

WRITES OF SPRING: A STUDY OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN COLLECTIVE
DEVISING

JENNIFER ADAMS
B.S.Ed. Columbus State University, 2005

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

Spring Term
2011

ABSTRACT

Communication is a pivotal element in creating theatre with other artists, with audiences, and with the outside world. Theatre artists are required to collaborate at nearly every step of the process. Despite the necessity of highly developed collaboration skills, communication in the creation of theatre is an often-underdeveloped curriculum area. As a Director and Teaching Artist I am particularly interested in how to find new ways of collaborating so I may model and pass these skills to my students. Through a qualitative research survey of communication used in collaborative devising, this research analyzes environments that improve communication and allow for maximum creativity in an effort to develop critical communication pedagogy.

This study examines my approach in working through a devising process as the Coordinator of a collaborative group of adults creating an original play. I examine our process and make connections as to how devising influenced my future work as a Director and Teaching Artist. By examining the theatres that make extensive use of ensemble devising as a tool for creating theatre, I gained insight into more collaborative ways of working. This research found support through examination of group communication theories and methods in which they promote collaborative spirit.

Finally, critical pedagogy offered a lens through which I can impart these discoveries to young artists. I discovered ways to use the model of devising to open the possibilities for my students to take ownership over their processes and the art they create. I also gained insight into the role of facilitator in order to develop ways of modeling and teaching these communications. Communication pedagogy in the theatre allows me the tools to identify, question, and transform my experiences in creating theatre as a director and teaching artist.

“One’s desire to engage critical communication pedagogy is inherently Frierean: it is about fulfilling a call to do the work of social justice, it is about learning to listen and see in self-reflexive ways, it is about speaking carefully and humbly and recognizing that it is the job of the critical scholar to open rather than shut doors of possibility, it is about engendering hope in the world rather than dwelling in stubborn immobility. In our writing, we imagine critical communication pedagogy that fulfills Friere’s call to us as communicators”

--from *Critical Communication Pedagogy* by Deanna L. Fassett

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to everyone who helped me along this journey. First and foremost, Vandy Wood who inspired me to see theatre and life through a wider lens. You have inspired me more than I can describe and helped me change the way I think about theatre, education, and who I am as an individual. Earl Weaver for being such a positive force in my work and for serving as my committee chair. Chris Niess for pushing me to move past my fears and consider new ways of creating theatre. The Cast and Crew of *Writes of Spring 2010* for giving me this incredible experience. Gary Cadwallader for your never-ending advice and support. Anthony Jackson for helping me believe that I can do anything. Megan Alrutz, Elizabeth Robbins, Bob Ramseur, and Ron Anderson, for being the most amazing teachers in my life. And of course Lucy, Katie, Megan, and David for pursuing the magic with me—I'm yours.

And a special shout out to Richard and Jana Adams. Thank you for never giving up on me and letting this late-bloomer take her time. I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: TO DEFINE DEVISING.....	3
Why Devise?.....	3
Model of Non-Hierarchical Possibilities and Cooperative Collaboration	5
Reflecting Contemporary Social Reality.....	8
A Process of Generating Performance.....	9
CHAPTER TWO: EXPLANATION OF WRITES OF SPRING AS A DEVISING PROJECT ..	12
History	12
Why and How to Devise	14
CHAPTER THREE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNICATION	18
Group Flow	18
Defining Roles.....	19
Community building	24
Creation and Development of Script.....	26
Shift from Devising to Rehearsing	29
Feedback.....	30
Responsibility	35
Time.....	36
“I” vocabulary	40
Discoveries.....	41
CHAPTER FOUR: TOWARDS A COMMUNICATION PEDAGOGY	42

Communication Pedagogy.....	42
Finding Teachable and Learnable Moments.....	45
CONCLUSION.....	55
APPENDIX: IRB PERMISSION LETTER	56
REFERENCES	58

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Spheres of Responsibility	46
Figure 2: Information Flow Chart.....	50

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores practical and theoretical processes of group-devised theatre in an effort to examine group communication dynamics. A majority of the literature on devised work places a great deal of emphasis on the subject matter and political history of the groups involved. This study examines *Writes of Spring*, a writing contest and original play for young audiences. This project allowed its artists to use their collaborative and artistic skills to make theatre in a way far different from how most of us are trained. No two devising projects are the same; therefore, this thesis does not propose to offer a definitive way of working, but it offers an examination of the process in hopes that it will reveal more collaborative ways of working in the theatre, whether devising is the tool or not.

Chapters one and two examine group devising within the framework of avant-garde theatrical practices and the history of devised work. A thorough study of non-traditional creation, rehearsal, and performance practices contextualizes group-devised work as a form of process-oriented theatre, which puts a critical eye on its development. A study of performance collectives of the 1960s and 1970s led to the choice to organize this devising group as a collective democracy. With the hierarchy of production roles no longer present, the need for communication and critical thought becomes paramount. We no longer have structures that we know and understand to guide us. One key element of this critical process is the ability to ask questions and examine our answers. Collaborative ways of working developed by experimental theatres throughout history "...emphasizes the asking of questions and the search for technique to research the answers as a principle of developmental theatre." (Harding 112). Current theatrical pioneers reflect this same notion. Anne Bogart states, when talking about the subject matter of theatrical work, "You should choose questions that are vital to your life and can

reverberate beyond your wildest expectations” (Harding 121). I propose we can look at the way we create theatre with the same fervor we look at what we make theatre about.

Chapters three and four combine research on communication dynamics with my practical experience as a devising artist, through examining our methods of creating and communicating during the *Writes of Spring* process. Achieving a state of group flow and finding collaborative ways of working relies heavily on effective communication. My co-creators and I come to the project as theater artists of varying expertise, with our own set of experiences and assumptions about collaboration. I examine verbal and non-verbal communication as well as the effectiveness of games and activities to inspire an active way of working. I then explore what my discoveries offer in terms of how I approach using devising as a tool in the classroom.

With no formal training in communication theory, I approached the communications research from the perspective not of a trained scientist or psychologist, but of an artist examining the process of her work and the moments of learning that arise from it. I hope to take with me from this experience reflexivity about my work that will allow me to be a more collaborative director and teaching artist. The challenges revealed themselves not only from inexperience with my new passion of devising, but also because communication, collaboration, and the moment of creation are intangible things, difficult to discuss and comprehend regardless of prior experience. A third challenge to my research is the sheer size of the topic of communication. I focus my research on certain communication topics in order to effectively examine the experience.

CHAPTER ONE: TO DEFINE DEVISING

Why Devise?

When asked to lead my peers through a devising project, I struggled with knowing exactly what it was we were trying to do. I not only had to define this new process, but also had to adapt to its ever-changing nature and purpose quickly. Greatly inspired by philosophies of The San Francisco Mime Troup, the Open Theatre, the writings of Judith Malina, co-founder of the Living Theatre, and the publications of devising groups across the world, I have formed a definition of theatrical collective devising that inspired my choices to look at the process of making theatre, both collectively and traditionally.

What is a traditional process? Is there even such a thing? With a wide variety of company structures existing in theatres across the world, some produce classics, while others produce new works, and others cover everything in between. What is traditional in one may be foreign in another. However, when you consider what you could expect going into working on a production at most theatres, the differences in procedure are not as varied as you might think. I refer to a “traditional process” to mean a play produced from a pre-written script, with clearly-defined production roles including but not limited to director, design staff, actors, and technicians. The process by which traditional organizations achieve final performance typically begins with the playwright and leads to rehearsals and then to the performance. In this process, actors are chosen to fit the roles provided in the script. The director is the guide to interpreting the action of the play and unifying all elements. The rest of the production staff looks to the director for his or her approval. This process also could be referred to as “‘directors’ theatre’, where the director is ultimately in charge of the overall production” (Oddey 60). Concerned with efficiency, the process is designed to move quickly and create a product successful enough to put in front of

audiences. Theatre artists are specialized in their area and become the defacto expert for the team. There is no doubt that director's theatre works especially well for the production of commercial works. If it didn't, companies around the world would not use this as a model. Its efficiency calls into question why anyone would want to find another working structure? In our desire to make theatre accessible and more energy and cost effective, have we given up something? Have we stopped trying to innovate our field?

Robin talks about the theatre, but the theatre of which she talks is thoroughly corrupted by the inbreeding of a tradition that has begun to destroy its worthy roots... Theatre work is now so specialized that no one is permitted knowledge of another's activity. The stagehands paint the flats; the actors stand in front of them. The only ones involved in all the aspects are the omnipotent and power-corrupted director and the non-artist producer. There can be a living theatre only in the work of small groups of people interested neither in effect nor success—except for the successful action (Malina 168-169).

In an effort to create an “alive” way of working, collectives began working without the hierarchical structure they were used to and explored more equality centric ways of working.

Heddon and Milling, authors of *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, propose an extensive list of ideas that can and have defined devising works throughout history. I focus on three of those definitions: devising is “...a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration...a means to reflect contemporary social reality...and a process of generating performance” (Heddon & Milling 4-5). Each definition holds collaboration at the core of its

meaning, whether artist-to-artist or artist-to-audience. These explanations create a loose definition of collective creation.

Much of the research on collective creation uses the term ‘devising’ to refer to both the solo process and group process. The term ‘devising’ itself refers to the creative process with no reference to how many people participate; however, ‘devising’ as a term for collective environments is more and more common as groups continue to explore this endeavor. With respect to the term ‘devising’ and its many applications, I refer to the collaborative work in this study as collective creation, or collaboration. This is in order to differentiate between the collective process of a group embarking on creating an original work and the process of a playwright or solo artist creating a script or performance piece on their own.

Model of Non-Hierarchical Possibilities and Cooperative Collaboration

Artists are driven towards collective work to explore possibilities of what we can learn and achieve through reimagining theatre and reimagining how we create it. These artists see “...theatre as a space that can spur the imagination toward the inconceivable, indeed, as a place where one can exercise and stretch her imagination in order to keep it nimble and open enough to consider the world without squelching her highest hopes” (Solomon 59). Originality and possibility are exciting ideas for an artist to strive for. In a theatrical landscape where theatres, due to economic constraints, are often producing shows that audiences already know and love, it is no wonder creative artists are seeking more from their field. How many times can you do the same show or same types of shows until you no longer become an artist but a mechanic? It is one of the ultimate challenges of the profession to breathe life and new energy into roles that have been played many times by many other individuals. Artists drawn to devising often are interested in bringing a different voice to the stage. In a post-modern era where theatre is expected to

challenge and discuss differing realities, artists, such as Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment, believe devising new works “make a theatre that’s both emotionally and intellectually engaging, allowing audiences to create their own meanings in the spaces between its texts, a theatre that trusts in its audience to find its own ways through” (Oddey 85). These artists don’t want to spoon-feed their audiences, collaborators, or theatrical community. In a collective statement from IOU Theatre, a theatre specializing in multi-media collaborations, they state, “A devised show sets sail without quite knowing where it will land. For this reason it feels quite risky but it can produce surprises and respond to possibilities unrestricted by fixed narrative” (Oddey 125).

