

CREATING ART THAT TRULY REFLECTS THE
COMMUNITY: AN EXPLORATION INTO FACILITATION
OF DEVISED, COMMUNITY-ENGAGED PERFORMANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

One purpose of community-engaged work is to build and reflect the community; to allow their voice to be heard. This research explores the relationship between the professional artist facilitator and participants in a community-engaged setting while applying devised theatre practices. The facilitating artist brings to the group their expertise in playmaking and storytelling. The research centers on how a facilitating artist might approach devising a community-engaged performance project with awareness of his/her ability to influence the group. How can the facilitator channel their influence to provide productive guidance for the collective creativity in order to honor the community's intent and minimize the distortion created by the facilitator's perspective? Are there guidelines that can be established in order to ensure that the community's voice is undiluted? I begin by engaging in dialogue with established current practitioners in the field and examining literature published on the subject with this goal in mind. From this research a roadmap of perils and pitfalls, signs to look for that indicate tension or discomfort within the group, and techniques and tips for productively refocusing the group's work have been created. The objective of the research is to formulate a philosophy on facilitation that aligns with my artistic mission and values, ensuring the work truly builds and reflects the communities from which it is produced.

For my Connie, who instilled in me a love of story and
taught me the value and worth of every individual.

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INTRODUCTION

Community-based artists interact with many people in constructing a piece and must contend with how much the piece is a reflection of the community or how much it is the community as seen through the lens of the artist.

Jan Cohen-Cruz (*Local Acts*, p. 116)

This thesis explores the facilitation process of devised, community-engaged theatre projects in an effort to outline a methodology for the best possible practice to effectively reflect the community. As with any artistic process, the energy of the room is affected by every individual present, including the facilitator – who is often an “outsider.” While the facilitator is always invited into the group to lead the work, there is no getting around the fact that this person is most often not someone who operates as a part of this community daily and, once the project is over, will leave that community. This aspect becomes key to the purity of the group work. Acknowledging that the energy is affected by all present, those who are a part of the community and those invited into the community for a short time, it is vital that the facilitator be aware of this precarious relationship and the implications surrounding it. I intend to investigate how one might facilitate a devised, community-engaged project with increased awareness of ability to influence, and how to channel that into productive guidance of the collective creativity in order to honor the community’s intent.

While in the past decade there has been more of a push to generate literature about devised and community-engaged work, few books focus specifically on the practice and technique of facilitation, instead opting to focus on specific projects, their content, and reflecting on their efficacy. This study will include not only a literature review on these topics, but also will look at group dynamics and conduct interviews focused on this topic with current practitioners in the field. No two projects of this nature are the same, which makes this quite challenging. This thesis does not propose to offer a conclusive way of working, but it offers an examination of best practices currently in use in order to act as a starting point for beginning practitioners.

Chapter one defines devised and community-engaged theatre work in order to provide a contextual background for the reader. Additionally, this chapter explores why these two practices are effective when used in conjunction with one another.

Chapters two, three, and four will examine facilitation practices and group dynamics through a series of interviews with current practitioners, a focus on two texts: *Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manuel* by Michael Rohd and *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* by Allison Oddey, and research of the field of group dynamics.

Chapters five and six are the culmination of the previous research in the creation and expression of a new philosophy and methodology for facilitation in of devised, community-engaged performance projects.

Chapter seven reflects upon the previous research and the newly-formed philosophy and methodology, highlighting crucial discoveries made and looking at the next steps that need to be taken in order to put this methodology into practice.

With no formal training in group dynamics or social work, I approached this study from the perspective of a theatre artist examining the process of her work, and the work of others, in order to reflect on the successes, challenges, and precarious moments in this work. My interest lies in what I can glean from this study that will continue to mold me into a practitioner who is perceptive and aware of the needs of the groups with whom I work. My hope is that future artists will benefit from this investigation in their endeavors to create art with communities.

CHAPTER ONE: TO DEFINE DEvised THEATRE AND COMMUNITY-ENGAGED THEATRE

What is Devising?

Put very simply, “devising” is a form of playbuilding. It is a method of creating a performance piece through an explorative and collaborative process utilizing a myriad of creative strategies and mediums. Championing the idea of the collective genius over the idea of the “genius playwright”, devised theatre strives to convey a collective meaning or understanding created within the process.

Although the act of “devising” is not new, the theorizing and documentation of devised theatre has come about only in the last fifty years. The form as we know it today began to develop in the 1960’s as a reaction to the dominant literary theatre tradition and, “challenges the prevailing ideology of one person’s text under another person’s direction” (Oddey, 4). Deidre Heddon and Jane Milling also point out in their book, *Devising Performance*, that there are many connections between the experimentations of form in the Historical Avant-Garde and processes that are utilized within devising. One example is the “paper bag” poems created by randomly drawing words from a hat used by Avant-Garde poet and performance artist Tristan Tzara; just one of many techniques that can be used when in the process of devising a performance piece. However, it was the companies formed in the late 60’s and early 70’s, searching for alternative methods by which to create performance that created the terminology and a context by which to dialogue about this method of playbuilding.

With changes in attitudes towards sexuality, the existing political and social climate in Britain, and censorship of the stage abolished, it is hardly surprising that theatrical expression found new ways of reflecting political upheaval and discontent. Devised theatre offered the opportunity to groups of artists to try out ideas or notions that were not text-led. It provided the potential for a designer, choreographer, or

performer to initiate a concept or starting point for performance. In turn, this encouraged the development of a performance language that included non-verbal forms (Oddey, 5).

In a sense, devising is a catch-all method for making performance in a collectively creative manner.

Due to the extremely flexible and experimental nature of devised theatre, there is no one model to look to when defining devised performance. The creative process can begin with any person, any idea, and happen in any space. Once the process has begun, the journey that is taken to create a performance piece is advanced by the energy and efforts of those involved. Despite the many variances from project to project, there are certain elements that all devised theatre share.

The first commonality is an emphasis on process. “The significance of this form of theatre is in the emphasis it places on an eclectic process requiring innovation, invention, imagination, risk, and above all, an overall group commitment to the developing work” (Oddey, 2). There is no set limit or time frame that is given when it comes to devising. These constraints are determined by the needs and desires of the group; performances can be created in a day or can take years to complete. Focusing on the process is about taking the time to explore, create, and reflect as a collective. The final performance piece is dependent entirely upon the process as groups work to discover the way and means to express their work.

The next feature that binds all devised works together is the importance of collaboration in creation. “A central reason for the large number of companies devising theatre in the 1970’s was the strong desire to work in an artistically democratic way” (Oddey, 8). Devising is about creating shared meaning and the inclusion of multiple perspectives in the telling of a story. There is some debate on just how many people are needed in this collaborative process. The examples of this work that are most

often cited have at minimum eight to ten people working together, but does that mean that it can't be done with only two?

Going hand-in-hand with collaboration, the integration of many ideas, beliefs, visions, etc. is a must for the creation of devised pieces. This is where I believe that two is simply not enough to meet this requirement. Having only two in a devising process would show only two perspectives on an issue, which fails to fall under the category of "many." The groups who come together to create devised pieces do so in a spirit that is open and accepting of a wide range of thoughts and attitudes, and believe it is important to share this spectrum of ideas. This is contrary to the dominant literary theatre tradition in which one person, the playwright, creates a story from a singular vision. This, too, links back to finding a more democratic way of working.

The last bit of common ground that all devised performances have in common is that the end-product is unknown until the group arrives there together. Certain elements about the final performance piece might be known; for example, if the inspiration for creating the piece is a specific location, the group might know where the performance will take place – although even that has been known to change. Stepping into a project with no idea what the end product will be is a great part of what makes devising so daunting. However, embracing this idea can also be creatively freeing and makes devising very exciting.

What is Community-engaged Performance?

There are many people (and I am among them) who believe that everyone is an artist; that everyone has within them the ability to create and express their ideas in a meaningful and powerful way. Community-engaged performance is a field of practice that allows and encourages all the "non-practicing" artists in the community to work alongside professional artists to create and express a collective meaning through performance. This work also is known in the United States as community-

based theatre, and around the world it is also referred to as participatory arts and community theatre. For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen the term community-engaged performance because I feel this title is more encompassing of the multi-disciplinary nature of the work and truer to the essence of the relationships developed within it. Jan Cohen Cruz states that “the term ‘engaged’ foregrounds the relationships at the heart of making art with such aspirations, and dependence on a genuine exchange, between artist and community such that the one is changed by the other” (*Engaging Performance* 3).

Community-engaged performance is a practice grounded in and born from traditional ceremonies, rituals, and folk culture all over the world. Parades, pageants, and festivals all contain within them performative elements that are enmeshed with the communities in which they occur. An example from Irish folk drama would be the performance of the mummers around the Christmas season who would show up at people’s houses, concealing their identity and seeking admittance. “One’s response to the captain of the mummers was a response delivered not just to them but also through them to the community as whole” (Pilkington, 39). Upon admittance, there would be singing, dancing, recitation of poems, and an enactment of a well-known folk-story. Every performance was different, however, as with each different region or location references were made to specific citizens and events within that community. Often the members of the household that had been taken over would also participate in the performance, rather than sit as a passive audience. It is from this type of tradition that community-engaged performance grows. In her book, *Local Acts: Community-based Performance in the United States*, Cohen-Cruz asserts, “its immediate roots are in the turbulent 1960’s and early 1970’s, when nationwide questioning of the status quo led to significant expansion of art” (*Local Acts*, 1).

In the 1960’s, artists began to question and play with the ideas of who could create art, where it could happen, subject matter, and audience. This led a great many artists to look to “the local”. By the end of the twenty-first century, community-engaged performance had established it-self as a field (*Local*

Acts, 1). Underpinning community-engaged work is the idea of active culture; that people often get more from creating art than simply viewing the product of someone else's creativity. The field is extremely diverse in intent, as well as the form it takes and the methodology used to create the performances. While social change may be the purpose of one project, cultural preservation is the focus of another. The performances can range from full-scale theatrical productions enacted by the community participants to a dance piece performed by professional artists to the recitation of gathered narratives in a site-specific location. The techniques employed in creating these pieces include, but are not limited to, devising, storytelling circles, movement-based explorations, and written testimonials. The practitioners in this field are constantly exploring and incorporating new ideas and methodologies into their work in order to discover new ways to engage with communities that speaks to the contemporary society we live in today.

The relationship between the artist-practitioner and the participants in each project is meant to be mutually beneficial, as each party comes into the project with specific knowledge required to see it through. The participants bring the knowledge of their lives, which informs the content, while the artist-practitioner brings knowledge of the theatrical techniques that inform the shape of any given piece. "The combination of artists and people with a tale to tell is the sine qua non of this field" (*Local Acts*, 20). There is a huge emphasis on process and participant experience in this work due to the need to build these relationships, not only between the artist-practitioner and the participants but the relationships amongst the participants. The process generally consists of training during beginning workshops in order to introduce any new techniques and ways of working, workshops in which material is generated for the performance, rehearsals, performances, reflection on the entire project, and the aftermath of the project, including sustainability and archiving of the project. The process and these experiences are what determine the end-product and how it will be presented to the larger community. However, not all community-engaged theatre practices culminate in a final performance piece.

Workshops in the community can stand alone and hold their own meaning and purpose for the participants who share in the work that is generated.

Various methodologies are used in the creation of community-engaged performances. A very popular approach is the use of personal stories that come from the participants. The stories can be factual or fictional, but the important thing is that they allow for self-representation. The stories can be used verbatim or simply as a prompt for further exploration through physical work, music, or visual devices. Devising is also a widely used tool in the creation of these pieces, using the personal stories as source material, an image, a place, etc. Through improvisation exercises, participants can create their own world in the moment and explore a range of possibilities available to them dependent upon the topic being explored. Writing in character is another tool utilized in the exploration of various subjects. For example, prompted by the image of a woman protesting in a participant's community from fifty years prior, the participant may be asked to step into that role and write a monologue about that experience or the aftermath of it. Additionally, sometimes a play or written work is chosen and a community engages with it in an effort to highlight specific movements/happenings that coincide with the material and their community. The possibilities for entry into this work are bound only by the artist-practitioner's and participants' creativity.

Also key to the work are research and reflection. A large quantity of the research involved is in working with participants in the community. However, it is important to research specific locations and sites that may be utilized in a project to ensure the sites speak to the ethos of the project at hand. Researching throughout the exploration of the work is also vital, again to ensure the work stays true to its collective intent – which can change during the course of the work. Reflection is used throughout and as a follow-up to a great deal of community-engaged work. The times of reflection aid the group in coming together to dialogue about what has been shared, where the work may go, and as a tool for the

artist-practitioner to check the pulse of the group for their thoughts and feelings towards where the piece is headed. As a follow-up, reflections allow the participants to collectively and individually process the meaning that the project has had and will have for them.

Next it is important to address what is meant by the term “community”. What makes up a community? How are communities formed? Often the idea of “community” is established by location, religion, and/or race. In her book, *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*, Helen Nicholson speaks to communities that are formed as a result of location, identity, and what she calls “imagined communities”. These imagined communities are created when “people maintain feelings of connectedness” (Nicholson, 84) with each other despite geographical location or common identifiers, such as religion, race, politics, etc. Each artist practitioner must decide for themselves what communities they choose to work with, despite what it is that binds them together.

Whatever the aesthetic tools and methodologies used in the creation of the work, artist-practitioners collaborate with a group of people whose experiences and knowledge inform the subject, and together, they work to create a collective vision that reflects the community. “Pettitt (2003) states: ‘Everyone needs recognition and is deserving of it. Everyone has a voice and something to say. If they’re put in the right circumstances together, all they need is a little thing to ignite it. And it will fly, fly on its own’ (*Local Acts*, 135). Community-engaged performance opens the possibility for anyone and everyone to share their voice and a means for it to be heard by the larger community. For this reason, it is usually very specific to the individuals of the community in which it takes place, as well as specific of the time it takes place in. This is not to say that viewers from outside of the community would not gain from viewing or participating in the performance of a piece; “personal essayist Montaigne avows that the most deeply individualized is at the same time the most universal” (*Local Acts*, 129).

Why Pair Devised Theatre with Community-engaged Performance?

When I think about the one feature that draws me to theatre, it is story. I have had a love of stories my entire life, and I quickly learned that the theatre was a place for sharing stories. As I matured, I began to question whose stories were being told and why. I have always firmly believed that everyone has a story to tell, many in fact. I have also always firmly believed that theatre is a place for everyone; it is a truly democratic art form that is meant to be shared and utilized by all. These beliefs are what have led me to focus on the field of community-engaged performance – a practice that allows for trained, professional artists to work with citizen-artists.

I have looked at various formats used in the creation of Community-engaged pieces and have found that some models, as Jan Cohen-Cruz pointed out, can look like colonialism. Artists, “mine the raw material, all that experience and all those stories. Then they leave with the natural resources and make their own art out of them” (*Local Acts*, 91). Worse than that, “artists with liberatory goals imposing their monologic perspectives rather than engaging dialogically with a community” (*Engaging Performance*, 6) often employ theatrical techniques in a manner reminiscent of Augusto Boal’s claim that theatre is a weapon that is often used to oppress. The idea behind community-engaged performance is that it is a liberating experience; a chance for a community to let their voice be heard. This is a very big reason why I have come to embrace the model of devising performances when working in the field of community-engaged performance. “Devising reflects the belief that all of us can be expressive in ways worth of attention, gesturing towards the democratic impulse in engaged work” (*Engaging Performance*, 5).

Looking at the two practices side-by-side it is very easy to understand why the two are so complementary. Both practices place a large emphasis on process, allowing the process to dictate what the end-product will look like (if there is one). In both practices the goal is to collaborate with others (others being artists of any discipline, as well as citizen-artists) in order to express collective meaning. In

order to do this, both practices encourage the use of multiple disciplines and appeal to multiple modalities in their aesthetic. Due to the large emphasis on process, the result of these practices is generally that they create and strengthen the group that comes together to create the work, thus resulting in the formation of a new community.

Through the devising process, “participants make sense of themselves within their own cultural and social context, investigating, integrating, and transforming their personal experiences, dreams, research, improvisation, and experimentation” (Oddey, 1). This byproduct of the devising process reinforces a major idea behind community-engaged performance; that it allows communities to come together and dialogue about issues important to them, while at the same time allowing individuals to find their own meaning and voice within the larger context of the collective.

As an artist practitioner, what really compels me to fuse these two practices together are the concepts of community and collaboration; that these two so beautifully allow for dialogue within a community, a democratic process that allows every participant to give, and an opportunity for all involved to have their knowledge and skillset appreciated and utilized to its full potential.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERARY REVIEW

In consideration of the goal to facilitate a devised, community-engaged performance piece in which the product is a true reflection of the participants and not colored or manipulated by the facilitator/director's views, I will begin my research by looking at two books: *Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue: The Hope Is Vital Training Manual* by Michael Rohd and *Devising Theatre: a Practical and Theoretical Handbook* by Alison Oddey. These books were chosen because they each provide meaningful insight into the various components of this research. Michael Rohd's book focuses primarily on community-engaged theatre-making, while Alison Oddey's book is centralized around devising theatre in various respects (including models that represent community-engaged performance.) I explored these books with a specific intent to extract facilitation techniques, recommendations for planning a workshop, and signs/signals to be aware of in order to be more sensitive to the wants and needs of the participants. I identify these elements in order to reflect upon the choices and observations, and then analyze them for use in the creation of my facilitation methodology.

Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue: The Hope Is Vital Training Manual by Michael Rohd

The Hope is Vital program was started in 1992 when Michael Rohd began to work with men and women in HIV clinics in the Washington, D.C. area using theatre as a medium for learning and creating dialogue centered on HIV education. At the time, Rohd was teaching at a school in the area and invited his students to join him at the clinic in a series of workshops. From these workshops, the idea to continue this kind of work in schools developed, and a year later twenty workshops had been held in schools in the Washington, D.C. area. At this point, Rohd left the group in Washington, D.C. to continue working and set out on the road to share these practices and ideas with communities across the United States. Over the years he has expanded the practices and techniques used as a part of Hope is Vital to

deal with various other topics, such as violence and teen pregnancy – to name a few. “The beauty of this work as a medium for dialogue is that it is specific to the individuals with whom it occurs and to the moment in which it occurs” (Rohd, xvii).

At the core of the Hope is Vital program are several beliefs: - That “theatre is healing” (Rohd, xv) and “education is dialogue” (Rohd, xvii). Rohd views dialogue as essential to humanity and, along with his collaborators, developed a methodology of utilizing theatre to create dialogue with various community groups in an effort to collectively learn and educate the participants and each other on the varying topics and, well, life. His views align closely with Brazilians Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) and Augusto Boal (*Theatre of the Oppressed*) as his practice focuses on learning through the act of doing and his incorporation of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed techniques into his own practice. The mission statement for the program highlights the intention of the work and the motives of the facilitators:

Mission Statement

Hope is Vital poses questions. It does *not* offer answers.

Audience/Participants propose answers. Together, everyone looks at options. It does not declare right and wrong. It does not seek single solutions. It seeks discussion, trust, and a step forward in each person’s ability to take care of themselves and look at their world with compassion. Theatrically, the goal is to work together to create theatre, which will engage, strike, and stimulate the audience; to give them the desire and the need to participate actively – in their work, in these moments of theatre, and in their own lives. (Rohd, xviii)

Emphasizing that there are no right or wrong answers, as well as the desire for unlimited solutions, resonated strongly with my desire as a facilitator to let the voices of participants shine through. Additionally, the focus on generating dialogue and creating theatre collectively aligns nicely with the agenda set out in this thesis. The techniques, tools, tips, and activities outlined in the book *Hope is Vital: Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue* are informed by years of experience using theatre to work with communities and allows this book to be a wonderful base for beginning this research.

Rohd described the model for creating a workshop or series of workshops laid out in this book as an arc. This model begins with warm-ups, moves into bridge activities, and finally activating material. What he is setting out in this structure is a manageable way to scaffold ideas/concepts. He stresses that the activities/games described are not just for fun, but they are building blocks to be used purposefully throughout the process. In each of the chapters devoted to the three stages of the arc described by Rohd there are suggested activities, and while there are recommendations, he makes a point to say that these blocks can and should be moved around to suit different needs/purposes.

Warm-ups seem like an obvious place to start, but what is important, and Rohd points this out, is knowing why you are warming up and what you hope to accomplish. For his purposes, Rohd states, “the goal is to demechanize the body and mind and to engage responses that are fresh and utterly in the moment” (Rohd, 4). Additionally, he says warm-ups are for getting groups to play together in a safe space, energizing the space the group will be working in, and creating a sense of comfort in working together to complete specific tasks/activities. In the early stages of this work, it is crucial to create a sense of comfort, as well as build/strengthen the connections within a group. Not only are the warm ups for the mind and body of the individual participants, but also to warm up the group to each other. It is important to note that this arc (warm-ups, bridge activities, activating material) is not only used for the entire series of workshops, but also within each individual workshop. This goes back to having an

understanding of why you are warming up; do you need the group to focus? Energize? Build trust?

Depending on your needs, the warm-ups may vary. Rohd speaks to the idea of creating a sense of ritual within the structure of the sessions to allow for a sense of security for the participants.

Moving into the bridge activities, Rohd says the goal shifts to theatricalizing the space, “to take advantage of the energy generated during the warm-ups and to begin focusing on imagination and issues” (Rohd, 49). The activities outlined in this section are a bit higher risk and involve a deeper level of commitment from the participants. Always referring back to the building blocks metaphor, Rohd speaks a great deal to how to tie warm-up activities into bridge activities so they build upon each other. The benefits to this are that participants are familiar with the technique and become more comfortable, and it also provides a sense of trust in how the work relates to the bigger picture.

To complete the arc, the creation of activating material as the final step is explained. The group has been brought to a point where they are able to create scenes that allow for exploration of a topic. Activation scenes do not prescribe a solution or remedy to a problem, but rather simply present a problem/conflict. Once the scene is over, there is group discussion and solutions are asked for and explored by allowing participants to take the places of the protagonist or antagonist in the scene to try out their ideas and have the opportunity to see what the outcome might be. This is very similar to Boal’s Forum Theatre approach. While activating material can be a part of the devising process for a performance, it does not have to be the end-product or the only approach taken. It is at this last stage in the arc that Rohd’s goals/intentions with the workshops described in this book vary with the goals of creating a devised theatre performance with the participants.

Although the intention for this thesis is not the same as the end-goal with the workshops outlined by Rohd in this book, the underlying ideas of creating community, building trust, playing, exploring, and imagination skills are equally important to both processes and, although there may be a

need to extend the arc for the purposes of this thesis, there is great use to be found in this basic model. The idea of scaffolding activities/using them as building blocks to develop trust, comfort, and build skills within the group necessitates the need for extremely careful planning and analysis of activities used by constant questioning of what the goal is to be achieved and how best to get there. The imagery of the arc also allows for fluctuation and adapting to the needs of the group as opposed to thinking of the work in a linear fashion that only goes one direction. Thinking about the basic structure and planning for a series of workshops is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the wealth of information that can be mined from this book in regards to facilitating workshops in a community setting. Throughout, Rohd provides tips and insights into the fine art that is facilitation, which will be addressed next.

When beginning work with a new group, Rohd has several suggestions for facilitation and at the core of these is honesty. "When beginning this type of group work, it's important to take some time and discuss what participants want and need to see happen in order for the space to feel safe." (Rohd, 5) Additionally he urges facilitators not to withhold information about the process, but rather to be open about what is happening or going to happen. Having a dialogue with the group about establishing clear signals and definitions for working is also encouraged. Setting up an atmosphere of open communication where every person's input is welcome and honored is the first step towards building community within the group.

Early on, Rohd encourages facilitators to make sure the participants get a chance to work with everyone in the group. He does this for two reasons: 1. So participants meet new people; and 2. So those who are familiar with each other do not become distracted or distracting. This also allows for another opportunity to build/strengthen community. That said, Rohd makes a point to say that people should be allowed to participate at their own comfort level. Participants should be encouraged, not forced to participate. This is another area where this kind of work can become tricky. The progress of

the group depends entirely upon the group's participation. So, the question becomes how to make it impossible for people not to participate. Rohd advises walking into the room with the energy and enthusiasm required. "You create an environment with its own energy and demand that they come up to it." (Rohd, 113) Participants come into the room with baggage from their day which puts each individual at a different level, and it is important the group find a place to be together. While this advice is sound, it is important to consider what form this energy and enthusiasm may take on any given day with different groups. Sometimes high, bouncy, and exuberant energy may be called for. Other situations might require a calmer, focused energy that is no less enthusiastic about the work.

In leading activities, Rohd promotes the use of task-related discipline. This is described as simply reminding participants what the goal of the game/activity is and directing focus back to that goal, instead of reprimanding a participant for not following directions; "Support, not scolding, and constant reminding that we had to accomplish certain things as a group before we could move to the next level was much more productive." (Rohd, 29) While playing games, Rohd also recommends you stop playing when the interest level peaks in order to ensure energy for the next time the game is played. This advice feels a little contrary to the natural impulse to continue playing something that appears to be working and gaining momentum and energy; however, if it helps to generate energy and enthusiasm for the work being done, it may well be worth trying.

