers told *New York* magazine that overreliance on direct instruction and repetitive, poorly structured pedagogy were likely culprits; children who’d been subjected to the same insipid tasks year after year after year were understandably losing their enthusiasm for learning (Christakis).

In reflecting upon Dr. Taube’s questioning and my research regarding the current status of early childhood education throughout the U.S, I came to the conclusion that we devalue our earliest learners by failing to prepare our educators with proper training and support to enhance early childhood learning. Valuing the quantity of preschool classrooms over the quality will continue

to limit the impact of providing an early learner with personal development, world knowledge, and understanding. As it stands the educational system is unable to meet the needs of small children throughout the U.S. Though research surrounding this notion remains devastating, I was adamant in locating the psychological impact that the arts have in filling this void.

Learning processes throughout the ages, beginning with Plato, emphasize the importance of the arts within an educational setting. As reported in *The Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (Fiske), the arts utilize methods of teaching that students are not typically accustomed to and because of that there tends to be a positive shift regarding students' integrity, confidence, and overall morale. In exploring the value of small children within society, I came to solidify where TVY helps meet a need afflicting our society: apathy. As educator Eric Jensen notes in his book, *Arts with the Brian in Mind*, "We are in the twilight of a society based on data. As information and intelligence become the domain of computers, society will place a new value on the one human ability that can't be automated: emotion" (Jensen 84). Jensen's writings inspired me to think about the ways in which my own work as an artist, educator, and practitioner are rooted in navigating, strengthening, and nurturing the sense of self my students discover as they come to understand what it means to learn through an art form. By inviting students to become partners in learning, I create an environment that encourages exploration and discovery. How might I allow that emotional drive to influence my work as a playwright? I became inspired to begin the playwriting process by highlighting the emotional journey for my main character, Avery:

- A young piglet named Avery (inspired by the disastrous puppet residing in my bedroom closet), is *desperate* to explore life off the farm he has grown up on.

- Avery is *inspired* by birds migrating south for the winter and makes it his mission to fly.
- Avery, feeling *helpless*, enlists the help of his owner, Farmer Brown, a series of animals living on the farm, and the audience to help him do so.
- Avery makes multiple attempts at flying but fails. His failure *devastates* him
- Avery is *determined* to create a pair of his own wings and flies
- Avery remains *joyful* through his flight

I now realize that I was so eager to begin the playwriting process that I failed to fully consider the elements of language, story, and communication that are specific to TVY. In turn, I failed to acknowledge the ways in which the development of a TVY piece deviates from the traditional methods of playwriting. However, in identifying the emotional arc of the piece as a whole, I was able to identify my intent of crafting a piece that explored themes of perseverance and hope.

Perception

If image addresses the educational function of TVY, perception addresses the assertion of art for art's sake. Taube shares that throughout Germany there are many artists and practitioners who remain emphatic about the fact that theatre for children under three cannot work: "In Germany, the corporate discourse about the legitimation of art is held within the two poles; the art as a kind of cultural-aesthetic education versus the autonomy of art" (Taube 17). He also shares that because of the civic representations within theatre, there is not a clear model upon which people are able to legitimize TVY. Taube advises, "We have to deal with the legitimation during the dissection and the wider reflection of this form of theatre, but it may not dominate, as the underlying discourse of the progression of this kind of theatre is still the aesthetic discourse"

(Taube 17). In imagining the perception of TVY within the U.S., Megan Alrutz's chapter, "Visionaries wanted: Theatre for very young audiences in the United States" in *Theatre for Early Years: Research in Performing Arts for Children from Birth to Three* offers a reminder that the link between education and TVY stems from the fact that in lieu of offering conventional performances for children under the age of five to attend, theatres tend to "offer process-centered drama experiences in classroom settings...[that] focus on imagination, creative expression, and multi-sensory guided play" (Alrutz 120). What makes TVY stand apart from a typical drama class is honoring the aesthetics and theatrical elements of the production that serve as a stepping stone in preparing the very young for a more traditional theatrical experience. The connection between the two conventions is where the perception of TVY is challenged. It is assumed that this work will defy the ways in which TYA has managed to successfully overcome stereotypes of being trivial and juvenile throughout the U.S. Alrutz invites the idea that the nature of this work challenges the field to:

...re-consider[ing] the role of child development specialists in our creative process, examine our somewhat rigid and financially driven creative processes, and think less about realism and narrative text, and more about the role of movement, music, objects, puppets, and ensemble based devising...we may begin to re-imagine a theatre where marketing and profits are measured by ticket sales, but by the cultural and aesthetic development of our next generation. (Alrutz 126)

Though tapping into the tools I use as an instructor of creative drama for the very young was not yet something that would come to influence the creation of this work until later on in the process, Dr. Alrutz's words spoke to the importance of this work. Furthermore, her writing reinforced the ways in which my own creative process was being driven by text and realism. However, it also challenged me to acknowledge my current understanding of the cognitive skills and abilities of

children under the age of five in order to enhance the moments of creativity and interactivity within the design.

Cognitive Development and the Audience

I allowed Jean Piaget's extensive studies of child development to guide the next component of my research. Four distinct stages make up cognitive development: the sensory motors stage, the preoperational stage, concrete operational stage, and formal operational stage. According to Piaget, "...cognitive development is a coherent process of successive qualitative changes of cognitive structures (schemata), each structure and its concomitant change deriving logically from the preceding one" (Wadsworth 25). This continuous process is gradual and can be divided into four inclusive levels. While Piaget was criticized for his use of the word stage within theory, as he was not suggesting that children move from one level to the other as one would walk up a flight of stairs, the levels refer to parts of the continuum to the whole developmental process. The stages are as follows:

1. *The stage of sensorimotor intelligence (0-2) years.* During this stage, behavior is primarily sensory and motor. The child does not yet internally represent events and "think" conceptually, although "cognitive" development is seen as schemata are constructed.
2. *The stage of preoperational thought (2-7) years.* This stage is characterized by the development of language and other forms of representation and rapid conceptual development. Reasoning during this stage is dominated by perception and is thus pre-logical or semi logical.
3. *The stage of concrete operations (7-11 years).* During these years, the child develops the ability to apply logical thought to concrete problems in the present.
4. *The stage of formal operations (11-15 years).* During this stage, the child's cognitive structures reach their greatest level of development and the child becomes capable of applying a logical reasoning to all classes of problems. (Wadesworth 26)

In having identified that my script would be targeted to students two to five years in age, I honed in on the transitional period of sensorimotor intelligence to preoperational thought. This research highlighted the ways in which throughout the second year a child begins to problem solve through forms of experimentation. This information challenged Christopher, my scenic design collaborator, and I to consider that throughout this piece Avery is experimenting with different forms of flight until his wings provide some form of resolution. Because “a child sees himself or herself as an object among objects, and comes to internally represent objects and events by the end of their second year” (Wadesworth 27), we determined that introducing three specific objects would remain the root of the story, with the audience serving as a character that would carry out the actions necessary to help each object maintain flight. We determined that each of the objects needed to build upon one another in working to solve the overarching problem at hand.

Participation

As we set out to begin outlining the specific objects that we would utilize throughout our script, I re-visited Taube’s article to explore participation. The interactivity that is innate within a TVY production lends the artistic experience between the actor-facilitators and audience members to remain a shared one. Taube poses the following questions: “How do players and spectators come to an interaction? Does it require a collective space where players and spectators interact (also physically)? Can this ‘playing together’ also take place by the spatial confrontation and separation of the players and the spectators? (Taube 20). It was in this moment that I realized that the interactivity within this production would come from sensory play, activities stimulating

from touch, smell, taste, movement, balance, sight, and hearing. Meaning the objects that we were to utilize would serve as the guiding force for the script. The activities surrounding these objects needed to be repetitive for proper sensory stimulation; the process of the discovery should take precedence over utilizing the objects in the way that they are realistically intended to be used. At this point we had identified that our story would revolve around a pig who was attempting to fly; we were now in a space of identifying how the visual and scenic elements would continue to shape the form of the piece. I shared the following in my journal:

Though the plot lends itself to a compelling story, the scenic and visual elements of the show are what will enrich the theatrical experience. Creating a safe and inviting environment remains my only non-negotiable throughout this process. Being that every single set piece, prop, and/or costume could [tentatively] be handled by a child under the age of six, requires that a great deal of effort be placed on the set remaining functional, innocuous, and still pleasing to the eye...Spring flooring offers the audience members the opportunity to comfortably move around the space while reinforcing the idea that there are no distinct barriers between the "stage" and seating areas... I want children to come into the space and not find it inviting, but relatable. I want them to see bright red farm doors and immediately associate the door with pictures of farm they have seen in picture books. For that reason, it is important that the set include traditional components that we typically see on a farm. Bales of hay, fences and water troughs are crucial elements that lend themselves to being interactive. [I imagine] placing barrels of hay throughout the entire performance space for audience members to sit on, a fence potentially painted in chalkboard paint that serves as a quiet area for children to color on, and a water trough that doubles as a water table, are ideas currently in mind...Initially I had imagined that all of the characters in the script would be played by actors in animal form. However, in reflecting on my experience teaching Kindergarteners, I found that hand puppets I had created to use as a classroom management tool received an overwhelmingly positive response from my students. In seeing how my students developed unique relationships with these hand puppets I feel somewhat encouraged to use puppetry as a tool in bridging the gap between actors and audience members. While, Avery is a classic hand-and-rod-puppet that would sit on the same level as the audience, Bird is a kite puppet that moves freely throughout the space and above the audience...