Beyond the call for new works in our theatre, artists seek a new way of working. Throughout the history of theatre, great discoveries were made when a person or group broke from the traditions set forth by the mainstream. Today we clearly can see the effects of innovators such as Thespis, Constantine Stanislavski, and Augusto Boal. Thespis is credited with being the first actor, changing storytelling on the stage forever. Stanislavski revolutionized acting styles to break from mechanical and emotionless performance. Augusto Boal broke from traditional performance and used theatrical tools to empower oppressed communities. There is much evidence of artists trying something new simply because they were not interested in or fulfilled by the mainstream work of their time. This becomes especially prevalent in the history of collectives. The founders of Frantic Assembly, a physical theatre devising company, describe their impetus for starting their own company. “We met as an unused understudy and a bored stage manager” not interested in “presenting the usual talcum powder headed Chekhov and vanity projects. That is what we thought theatre was” (Graham and Hoggett 1). Likewise, the Living Theatre was created to fulfill the theatrical imagination of Julian Beck and Judith Malina. Uninterested in and sometimes disgusted by commercial theatre, the Living Theatre was created

as a reaction to the Bourgeois narrative being played out on the stage. R.G. Davis, founder of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, “rebelled against the narrow Bourgeois concept of legitimate theatre in the United States in the 1950s. His vision was to “free the stage from its constipated décor and reaffirm the essence of theatre—a vital human performing for the live audience.” ” (Mason 197). Whether a company or individual sees their new ways of working as rebellion or simply an evolution of their art, the norm is not typically changed unless there is something about it that does not fulfill all the possibilities we can imagine.

Oddey states, “I think the primary appeal is to be able to make a personal statement within a group context, to feel that one is part of the making of a theatrical experience, not an interpreter of something already written. This desire to create an original piece of work brings an enormous freedom that is both terrifying and liberating at the same time” (27). Artists are interested in creating spaces where we are comfortable to explore and grow.

The collaborative principle which underpins so much devising means that relationships themselves can provoke ideas...designed to provide the individual artists with opportunities to rediscover and develop their individual artistic identities and thus reinvigorate their collaborative approach (Mermikides 22-23).

Collective devising pushes communication and collaboration to its limits. Communication is imperative, not just communication of facts or agreements between artists, but how we argue and disagree is pushed to the limit. We are forced to confront what we are willing to accept from each other, “for successful devising depends to a great degree on finding the appropriate balance between clash and consensus” (Mermikides 157).

The work of collaborative creation requires a certain amount of reflexivity and ability to question oneself and one's collaborative partners, not because we assume ignorance or inability, but because that is the way we will discover something new and exciting. The more we question, the more possibilities open to us, whether the possibilities are embedded in the topic or in the way of working. The Living Theatre cites their constant relocation as a major contributor to their constant question asking and reinvention. "Our work is guided by the sense that we may be the last generation in the experiment with the living" (Munk 41). As history shows us, they were not correct, and the continued experiments with communication and ways of creating theatre have extended possibilities to include collaboration across states or even continents, across languages, cognitive abilities, in backyards, bars, and on the greatest stages in our most metropolitan cities.

Reflecting Contemporary Social Reality

Many theatres that arose from the 60s and 70s collective theatre boom focused on using theatre as a means to make political statements or reflect and examine society. These groups saw devising as a "way of rearranging the world for members themselves, confronting their audience with an emotionally, intellectually, complex experience that is indicative of their particular perceptions of the world" (Oddey 94). In the case of the Living Theatre, the artists claimed to create work, which "resonates in places where people are looking for alternatives, open to simple truths, and eager for affirmation—and where the larger culture at least allows, if not supports, such exploration" (Solomon 62). They also were not under the assumption that they had all the answers to the plight of theatre. "Their charge was never the postmodern dictum that Truth could not be claimed at all, but simply that Bourgeois drama was not the best means for discovering and expressing it" (Solomon 57). The Living Theatre gave their ideology priority over all other aspects of process or product. In the same manner, the San Francisco Mime Troupe

focuses on theatre specifically about illuminating oppression in their communities, “The protagonists of Mime Troupe plays are almost always oppressed people in conflict with a capitalist economic system indifferent to their needs and rights. Frequently the plays end with a political awakening when the people take collective action against their oppressors” (Mason 206). The Mime Troupe “has plunged into our shared social world and used this common reality as the basis for envisioning a new one, both on stage and off stage” (Orenstein 184). The work of devised theatre often centers on the underdog taking on the establishment, be that through a literal “us versus them” scenario or just the exploration of a theme that the established theatre does not typically produce.

One political statement that devised theatre often makes is the idea that our private lives merit public consideration, and not just the private lives of the characters in our plays, but the private lives of each individual actor in each production. We have a unique opportunity when devising to bring ourselves into the script. The People Show Company in London fully embraces their artists as creators of meaning and art. “Their work is truly what they are as people, and it is their respect for and reactions to each other’s ideas that are responsible for the unique qualities of their shows” (Behrndt 35).

A Process of Generating Performance

In most devising companies, improvisation plays a key role in the creation of performance. “Devised theatre is concerned with the collective creation of art (not the single vision of the playwright), and it is here that the emphasis has shifted from the writer to the creative artist” (Oddey 4). One common characteristic of improvisers that serves collective devising extremely well is a “willingness to use any method or technique which seems to work within the context of a given project” (Mermikides 23). When you have few structures, the

possibilities for new ways of working become like another game to play. The “rules” of improvisation such as “Yes, and” and “Give and take” are so perfectly broad that they allow for immense freedom along with being specific enough to make a huge difference when they are used effectively or ineffectively. In both improvisation classes and devising sessions, you may hear participants use phrases like, “Let’s play with this idea”. Before my involvement with devised work I often would scoff at that turn of phrase, feeling it marginalized the work I was doing. It was not until I was in the room experiencing the give and take and sharing of ideas that I could think of no other word to describe it than ‘play’. I gained a new understanding of the word play -- “play is both the willingness to improvise around ideas and the degree of strategic flexibility purposefully left within the process” (Mermikides 23). This ability to freely work with both people and material is a factor that all businesses and other collaborative groups strive for constantly. Improvisation both in jazz music and on the stage serves as a great metaphor for how groups can work together to be more productive and creative. “These are the purest form of group genius; their creative performances emerge from everyone’s equal participation” (Sawyer 9).

Improv, as free and flexible as it may be, also is not immune to the notion of subversive groups breaking off to fulfill their own expectations and viewpoints. In many ways, its development has mirrored the development of collective work of the theatrical-avant-garde, which it grew up alongside. Mick Napier and some of his colleagues left the well-respected training center at Second City to open their own improv theatre because they felt too confined by the structures of the Harold style. “The “Harold” is a recurring, intersecting series of scenes, monologues, and blackouts improvised on the spot by the cast from a series of audience suggestions, including a topic” (Patinkin 164). As long form improvisation began to become a

popular evolution of the shorter theatre games, the performers became more aware of things playwrights and directors have been wrestling with for years: the communication and storytelling relationship with the audience. This newfound awareness is ultimately what makes improvisation ideal for devising. Particularly, the respect for which companies like Second City show their audiences make it an especially effective tool for devising.

With a foundation of how and why the devising companies of the past and present create their art, I move forward into examining our particular process of *Writes of Spring* and how we navigated creating and communicating in our work.

CHAPTER TWO: EXPLANATION OF WRITES OF SPRING AS A DEVISING PROJECT

History

Writes of Spring was started in 2004 at the Orlando Repertory Theatre (Rep) as an event to celebrate and encourage writing. The first year, one class of 25 students responded to the contest. That class was invited to the Rep where students read their own writing aloud on a small stage in the lobby of the theatre. The second year, 100 entries were received, and the Rep called upon a University of Central Florida (UCF) playwriting class to help narrow down the entries and turn them into a script. This script was performed as a staged reading in a small black box theatre at the Rep. The following year, the Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) graduate program at UCF began. Young theatre professionals interested in theatre for and by youth began studying Theatre for Young Audiences through scholastic work at UCF and practical application of the work through internships at the Rep. *Writes of Spring* became a project organized by the TYA students, with the writing contest portion in the Fall semester and a fully-staged production and celebration reception in the Spring semester. The educational goal of the program was to allow the graduate students a personal experience in producing theatre. *Writes of Spring* is a place where graduate students can apply their theoretical and practical knowledge. This structure worked for four years with 10-12 TYA graduate students and sometimes a few community members.

The need for a change in the structure of *Writes of Spring* came when the availability of TYA graduate students decreased by more than half during the 7th year of the project. A process that was already overwhelming became doubly so. Our instinct was to scale back. With only four students involved, putting on an entire production at the scale we were expected to, seemed

impossible. We proposed going back to staged readings and making the celebration and performance more of one event rather than two separate events. *Writes of Spring* always had been a program run by TYA graduate students and we felt re-imagining the program to fit our strengths and numbers was a necessary choice. When the idea was brought to our partners at the Rep, it became clear the project no longer was in the hands of the TYA program, but now the Rep had certain expectations of how the project would look and operate. We were told a full production needed to be created; however, we were encouraged to open our production team to artists outside the TYA program. Our professors suggested the process had become so daunting because there was an uncertainty surrounding the amount of responsibility to produce this new work and how to delegate that responsibility. The idea of not assigning specific roles but rather working as a collective group to devise the piece was suggested as an alternative structure. By encouraging us to devise, we were not only given the opportunity to continue the momentum of the project without scaling back, but it also offered a chance to experience and think about theatre in a different way. If only that perspective was so easily seen from the beginning.

We met the concept of devising with a great deal of resistance. We had a difficult enough time working together on a process we were familiar with. How could we ever get along on a project with even less structure? I believe the words, “There is no way this will work” emitted from my lips more than once. We perceived that those who were encouraging us to devise had no idea what a massive undertaking this project was and were out of their minds in thinking we should attempt a new process no one could completely explain in a way that felt comforting. Still, we pushed forward into the unknown, with a million questions and a million uncertainties.

Why and How to Devise

Alison Oddey, scholar of devising and author of *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, asks seven questions as a starting place for devising. I utilized these questions as we began devising *Writes of Spring*. The questions are,

Is your content or subject matter the starting point for the work?

What are the source materials? Who are you devising for and why?

What are your initial aims and objectives as a company for this project? What is it you want to devise and why? What kind of theatre do you want to create? Is the form or structure an important preliminary area for exploration? (Oddey 41).