There is a great deal of emphasis in the book placed on the idea of silence. Many of the games and activities Rohd describes are done in silence. He urges facilitators not to be scared of silence, but rather to use silence. He advocates that "silence insists on a form of communication that speech often does not convey." (Rohd, 76) Used properly, silence can sharpen focus and intention on how participants relate to one another, rather than idle chatter filling up a space. Silence forces people to

find different ways to communicate, to be creative, and it also forces people to really think about exactly what they want to say and how.

When moving into activities that require more imagination, there are two main concepts Rohd feels necessary to address. The first idea is making sure participants know that when they are doing image work, there is no right or wrong answer. It is important to know every image holds a certain truth for the creator(s) and the observer(s). This is not only to help relax participants but is also preemptive in stopping arguments over “right” and “wrong”. The second idea that must be shared and constantly enforced is that creating material within the group is not about entertaining the group, but it is about an honest human response. While this can take pressure off people because they don’t have to try to be funny or clever, this is still incredibly high risk, because it does require genuine responses and reactions. For the purposes of the devising process this thesis centers on, it may not be necessary to discourage humor, wit, and the playfulness that comes with it, but rather to find a balance the group is comfortable with.

After each activity/game, time is given to reflect on what the group has just experienced. Reflections generally consist of listening to observations, asking questions, and dialoguing as a group. During this time, and throughout when talking with the group, Rohd recommends trying to be nonjudgmental, not putting people on the spot, and not allowing participants to directly respond to anyone else’s opinion. This advice is to help avoid conflict, but also to help avoid alienating any single person in the group. When asking questions, Rohd writes, “ask every question truly wanting to hear the answer.” (115) This may seem like common sense, but keeping this in mind will really challenge a facilitator to ask questions that are meaningful instead of asking questions to fill time. This also increases the opportunity for participants to feel “heard.” If the facilitator is engaged and invested, it increases the chances that everyone else will be too. If the facilitator is asking questions they don’t seem

interested in hearing the answer to, participants also will start to disengage. Additionally, in regards to questions, Rohd says they should be used to push the group to think and consider options. This goes back to the idea of the building blocks and how one game/activity should lead into another; questions should help grow the work.

During reflection times, there are a few more pointers/tips that Rohd shares. He recommends echoing responses back to the group after each participant speaks, challenging apathy/surface responses, and letting groups work out disputes on their own. The first recommendation can have great value in that it allows extra time to process what has been said and it allows for the speaker to hear if he/she has been correctly understood. The one drawback to this technique is it may impede the idea of the group having a dialogue, since everything said at that point will be happening through the facilitator. Making a point to challenge apathy can be dangerous, because it can either open and deepen a conversation or cause a participant to shut down. However, it does remind the group about what the point is of the work. Lastly, stepping back and letting groups work disputes out again seems contrary to a gut reaction of wanting to solve a problem. The wisdom in this last recommendation is that (barring physical violence) it does force group to communicate with one another and solve problems together, which is what the point/goal is of many of the warm-up activities/games.

Throughout the book, Rohd also spends time addressing being aware of a groups' needs. "A lot of the process rests on moments where you have to gauge where your group is at and where they want to go." (Rohd, 124) He puts forth that you shouldn't be afraid to ask the group outright how they are feeling/what they are thinking. Once again, this may seem obvious, but it is so easy to fall into the pitfall of making assumptions. However, not all participants may feel comfortable sharing verbally, so physical cues must be looked for. In regards to personal needs, Rohd recommends letting participants take care of themselves. Although a facilitator should encourage participants to push themselves, it is important

to empower participants to take responsibility for their own well-being. While Rohd points out that a facilitator must watch and be aware of the group dynamics, there isn't a lot of information given on exactly what signs/indicators to look for in order to gain information.

Rohd ends his section on facilitation by saying, "your strength is your own self and your own style." (127) One of the things that can make this work so exciting is that it is specific and unique to every group that comes together, and this includes the facilitator. Each facilitator has their own personality that brings something fresh to the table and he encourages it be used to full advantage. However, while making sure to be genuine as a person and facilitator, he adds that you must be willing to listen, learn, "challenge your creative self" (127), and trust in dialogue.

Because a large portion of Rohd's work centers on building trust and creating moments of genuine exchange and dialogue among participants, many of the techniques and tips he discusses can be applied in the practice of devised, community-engaged performance. When Rohd speaks of the very first workshop he held with his students, he says, "we played together, we laughed, we told stories, we shared awkward silences, we improvised, and we began to create theatre..." (Rohd, xvi) This is the type of environment needed to devise with communities. Although some of the techniques and tools extracted from this text may need to be altered to suit the purposes of the work that this thesis focuses on, it has nonetheless been an invaluable exploration.

Devising Theatre: A Practical & Theoretical Handbook by Alison Oddey

At the time of writing this book, Alison Oddey was a lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Kent and had been devising for almost twenty years. Now, she is a Professor in Contemporary Performance and Visual Arts at the University of Northampton. This is the first text written to attempt to theorize the technique of devised theatre. Oddey uses this text not only to explain what devising is, but she also shares information on how it is done using various models of theatre

companies who employ devising as a primary method of working. She charts out the entire process of creating a devised performance piece, from funding to management to creation and performance. This research is confining the exploration of this topic to the art of facilitation; planning the process and leading workshops/rehearsals.

“The most fundamental requirement for devising theatre is a passion or desire to say something, a need to question or make sense of a starting point that encourages you to investigate further through a variety of processes and close enquiry.” (Oddey, 42) When beginning work in a devising process, Oddey is very clear that the group working together must decide on several factors before beginning to create. First, she says, a group must decide what they want to devise and why, then they must decide the context of the work, who the intended audience is, and, finally, what form this performance will take. These prerequisites for beginning devising work may be important to professional acting troupes who are creating together, but less important in a community-engaged setting. When beginning work, a community may or may not know what it is they want to say just yet. The community that has been formed may not be familiar with one another because they may be brought together because they attend the same school or live in the same community, despite not socializing in the same circles. In cases such as this, beginning with what Oddey has set forth would be almost impossible; however, there are elements of what she has put forth that still can be answered by a group of strangers coming together. The main question of “why” can most certainly be answered by the group, and perhaps this should be a key starting point for the work.

After the prerequisites as stated by Oddey have been established, she recommends establishing as a group how and where to begin the process together. She goes on to state that sometimes groups may not have much of choice in the “where” because it is dependent upon the resources available to the group. The issue of discussing “how” to begin devising also becomes a sticking point. Often times

community groups and citizen-artists have very limited or no experience in devising, so how are they going to be able to dialogue about how to begin? Again, this practice fits in very well with the model of devising theatre that uses a collection of professional artists but is lacking for the citizen-artist in the community. Once the group has started and is comfortable with the process, perhaps it would then be a possibility to have this conversation in the midst of the process to decide how to continue.

When it comes to generating ideas and suggestions, Oddey says they must come from the group. Many techniques of how to do this are mentioned in the book. The one that aligns itself most closely with this thesis is the technique of starting from the self, or the group self. This involves storytelling and sharing of personal ideas and experiences within the group. Another technique is to take a preliminary idea from the group and use large pieces of paper to get responses from the group to questions around that idea. Whatever technique used, Oddey says it must come from the group; even if there is research involved, she recommends having the group/participants do the research themselves. This allows for even greater ownership of the piece by the participants.

In these initial meetings, Oddey also recommends identifying “potential tools” (42) within the group. By this she means learning about the various talents that may be hiding in the group, such as painting, knowing how to play a musical instrument, or skill at a certain sport or game. All these talents or tools can add to the creative energy of the room by effecting what methods are chosen for devising and how thoughts/ideas are expressed.

Moving into beginning workshops, Oddey’s recommendations are very similar to Rohd’s. She recommends “games that encourage group creativity, concentration and trust, improvisation, and relaxation, as well as ways of focusing discussion, decision-making, and leadership.” (172) From the very start, she stresses the importance of establishing “a shared feeling of participation at the beginning of a session.” (172) This is done by playing games and doing activities that involve total group participation.

She veers away from prescribing any set list of games and activities because she acknowledges that every group is different and the leader (as she puts it) or facilitator must adjust to the needs of the group he/she is working with. "In the early stages of devising, it is important for a company to explore and experiment with a range of stimuli, to understand how the group operates in different situations." (Oddey, 25) This statement shines awareness on the fact that every group is different, and therefore the process will be unique and must cater to them. If the best practice is to explore the range of entryways into the work, then understanding how to observe and choose how best to move forward is imperative.

When it comes to leading devising, Oddey states that "leadership is essential in order to focus direction, establish the way forward, and maintain an overall eye on the developing work." (105) She advises against completely communal devising, because in her experience she has seen a need for an outside eye. "Watching the different devising processes of professional companies has enabled me to clarify how a lack of communication creates confusion between people to the extent that a group can complicate subject matter into six areas instead of clearly focusing on one, which, in turn, emphasizes the importance of an outside commentator on the work." (Oddey, 155) These observations give even more credibility to the purpose and need for a facilitator in devised, community-engaged performance processes.

Throughout the devising process, Oddey stresses, "The making and examination of work 'on the floor' is the most important aspect of devising theatre for any group, because it moves the process forward practically towards the creation of the product." (168) Although reflection and dialogue is important, and will be discussed a little later, Oddey has found in her studies that "there is no substitute for exploration and experimentation of ideas, knowing that all can be abandoned, and that the possibility to start again is always there." (168) This advice warns against spending too much time talking and debating and more time trying ideas out, putting them on their feet.

In regards to techniques she finds helpful, Oddey “finds that the construction of images is a useful means of clarifying ideas” (193) and recommends using image work whenever communication problems arise. Like Rohd, she too favors improvisation and also warns that “these introductory exercises can produce a tendency towards rather shallow improvisation at first, with unreal characters, conversations, and situations.” (184) Her recommendation is to address this issue as a group and come to an understanding before continuing on. Oddey’s solution to this challenge aids not only in working through the issue but also in building community. Instead of stating a guideline or rule about not trying to “entertain”, this allows for dialogue and for the group to have a say in what they would like to see.

Throughout the process, Oddey stresses “that constant clarification of original aims and objectives are vital” (46) and there is a need to analyze and evaluate the work being done as it is happening. She doesn’t say whose responsibility this must be, simply that it must occur. To aid in this, Oddey recommends keeping a log book of the progress that is made in each session. Additionally, she suggests the leader/facilitator should keep pen and paper nearby to write down observations as they occur. Once again, she does not prescribe whose responsibility it is to keep the log book, only that it is a good practice. Oddey also says that a balance is needed between discussions, analysis, and “on the floor” work. If a group finds themselves “stuck” in the work and they have spent a great deal of time in one of these areas, a switch is needed in order to get out of the rut.

Although Oddey champions “thinking on your feet” (155), a certain amount of reflecting and brainstorming must happen as well. Like Rohd, she encourages the asking of questions, but warns against asking closed questions that not only narrow focus (perhaps too soon), but also do not allow as much freedom in answering for the participants. When having a group discussion, she recommends exploring various ways of structuring the conversation, “such as appointing a chairperson to lead, intervene as necessary, and summarize points of agreement. Try a system of everyone having the

opportunity to speak in turn, rather than random ideas being offered by the same members, or those people with the loudest voice or the strongest personality.” (Oddey, 170) Additionally, she offers the idea of using sub-committees in discussion and problem-solving and then having the committees come together to share and the use of sheets of large paper put on the wall to aid in visualizing what is being discussed (she also recommends this technique when it comes to structuring the performance piece, if there is no playwright involved). All these ideas offered are wonderful tools for engaging the group in healthy dialogue, but Oddey also has an interesting take on disagreements.

“Disagreement is a healthy way to select, clarify, and simplify choice of materials and methods of procedures. The danger comes in everyone compromising to the lowest common denominator, which means starting from a mediocre position.” (Oddey, 25) This statement recalls Rohd’s advice to let participants argue issues and supports the practice even more by bringing up the idea of compromising to a point where no one is satisfied. Disagreements must be able to be solved by the group, and in the same vein, criticism must be welcome. Founding member of The People Show (a company specializing in devised works), Mark Long believes that “the artists themselves are the best critics, and that an inability to criticize each other is an unhealthy option.” (Oddey, 44) This presents the added challenge of getting groups comfortable enough with each other to give and receive criticism, which relates back to the importance of the introductory games and activities to establish a sense of community. It also needs to be said that the idea of constructive criticism should also be discussed, in order to avoid having participants slander ideas simply because they belong to someone else, etc.

Another warning Oddey gives is to allow plenty of time for rehearsal. She has observed and experienced that often the devising process will go on for so long that there is too little time left at the end to rehearse the piece before performance. Making sure to plan ahead to give time for rehearsal does not always work because each process has its own time. In order to help manage this, Oddey

recommends incorporating deadlines for specific activities and also even planning a viewing of the “work in progress.” These recommendations still allow for freedom, but also provide a sense of urgency and remind the group that there is an end in sight.

With all of the techniques and recommendations offered, Oddey also speaks to being aware of the group’s dynamics (just as Rohd did). In addition to this, Oddey offers up two suggestions, one for the group as a whole and the other for the leader/facilitator. For the facilitator, she strongly recommends Boal’s methods for becoming more aware of the dynamics within a group of people. In her experience, these techniques have proven themselves to be helpful. In regards to the group, she says, “it is the participants who have to find their own dynamics as a group and be responsible to themselves.” (Oddey, 150) This idea is very similar to what Rohd suggested about allowing participants to be responsible for themselves, but takes it a step further in saying that as a whole the participants should also take responsibility for the group as well.

Oddey’s book is extremely insightful when it comes to the process of devising and how the structure works, despite not having a fixed structure. However, when it comes to the most essential element of devising theatre, Oddey says:

Researching and observing contemporary British professional devised theatre practice in recent years confirms my own experience of sixteen years: that devising is dependent on people, their life experiences and motivation, why and what they want to devise, and the pathfinder process chosen by them to explore their particular set of circumstances.

(148)

At the core, devising is concerned with people, with collaboration and communication between people. Although the information and guidelines in this text often addresses the professional acting company,

working with professional artists, the techniques and tips are still often transferable to working in the community-engaged setting because when it all boils down, it is really all about a group of people coming together to create.

CHAPTER THREE: A LOOK INTO GROUP DYNAMICS

What is Group Dynamics and Why is it Important to this Study?

According to Donelson R. Forsyth, group dynamics is “the influential actions, processes, and changes that occur within and between groups over time” and also “the scientific study of those processes.” (2) Throughout time the study of group dynamics has been approached from two points of view; an individual-level analysis that focuses on the individual within the group and a group-level analysis that focuses on the unit of the group as a whole. Both approaches have added insight into how people in groups tend to function and under what conditions they thrive or fail. At a very fundamental level, the work done in a devised, community-engaged performance piece relies on the group/community that has formed to undertake the task. In order that this researcher and future facilitators should better guide groups/communities through this process, an investigation into the field of group dynamics is imperative.

Understanding Groups

In his book, *Group Dynamics: Basics and Pragmatics for Practitioners*, Norris M. Haynes explains that what separates a group from a crowd or an assembly is a common purpose, shared values, and shared norms. (7) A shared purpose and values is self-explanatory; however, what Haynes means by shared norms is a shared sense of how the group should proceed and interact with each other. One example would be rules within a classroom setting. Additionally, while pointing out that there are many ways in which groups differ from one another, Forsyth states there are five common characteristics of groups: interaction, goals, interdependence, structure, and unity. (10) By this he means that individuals within groups communicate with each other and depend on each other for the success of common aims. In order to do this, groups must operate within a framework defined by the group and perform as a unified whole. The quality or success of a group often is reflected in the group’s cohesion, or “the strength of the bonds linking individuals to and in the group.” (Forsyth, 9) The greater the group’s

cohesion, the more successful the group will be. This relates back to Rohd's emphasis on building trust and respect within the group to build/strengthen community. In order to better understand how groups function, this section is going to explore the different types of groups, elements that affect group structure and progress, the various stage development of groups, and benefits of groups.

Haynes divides groups into two very large categories; functional groups, defined more by what they are designed to accomplish, and identity groups, defined by what the individuals in the group have in common. (8) Groups formed for the purpose of creating a piece of theatre are functional groups, but because of the nature of community-engaged performance, many times they can often also be identity groups. Forsyth speaks to four different classifications of groups which he labels primary groups (made up of family and friends), collectives (large, spontaneous gatherings of people), categories (individuals that share a common bond), and social groups (a small number of individuals who interact with each other over an extended period of time.) (10-13) Within these parameters, a group/community formed for the purposes of creating a performance would be termed a social group, and might also be considered a category. Now that a better understanding of groups and the varied types of groups has been established, knowledge of how groups function is required.

"Norms are a fundamental element of a group's structure, for they provide direction and motivation, organize social interactions, and make other people's responses predictable and meaningful." (Forsyth, 145) Haynes states that norms are either explicit (openly expressed) or implicit, which means they evolve during the group process. (26) When it comes to establishing group norms, Haynes believes that "as much as possible, it is important for the group facilitator to allow group members to generate their own norms" because it leads to greater commitment and adherence to the established norms. (26) Two methods for establishing group norms are offered by Haynes. The first strategy is simply to write down all ideas put forth by the group and then discuss those ideas and

collectively decide upon which ones will be kept. The second method offered involves making columns that will help clarify what groups members would like to get from the group and what they are willing to give to get what they want. After these two columns have been filled, a third column is made by combining the two that will contain the established norms. In this way, the group can feel ownership over the process they are going to be working in, as well as have comfort in knowing how the group will operate and what is expected of them. Haynes also addresses the violation of group norms, saying “it is important for the group facilitator to confront (point out) group members’ violations of group norms and invite feedback from other group members regarding norm violations.” (26) The risk of letting a violation go unacknowledged means taking the chance of losing the group’s trust within the group, as well as in the facilitator.

Within each group there is a prevailing atmosphere or climate that dictates how the group will operate. This atmosphere is directly affected by the leadership style (autocratic, democratic, or laissez-faire) being used. The first type coincides with a democratic leadership style; it is a group-centered climate in which “group members set the tone and drive the group’s dynamics.” (Haynes 33) In a leader-centered climate, the leader/facilitator controls the group’s activities and “group members tend to orient their behavior toward the leader rather than to one another.” (Haynes 33) Leader-centered climates are linked to a more autocratic form of leadership. The laissez-faire leadership style is associated with no clear leadership or organization. This research will focus more on the group-centered climate and democratic form of leadership because it more closely aligns with the goals of the research. Within this type of climate all group members’ views are heard and respected by all individuals in the group, as well as the leader. Democratic leadership requires there be open and direct communication amongst the group and leader and the leader actively seeks to engage and involve group members in the process.

In addition to the social atmosphere, the physical atmosphere a group is working in also affects the group's dynamics. If the group is physically comfortable in their environment, they are more likely to be at ease and be more productive and creative. Although this might vary from group to group, Forsyth points out three variables that make for stressful environments: extremes in temperature, large amounts of noise, and dangerous settings. (447) Making a point to find a physical environment that avoids these three factors will help ensure the comfort of the group members.

In groups and throughout group processes, individuals will take on different roles, and it is important for individuals to have a clear understanding of what their role is. Haynes divides these roles into three categories: task roles, group building roles, and individual roles; while Forsyth categorizes them as task roles, relationship roles, and individual roles. While both task roles and group building/relationship roles are somewhat assigned by the group and the leader, individual roles are chosen by the individual to "emphasize their own needs over the group's needs" (Forsyth 152) These individual roles include, but are not limited to: the aggressor (who tends to attack), the arguer (who tends to disagree), the blocker (who resists the groups influence), the dominator (who is manipulative), the player (who is uninvolved), the recognition seeker (who tries to constantly draw attention), the self-confessor (who constantly shares feelings to the extent that it limits others involvement), and the help seeker (who expresses insecurity). Although these individual roles may come across as detrimental to the group, Haynes is quick to point out that this may not be so. "One has to keep in mind that many groups are formed in part or in whole to help the individual grow, resolve personal issues and to achieve a sense of belonging and purpose. When a group member takes on any of the individual roles, the group may in fact be doing its work" (Haynes 28)

While individuals within groups take on certain roles, conformity within groups is a large part of the way groups function. "Lone individuals are free to think and act as they choose, but group members

must abandon some of their independence.” (Forsyth 179) The group norms set forth and agreed upon by the group are a good example of this idea of conformity. Haynes says that members will range from being full conformists to what he calls “sliders”, who will move back and forth on the continuum, to non-conformists. (35) However, the urge to conform was found to be very strong in the research conducted by Muzafer Sherif which “verified the group members modify their judgments so that they match those of others in their groups.” (Forsyth 179) As this is a naturally occurring process, this researcher finds no reason to be concerned that individuals aren’t being honest when the group begins to conform, but this does point out the need to making individuals constantly aware they are still welcome to express diverging opinions. A certain amount of conformity is definitely helpful as “perceptually, when people or objects are categorized into groups, actual differences between members of the same category tend to be minimized and often ignored in making decisions or forming impressions.” (Hess 8) When differences are minimized, ingroup favoritism begins to form, indicating a group’s high level of cohesion. This also can occur in small groupings within groups, which then could break the group into smaller factions. (Hess 17) This requires that small groups constantly be mixed up in order to avoid the possible negative affect of ingroup favoritism.

In looking at how groups function, it is also important to examine the various stages that groups go through as they develop. The first stage, referred to as “forming”, is when the group is first getting to know each other. During this stage, members will look to the leader for guidance and are more concerned with being included; they will “monitor their behavior to avoid any embarrassing lapses of social poise and are tentative when expressing their personal opinions.” (Forsyth, 130) Given time (and proper community-building), these tensions will ease, leading the group into the second/“storming” stage. It is during this stage that conformity will decline and conflict begins to appear, often marking it with hostility and criticism. During this stage, however, the communication and power structure begins to become less centralized and more distributed amongst the group. (Haynes 15) In stage three, also

known as “norming”, there is a growth in the cohesion of a group and interpersonal interactions are based on trust and openness. Indicators that a group has moved into this stage are: increased eye contact, group members addressing each other more in the second person instead of the third person, and increased communication among group members. (Haynes 15) The fourth stage, referred to as “performing”, is the stage where most of the work gets done. In this stage, communication becomes completely decentralized and leadership becomes more shared by the group. This stage is marked by a great deal of cooperation and problem-solving in which members speak directly to each other, have clear eye contact, and members begin to pay close attention to the nonverbal cues of other members. (Haynes 16) The fifth and final stage is known as “adjourning”. As the name implies, this stage is where the group parts ways. Group members usually react in one of two ways to this stage. The first reaction is to withdraw from the group and become sullen. The other is to become more emotional and seek more independence. Being aware of what stage a group is in throughout its evolution is helpful in deciding how to proceed in each meeting, and in every moment.

No matter what stage the group is in or the type of group formed, there are benefits to be had for participating in the group and group processes. Various benefits of participating within a group are: the sharing of information, providing hope, giving and receiving feedback, promoting bonding, promoting interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, disclosing of universality, and support for catharsis. (Haynes 12) While community-engaged performance processes do not claim to be a form of therapy, many participants often comment on the therapeutic nature of the process. These benefits of being involved in a group are not only important for a facilitator to know, but to be aware of what each individual may be seeking to get out of the experience. These benefits can also be helpful in the recruiting of participants for a project.

Power within Groups

“Power, although notoriously difficult to define, suggests influence, the potential to influence, and control over outcomes.” (Forsyth 215) People use various kinds of power, struggle for power, and are influenced by forces of power every day. Group work is no exception. Power exists within groups, and it is the balancing of this power that helps make groups so dynamic.

The interpersonal complementarity hypothesis suggests that obedience and authority are reciprocal, complementary processes. This hypothesis assumes that each group member’s action tends to evoke, or “pull,” a predictable set of actions from the other group members (Carson, 1969). If, for example, an individual seems agreeable, pleasant, and cooperative, the other group members would tend to react in kind: they would behave in positive, friendly ways. Friendly behaviors are reciprocated by friendly behaviors. But what if group members act in dominant, firm, directive ways — issuing orders, taking charge, giving advice? Such behaviors would tend to evoke submissive responses from the other group members. (Forsyth 232)

In order to better understand these power dynamics, this section will investigate the various sources of power/power bases, power tactics, and shifts in power.

Different individuals locate their power in various sources, which can shift from situation to situation. Six key power bases were identified by researchers John R.P. French and Bertram Raven in 1959. (Forsyth 221) They are: coercive, expert, informational, legitimate, referent, and reward. Later, connection, a seventh source of power was added to this list. (Haynes 70) A coercive power source gives the holder the ability to punish others, while on the opposite end of the spectrum, reward power gives

the holder the ability to reward others. Expert power is based in the belief that the holder is more skillful or knowledgeable about a particular subject, whereas informational power simply means the holder has a piece of specific information that will aid the group and/or access to informational resources. Individuals who possess legitimate power gain this because they were appointed by an acknowledged right to require compliance. Referent power is given to individuals because they are admired and respected by others, and lastly, connection power is based in who an individual may know in “high places”. When looking at the process being researched here, it is easy to see that the facilitator definitely comes into the process with legitimate and expert power. Depending on the situation, the facilitator may also possess reward, coercive, informational, and connective power as well. This places the facilitator in possession of most of the “given” power in the room. This is important to note and take ownership of in order to redistribute more power to the group. In any given project, participants will also come into the process with expert power and, depending on the individuals, may be in control of other power bases too.