In hindsight, I realize that because I moved into embracing the aesthetics of the script, the script began to resemble that of a children's book, with the narrative dominating any other component of the script, as shared in an excerpt of episode 3:

Episode #3: Avery and the Windmill

(Wind starts to blow. Avery is making his way to the water bucket, and passes the windmill. As it begins to move, he turns around.)

Avery: A windmill! What if I made it to the top of the windmill and jumped from it? I bet it would push me all the way to the South and I would see so many beautiful places along the way. (Windmill stops moving)

Avery: Oh no! The wind stopped. Can you all help me get the wind moving again?

(Individual wind mills set in craft barrels. Encourage audience members to pick up their wind mills and blow)

Avery: Blow on your wind mill! Keep blowing!

(As audience members blow their individual wind mills, the large set windmill will slowly begin moving).

Avery: You did it! Keep going!

(As audience members continue to blow on their wind mills Avery attempts to jump on the wind mill but fails. He tries three separate attempts at jumping up on the wind mill but misses).

Avery: Thanks for your help but I don't think the windmill is the best idea. I can't make it all the way up. I'll just have to think of something else.

Though I am able to identify moments of interactivity and sensory stimulation, what I struggle to identify is the physical life and elements of play within the piece. It felt much too rooted in dialogue, which I believe is a reflection of our pre-research. The lack of educational opportunities made available to very young learners throughout the United States challenged

Christopher and I to imagine the ways in which TVY might help fill this void. Regardless of our good intentions, the artistry of the piece suffered. Though I knew the playwriting process was far from over, shaping a clear beginning, middle, and ending through this initial draft would make for a rousing start to this journey.



Figure 1: Set rendering for *When Pigs Fly*

CHAPTER THREE: CREATING THROUGH THEORY

I solidified my teaching philosophy the final semester of my undergraduate career. Having obtained a Bachelor of Arts in both Theatre and Elementary Education at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, I entered graduate school feeling more than confident in my ability to demonstrate and communicate the conception, description, and justification of my teaching. In revisiting this same teaching philosophy during a Careers course in Fall of 2016, I found that while my core values and ideology regarding art and education still held true, my colleagues and professors were challenging the depth of this document. How was I providing specific examples of the ways in which I put my own methodologies into practice? It became my prerogative to plunge deep into my own psyche and become an expert of my practice and the specific theories that supported my constructive approach to teaching. Ironically, the semester also found me enrolled in a Dramatic Theory and Criticism course that worked to investigate theoretical developments in theatre and their connections with theatre history and dramatic literature. We were to begin with Aristotle and the Greeks and trace the development of theoretical thought in its association with practical theatre up to the present day. Amidst all of this, I was ready to see *When Pigs Fly* through its next draft. While the concept of the piece felt rooted in exploration and discovery, I was prepared to acknowledge that my script was defying the collaborative nature of TVY with its predetermined vision already set in place. An introduction to German playwright Frederick Schiller and in turn, play theory, would pioneer the next phase of my work as a student, educator, and playwright. In this chapter, I reflect upon the ways in which play theory and forms of Dada influenced a new draft of *When Pigs Fly* that

embraced elements of chance and collaboration. I also share a detailed workshop lesson plan that I utilized at the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC). I invited current TYA practitioners to devise original pieces inspired by the first draft of, *When Pigs Fly*. I then reflect upon the ways in which that experience informed my understanding of language within a TVY production.

Frederich Schiller and Story

In revisiting, Taube's "First Steps," I was reminded that though elements of conflict, discovery, and suspense are conventions of TVY, they are not always used in traditional ways.

Dr. Taub shares:

The theatre for the youngest is no theatre of illusions. The created artificial worlds are visible art spaces. The creation of this special world are not veiled, they are rather shown...the theatre for the youngest doesn't miss the stories and neither the creation of illusions. But the stories are not told straight-line. They are based...upon the spectator's imagination (Taube 23).

Embracing the idea that every child and adult within the space should have the opportunity to feel validated in their own perception and experience throughout a TVY piece challenged me to reflect upon the idea of creative play as a form of grown up engagement. What would it look like if I utilized the theory behind creative play to enhance the story of *When Pigs Fly*?

The opportunity to enhance the sense of fulfillment necessary in revolutionizing and liberating a person's daily life, regardless of their age, can be found in the manifestation of the concept of play. For centuries, theorists have showcased the ways in which a healthy sense of play has come to liberate human beings not only physically but morally. German idealist philosopher Frederich Schiller's theory of play was first exposed in his manifesto *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, which articulated his belief that aesthetic activity, the highest form

of play, is a necessary component to achieving a lifestyle of happiness. In comparing Schiller's work to present day theorists such as Pat Kane and Stuart Brown, the interrelation between the aesthetics of play and the sense of morality that develop through integrating play into everyday life is incontestable. Schiller set out to celebrate play as a mediating factor that cures human kind's "fragmentation of being," while in similar fashion modern day theorists continue to demonstrate the ways in which a healthy sense of play leads to a strong moral compass (Schiller). Because of this, the definition of play is evolving into much more than that of amusement and recreation. Could play be a pathway for social change? It is my belief that through acknowledging the power of play human beings become capable of reaching the fullness of their humanity.

Frederich Schiller, a German dramatist, poet, and literary theorist, was a man whose work came to provide him with a spiritual freedom he had yearned for all his life. The influence of philosophers Johann Wolfgang Van Goethe and Immanuel Kant motivated Schiller to use his writing as an opportunity to define the character of aesthetic activity, its function in society, and its relation to moral experience. His work was rooted in his love for the listeners, not the readers. Schiller believed that the creative process liberated humankind by allowing the spectator to see through sensuous matters and discover the "free working of the mind" (Schiller). While his earlier works explored the use and abuse of power, a nod to the political oppression and social convention of the late 1700s, Schiller's later work came to reflect the inner freedom of the soul that enables man to rise to their most superior state of being. It was through this writing that he identified the ways in which art helps man attain an inner harmony, and how through the

“aesthetic education” of the individual citizen, a happier, more humane social order may develop (Schiller).

Schiller developed a series of essays, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, which served as his response to the ways in which he believed the government failed to put ideas into practice. He challenges the ways in which the government could go on to address similar circumstances in the future. He articulates that the educating of man on his emotions, to bring harmony with reason, remained key to morality. Schiller was convinced that art “served as the vehicle of education, one that can liberate individuals from the constraints and the excesses of either pure nature or pure mind” (Schiller). Through aesthetic experience, he asserts people can “reconcile the internal antagonism between sense and intellect, and nature and reason” (Schiller). Schiller’s proposal of art as fundamental to the development of society and the individual is an enduringly powerful concept. He found play to be a natural and spontaneous instinct activated by energy, which contributes to its ability to liberate human beings both physically and morally. Play has both intrinsic and extrinsic values, and while it is pleasurable, it also manages to contribute to the moral enhancement of society. As Schiller states, “Man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays” (Schiller 14). Furthermore, Schiller highlighted that aesthetic activity is essentially a higher form of play; play tends to be more of an apprenticeship to the aesthetic appreciation of the beautiful, which in turn is a stepping-stone into morality.

Pat Kane and Play Ethic

An understanding of Schiller's definition of play is crucial to understanding the work of Pat Kane, a writer, musician, and theorist who initially became intrigued by the idea of play in the mid-90s. Kane believes that an environment encouraging creativity, open-ended learning, and experimentation, is the key to boosting the overall moral of employees in the workplace. "Play is at best trivial, at worst demonic, and at the very least, not work" (Kane 3). His book, *The Play Ethic*, shares many of the misconceptions of play; expressing the ways in which play always seems to be considered as too inconsequential or too diffuse. Play is believed to be a temporary effect, providing a brief escapism from the trials of daily life. However, Kane believes that play, as a concept, is "a great-unarticulated metaphor of our time, informing public discourse of all kinds" (Kane 5). Play enters our lives in much more profound and constitutive ways than merely recreation and leisure. "We may go to work, but we are always in play or at play. Which is always to say that we are always, no matter how determining our context, free humans" (Kane 8). Much like Schiller, Kane views the art of play as vehicle liberating individuals from the constraints of their mind, and to liberate them to create a more just world.

The "work rules" mentality that dominated the early portion of the 20th century began to shift after the rise of rock and roll and mass consumerism in the 50's introduced a leisure mode of thinking. By the early 70's many growing influences in technology generated a new vision of writers and thinkers. Individuals came to identify the values of improvisation, fantasy, and abundance, in comparison to the values of routine, self-denial, and propriety. The play ethic, according to Kane, is at heart an argument about human nature. For the ethic to succeed people need to know and understand that the play ethic goes with the grain of humanity and the social,

and material universe, rather than against it. Players need to be energetic, imaginative, and confident in the face of an unpredictable, contested, and dynamic world. We need to accept the complicated relationship between all forms of play. Kane expands on the idea that as individuals in the 21st century we are at a period where we are experiencing a new level of play that knows, self-consciously, that it is important and significant. “Too many people out there think that when they’re playing, it’s fooling around, an escape from things. Know that I couldn’t provide a service to anyone if I didn’t do a huge amount of playing-exploring, testing, putting myself in the place of something else, seeking beauty” (Kane 11). We can acknowledge the sheer scientific reality of play as a principle of natural variety, a sign that our universe is creative and dynamic. Furthermore, we come to find that we need to re-design the way we live our lives as play connects to fields and purposes outside of theatre and education.