The source materials for our piece are the winning entries from the writing contest. Winners are chosen through an adjudication process in three categories: essay, short story, and poetry, in four different grade levels, K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. First, second, and third place and approximately 12 honorable mentions are chosen in each category and grade level, resulting in just over 100 winning entries. The writing prompt for the entries was “If a _____ could talk, it would say _____.” This prompt was chosen by the current and previous years TYA students and then approved by the Education Director at the Rep. The goal is to take these winning entries and create a script, using as many of the words directly from the writing as possible. The play is then produced at the Orlando Repertory Theatre. Graduate students are given complete control over the project. Many use it as an opportunity to explore leadership roles they never have experienced before or further explore an area of personal interest. The project sets itself up as an incredible learning experience for the graduate students, as well as an

opportunity for Orange County teachers to promote writing in their classrooms and give the students an exciting outlet for their writing talents.

Any TYA production has a high probability of being someone's first theatrical experience, which makes it important to us to make that experience as engaging as it can be. We are devising for the student writers, their friends, peers, teachers, and families. Some of whom may be patrons and/or students of the Rep or other theatres in town, but many of whom are not. Some students who have never been to a theatrical production may attend simply because they or someone they know won the contest. The hope also is the play will appeal to all age groups, which is a considerably hard task considering the age range of the winning entries is from five to eighteen.

The purpose of *Writes of Spring* is a much-debated topic from year to year. We want to honor the writing of the young people as a means to support writing and literacy. We want to create a theatrical tie to the classroom. We want to create exciting original theatre for youth and share that with our audience. As graduate students, we want to experiment with the theories and ideas we are exploring in our research and classes. It is also an act of community engagement. Ask any member of the TYA class or Rep staff and you will get varying opinions on which of these is most important.

As a guide to the project, we operated off the existing mission statement, "The project strives to support literacy, critical thinking, and creative expression by transforming the words of submissions into a fully produced show onstage" (orlandorep.com). In examining the mission statement we ran across some questions regarding whether or not we were fulfilling its ideals to the greatest extent possible. It seemed to us that the mission statement was fulfilled through the writing contest alone, which called in to question how the production fits into the mission of the project. The writing contest certainly supports literacy, critical thinking, and creative expression.

Gary Cadwallader, Education Director at Orlando Repertory Theatre, explains that the production fits into *Writes of Spring* because it falls under the mission statement of the Rep, which is to create “experiences that enlighten, entertain, and enrich the lives of families and young audiences” (orlandorep.com). In an effort to bring more of the critical thinking and creative expression skills into the production of the play, we created a Winners Workshop, where the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners in each category were invited to a rehearsal at the Rep, in which they saw and comment on part of the play as well as help create a section of it. Our hope was that by seeing the work in progress and participating in the creation of the work, students would gain a fuller and more critical understanding of theatre and playwriting as an art form.

Oddey suggests, “The most fundamental requirement for devising theatre is a passion or desire to say something...” (42) As a group, we decided that honoring the voices of the young writers was of the upmost importance to us, and one way to achieve honoring their voices was for everyone involved in the process to be as close to the source material as possible. I often thought of this as having roots in political-based devised work, since we invested in the beliefs and words of the students and advocated for their voice to be heard. In extending this expectation to the designers as well, the production team as a whole benefited from the in-depth exploration. “Research and discussion of the issues at hand force all the artists to educate themselves about the political realities confronted in the show. They are not ‘just actors’ or ‘just designers’, but people with a political stake in the views the plays advance. Having an understanding and commitment to the play’s political agenda necessarily informs their artistic work” (Orenstein 190). Just like these actors who have political agendas at the core of their work, the actors in *Writes of Spring* have a stake in the play. Not only did they help create the text, they also developed an attachment to the original idea from the student writer. Roberta Skyler, of the Open

Theatre, echoes this idea of commitment and devotion to the message. “That way of working, with the actor as a primary researcher, with acting exercises as a method through which you learn something and the actor as a co-creator alongside you—that was what the open theatre was about doing” (Babb 112). Having the company read and discuss all the entries created a sense of ownership or investment in the celebration of the young voices. With honoring the voice of the writers at the center of our mission, we focused on the goal of having as many writers as possible recognize their writing as soon as they saw it on stage. We chose a non-linear structure to give more opportunity for individual characters and ideas to be heard and not get folded into other characters or ideas. The goal was to make each child’s writing more distinct and recognizable.

Ultimately the question of “what is *Writes of Spring*?” in the grander scale of theatrical types is a difficult one to answer and closely tied to our choice to use collective creation as a method of development. Would it be considered political theatre since we chose to devise to greater honor and legitimize the voice of the young writer, a group that is more marginalized than nearly any other audience? Is it community art based on the fact that it is coming from the young community of Orlando? Can we even call it community art when they are not directly involved in the making of the performative aspects of the production? Is it a professional production because the Rep produces it? Is it a student production because students staff it? Gary Cadwallader, clarifies that from the Rep’s perspective *Writes of Spring* falls under the Youth Academy umbrella at the Rep. Youth Academy is the title of the Rep’s performance based educational programming. Through much reflection I can say that education is truly the driving force behind the project, for the student writers and for the graduate and undergraduate students involved. However, the political stake in all theatre for youth served as a major influence as well.

CHAPTER THREE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNICATION

In looking specifically at the process of creating *Writes of Spring* and how we communicated throughout the process, I will look at the major questions that arose. How did we build a community? How did we communicate through creation and critique of the material? Where did we find the most roadblocks? How did we find success through communication? Were we able to live up to our goals of a collective working environment?

Group Flow

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, psychology professor and scholar on creativity and happiness, describes the optimal working state as “flow”. Flow is sometimes described as “the zone” when you are working efficiently and creatively and feeling a deep sense of satisfaction from the work. A state of ‘group flow’ indicates achieving this state with a group of people. The sometimes-idyllic view of devising original theatre led us to pursuing this state of complete harmony and efficiency. Csikszentmihalyi states in his book, *Flow*,

A community should be judged good not because it is technologically advanced, or swimming in material riches; it is good if it offers people a chance to enjoy as many aspects of their lives as possible, while allowing them to develop their potential in the pursuit of ever greater challenges (191).

We took this idea to heart. We felt it was our responsibility to open ourselves to this state and offer our production team the opportunity to expand themselves and their art in this way too. Flow requires a delicate balance between challenge, expertise, purpose, time, and fulfillment. Difficult to define and nearly impossible to control, we approached the project simply just trying

to do the best we could, and we found moments of flow throughout which added to the momentum and pleasure we received from the project.

Defining Roles

To begin the process of *Writes of Spring*, we needed to organize ourselves as a leadership team. Our initial ideas about devising led us to believe that collective power and responsibility was the best way to work. Inspired by this idea of collective devising, we “undid hierarchical arrangements to maximize individual participation and equalize power” (Greeley 131). Our goal became to work as collectively as possible. While we were not confident enough to work without some defined roles, we did want to embrace the philosophies of our devising predecessors from the 60s and 70s. As students, we all relished the chance to create the kind of theatre WE wanted, not tied to the aesthetic of the Rep. Like members of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, “the reality of running the company without a leader both terrified and energized them” (Mason 206). Most of our troubles, and the struggles of our predecessors, seemed to arise from lack of these structures. It was when we didn’t know who was in charge or what our responsibility was that we ran into difficulties. “Clearly, the working structure of the company, whether hierarchical or democratic, sets boundaries for the extent to which roles or responsibilities can integrate or overlap...” (Oddey 65). Some forethought about structure may have made these issues obsolete. Thus began our obsession with the power structure.

We all requested positions from the Project Coordinator, who, in cooperation with the Education Director, chose our roles for us. We made our requests based on positions that existed in the past. The roles primarily requested were Director, Stage Manager, Playwright, Dramaturg, and Event Coordinator. It was decided we would seek a Stage Manger from outside the TYA grads and we would not have a Dramaturg or Event Coordinator this year. The role of Dramaturg

folded into the duties of the Playwright, and the role of Event Coordinator folded into the duties of Project Coordinator. In our conversations about dividing the roles, we ran into a question that often arises in education theatre -- choose positions based on talent or the learning opportunity? While it would be foolish to say every theatrical production doesn't provide a learning experience if the artist is open to it, the purpose of *Writes of Spring* was again called into question, about how much of this project is about giving us a chance to try on a role for the first time or how much is about the responsibility to have effective and efficient leaders. Forced Entertainment Company wrestles with this question in a professional setting as well.

This company does not assume collective responsibility for everything, and perhaps a weakness in company development has been to play to the strengths people have built up, which narrows opportunities for learning new skills (Oddey 44).

While ultimately we were not involved in the final choices of assignments, the time spent discussing and disagreeing about the topic led us to define for ourselves what we felt was important. "Respect and trust in each other permits criticism, enabling individuals to give up personal interests in particular areas of investigation in favor of decisions that may benefit the group to explore new directions" (Oddey 25). For myself, I started on the side of believing that experience should trump any learning experience, that the need to have people capable of performing their jobs and leading each other through the process was more important than giving someone a chance. As the conversations continued, and as the entire project unfolded, I became more and more aware of how little prior experience mattered. It was a learning experience anyway, and no matter how much administrative work, play directing, or scenic designing

you've done in the past, theatre is the type of art that offers an entirely new set of challenges you can never be ready for.

My original roles were Playwright and Director. Under this structure I identified closely with director/leaders such as Joseph Chaikin and Judith Malina who led their groups to work collaboratively, but ultimately were the driving force behind the creation of a piece. However, before the production began, our Project Coordinator had to withdraw from the production. After some juggling between the remaining grads, I gave up my position as Director and took on Project Coordinator while retaining my role as Playwright. The shift brought up quite a few questions and issues that required some examination of our communication and fears about working collaboratively. Before this shift happened, we had been assigned our roles but had not discussed them in-depth. All we had to reference were our preconceived ideas about what the roles were. About the time we began to more clearly define these roles, we lost a team member and had to re-organize. John Wright of the Trestle Theatre finds the adjustment of roles equally as challenging. "When key people or roles change, it inevitably alters everything in the group. Wright observes, 'We're like an amoeba, never really in control of devising'" (Oddey 66).

As the leaders of this project, we were in a strange position of having more "experts" than leadership roles. As the MFA students who were accountable for the project, we all wanted to be involved in the decision-making and ins and outs of the project; however, when we divided the leadership roles, we found there was one person omitted. We created a role for her to fill, which we titled "Production Manager" in addition to her role as Scenic Designer, but then did not endow her with all the typical responsibilities of a Production Manager. Looking back on this choice, it seems very strange. The idea was that she would be in charge of organizing and advising all designers, but as a designer herself, she had no outside perspective to offer her team.

She would often express feeling just as unsure about the next step as the rest of the designers. Also, as Project Manager, I wanted to stay informed of all choices and progress, so I was involved in most correspondence among the team. I feel my need to micromanage the production process as well as the passive approach to management taken by the Production Manager may have caused a lot of the confusion of responsibility. In reflection, sometimes it just seems easier to let the more dominant personality take control than cause waves or take on the unsolved problem. It is a negotiation of power versus productivity that is sensitive to personalities, time available, and passion on the subject matter.