In addition to influencing others from the power bases, Forsyth addresses that individuals use various tactics/specific strategies in order to influence others. (228) These tactics are described as being soft or hard, rational or non-rational, and unilateral or bilateral. Soft tactics influence more indirectly and interpersonally than hard tactics. (Forsyth 228) Rational tactics appeal more to reason and tactics appealing to emotion are non-rational. If the tactic used is simply a give and take, it is unilateral. Bilateral tactics require conversation and negotiation. The use of these tactics can help identify personality types, such as extroversion and introversion. According to Forsyth, extroverts tend to use a larger variety of tactics than introverts. Ability to recognize these tactics when used by others will help allow further understanding of the group and the relationships being developed in it. Forsyth lists various tactics as examples. (299-230) The more self-explanatory tactics are bullying, collaborating, complaining, consulting, criticizing, demanding, discussing, evading, ingratiating, inspiring, instructing,

manipulating, negotiating, persisting, persuading, promising, punishing, insulting, requesting, rewarding, socializing, pleading, and threatening. Additionally he lists appraisal (pointing out more information), disengaging (ignoring), expertise (letting others know that you are an expert), *fait accompli* (doing something by yourself without permission), humor (making a joke out things), and socializing (getting to know others).

Now that there is a better understanding of the sources and tactics from which individuals pull power, an understanding of the shift of power within a group can be explored. As stated previously, the facilitator begins the process in possession of a majority of the power. In order to balance the power among everyone, facilitators can empower group members by reminding them that they come into this process with a certain set of skills and knowledge that are absolutely necessary to the success of the project. Also, strengthening the cohesion of the group shifts power to group members because they become more comfortable with their surroundings and the nature of the work, gaining confidence. These are both examples of what would be deemed as positive power shifts for this research, but it is important to be aware of shifts that may not be so helpful. Forsyth refers to the “head of the table” effect which is a phenomenon in which power is subconsciously given to the individual sitting at the head of a table/in front of a group. Awareness of this effect can prompt the facilitator to adopt more communal ways of sharing information or holding discussions. One such technique would be to stand/sit in circles when working together. It is also important for a facilitator to be aware of individuals in the group who may attempt to gain power in order to dominate the group through the use of power bases and tactics. This leads to one individual dominating the group, instead of the process being truly collaborative.

Verbal Communication

Communication structures in groups “range along a continuum from centralized to decentralized.” (Haynes 37) Centralized structures require that all information flows through one central figure, whereas in decentralized structures information is passed among members of the group in an unimpeded and uncensored manner. Most groups lie somewhere between these two extremes. For this purposes of this research, a more decentralized structure is desired because Haynes cites a study stating that “in centralized structures, the number of possible patterns of communication was smaller than in decentralized, thus limiting the number of ideas.” (Haynes 38) In devised, community-engaged projects ideas must be plentiful and information able to flow freely among the participants. Further aspects of communication to be explored here are: discussion pitfalls, feedback, conflict and conflict resolution, and decision-making.

According to Forsyth, “most experts on group communication agree that misunderstandings seem to be the rule in groups.” (326) As a result, many studies have been done to pinpoint what exactly is at the root of these misunderstandings. These studies have shown that the miscommunications are most commonly caused by poor communication skills, egocentric behavior within groups, nonparticipation of group members, sidetracking of conversation, interruptions, negative leader behavior, and poor/negative attitudes and emotions. (Forsyth 326) Specific behaviors/elements include poor listening skills and insufficient vocal projection. These are things to be vigilant about avoiding when holding group discussions. The facilitator must find the balance between encouraging everyone to speak without allowing some to dominate the conversation. It also requires focus, so that the group does not become distracted.

Giving and receiving feedback is a crucial element to group work. It allows for honest critique and the opportunity to strengthen the group’s work. According to Haynes,

When a group member gives feedback he or she reveals information about him or herself to other in the group that they may not have known before. When a group member received feedback, he or she comes to know more about how he or she is being perceived by others.

(Haynes 44)

According to Haynes, the facilitator should provide opportunities for feedback as often as possible to allow for a more open atmosphere. This revealing and gaining of information by group members is a very emotionally vulnerable process and, if done incorrectly, can be extremely ineffective and detrimental to the group's work. In order to be the most effective, Haynes writes that feedback should be "focused on what a person says or does in a given situation and not on inferred motivations", "specific and concrete", "given as soon as possible", provide information about what impact was felt by the giver of the feedback, and "offered in a descriptive and non-judgmental way." (Hayne 46)

When individuals interact, conflict is never far away. Conflict tends to be equated with negativity, but this is an unfair assessment of conflict. Negative affects occur when conflict is mishandled and there is no plan in place for conflict resolution. "A diversity of ideas, which at times may be in conflict, can be healthy and useful for the development of the team." (Hayne 96) Conflicts arise when individuals carry differing opinions about a subject matter, but this often helps to lead to a better understanding of both sides and creative solutions to whatever problem is at hand. Haynes writes about various modes of conflict resolution that fall between assertion and cooperation. Given the nature of this research, the two modes that fall into the cooperative category would be the most helpful: collaborating and compromising.

When it comes to making a decision (whether there is conflict or not), a facilitator has various options from which to choose. The three options that would help accomplish the goals of this research

are leading a discussion of the issue, facilitating an analysis of the issue and arriving at a consensus, and charging the group with making a decision on their own. (Forsyth 325) This last technique is one that Rohd suggests when it comes to conflict and decision-making within groups that he has led because he has witnessed that it requires group members to learn to communicate better with each other. Haynes espouses the consensus approach because he deems it to be a democratic approach that “avoids winners and losers.” (Haynes 99)

Non-verbal Communication

When it comes to understanding the nonverbal signals that individuals send out, there really are no hard and fast rules. This type of communication deals with facial expressions and body language, including orientation of self in the physical space and in relation to others, as well as eye contact.

Tests have shown that, in general, people are very good at interpreting emotional expressions of others. These tests have led researchers to believe that facial expressions are largely universal. It is important to note, however, that there is evidence of cultural specificity, especially when it comes to the rules that various cultures have about the rules of expressing and understanding nonverbal communications. Additionally, “when individuals are feeling anxious, their own emotional facial displays are likely to be more difficult to decode, while at the same time they will be more susceptible to misinterpreting neutral or slightly negative facial expressions on the part of their interaction with others.” (Hess 25)

In addition to facial expressions, a great deal is communicated through the manner in which an individual carries himself or herself, as well as their spatial relationship to others. Preference in regards to personal space varies from person to person; however, the boundary generally extends further in front than it does behind a person. According to the Equilibrium Model of Communication:

...personal space, body orientation, and eye contact define the level of intimacy in any interaction. If group members feel that a low level of intimacy is appropriate, they may sit far apart, make little eye contact, and assume a relatively formal posture. If, in contrast, the members are relaxing and discussing personal topics, they may move close together, make more eye contact, and adopt more relaxed postures. (Forsyth 455)

This level of intimacy is ideal for subject of this research. Being acutely aware of these factors (tension in the body/eye contact/spatial orientation) can work two ways; they can allow a facilitator to judge the comfort level of a group, and they can also provide opportunities for the facilitator to introduce some of these factors in order to bring about a more comfortable and relaxed environment.

Leadership

“Leadership is a form of power, but power *with* people rather than *over* people – a reciprocal relationship between the leader and the led.” (Forsyth 247) This is exactly the form of leadership that this research is hoping to hone. According to the study of group dynamics, leadership is meant to be reciprocal, collaborative, transformational, cooperative, and adaptive. (Forsyth 250-251) Additionally, effective leaders are found to be knowledgeable, competent, flexible, fully engaged, empathetic, attentive, communicative, inspirational, and trustworthy. (Haynes 79) Some of these qualities are personal characteristics that a facilitator may already possess - many can be learned and honed if the facilitator knows what to look out for. This section will explore the skills required to lead, leadership styles, the first session, reflection, and phenomena linked with leadership to be aware of.

Haynes’ list of effective leadership skills includes blocking (stopping group interactions to maintain the integrity of the work and safety of the group), confronting (addressing/challenging a group

member's statement/behavior), cueing (ability to interpret nonverbal signals), disclosing (revealing personal information), energizing/motivating, interpreting, linking, questioning, reflecting feeling (focus attention on what a group member is feeling in order to address it), reframing, rephrasing, suggesting, summarizing, and supporting. (83-90) Of these skills, it is important to note that Rohd also identified confronting, energizing, questioning, reflecting feeling, reframing, rephrasing, and supporting as important skills for effective leadership. Some skills listed by Haynes also are somewhat questionable to this research, especially the disclosing of personal information by the facilitator. Being that the specific intent is to let the group members' stories be told without influence from the facilitator, this skill may be one that is best left out for this type of work. Additionally, strong active listening skills are required in order to master most of these other skills. Having these skills and making sure to display these skills to the group is vital. Cues that participants look for to gauge the leader's listening skills are direct and focused eye contact, appropriate changes in body posture, slight vocalizations, appropriate facial expressions, asking for clarification, paraphrasing what is being said, as well as summarizing what was said. (Haynes 42)

Leadership styles have been lightly touched upon in regards to the different atmospheres they generate, but now authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles will be investigated more thoroughly. Authoritarian leaders do not take any input from the group members and control all aspects of the groups' structure and communication, preferring to dictate assignments, etc. Democratic leaders, as their name implies, prefer to receive input from the group when it comes to finding ways to work, decision-making, and dividing assignments. Leaders who display a laissez-faire leadership style very rarely intervene in group work and often function as a "source of technical information." (Forsyth 272) Within each of these leadership styles there are two different kinds of leadership that is given: task leadership and relationship leadership. (Forsyth 252) Some groups require only one of these types of leadership; however, this research requires both. Task leadership deals with the more technical aspect

of what is being done such as making sure to monitor communication structures, assigning specific jobs and monitoring their progress. Relationship leadership involves “maintaining and enhancing positive interpersonal relations in the group; friendliness, mutual trust, openness, and recognizing performance.” (Forsyth 252)

The study of group dynamics also places very important emphasis on the first meeting or session that a group has. Haynes states that “the first group session sets the stage for the other sessions to follow” and “as such, the first session needs to be carefully facilitated so that all group members at the very beginning of the group process...derive a sense of comfort, acceptance, and value.” (40) In order to do this, he recommends addressing the purpose of the group, brainstorming the norms for the group, and stating (and restating) the need for confidentiality within the group. These three recommendations help give a sense of value to the work being done and each individual’s importance to that. For the sense of comfort and acceptance Haynes recommends “icebreakers” in order to “get members interacting and involved in a safe, non-judgmental, and non-threatening way.” (41) These “icebreakers” should slowly progress from easy, surface-level activities that are low-risk for the participant to pave the way for activities that are more complex and higher risk. One “icebreaker” suggested by Haynes is “Find Someone Who”, in which participants are given a paper with ten statements and they must find members in their group for whom that is true. (42) This is only effective as an icebreaker if the statements are relatively universal and noninvasive, such as, find someone who has a brother. It must be pointed out that this activity also could be altered to serve as a deeper form of investigation and learning within the group.

In regards to reflecting on group processes, Haynes writes that “reflecting on and processing group activities and experiences helps group members internalize the full cognitive and emotional impact of the group experience.” (48) The practice of reflection not only allows individuals to process

the content that is being explored, but also the process itself. Journaling is a highly recommended activity, not only for the group members, but also for the leader. Not only does journaling chronicle what happens in each session, but it also comments on the process and the effectiveness of it and the individual's thoughts and feelings towards it. Reflection is also a technique/activity recommended for the final session of a group in order for participants to think about "what one would take away from the experience that might be useful and valuable" in the future. (Haynes 62)

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEWS WITH PRACTITIONERS IN THE FIELD OF DEvised, COMMUNITY-ENGAGED PERFORMANCE

In an effort to have the most current research available, a series of interviews were conducted with artists and practitioners whom I have come across in my work. All these practitioners have experience working in community-engaged settings and using devised theatre practices, even if this is not their primary method of working. This chapter summarizes the information obtained during five interviews with Declan Mallon, Jenny MacDonald, Stephen Murray, Michael Rohd, and James Rone. The information obtained is divided into six categories: planning, working environment, challenges, conflict and conflict resolution, and signs/indicators to be aware of. There is a wealth of knowledge and information in these interviews, and what appears in this chapter is solely what pertains to the direct intent of this thesis. If you are interested in this type of work, reading the original transcripts located in Appendix A is strongly recommended.

Planning

In regards to planning, the answers were divided into thoughts about planning for the first day, tactics used to help in planning, and the process of planning throughout the project. Additionally, the interviewees put forth important questions when it came to the planning process that require answering, or at least require the seeking out of answers: What is the aim of the work? Why are the participants present? What will it take for the participants to feel successful in the work? How can we help the participants feel comfortable revealing themselves? The answers to these questions lie with the participants, and it is up to the facilitator to determine how to approach the exploration of these topics.

Most of the interviewees agreed the participants are the starting point for everything that needs to happen in this process. Declan said, "If I were to walk into a workshop today, the first thing I would do is sit down and talk to people." (Mallon, 2012) In fact, however the facilitator decides to go about it,

there is a consensus that the main goal is to generate conversation within the group. The generating of conversation feeds into the overarching goal of the first session, which all interviewees agreed is the forming of a group. Building a sense of community within the group is vital to the process, so much so that Jed doesn't even see the point in moving forward until the group is functioning at a high level together. "...basically you are trying to move from independent constituents to shared stakeholders." (Rohd, 2012)

In order to accomplish these initial goals, both Jed and Jenny recommend having an idea of what needs to be accomplished and matching that with activities that will meet those goals. Jenny determines what is it she wants to cover in each workshop and saying, "...so that looks like these series of exercises." (McDonald, 2012) With that in mind, both practitioners stress the importance of planning loosely so the process can adapt to the needs of the participants. After the first workshop, the facilitator has more information about who they are working with and how those people work, and so, are better able to plan for the next.

Because participants are so unique and varied, both James and Jenny recommend working in as many different ways as possible. James makes a point to appeal to all the different learning styles by saying, "I have to plant crops in lots of different kinds of soil, and I have to plant lots of different kinds of crops, so no matter what the weather is something is going to grow." (Rone, 2012) Declan supports this idea of working in different styles, warning that solely relying on the use of theatrical techniques and games is not always the best approach.

In order to achieve a strong working group, it is recommended to use exercises that involve achieving goals as a group and a great deal of collaborative making at the start. While creating solo pieces can be integrated into the process and is useful for making sure each participant is heard, it is recommended this happen later in the process. James extolls the use of improvisation training because

he has found improvisation training helps participants learn how to accept new ideas, support each other, create strong bonds, and learn how to advance or deepen a scene. Improvisation also helps reinforce the idea that not all material generated will make it into the final piece. Making sure this concept is understood by all participants, and they are all comfortable with it, is important. Planning in exercises that support this idea can help in averting potential problems later in the process.

When it comes to the topic of teaching or building performance skills, every practitioner encouraged incorporating these ideas into the community-building and content-generating parts of the process. Jed and Declan also stated that often the time to focus on those acting skills is during the rehearsal phase of the process. Jenny's approach harkens to Paolo Freire's ideas of teaching in regards to the participants not being empty vessels needing to be filled, but rather it is a matter of revealing what they already know. "I try to build skills that reveal to people that they have a lot of those skills and it's just about shining a lens on them...that they know how to talk and breathe or how to sing or how to shout or wiggle their body or whatever it is, and it's just about making choices about when and how to do that." (McDonald, 2012)

In regards to planning the process as a whole and the process of planning throughout, Declan, Jed, and Jenny all stress the need to respond to the participants. The workshops need to be built around the participants' needs and desires. Jenny recommends having a "notion of a destination" to ensure the journey has some shape, but to be ready for that to change entirely. Michael recommends mapping out the sessions by looking at a map of the entire time there is to work and blocking out sections for the different phases/stages needed in the project. Throughout the process, Jenny encourages sharing more and more of the planning responsibilities with the participants because it allows for the participants to engage more fully with the process. This can be done by allowing for more time in each session to talk about what needs to happen in the next session with the entire group. Lastly, Jed makes a point to say

that not all groups will be ready to present a final performance piece. Some groups simply won't be there in terms of confidence or, they might simply not want that to be their end. If that is the case, finding an alternative, such as a shared/viewed workshop for family and friends is warranted.

In addition to planning for the time spent inside the workshops, the facilitator needs to be prepared to plan time for themselves outside the workshops in order to reflect and decide how to move forward. Both James and Jenny recommended taking ten to fifteen minutes after each workshop to journal privately about the session. While reflecting, Jed and Jenny go through the piece to make sure each participant has a moment or has given their input. This must be done purposefully in order to ensure that no one gets overlooked. If there is something missing it will be worked into the next session.

Working Environment

Creating the proper working environment is a major concern with this work, and each practitioner shared their ideas for how to actualize that environment. Although each practitioner's specific techniques were a little different, the core goal/aims of these tactics are very similar. Each practitioner interviewed stressed the importance of honesty and creating an environment in which they were honest with the participants and the participants felt comfortable being honest with each other. Additionally, creating a space in which participants felt comfortable collaborating and creating together is stressed.

In order to create this environment, Michael recommended incorporating a lot of small group work that allows participants more freedom within their group to share their ideas before sharing with the larger group. James relies heavily on improvisation when he works, while Jed chooses to put group-building at the heart of everything in his process. Jenny recommended doing activities/games that don't have any right or wrong answer, as well as putting the participants in the director's seat every now and again so they know their input is wanted, needed, and valid. James, Jenny, and Michael brought up the

use of contracts at the beginning of the process to help create a comfortable working environment.

While Jenny and Michael encouraged creating this contract with the participants, James stated, “it is up to me to assert myself as a protector of their emotional safety...” (Rone, 2012) Because he feels so strongly about that, he sets up expectations at the beginning of kindness, confidentiality, openness, honesty, non-judgment, and right to pass. He does leave room for this contract to change and expand, but he feels like it is his responsibility as the facilitator to state those expectations outright.

One thing all the practitioners agreed upon was the need to get to know the participants. This includes getting to know their personality types and how they interact with one another. Socializing with the group during break times, as well as before and after the workshops begin, is recommended. Several practitioners noted that people often will reveal more about themselves when they are relaxed, and in these settings, especially in the beginning, people are more relaxed in the informal chatting that takes place during these times. When it comes to getting to know the participants, Jenny encourages the facilitator to really invest in the participants. Sometimes the facilitator feels a need to stand apart from the group, but Jenny warned against the facilitator hiding themselves from the group. This idea about the facilitator being a part of or a member of the group was echoed by every practitioner interviewed. In the spirit of this idea of honesty, the interviewees recommended exploring all ideas that are brought to the table, even the facilitator’s ideas. In doing this, the facilitator can get a sense of individuals’ strengths along with reinforcing the idea that each participant is crucial to the process.

Challenges

Each practitioner spoke to very different challenges they have experienced in this work. Although some overlapped, it is necessary to address each practitioner’s list of challenges individually. Although the challenges discussed here are probably not the only ones that exist in this work, these are certainly worth noting in order to prepare facilitating this type of work.

Michael placed the biggest challenges he sees in the process of group-building, which was discussed in greater length earlier in this chapter. For James, the two challenges he spoke about were choosing a topic as a group and the attention span of the group. When it comes to choosing a topic, James' experiences have shown that although this can be a great challenge, focusing on community-building from the start will aid in these challenging moments of indecision and conflict. The challenge of attention span is one that James has noticed in working with community participants, especially during long projects stretching over months or years.

Declan talked at length about the greatest challenge in searching for a compromise in the work between the facilitating artist and the group. While focusing on the goal of making sure the group's voice is truly heard, Declan pointed out the need for the facilitating artist's expertise in the art of theatre and storytelling. He feels this expertise should be recognized and advice on shaping/making decisions should be heeded. This presents a very big challenge in working with the group because it requires constant negotiations through the process in order to present a high-quality product in addition to one that reflects the community from which it comes.

Jenny didn't state one overarching challenge, but rather she cited several small challenges to be aware of while moving through the process. The first two challenges occur prior to any workshops taking place and have to do with working with the institutions sponsoring the work. Communications between the institution and the facilitating artists can be tricky, because educational or community institutions often have their own language for describing things that is different from the facilitating artists. The challenge is to be very clear about what needs to happen and what the project is going to do. The second challenge in dealing with institutions is there is often a desire to shortcut the process. People and institutions want to get the most from the absolute minimum amount of work, which does not fit well with this type of work. Inside the workshops, Jenny said the biggest challenges she has seen

are getting participants comfortable with being watched and having groups be disagreeable at the beginning until they become invested in the process/project.

Jed reiterated this idea of having tough groups to begin with. In fact, he joked that he seems to specialize in working with these types of groups. He believes the challenge lies in getting the group interested in the project, getting them to trust each other, and getting them to see the benefits of the work in their lives. To overcome these challenges, Jed uses a lot of playful activities where the participants are able to have fun with each other and poke fun at each other a bit. He said, "I will always do introductory exercises at first and let people make a bit of a tit of themselves..." (Murray, 2012) This helps to break the ice and put people at ease.

Conflict & Conflict Resolution

All the practitioners have ideas and tactics for conflict resolution, but the most important and surprising answer I heard in this part of the interviews was that conflict is a good thing! Jed even pointed out that all drama is conflict, which means that conflict within the process is a healthy thing. Physical violence aside, disagreement and heated debate on a topic is an indicator of full engagement of the participants. Conflict is actually considered necessary; Jenny even said, "that's the pain of collaborative work." (McDonald, 2012)

When it comes to resolving the conflict, various approaches were shared. James likes to make a point to facilitate to ensure all points of view are heard before coming to a conclusion. Jenny also supports this technique; however, she and Jed also stated the importance of knowing when to set something aside and come back to it later. Not all conflicts can be resolved in the moment. With time and space; people often will change their minds or be more willing to compromise. Jenny sees the value of the collaborative process, saying "over time people let things go because they want the show...and they're invested...and that's why I think it's an amazing means for conflict resolution." (McDonald, 2012)

Jed also encouraged setting time limits on a conflict. Sometimes simply giving the instruction that they have five minutes to find a solution is enough to encourage participants to compromise and collaborate more effectively.

Awareness of Signs/Indicators

The basic mantra for this concept from all interviewees is for the facilitator to be watching everything all the time! While there are no prescriptive signs or indicators for every situation, each practitioner did have advice to share that occurred commonly in their work. Before those are listed, however, it is important to speak to the idea of the individual first. As stated earlier, all the practitioners encouraged getting to know the participants and getting a sense of how they express themselves and interact socially. A big reason for this is so the facilitator will be better equipped to pick up on abnormalities that occur within the group work. These little traits or habits are person-specific, so the better a facilitator knows the individuals of their group, the better they will be at reading them.

General signs/indicators that something is wrong are both extremes in expression. A participant who is seen sulking or unnaturally quiet can indicate there is a problem, while at the same time a participant who is constantly interrupting and jumping into conversations can also indicate they are not feeling heard. Jed also cited participants who are purposefully excluding themselves as an indicator that something is wrong. Generally, Michael recommended watching participants' eyes; are they making eye contact? Where are they looking? Are they engaged?

When it comes to sensing whether participants have more to say or if they are ready to move on, Michael recommended always waiting too long in silence. Silence is another tool he uses in the workshop setting. Jed has found if there has been a bit of "banter" among the group and the conversation has died down, then the group is ready to move forward.

Jed made a very interesting point about deciding whether or not the process is going well. He said, "if you're working really well, you're not doing anything at all." (Murray, 2012) He meant this for the facilitator, and in various ways this idea was echoed by the other practitioners. Jenny referred to sometimes feeling "lazy" and Michael made a point to say, "it's not pretending you're not leading." (Rohd, 2012) However, the desire is for the group to take ownership of the process and use this process as a means of expressing themselves, so Jed's insight into the facilitator "not doing anything at all" is really a testament to how effectively the facilitator and the group are working together.

Summation

Throughout the interviews, there was one idea or thought that kept coming up: the facilitator is part of the group. Each practitioner I interviewed made reference to accepting and acknowledging that, and it would make you a stronger facilitator. With that said, this makes the fine line that a facilitator walks even more precarious. The initial approach to this thesis research was how to focus on the group's voice without interference from the facilitator, but if the facilitator is part of the group, that carries with it two major implications. The facilitator can be free to be honest, open, and sharing with their group, but also the facilitator must be careful to make sure their influence does not overwhelm, and for the purposes of this style project, the ideas and thoughts are coming from the group and the facilitator is more of a sounding board for ideas.