Stuart Brown and the Science Surrounding Play

Play is a necessity, not a luxury. “The philosophy, psychology, and biology that support play as progress are a great anchor for our dreams of human potential” (Kane 44). Dr. Stuart Brown, who has a background in general and internal medicine, psychiatry, and clinical research, began putting his theory of play into practice after conducting a series of studies on a group of violent young men. Brown worked closely with the FBI in interviewing Charles Whitman, an engineering student at the University of Texas who was responsible for murdering 16 people and wounding 32 others in a mass-shooting rampage on campus. Whitman was “an Eagle Scout, excellent pianist, and by all outward appearance, a handsome man with a promising future” (Allen 1). However, Brown was able to uncover much more throughout the duration of their time

together. He discovered that Whitman's extracurricular activities were not ones that he intentionally chose to take part in, rather activities forced upon him by an incredibly abusive father who fixated on his son's imperfections. This proved to be detrimental to Whitman as, "The multiple options found in a free-flowing imagination, which occur spontaneously in a naturally playful, safely nurtured child, and were not available. The open exchanges that begin in preschool parallel play, the broadening spectrum of give-and-take offered in pick-up games and the variety of choices that more intricate play provides were not his to experience" (Stuart 52). Brown has been able to consistently identify the ways in which a lack of play throughout childhood has served as a common link amongst over 6,000 felony drivers, school shooters, and serial killers. Furthermore, Brown has also been able to uncover the impact that play has on animals. His work has shown that mammals deprived of play have a much shorter lifespan. For example, Brown shares a study in which "Rats [were] deprived of play as pups, and a group of healthy/playful control rats was both exposed to stimuli suggesting a hungry cat was nearby. Naturally, both kinds of rats hid from the mortal threat. But where the normal rats would eventually, cautiously, poke their noses out to see if the cat was gone, the play-deprived rats never did. They literally wasted away because they refused to risk coming back out" (Minchen). Fellow play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith made it his life work to unveil the cultural significance in play. He was known to say, "The opposite of play is not seriousness or work, it is depression" (Minchen). How can we continue to deny the power of play with scientific evidence reinforcing the ways in which human being and mammals rely upon play to survive?

Furthermore, studies reveal that children who can engage in free play on a regular basis actively showcase their ability to cooperate with others, practice self-control, and identify their

extracurricular interests. Psychologists Robyn Holmes and Anthony Pellegrini conducted a study in 2005 that reinforced the ways in which free play benefited students of all ages. The outcome was “increased attention, better behavior, and more desire to do well in school. And not only children, for adults need play for a host of reasons, one of the most important of which is to maintain our basic ability to survive” (Daddio). It has been made known that the necessity of play for adults moves beyond the likes of socializing and leisure, but as Brown states, “The basis of human trust is established through play signals, and we begin to lose those signals culturally and otherwise as adults,” (*Ted Talk*). That play-trust relationship is evident in animals of all species, from monkeys to dogs to humans. It’s the foundation upon which all of our relationships are built, from the bond shared between parent and child to the spark between lovers (Daddio). The dynamics of the play-trust relationship challenged me to re-visit my initial desire to categorize TVY as an intergenerational model of theatre.

A major component of TVY is modeling, an instructional strategy that provides a clear example of how audience members may engage or interact throughout the performance piece. Elements of modeling are intended to instigate imitative behavior from young people with the hope they will be inspired to analyze and think beyond the simple repetition of a movement. This idea is supported through a study psychologist Andrew N. Meltzoff shares in his article, “Born to Learn: What Infants Learn from Watching Us”. The article identifies the psychological benefits of imitative behavior through a series of case studies. Meltzoff shares:

In this experiment 18-month old infants were shown a series of unsuccessful acts. For example, the adult tried to perform a behavior, but his hand slipped. Thus the object was not transformed in any way, and the goal-state was not achieved. For other acts, the adult accidentally under-or overshot his target. To an adult, it was easy to read the actor’s intentions. The experimental question was whether infants also read through the surface behavior. The infants, who were too young to provide verbal reports, informed us how they

interpreted the event by which they imitated. The results showed that infants could infer the goal of the act, even though it was never seen or achieved. Most infants re-enacted what the adult mean to do, not what the adult actually did do. (Meltzoff 6)

This study inspired me to think specifically about who the young people in a TVY performance space are imitating, not only a series of players, but their accompanying adult. In familiarizing myself with, Music Together, a music and movement inspired program geared for zero to six year olds and their guardians, I learned one of the of the key benefits to the program was its ability to “support positive parenting practices and parent-child interactions...particularly in the earliest when a child relies on his or her adult attachment figure to learn about the surrounding world, gain self-regulatory skills, and begin language development” (Smith). In reflecting upon this specific practice I became fascinated by the idea that the reason TVY serves as an intergenerational model of theatre is because it inspires young people to engage in imitative behavior with adult figures of all ages that they are emotionally attached to. This art form asks that the adults within the space actively engage in creative play, not only for their own social and emotional benefits, but because they inspire the engagement of creative play within the young people they are bringing to a given production. I became compelled to expound upon this notion as I continued my process and study of creative play.

We are known to live in an age of false security where we work tirelessly to plan and prepare for the unexpected events that life may throw our way. It appears that somewhere between adulthood and childhood we abandon our innate desire to push, test, and take risks. We have lost all understanding of what it is like to live without boundaries and allow our imaginations to run wild. This is valid for adults and children alike. We are residing in a day and age where even brief periods set aside for recess have been restructured and compromised for the

sake of classroom time. When are we creating opportunities for discovery and experience? Schiller believed that the aesthetics of play were rooted in the idea of sensation, fantasy, narrative, challenge, fellowship, discovery, submission, and expression. The question becomes if research shows us that play is scientifically linked to the creating better human beings, how are we continuing to create these moments within our schools, workplaces, and on our stages? Furthermore, what will continue to happen as we move further away from embracing the idea of play in our lives? It was the research within play theory in tandem with an in-depth analysis of Dadaism that inspired the next active step within my process.

Dada and Language

Through chance, collaboration, and language, Dadaism has managed to challenge the entire notion of art; its own productions proving no exception. An artistic and literary movement that began in the early 1900's in reaction to World War I and the nationalism that led to the War, the staged performances rooted in pranks, chilling humor, and a lack of seriousness led to this movement being valued by its participants. Nearly ten years after its demise, Dada was still viewed as a transitional movement to Surrealism. With texts and performances that were deliberately unintelligible, most scholars ignored the work of Dadaists for centuries. In grasping a better understanding of the aesthetics of Dada, I wanted to take on my work as a playwright through a new lens. I wanted to model my work after a movement that was rooted in the great masterpiece of celebrating fortuity amidst a time where humanity appeared at its lowest.

With elements of chance, collaboration and language challenging the entire notion of art throughout the early twentieth century, I unpacked the ways in which I might integrate each into

my own practice. The idea of chance was a reminder to Dada artists that he or she should free themselves from the rule of reason and causality by welcoming chance into the creative act itself. It prompted artists to embrace elements of surprise, specifically through a high level of interactions between verbal and visual experimentations. These interactions reinforced collaboration as a component of the work, as Dada artists also believed the value of art lay not in the work produced, but in the act of making and collaborating with others to create new visions in the world. Finally, Dada artists sought to undermine fundamental structures of a rational, ordered society by freeing text and speech from conventional rules of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. They sought to turn words and letters into abstract forms by stripping them of their legibility.

At the time I prided the current draft of *When Pigs Fly* on its interactivity and visual appeal. However, I knew that a few ingenious ideas and my ability to guide audience members thoughtfully out of their seats was not necessarily all that this script could be. I needed to look to other sources of information to inform my script and broaden my own perspective. The script felt too rooted in the text; nothing about it felt organic. There were elements that alluded to the idea of fun; but having to convince myself that the script was enjoyable seemed counteractive. I approached this challenge by applying to workshop the script at the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC) held in Greensboro, North Carolina. I proposed to engage current TYA practitioners in a conversation surrounding TVY: What do we know about TVY? What theatrical elements of this work are being utilized as we put this work into practice? I crafted the following workshop through a lens of language, collaboration, and chance as shared with my reflections and observations:

Baby Love: Celebrating Theatre for the Very Young Workshop Script

1. Check-In/Poster Dialogue: 1:00-1:10

- *What excites you about TVY?*
- *I have experience with TVY (Y/N)*
- *What hesitations do you have in regards to TVY?*
- *What IS TVY?*
- *Why did you come here today?*

I posed a series of questions by writing each question down on a poster board before spreading the poster boards throughout the workshop:

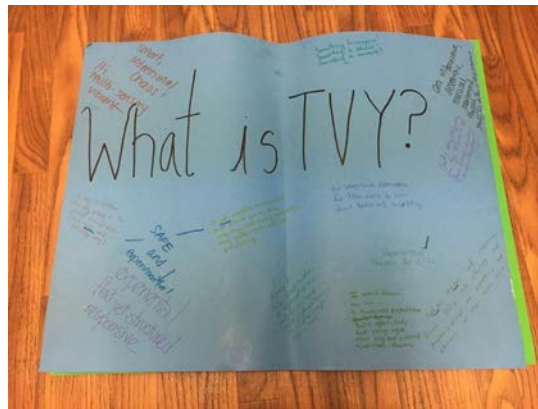


Figure 2: Poster dialogue, "What is TVY?"