The problem of people being unsure of their role or responsibility in any given moment continued to be a topic of concern throughout the production process. The biggest roadblock in addressing these problems was that none of the parties who were feeling lost would ask for help or admit to feeling out of the loop. As artists, and particularly when creating a new work, we have to wrestle with the questions of how do we live in the unknown? How do we become “O.K.” with not knowing the outcome? What kind of leader and participant does it take to do this kind of work? Did I need to step in when I sensed the confusion, or is it up to the individual to take responsibility for his or her own participation and experience in the project? My instinct first told me the individual is responsible for his or her own experience, but as the project continued, I wondered if as the Project Coordinator I needed to offer those individuals an outlet to make their frustrations known. In a field where martyrdom is sometimes praised (sick or injured actors called “trouper” for showing up at rehearsal, or stage managers called “Saints” for putting up with mistreatment by diva directors or designers), it is common practice for the behind-the-scenes staff to just put up with neglect or mistreatment. I eventually realized I needed to give those people permission to complain. Without airing our uncertainties or frustrations,

how can we move forward and solve the problem? The only reason I was even aware of some of the frustrations was through personal conversations, which seemed to live strangely both inside and outside the world of the project.

I often questioned if our professionalism was compromised or strengthened through personal relationships. Among the TYA grads, some of us were roommates; which meant that sometimes emotions were brought home that had been stirred in rehearsals. How do you navigate speaking emotionally to your friend and roommate and then transfer to speaking professionally to the group? Can I rant and rave about how I disagree with someone so vehemently and then turn around and approach it diplomatically in a meeting the next day? Do the emotions transfer with you (and the person you unloaded them on), or does it allow you to “get it out” to someone who understands the specifics of the problem? Where is the right place for emotional language? Is it foolish for me to strive for a completely neutral way of communicating? I wonder how the collectives of the past dealt with these issues. Groups such as the Living Theatre lived, worked, and created together twenty-four hours a day, there had to be similar moments of personal life overflowing into professional work. What I discovered was that the purpose of their work became their life. “The Living Theatre now defined themselves as a collective, living and working together toward the creation of a new form of nonfictional acting based on the actor’s political and physical commitment to using theatre as a medium for furthering social change” (Heddon and Milling 39). I found myself continuing to remind the group of our political stake in serving as voice for our young audiences. The devotion which collectives of the past held for their theatrical creations served as a reminder that we became emotional over the work because of how deeply we cared about it.

As our obsession with defining power and hierarchy continued, I began to question the very fabric of what we were doing in the theatre. Why do we use/have a system of responsibility? Why do we use directors? Why are there multiple designers? We assume that knowing what our job is and dividing jobs makes for more efficient work. What is it about these artists' special skills that we value so much that we would rather work harder on the communication end than possibly sacrifice the artistic quality. How do we decide which is more important to us?

Community building

As teachers, the leadership team of *Writes of Spring* placed a high value on community building at the beginning of the rehearsal process. Our collective experience across age groups and class types taught us that if a group does not feel a sense of camaraderie and purpose, it would be very difficult road to a finished product.

By studying many different work teams, psychologists have found that familiarity increases productivity and decision making effectiveness...Psychologists call these shared understandings tacit knowledge—and because it's unspoken, people often don't even realize why they are able to communicate effectively (Sawyer 51).

What kind of knowledge did we hope to create? We knew that in order to create theatre we would have to build, among many others, an understanding of how to work as a team, how to discuss and critique our work, an understanding of what theatre for youth is and/or could be, and what we value as artists. We needed full investment, not just for effective communication, but also for us to assuage our fears that the project may fall apart at any moment.

We decided to have the Director lead the community-building activities while the Playwright would lead devising activities. We wanted to establish a rapport of leadership while also allowing each other to participate and get to know and become a part of the group. This dual leadership was prompted by the advice of Susanna Morrow in her article, *Preparing to Devise*: "...it is very important to note that while it is valuable to have someone guide and facilitate development and later help form and direct the finished product, this person should also be an equal participant in most phases of the process" (Morrow 133).

We utilized many activities from Augusto Boal's book, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Boal describes the games as exercises that "deal with the expressivity of the body as emitter and receiver of messages. The games are a dialogue..." (Boal 48). We chose these games for that very reason. They allowed us to encounter each other both physically and emotionally, without forcing anyone to act in a way that was not comfortable. These games, created for non-actors in a Theatre for Social Change setting, were less about performance and more about building "an awareness of the body and its mechanisms, its atrophies and hypertrophies, its capacities for recuperation, restructuring, reharmonisation" (Boal 48). These activities are also used a precursor to exploring oppression within a community and therefore lend themselves to opening the group to feel comfortable sharing their feelings and observations with each other. This freedom of expression is especially important in devising. "It is essential for each member to be able to reveal the personal, knowing that there is sensitivity and support within the group. Every individual must invest something of his or her person if the group is to communicate fully" (Oddey 24).

We also used a game we called Pat Ball. We took a stack of newspapers and as a group crumpled and wrapped them up into a large ball, which we then completely covered in clear

packing tape. The group would stand in a circle and hit the ball up in the air and then try to keep it up by each patting the ball in the air with our fingertips. Part volleyball, part hot potato, the goal of the game is to get as many “pats” as possible. We played this game throughout the process, and it even made its way into the final production. The excitement over this game came in beating our own record and in the teamwork that was evident and motivating. The game also became a surefire way to assess the mood of the group on any given day. Since we played it nearly every day, we could all sense the shifts in energy. Pat Ball was one of the most obvious moments when the group as a whole achieved a state of group flow.

Creation and Development of Script

The devising process became the happy surprise all of us hoped for. With experience in creative drama and teaching, we soon realized the structures we use every day in our classrooms became the tools we would use to activate and develop material for the production. Inspired by a class on Avant Garde theatre several of us were taking, and the wide variety of interesting characters produced from the writing prompt, we decided early in our process we wanted to produce a non-linear script that lived in and out of reality sometimes verging on the silly or random. With that in mind, we focused our devising work on short bursts without much thought of how it would all fit together.

The Director and Playwright met and divided the entries into themes. Each entry belonged in one theme category. At each rehearsal a set of entries was given to the team to read and prepare for the next week. Our hope was that by giving the entries to the group in smaller doses, they would not be overwhelmed by the number and would be able to better focus on the entries of each week. We wanted to be very cognizant of their time and effort considering we were all students and all donating our talents on top of already busy and demanding schedules.

This also kept the group from coming up with preconceived ideas about where the play was going. “Innovation is blocked when one (or more) of the participants already has a preconceived idea of how to reach the goal...” (Sawyer 46-47). The ever-changing material in devising also helped us not develop too much of a prior agenda.

Each rehearsal began with a round-table discussion about the entries. Anyone could speak up about entries they liked and everyone would comment on them. We jumped from entry to entry and people took turns speaking in a very natural, unstructured way. In the beginning, this was due to professional politeness. People were respectful of each other’s opinions simply because we were all strangers and no one wanted to cause friction. But, as the project moved forward, this freewheeling group flow of the conversation was due to the community that was built and fostered throughout the project.

One thing stressed in the early stages was the philosophy that there were no bad ideas and that no idea was sacred. Anything created in rehearsal could be explored or developed by anyone else, and multiple hands would likely touch every thing created. We worked quickly, building up a giant arsenal of scenes and monologues from the point of view of the eclectic group of talking objects generated from the prompt, “If a ____ could talk...”. There was no critique, only observations. We took the philosophy of the improvisation structure, “Yes, and...”. The group would discuss what we would like to see the character do next or what we could add to this situation. Like many devising artists, we quickly discovered that criticism didn’t have much place in the early stages of devising and whenever it reared its ugly head, the work would lose momentum and sometimes come to a standstill. In a study of group productivity, Robert Sawyer discovered that “Social inhibition is a second cause of productivity loss. This is when a group member holds back an idea for fear of what the others will think” (Sawyer 65). Ultimately, we

couldn't start criticizing because we didn't know what it was we were looking at in the broader picture of the project. "Successful innovators keep having ideas. They know that most of their ideas won't work out, and they're quick to cut their losses and pursue those few good ideas that resonate with their collaborators" (Sawyer 107).

Total commitment was stressed to the production team from the beginning. Designers and Actors were required to attend all devising sessions and participate fully. Asking the Designers to get up from their tables and drawing pads offered us the opportunity to see each other in a different way. We didn't view each other as separate groups with one being more adept at certain skills. In the end, when it was necessary for the Designers to begin designing and the Actors to begin rehearsing, it felt like losing family members. Not having all the same personalities in rehearsal absolutely changed the mood of the room and the viewpoint of what we were creating.

Knowing when to lead and when to let the group develop on its own proved to be one of our major challenges. "Yet despite the freedom of thought and action apparent in rehearsals of devised work, the project needs a leader with a firm grasp of the direction in which the work is heading" (Bicât and Baldwin 9). One way of keeping our work collaborative was to divide up sections of the play for some of the Actors to create or block. This was possible because of the segmented nature of the script. Actors expressed excitement over being asked to block certain scenes. They also expressed refreshment when a new set of eyes came into rehearsal to look at a moment that was giving the group trouble. Nancy Meckler, of The Freehold Theatre, reflected this same dilemma: "I was the guide, but I was desperately trying to be totally collaborative, and that's why everyone felt so connected and felt so much ownership" (Heddon 47). With the ego typically involved in the creative process, it was rewarding to see us share in joy of creation.

Shift from Devising to Rehearsing

As we shifted from the devising sessions into the working sessions, the main facilitator shifted from Playwright to Director. I quickly found myself feeling out of the loop. After all the work we had done to make things collaborative, I was very disappointed and worried that I had done something to cause the Director not to want my opinion. Graham and Hoggett discuss the difficulty of trust and collaboration, “Surprisingly, this is not always a condition that automatically gets easier the longer you work with another creature” (7).

Before every devising session I met with the Director to discuss the day’s plans, but those meetings were no longer happening. The Director was coming in with a plan of how to work script sections and possible re-writes without having these planning meetings. As I sat in the working sessions and saw the Actors play with the material and then comment and give feedback on the performances, I suddenly felt a great tinge of resentment. I felt as if my opinion and contributions to the process were no longer needed or valid. After a few rehearsals, I went to the Director and other TYA leaders and explained how I felt. Once my feelings were revealed, things shifted. Questions of intent were directed towards me and more of an effort to discuss what would happen at any given rehearsal was shared. Although I never felt the same camaraderie as we had in the planning of the devising sessions, the working atmosphere did change and felt more inclusive.