Going along with this same idea, most of the practitioners said the work must begin with the people who are going to be in the group. Instead of the notion of pre-planning an entire series of workshops, the first step is to walk in and get to know who the people are and why they chose to participate. Of course, this approach seems logical; but honestly, when planning a workshop, etc., very few facilitators think to walk in with nothing, no plans, except to get to know the participants. It can be scary. Although each practitioner had varied methods for building and strengthening community within

the group, there was a general consensus that the group work must happen first. In fact, it is key to the whole process. Jed even went so far as to say that if the group wasn't right, there was no point in continuing to try to create art because it wouldn't work. This puts into perspective the notion that you must dive into work and begin immediately. Instead, most advocate spending as much time as is needed to get a group functioning in a healthy, collaborative manner before even trying to create.

Four of the practitioners interviewed also spoke to the facilitator's willingness to change and adapt to what is happening in the room. This requires letting go of control and, importantly, requires the facilitator be present and actively engaged in watching everything happening in the room. This can be a scary idea, because sometimes it feels much safer to stick to whatever plan was made prior. Jenny recommended making plans but also being willing and ready to toss them out the window if the group isn't responding. In regards to time spent on skills-building activities and generating content, it was unanimous this could be achieved at the same time with careful selection of activities. Many of the responses also brought into light what the purpose and goals of this work would be. Is the goal to have these people create a performance like traditional theatre performances? When working with non-self-defined artists, or as Declan prefers to refer to them, citizen-artists, is theatrical training and technique so important? At any rate, it was mostly agreed that theatrical conventions such as proper staging, cheating out, etc. could be left for the rehearsal stage in the process.

The last major point that struck a chord was the emphasis on being honest. All the practitioners spoke to this point. Honesty in sharing the process, admitting mistakes, sharing ideas, giving feedback, addressing issues that arise, and asking questions. Also, encouraging others to be honest in their work and when giving feedback. This idea of being one hundred percent genuine in interactions with the group instead of removing yourself from it again doesn't sound completely novel, but it is something facilitators struggle with. It's probably something most people struggle with, because that leaves you

vulnerable and that is a hard step to take. However, this is modeling the behavior needed for the group to be successful. How can we ask others to take a risk, when as a facilitator, we are not willing to go there ourselves?

CHAPTER FIVE: PHILOSOPHY

Everyone has a story to tell; multiple stories in fact, and everyone should be given the opportunity and a forum in which to do so. Robert Alexander, who was the founder of Living Stage in Washington, DC said, “Every human being is an artist and in the moment of creation, we are at our most sane, most healthy, and most fulfilled. When we share a piece of our vision of the world with others, we are better able to see ourselves, to interact with others, and to make our own choices.” (Rohd, xix)

There is something about the truth of a story, whether factual or not, that has the power to inspire and foster empathy – something the world needs more of if we ever have a chance of living harmoniously together.

I believe every single person is an artist; everyone has within them the ability to create and express their ideas in a meaningful and powerful way. My work sets out to create shared experiences within communities and find commonalities, while celebrating that which makes each person unique. Through this work, I seek to deconstruct the human experience by bringing people together in order to share their stories in a theatrically-inspired environment. Borne out of these beliefs is the desire to engage with communities of citizen-artists to devise theatre that comes from and speaks to those communities. From my deep reverence for the individual and story comes concern for staying true to the voices of the individuals in the communities with whom I work. This can be achieved through careful and thoughtful facilitation of a process that allows for respect, honesty, and total participation by all involved.

CHAPTER SIX: METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the goals set out in the Philosophy in Chapter five, the following approach will be applied to the process:

Qualities to be Assimilated and Exhibited by Facilitator

An individual who is leading a process of this nature must be honest, curious, attentive, flexible, and patient. These five qualities are paramount to achieving success in this work because they are necessary to carry out certain requirements to follow in this new approach to facilitation. By exhibiting these traits, the facilitator is making themselves accessible to the group. When a facilitator is being honest, they are open to admitting mistakes on their part, as well as fostering an environment that encourages honest feedback from others. This establishes trust between the participants and the facilitator, as well as within the group as a whole. Curiosity is required because the entire process hinges on the sharing and telling of other peoples' stories. If there is no interest, there are no stakes for anyone, and the process becomes devoid of meaning. A facilitator must be inquisitive, which demands the ability to listen to others. This curiosity encourages the sharing of stories among the group and for the dialogue to take place afterwards. Going hand-in-hand with curiosity and listening is being attentive. A facilitator must get to know the group they are working with and become sensitive to what is happening in the dynamics from moment-to-moment, which allows them to be flexible. This flexibility is proof in action to the participants that they are being heard and thoughtfully regarded. It proves that this process is unique to this group, instead of being some mold they are being forced into. Lastly, the facilitator must be patient. Each group will move at its own pace, and it is important they not be forced to go to the next step until they are ready. This does not mean the facilitator isn't supposed to challenge the group and give them obstacles to overcome, but that the participants must be given the time and space to meet these challenges in their own way.

Planning

Effective planning for this work takes place on two different levels. There is the planning of the phases for the entire process, and then there is the planning of each individual workshop. The major rule of planning for this type of process is to plan loosely! Everything must be subject to change based on what is happening within the group.

Unfortunately, but realistically, the time constraints put into place by the producer, funder, or community partner play a large part in how fully each project can be realized. As Jed Murray mentioned, not every project can or will end in a rehearsed performance piece because that just isn't where the participants are. There are different levels of showcasing the work that has been done, if that is required or wanted by the group. With that said, before you begin work, it is important to look at the time you have and generally divide that time into the different phases of the process. The phases required for this process are: Community-Building, Gathering Assets, Structuring, and Rehearsing. It is possible, when under extreme time limitations to include some gathering of assets into the community-building phase, as long as it is nonintrusive. Structuring also will bleed into the gathering assets phase, because as the group slowly begins to make connections, decisions will be made about what more is needed to tell the story and where each individual piece should go. Having a loose idea of how you would like the group to progress through the process will provide a starting point. It cannot be emphasized enough, however, that if you only allot two days to community-building but the group needs more time, then more time must be given to the first phase. It is crucial that a group be ready to progress, especially from the first phase to the following phases. All research supported the importance of community-building within the group; without a shared sense of community and trust, it is impossible to progress and still hope the individual participants will be comfortable honestly sharing their opinions, etc. with the group. Community-building will be addressed in further detail in a later section. Knowing when a group is ready

to move from one phase to the next also will be addressed later in the section: “Signs/Indicators to Be Aware Of.”

When planning each individual workshop there are several questions a facilitator must ask themselves: What needs to be accomplished today? How can that be accomplished? Why are you warming up? (i.e., what will the group be doing later and how best to prepare them for that) The answers to those questions will enable the facilitator to choose what activities to use in the workshop.

When deciding on those activities, the facilitator must be conscious to scaffold the activities; using the activities like building blocks upon one another in order to set up the group for success. It is also extremely important to work in varied modes in order to appeal to the range of learning and processing styles. This allows for every individual to participate fully, not just those who happen to be more talkative or more comfortable with dance, etc. This is of particular importance at the beginning of the process to allow the facilitator to see how each individual is more comfortable working. Additionally, planning activities that have no right or wrong answer encourages participants to share their opinion and validates their thoughts and ideas in a safe setting. If there is no right or wrong answer, no stress is placed on participants to “get it right.” Small group work should be done throughout the process, making sure the groups are rotated constantly so no factions form within the group. In planning, it is also important to include time for reflection after each activity. It may be a short check-in or a longer dialogue, but the facilitator must account for that time and plan on it. Again, as with the activities, the modes of reflection should be varied and appeal to all learning and processing styles to include all participants. Once you begin working with a group, it is important to get a feel for that group and begin to build the workshops around them. If you have a group where every member is more comfortable expressing themselves verbally instead of through movement or visual work, then you must begin to center the workshops around that. However, to know this, you must first experiment with the various

modes. This does not mean you abandon other techniques completely, but that you may place more emphasis on the modes that fit the group better. A good facilitator must always respond to the group, using the people as the starting point for all decisions.

As the group progresses into later phases, there should be a smooth transition where the planning of each workshop is slowly handed over to the group itself. Again, to quote Jed Murray, “Basically what you’re doing is training them to make you redundant.” (Murray) This allows the group to have a true sense of ownership over what they are creating and ensuring that the product is a true reflection of them.

As all the research indicated, planning for the first workshop is a little different from the ones to follow. In the first workshop, several things must happen: 1. The facilitator must discover why each individual is there and what they would like to get out of the process; 2. The facilitator must state the need for confidentiality in the process; 3. A group discussion of what the participants need to see happen in order for the space to feel safe; 4. The facilitator must discover what participants will need to feel successful in the process; 5. The facilitator must establish a shared feeling of participation; and 6. The creation of group norms or expectations.

Using the point of view of the participants as the starting point, the methods used to make sure all the above happens is up to the facilitator. As a side note, the creation of a shared feeling of participation is best achieved by using activities that have goals that can only be achieved by the group working together, as well as those that have no right or wrong answer; allowing for valuable input from every participant.

Lastly in planning, the facilitator must take the time to prepare themselves for the process each day. The facilitator must determine what sort of energy is required for each day and bring that into the room with them. While this process is different for everyone, it is recommended the

facilitator plan time before the workshop to focus their energy in the right place. While in the workshop, the facilitator needs to have a pen and paper with them at all times and must plan to keep these things with them. When scheduling their day, the facilitator must also schedule time after each workshop to reflect and journal about what occurred in that day's session. There is no time limit on this, but a minimum of fifteen minutes is recommended.

Power

As the leader in this process, the facilitator begins the process with a great deal of given power. It is important for the facilitator to fully understand and embrace that "leadership is a form of power, but power *with* people rather than *over* people..." (Forsyth 247) The facilitator must have an awareness of the different bases of power (coercive, expert, informational, legitimate, referent, reward, and connection) in order to work to redistribute power among the group. This can be as simple as reminding the participants of the expert power they bring to the group that it would be impossible to create in the process without. Consciously moving from a democratic leadership style towards a more laissez-faire style through the process is important in this shifting of power – again, enabling the participants to take greater ownership of the process and what they are creating. Never feel that by doing this that you are no longer guiding the process. It was mentioned quite a bit that sometimes when things are going well, the facilitator might feel like they are being lazy or are not "leading" properly; actually, the opposite is true; it means that the process is being facilitated well!

Signs/Indicators to Be Aware Of

One of the key qualities to being an effective facilitator for this work is attentiveness. This section will outline what exactly the facilitator should be looking at and for. Firstly, the facilitator must make sure to listen and watch everything from the moment participants arrive to the workshop until they leave. This means listening does not stop because the group is taking a break or it hasn't started

because the workshop has not technically begun. The facilitator must be paying attention and absorbing as much as they can the entire time.

When observing the group it is important not only to take in facial expressions, but also body language, eye contact, energy levels, ability to complete tasks/activities, and orientation of participants in the space and in relation to others. It has been found that most facial expressions are universal, but a good facilitator cannot depend on that alone. A good facilitator must get to know their group and the individuals in it so they are able to perceive when something has changed, for better or worse. The facilitator must especially be aware of these things in order to make decisions about when to progress from one phase to another. The facilitator will know the group is ready to progress from the community-building phase to the gathering assets phase when the group's cohesion is strong. This is indicated by marked confidence in the expression of thoughts and ideas by the group, greater awareness of and attention to others by individuals in the group, and conflicts are dealt with in more constructive and thoughtful ways. Additionally, communication in the group will become more decentralized and there will be an increase in eye contact with group members. When these things occur, the group is ready to progress into the creating of material for the performance piece.

When it comes to group discussion and determining whether or not there is something lingering that has not been addressed, a good rule of thumb is always to wait too long. It is better to err on the side of silence than to rush through and potentially not allow space for an individual to speak. However, a good indicator the group is ready to move forward is if there has been a good rapport among the group which has died down. It is also okay to specifically ask participants for input if you have noted that they have not spoken yet, or you can see through their body language they have might have something to say.

Communication

The number one thing to enforce with communication among the group is honesty. The facilitator must always be genuine with the group, especially when they have to make a call due to aesthetics or audience concerns that may, at first, oppose what the group wants. Truthfully, a facilitator cannot make decisions or change things without the agreement from the group, and this is accomplished through coming to the group honestly and explaining why that choice needs to be made. Honesty is also at the core of what the facilitator should ask for from the group. An honest human response is needed to bring this work to life.

In order to help establish this honesty, an atmosphere of open, decentralized communication must be established. This is very similar to King Arthur's round table and his knights. There cannot be one person sitting at the "head of the table" funneling all information down. Communication needs to be free among group members and they must feel like they are allowed and encouraged to communicate freely with each other. Tactics such as sitting/standing in a circle instead of placing the facilitator in front of the group will help accomplish this.

Reflecting after each activity and frequently is paramount to the process. When reflecting and holding group discussions (and the facilitator should also be aware of monitoring this when small groups are working) the need for constructive criticism should be addressed. In order to progress as a group and create, it is important the participants not feel attacked or like they are attacking when giving feedback. As mentioned previously in the planning section, exploring various ways of structuring the conversation is the best practice. It is also important to try the ideas that are thrown out, even if the idea is the facilitator's. This is the first time this issue has come up in the methodology and will be addressed more later, but it is important to note that the facilitator is a member of the group, and as such, shares the same privileges.

There are two factors the facilitator should be aware of and become comfortable with: the first is silence. Silence will happen, and often it can feel uncomfortable. It is okay to address this issue with the group and let them know that there will be moments occurring like that throughout the process. The second issue is finding a balance between encouraging participants to speak and not allowing a small few to dominate the conversation. This issue can be skirted by sometimes structuring feedback in a way that requires everyone to give input one at a time or breaking into small groups for discussion first and then coming back into larger groups.

When communicating ideas to the group, there are some guidelines for the facilitator. First the facilitator should ask every question they ask truly wanting to hear the answer. This will let the participants know the facilitator is invested and allow them space to invest further themselves. It is also important when guiding the group that the facilitator stays away from scolding or lecturing the participants about how to do an activity “correctly.” Instead, what Rohd refers to as task-related discipline should be used. This includes support and recognition of what the group has achieved and reminders of what needs to be accomplished.

When working with the group, the facilitator should not make assumptions. In fact, it’s okay to be honest and ask a group outright about a concern or issue. As mentioned previously, various methods can be used, such as having participants write a brief statement on an index card about how they feel towards the process and handing it in anonymously. Lastly, the facilitator must make it their job to challenge surface responses from participants at the very beginning. This reinforces the idea of honesty and honest human response while allowing them to think deeper about the process they are taking part in.

Conflict & Conflict Resolution

The most important thing to remember when conflict occurs is that it is a good thing! In fact, conflict is very healthy for the progress of the group, as well as strengthening the bonds between the group members. If conflict is occurring and there is no shouting or physical violence about to break out, it is best to leave the group to sort through the conflict on their own. If time constraints get in the way or the communication is going around in circles, the facilitator can step in to help. The first step would be to give the group a time limit to find a solution to the problem; this will hopefully make them more proactive about finding a solution. The next step would be to make sure that everyone gets a chance to articulate their point of view and then suggest a compromise for the group to consider. If this still doesn't bring the group to a resolution, then the facilitator can leave that problem, work on something else, and come back to it at a later time when everyone has had a chance to digest the issue a bit more.

When it comes to conflict resolution, the group must come to an understanding of what compromise is. They must realize that individually they are not always going to get what they want and learn to let things go; creating material and releasing it to the group is a part of the artistic process. It's an important part of the process and something that everyone, including the facilitator, must accept.

Community-Building

This concept and phase is at the heart of this process. It should be the number one priority of the facilitator from the very beginning. Once a strong community has been established, the rest of the work will flow naturally from it. As mentioned previously, the facilitator is a collaborator in the room and should work to develop real relationships with the participants. Talking with the participants before, after, and during breaks in the process is fundamental in growing these relationships. As a facilitator, you need to know why you are there because this isn't just a job, it's people; which means you cannot

just clock in and clock out with them. The facilitator must build trust with the group and encourage the group to trust each other.

To stimulate community-building it is a good practice to have the group generate the expectations or “norms” that will be the standard for the group as well as have the members share with each other why they want to devise. This creates shared investment in a purpose and coming back to these original goals and constantly clarifying them throughout the process will help unite the group in that common goal. When talking about these goals, it is important to work as a group to understand that no material or piece belongs to any one person once it has been shared. It is shared with the group in the spirit of honesty and with the trust that the group will be respectful and honor each story. The group must start to consider the whole, while still honoring each individual. This is a hard concept for some, but through dialogue, activities, and time will manifest.

It is good practice to create a sense of ritual within the group. This may be a warm-up activity or how you end the work for a day, but it establishes another bond between the group members. It is something they share with this group and this group alone. Additionally, when the participants are divided into smaller groups, the facilitator must be actively mixing those groups up so everyone has an opportunity to work closely with everyone else in the group.

Lastly, the facilitator is responsible for overseeing the process and progress of the group. While it is important that each participant take personal responsibility for their health and safety, the facilitator must be aware of violations to explicitly-stated group norms and expectations. When these violations occur, they should be address by the entire group and an agreeable solution should be found by the group as a whole to help grow and maintain a strong sense of community within the group.

Novelties

In this research there were tips and helpful information that didn't fit cleanly into one of the above sections, but were found to be of note and will now be addressed in this final section. These recommendations are specific to the intent of this specific process to ensure that the product, whatever that may be, is a true and genuine showcasing of the group's voice, and not refracted through the facilitating artist's lens.

It was mentioned during the planning section that all plans should remain loose. The purpose for this is not only to allow changes to be made from workshop to workshop, but to also leave space for changes to occur on the spot. The best thing a facilitator can do is trust their instincts and respond in the moment. It can also be a terrifying thing, but it is vital and the reason why flexibility is one of the main qualities of a good facilitator.

When in the community-building phase it is important for the facilitator to gather information on who can do certain things well (sing, play violin, perform a back handspring, etc.) and who can benefit from certain things. Jenny McDonald refers to this as finding the places where people shine and where they would like to improve. It is important to note these things in the early stages so that when the group arrives as the structuring stage the facilitator, in their personal reflection can look through what the group has created and make sure that each participant has their moment to shine, as well as their moment to "gain." During the structuring phase, the facilitator must always be aware of who is in the piece and how much. If the facilitator notices that someone is left out, a simple remedy is to come in to the group and suggest incorporating a segue or pointing out that the piece is lacking something and offering up something that the missing participant has generated in the gathering assets phase.

Because the major goal of this process is to have the final product, whatever that may look like, come from the participants any research that may need to be done or props that may need to be

gathered should be done by the group. Again, this gives the ownership of the piece to the participants.

Also, letting participants write their own pieces to later be assembled and worked into the performance is crucial. In the most complete sense, this allows their words to be spoken the way they have structured them.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The philosophy and methodology created as a result of this research reflects the aesthetics and ethics of the researcher. They are intended to be a “best practice” approach to working with communities to create a performance that truly reflects that community; a performance that speaks to their concerns and beliefs in that moment in time. As this is not always the intention of community-engaged performance work or devised performances, this research does not profess to be the only way of working with citizen artists to create performance. Throughout the research, discoveries were made and, more importantly, new questions about the process were formed.

The focus of this research has been an exploration into how to facilitate a devised performance piece with a community of citizen artists that truly reflects their voices and articulates their aesthetic. It began with the idea that a large part of accomplishing this task would revolve around the question of how to take the facilitator’s voice and aesthetic out of the equation as much as possible. The greatest discovery made during this research is that initial assumption is incorrect. Whether or not the facilitator is a member of the community prior to the project is irrelevant. Once the process has begun, once the group-building within the workshops has begun, the facilitator has become a member of the group. They are a part of the group, while also being in a leadership position. To place the facilitator outside the group in order to lead the process would actually be the first step towards creating a rift in the creative process between the facilitator and the participants. Rather than focus on trying to diminish his/her voice, the facilitator needs to focus on making sure that all participants are able to express themselves in the way they feel most comfortable.

After the philosophy and methodology were formed, many other questions related to this process began to emerge about how to be able to put them into practice. These questions concern how

to find community partners to work with and how to communicate effectively with those partners to understand the needs of all parties involved. What is the ideal process for planning the workshops to actually take place? Questions also arose concerning the commitment to the process and how to work around a citizen-artist's schedule. What happens to the process when participants miss a workshop or rehearsal, or worse, suddenly drops out of the process altogether?

These concerns of feasibility in creating an opportunity to apply this new philosophy and methodology came about as a result of the interviews that were held, but also as a result of several failed attempts by this researcher to create a project within the community to take place in the Autumn of 2012. Several of the practitioners' interviews allude to difficulties in setting up a project, and Jenny McDonald, in particular, spoke to these difficulties in setting up an ideal workshop plan outside the actual facilitation. In attempting to set up a project for Autumn of 2012, I set up a project so far in advance (in the Spring of 2012), the organization had restructured and forgotten about the project by August. After that happened, the problem became not having time for community organizations to plan and complete a project within a two month time period. While each specific incident has its own particulars, what can be concluded from these experiences is the need for advanced planning, while also following up on a regular basis in the interim between the initial conception for the project and the implementation of it.

When it comes to personality and disposition in the workshop setting, this paper intentionally does not prescribe a certain "teacher persona" over another. It was stated in the research, as well as in every interview that each facilitator brings with them his/her own personality. No two styles are the same, and an attempt to replicate someone else's style would not be effective because it would not be honest. Honesty was found to be one of the most important qualities for a facilitator to possess, which means each facilitator must use their specific and unique skillsets as a facilitator. This idea also repeated

itself when the practitioners interviewed were asked about what other types of training a good facilitator should possess. The answers were vast and varied as each practitioner thought of other facilitators they knew and compared that with their background and training. There was a consensus that there was no training or knowledge that would be detrimental to the work, and in fact, any sort of training, such as sports training, culinary work, etc. would only add to the arsenal of tools and techniques that can be used by a facilitator. Individuals wishing to become great facilitators need to be comfortable allowing their true selves to be seen by their participants.

The methodology created in this thesis is based upon solid research and investigation into this particular way of working. Throughout this paper it has been noted each process and project is different, which means there is potential for an occurrence or happening in a process this paper doesn't specifically deal with. Adhering to this basic methodology will, however, equip a facilitator for whatever issues may arise in the workshop setting.

APPENDIX: ORIGINAL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Declan Mallon

Declan is the co-creator and artistic director of Upstate Theatre Project in Drogheda, County Louth, Ireland. The company was originally formed in 1997 to work with the border counties of Northern Ireland to help those communities engage in dialogue and process what was happening in their communities as a result of the Troubles. I met Declan in 2011 on a visit to Upstate through a course taken with New York University. I was immediately impressed by his desire, especially in recent years, to engage with the community of Drogheda and how he has been able to provide this outlet to the community while maintaining such high standards. I was fortunate to secure an internship with Upstate during the Summer of 2012 and felt it absolutely necessary to get his insight for the purposes of my research.

What is your experience working with nonprofessionals and communities using devised theatre practices?