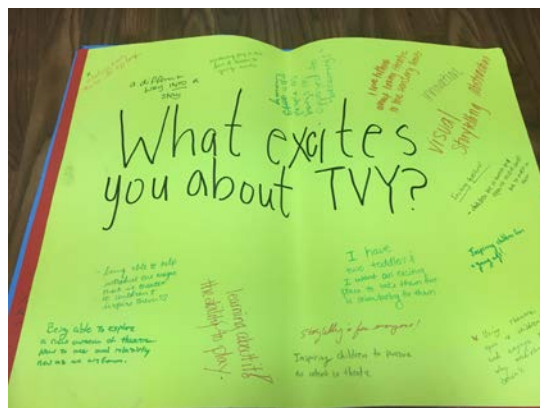


Figure 3: Poster dialogue, "What excites you about TVY?"

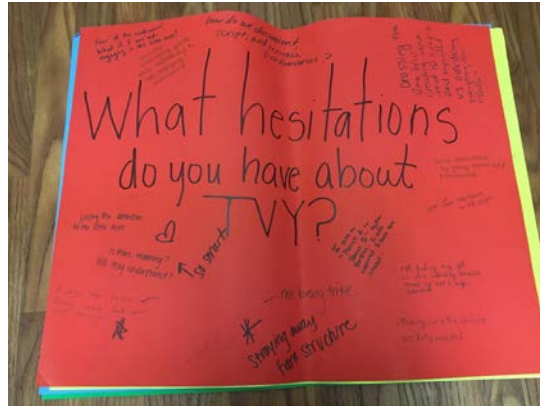


Figure 4: Poster dialogue, “What hesitations do you have about TVY?”

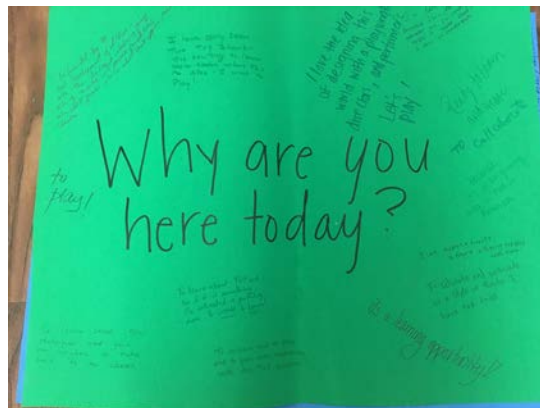


Figure 5: Poster dialogue, “Why are you here today?”

2. Welcome/Introduction/Name Circle: 1:10-1:15

- *Share your name and response on one of the posters that resonated with you the most*

TYA practitioners refer to this activity as poster dialogue, and it allowed for me to identify that though the workshop attendees were made up of experienced TYA practitioners ranging from Artistic Directors to graduate students, TVY was new territory for us all.

3. What is TVY? 1:10-1:20

I shared a brief history of TVY and stressed the exploratory state in which the field currently lived, before sharing out the developmental state of *When Pigs Fly*, and my desire to utilize collaboration as a tool within the playwriting process.

4. Activating Text: 1:20-1:45

- *Breaking into groups based on the quote you picked up at the door. Each group will receive*
 - *Text to activate*
 - *Access to the Sensory Box (filled with interactive objects)*
- *Objective: Using every member of your group in one way or another-activate the text.*
 - *Make the decision of whether or not you want the text to remain interactive*
 - *3 opportunities to make a change within the text you are given*
 - *You are allowed to use any objects in the Sensory Box*
 - *DON'T LIMIT YOURSELF! We are creating theatre in general. The fact that it is TVY should in no way limit you.*

***** Stop groups 10 minutes in and ask that they include an invitation to the audience at some point*****

- *What does that mean to you and your group?*

I then allotted each group 25 minutes to devise one episode of *When Pigs Fly*, with only the following limitations:

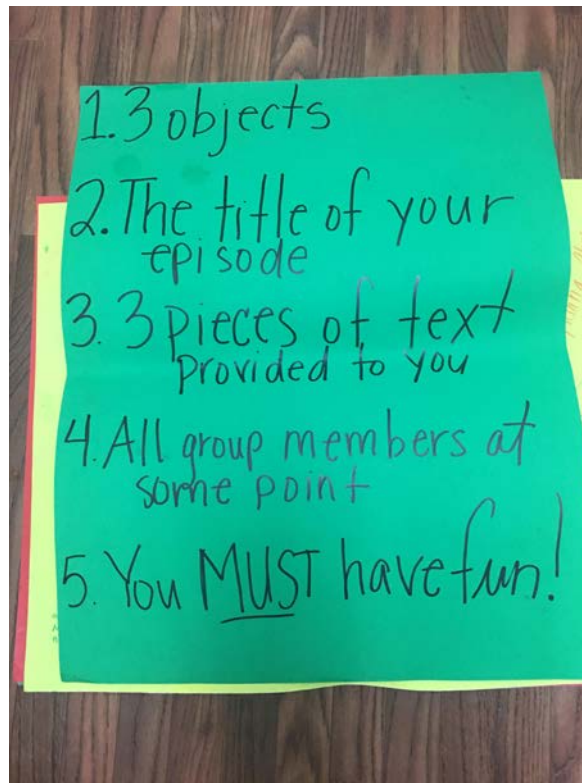


Figure 6: Objectives for devising

I brought a basket filled with sensory stimulating props that aligned with the idea of flight (balloons, feathers, noise-makers, bubbles), shared one of the 5 episode titles from my first draft of the script with each group (i.e. Avery and the Bird, Avery and the Windmill), pulled three specific lines of dialogue from each scene, reinforced that all group members had to be utilized in some way, and aspired to build momentum by insisting that my participants have fun while doing so. I then called attention, after providing 25 minutes for each group to devise, to ask that each group find a way of acknowledging the audience and utilizing them as a way of moving the story forward. As I recorded each piece, I concluded that though this workshop proved to fortify the ways in which TVY invites audience members of all ages to engage in creative play, each group relied heavily on text to reinforce their actions. Because I provided each group with text

from the script, the burden of needing to create a piece that held true to their given circumstances limited what each group felt they could create. The ingrained cultural norms of theatre practitioners, this idea that text is sacred, had stifled my process. I look back and can determine that at that point in the process I was not yet ready to embrace the collaborative efforts that might have challenged the current draft of the script. It would come with time.

5. Sharing: 1:45-2:10

- *Reflection*
 - *In what ways were sense/text incorporated?*
 - *How did those choices active the text into creating an experience?*

6. Check-Out and Closing: 2:00-2:15

- *How was your view of TVY changed today?*

In reflecting upon this process after having a better understanding of the aesthetics of Dadaism, I can come to understand and appreciate how chance and collaboration played an integral part in the workshop. I provided a prop basket and filled it with a variety of items that all groups were given authority to use, should they feel compelled to do so. With a time limit, it became clear how this basket of visuals could mold into this idea of chance. Collaboration was clearly an integral part as all groups worked collectively to bring their scenes to life, taking time to vocalize their strengths and weaknesses as individual artists.

In thinking about language, I was brought back to Taube's "First Steps" as he shares that in regards to language, "The theatre for the youngest (like any theatre) is imbued with many languages and it is not reduced to the language of words" (Taube 20). In reflecting upon the workshop, I realized that though participants were given the opportunity to strategically incorporate language in any which way, the text was consistently reinforced verbally. Granted,

(Players sitting in the audience model picking up their individual wind mills and blowing them. All audience members should be blowing their wind mills. Music plays)

(Avery stops crying. He turns around to see the Dancing Players moving)

(Avery begins mimicking the Dancing Players movement. He falls. Dancing Players move into a second tableau)

(He stares at audience members who continue blowing their wind mill and applauds them.)

(He waits.)

I used Dr. Taube's writing to explore the physical life of this scene. I visualized players embodying a windmill and documented the visual objectives of the scene. I thought a great deal about the element of language within Dada and intentionally worked to deconstruct the dialogue I had originally crafted. However, the text itself still held no emotional value. I knew I was moving forward, yet I recognized that I was working to apply elements of Dada in a way that felt artificial. If my workshop at SETC taught me anything it reminded me that I did not need text to reinforce the actions of the piece through dialogue. Furthermore, I was brought back to thinking about TVY as an intergenerational model of theatre. With 15+ TYA practitioners engaging in creative play, I was able to experience imitative behavior from this newfound perspective. I observed the ways in which my workshop attendees embraced elements of play, ridding themselves of any preconceived notions and embracing the physical components of each scene that was being shared. I was reminded that through instigating imitative behavior and proper modeling, that adults were more than willing to embrace TVY as a valued art form. These reflections challenged me to continue piecing the puzzle together.