This brings up the question that plagues the development of all new work -- how much power does the Playwright give up when a Director is asked to come in and lead the script development process? Is it beneficial to have an outsider work the script at this early stage? Did they even need me? Why did we have a Playwright at all? In examining these questions, I concluded that one reason we needed a playwright for this experience was that we needed

someone to be sure to get all the winning entries into the script and accounted for. Another reason was our fear that we would not be able to finish the project if we didn't latch on to roles and structures we were familiar with. Many devising groups don't use a Playwright for the reason that they don't feel one is necessary with this kind of work. David Gale of Lumiere and Sons states, "The writer's personal imaginative development is devalued and Gale argues that the process of devising is 'properly potentiated' without a writer, as group members may be skilled in editing and assembling material that 'will bring something of a textual aesthetic to the product'" (Oddey 56).

Feedback

I am an artist who likes to think out loud. I stage scenes and dances, just to throw it all out the window and start over. I say things out loud even if I'm not sure where it is going, and I list all my ideas, even if I'm certain they are not the best choice. I find that by taking in every possible solution or just jumping into the action, I make discoveries I never would have discovered immediately or ever have created on my own. When it came to giving feedback on the growth of *Writes of Spring*, I knew it was important to me to have a structure that allowed this kind of freewheeling feedback, and it also was important to us as a group for everyone to feel like their voices were heard. Therefore, we not only used the company to develop the script, but we also used the company to evaluate the ideas as they developed. Our assumption was that more heads are better than less. Robert Sawyer confirms this through his/her research on group dynamics, "It turns out that groups are better at evaluating ideas than a nominal group of solitary individuals" (Sawyer 63). Taking into account the very personal nature of creation and the notorious fragile ego of the average actor, we knew that when asking questions about our ideas we had to navigate how to ask those questions respectfully.

In a perfect world, a question is just a question, but when you factor in all the human elements in each of us, it doesn't quite work that simply. We not only have to watch how we speak to each other, but we have to find a way to listen without engaging our defenses. Many devising groups have had to traverse this sensitive territory as well. At Frantic Assembly, Scott Graham and Steven Hogget stated, "The important thing each of us had to learn was that a question about your idea is not simply a challenge. It is another opportunity for you to put it across, to clarify your intention" (31). In *Writes of Spring*, we made it a priority to pay attention to how we spoke to each other in the process.

After attending a couple workshops with Liz Lerman, I proposed we use her Critical Response Process as a way of giving and receiving feedback. She describes the process as, "the Critical Response Process enables a group of people to uncover their various aesthetic and performance values and, by being patient, apply them to a creative work-in-progress in a way that pushes the artist's thinking forward" (Lerman 11). This served us very well in devising because it allowed us not to just judge each other's contributions but to attempt to understand each other and where the ideas are coming from. Using this process worked so well that soon we didn't need to structure the feedback sessions at all. The company was able to give and receive feedback in an effective and group-oriented way.

Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process has four parts. The first is called "Statements of Meaning". Audience members reflect and express on moments they found meaning in. The second section is "Artist as Questioner". The artist is allowed to ask questions about their own work. The third section is "Neutral Questions from Responders". The audience asks questions to better understand the artist's choices. The fourth section is composed of "Permissioned Opinions". The artist can choose whether to accept opinions or not. The process gives artists and

responders a chance to think, reflect, and communicate about how and why choices were made to come to a better understanding of the piece as a whole. As Playwright, I found the Critical Response Process extremely user friendly and helpful. Nearly all suggestions from the workshopping period were accepted and made the work stronger. Consistently, I found the questions someone else expressed were exactly what I needed to hear, and I craved that partnership, much in the same way as Frantic Assembly. “We are the other’s sounding board. We are the key to making this happen. We are the support. We are the missing link. We will make sense of it when it starts to ache our partner’s head. We are the fiercest critic because it matters” (Graham and Hogget 32). We knew that all we needed to do was throw out an idea and others will run with it. We had a desire to see each other and the project succeed.

The group talked through each idea and notes were taken. With so many opinions being shared, I felt confident the ideas were thoroughly represented and explored; it was left up to me to decipher and make those final adjustments. I certainly could have ignored any piece of advice, but more often than not, because of the collaborative effort at exploring each suggestion, the answer revealed itself to us by the end of the conversation or acting moment. Does this mean we found a magic formula that solved all our communication problems? Definitely not, but every time there was a hiccup in the process, I found myself more prepared to look at it, examine and learn from it; “research shows us over and over again that the twin sibling of innovation is frequent failure” (Sawyer 55).

The most awkward part of the Critical Response Process for me was the “Permissioned Opinions”. Why would I not want to hear a suggestion to make my work better? Perhaps this is a testament to the trust we built in this process. Perhaps it is due to me not being a Playwright by trade; therefore I was not as protective of or confident in my work. Regardless, I was open to the

feedback. “Artists need to be at a point where they can question their work in a somewhat public environment” (Lerman 14). This worked so well in the playwriting period that we folded it over into the rehearsal process. It was very obvious that when it didn’t work, it was due to someone’s ego getting involved or in a commenter being judgmental as opposed to asking neutral questions.

As we evolved into workshopping scenes, we evolved into questions that started with phrases such as, “it made me think...” or “I wonder if...” Although it seemed odd at first giving a room full of adults a kind of fill-in-the-blank statement, the effect was tremendous. The work became more and more personal as more time was put into the staging and character development, and using this process made us aware of the genesis and nature of our comments.

In one meeting a colleague made an announcement that I vehemently disagreed with. Before I even thought about it I spat out, “That’s stupid.” As soon as it came out I knew it was inappropriate. When you are dealing with communication you cannot underestimate the power of emotional reactions. I find they happen all the time, even when we believe we are being neutral. How do we retract a statement when we realize it came out in an emotional outburst? How do some people seem to never have these outbursts? This is especially prevalent when working in the theatre or with creative artists who often are temperamental and passionate to a fault.

The idea of finding ways to understand and listen to each other rather than criticize was not only helpful in creation of the script, but it became an element to keep in mind throughout the process. One such example was an interchange between myself, as Project Manager, and the Stage Manager.

From Stage Manager to Project Manager:

“...Also, I have started collecting boxes from Panera and my trunk is almost full.

Do we know where we are going to be storing these hundreds of boxes when we get

them? Just figure some planning in where they can be stored would be a good idea.

Thanks!”

From Project Manager to Stage Manager:

“We have thought about this- we don't just make things up as we go along.

For now the boxes will go in the grad office...”

The Stage Manager immediately responded with an apology for coming across as argumentative, but he expressed feeling like he was left out of the loop on many decisions. My feeling was that if he didn't know where the boxes went, all he had to do was ask and we would have told him. It was only an oversight that we hadn't shared this information previously. I took offense to the idea that we would have not thought about where they would go and reacted emotionally to the implication in the email. As much as I wanted him to approach the question from a more neutral standpoint, I should have required the same from myself. All I had to do was tell him where the boxes went instead of pointing out how I had been offended.

Frantic Assembly artists express the need for mutual respect and belief that we are all in the project together:

We had to control that raging voice that suggests running to the hills, remember that theatre is about the transference of ideas, and try once again to see if our collaborators can see the merits of our idea. When they cannot there comes a point when you have to look around the room, remember that you are working with people you trust and respect, and that there must be some flaw in the idea for it to stumble at this early stage...If you trust your idea, then it will

return stronger. You will find a better way to communicate it
(Graham and Hogget 31).

I found that transparency was an important idea to hold on to. Letting others know how you think and what you think does not have to mean giving up your secrets or power. It can mean making your methods stronger. When you have to explain your way of working to others, you have to think it through more thoroughly. It supports my belief that to teach is the best way to learn. Transparency also keeps you more even-headed. When you know five different people will read an email or witness a conversation, you are more careful with your words. “Disagreement is a healthy way to select, clarify, and simplify choice of materials and methods of procedure. The danger comes in everyone compromising to the lowest common denominator, which means starting from a mediocre position” (Oddey 25).

Responsibility

During one of the first script workshops everyone was asked to write down one thing they were excited about for the process and one thing they were nervous about. These were scrambled, distributed, and then read aloud, in pairs, and then passed to another group. The fears were all very similar -- the fear of disappointing others or not being smart/good/talented enough to contribute.

- “I’m scared that I’ll disappoint someone in this process.”
- “Nervous about making sure everyone feels their voice is heard.”
- “Not having enough knowledge/experience with puppetry and non-traditional theatre to be able to contribute many good ideas.”

The list went on and on. The responsibility the Actors felt towards the project was overwhelming. This responsibility was directed towards each other as artists and towards the

student writers for whom we were creating. If anyone had felt a sense of being lost in the creation process, they certainly found new purpose and commitment in the excitement and fulfillment of having a script to begin exploring. “By its very nature, ensemble theatre attracts actors who are humble and hunger to create something larger than themselves” (Wetzel 128).

Time

One thing we always wanted more of was time. Meetings, both scheduled and impromptu, seemed to be the lifeblood of keeping ourselves on track and in a collaborative spirit. With a small leadership group, we fell into our way of working without always talking about it. We benefited from being very good friends as well as having multiple classes together and all working in the same theatre, which meant we spent lots of time together not only socially but also scholastically and professionally. The conversations about who would handle what jobs were much more casual and sometimes would happen at the last minute, due some to informality and also due to realizing a need at the last minute. Perhaps it is because we are all good problem solvers, but there often seemed to be a state of flow happening between the three of us as leaders of the process. Sometimes it felt like all we ever talked about was *Writes of Spring*, but the constant contact allowed us to work more smoothly without lots of formal meetings. “Group flow requires constant communication. Everyone hates to go to useless meetings; but the kind of communication that leads to group flow doesn’t happen in the conference room. Instead, it’s more likely to happen in freewheeling, spontaneous conversations in the hallway, or in social settings after work or at lunch” (Sawyer 53). I did often feel guilty for taking up my colleagues’ lunch times or the few free minutes we had between classes to conduct business. I even found myself apologizing to them, however I feel like the productivity that came from the constant contact was worth the possible frustrations.

One challenge to the use of meetings and rehearsals was keeping the group on track. “Groups become fixated faster and stay in the same category for longer” (Sawyer 65). With so many possibilities it was very easy to spend a lot of time talking about one idea as we got excited about it or when we came to crossroads and allowed everyone to express their differing opinions. We found ourselves often needing to drop a topic or move on even though we didn’t feel a conclusion was drawn.

What is essentially different for devised theatre is the company’s need to plan and schedule its own timescale according to the development of the work, and in relation to a flexible structure of potential change, shift of focus, and spontaneous decision-making. Time is needed for the trying out of ideas, the experimentation of work, the development of a process, and subsequently to create deadlines out of that work. (Oddey13).

As the performance drew nearer, the work in rehearsal took on a slightly more authoritarian feel. We needed to finish blocking, but there was a lot left to do and the group approach took more time than we had. This falls in line with research on group flow. “Group flow tends to fade in the presence of strict, high-pressure deadlines” (Sawyer 47). I remember one rehearsal I was in charge of just before tech week. I was unable to get through the blocking and then had to e-mail the cast with their entrances and exits. I remember feeling it was necessary because of the time crunch, but also feeling deeply ashamed that I had reduced the art of creation, collaboration, and theatre to an email with dictatorial directions in it.