It is the way that I work mostly. I haven't worked in professional theatre. Well I have, but not in that context. I've worked as production manager, technical assistant, administrator, or in a coordinating role, but not as an artist so to speak. So no; I've never called myself an artist, but then I was always dubious of the word artist. I was suspect of the title; of what it meant and who they were and their relationship. It all stems from coming from the background that I do. Being working class, the idea of artist traditionally had no link with our community, it wasn't of our community. They were of another community and it has come to do with the way they were portrayed through history I suppose. The way the history of artists is often spoken and taught and wrote about; the idea of the artist as some sort of Shaman, as some sort of outsider looking in...a very objective sort of view on community. I suppose where I come from we would be the subject of the artist rather than being the art makers ourselves. I think it depends on how you define art, and that's the big question. Who is defining art? Who says what

is art and what is not? High art, if you like, has been portrayed as something that is beyond or outside of the community that I would come from. Folk art, which I've never really recognized as art myself as such, because of those histories that I was reading...it never really fit into their equation, so it never came into my equation. So I never thought of art as being part of the community that I came from until probably recently, in the last ten years. I started considering culture rather than art and that's when things began to change for me. Traditional music, traditional dance....versifying rather than poetry. Poetry, I suppose, Tom Poland is the one that, he was the one who used that phrase in a review of spoken word artists or performers, or rap artists to some degree, or Benjamin Zephaniah, the English poet. People I listened to as a young punk rocker, John Clarke may be the best known of them and they are not considered poets as such by certain parts of the establishment, but to me they probably were better poets...or at least more in tune with where I was coming from. So when you talk about nonprofessionals and community, the question almost suggests that I am somebody who has a skill that I am putting back into the community and that is true to some degree but it's...again, I'm speaking from a very personal point of view...I've very mixed feelings now. When I started off twenty years ago, I thought theatre would be the new punk rock because I'd come out of that culture...that counterculture of punk rock. I had just discovered that in my late teens...and thinking we had something here that we could call ourselves and the whole notion of do it yourself and I thought theatre could be something similar within the community and I wanted to set up a base within my own community of Drogheda that would actually allow...create that environment where we could actually be the punk rockers of theatre. So, the experience has been varied and my thinking around it has changed incredibly over the last twenty years or twenty four years or whatever it is since I've started from having great faith in the techniques and the ideas to having some questions about it and whether or not it is the appropriate way to go about it. The techniques are interesting because they are a way of starting. They are a starting point, but they are only a starting point. I think that is the most important thing that I've learned is that

you should not rely on them entirely because they don't deliver entirely of themselves. It's how you use them or how you choose not to use them. When to know when to drop all of that and start from the point of view of the people you are actually trying to collaborate with who may have no experience of collective devising or producing or collaboration and finding out where they are at and starting from there. Feidlim Cannon, since he has come to work with Upstate over the last two years was a fascinating case in point in that his first workshop had no games, no theatre games or exercises of that nature at all, but was one of the most fascinating days on an Upstate project that I've spent and all he done...simple and complicated at the same time, was ask people to take him through the town...because he's not from the town...to places that were of personal or some other significance. He was given a tour of the town and people talked about themselves, if they wished, or they talked about sites that had significance. From that he was able to base a whole project on it. It started like a reminiscence workshop and there were discussion workshops because the people that he asked me to try and bring into the project were not to be community performers or not somebody who had been on Upstate projects. Because of that, he knew, he realized that if he started doing "pass the ball" or "pass the story" or whatever exercise or theatre game that you might want to suggest...if he began with any of that, if he introduced any of that at too early a stage those people would have walked out of that workshop and walked out of the project because that wasn't within their cultural understanding at all. He started from where they were at. He found where they were at and they he just began to build it. What is amazing about it...while they won't perform live, they will perform on video. Because of his artistic bent, he is interested very much in making surreal the ordinary, so their stories are quite ordinary and fantastic at the same time because that's what they are. All our stories can be that. He has coached them and built up a trust so that when he suggests that, for instance, they wear a party hat in the middle of a graveyard as part of a video shoot they are prepared to do it. That becomes performance. Feidlim very cleverly understands performance, one that is not just live, but that it can be on video as well and how we

perform in everyday life. He has actually thrown a curveball there as well because it is very surreal. So when we talk about what are my experiences...they have been vast and varied. They've failed very many times when I've gone into certain environments and worked with certain groups...they've completely and utterly failed. I'd say they failed, not because they are failed techniques in themselves, but because they were not applicable to the people I was working with and I was too slow to understand that I needed to do something else...to have a different approach. Then, of course, many have been massively successful if you look at the history of Upstate, working within the conventional as we did then at the start of Upstate. We worked within conventional and conservative notions of what performance was, which basically translates that it was a theatre piece. A live theatre piece to be put onstage for an audience to sit there and watch and drink it in, and that was it. There was no playing. Well there were with those sort of theatrical conventions, but not in any very radical way. Although some people say the fact that you have people onstage performing their own stories, performing stories that they imagined or their own lives reimagined as we used to call it, that that in itself was a radical step. To some degree it is. It's not to denigrate what we've actually achieved...but anyway, looking back on those sort of achievements we certainly can rank a lot of our work as being very, very successful within those parameters of theatrical performances. *Zoo Station*, for instance, produced over a two year period back in 2003 or 2004, was one of the first non-professional performances that was accepted into the Dublin Fringe Festival and favorably reviewed by critics, and popular because it sold very well. There were, of course, many many more...the cross-border work that we did for five to seven years that had great moments of great theatricality and great coming together of communities. Year upon year it produced original work created by ten to fifteen people reflecting on their own community within the context of cross-border peace and reconciliation. It reflected all those contradictions within the peace process and within the conflict itself...the fears, the anxieties. Looking at histories...looking through the prism of theatre you can safely remove...and a lot of those people were able to talk about things and use that

environment of devising a theatrical piece as a way of talking and thinking about what was happening in their community. They were on the border...they were very much a part, not in the center, but very much a part of the conflict as well. The youth programs were extremely successful within the cross-border work because it managed to bring together a cross-section of the community ...a very divided community...Nationalist, Loyalists, Protestants, and Catholics...a rural area that is extremely conservative. The young people managed to overcome those divisions simply because there was an outlet provided for their energies. We provided a creative outlet that allowed them to discuss differences. I'm very proud of that work as well. But again, we worked in a very conventional way. I'm convinced that that is not the only type of performance or the only definition of performance. I have spent the last two years looking at that a bit closer...seeing where community performers can be witnessed to the best of their abilities...to a better understanding or reception of what they're doing. I suppose the contradiction in our previous way of working is that we were never a training organization, but we were asking people to go on a stage and somehow be able to replicate skills that professional actors spend four or five years training to replicate.

How do you balance building performing skills versus growing content?

Because it's devising you use techniques, particularly improvisation...open-ended acting or performance around an idea for a scene or around a couple of characters that have been collectively arrived at...so performance is always part of it. While in the workshop space or environment the performance is different because it doesn't have to have a lot of the technical requirements that you need when you get on a stage...voice projection, the way you stand, the way you sit, which way you're looking. All of that...all of those technical difficulties can be overcome in the workshop. It's when it moves from the workshop onto the stage that it sometimes begins to falter simply because those technical abilities aren't there. I don't know if we have ever been able to successfully bridge that gap.

We have to some degree because some people are natural performers. Some people are naturally loud...some people are able to project themselves physically when on stage and in front of an audience. If we were to do a comparative study, and people consistently want to do comparative studies between: is this play as good as this professional production?... then we begin to falter. Community-engaged theatre begins to falter because it doesn't have the technical ability. We don't have the time, or sometimes the ability, to train people to perform. It's a different type of project. So if it's a different type of project that you need to reach those technical standards, the question I have begun to ask is: should there be a different type of performance that we aim to create? That way, we avoid the technical flaws, to some degree, and we never ask people to do exactly that. Don't ask them to try and achieve technical standards that they haven't trained and our project hasn't trained them for.

So, the workshops are more about developing content more than developing performance skills; that is just a side effect of some of the methods used?

I think that it depends on what methods you're talking about. The side of the performance skills really comes in during the rehearsal phase for public presentation of the work that was created within the workshop. The initial stages of any project is not about making anything, but about creating the community that will make it. That's what the first six to eight weeks is generally about...maybe more. The irony of course is that people don't understand what you're doing at that phase...think that you're just wandering around doing nothing when what you're trying to do is bring people close together and form a community that will be a collective who are able to collaboratively create something. When it is created, then you begin the rehearsal phase to look at the technical necessities of the public performance. But, if you think of it purely in terms of conventional theatre, with a fourth wall, etc. I would say that may be that is the wrong way to go about. That's why in the last couple of years we've begun to do more site-specific work, looking at how to bring the audience closer. We've begun working

with Louise Lowe, who doesn't allow more than one or two audience members into each performance so you have very intimate settings where old-fashioned storytelling is more appropriate in some cases a better description than acting. That proximity helps create a genuine exchange and the performers become a part of a very a reflective process that includes the audience. Those techniques and that approach have come to very much color the way that we create work. That isn't to say they we will never create anything for the stage again, but at the moment I'm looking at ways to avoid the stage.

Can you describe your process in putting together a workshop/series of workshops? What kinds of things go into your considerations?

I design workshops with an artist who will lead them and one of the most important things that is very much a part of that is...the collaborative ethos of the work must at all times be upheld and that is a much more difficult and gray area than people sometimes want to admit. If you have ten people in a room with one artist and you decide that everything must be voted on democratically, it wouldn't work. If everyone says that they like one person's poetry and they want to do the poem in the middle of the performance in a certain style and they have notions of how it might be part of the performance and the artist says no...that they can see how it wouldn't work through experience, through trying to mold the performance and they realize that it doesn't work and yet the majority of the people want it in, then you have a difficulty with the whole idea...the whole notion of the process because surely the artist who has studied and worked in the area for a long time is the person to advise and warn people that they are going to wrong direction. Sometimes the idea that people have of performance or theatre is, again, molded by very conventional ideas of what has been handed down through the way we all learn about theatre. In our education system most young people still...their first experience of Shakespeare, for instance is that it is read or it's performed for them...but never in a new way. So when I sit down to design, we try to discuss what happens or how does the process stay intact, collaborative, and collective

if the artists has to suddenly make a call that will turn them into the despot in the room because they will be saying no for the common good, but yet, democratically speaking the group wants to say yes to an idea. So when we talk about processes, we have to talk about processes that uphold both of those viewpoints...what is good aesthetically and what is good for someone's ego who wants to see their poem put into the performance. So when you are designing all of those sorts of things come into question. The most important characteristic of an artist in that context is that they must be able to listen...that they must be hearing what people are saying to them and not only considering what's coming at the end, but what is being asked and the complex relationship between each individual in the group...and how do you manage those relationships...how to make them real relationships so it isn't just totalistic acquaintances who happen to be working on the same project for a couple of hours every week with the artist. Maybe it is through time. Maybe it is through abandoning the idea of looking at certain techniques and using more natural techniques. Discussion...talk is always a good one. There is no conclusive answer to any of that. Simply it's an ongoing procedure. You check back, you think about these things, and it doesn't always happen in the workshop. Often it happens at home and you've finished your work and you start thinking about what's happened and you realize that you've made a mistake and you go back and you tell people you've made a mistake. What I like about Fiedlam Cannon's style is that...one he's a very affable man. He talks and jokes about everything he does as much as anyone else in the room might be tempted to do. There's always a good, jovial atmosphere in their approach and yet he's always managed to create an environment where trust is so high that people will divulge very very personal, very tragic stories and offer them to people in the public arena...and that's incredible. It's our job then, both Fiedlam's and Upstate's to ensure that we do that with the greatest respect for those stories and hold them in the highest esteem and create good quality aesthetics around it so it's actually received in the highest esteem and considered in that way. So relationships and processes will always change and the environment that you create depends on who comes into that. If

you're working with young people then it's a different ballgame altogether. You are often contending with an ignorance of the idea art or the lack of consideration for what we might consider the traditional arts or a culture clash between young people's idea of what's exciting as far music is concerned, what's exciting as far as film is concerned and what we may consider exciting. So you have that culture clash of youth and the not so young coming together to try and create something. That is about good debate and good conflict of interests and battling it out with each other to find compromise where they feel safe and good about what they do...and excited about what they do...and we feel good about the fact that we've brought the same aesthetic standards and the same respect for what the group and we are trying to achieve. If there is going to be a collaboration then it has to be through the way we look at things and the way they look at things. We are searching for a compromise. You negotiate your way through the whole process. That doesn't mean you don't try radical things...you do. With Lowe's first workshop with the group, they came in and there wasn't a word spoken for two hours. They simply moved. She asked them to follow her orders, if you like. It was just a physical workshop, very little said. At the end, she asked if people cared for what just happened. The general response was, we don't know what just happened, but let's try it again, let's continue. You can always insert a very radical approach and see if it sticks and as Louise admits herself, if it doesn't work, you just start again. I suppose ultimately it's trying to find a time where both the artist and the participants come in and they have the time to do that exploration...and finding new techniques as well that will actually bring you in a different direction that is possibly a bit more radical than anyone may have thought of doing in the first place and it has an outcome that surprises everyone...and maybe that's not a theatrical performance, but it is a performance of some sort. We have always described ourselves as a performing arts organization with the notion that theatre encapsulated or had the potential to encapsulate music and dance and some and rhyme and text and visual. That's why theatre was very very important to us...but now theatrical convention may be what is getting in the way of our performance and we need to break that. It's not

just Upstate...we are following the lead of Avant-Garde artists of the sixties and seventies. It's only coming into Ireland via artists like Fiedlam and Gary and Louise and Rita Dice...people like that who are very good. Throwing it up in the air and seeing which way it lands and making good work from it and people are intrigued because it's very very different. That's not to displace one tradition with another one. It's just that they can go along parallel and together or intertwined. That's what will happen...what does happen in good places with good artists is that they begin to intertwine. I think it's important as well for community-engaged theatre to recognize that there are others ways to make the omelet...and you crack extra eggs or don't crack any at all...and play around with it a bit...and we have been cognizant of all that. Because of culture shifts, the citizens that we work with are sophisticated and cultured. They may not be cultured in the way of ballet or opera, but they may be damn well cultured in the way of rap music, in the way of fishing and football...and that's culture. Culture is very very broad and the arts have to encapsulate culture...and it has to respond to these cultural touchstones otherwise it is dead for those people. Why would they want to use it then...because it's a tool for reflection...as a tool for self-expression, for self-advancement, in any way a personal development if it doesn't reflect their culture...then they have to find something else that is. I've gone off on a rant and that probably doesn't answer the question at all. Give me the question again and I'll answer it.

Can you describe your process in putting together a workshop/series of workshops? What kinds of things go into your considerations?

You want some framework. What is the aim of the project, and the objective is how you get there. When preparing a workshop you go in and you start talking to them. You go in and you introduce yourself to the group and you find out, possibly through using games and those exercises, but maybe not. If you go in to people in wheelchairs, do games and techniques work? Is it a reminiscence approach that you need? If you want people to start talking about their personal histories then find something

that we all have in common so we can share and reflect upon our personal opinions of that one item. For instance, if you were in Savannah, Georgia, what might be the theme that a group of elderly citizens would be interested in? History...again, I come back to Fiedlam's stuff, but what is history? You are history. Upstate's seven year old participant, they are history. They are literally history personified and that is how we come back to finding a way into recognizing the personal in the grander idea of history. As for techniques, like I say, you know them already. Being trained as a facilitator gives you a bunch of tricks that you can taper to whatever conditions you walk into. But also, just know they are not the only techniques...and those techniques can be alienating to certain communities if you bring them in...some groups because they've never encountered them before. Even in a peer group...closed environment of the workshop with ten people and you ask someone to stand in a circle and make a gesture. Watch how people are able to do it and those who are less able. Watch them as they walk from the circle into the center and you can see how hard it is for them to do that. So when you introduce even very simple games like that to the group, be very cognizant of the variety of experience and emotion in that group and the fear that they might have. They are a great framework though and they are very adaptable as well. They can be made to fit different occasions and different peoples. If I were to walk into a workshop today the first thing I would do is sit down and talk to people...and I wouldn't have done that twenty years ago because I would be afraid of a stagnant situation. There is this idea that the first thing you do every time is to start with an activity because it is about acting in one way or another. I mean acting in a general sense. It's about doing and to start talking can sometimes make you think that you avoid doing...but I probably would just sit down and listen for a while and talk to people about what they thought art was about and what a project might be about or why they walked through the door. Try to get a good feel for people that way and then begin to build a workshop around them and the techniques that you might introduce around them rather than coming in with a bunch of techniques and then giving out to somebody for not participating fully or wholly in it. I'm not sure if that's right any more. It's not

right and it's a mistake I've made. I've gone in thinking that people should just respond positively and openly to...you know, Knights, Roundheads, and Cavaliers...do you have that? It generally was a lot of fun...people did laugh an awful lot playing it and thought it was very funny and silly...particularly with adults. Basically you walk around the room...you have a partner and if I call Roundheads then you have to run and one lifts the other in their arms and the next they jump on their back and ride them like a horse...its quite physical...all about contact. Always very fun...but then someone would turn around and ask me what was the point? The point was that you make physical contact and you not afraid of that. It brings them together physically as well as the idea that they can laugh together...they can laugh at each other and with each other at this nonsense game. It's about judging when somebody can't do that or doesn't want to do that. They are probably the people that I want to work with. Declan Gorman made a very good observation about Forum Theatre. I've done a session with Augusto Boal, which I enjoyed very much and learned an awful lot from...he and I attended it and after he said there was just one thing that was worrying him. He said that anyone who actually came from the audience to participate in the performance...he said they were the exhibitionists. What about the ones who weren't brave enough to stand up? How do we participate with them? I think they are the people I'm still trying to reach. Every time I'm creating workshops I want to create an environment that allows the quiet one to come in and perform...and find techniques that allow them to blossom during the process...and the means at the end that that actually can be communicated to a wider community and audience...and allows that audience a means to participate in a way that an audience doesn't traditionally doesn't do...but if we can find a way that it is interactive then I think I'm doing a better job. Don't get me wrong, I'm not dismissing games and exercises. They are an excellent framework. That's a wonderful tool...a wagon to have in your arsenal. We just also need to keep stretching and challenging the idea and notion of the workshop as well.

How do you (facilitator) share growing connections/themes you may see without imposing your ideas on the group?

I think that a facilitator artist who actually is very good would possibly see the links between work or what is emerging far quicker than participants. Not only because they're trained, but because they're committed artists. They see these things. I think that the roles have to be understood from the outside that the artist will make the call. The artist won't come up with the material, but the artist will make the call on how the material should go together...but the artist who is a good facilitator as well will recognize that that can only be done with complete agreement of any participant. You can't impose ideas because if you attempt to impose anything on anybody, I mean, what would you do?

Shut down.

Or resist. You'd resist it and if you're meeting that resistance you're not going to achieve what you're trying to impose so why bloody bother? It's a pointless exercise. So the good ones will understand that and will negotiate everything with the people they are collaborating with because that is part of the collaborative process...that you must be negotiating with people. The artist is one of the collaborators...they are the lead collaborator because of their experience, but nonetheless they are collaborators and I think the good ones do understand that.

What other types of training do you think might be necessary for this type of work?

I may be reading this completely wrong...and again it's from a personal perspective...I regret not understanding the politics of art from an earlier age. I think I would have appreciated what we were doing at Upstate and what I was doing when I set up the youth theatre had I understood the policy battles of the last forty to fifty year... and only again educating myself around those issues...I must have appeared a very naïve person, you know? Just extremely naïve. So, I suppose politics. Some people say

that's bollocks. Let the politics and the policy makers argue it out among themselves, we make the art, let them make of it what they want. To some degree that's a very good approach as well because you don't have to spend a lot of time reading very boring or sometimes very annoying reports and books around these issues...and you wonder where it gets us all. But it does allow us to where the work impacts...in ways that we probably don't expect that it would. I just finished reading Baz Kershaw's *The Politics of Performance*...and do community-engaged interventions actually have any worth? He did a history of it in the UK and of course it did. Within the communities it had massive impact, but it's not a panacea. It can't replace politics...it doesn't replace politics. But it builds on the whole idea of society and community and I think if I understood all of that at an earlier age I would have made better work as a facilitator and in that role myself. Looking at policy and why...again we go back to the idea we were talking about earlier on...an experience you just recently had with a participant who walked into the process that you were leading and thought he was going to be part of a big film set of some sort. If that is the dominant perception of art...you make it to be a star, you make it to be rich. It's a sad reflection of what art has actually become for a lot of people because they don't see it as something that is integral to their own personal daily lives...something that you use as a part of being a human being, which is, I suppose the pinnacle, the summit that we're all trying to reach...where human society is not divorced from art and art is not divorced from human society. I suppose in the telling of the history of art it has actually managed to do exactly that...and if anything, our work in applied or community-engaged theatre is trying to integrate it back into our daily lives. So a history of art, a history of community theatre, community-engaged theatre, or whatever we're going to call it. There are books out there now that you can read. Helen Nicholson's book on community is a very interesting take on what the hell is a community? What do you call a community, how can you call a community? The sense, again the naivety that I once shared, that a community was something was homogenous...a unit, a collective unit...but of course communities never are. The working class community is a very good example. I use

the phrase, but if you ask me to actually define it I struggle because it is a multicultural community unto itself and very very diverse. So, a history of art and a history of community-engaged or applied theatre is a very very important thing to understand. It's true that you should understand the policy making and the politics of it as well...and politics with a small p. Augusto Boal called politics the greatest of all the arts because it is invested with the responsibility of governing the relationship between people and that is what is most important. Art is part of that because art is about communicating. It's discursive. All art processes, even for the individual artist living in garrets or the individual poets or composers...whatever they do, it's discursive. They want to talk with the rest of the world, but they just want it to be their voice and that's fair enough. Sometimes I want to make work and I imagine...I hope the day will come when I have something to say and I'll make something for myself to share it with everyone else and they can reject it...and that's the other thing...just because its applied theatre, just because it's community-engaged theatre doesn't mean it cannot be rejected. People can walk away and say its rubbish. We have to accept that just because we make it collectively with the very principled intent that we do that it doesn't make it any different to any other art experience, cultural experience that an outsider from the project might have. So when they walk into it, they walk into it cold and they might say, sorry pal, that's not for me and walk away...but that's part of the discussion as well. You just keep talking...otherwise if you stop talking, nothing will happen then.

Jenny MacDonald

Jenny MacDonald is a teaching artist and facilitator based in the Dublin area. I came into contact with her through the Study Abroad program I participated in with New York University on Community-engaged theatre practices. She was a tutor on the program and I had the opportunity to work with in the process of devising a performance piece with my fellow NYU colleagues. Being a participant in one of Jenny's projects allowed me to not only observe Jenny's facilitation style, but to feel the impact that it had on the group, and myself individually as a member of that group. I was very impressed with her

ability to bring the group to a creative, collaborative energetic space. It was during this process when the idea for my thesis arose. I wanted to know how to capture that spirit and energy that I witnessed in this facilitator towards her participants.

What is your experience working with non-professionals/communities using devised theatre practices?

I've worked with a really big range of groups, from children and young people in a school context to adults and young people in a community development context, and also to adults and young people brought together for the purpose of some kind of intercultural exchange or the exploration of a community of place or interest. As an example...first the intercultural exchange. There's an organization called Project Comma in the UK that I've done a lot of projects with. They work very locally, bringing young people from different place or different backgrounds together and I just finished a project with them in London where we brought an Irish group to engage in that process with five other European countries. As an example of the second one, a community of interest, there's an organization called Frazi in Dublin who deal with vulnerable migrants...so that was looking specifically at what is the experience of migration...so that would be looking at a community of interest and if I said a community of place it would be something like a women's group I was just working with in Dundalk...so they've had a very specific experience of a place that's been very unsettled in the past...so their experience of getting into education and getting their children into education and that kind of stuff. I think, in certain ways I always see that the process is the same...that you respond to a group as they are, but you bring in a similar set of principles. I think that's important because that guards against the tendency to condescend or patronize or assume knowledge of a group. If you go in kind of going...this is a group of asylum seekers so they're going to need a lot of care, or this is a group of young people so we can't expect them to have intelligent things to say or strong opinions...you can come up with all kinds of assumptions. I would start

with the people as a starting point. Who are these people? What do they have to say? Then I look at trying to “upskill” in terms of dramatic or theatrical techniques to enable them to say it...but I definitely see my side as being... in some ways I’m offering technical capacity and I’m also a detective. I’m trying to discover who are these people and how can we help them reveal themselves the most. Sometimes that’s through a personal world and sometimes it’s an imaginative world, but I do think every piece should be...the process is very similar, but every piece should end up being totally different...well, maybe not totally different, but every piece will be different because every individual is different and every piece will have similarities because those are the common denominators of being a human being. I think the first point to me, and maybe it’s just my own personal interest...I always want to know who are these people...what do these people have to say because I’m always looking at how to get them revealing themselves...and then I think once you know what your material is and who these people are and what they want to say, then you know what you need theatrically to say it. Then you can help people gain those skills in order to say it.

What are some of the challenges that you have come across in this work? (Have you found solutions?)

The challenge that I’m seeing the most right now is...and it almost has to do with how much bridging of communication has to go on. So, I was working on a project with the Health Center here creating an issue-based forum theatre piece for schools and we kept having meetings where I thought I was being very clear and I would say it’s going to look like this and we’re going to do it like this because of a, b, and c...and then coming back to it several times realizing wow, that person heard something completely different because I think there is a real challenge in working with the arts outside the arts. In most fields actually there would be a challenge in inter-sectoral work. In this field you’re looking at working with formal education institutions, informal education institutions, community development sector, the arts sector...and all those have their own language, their own way of working and their own

set of assumptions. So there is this actually quite rich challenge, but there is a challenge of...how do you clearly communicate what you're trying to do? How do you stay open to the fact that somebody else has different needs and a different way of working, but also not compromise yourself or your work in terms of things like aesthetic or process as well. Another challenge I notice a lot is a desire to shortcut process. I think that is usually funding driven...people want to get the most for the least amount of money so they are like, can we do fifty workshops in two days with fifty thousand young people and two facilitators...people kind of come up with these ridiculous asks and I think I used to say yes to a lot of them because I was trying to get work, but also because I was like...yes, this work can do anything! And people would ask...so if they do a three week drama program will all the social problems be solved? And I used to be like, yeah we can change anything! Now, I'm much more...we may observe a slight change in confidence in that time. Which I think is a huge thing. So one of the things for me I think is to be more confident in terms of ways to solve problems. I've come to be more confident in saying I believe in this kind of work and I know what it can do, but have to ask for some things to do it properly...like, it's not okay to do a drama workshop on top of a pool table. I used to think that was cool and edgy...like we can do it anywhere! But now I'm like...no we actually need a floor space, we need to be able to move, and it would be nice if that floor space were clean because then there is respect for the work we're doing. Equally you don't want to be like...if I don't have an offer tomorrow morning I can't make the piece. So there is a balance between those, but I think I'm noticing that the more confident and clear I am about what is required to do the work well and in particular, what kind of timeline is required because these processes don't happen overnight. You tend to ultimately have a project that goes better and you have a happier group and a happier organization that you may be working in partnership with...so in the long run it is important to ask for what you need and be clear about what you need...and in terms of that thing on communication...I'm still working that one out. I think a lot of people are very drawn to drama, particularly in the community because it's very exciting and it's cool and interesting and fun, but there

can be a misunderstanding sometimes about what's possible and what's required. I suppose I'm still working that out...in that I'm becoming aware of investing in relationships, having meetings and not jumping in...sometimes people will call you and go...can you do this and start tomorrow, here's the budget, let's go! Now I say...let's take a step back. Let's have a meeting. Why don't you tell me more about yourselves? I'll tell you more about myself. Why don't we meet the group and have a taster session instead of assuming that your group wants to do the project? Sometimes you get a group leader coming to you and they, for their own reasons want the project because they think it's going to be beneficial or its going to look great on their yearly report...and none of those are negative things necessarily, but I've started to be like...first let's have a meeting, then we'll have a taster workshop, then we'll talk to the group about how that went, then we'll look at starting in a couple months and we'll reassess at that time...and also not jumping instantly to performance as well with a group who has never done a drama-based program. Sometimes saying...let's start with workshops initially and maybe at the end have a small sharing with family and friends...and maybe in a year having a big public moment...so I've kind of slowed down. That's been one way of dealing with the challenge...probably slowing down and doing less theatre projects at one time to make sure I don't take too many shortcuts.