CHAPTER FOUR: CREATING THROUGH PRACTICE

With two versions of a script in place it was clear that the next part of my process would be to assemble a series of actors who would be willing to guide *When Pigs Fly* from a script into an imagined production. Though a clear story was in place, enough time had been spent analyzing; I was ready to integrate collective creation into my process. This motivation stemmed from being hired as an Early Years Educators at Play (EYEPlay) Teaching Artist for Orlando Repertory Theatre in Fall 2017. EYEPlay is a professional-development program for early childhood educators, which was established by Childsplay, a professional children's theatre located in Tempe, Arizona, and Arizona State University, with funding from the Helios Education Foundation. As the program recently partnered with Orlando Repertory Theatre and Orange County Public Schools (OCPS), I was hired on as a peer coach to assist classroom teachers with facilitating language development through focused story drama lessons that incorporated elements of narrative pantomime, character development, and group storybuilding. Despite the fact that language plays an integral role within story drama, I would come to embrace the physical world of drama from a brand-new perspective, alongside using the EYEPlay program model to re-imagine the form of my own script. I then invited six practitioners into a rehearsal space to bring *When Pigs Fly* to life before an invited audience. This chapter shares the ways in which I utilized my work as an EYEPlay teaching artist to explore methods of expressive language skills. I also share a detailed outline of the rehearsal process for an invited workshop of *When Pigs Fly*.

EyePlay, You Play

EYEPlay is defined as “an evidence-based professional development program for early childhood educators, which has demonstrated success in improving teaching facilitation, changing deficit views of children’s capabilities, and developing pre-literacy skills in preschoolers, including children learning a secondary language” (“EYEPlay”). Childsplay adapted this program from *Drama Frames*, the theatre’s year-long professional development model that trains classroom teachers to incorporate drama techniques to further develop literacy and language acquisition in students. The program partners a classroom teacher with a Childsplay Teaching Artist in following an “I do, we do, you do” approach to introducing a focused drama and curricular pairing to students. Each unit follows a carefully structured series of events:

- **Model Lesson:** in which the Teaching Artist (TA) teaches a lesson in the classroom that demonstrates a drama and literacy lesson.
- **In Service:** in which teachers gather in grade level teams with teaching artists to learn about the drama strategy and to practice implementing techniques that will lead to successful implementation and student learning
- **Team Lesson:** in which the TA and Classroom Teacher (CT) co-teach a drama and literacy lesson
- **Planning Meeting:** in which the TA and CT sit down together to plan a solo lesson
- **Solo Lesson:** in which the CT facilitates a drama lesson in the classroom by him/herself with the TA and dedicated research observers watching
- **Reflection Meeting:** in which the TA and CT meet to debrief about the Solo Lesson, both in terms of facilitation success and student response. (Drama Frames)

This model was created in partnership with Washington Elementary School District and tested over the course of three years. What teachers have found throughout embracing this model of learning is that students not only begin to associate physical action with specific components of the curriculum, but emotionally attach themselves to what they are learning. Jenny Millinger,

Childsplay's director of strategic initiatives shared with *American Theatre* magazine, "What's thrilling is that we can look over a period of multiple years at how drama intervention can [be] success[ful]..." (Weinert-Kendt). Thanks to a \$1.6 million grant awarded to OCPS and Orlando Repertory Theatre, I was able to witness firsthand the ways in which this model would come to serve classroom teachers and their diverse groups of students.

Pre-school students of nine Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) programs throughout OCPS began receiving instruction in both English and Spanish in Fall 2016. With close to half of VPK students being native Spanish speakers and half native English speakers, dual language programming reinforces the Helios Foundations belief that "...by strengthening early childhood systems to promote language acquisition and emerging literacy for children birth through age eight, that more children will enter kindergarten ready to learn and more children will be ready at grade level by third grade" (Winton). Aside from simply providing students with a better understanding of their native language, all students in the classroom are afforded the opportunity to serve as experts within the space. Not only are they able to fully comprehend and engage in the lesson at hand, but research has shown that these students experience a boost in self-esteem by being able to assist their fellow classmates.

Each EYEPlay lesson was made up of the following components:

- **Anticipatory Set:** Foundational concepts and vocabulary are introduced through multisensory elements (pictures, sounds, objects, etc.). Children are encouraged through inquiry to relate new concepts to prior knowledge and cultural/familial contexts, placing them in the position of "experts."
- **Story Sharing:** A text is introduced through dynamic, dialogic reading, with both verbal and kinesthetic points of participation (e.g. "How do you think the lion is feeling? Show me with your face and body")
- **Drama:** The key concepts of the story are explored kinesthetically, with children replaying action, assuming a character role from the story and retracing the character's emotional journey, or entering the story at a point of critical decision making and

problem solving as a group to create their own ending. Key vocabulary words are repeated and explored in the context of the drama

- **Reflection:** Key concepts and vocabulary are revisited through verbal and kinesthetic inquiry and elements of the story are applied to the children's world. (Norton)

As an EYEPlay teaching artist I found observations of EYEPlay lessons in Spanish greatly informed the development of *When Pigs Fly*. With each unit our EYEPlay team of Program Directors and Teaching Artists would meet to discuss the focus and specific strategies utilized. During that time our Program Directors would share the lessons that we as Teaching Artists would go on to model for our classroom teachers. In taking on the role of a student during the sharing of the Spanish lessons I was hyper sensitive to the fact that I was one of two non-Spanish speakers in the room. I longed to participate and identify the teaching strategies that were being utilized, but despite my best efforts I was simply unable to engage in the lessons as I would if they were shared in English. I can recall a sharing of Mercer Mayer's *Hay un Cocodrilo Debajo de mi Cama* where I was able to comprehend "idea" as the key vocabulary word being introduced. I was even able to follow along as we repeated the social phrase, "Necesitamos una idea!" in working to solicit ideas of how to remove a crocodile that was caught underneath our bed; yet my attention span was waning. I found a surprising sense of shame in observing how attentive my fellow Teaching Artists were, laughing at whatever witty context had been enveloped into the lesson, or eagerly raising their hands to show off their expertise within a given moment. It was not until we began physicalizing the suggestions, placing food out for the crocodile or grabbing a net to catch him with, did I begin to feel as if I were a valued part of the lesson.

In re-visiting my script after beginning my work as an EYEPlay Teaching Artist, I came to realize that as it stood my script was failing to honor all ages as experts within the

performance space. My intent in creating this piece was to honor the intergenerational model of TVY that allows for audience members of all ages to engage as experts in propelling the story forward. For example, in The Alliance Theatre's production of *Waiting for Balloon*, a large balloon floats behind two players as they unknowingly search high and low for the object. The players wait for the audience to suggest they turn around, before they successfully locate the balloon. Each TVY performance that I had attended knowingly worked to make each and every audience member feel as if they were a valued part of the experience. In knowing that I needed to maximize the physical life of the audience throughout, I began to observe my students as I shared each EYEPlay lesson, making mental notes of what specific physical actions they were drawn to pantomiming. I played with tempo, vocal variety, and noted the ways in which each of them were enamored with the opportunity to hold any physical item that I brought in to share. It was through this work that I began to ask myself: In what ways will my piece honor my audience members for who they are as opposed to who they would become?

Playing by the Rules

The decision to bring *When Pigs Fly* before an invited audience occurred incidentally. A professor who had been witness to the artistic journey of *When Pigs Fly* from its conception shared a synopsis of the production with the director of Kids Fringe, a segment of the Orlando Fringe Festival geared toward children and families. She was interested in potentially including *When Pigs Fly* in their 2018 festival. In speaking with my supervisor, Emily Freeman, our conversation reinforced that there was little that could be done with the script without putting it on its feet. Together we imagined what the creative team would look like; each member of our

ensemble needing to be a master of collaborative ability with a strong imagination, willingness to take risks, and inviting stage presence. As Taube notes in “First Steps” each “player”, as he identifies every ensemble member, is:

“...just there. He is present on the stage or in the performance space. And he should be serious, real, honest and present according to the artists who are doing theatre for the youngest...The play doesn’t personify any figure-he’s just himself...[so that] during the performance the spectator opens himself up to a presence of another being. He perceives this other being like he is being perceived himself. And his imagination allow him to experience the player’s activities.” (Taube 20)

I felt drawn to calling upon actor/facilitators that valued young people for the same reasons I did. That not only held experience in working with the very young, but that also had the patience and demeanor to lead an audience through an experience with the ease and flexibility that stood in conjunction with the limits that could not be negotiated throughout the performance. As communication remains one of the elements. Taube also addresses, I found that I became incredibly mindful of his advice that:

Communication is based upon reciprocal perception. For our examination, the reciprocity of perception is crucial-the players and spectators betake themselves in a special relationship. Firstly, no part is dominant in this relationship. The eye contact-for many players of theatre for the youngest a basic requirements for the performances’ success-is one approach of the reciprocal perception. Perception is not reduced to hearing and seeing. It means perceiving with all senses. (Taube 18)

My players needed to be clear and intentional, yet vulnerable and impulsive. They needed to honor the fragility that comes with initiating a new relationship, but confident in their decisiveness and ability to navigate through the sharing of tactile objects within an intergenerational environment. They needed to be able to understand the cognitive abilities of a two-year-old, yet challenge the gatekeepers to stand up and play alongside them. Together we identified four actor-facilitators, Kate Kilpatrick, Pat LoRizzo, Jarrett Poore, and Mikey Reichart. I had worked alongside each of

these artists and felt more than confident in their ability to navigate through this uncharted territory with an open mind. Pat was also an accomplished technical director, and I knew how fortunate our production would be to have his skilled and precise craftsmanship to execute the specific technical elements we aspired to incorporate into the production. I also engaged the assistance of Michelle LoRizzo, a member of my cohort and fellow EYEPlay Teaching Artist, whose clarity of vision and originality in directing I have always admired. Emily also agreed to serve as a co-director of the piece and with her mastery of playwriting, movement, and ensemble building, I knew she would challenge the physical life of the script in a way that would enhance the intention and artistry of the piece. In reflecting upon the artists I was fortunate enough to share this experience with, I realize that each of them brought a specific expertise. Emily and Michelle created compelling pieces of art that were notorious for being not only aesthetically pleasing but also continued to push the boundaries of what theatre can be. Mikey, a skilled dancer, Jarett, a distinguished character actor, Kate, an exemplary singer, and Pat, an accomplished technician, completed our ensemble in way that allowed for me to release any form of control and put complete trust into the process. I somehow managed to find my dream team.