When the Director had to leave town due to a sudden death in the family, I was asked to lead a rehearsal, which made me question if any of the collaborative work we had done actually

made a difference to our process. In trying to move speedily forward, we attempted to block a complicated scene with movement and puppetry, which had been initially explored but not set. Actors were very reluctant to change anything from the initial exploration. They constantly referred to what the Director “wanted”, which felt so argumentative, considering the project had been so exploratory to that point. It did not feel collaborative at all and the second-guessing made the rehearsal slow and frustrating. Should we have moved forward and just disregarded the initial choices if they weren’t working, or was it right of the Actors to stick to them? How did we shift from an environment where exploration was the norm to worrying what the Director would approve of when she returned? “If one person dominates, the other members have little growth or pleasure in the activity; a true group relationship does not exist” (Spolin 9).

Late into the rehearsal process, just before tech rehearsals started, I watched a rehearsal and realized a scene was omitted. We had not discussed cutting a scene, and we had just received the professionally printed stack of scripts, which we were going to give as prizes to the winning student writers. I panicked. I insisted the Director find time to block the scene. She understood the dilemma but simply couldn’t see where there would be time to work it into the schedule. I was livid. As the Playwright, I was upset the Director chose to cut a scene without my approval, and as Project Manager, I was dissatisfied with the time management. I kept a close eye on the next few rehearsals and soon realized that in order to get the rest of the performance to the level it needed to be, we would have to lose the scene. During a break, I went to the Director and told her to cut the scene and not worry about including it. I sensed we both felt a bit of guilt -- she for not having finished the script and myself for not trusting she was doing everything she could to get it all done.

During tech week I also noticed the blocking of a scene that made a very strong statement, which made me uncomfortable. A section of the play was based on an entry about “my daddy’s uniform”. This entry about the uniform was combined with some other entries about war. The blocking of the scene consisted of a few soldiers folding a white sheet as if it were an American flag and handing it to a little girl as she spoke about her father, portrayed by another actor. The scene clearly implied the child’s father died. I wondered if this was a responsible choice considering the student may be in attendance at the performance. This student clearly cares and is concerned about his father’s safety as a soldier, and for us to imply that he could die, while may be true, felt like a potentially upsetting and scary thing to see on stage. I mentioned my concern to the Director and Education Director. We discussed the creative license we are allowed as artists and the responsibility we have as artists to honor the story the young man had originally written. It was determined there was no time to change the blocking and we would move forward with what we had. I felt at the time that if this was something we had caught earlier there might have been another blocking solution to the play, but the time limit caused us not to explore the moment further.

These two examples of time determining the outcome of the final product brought up questions about use of time in general. When is it too late to make changes or ask questions that may disrupt the sequence of events? If it makes the play better, then is it ever too late? Certainly we could have stayed hours later to re-block the scenes, but that would have most likely upset Actors and Designers who already were pouring their heart and soul into the project. And what if it was a sudden realization that the scenery or costumes just didn’t work for some reason. Is it in the best interest of the production to insist on the changes? When does doing what needs to be done infringe on other artists’ work? Is it a power trip? How do people react to a change after so

much work has gone into something? Hopefully, the team has achieved a state of flow that will catch any major inconsistencies before the last minute, but as a Director, I often find myself in tech week suddenly realizing that something I thought I understood was completely different from what I pictured. I have discovered that you can never be too thorough or ask too many questions.

“I” vocabulary

One simple way we tried to create an atmosphere of working together was to eliminate as much “I” and “my” vocabulary as we could. Instead of saying, “I think this part should be a puppet show” or “I want it to be pink,” we used “Would the theme of this scene be better told through puppets?” or “The hope and energy in this scenes feels pink.” The focus came away from the Director or Designer and was put back on the play. This became complicated for several reasons. For one, it is hard to train yourself to talk about your work in a different way. It also is hard when you are dealing with differing opinions. If I think the energy of this scene is pink and you think it is yellow, in order not to make definitive statements that do not actually reflect the feeling of everyone in the room it is easy for me to say “I think this should be pink.” As we made ourselves cognizant of this use of language, I found myself critical of how people used it, even in my personal life.

I have put together many playbills in my life, but I’ve never paid so much attention to the hierarchy of credit as I did during the development of this one. There is a traditional and honored system to giving the proper billing in theatrical programs. In this process it became, or I just made it, complicated by feeling that to list people individually took away from the atmosphere of a collective that we tried to create. The first draft of the program had everyone listed alphabetically with their title or role listed next to it. The Designers, Actors, and Administrators

were all mixed together. The Rep staff member who proofed the program found this confusing and recommended we use a traditional program structure with areas sorted and then listed using traditional billing. This felt completely wrong for our process and against everything we were trying to create. Ultimately, it was decided no one would be listed by his or her title(s) in the program. There was one alphabetical list of participants. This aimed to make a statement about our way of working.

When the first draft of the program went out, I happened to be sitting next to the Lighting Designer when he opened the program. “Oh!” he puzzled. He expressed surprise that he was not listed specifically as Lighting Designer; however, he agreed it was fitting of our process to have everyone listed as company.

Discoveries

Through all these experiences I learned first hand that it is less about what your title is and more about how we treat each other. This explains why people don't hate each other after working traditionally. You can be collaborative no matter how rehearsals, timelines, or development is structured. Our obsession with leadership was completely contradictory to everything we were trying to create, and I also realized that while we may have created a play from scratch, we had just as clear a hierarchy as any traditional process. The thing that made this experience powerful and different is the fact that we examined the process so closely and instead of just accepting what we assumed the roles and timeline and procedures should be, we examined and created them ourselves. The learning experience was like none other I'd ever experienced and prompted me to change the way I think about theatre and teaching theatre to my students.

CHAPTER FOUR: TOWARDS A COMMUNICATION PEDAGOGY

The experience in *Writes of Spring* has given me quite a lot to consider. As an artist, I look at my work differently, and as a teacher I wonder how to offer my students this same kind of critical look at their artistic growth. I remember as a high school drama student, convincing my drama teacher to let us do a student-directed project in drama class, only to find that at the time I was not ready to be a Director and the project fell apart. I felt like I let him down. That guilt moved me to work harder for the next time. I agonize over choices I made as a graduate student doing collaborative work that may have slowed down our process. I agonize even more over my mistakes as a teacher and all the times I wasn't able to help my students through a difficult theatrical moment. It is these moments that drive me to study my future work as a communication-centered Teacher and Director. "Critical Communication Pedagogy can be as much about failure as success, as much about pain as celebration, as much about what happened as what sense we made of it" (Fassett 131). I will examine a few changes and developments to the *Writes of Spring* process made between the 2010 and 2011 projects that represent examples of how we learned from our past as well as adjusted to new challenges, illustrating the power of focusing on communication models when creating theatre.

Communication Pedagogy

Devising original theatre takes the artist to a place of great bravery, "a place where anyone may get up and dare to fail" (Ristau), taking ownership over their art, no matter the reaction, empowering those who choose to take the leap. As an emerging artist in the field of group devising, I draw my ideas about devising mostly from my experience as a Teaching Artist and Director heavily influenced by the teachings of Paulo Friere and the ideology of Critical Pedagogy. Critical Pedagogy is a philosophy of education concerned with educating and

empowering the individual to take control of their education. Through political and personal examinations of their life experiences, students achieve a state of conscientization and then hopefully, praxis. Conscientization is an understanding of the individual's unique world and their place and power within it. Praxis follows Conscientization and is the motivation and ability to affect change in their world, if they want it. Through critical self-analysis, students are able to "name the world" for themselves and take control over their education and existence. Devising, to me, becomes a natural venue for a critical process since it also embraces a philosophy of empowerment and analysis.

Two kinds of curriculum and teaching strategies may be distinguished: those which equip students with the means to interpret, assess, and redefine what they are taught, and those which promote acquiescence and passive acceptance. It is within the power and should be part of the responsibility of the teacher to encourage pupils to be more reflective, critical, and analytic (Reynolds and Skilbeck 85).

In hopes of developing a teaching style that places communication at the center of its method, I have to consider the responsibilities within for both my students and myself.

Questions are at the center of how we work together. As a Teacher and Director, I found that devising used many of the skills I already use in my classroom. I am drawn first to the question, "why?" I find with every decision I make, if I simply ask myself that question, I will gain far more insight into my decision-making than any other inquiry.

The director is taking on the role of enabler—he is not telling the group why the stimulus is important, indeed the reverse. He is

using a strategy every good teacher/enabler uses every day: he is asking open-ended questions and avoiding those kinds of questions which have implicitly correct answers (Bicât and Baldwin 17).

I see the Director's role in devising as a guide and kind of Teacher. I remember an exercise in a design class in my graduate training where each of us was asked to explain the design concept we created. Any time we started a sentence with "I want..." or "I think..." we were asked to rephrase and/or consider if the design choice we made came from the text or our own agendas. I found this very direct exercise incredibly moving as an artist. I had never before thought so specifically about the way I speak to others. I believe that pushing young artists to answer the question of "why" and encouraging them to think specifically about their communication can give them an entirely new perspective on how to create and communicate their ideas.

As a theatre teacher, I am no stranger to the ideas of producing student-directed and/or created work, however most of that experience came before my exposure to the ideas of Critical Pedagogy and asked my students to passively accept knowledge of what their roles were and how to fulfill them. I was always surprised by how much I both over and underestimate student's ability to take on these roles and lead their peers. I have high hopes for what devising can offer my students and me as I develop use of Critical Communication Pedagogy into my teaching. "Devising is a craft, which is inevitably learnt on the job. Certain skills are acquired empirically, and it is difficult to imagine one system of working across the board" (Oddey 25). I question if devising allows students a more tactile way of learning about themselves and their views? Will the exploration strengthen their skills and ways of working? Susanna Morrow believes it has with her students,

Students who have been involved in this multi-dimensional process of making performance often become energized and enfranchised. They return to the more traditional theatrical model with a heightened awareness of the holistic event, a broadened dexterity within their own craft, and a deepened sense of cooperation with and respect for their collaborators (Morrow 137).

These students will have the power to innovate in ways that other students without the experience in “naming their own world of theatre” will not. They will be innovators in our field. According to the New South Wales Government, which influences many European devising companies, the definition of innovation is, “The application of fresh ideas that enable a business to better compete in the future” (What is Innovation). It is not innovative just to create our work; the work must create excitement and inspire new ideas or improvements on existing ideas to be innovative. Innovative work cannot be didactic or dated or unauthentic. I hope to give my students an equal “place at the table” of communication and collaboration. Clar Doyle suggests, “If we are not free to speak out of our experiences, we might not have any voice. If the individual experience is negated, it is possible that the individual is negated? Silenced? Drama can be used to help students speak around these silences” (Doyle 131).