How do you balance building performing skills versus growing content?

I think you can often marry the two. Often the very generating of content can happen through something that's also building skills...so storytelling exercises, improvisations...and I think you can reflect with the group at the end of each session as to both of those things...like what content have they built and what skills are they gaining so that they become aware of their own skills-building process...and I think it's also really good to watch for opportunities to find out what skills your party has because most people are sitting on little hidden creative gems. You discover that somebody is actually an incredible painter or singer and they just haven't had chance to reveal it for twenty years. I think you want to work

as many different ways as possible initially to allow as many of those to come through and then, especially if you do have the time frame on the devising process...everything is material. A game can be a great movement piece ultimately or a warm up exercise. I think you experienced that in a lot of the stuff we did with NYU...like we were playing warm-ups with balls and that movement style ended up in the piece...or like a physical warm-up that can end up looking like good choreography. So I think initially I try to do them together as much as possible and I try to really demystify drama. I try to build skills that reveal to people that they have a lot of those skills and it's just about shining a lens on them...that they know how to talk and breathe or how to sing or how to shout or wiggle their body or whatever it is and it's just making choices about when and how to do that. That's the difference with drama...and it's getting comfortable with other people watching them. I think the biggest skill usually that has to be built with nonprofessionals is getting comfortable being watched. I think that people who go into theater...go into acting, love to be watched and most people don't like it. That's the big difference. Whereas a natural performer...as soon as they know there's an audience you see them rise...if everyone turns to hear the story in the pub you see them get all lit up and I think a lot of people, as soon as they feel all the eyes turn, they freeze. So I think trying to find ways to move from a low to a high focus...scaffolding from a low to a high focus so that people get used, from the first week, to being seen so that you don't sacrifice them on some sort of community performance space where it's horrifying to be observed at that level. I think most people are naturally dramatic. I think it's like...them, but it has to be built...the comfort with sharing that or being seen because most people can be hilarious when they think no one's watching...like you're doing a game or something very low focused and people are doing it in pairs and they're so funny and then you go...let's take a look at this pair and then they...it goes down a notch.

Can you describe your process in putting together a workshop/series of workshops? What kinds of things go into your considerations?

I guess I do always think what I'm trying to get to because you have to know the first day where you're trying to go...and then you have to be open that completely changing, but I think if you don't have a plan that has a notion of a destination then you end up with a formless journey. So for something like NYU, I would say...we have six days, we need people to learn a devising process that can be used in a community-engaged context, and we need a show by the end of it. So to get there, what do we have to do from day one? So I would start usually with what was happening at the end...so what has to happen on day one...it is day one of a very quick process. So we want something to happen in day one that could appear in the final piece...at least one thing that could generate content. People have to get to know each other, people have to get relaxed, people have to get comfortable. People have to start to consider what kind of themes they're interested in or they want to explore. So I tend to have...these are the things I want covered and I look at that and I go...so that looks like these series of exercises. Then I often find that I over plan and I have too many for that day, so I can put some of these on day two or day three. Then what I find...once I've done one workshop I have so much more information on something I just...the first day is this mecca of information about who these people are. Then I find the adaptation comes according to who they are, and each step of the way I'm trying to involve them more and more in the planning of the next stages. So by eighty percent into a process I would hope at the end of each session we're taking half an hour together and going, okay where did we get to and what do we still need to get done. So there is this shifting of awareness on the planning side of it and understanding what's going on. I think initially people don't have the space for that. You just want to create a safe space for them to experience something new or to express themselves, but I think there comes a point when you do want to engage people in...this is what we need to do to make this happen, so who's going to do that? And it's hard because you can almost feel a bit lazy, like...I'm the director so maybe I should do this, but I think it's important that you say...oh, so we need a hat...who's going to get that hat? And you could do it because you know where the shop is, but somebody actually going and getting the hat

and bringing back the five Euro receipt...that means their engaged in the whole process. It's not just the school play where the teacher comes on at the end and makes it look perfect kind of thing. So it does get more involved as it goes on and...I think there is that kind of thing where you have to have...I guess I do probably plan less or stitch a plan less than I used to. I now go in with plans every day, but more and more I have the confidence to respond to what's happening in the moment...which I think is exciting for people especially as you get further down the line...if they can see you directing or trying things, they're thinking...hmm what about this? But I think that you have to know how confident your people are too because some people want to be clearly led and some people are quite comfortable if you get more and more open and you want to experiment with that...so that's a kind of theatrical confidence that people build...and actually a lot of professional actors don't have that confidence...they either love a director who experiments and tries things or they hate it because they just want to be told where to stand and they want to know how to get where they need to get to...but I find it interesting to experiment with this so...and I think it's okay, in fact even important, that the facilitator does honestly have a creative interest in what's going on. I don't think the facilitator needs to hide themselves and their own gifts or skills because you are one of the people in the room...you are one of the people that are doing the project. That notion of...I'm completely open to what anyone else wants I think is false because a facilitator has a bunch of skills just like everyone else in that room and should be offering their full self...obviously leaving space for other people because if you're much more confident with theatre than other people there's a hazard that you won't leave enough space...not over planning is a good idea because you want to leave some space to respond to people. Sometimes somebody brings something to you that you weren't expecting. Sometimes someone has an amazing idea and it's great to run with it for a moment. Yeah, so I guess that is how I go about planning...and I love planning actually. It feels like writing a play or something, it's really exciting...especially once you know the people because you start being like...she told that story about this, so what if we did an exercise that was now more about

this...and then I also look with plans...looking at that scaffolding thing. Have you given people the steps they need to do what you're asking them to do by hour four or five...if you're asking people to move in weird ways in the fifth hour, have you warmed them up properly? If you're asking people to reveal a lot about themselves on day three, did you give them the opportunities to reveal their names and something they like on day one? Just being aware of building such that people can...so that there are actual steps and building in some risk...and knowing when it's time to push people... and then there will be sessions where you might say...that was a big push last week...we need to have a cozy session where we play a lot of games we've played before and everyone gets to feel confident and everyone gets a group hug at the end, you know? Then I think you need sessions where you're like...we're going to stick you out on a limb a little bit, you know?

What techniques do you use to create an environment where every person feels like an integral part of the process?

I do think it's really important to get a sense of people's strengths. One thing that is simple that I find can be really good, is at some stage to look at the idea of given games and make a list of...these are the sort of things we need to complete this project...so we might need acting and story, we might need people who can make phone calls, we might need people who can sew costumes, we might need people who are great at making other people feel good, people who are good at making a great cup of tea, whatever...so sometimes you can take a look at what are all the skills that are going to make a great project and where do people feel like really have that skill and that is something they can give...and where do they feel they don't have that skill and they would love to have more of that skill, so that is something they have to gain. So almost mapping out who you have in that way and making sure that everyone gets their shine moments...like that great dancer gets a solo, but everyone also gets their gain moments...so everyone who wants to sing gets to do a number with two really confident singers. Making

sure everyone gets a challenge and everyone gets to be in their strength. Also, I think finding different modes of expression, especially when it comes to shaping the content because some people are really good verbally and very confident at shaping words, but some people can't do that at all...they want to draw or express themselves physically. So I think in reflection sessions it's really important to find lots of different ways for people to feedback on what they think works or doesn't work...like show or draw us an image of what you think was the strongest moment today or write down one word that was the strongest moment today or sometimes have a discussion so discussers get that as well. Also, in terms of all exercises...really varying approaches so that some people get to express themselves in story and some people get to express themselves in a picture...and then it's just watching that basic group dynamics stuff...is there anyone who is dominating....and that's when I like to use contracts. I do contracts with all ages and all groups just because I think it never hurts any human being to put a focus on what it actually means to listen or make space for people...even the discussion of it I think is a useful reminder for people that a creative person requires a lot of careful awareness of dynamics. The thing that you're also always watching for...sometimes you make purely aesthetic decisions when it comes to shaping a show and sometimes you do go....you have that shaping day discussion with people, I always go home that night and ask...does everyone have a moment in here, does everyone have something that's theirs because not all material is going to go forward...so cross-referencing back to earlier notes and looking to see, okay that's a piece of that person's story...and then just watching to see if there is anyone who has ended up with nothing that's their little piece in it. Some groups are at a level where you can just ask them. Please consider whether you feel like you're in this and if you're not talk to me...and you also have to be aware of whether someone is confident enough to say that and if they're not...then just looking at the piece and coming back the next day and saying...you know I feel like we're missing a transitional move here, so remember there was that great song that we can put in there...you're just doing in consciously to make sure that everyone has something in there. Which again,

I think is different from a school play where you go...this person is the best actor, this person is the best in the scene so we're just going to do that and it's all about the best. To me you will end up with the best piece if all of the performers feel invested. If there is anyone who is visibly a bit checked out then it's not a strong piece of community-engaged theatre because the power of a piece...to a significant degree is how engaged and alive the people presenting it are.

In what ways do you go about “checking in”/ “reading the pulse” of the group?

I guess you're always...sometimes I feel like I'm being some kind of wildlife tracker. Your senses have to be so alive. I find I sometimes come home and I'm tired and completely overworked because you're taking in so much information all the time...how are people sitting, how they are speaking...who is getting really animated about what? It's important to take time at the end of the workshop to reflect upon that for ten or fifteen minutes on your own. I think it's really valuable, if you can, to go for a coffee or tea by yourself before you go home and get into your own life again because you get to kind of go...oh that person was a bit quieter today...maybe there is something going on with them. I think a lot of that is with your senses and your instincts trying to be very conscious, but also developing a group consciousness of that too so that eventually everyone in the group is also taking care of that piece because you will have some people in your group that know each other better than you know them...so sometimes people in the group can also be aware of that kind of caretaking. I think it's good too with breaks to have little informal chats with people...and I think there's a lot of people who might mention something they're concerned in an informal chat that they wouldn't in the group. So I think getting there early and hanging out with the group, during the break, and also sticking around a bit after is always good. Then you also notice things like...say you're in a community center...what kind of energy do people carry out of the room and go into the next space with. That can give you a lot of information...and then sometimes at the end, one word for how you're feeling or how the process is

going...also, sometimes check-ins at the beginning. One time I had a group that had a lot of tension going on in their lives, so whenever they came in I would say, okay this is going to be in the room so let's give it twenty minutes to fly for warm-ups and each person would have three minutes to say what's on your mind and then we would set up the space for the drama. I got a lot of information about their lives and culture that I might...they were very verbal and that was their way so...but in many groups I would think that was a crazy way to start a workshop! It could be risky though, but it worked with that group.

What cues (verbal/physical) help you discern when the group has something to say and when they need direction?

Yeah...it's interesting. Sometimes I think really....particularly young people...really strong young people will get sullen and sulky if they feel like their ideas aren't being taken up or they're not getting enough chance to speak. You can see them disengage and go kind of quiet and be disinterested, so I feel...that may be an obvious way because teenagers can be sulky...but, I think everybody, if they feel like they're not saying something they need to say...maybe initially you'll get them jumping in and interrupting...say with children with an attention deficit or who are very hyper, I think they just need reassurance that they're going to get their moment. So let them know...I can see your hand and I'm going to come back to you, I'm just going to finish this conversation. I sometimes worry I'm going to forget so I'll just take a moment to write it down. I think there's almost two ways you'll see that people don't think they're being heard. One is to be jumping on everything and interrupting all the time and not giving anyone else space, so sometimes with that I'm just...let's make sure this person says what they need to say or show us, or let's make sure this person is first with their scene...so just letting them have it out...and the other way is to...the other is the disengagement and the sulk...and I think so often when you dig below the surface of that, some idea has been cut that the person really wanted...and that's important too and another skill you can build in the early exercises is that not all material will go

forward as is. You can do exercises where everyone does a frozen picture and then you rotate and you remake the picture and you do the first word and then rotate and you remake the picture and do the movement...so right away you're getting this thing of like...nobody owns this material, it's going to change, it's going to shift because people will struggle with that. Sometimes you will get someone who will sulk because they are just obsessed with a certain idea and it's not an idea that is working for everyone else...so you want them to be heard, but you also have to explain or you can try to find them another idea to go forwards with...we can all be like that, especially around creativity...it's like your babies...so everyone is being a protective parent around their ideas.

How do you (facilitator) share growing connections/themes you may see without imposing your ideas on the group?

Just honesty...come in and say...I've been thinking about this a lot last night and this is what I see...and if they see it too they'll grab it and run. If they don't see it or you're imposing something and they don't see that at all and for some reason it's not resonating with them...I think it's great to get your group into the director's seat sometimes. So sometimes pull people out and say I'm going to get somebody to watch this with me and then you get that person to give a few notes back as well. So it doesn't need to be this hanging on individually to this directorial role. I think there can be sharing of that role as well. Yeah, I guess it's just honesty...and I think there are also just times from your theatrical experience the audience is going to have a much better experience if we do the following. Sometimes I've even said to groups I know you disagree with me, but I want to try it this way and if you come back to me after the first show and it didn't work, then great, we can change it. Often they're like...oh yeah, it was much better, we got the audience's attention or they would have felt weird. If you have a really strong feeling, especially if it has something to do with the audience's actual comfort or ability to see...sometimes I think it okay to go for it, but that's just you being a member of the group in the same

way other people in the group. Most of the time I think if the way you're putting things together is not the way they put things together, they won't fly with it and you can give them opportunities to try and put things together. It doesn't have to be all you who goes home and make connections, in fact it can even save you some time to go home and have a night life! I think again...I used to think it's my job and my responsibility and I used to go home and re-plan and rethink for six hours a night and then come in and be like...I think it could be like this! But now more and more I build that into the workshop time. What is everyone seeing? How does this connect and what makes sense...and often you get a little director in your midst as well and if that person is good, people will listen to them. They will have authority based on skill because if somebody has that natural ability people will listen to them.

What do you do when/if a group is unable to come to a consensus about a piece?

I've never experienced that in a terrifying, the "show won't go on" kind of way. I guess I've experienced moments of disagreements and I think sometimes you hear the points of view and you say...let's move on to something else and we'll make a decision about that part later...and sometimes by the time you get back some people have shifted. Sometimes there's still disagreement and really crass stuff, but I guess that's how the world works... like...we're going to take a vote with our eyes closed or sometimes you can suggest something different. You can suggest something between what they're suggesting. I often find it's not really about their creative opinion...it's about something else that's making them getting really stuck...it's a personality conflict or something else working itself out. So I find if you can get people really excited about something else, by the time they get back to that scene, they're like...oh its fine. It's interesting because I'm trying to think if I've ever seen it for the whole show, and I don't think I have. I think that's because once people are into it, everyone wants the show to go on so people do sacrifice their individual moment, I think everyone has to do it actually and its kind of painful and I always have that kind of moment where I'm like...but I love...and it's not going on that way!

That's the pain of collaborative work. I think sometimes...over time people let things go because they want the show...and they're invested...and that's why I think it's an amazing means for conflict resolution. I think theatre...anything people are passionate about is an amazing way to get people you do not expect to work together, to work together because what they want more than anything is to make it happen.

Do you ever get the sense that participants are trying to please you/give you what you want? What do you do to deter this behavior?

That's something that is common in schools because that's the training of the education system. To be a good student is to get the right answer. In other contexts, I feel like initially people are being ornery or disagreeable to prove that they can until they decide you're okay and they want you to stick around...but in schools I do think that people look for the right answer. I try to do a lot of exercises that clearly have no right or wrong answer, even the simple one of looking at somebody's tableau and saying what you see and saying to the actors to not correct them because whatever they see is what they see. It's not a question of right or wrong. They might see something different...and you guys can be learning through this about how you are communicating with your bodies. We might get really exciting ideas by people seeing something different. So I try to really reinforce that with exercises like trying to very clearly do stuff where the interest lies in it having many avenues. I've had it also with refuge and asylum seekers where there can be a culture...they may come from a culture that had more of an offence to differing authority to somebody who is an educational position...so people might be very polite and might not want to register a disagreement. It's about constantly trying to find things to do where there is no right or wrong...like tell your own story. I don't know your story. I can't correct you on it. I can't tell you what to say, it's impossible, I don't know your experience. I think that's part of why I really like this way because everyone is the expert on themselves. So if you start with a theme, like our theme is racism

in inner city, you can get into debates and I think debates are great and important, but theatre isn't really about debate, it's about story. So that's why I like to start with story first because there is no such thing as a right or wrong...or even a true or false story. So storytelling exercises too that are like...let's lie more and more because the more we lie, the better the story. I think that might break the notion that I have to give her one answer.

What other types of training do you think might be necessary for this type of work?

I do find often that when you meet people that do this well, they have something else up their sleeve somewhere...but I don't think there is anything that would be required. I think the most important thing is that you've done a bit of investigation of yourself. I think a kind of...an honest examination of who you are and I think if you've done anything in your life where you've put yourself out there like...moving to another country or going somewhere where you know nobody or taking dance classes when you have two left feet. I think that it is a really amazing experience to have had as a facilitator because you have awareness and compassion for risk and discomfort. If you've always stayed in your own comfort zone, it's hard then to ask other people or to know how to ask other people to leave their comfort zone. You need to be comfortable as well being observed and being up on your own. I could imagine a lot of different careers that would give a person that skill...like law or teaching. There are so many types of skills that could feed into it and you could get from different ways. Psychology can be useful, but I think too much psychology can be dangerous. I worked with a great facilitator who was a psychologist, but sometimes I felt like he got really fascinated in his analysis of people and that kind of made them a little bit objectified. I don't think that would have to be the case...I would say any, whether its theatre or any art form, because then you'll have that passion for creativity that's going to be infectious. Let me think of people I know who've come from really surprising backgrounds...for instance, somebody like Jed, who had worked on boats and he had been a cook and I remember thinking it'd be

great if he'd come from a job in a really stressful environment where things are always changing. Because one...facilitation is something you cannot predict. It will always be different from what you expect. So I'd imagine anyone who's worked in any field where you have to have doubt...and that's where I do think that travel is where a lot of people come from because I think if you are drawn to travel you are curious, you don't mind being uncomfortable...and they're drawn to travel if they enjoy and are not bothered by change. What else would be useful? I've done a lot of things where companies send their actors on tour to do post-show workshops and so you get asked to train the actors in facilitation and some of them totally get it and some of them don't at all. Theatre doesn't necessarily, especially as an actor, give you the ability to adapt to any circumstance because often it is the stage manager's job or somebody else's job to make sure your circumstances are very similar every night. It doesn't necessarily give you a deep interest in other people. Yeah...so, that ability to really not take on what isn't yours. I think I used to struggle with that. I used to think that anything that went wrong in the workshop was because of me...and then to start to lose your own ego over that and be like...actually, people come into this room with a million experiences from their own lives and probably none of its to do with me. I would imagine that people who work in psychology or social work learn how to make that distinction and sometimes I think we struggle because if you've done theatre training you're into empathy and you're into getting into character and imaginative extension and you can sometimes struggle to recognize that you're not the only person in these peoples' lives. It's a very strange collection of skills. I was trying to put my finger on...what is it that makes someone brilliant at this? Is it the passion, instincts...it is! Passion or instinct or...maybe the biggest one is the willingness to go on the journey. The trust in things...I'm embarking on this and I don't know quite how it's going to end and I'm okay sitting in the unknowing...which ideally one would hope all artists would be like that, but I don't think all artists necessarily need to be depending on what styles of art they're working in. That might be it...that willingness to sit in the unknowing and you can get that in many ways. Inevitably, no two people will do

it exactly the same way. You can't just watch someone and do it just like they do. Everyone has their own personality. Some people are really loud and zany like Jed...he's a big energy and personality. He still leaves space, but I think what people love about working with him is that he's dynamic...and then some people are these calm, comforting facilitators...and people love that too. So maybe its honesty. People who are really really honest with who they are...reveal who they are. I think maybe it's just a very conscious event and looking at what you've already done and experienced.

Any other advice you would give a new facilitator?

I do think you have to find the joy in it. I think it's important not to be a martyr about it. In terms of always working with the hardest group or...first of all, people are drawn to different groups for different reasons. Some people are amazing in prisons and some are amazing with children or whatever it is and that's fine. There's somebody for everyone. You don't have to worry that there isn't someone who wants to work with that group and if you're drawn to a certain place and you're enjoying it. I say to actors before they go on, if you have a good time and you're in it, the audience is going to be loving it and I think it's the same with facilitation. I think whenever you catch yourself not loving it you have to stop and say...am I saying yes to too many gigs...am I too tired...do I need to go away for the weekend...have I gotten off on the wrong foot with this group and do I need to stop for a moment and realign it. Whenever you feel your enthusiasm dying you have to stop for a moment and figure out why. And whenever you think there's something wrong with a group, I think we all have that moment when we say...I think I have a weird group! Then you have to go...okay, what am I bringing in and how can I regroup. What am I bringing in to that particular group? If I go in with more energy I tend to get a better reaction, so that's it. You just have to watch for those things, like with any job...little moments where you have to check in because I suppose in other jobs you can coast longer in burnout, but if you are burnt out in this it just doesn't work. People can feel it. It is important to take the gigs that you're

buzzed by, but also generate and create your own gigs. If you're psyched by an idea, find people who are also psyched by that and keep it a creative endeavor and not an opportunistic endeavor. I think you want to have meaty gigs that feel satisfying and have rich relationships with people because that's the joy of the work is all those relationships. It's very fun. I don't feel like I have a job ninety percent of the time and I feel quite ridiculous about it! I go around on my bike from play to play...and it is play! Theatre is play and we need joy and we need that energy in this world.

Stephen Murray (Jed)

Jed is a teaching artist and facilitator working in Dublin who came to this type of work later in his life. I was introduced to him briefly during my studies with New York University and very much admired his welcoming attitude and ability to get people to do very high risk, silly things very quickly. Of particular note to this thesis research, he came back to my attention during my internship with Upstate Theatre Project in the summer of 2012. I was editing video footage and archiving for the company and I came across a show he had facilitated/directed called *The Mango Tree*, which was a multicultural community project with the citizens of Drogheda. I was most impressed by the interviews where the participants kept saying how Jed was able to help them express their voices and their vision through the piece over and over again, and I knew that he was an artist I needed to interview for this research.

What is your experience working with non-professionals/communities using devised theatre practices?

Well, for the last four or five years I have worked with Upstate at least once a year to work with a community group and devise, direct a piece of theatre with them...so that would be five or six shows over the last five or six years. I work with a youth theatre and devised a show with them just this year as well. I work with several groups of recovering addicts and such like in adult education centers and we usually devise a performance as a part of their accreditation. So we usually devise four or five times a

year with those groups...usually small pieces, ten to fifteen minutes. I am the outreach officer for the Abbey Theatre at the moment as well and I will go and work with groups and devise a piece of theatre with a group who has absolutely no experience with theatre...so that would be my experience with community groups with devising.

What are some of the challenges that you have come across in this work? (Have you found solutions?)

The challenges very much depend on the group and every group is different, so every group has different challenges. I seem to specialize in groups that are tough to work with initially. I do a lot of work with people in addiction...people in recovery from addiction, people who are homeless...people from deprived areas or from rougher areas or groups that are part of programs that don't necessarily want to have anything to do with drama. So most of the challenge I find is actually getting the group interested in it to begin with. For example, at the moment I'm working with a group of kids from...they're not kids, they're eighteen, nineteen, twenty year old girls maybe...and they're from a really rough part of town and they've known each other...they're on force course, so they kind of have to attend...there's a mix of about twelve or fourteen in the group and about half them want to do drama and half of them don't. They're there because they get paid to be there and if they don't turn up they don't get paid...so it's a really difficult group to work with. I've been working with them for four months now just trying to get them to trust each other and that's the biggest challenge sometimes with groups...just getting them to trust each other. Getting them to...especially if they have no interest in drama...getting them to see the relevance of it to them and how they can benefit from it because it's extremely beneficial to those groups. It's mad yeah...so that's the toughest challenge. And then other times...again, with other groups you have completely different challenges. Other groups...you'll be trying to get them to calm down and to not throw so much into it! To pull back a little bit, you know? Or getting groups to know each other...people who are in recovery...a lot of the guys I've been working with who are recovering

addicts...a lot of them have spent time in prison and for them it's about getting them to drop...the phrase they always use is "drop the image" and getting them out of the office. The office being their heads...so that would be the big challenge, getting them to drop this image that they have to be hard and everything has to be a joke and that talking about things is beneficial as opposed to confrontational. It's really interesting. I work with a youth theatre and with them...it's so easy! If you could work with those guys seven days a week it would be so, so easy. Whereas with the other groups...some of the groups you have to bring a huge amount of energy in with you to carry that through a lot of the time...it can be tough. I do maybe...I never do less than twenty hours of workshops a week so...it's a lot. It takes a lot out of you, particularly when ten of those hours are challenging groups. So yeah...the groups dictate.