The Rehearsal Process

An invited workshop of the production was finalized with only three rehearsals leading up the initial sharing. Emily, Michelle, and I agreed the first rehearsal would mirror the workshop I had presented at SETC. However, it was important that I take the time to revise and edit specific components of the workshop to address my previous concerns of language appearing to dominate all. I also wanted to hone in on my research of play theory, and establish a

space for my actors where they knew their main objective throughout this process would be to play. I wanted them to imagine the rehearsal space as an opportunity for them to leave their realities at the rehearsal room door.

I believe that a lack of understanding remains at the root of every misconception. As a society, we have a complete misrepresentation as to the ways in which play serves as a contributing factor to the success of all humankind. Theorists like Schiller, Kane, and Brown have spent years not only culminating their definitions of play, but they have allowed their theories to blossom through the experiences of others. We know that play is rooted in instinct, nature, and discovery, and through a series of case studies and examples have come to understand the ways in which play serves our emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs. The direct connection between play and a lifestyle that is made up of ethical behavior has and will continue to show itself for many years to come. We need play not only to survive, but also to aid in the way that we navigate through life with open minds and hearts. What could prove more powerful than that? How was I implementing these components throughout my own practice? I was hopeful this rehearsal process would show me. I adjusted the plan as follows:

1. Poster Dialogue/Introduction to TVY: 4:00-4:30

It was my intent to set up a space where our ensemble understood that their voices were welcome. Though at this point I had yet to solidify which draft of the script would guide the execution of our process, I shared the inspiration for the piece and my journey thus far, identifying my main concern of relying far too much on the narrative of the piece. We then spoke through our own definitions of TVY (an immersive, safe, multi-sensory, vibrant experience that was both smart and chaotic), what excited us about the work (taking theatre to the sensory limits,

embracing the abstract, and introducing the magic of theatre to very young people through a different form of story), and what hesitations were had (fear of being trite, maintaining attention spans, finding the value, and heading into the unknown). This conversation held important to me as it established the neutral and equal ground upon which this piece was to be created.

2. Activating Text:4:30-6:30

From there we moved into building a word wall surrounding the word “flight.” At this point in the process I was thinking a great deal about the ways in which EYEPlay had reinforced the introduction of one key vocabulary word throughout each lesson, and I was inspired to imagine that with each object that was introduced throughout the piece, one word highlighted the specific way in which that item flew. For example, a balloon would float while a paper airplane might soar. We created the following:

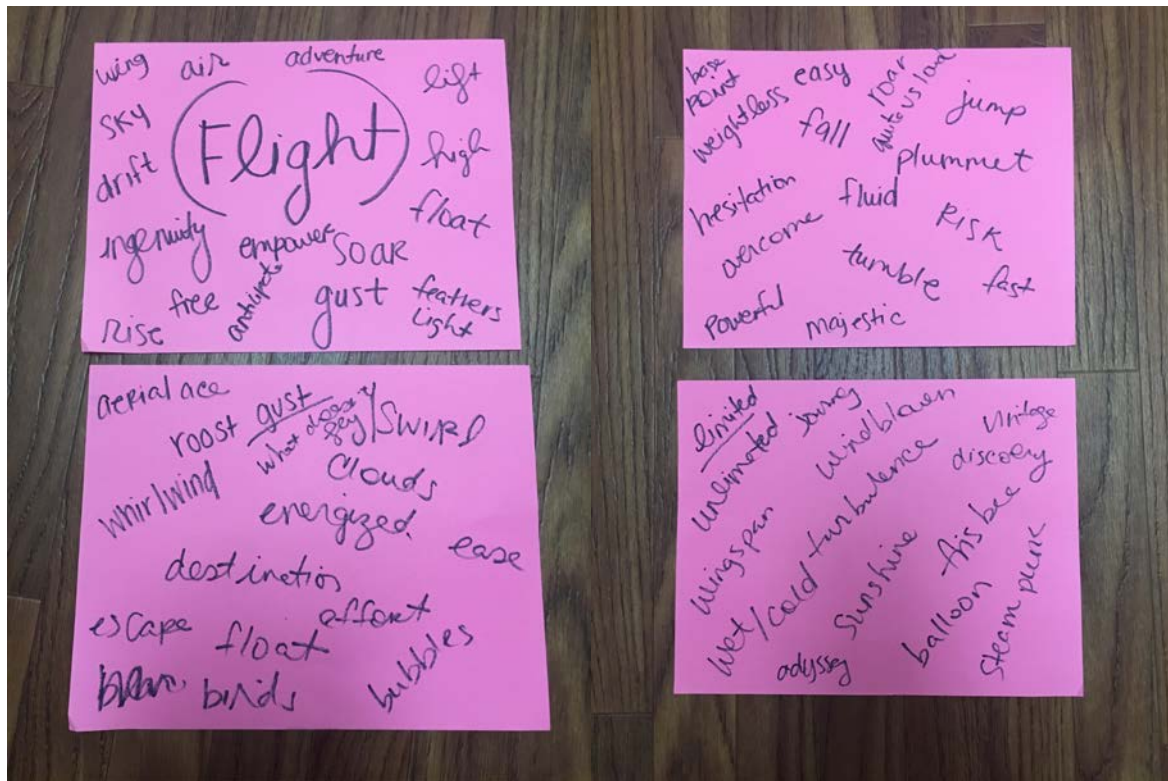


Figure 7: “Flight” word wall

This exercise was intended to inspire our initial devising activity. I divided our players into groups of two and provided each of them with a sensory stimulating object with the objective that they were to build a scene exploring the functionality of that object as if they were doing so for the very first time. For this reason it was incredibly important that I work to adjust the workshop plan for the rehearsal process so that it reinforced the “showing, not telling” component of building each scene. I did this by limiting the text available to both groups. As opposed to providing them with episode titles and lines of text, I asked that each group utilize the “flight” brainstorming poster we had created and allow one of the specific words surrounding flight to inspire the execution of their piece. That word was the only text they were permitted to

Speak aloud should they feel inclined to incorporate text at all. I was inspired by my research surrounding Dada to identify the abstract ways in which our ensemble would come to embrace each of their key words in an unfettered way.

Kate and Jarett were provided with a multicolored parachute with handles and Pat and Mikey were given a package of balloons. Both groups were given 10 minutes to devise a scene following the designated prompt. My only instruction to them was to focus on creating a clear beginning, middle, and end to their piece, and that as we were imagining this piece taking place on a farm, they were to embody an animal of their choosing. The two groups divided and conquered, and I allowed them the time to play and explore with their given objects before sharing that they were to invite the audience into exploration and discovery of this new object. This adjustment was made to the workshop plan in the hopes of experimenting with the “I do, you do, we do” approach that my work that EYEPlay had inspired.

As the two groups shared their scenes I found myself identifying active moments throughout each scene:

- Player hiding under parachute
- Tug-of-war with parachute
- Audience members invited to lift the parachute
- Balloon flying away
- Jumping off of chair with balloon in hand and attempting to fly
- Players passing balloon back and forth with members of the audience
- Balloon popping

It was in this moment that I was finally able to acknowledge a clear sense of balance in devising and playwriting. I realized that as opposed to identifying the clear actions that would highlight the emotional arc and embrace the world of the drama, I had been orchestrating each moment as I would if executing a lesson plan for my pre-school students. I left our initial rehearsal understanding the adjustments that needed to be made within the narrative of my script, and shared the following in my journal:

Michelle challenged me to think about painting the world of the drama and leaving my facilitator hat at home. This is where referencing the [initial draft] I created may be helpful to me so that I may remember those defining moments that I can't imagine the script without. [It was] interesting [to explore] broad prompt, [and then to have] directors hone in and allow for it to become even more specific-that helped and allowed for us to work as an ensemble where all ideas are honored. TVY scripts [ask that all members of the creative team] play.

My journal reflection highlighted the following findings:

- Brainstorming key words helped to keep text purposeful
- I can create TVY based on my own terms and I don't need to worry about following the models that I have seen before me.
- Utilizing players that are both actors and have experience teaching has proven to be an integral component of the process
- Honor ambiguity by releasing the need for specific characters
- Great success in devising and immediately reflecting on what we devised. Nice to hear multiple perspectives of what worked/what each member of the creative team noticed as all players are being watched
- Longer rehearsal appears to be the key to success.
- Being able to release your prompt, but allowing it to inform what must happen.