Finding Teachable and Learnable Moments

Moving from the 2010 project into the 2011 project with the same focus on devising has given me a unique opportunity to examine and improve upon certain structures. In the 2011 project, our leadership team grew to six. We also did not have classes together as a group nor were we all working in the same building every day. We also were charged by the theatre to make sure that the two new TYA students understood and felt comfortable with the process,

since the rest of us would have graduated and moved on by the next year. There was some discussion of using less-structured roles and attempting a more collective structure. How far could we push ourselves in this direction? We ultimately were asked by the Rep to stick with the successful structure from the past year.

In reflecting on the use of “I” and “Me” vocabulary discussed in Chapter Three, I question how that way of communicating can be translated into teaching how productions are created. The *University of Central Florida Theatre Handbook* puts forth a “Spheres of Responsibility Chart”. It places the play at the center and then places all the production and departmental roles in circles around it based on the focus of responsibility. The chart is not so much a chain of command, but more of a “what do I need to pay attention to” structure. Each layer has a wider responsibility.

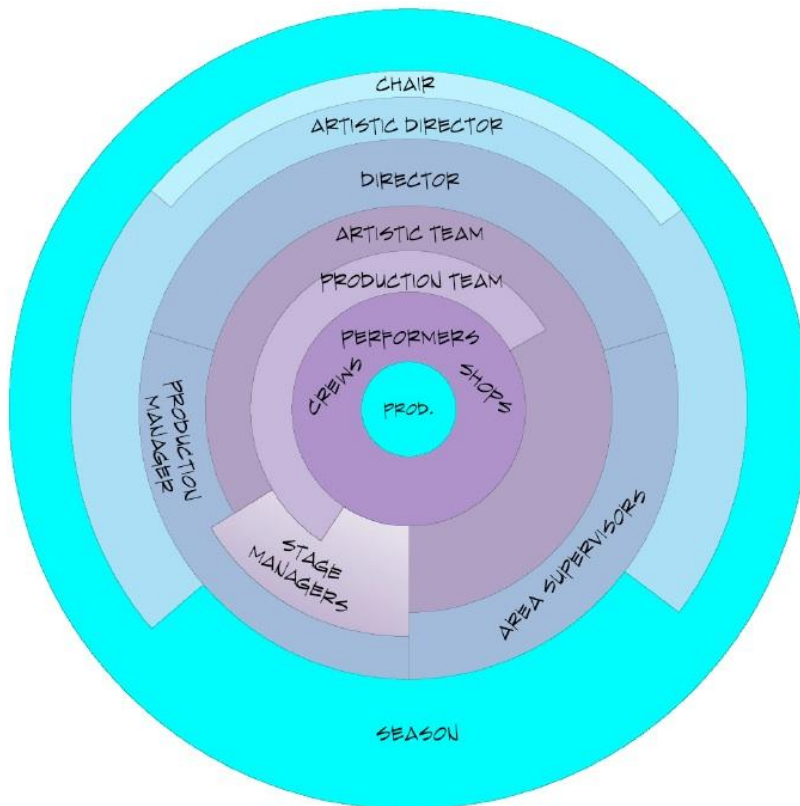


Figure 1: Spheres of Responsibility

Upon first looking at the chart, I was confused and surprised by the perspective; but the more I look at it; I can't imagine myself teaching how to put on a production without it. This chart reflected ideas from many of the collective theatre structures. Bicât and Bladwin echo this idea of the concentric circles in their view of leading and communicating, envisioning themselves "at the center of the rehearsal fulcrum, ensuring everyone is working together and, at the same time, making sure that the project remains conceptually consistent and elegant" (13). In the *UCF Production Handbook* the chart "illustrates the interconnectedness of everyone in serving the production" students are encouraged, "If you are experiencing difficulties seek help from someone in a circle bigger than your own" (UCF). The most interesting part of this was seeing the production at the center and thinking not about who had more power, but how specific one person's connection to the material is compared to others who need to keep a wider perspective. I believe that this offers a set of checks and balances to the production process when everyone works together. Where do we become less concerned with our egos or protecting our egos and focus on the art? Do we begin to define the difference between process versus product? "The paradox of collaboration and control should not be seen as proof that the group theatre ideal somehow failed in practice" (Puchner 323).

We decided to establish a working mission statement in 2011, not to replace the one already in place, but for our own use and reference as a way of working and thinking about the project. The old mission statement speaks to the philosophy and purpose while the new mission statement speaks to how we want to communicate. We started by putting all our thoughts into a document, and then taking time to read and comment on each other's ideas. We had a meeting to flesh out ideas and talk through each suggestion. The Project Coordinator took the ideas and formed them into the following mission statement.

The *Writes of Spring* Company of 2011 is guided by honor and communication.

1. Honor the young writers and our own creativity
 - Respect on all levels at all times
 - Listen openly
 - Actively try new/each other's ideas
2. Keeping lines of communication open
 - Challenge ourselves and each other with support
 - Focus on our common goals, not failures
 - True listening is active and constant work
 - Remember we are all in different places artistically
 - Be fearless in our work

Creating this statement allowed us to start getting to know each other as artists and define what is important to us. We were forced to listen to each other in order to create and understand the statement. Often in the theatre we speak in artistic terms that leave interpretation open. We had to marry our artistic understanding of what we were saying to a more specific way of wording it to eliminate future confusion.

In a tour production class some of us took the year before, we were asked to write our own contracts in order to define our role and discuss how we would operate as a team. I'm not sure how seriously we took the class contract assignment (or perhaps none of us realized how important this step was), but the lack of commitment caused us multitude of problems later in the tour production. Having had this experience, we made contracts a priority for *Writes of Spring* 2011. We agreed to each write our own contract and then post them online for each other to read and comment. This was in an effort to give everyone feedback and keep our face-to-face meeting

time down, since everyone's schedules were extremely tight. Unfortunately, most of the team did not have or make time to comment on the online document versions. It was frustrating to decide on using digital versions as a group and not have anyone else use them. We did have a face-to-face meeting, which was extremely helpful. This is possibly because we had learned the hard way the pitfall of not being clear about whose responsibility is whose?

The contracts were divided up by working periods; Adjudication, Devising, Playwriting, Script Workshops, Design Period, Rehearsals, Build Period, Tech Week, Performances, and Post-Production. We went through each time period, contract by contract, and discussed everything that needed to happen, who should be responsible for it, and the language to be used. I see this as an example of how I can lead my students to conscientization of their role in the process. Through examining the responsibilities, politics, and timetables they can develop a fuller idea of what it will take to complete the project as well as what their role in the success of the project will be. At this point it is up to the student to use praxis and fulfill their responsibilities, or suffer the consequences if they do not.

We also created an Information Flow Chart that would help us keep in mind that we were not making decisions alone, but that we needed to communicate and consult with others at all times. One important element to this was including the various parts of the project, Entries, Awards, Lobby Event, Production, and Script Development, in the chart. Everything boils down to these elements and artists need to always remember their purpose. The goal of the chart was not to create a chain of command, but to examine and remind us to communicate with each other. Each person is responsible for communicating directly up and down the chart. This does not mean that you can't skip over someone, although it is encouraged to go directly above or below yourself on the chart, because those people are most closely focused on the same part of

the project that you are. The key to the effective use of the Information Flow chart is remembering to communicate up and down the chart once a final decision has been made.

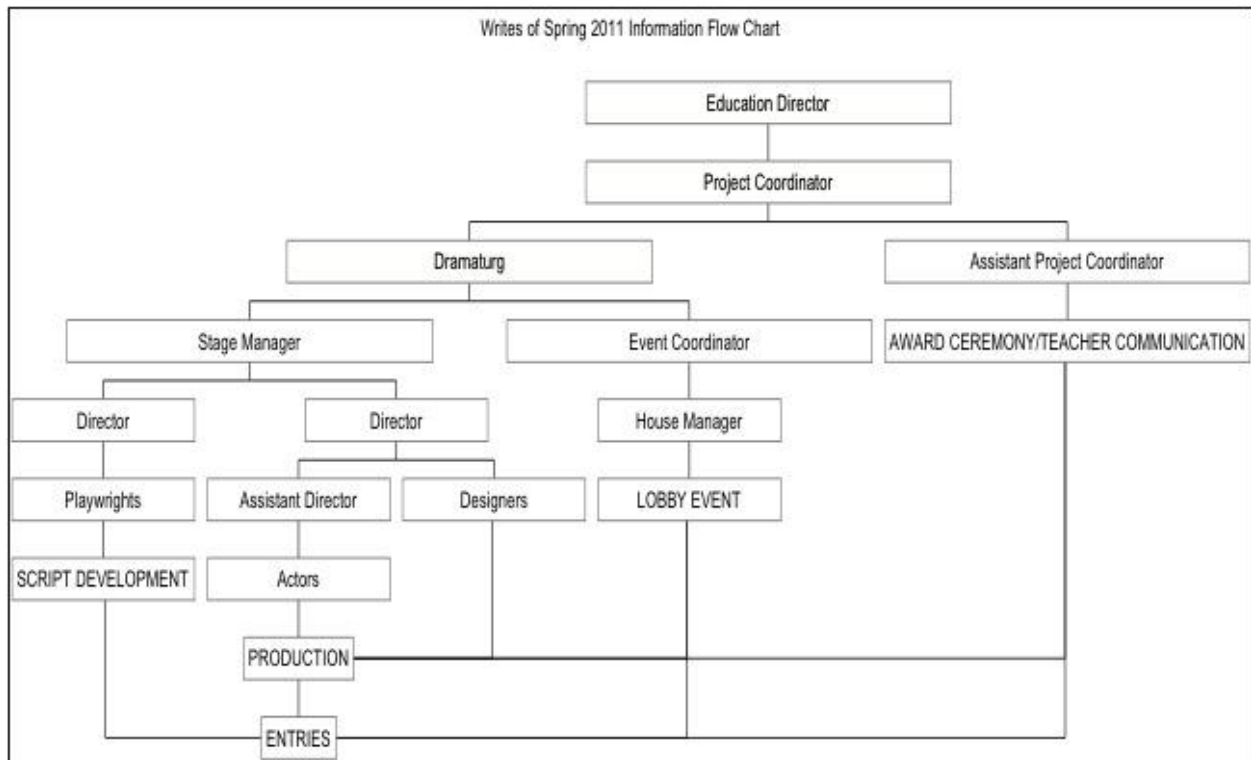


Figure 2: Information Flow Chart

Even this chart does not do justice to our goals. The chart still reflects a kind of top down structure and takes explanation in order to understand. As I move forward into more collaborative work and teaching, I hope to continue the refinement and structure of this chart to truly reflect the collective nature of devising.

As I have said before, while our roles and structure may not look much different than a standard theatrical hierarchy, the difference comes from our conscientization of the process and the fact that we examined and created the roles ourselves. Through this thought and consideration, we as a leadership team used communication to develop a way of working. I feel it was a true and thorough use of Critical Pedagogy that came not from a conscious group choice to use this philosophy, but simply from focusing on understanding the process and not taking any

information for granted. We defined the roles by asking questions and helping each other find more specificity in what we are saying.