How do you balance building performing skills versus growing content?

To a degree, one of the things I find very interesting is that the performance skills aspect of it comes as a part of the creative process anyway. So you deal with it as a parcel. I don't focus hugely on performance skills. Generally when I devise, I don't have time to. The first part is about getting groups to trust each other and getting them to work well together. You can flag little bits of performance stuff with them...generally its volume. Volume is the biggest difficulty with the groups I work with, you know...just speaking up. So you'd flag that stuff as you're going along, but the energy of creating stuff usually brings out amazing changes in people's performance...and the energy of actually performing in front of people will generally give everybody a...you know, if they're confident in what they're doing and they're confident in what they know it'll add to it. Volume is the biggest thing. Generally I find with devising stuff, you don't have as much time to focus on...anything that you want to, you know! It's always...if you're devising something and you're one hundred percent happy with it there's something wrong! I would think, you know, because that's part of it...its always changing...it's not until third or

fourth night of doing something that you know...you think, okay right, now you've got everything to go...but that's part of it.

Can you describe your process in putting together a workshop/series of workshops? What kinds of things go into your considerations?

When I finished training for facilitating...this was seven or eight years ago, I spent a huge amount of time focusing on planning workshops. Focusing on what you had to do. I found that was extremely beneficial when I was training, but when I went into the real world plans went out the window as soon as you drew them up...as soon as you met your group. So my thing with planning is to have a very loose idea of what you hope to achieve in that one day or in that session...a very loose idea of it...and then probably expect to achieve half of it depending on the group. Be prepared to not achieve any of it and for it to go out the window from the first minute in the door because only half the people you thought were going to be there are there or because the venue has changed or because some mad thing has cropped up. Firstly, when I'm working with a new group there are certain things I will always do to begin with in the first couple of weeks. Introductory exercises, because most of the time they won't know each other that well...getting them to mingle, getting them to make a bit of a fool of themselves...have a bit of a laugh with them...and then from there, very much the group will dictate what needs to be done. With some groups it's really easy, it just flows naturally. They'll take to whatever exercise you do and they'll develop it themselves. With other groups you have to do a huge amount of work to get them to do anything...or to gel in particular ways or to even realize what it is they like or want to get out of it themselves. A lot of the people I work with have no concept of what drama is or what performance is or have such low self-esteem that they think there is absolutely nothing they have to offer at any level. So it depends on the group again, but I will always do introductory exercises at first and let people make a bit of a tit of themselves...get them working together with exercises that involve

stuff that they want to achieve...challenging stuff that can be got. Even just a ball and you have to keep it up for a count of thirty...that's a really handy one just to get everyone working together. So I use exercises like that. Then just chatting to see what naturally crops up with them. From doing this a lot I know what exercises will suit within certain circumstances so if something in particular crops up in a workshop it will make me think of an exercise or something that...or some way that I can develop it or explore whatever it is that's brought up. That's the way that I work, I don't hugely plan...it would be more intuitive as you go through the workshop. Something would happen within the workshop that you can go...okay maybe I can look at this in this way or deal with it in this way. But I would usually have an idea of what I want to get done in that workshop so...you know, lots of talking as well. Getting the group to talk is a huge thing...getting them to communicate as well is a big thing. A lot of times I have difficulties with groups because people don't want to offend somebody in the group...offend them in any way so they won't say anything or express their opinion...they would say...no I think it was really good, you know...brilliant...why? ...(no answer)...it's just being nice you know...and just getting them past that...getting them to talk about stuff without being offended.

What techniques do you use to create an environment where every person feels like an integral part of the process?

Feedback. Getting everybody to talk about stuff is a huge thing...asking people to talk about what they thought of things. I will always get people to write their own pieces. I usually try to get people to write their own pieces and include everybody's piece in the performance if I can. Generally I get characters to write...or people to write a monologue as one of the exercises...getting them to write a monologue or piece that is...choral piece that's about whatever topic it is and include lines from everybody in it. It can be really simple...it's a really, really effective way of getting a very short performance from groups...it's like that David Bowie thing, you know...everybody writes lines about stuff

and you cut them all up and put them around. It can be really effective. You just have to make sure you've got something from everybody. I spend a huge amount of time with groups not doing any performance stuff at all. The initial time is getting them to work together. It's about creating this safe environment thing. Everybody talks about a safe environment...getting that, but more importantly getting the group really tight together. If you get that, then it doesn't matter...everything will come naturally from it. It's very hard to get that...it can be really really tough...the group that I work with on Wednesdays...I had them this morning...four months of two hours sessions and its only now gotten them to the stage where now they are ready to do stuff. You can create stuff quite easily...in two weeks you can create a small performance if they all put their effort into it. You can create something in a matter of...if you've got the right group you can create something in two hours with them. You can create a decent enough piece in a really short time. I'm a firm believer in getting the group right and then everything is easy. There's a great stakes exercise that Louise Lowe, who did the workshop with us, I think, wasn't she? With the sticks...that's brilliant. That's a meditation as well, that really works well for getting frantic groups together calmly...all those little simple things, but working at them can really frustrate groups...pushing them past that and getting okay...and they realize when they've got it themselves and you can see it click...and you keep at it until you see that click...and then it's very easy to create and you get groups that stay together as well from that. It's hard to get, but if you can get that it makes everything else very easy.

In what ways do you go about “checking in”/ “reading the pulse” of the group?

The phrase that they used when we were training was “side coaching”. You sit so you can see everybody and watch everything. Watch everything...watch people's body language...basically if you're working really well you're not doing anything...you're just watching stuff, that's all. Somebody asked me a couple years ago in a similar situation to this...what do you want to achieve when you're facilitating?

This is more in connection in working with a group for a long time. Basically what you're doing is training them to make you redundant...that you're not doing anything, that they're doing everything themselves. That's the whole aim of it...that everything is coming from them really, ideally. So when you're really working well you're actually not doing anything at all...you're just sitting and watching it and picking the bits that you can feedback with them...and watching who's doing what and who's taking on what roles...who's being in charge, dictating...and then just talk with them about it. If you've got the group going then that's all you're doing. You're sitting watching them and chairing a conversation essentially and letting them go to it themselves. That's the ideal. If you get it, it's great. So I would...after hopefully getting the group to the stage where they're all working together...just watching and asking questions. How was it? Who was doing what and how did it go? Talk to the whole group...charging them to answer and not letting them get away with good...this whole open question thing. If they say it was good, okay...what was it that was good? What was good about it? Keep at it...and this is where people get pissed off...if you get them expressing what it is and examining what it is they like about something...that's part of it.

What cues (verbal/physical) help you discern when the group has something to say and when they need direction?

There's a guy I worked with at the youth theatre for a while...I was doing a show and he was standing there and they were talking about getting great feedback stuff from sessions and he'd stand there and he'd wait until he thought they were finished...and it would be quite a while...and he'd get stuff from them by doing that...so...his approach was to actually really leave it a long time. I will say, initially when you first start off with a group, you keep pressing them a little bit. You figure out who the ones who are talky are and the ones with not much to say...so what I would do after a couple of weeks of figuring them out...I would ask the group general questions and the talky ones respond and I will

specifically ask the non-talky ones what they have to say about it or what they think...until they know they're going to be asked so hopefully they'll volunteer something...you can see it, again...if it hasn't come to a natural discussion...if you haven't kick-started a bit of to and fro or a bit of banter between them then there is probably something left unsaid. If you have kicked off a bit of banter between the group and that comes to an end, then that's probably come to an end. If there has been a bit of to and fro...and you can tell...if somebody's shifting or they're...something's been said that they don't agree with, you can see it. If they don't bring up it, you might say...okay what do you think about it? I point out people's behavior to them all the time. You seemed pretty shifty about it, you were giving it all that, so what do you think? I don't know...Oh off it! I know you have something to say!...well I think what he said was wrong. Why? ...and again, that's some of it. Watching...you have to be good about reading people's body language. Looking at how people react. Watching is great...observing. Observational skills are great to develop and an understanding of body language...an understanding of your group and what the personality types in your group are...who is going to influence who. That's the other thing...while you're getting the group to work together, that's what you're doing...really getting to understand them...and once you understand them and can communicate to them...because again, it's all about communicating. You need to figure out who's who and what's what and what way they communicate. Particularly when you're working with groups that speak in a different way to you...there's a generation gap or a social gap or whatever. You need to figure out the way they are and the way they think and the way they react to each other in order to be able to communicate clearly with them in order to bring them together...get them into a cohesive unit. You've got to understand who can do what and who can play what and who wants what from it...who can benefit from what particular...I mean, with some groups, just the mere getting up on stage for one person and standing there is a huge achievement. Being realistic in what you're hoping to achieve and recognizing that drama is not for everybody...the benefits are for everybody, but the love of it and the actual enjoyment of it isn't there for everybody. For some people,

standing on a stage with people looking at them is a huge thing. They don't have to do a monologue or do a movement piece...just getting them to stand in the chorus and move with people...you know, just walk on and walk off of whatever is a huge thing. That can kick-start all sorts of things, but it doesn't have to be a massive performance thing. Knowing that...you need to know that about your group as well...who can cope with stuff....so yes, watching them, watching them always...and body language, you have to be good with body language.

How do you (facilitator) share growing connections/themes you may see without imposing your ideas on the group?

Generally, what will happen with groups, or my approach to stuff would be...if we're creating the piece...it depends on the style. If we're bringing in a writer to work with us, if they're taking the material that comes from the workshop to write a script from it, then that's a very different approach. We would really explore what happens in the workshop and, again asking the group themselves, what do you think should happen? How can we develop this? I would give them improvisations or story-creating games. If I'm working with a group that's going to write it themselves, for example...with the *Mango Tree* a couple years ago...we'd do workshops, writing workshops and get them to pick events in their life that they don't mind sharing. I do exercises that get them to talk or write about them completely in their own way and we try not to change that...what they have to say. Then we go, okay look, how can we link these? What are all these stories about to a degree? Or we give a theme to them and get them to create pieces around that. There have been times when we have to do a show...and because of the people who are funding it, the project...we have to do "issue based" stuff and you're imposing stuff on the group. You have to because it has to be dealing with this...I mean, it can be about anything on some level...for example, a couple of years ago we had to do a piece on sectarianism. This was with fifteen or sixteen girls and they didn't really relate to the subject matter because it's dealing

with a struggle that was really their parent's generation and not really theirs, or not as much theirs. So we had to impose this topic...and how are we going to deal with it. That ended up being....everything that we used was stuff they wrote themselves except for a couple of introductions and definitions of what sectarianism was...and it ended up not being the best show we have done because we were imposing a subject matter on them. In an ideal world...everything comes from the group...except maybe some more artistic choices with...I would say, okay look I'm going to edit this or it won't make sense if this is here...but generally we try to get...well, I suppose editing is the thing. You can't help but be influential at that stage because things have to make sense and you're dealing with people who aren't as experienced...and sometimes you do plant ideas in people's heads just a little bit with improvs and stuff...if just like...what about if we try it this way, what will happen there and steer things a little bit. I think it's perfectly fine to steer things while they're being created but once they hand over something we try to keep it as intact...and it can be amazing. Sometimes the best stuff that you get is when you've put little...what you're really trying to get them to do is to not edit themselves, you know? Spur of the moment stuff. We actually do improvs and try to record what's going on and use that as a script then, or edit it down.

What do you do when/if a group is unable to come to a consensus about a piece?

Well sometimes I think it's very difficult to get people to agree on stuff...and again, if you've got everybody agreeing about it you're probably in a little bit of trouble. That's part of it. Devising is a process. If everybody's happy with it, it's not going anywhere. All drama is about conflict. If there's no conflict within what you're creating you're probably fucked. If everybody likes it...it's not got much to say really, do you know what I mean? If people are agreeing completely and everybody's going...yeah, that's great...then you're leaving it. Okay, that's great and we're not going to go near it anymore. The process is about finding stuff out and creating stuff and that's naturally a disruptive process, so I think

that if a group are disagreeing...unless their fighting with each other and rowing, you know...but if they're disagreeing, well that's great then, there's something going on, they're in the process, they're engaged.

So just leave them?

Yeah, you know....or say...look not everybody in the group is going to be happy with it, but find a way of doing this in five minutes. Time limits are great because, like I said, you give deadlines. Deadlines mean you get stuff done. If you didn't have a deadline, it'd never be finished...and you're never going to be happy with it either. I don't think you've ever had a show when everybody comes off and has gone...oh that was perfect tonight...or maybe you have, maybe it happens every now and again, but if they do that coming out saying everything was perfect tonight, as a director I'd be going....we're in trouble because I saw problems! You know what I mean? Nothing is ever perfect. If it's perfect...if we think it's perfect, you're in trouble a little bit, I would think particularly with creating stuff. I mean, you have to know when to set stuff aside and say, okay, leave it there, but I would think disagreements are a good thing to some level. And again, getting the group together and letting them know that not everyone is going to like everything, but coming to a compromise or coming to a level where...look, you might not be happy with it but ninety percent of people are, we've got to go with that. It's about working together and finding a happy medium...and setting time limits! Ha ha!

What signs/signals have you noticed in your experience alerts you to when a person/group is feeling left out/unheard?

Generally, again with body language...people excluding themselves. I would press people to get them to say something. If we're doing feedback in a group I would go around and make sure that each person says something and when you do that you can see who's holding back or who's not happy. But generally you can see when people are working well together. You can usually see who's unhappy or not

by their exclusion from the group. So if you get a group to work together and you split them into smaller groups and somebody is sitting back from the rest of the group....or again, giving groups exercises and you stepping back and watching it. You can see...and you can say...okay what's the story here? What's going on? Oh, they're talking about whatever and I've not got anything to say...or they're not listening to me. Okay, well maybe you need to go tell them more about what you think. If I see somebody not included, I'll go to the group and say look...make sure you're including everyone. It goes back to the whole thing of working with the group initially until you know you've got enough to start creatively working with them. So the first three or four workshops I might not do any drama stuff at all really...maybe simple exercises like "What are you doing"? But I don't start creating pieces or taking a more in depth look at stuff until your group is ready to do it because you get no benefit from it. You get no benefit from devising the piece if it's only the three who are really confident and happy with performing and everybody else sitting back...and that's not what it's about. I would avoid....and with some groups you don't create a piece. In some groups maybe you just show off a workshop. I wouldn't devise with a group until you are pretty sure they are all working together. It goes back to having the good base with them....until you're completely happy that they're gelled and that they're ready and that they're not going to leave anybody out. If somebody is excluding themselves then the rest of the group are going to bring them in. That's far more important than...again, it's the whole process versus product thing...and I think they're both important. That...if you're going to work toward a product, it has to be a good product, but if that's not what you're going to get then you're better off focusing on the process and not being ashamed of that and doing a presentation workshop because that can be amazing to do or watch...or create an improvised performance...actually a group I was working with recently, a group of recovering addicts...it was a really tough time, a really hard group...and their performance at the end was a workshop, but it was a rehearsed workshop with them doing monologues they had half-learned, but it was okay because we were treating it like a workshop, so they could stop halfway through and

we'd talk about it. That worked really well and they got a huge amount of benefit from it. If I had tried to push them to do a rehearsed performance...they wouldn't have turned up, they would have said they were going to do it and then not turned up on the day because that's the way Irish men deal with stuff!

Do you ever get the sense that participants are trying to please you/give you what you want? What do you do to deter this behavior?

Yes and No. Sometimes you get that feeling...depending on the group. One of the difficulties I'm having with the youth theatre at the moment is that they're always...they're a fun group of seventeen to nineteen year olds, they're great craic, but all they do is light. They don't really explore anything...they just go for company, which is great for a while...and they think I get a kick out of it...and I do. I think its brilliant, but I really want them to explore stuff a little but more deeply and challenge themselves a little bit more. So I'm trying to get them around to that so I change the stuff I'm doing with them. If I think they're trying to give me stuff in one particular way and it's not really working, well then I'll do some exercises with them that hopefully change the way they think or approach stuff. Again, that's what I mean by not necessarily having a plan. What you see in the workshop then is what you're reacting to. Generally if you have a plan for something and stuff starts going wrong then you're not able to cope with it because you feel like you have to stick to the plan. Whereas, if you're pretty loose and you know you want to achieve a certain thing but you're not a hundred percent sure how you're going get there...you know how you're going to start off and an idea of where you'd like to finish, but you're not one hundred percent sure how you're going to get there, then you can react however you want to stuff. So if I think the group is giving me stuff that they think I want to see or to please me...because I don't know if I've ever...I don't know what pleases me, so I don't know if any group can ever think...oh I think he'll like this thing. I don't know how I'm ever going to react to anything until I see it...so I don't really think I've ever had that difficulty with a group. I've had people in groups getting up to do stuff because

they know that I'm going to ask them to give it a shot, but never anything...a lot of time the youth theatre I work with on a regular basis...but most group I'm brought in to work with a random group for a short period of time so they don't get to know me...as to what I'd want or like, do you know that way? If I don't like something, I tell them right away. I'm extremely honest. I might say, yeah look...that was pretty bad. And tell them. That's one of the reasons why I get on with my groups so well...because I'm completely honest and up front with them...and talk to them the way I would want to be talked to...and I'd want to be told if something wasn't good...and you know, not being nasty...being honest and respectful, but honest and harsh enough you know. So, I would tell people very much what I think...so that way when I'm giving positive feedback they know it's not bullshit. So, yeah, I would be completely honest with groups. I don't believe in the whole thing of saying it was brilliant when it's not.

What other types of training do you think might be necessary for this type of work?

I think really, people...body language, group dynamics...just looking at how groups work. I think that keeping in touch with other people...getting new exercises. I do workshops every year training trainers and one of my favorite things is asking everyone what their favorite exercises are because you tend to do the same things, use the same stuff...I love finding new materials, getting new material. Learning more about how people communicate...anything that gives you insight into groups. I think one of the reasons why I did hundreds of jobs before I started doing this type of work...I think all my experiences really helped with me working with groups. I've done lots of jobs where I'd be bartending and working with people...anyway, a lot of contact with people. So interpersonal skills, communication skills, ability to read a group and react to a group...that stuff is hugely beneficial...so anything that gives you that insight and confidence working with groups is hugely beneficial...any other little disciplines that give you insight or interest as to how you might develop new material...creative writing workshops to steal exercises...any bit of training. There's no training in anything that you can do that you cannot apply

to your workshops. Anything that is of interest can be used to create something. It's all about little insights or little nuggets of information and that being a seed for something.

Michael Rohd

I was first introduced to Michael Rohd through his book *Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual*. It was actually the first book I picked up on this subject and probably what captured heart and attention the most. I have since read most of his published and blogged articles and each time I find that he has such a clear, intelligent, but also down-to-earth way of speaking about the work. He makes it accessible to people who may not be trained theatre artists, which is amazing, and exactly what this kind of work should be about. When the idea for this thesis research took hold in me and began to take shape, I knew immediately that he was a practitioner I wanted to interview and meet

What are some of the challenges that you have come across in this work? (Have you found solutions?)

The answer to that question is a book! There is not a certain answer to that question. Can you be more specific? Tell me the areas of challenges that you are specifically interested in. There are challenges in the aesthetic process, there are challenges in the ethics, there are challenges in partnership issues, there are challenges in partnership dynamics, there are challenges in the institutions that are attempting to work with perhaps different, maybe shared intentions. What sort of challenges?

What are the challenges that you've come across when you're in the room, working with other people who don't really know each other all the well, but have come together voluntarily for a purpose?

So, the big challenge you encounter in those settings tends to do with how you build people who are individuals into a community, even temporarily. So it's how you build group and the challenge is that every person is different and you want to honor and hear that, but you also need to try to tease out

from the group what kinds of values or shared core interests or principles they may have that will allow you to....basically you're trying to move from independent constituents to shared stakeholders. So you get people who come in with their own things and you need to find some way to get them on some agreed upon path together. What kind of practitioner you are determines what sort of tools you use to do that. Is it games, is it stories, is it physical, is it singing, is it why I am taking a tour of the neighborhood? Is it all of these things? How are you structuring the building of that community? That's the initial and appropriate challenge, how do you build that community.

And do you think that is dependent on the practitioner, or do you think that the practitioner should try to feel out the group to see what they might be more comfortable with?

I think it's a combination. I think at the beginning of one's time as a practitioner, it's very much about feeling out the group and figuring that out...trying to learn what assets you have that might be employable. I think as you get more and more experienced you have a sense of what assets will work in what contexts, but you have to be super open to discovering that they don't or to what's different about this group. So you're always trying to make a match between you and them. You're also trying to uncover and understand the needs and uncover your own assets and create matches. So I think that it also has a lot to do with...so the group I'm meeting with today, we're going to meet for three hours this afternoon...tomorrow at one o'clock I will start a three-day Sojourn Institute in Silver Springs. So, starting today with a group for three hours versus starting with a group tomorrow for three days...there's a different kind of group that needs to be built. For today I won't spend a lot of time making sure everybody knows everybody's name. There's not time...or I may...I may go back on that, it depends on what the group feels like, but I will certainly do that tomorrow with the group that's going to be together for three days because I think that naming becomes part of that process that isn't as important today in the shorter session. If you're working with a group for a year, that's a whole other

set of challenges in terms of how you need to build that sense of community and towards what kind of goal.

If you were working with a new community, devising a piece – in an ideal world, how much time would you like to have?

Well, its project specific. It depends on what you want to do. Are you devising twenty minutes of material for a school assembly? Are you devising a full-length evening that's going to tour? Are you devising a performance piece that you want to take to conferences? Are you devising a piece with three students who have been theatre for eight years? Are you devising a piece with a group of community members who are not self-defined artists who have stories to tell? All those things are going to determine the kind of time you might want. If you're asking me how much time you should want for something specific, I can give you my thoughts on what might make sense to me, but it's still personal...it's what you would think. However, I do the math of it a lot. So if you have fifty hours and you think about a rehearsal process in a more traditional setting...where on the low end, you work for four weeks, six days a week, four hours a day...that's ninety six hours in four weeks...whereas you could be talking about fifty hours spread over twenty five weeks, say, so you have to think about what you can accomplish in that time. You can accomplish a lot, but you have to be really patient. You have to almost lay those sessions down next to each other on a big map and say...okay, so if I'm devising...I've got the research phase, conceptual/idea phase, the generative phase, the authorship phase, then I've got to rehearse that and refine that...so how many sessions do I want for each of those phases? They don't have to be equal. You can put the focus wherever you want, but, for instance, if it's a group of non-actors and you want a polished piece you better leave more than a week for rehearsal at the back end...you can limit, you could play games for four weeks and that's great, but maybe two and half would still get us somewhere good and then you have more rehearsal time. You have to be really rigorous with

the process and think about where you think the focus needs to be...which you can't know sometimes until you know the group, but you have to take your best guess.

Can you describe your process in putting together a workshop/series of workshops? What kinds of things go into your considerations?

Why they're coming. What they want to get out of it. Like today...I have guesses, but I'm going to start by saying...why are folks here? What do you want? And then that will affect what we do. You basically want to know what will make...I think particularly if you're doing engaged work with people who don't self-define as artists, it's partly your responsibility to figure out what they will need to feel successful and then to ask them to help you create the markers of what success feels like in process and then keep coming back to that together as a group. Otherwise people can get very lost, especially in a devised process with no script to begin with so people don't have a map. The map has to be the process and the process has to be clear. This doesn't mean there's not lots of uncertainty, there should be in the art...but in the process people need to feel like, okay...we talked about how in the first three months what we wanted to do to be successful was to get to know each other better and start moving towards a theme. We're two months in and freaking out...what are we doing? We look at that definition of success...to know each other better and work towards a theme. Let's sit down and talk about it...well, we do know each other better and we're actually working around public safety, so I guess we do have a theme, so let's not freak out so much. We didn't have until month six where would we actually start to have pages or whatever we decided.

So, you are doing that with them? Creating the process with them?

You're leading. It's not pretending you're not leading, but you can be very honest and say...I want the process to feel successful to all of us so we should agree on what success is going to be. That's one way to do it.

What techniques do you use to create an environment where every person feels like an integral part of the process?