The creative team moved into our second rehearsal with adjustments in place. Along with a new draft of the script, the creative team and I decided that I would step into the role of a player. After our first rehearsal, I found such inspiration in allowing my own movements, observations, and gestures to guide the moments of discovery and play throughout the piece. As a playwright/co-director I was feeling such tension and frustration in my desire to plan out every

moment. Stepping into the role of a player magically released me of those burdens; it allowed for me to re-visit play theory and experience play. We also made the decision that our technical director and one of our five players, Pat, would serve as a Farmer throughout the piece and initiate the introduction of each new object and/or puppeteering throughout. Based off of my past observations of TVY productions there always appeared to be a stage manager that served as an outside figure within the world of the drama, but facilitated the management and safety of the audience. However, in working to release this notion that *When Pigs Fly* needed to follow any specific model simply because I found it be successful, I reminded myself of the research that had reinforced TVY as an exploratory phase. Though this term had initially made me frustrated and left me hungry for structure, I was now relishing in the freedom of it.

It was decided that in order to build and maintain the momentum we found throughout our first rehearsal, our creative team would commit to a five-hour rehearsal where we worked through devising each specific episode.

1. Housekeeping/Outline/Read-Thru: 12:00-12:30

We began by reading through the newest draft of the script that shared the beginning, middle, and ending moments for each five episodes. I had stripped the script of any form of dialogue, and established a clear action for each beginning, middle, and ending. With each beginning, middle, or ending, I noted specific actions and/or intentions to help guide the devising process. I utilized one specific vocabulary word for each episode with the intent that it would be the only word that the devising team would verbally articulate. After the success of our first rehearsal, I was hopeful this shift in form would provide my ensemble with just the right amount of structure they needed in order to feel successful. The newest version of the script was formatted as follows:

Episode #3 Avery and the Windmill

B: Avery finds a windmill

- Cowbell is heard
- Animals are ready for lunch
- Avery is alone
- A windmill appears
- Avery watches the windmill
- Avery feels wind

M: Avery explores the windmill

- Avery plays in the wind
- Avery accidentally bumps into the windmill and is lifted slightly off the ground before falling
 - DISCOVERY: SOAR
- Avery works to jump onto the windmill

E: Avery falls

- Avery climbs under parachute

2. Sensory Word Wall: 12:30-1:00

Following the read-thru we brought out a large role of newsprint paper and identified the sights, sounds, smells, and images associated with a farm. We created a series of sounds connected to the images, and Michelle and Emily asked that I highlight certain images that might come to influence our devising process. This activity reinforced the idea that sounds tell their own story, and as an ensemble we reflected upon the picture we painted through these sounds.

3. Warm-up- Flocking: 1:00-1:15

- *Fly*
- *Float*
- *Soar*
- *Woosh*
- *Fly*

4. Animal Character Development: 1:15-1:30

- *Cover the Space as your character*
- *8 Count Movement - Transitioning from Human to Animal*

We then moved into an actor warm up that utilized the key vocabulary words integrated into the script, alongside a warm-up which allowed for each of the players to identify the animal that they would be embodying throughout the production. Though Taube's article had shared the ways in which players should remain neutral figures throughout the space, I had attended TVY productions where players were very much themselves, and then again attended productions with actors placed in large costume pieces that clearly identified who they were. I recognized the value in both artistic choices I knew that I wanted our players to live in an ambiguous world of the two. For that reason each player, aside from our Farmer, had a specific animal that inspired their physical and vocal life alone.

5. Episode Development (5 episodes - 15 beats): 1:30-4:00

- *Improv based on beginning, middle, and ending*
- *Refine, edit, repeat*

We then moved into the devising of each episode with Emily and Michelle guiding all five players through each of the highlighted moments within the script. They would provide us with specific prompts, or initiate moments of discovery until we had found a way of hitting the beginning, middle, and ending of each episode. It was a great deal of improvising, pausing to reflect on what

worked, taking Emily and Michelle's direction into account, and continuing the process until a clear scene had transpired. I was thrilled with the collaborative effort of the process. There was shared brainstorming throughout and we even worked to navigate through the re-writing of Episode 3: Avery and the Windmill, when our ensemble was struggling to connect with the text as written. My journal reflection highlighted the following findings:

- As a playwright create a clear beginning, middle, and ending. Share that with the actors, stop and re-create and restructure identifying what elements work.
- Don't worry about the audience in devising. There was a moment where I asked about where we planned to put the audience. Michelle mentioned that we should paint the picture for each episode, and create an ideal place for where our audience would go before looking at all of them and then determining where they need to be.
- We identified the why we're here before anything. What was each character's objective and how were they contributing to the story? That helped to solidify the audience's objectives throughout.
- Don't be afraid to start over. There was a moment during Episode Three where we were discussing the convention of the windmill. I had written in my most recent draft that the windmill pushed Avery up. However in rehearsal today the mechanism wasn't flowing as seamlessly as other episodes had. The balloon imagery had worked so perfectly, however in this it wasn't. My director asked me why I chose to utilize this convention and I shared that when Chris and I were creating the story we thought so much about how visually stimulating this show could look. As it evolved the windmill just didn't fit. It was a really interesting moment of dialogue where we were all forced to recognize what it was exactly that were intending to do-build the story and imagery, and allow for ourselves to come up with answers for our solutions. Windmill didn't make sense and so we changed it.

6. Run Show: 4:00-5:00

The ending of the second rehearsal was the moment that *When Pigs Fly* became a reality. I had allowed so many experiences to shape the world of the play. By the time I brought it into a space with my creative team I was more than ready to release it and allow others to become a part of the telling of this story. I knew the only missing component was an audience.

The final rehearsal found our creative team focusing on the audience-performance dynamic. Being that *When Pigs Fly* was being shared in a black box theatre, we worked to

solidify where we would place the members of our audience. As Taube notes in his response to the audience/performer dynamic:

We have to distinguish between the limits which are apart from the performance's aesthetics and those which are set by the aesthetic. Both kinds of limits are defined externally by the players. They can't be manipulated by the children; but they are different in the way which they will be communicated with the spectators...How does the performance's aesthetic claim the area for the players, the area for the children and the common area? This could be a clearly limited ring, a sound area, or the player's presence in a certain cruising radius. All those artistic means are setting psychological barriers which usually will be respected by the children. (Taube 21-22)

I was brought back to The Alliance Theatre's production of *Lizard y el Sol*, where a player guided the audience into the performance space before carefully leading each young person to a brown cushioned pillow. The pillows surrounded the playing space where the actors were beginning to engage members of the audience. The aesthetic of offering a designated pillow to each young person set a clear limit of what space audience members could designate as their own. There were moments in the show where the young people were asked to join in on an activity, such as taking part in a maypole dance, but once the dance was finished and the players clapped their hands signaling the end of the dance, each of the young people in the audience returned to their designated spot. This allowed each player to place the proper distance between themselves and the audience members, and that stood out to me as being a key component in navigating the audience-player relationship. It was clear that that the cushioned brown seats were the designated area for the children, the large rock set piece that that the character of the Lizard utilized for the players, and the space in between the cushions and the rocks was the designated playing area. The players were the ones non-verbally articulating this with audience through their vocal and physical choices.

As the show was being performed in a black box space we made the decision to lay three different colored table clothes on stage where we would strategically place our audience members based off a sticker they would receive upon arriving. This would not only to ensure that we were filling our space appropriately, but three of the players had the designated color of the tablecloth on their costumes, and that was the section of the audience members that each of them would directly engage with. We set up wooden crates with hay and buckets throughout the space to allude to the fact that we were on a farm, and initially our technical director had imagined hanging a clothesline for a backdrop. We had large strips of fabric that would hang from the clothesline. In hanging up the clothesline we came to find the black box space overwhelmed the clothing line, and it was in that moment that I was once again reminded of embracing the simplicity of space. Though the clothesline was ideally intended to enhance the environment, the story stood strong enough on its own. Months earlier I feared my own abilities and here I was with a creative team that had come together to help build a show that was rich in moments of discovery, play, and connection. I was beyond confident in moving forward with our piece.

The Workshop

The creative team and I welcomed eleven adults and six children (ranging in age from two through five) into our workshop space for an 11:30 A.M. performance of *When Pigs Fly* shared at Orlando Repertory Theatre. Prior to entering the performance space, students had the option of coloring pictures of farm animals, listening to a soundtrack of animal sounds, or partaking in the animal crackers and apple juice provided. The intent was to create a space of comfort and familiarity. In lining audience members up to bring them inside the performance space, the

interactivity of the piece was initially introduced by asking that audience members work to blow a windmill, signifying the beginning of our story.



Figure 8: Invited workshop for *When Pigs Fly*: Welcoming audience members



Figure 9: Invited workshop for *When Pigs Fly*: Moments of interactivity

Audience members were then escorted to their designated seating areas based upon the farm animal stickers they received upon entering the pre-show space. Each player was set in place as a sleeping animal. From there began 25 minutes of sheer excitement, discovery, and play:



Figure 10: Invited workshop: *When Pigs Fly* production photo



Figure 11: Invited workshop: *When Pigs Fly* production photo



Figure 12: Invited workshop: *When Pigs Fly* production photo



Figure 13: Invited workshop: *When Pigs Fly* production photo



Figure 14: Invited workshop: *When Pigs Fly* production photo



Figure 15: Invited workshop: *When Pigs Fly* production photo

The sharing of *When Pigs Fly* was such a surreal moment; in short, it was everything I could have ever imagined it to be. In reflecting upon the experience I am once again brought back to Taube and his reflection on the role of time within a TVY production. Taube shares, “The theatre for the youngest has got its own handling with time and its own rhythm corresponding to the audience’s rhythm...A collective breath...” (Taube 24). That was exactly what this invited workshop was for me, a breath. I was taking in moments of discovery and play alongside every other person within the space. Though one of the most prominent components of any piece of theatre is that it can never be duplicated, TVY falls into a category of its own in trusting that the

relationship amongst players and audience members will find a collective rhythm. I know that the success of this invited workshop was not only the result of many hours spent researching, pulling cement glue out of my hair, and obsessing over the progression of the script; the success of the workshop lived in its ability to allow me the opportunity to connect and play with parents, students, friends, colleagues, mentors, and young people in a way that I never had before.