I continue to examine my place as a potential teacher through devising. One moment that made me examine my role as an educator happened because our current Stage Manager is very aware of sending emails only to the people who need them, so as not to overload anyone with irrelevant or repetitive information. I am currently responsible for choosing the entries we will use from week-to-week, and I send the numbers to Stage Management who then sends them to the cast with any other information that may be needed. The first time she sent the information to the cast, I kept waiting to receive the email, and assumed there was some issue since it hadn't gone out. What I didn't realize was it had, but I was not copied on it. I nearly asked to be copied but then reflected on why. Why did I need to be sent the same information I created? I don't; what I did want was to be able to monitor whether or not the Stage Manager was doing her job. I took a moment to reflect on how micro-managerial that was and felt silly. Why didn't I trust her? She has never given me reason not to. I reflect on whether when in an educator role it is my responsibility to keep up with correspondence such as this or do I just let them "sink or swim" on their own? How much do I trust my students to just get it done?

Keeping a reflexive outlook on my work as teacher is incredibly important when leading a group through collective devising. It is not only important to keep thinking critically, but to continue pursuing group flow. I reflect on a few major elements of creating a space of group flow in my classroom. One element is time. I must supply my students with an appropriate amount of time to both experiment and create, while keeping them motivated. "Creativity requires that we encounter and internalize previous sparks of insight, and it requires incubation time for those sparks to combine in the mind" (Sawyer 167). It is also important as a teacher to

encourage an environment that does not turn into a competitive battlefield and keeps a collaborative group flow. I hope to give them an opportunity to work through their differences and see what they can learn from them, “to more or less cope with each other’s foibles, and to work off what’s happening between them and the others instead of just off themselves” (Patinkin 4). I must encourage true listening and acknowledgement of emotions and reflection on where those emotions come from as related to the process. My research has led me to believe that communication cannot be taken for granted regardless of the age or experience of the artists involved in the project.

The ability to create their own opportunities in the theatre, gives students a more empowered way of approaching their profession, “resistance to absorption into the existing theatre industry” (Heddon 47). Leaders of the San Francisco Mime Troupe see the same empowerment in their own actors who

Unlike most theatre artists in the United States today, who live as freelancers at the whim of the entertainment industry, uncertain of their next opportunity and hoping for a “big break,” the members of the Mime Troup have an artistic home with an investment in nurturing their talents (Orenstein 190).

“We have always been of the mind that an essential form of development is the next production. We really do not know what we have learnt from the last production until we are under the pressure of making a new production” (Graham and Hogget). In reflecting on my devising experience, I could not agree more with Graham and Hogget. Before, I would have considered a devising project like this as something to build up to in a drama class. Now, I see how just doing it once offers only a piece of the greater puzzle that is an education in theatrical

communication. If a class has a base set of theatre skills, then offering multiple opportunities to create their own work and structure of working is the best way to give them ample learning opportunities. The skill involved in taking up a project and figuring it out and then moving on to the next and utilizing those same skills is an incredibly important one to the theatre. Through devising and the process of creating, changing, developing characters and plot lines, the student has to examine quickly and then move on, which won't be a foreign activity; however, making them aware of the concept is a tool the devising instructor may use.

When we were children, we changed our minds on a dime. We were experts on change and great shifters. We'd cry one minute and laugh the next... We believed in what we were doing and we dropped it without a thought if something else took our attention.

That's what the shift is all about (Zaporah 37).

I also have considered that as a teacher using devising, I may have to let go of some of my ideas about product and artistic value. I believe firmly that young people are capable of a high quality artistic product; however, when working in a process-oriented fashion, it is highly possible that the product may suffer if the group is having a particularly hard time communicating or organizing themselves. "...the participatory, process oriented, and non-hierarchical nature of devising calls into question both the pedagogy of theatre education and the criteria by which one evaluates what constitutes "good" theatre" (Magnat 74). I certainly believe you can have a collaborative working environment and a high quality product, but I have to acknowledge that if I include devising into my drama curriculum, the process should trump all other elements if I am committed to providing a critical learning experience. Just as we experienced in *Writes of Spring*, if during tech week we drop all our collaborative ways of

working just to get a polished final product, I would be teaching my students that all that came before was just for play, and now we are getting down to business. “Moreover, the teacher cannot truly judge good or bad for another, for there is no absolutely right or wrong way to solve a problem: a teacher of wide past experience may know a hundred ways to solve a particular problem, and a student may turn up the hundred and first” (Spolin 8).

CONCLUSION

The working structures of *Writes of Spring* are like spirals, “because with each return they expand wider...a constantly moving structure held only momentarily by a single point of view” (Greenley 135). This point of view differs with each project and from each vantage point within a project. As I began my journey into devised and collective theatre, I found a home where my constant questions and reflexivity were not seen as being difficult or untrusting or over analytical, but welcomed as a part of the process. This process also taught me how to ask the questions without offending or second-guessing my collaborators.

While the structure we created in *Writes of Spring* may not be an original way of working, it certainly was innovative to my theatrical experience. I wonder how I can keep this fire I feel for collaborative work going. Will I ever arrogantly feel that I’ve tapped out all that devising has to offer me? New and exciting ways of working no doubt eventually lose their shiny newness. “Innovations are interesting because they are new; then because they help initiate a new order and become the building blocks out of which new paradigms are made” (Babb 122). I wonder what building block devising is for me? I look forward to taking these revelations that devising has offered me, and step back into my practice as a teacher with a new awareness to lead discussions and observations on the way artists communicate.

APPENDIX: IRB PERMISSION LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

NOT HUMAN RESEARCH DETERMINATION

From : **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To : Jennifer Adams, Department of Theatre

Date : April 5, 2010

Dear Researcher:

Thank you for sending the description of your proposed research – working with a group of professional adult actors in devising a piece of theatre – to the IRB office. After reviewing this information and discussing your plans on the phone, the IRB determined that the following proposed activity is not human research as defined by DHHS regulations at 45 CFR 46 or FDA regulations at 21 CFR 50/56:

Type of Review: Not Human Research Determination
Project Title: Theatre project for Master's Thesis
Investigator: Jennifer Adams
Research ID: N/A

University of Central Florida IRB review and approval is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are to be made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, please contact the IRB office to discuss the proposed changes.

On behalf of the IRB Chair, Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, this letter is signed by:

Joanne Muratori
IRB Coordinator

cc: Earl Weaver

REFERENCES

- “About Us.” orlandorep.com. Orlando Repertory Theatre. n.d. Web. 3 March 2011
- Babb, Roger. "Ways of Working: Post-Open Theatre Performance and Pedagogy." *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*. Ed. James Martin. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2006. 106-24.
- Behrndt, Synne K. "People Show in Rehearsal." *Devising in Process*. Ed. Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 30-49.
- Bicât, Tina, and Chris Baldwin, eds. *Devised and Collaborative Theatre*. Marlborough, Wiltshire: Crowood, 2002.
- Boal, Augusto. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Trans. Adrian Jackson. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2002.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1991.
- Doyle, Clar. *Raising Curtains on Education: Drama as a Site for Critical Pedagogy*. Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1993.
- Fassett, Deanna L., and John T. Warren. *Critical Communication Pedagogy*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007.
- Graham, Scott, and Steven Hoggett. *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2009
- Greeley, Lynne. “Cut by the Cutting Edge: Martha Boesing and At the Foot of the Mountain.” *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*. Ed. James Martin. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2006. 129-149.

- Harding, James Martin, and Cindy Rosenthal, eds. *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2007.
- Heddon, Deirdre, and Jane Milling. *Devising Performance: A Critical History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Lerman, Liz, and John Borstel. *Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process*. Takoma Park, MD: Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, 2003.
- Lewis, Ferdinand. "Why Devise? Why Now?" *Theatre Topics* 15.1 (2005): 23-24.
- Magnat, Virginie. "Devising Utopia, or Asking for the Moon." *Theatre Topics* 15.1 (2005): 73-86.
- Malina, Judith. *The Diaries of Judith Malina: 1947-1957*. New York, NY: Grove, 1984.
- Mason, Susan Vaneta. "San Francisco Mime Troupe Legacy: Guerrilla Theatre." *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*. Ed. James Martin. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2006. 196-212.
- Mermikides, Alex, and Jackie Smart, eds. *Devising in Process*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Mermikides, Alex, and Jackie Smart, eds. *Devising in Process*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Morrow, Susanna, Gleason Bauer, and Joan Herrington. "Preparing to Devise." *Theatre Topics* 19.2 (2009): 125-38.
- Munk, Erika. "Only Connect: The Living Theatre and Its Audiences." *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*. Ed. James Martin. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2006. 33-55.
- Oddey, Alison. *Devising Theatre: a Practical and Theoretical Handbook*. London: Routledge,

2008.

Orenstein, Claudia. "Revolution Should Be Fun: A Critical Perspective on the San Francisco Mime Troupe." *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*. Ed. James Martin. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2006. 175-195.

Patinkin, Sheldon. *The Second City: Backstage at the World's Greatest Comedy Theatre*. Naperville, IL: Source, 2000.

Puchner, Martin. "The Performance Group between Theatre and Theory". *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*. Ed. James Martin. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2006. 313-331.

Reynolds, John, and Malcom Skilbeck. *Culture in the Classroom*. London: Open Books Publishing Ltd., 1976.

Ristau, Todd. "Iowa's No Shame Theatre." *The Drama Review* 34.1 (1990).

Sawyer, Robert Keith. *Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration*. New York, NY: Basic, 2008.

Solomon, Alisa. "Four Scenes of Theatrical Anarcho-Pacifism: A Living Legacy." *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*. Ed. James Martin. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2006. 56-74.

Spolin, Viola, Carol Sills, and Paul Sills. *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999.

UCF Conservatory Theatre Handbook. Orlando, FL: University of Central Florida Theatre, 2009.

Watt, David, and Graham Pitts. "Community Theatre as Political Activism: Some Thoughts on

Practice in the Australian Context." *Community and the Arts: History, Theory, Practice: Australian Perspectives*. Ed. Vivienne Binns. Leichhardt, NSW: Pluto, 1991. 119-33.

Wetzel, Liebe. "Why Devise? Why Now? Why Breathe?" *Theatre Topics* 15.1 (2005): 127-28.

"What is Innovation?" Department of State and Regional Development: Home page. New South Wales Government. 23 Apr. 2009.

<<http://www.business.nsw.gov.au/innovation/whatisinnovation.htm>>

"Writes of Spring." orlandorep.com. Orlando Repertory Theatre. n.d. Web. 3 March 2011.

Zaporah, Ruth. *Action Theatre: The Improvisation of Presence*. Berkley, CA: North Atlantic, 1995.