CHAPTER FIVE: CREATING YOUR OWN TVY

The creation, development, and execution of *When Pigs fly* have been a labor of love. I set out on this journey with the intent of crafting my own definition of TVY through theory, practice, and research. I wrestled with the complexity of developing a script that was rooted in exploration and discovery but aligned with my desire to share a story of perseverance and hope. Through this document I was able to better understand the ways in which we legitimize TVY by speaking about it: sharing our successes, failures, and reflections throughout the process. I am reminded of the EYEPlay model of “I do, you do, we do;” though we work within our own creative teams and share TVY across the world through many avenues, the coming together and exchanging of this work is what will move TVY from an exploratory phase to an established and valued form of theatre throughout the U.S. Within this last year it has been such a joy to observe the ways in which current TVY practitioners are making vast efforts to document the work that is currently being presented. As a member of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) Theatre for the Very Young special interest group, I am fortunate to meet other TVY practitioners and participate in yearly conferences where TVY practitioners discuss current practices and findings. 119 TYA practitioners connect on the AATE TVY Facebook group where recent efforts are currently being made to create a database of theatre and dance performance for the very young throughout the United States. Recently, AATE launched the American Theatre for the Very Young: Digital Festival, an online venture where theatres have recorded and shared TVY productions so that we may continue conversations of where this work is being produced and how it is being received throughout the United States.

It was my original intent to create a best practices guide for creating a TVY experience; I wanted to lend a helping hand to future practitioners who might find themselves in a similar position at the start of their journey. However, as I reflected upon my process I realized that the intent of a best practices guide felt too rooted in finality. I had unknowingly been given a gift of being able to define TVY on my own terms, persevering through the unknown, and celebrating the ultimate success of creating an original TVY production of my own. I came to realize that what I was looking to do was to simply document my process so that I am able to articulate and justify my own understanding of TVY. I wanted this document to transition into a fluid discussion of my own developmental processes and the suggestions I could offer future practitioners. Though the trajectory of my graduate career informed the path upon which my research and practice led me, I also realize that in utilizing the resources surrounding me, I was better able to understand the impact of this work amongst intergenerational audiences. I came to understand the many facets of TVY: its ability to combat perceptions of what theatre can or should be; to release the pressure of creating theatre that must meet an educational standard; and ultimately create a piece that allows human beings to experience a form of art that is rooted in play. I challenge theatre practitioners to re-imagine the ways in which we honor each of these realizations within the American theatre canon as we continue to share stories that hold history of where we have been and where we hope to go. This chapter is a culmination of the practices I utilized throughout the development of *When Pigs Fly*. I found the heart of *When Pigs Fly* through relationships, chance, experience, and play. These four fundamental practices proved key ingredients in the development of *When Pigs Fly* and have become the core values that shaped my own definition of TVY. TVY is an imaginative experience of chance and play where

intergenerational audiences examine their relationship with the surrounding world. It is through these four values that I gained an overarching vision of what I hope to share and continue to reflect upon with future artists, educators, and audiences.

TVY Takeaways

Below I share specific practices I utilized throughout this document. I reinforce each practice with action points that I found most helpful and that I hope will inspire future TVY practitioners as we continue to collectively create:

1. Writing

- Answer the following question: “This is a piece about _____.” There may be multiple answers. In establishing that I wanted to build a performance piece surrounding flight I was able to imagine the aesthetics of the production that allowed for me to create the world of the drama and identify specific actions that I imagined throughout the piece.
- Identify the age range the piece is targeted for. Though I stand firm in the fact that TVY is an intergenerational model, the decision to create a TVY experience specifically for two to five year-old audience members was greatly influenced by my training as an EYEPlay Teaching Artist. I incorporated a great deal of my practice in working with those specific age groups throughout my story.
- Break up the elements of the story into specific episodes. Each episode of *When Pigs Fly* was based upon one specific discovery. The players would engage in exploring the object at hand (“I do”), invite audience members to explore the

object (“you do”), and find a way of establishing a relationship through the use of the object (“we do”).

- Avoid being precious with your work. Though *When Pigs Fly* remained rooted in meeting my initial objectives and initiatives, a great deal of the piece was re-formatted and adjusted based on the collaborative nature of this work. I was forced to release control and allow chance to inspire new moments of discovery that would come to be better than anything I would have otherwise imagined.

2. Research

- Find access to any books, articles, videos pertaining to TVY to gain an understanding of the TVY field as a whole. Because of the limited resources available it became imperative that I remained proactive in documenting the research I could find. Anytime I came into contact with fellow TVY practitioners I would ask about written resources they found most useful. Manon Van de Water’s *Theatre, Youth, and Culture: A Critical and Historical Exploration* includes one of the most informative chapters regarding TVY that I have found yet. I also found Wolfgang Schneider’s *Theatre for Early Years: Research in Performing Arts for Children from Birth to Three* filled with articles by national and international TVY practitioners; this text influenced great deal of my own journey.
- Experience a live TVY production. Though reading about TVY and experiencing TVY digitally proved to be helpful, there is nothing more magical than feeling the wonder of TVY in person.

3. Utilize your resources

- I was incredibly fortunate to have Orlando Repertory Theatre and the University of Central Florida supporting my endeavors throughout this journey. Through these two platforms I was able to collectively create with the most brilliant scholars, artists, and educators that embraced this uncharted territory with such willingness and kindness. Speak to artists, educators, and those who work with integrational audiences on a daily basis and identify a need that theatre might help meet. For example, Kids Fringe, a component of the Orlando Fringe Festival created specifically for families, is an avenue within the Orlando area that annually seeks out new work/performances for young people. I am thrilled to share that *When Pigs Fly* will be making its premiere at this festival. Where are moments where this work might live within your own area? Who is already doing the work? Perhaps they just do not know.

4. Document your process

- Journal throughout your process so that you have a written record of the trajectory of your TVY experience. This will not only go on to inform your future projects, but it will continue to challenge overarching perceptions of TVY as a whole.

5. Find your dream team

- Find the people who will specialize in helping make your vision of a reality. Identify the components of this work that may feel intimidating, and find

support through a fellow artist. Pat, our technical director, created two beautiful puppets for *When Pigs Fly*. It was the first time I had looked at a puppet and found myself teary-eyed from joy and happiness as opposed to anger and frustrations.

6. Challenge yourself

- Utilize research as an opportunity to explore your overarching theme through a series of different lenses. How does practice as research challenge your vision?

7. Embrace extravagance and simplicity

- TVY is celebrated for both. Do not allow the visual aesthetics to limit what you feel you are able to do. Instead focus on action and discovery. In knowing that I wanted to incorporate a moment where Avery was seen flying at the end of *When Pigs Fly*, we utilized each of the players to lift me up in flight for the final moment; no wings or harness, we looked to our ensemble of players to resolve any issue.

8. Never underestimate your audience.

- My initial draft of *When Pigs Fly* fell into the trap of telling the audience how a given moment should make them feel. I know this stemmed from my own insecurity of feeling as if the audience would not be able to fill in the blanks for themselves. I needed to trust my own work and creative process, but more importantly I needed to remind myself that my mission was to continue honoring young people for all that they are, as opposed to adjusting

my own artistic vision based off of what I imagined they would one day become.

9. Play each and every day of this process

- It will make you a better artist, educator, practitioner, and human being.

Though this journey has taught me many, many things, this is one I will keep with me always

From Playwright to Player

In culminating my list of TVY Takeaways I stumbled upon a quote by Karl Paulnack, the director of Music Division at Boston University. He shares,

If we were a medical school, and you were here as a med student practicing appendectomies, you'd take your work very seriously because you would imagine that some night at 2AM someone is going to waltz into your emergency room and you're going to have to save their life. Well, my friends, someday at 8PM someone is going to waltz into your concert hall and bring you a mind that is confused, a heart that is overwhelmed, a soul that is weary. Whether they go out whole again will depend partly on how well you do your craft." (Hinds)

This quote felt incredibly timely given my status as a graduate student on the brink of graduation. More than that, it challenged me to think about the ways in which my own practice would propel the field forward. What does TVY *need*? I came to realize that TVY needs practitioners to document their experiences based upon what makes their work unique to the field. For me, there are two specific components of my work that set it apart from what I found within my extensive research of TVY: the progression of moving from playwright to player and my drive to reinforce TVY as an intergenerational model of theatre through play theory.

In stepping into the role of a player I underwent my own transformation by not only observing my ensemble of actor facilitators, but in the doing myself. I began my journey by questioning the ways in which TVY invites all generations of people to engage in creative play. I discovered that by setting up a specific model that encourages everyone involved in the process to get up and do, that I was experiencing the elements of discovery organically. I have the research and can logistically identify the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of play, but throughout this document I share first-hand the ways in which the power of creative play brought me out of my head and allowed for a story of perseverance and hope to shine through.

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