A lot of collaborative making. I think that devising itself is inherently focused on everyone having feelings of ownership...so if you're doing that work well and you're curious and interested in the energy in the room, I think....so, my technique would be practicing my art in a way that gathers everyone's investment and actually needs their participation to make the art as good as it can be...so it's not so much a technique as it is a tactic. It's not a set of games...there are things I might do in rehearsal to make that stuff happen, but really...that's what you're trying to do, practice your art in ways that get everyone wanting and needing to participate.

How do you (facilitator) share growing connections/themes you may see without imposing your ideas on the group?

I have to say that, I work...I don't work in a consensus-driven way. I'm not interested in that actually. So, today I'll talk a little bit about the collaboration continuum, which has collective consensus on one end, hierarchy on the other and democracy in the middle. I think there is a sense in emerging artists sometimes...I find this a lot, where people think...okay devised means it's all collective so we all make decisions together. That is a way to work, but devised doesn't mean that. Devised means something is created collaboratively where you didn't begin with a script. Collaboratively does not equal consensus, it's a whole continuum. So, I tend to work with groups where portions of the process are collective, portions are democratic, and portions are hierarchical. I'm never interested, nor do I see a lot of successful models in the world where groups reach key authorship moments and are one hundred percent collective. I think at a certain point it's valuable to have an artist wearing a writer or vision hat, but the way that one creates that fluidity among that continuum...so we're here and then you come back with a draft of something and you give it here and say...this is what I've been playing around with

and everyone rips it apart and then you go back and do more or you have everybody do a version of an outline themselves and then you synthesize all that. There are tons of ways to do it. But if I have something that I'm seeing that I'm excited about I'm not going to pretend that I'm waiting for someone else to see it. Do you know? The same way that someone in the circle should be able to say...and all my work leading the session and the process is going to be about finding the moments when people are identifying what's interesting to them, I'm going to give myself the opportunity facilitating that to step out and say, this is what's interesting to me and I'm going to pursue this some.

And you don't feel like participants ever get put off by that?

No, because they know that if something isn't interesting they're going to say so. They're going to be like...I don't really like that or I don't think that...or that point of view doesn't have enough of this.

So, how do you bring them to the point where they're comfortable telling you they don't like your idea?

The thing I say a lot in the beginning...it's something we do at Sojourn a lot, which is...I say sometimes that there are three ways I'll bring in a writing idea. One way is...I know its crap but I'm bringing it in because we are using it to get to something interesting. We're going to read it or look at it and I don't care. We can get rid of it right away and that's fine. Tear it apart. Version two is...here's something I've written, I think it's interesting, help me develop this. Take it apart, write another version of it, or read it out loud. Version three is...this is good, I like this and even if it doesn't make sense in this moment, we're not going to rewrite it. What we're going to try to do it figure it out as a piece of text and we're going to work on it that way for a while before we tear it apart, because sometimes in devising you can have a great idea that slips through the cracks because it happened to come from one person and people feel like they need to add or change a lot so it has a lot of group ownership. When

the truth is, you want to make a space where people can go, that really kicks ass and that's great, let's work with that because we're going to work with something I make over here as well.

I think it's important too to give each person their moment, amidst all this that is collective.

Well, again, this depends on your intention. If you're working with a group of tenth graders and the goal is that they feel that their voice is in the piece, a hundred percent. So, if our interview is just about that context, I think that's right. If you're working with a group of teenagers because they want to devise a show and put it up in the city and focus on it as a piece of art, not as an investment for bringing their voice to the world, then it's not about necessarily making sure everyone has their moment – it's about the strength of the piece. So...very different contexts.

Do you ever get the sense that participants are trying to please you/give you what you want? What do you do to deter this behavior?

Totally and you have to just really break that open. You have to say to the group, from the beginning...the way we're going to make the best work together is if you work from your voice. Don't give me what you think I want to see. I might set up structures...break the rules, work within the rules, surprise each other...you can come in with an idea for a structure of something...the strongest work is work that going to come from...it's going to use the multiplicity in the space to its advantage.

In addition to saying that to the group, can you think of things that you do to reinforce that idea?

I think one of the things you do is....do a lot of small group work. Invite people to have a lot of freedom of choice within the small groups and then present, and then you're not the only voice responding and critiquing...you all are. So you get a sense that everybody is a maker in the room and everybody's response has value.

How do you balance building performing skills versus growing content?

It depends on your time. It depends on your time and your goals. If you have two hours a week for twenty-five weeks you try to collide together group building and skill building...so any games or warm ups that you do...every one of them has to be about skill building. It can't just be a crazy game to make us smile. Everything has to be focused on a specific skill...focus, physical expressiveness, whatever it is. So you have to find stuff that combines those needs with the needs of building an ensemble. You mix it into the process.

What signs/signals have you noticed in your experience alerts you to when a person/group is feeling left out/unheard?

Faces can be very misleading. You have to be very careful about putting it all in the faces. Some people's faces in repose look solemn or not engaged, and I've learned too many times that that doesn't mean that's the case. It's one indicator, but it shouldn't be the primary one. I think the eyes. You have to try and look in the eyes...and the bodies. And if you're really curious about something, then you say to the group...okay everybody take sixty seconds and talk about this with the person next to you...and then you watch closely and if you see a group where one person really isn't giving much to their partner, you know. So, that's a diagnostic trick you can do.

What cues (verbal/physical) help you discern when the group has something to say and when they need direction?

Always wait too long. I'm really a fan of letting a room be silent if you think there's something to be said that isn't being said. I think it's a real easy facilitator trap to fall into...filling all the dead space, because it's not always dead space...Do you have experience in Quaker communities? I grew up going to Quaker school and their form of meaningful worship is...basically you sit in a circle or square and there's a table in the middle of the room with a bible on it and you sit silently in this room for an hour and anybody at any point can stand up and talk about anything...there's no minister, no priest...and often

you just sit for an hour...but sometimes somebody will stand up and say...this week this happened and it's on my mind and they'll relate it to something in the Bible...sometimes somebody will stand up and say, this thing happened in my family this week and it pissed me off and I'm thinking about it...and sometimes somebody will tell a story. It's a really good practice for being in silent spaces...so I feel like I learned in that and tried to follow that in this. I sometimes say that to groups the first time there is an awkward silence...I'll say...I was student and teacher in Quaker school for twelve years, I'm very comfortable with awkward silence and then people giggle, and then they know...when another moment happens again, I'll just say Quaker! And just, not say anything...and then they just know that those moments are going to happen...and they'll talk, or they won't.

James Rone

I met James when I came to work with CLIMB Theatre Company in Minnesota in 2006. He was the Producer of Excellence in Teaching for the company, which translates to the Educational Director, and my immediate supervisor. Throughout my time as an actor-educator for CLIMB, I came to James for training in facilitation for these purposes and advice while on the road. He had a style and a way of relating to and facilitating large groups of people that established trust and opened communication in a very easy, but meaningful kind of way. Since leaving the company, we have remained in contact and I came to learn that he was in graduate school, working towards a masters degree in education. I also discovered that he too was interested in devising in community settings, that he had even started a company called Harbor Theatre Group to do just that with the youth in the Minneapolis area. Knowing James and his ideals, I immediately knew that I wanted to get his insight into the area of research I was conducting.

What is your experience working with non-professionals/communities using devised theatre practices?

When I was still a teenager I was offered some work over the summer teaching improv and other kinds of things like that. I found it challenging because I was still trying to understand how to improvise myself and I'd never really had any formal training. It was mostly intuitive. So I guess the first time I worked with nonprofessionals was when I was a nonprofessional myself. I was given an opportunity by a community theatre to put a lot of trust, either for good or for bad, in the nonprofessionals who work with them. I was given an opportunity to find my voice at a very early age, both as a performer and as a facilitator. When I went to college and got bored with my library job...I needed to find other work and I saw an ad for Adventure Club, which was an after school program that was being run at the University and I was there for the next two years. That was life-changing because the person who ran the afterschool program at the school I went to was somebody who knew a lot about and was interested in working with young people in group settings. She used techniques that I ended up bringing with me to CLIMB later on. One of the things that Adventure Club had going for it was that every single day when you came in you might have to teach yourself some new subject matter because then you might have to teach it to the kids! You might come in at two o'clock and find out that one of the day's clubs was going to be science...is going to be bugs or gross stuff or whatever, so you would have to quickly tutor yourself on that so you could teach the kids about it. Over time I asked why don't we have an improv club...a theatre club? I can do those...and so what I liked to do was teach the kids improv essentials, but what I liked even more was saving the moments they created through improvisation to see if perhaps we could sculpt them into something that could be performable and they could feel some pride about. That was a really fun, positive experience and I knew after I graduated that I either wanted to work in Shakespeare, doing classical theatre or I wanted to do theatre with young people. I went to the Midwest Theatre Auditions and I found out about CLIMB and it sounded amazing. The way they describe themselves is very different from how other theatre companies describe themselves and it sounded to my young college idealistic brain very progressive and

imaginative. It wasn't just doing plays, it was something else...and I couldn't even wrap my mind around what the something else was at that point...I just knew it was something that I had never done. I had had some experience as an undergraduate with Theatre of the Oppressed. I had a professor who became, while I was there very engaged in TO and in Pedagogy of the Oppressed as well and she made a connection with Augusto Boal and invited him to come to our school. So I got to take a couple workshops with Augusto Boal and I got to sit in on some of the lectures he was giving. I didn't know how big of a deal that was. I just knew that I liked his ideas, I liked what we did, but I felt disconnected from some elements of it because...there was one disconnect that developed further later on...but there was one that I felt in that moment which was that...we were all artists in the room making this work and we were all doing these crazy exercises...you know, he would put something on a box and say...what is this...It's a hierarchy of power! We were able to abstract meaning from things that were not concrete in any way, but that's because we were eager to find it...and we knew this guy was a big deal so I think we were eager to impress him as well. But I knew this work was designed to work with non-artists. He had created it originally to work with non-artists or non-self-defined artists and so these abstract ideas...I was a little unsatisfied with that. I didn't like that some of the stuff stayed abstract. We would create an image and talk about that image, but we would never really pin down what it represented for us. We would create a scene where there is a protagonist that we would replace, but we never nailed down what is the real location here...who are the real people? What are our feelings towards them? What is possible? So there was a lot of symbolic action taken, you know somebody would come up and join hands around the oppressor as a symbol of showing love to even the oppressor...and we would be like, yeah, cool, great idea...but what's the application? That's my mind. For a theatre artist I have a very concrete, sequential mind. I'm not satisfied with things when I feel like they're left in the realm of the abstract, especially when I'm working in applied theatre because ultimately what I want is for people to be able to take their experience engaging in an applied theatre process and use it. Boal himself was

against the idea of symbolic catharsis. He didn't like the idea of people attending a theatrical event, seeing a protagonist overcome an obstacle and then feel a sense of release at that. He wanted people to experience tensions that stayed with them so that in their own lives they confronted the obstacle instead of having some surrogate do it for them. I felt when we kept things in the abstract we were all able to pat ourselves on the backs as academics who were adventurous in the kind of work that we did and then go back to the life that we live...and it just felt a little vague to me. I was obviously extremely impressed by this style and it gave me a sense of potential even if I didn't immediately sense how I could use it in my own life. So when I got to CLIMB...well, before I got to CLIMB I was sent this big packet of stuff and some of that stuff was so "acty"...obviously written quickly to suit a specific need and some of it was a little condescending and some of it simplified complex issues...some of the scripts would provide the students with tools they could use to prevent violence without ever exploring causes of violence, without exploring what makes the moment where violence explodes so complex and difficult to manage...and there was some great stuff, but also some stuff where I was like...blah! I don't want to do this. One of the benefits of being a CLIMBer in 2001 is that they gave you carte-blanche to do whatever. Yvonne was just starting her job and she didn't know very much about what the teaching company was doing, the practices it was rooted in, the traditions it was a part of...she was a traditional stage director who had taught some drama classes to kids in the past. She had very minimal experience...so I remember from the very first week I was like...I'm not doing this lesson plan, lets write something else! Because I didn't have a huge arsenal at that point...what I knew was improv games and some theatre of the oppressed stuff. I started to draw on some of those things and I started trying to look up some new things...read this book or that book...so it was a very practical education in how to use theatre as a tool for dialogue. As I started to do that kind of work and in the subsequent years, I became less and less patient with work that was presentational and I wanted more and more to be engaged in more things dialogical. That encouraged the kids that we were working with to seek the truth...not feed us what they

think we want to hear or what is economic in terms of time, but to tell us their actual truths. Of course, we had this incredibly limited parameter. We had forty to forty-five minutes to do this crazy thing in. So what I started to do was to take some of the techniques that were exposed to me through Augusto Boal's...I mean *Games for Actors and Non-actors* is a big deal for me, but so is *Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue*, Michael Rohd's book and over time so was *Structuring Drama Work*...these became useful touch points for me...and then I got to do a workshop with Michael Rohd in Chicago for a week during one summer. But I heard all those strategies through a filter. I thought...yes, these are great ways to work...but I was always going...yes and how can I do this in forty to forty five minutes. How can I get to work that feels this meaningful and connected in such a short period of time...and of course we all know that the really true answer is that you can't. But there are ways that you can facilitate this work where you can get to surprising places of truth in a very short period of time...and that's not just what you say, but how you are. What side of yourself are you going to bring forward to each moment? Still preserving the authenticity of who you are, but choosing to invite out a particular side of yourself so that you can model and encourage a state of mind and emotion that will allow the students to get to higher risk levels and greater levels of engagement in a much shorter time period. So I feel like that has greatly influenced my facilitation style...limitation of time. We did some devised work in those early years that I was at CLIMB. Charles Adams, who was my mentor at that time, was a big believer in what he called role drama. I can't remember if we were still doing role drama when you were with us or not. It didn't get the best reviews from teachers and so that was one of the reasons we stopped doing it and what's more, we had to really compact our training for financial reasons and the skillset that was necessary to carry off a role drama...it was harder for us to develop. The role drama was essentially a lot like the work that Dorothy Heathcote did, but a little more structured and teacher-led due to time. But we would talk into a classroom and say you know...we are all going to be astronauts and you have been given a mission and your job is going to be to go into space to this particular planet...and they would give

us the name of the planet...and you are going to look for this element called...whatever they told us...that will cure a disease that is ravaging the planet Earth in the year whatever. What information do you need to know before we start? We would brief them as though they were astronauts and take their questions. We would do Mantle of the Expert, like Heathcote and Spolin. We would use image theatre and machine to make our spaceship and go there and we would have encounters with the aliens that were there...like with some of that Boal work that I got impatient with when I was young, it didn't feel connected enough for me. We didn't have enough time to make it truly connected to the students. They would go through this amazing experience that they loved...but they loved it because it was imaginative not because it was connected to their experience...and there's nothing wrong with that, but that's not what we were hired to do. All of these things fueled my eventual departure from CLIMB. I knew when I left CLIMB that I wanted to be able to do that kind of work in a way that allowed it to become connected...that had enough time for it to become connected. So it's this weird thing where in my post-CLIMB life my signature is still being able to get participants to a place of full participation at a high risk level in a short period of time. That's still the thing that I know how to do the best. Now I've added a lot of skillsets...I'm a professional improviser now, so that has entered into my work as well. Since I've left CLIMB, the kind of work that I do...now I work with the East Metro Integration District and do this program on synergy, which is a program where I meet with a group of fifth or sixth graders twice a week for two hours, if we can get it, and over the course of a semester they will pick a topic that is related to social justice in some way and we will create a piece of theatre about that topic and they'll put together a service learning project that addresses that topic. I also work with Stillwater area Office of Integration and every summer I do a project with them where we work with sixth graders who are all on the autism spectrum and we use theatre as a tool to imagine what junior high might be like and to prepare for it. I have Harbor Theatre Group, as you know, and I work with the Dokken Museum using theatre as a way to start discussions about science. I teach a lot of improv to adults as well. That's a very long answer to

your question, but I just wanted to give you some sort of exposition so you knew where I started and where I came to.

What are some of the challenges that you have come across in this work? (Have you found solutions?)

Yeah, it's interesting that we're talking about the subject of your thesis because I was just thinking about that earlier today. Albany Park Theatre project...they're a major inspiration for Harbor. They directly inspired Harbor Theatre Group. I saw a production of theirs called *Saffron* at the AATE conference and I was amazed by it because none of the students were self-defined artist and a lot of them had no aspirations to become actors at all, but the people who founded that company were so skilled with working with you people that the performance they gave us was professional level, not just in its performance, but also in its conception. I was amazed by that...especially when I found out about the other services that APTP provides. They also provide homework assistance...they provide counseling on colleges and post-secondary education. It's amazing... and so I noticed...I got an email from APTP today...because I consulted with them when I was starting Harbor to talk about recruitment and partnerships...and I noticed when I was reading the email that they had a performance they were going to be doing that year about the effect that the plummeting economy has had on Chicago, specifically people in the Albany Park neighborhood. That's the kind of thing that I love to address with theatre. I'm curious about how much APTP engage the students who were in their group in that issue in that way. My experiences working with young people are that it is challenging to choose a topic for their performance...period...that is hard...but also finding topics that resonate with adults and adults ultimately write grants and fill seats...so for example, with synergy we were this past semester trying to decide what the performance would be about. I had put together a sequence of exercises that would help the students brainstorm in an active way about the social justice issues that touch their lives. As an example, not as a suggestion, I helped them to understand what foreclosure was and the effect it has on

young people's lives. Just so that they could connect to what social justice means. The way we had been talking about social justice was that it's something that you notice about society that you think isn't fair. We use the word fair a lot to talk about social justice. I put together a garbage bag filled with artifacts and the artifacts were all things from a particular person's life. I had found a youtube video where this person was describing what foreclosure had done to his life, his experience of it and how it happened. So I made some things that looked like they might belong in the trash of this particular guy. There was a child's picture, a letter for the mortgage company...and I came in and said...I have some fake trash here for a real person and your job is to go through this trash and figure out who it belongs to. Then I said...okay, let's hear from him and I showed them the youtube video. After I asked them what is foreclosure...and they told me what it was, which was cool...and I said, what effect did it have on his life...and they told me. I asked...is this a social justice issue and they said yes. Okay, so what are some other social justice issues then. So we defined it through example. While we were in our beginning meetings this kid said...okay we have to talk about the bus and we have to talk about it now. I'd already heard them talk about the bus, but they were taking this bus home from school after synergy and they were sharing this bus with kids who were part of a program called SAIL, a credit-recovery program for kids who didn't do so well in school. Lake Elmo Elementary school is a very divided community right now...what was once a homogenous community is becoming very diverse, but most of the kids who are not white and not middle-class live in a community called Semoran and those kids all take the same bus to get to and from school as the kids who don't live in Semoran. So what was happening was...all the SAIL kids, many who are Semoran kids, were all riding home with the synergy kids, some of whom are also Semoran kids...and the way that the Semoran kids interacted with each other was in a very emotionally expressive way...which is fairly typical for kids who are not from the white middle class, not from the suburb, and had to be cooped up in a suburban, white middle-class school all day. I mean, they get on a bus...they're going to be loud and it's not hostile, it's expression of who you are and your identity. So the synergy

kids were upset about that because they felt as though the loudness was misbehavior. And what's more, if you've ever ridden a school bus that's loud it's super hard on your nerves if you're introverted...so these synergy kids were absolutely up in arms. They knew that there was some bullying happening on the bus, but they couldn't distinguish that bullying from simple cultural expression...they couldn't make that distinction. So I said...alright the bus has to be our social justice project then. We're going to do two things...we're going to address the things that happen on the bus and how you can advocate for yourself when you are uncomfortable and we're also going to educate about intercultural understanding so you can identify when someone is being disrespectful and when somebody is just being them as a result of how they grew up. So we created our theatre piece about that and it was cool, but once it was time to turn to the service learning project the kids were no longer interested in that issue. Part of the reason why was because bussing had been cut, so a lot of the kids who had been taking the bus home were no longer with us anymore...so the kids who were most directly affected by the problem were no longer a part of our program...which is a social justice issue. So we were meeting kids who were saying...this doesn't touch us anymore. They wanted to do something new and they said...I saw this commercial with the baby puppies and they were being abused! We've got to do something about that! So to me, one of the greatest challenges of working with young people or non-self-defined artists on a project that addresses a social justice issue is that their attention span for it is way shorter than yours is and they may not perceive...I think most of them were invested in the idea of this bus project because they wanted to address misbehavior stuff...the other piece was imposed by me. I wanted them to know how to interpret these other behaviors and I feel conflicted about that all the time. Anytime I feel like I'm exerting my own influence as a facilitator on what the product will be, I feel like I'm in the wrong but the other teachers that I work with who have worked with this age group for longer than I have in a much more organized setting are like...James, we admire that you feel that way and you are not just their facilitator for a theatre project, you are also their educator and this is an opportunity for you to educate

them about something that otherwise they may not learn about. So this is a different purpose project. However, there is a similar problem that I have when I work with Harbor because...the way that we arrived at our topic I actually stole from Michael...well Michael gave me. He said...try having all the students tell a story inspired by whatever you want, so it could be a newspaper article or it could be a word and so I chose emotions...and when they come in to tell the story have them also prepare a piece of evidence or research...and it could be anything...a song that connects to your story, a newspaper article, a short-story someone else wrote, a youtube video...it could be anything you want as long as it takes your story out of the purely personal and starts to bring it out into the universal. So we got to some amazing universal themes and responded to them with image theatre and improv...but then once we had gone through that whole process, we found ourselves only slightly closer to choosing a topic. We had all these fascinating things we could explore and we ended up on a kind of a generic topic, which was love and romantic relationships. It was exciting to me because immediately as an artist who likes to address issues I'm thinking we can talk about violence within relationships, we can talk about the definition of marriage and the upcoming elections...and they were more interested in doing things on like...the ethics of flirting and they had funny ideas for scenes and that's great, so we made those scenes...but then there were times when I also would bring something into the room. I would say...we have an election coming up and in that election there will be an amendment that will define marriage as being between a man and a woman. What about that? Do we want to address that? Or why have we not talked about that? So we talked about it and I said...okay, so if we were to address that issue who should we interview...because we were using an interview-based process. They said priests, rabbis, religious leaders...and maybe we could talk to people who want to get married or can't...and maybe we can talk to people who are campaigning for or against the amendment...and I will tell you, one of the things that I will work on for next year is working with the actors to get them to secure interview subjects. Some people would do that, but only if it was people they already knew. They were pretty bad about finding

interview subject that they didn't know. Only one company member did that. They just, were not comfortable with it and it wasn't a focus for me at that point...but it will be this next year because we're going to spend much more time on putting together our performance project, which means that we might encounter whole new issues of attention span. Anyway the point is, we brought in people, they interviewed those people and then they created based on that. I really did assert my influence...I did...and I'm not ashamed of it. I feel defensive about it, but I'm not ashamed of it. I wanted their show to be broad. I wanted it to take in as much stuff as possible. I wanted them to challenge themselves to think about how love and romantic relationships are social issues as well as personal issues. They had these wonderful, hilarious scenes they had created, but I also wanted to challenge them to handle some hard things. Things that would stretch them as a group...that would help them to bond as a group by talking about hard stuff. So I definitely influenced that. No question. I did not influence what they said about those issues, except that I said that we will not present only one side of the issue. We're not doing activist theatre and that's in my mission statement...that's about what Harbor is. I'm not interested in creating theatre that endorses or takes down a particular point of view. I'm interested in theatre that explores a question fully from all the way around and I impose that. Those are my ideals. But in terms of what the scenes actually end up being, that was them. I do also edit their work and I tell them that I'm going to do that from the beginning. So they generate copious amounts of material through improvisation mostly, sometimes they will write something, but that is not common. Our process is more that we interview somebody, talk about what was said, use images to explore, maybe some journaling to explore, we sometimes chat on facebook about it, but then we mostly would improv about it. So we would just create scene after scene in response to the interview, discuss what we like and then I take all of it and maybe say...I want you to take this scene that you've just created and hone it down to five lines. Let me see that...and then we build it back up again because five lines is an easy way to get at the kernel of something. Sometimes they would just say they liked one particular scene and then we

wouldn't have time to come back to it because we might have another interview the next day. So what I would do with that material is that I would take all that stuff and I would synthesize it. I would say...we're going to take this scene and we're going to twist it like this and I'd write it up...we're going to take this scene and this line is good, we're going to throw that line out and I'd write it up. Then I'd bring it to them and say...this is what I did with your material, what do you think? They would say, oh I like this, I don't like the ending of this...I feel like, in working with teenagers, one of the things I can bring to the process is my experience as a playwright and my experience as a songwriter and arranger. So that's what I bring to the process and I let them know that that's part of what we're going to do. If I had more time, I would definitely want to have them bring things closer to the final product. I would say...here is what I'm seeing, is this what you intend? Here are the ideas I think you are trying to communicate, is that right? Okay, if those are ideas you want to communicate, perhaps think about communicating them in this way or asking them a directorial question and sending them back to work on it some more and then they bring it to that point of finality. But we only had a semester to work on this project because we were waiting on grant stuff and so that was not a luxury I had. If I wanted them to have a performance piece that felt like a cohesive whole I had to exercise some editorial muscle...or at least I thought I did...maybe a more skilled, experience facilitator would say...James you actually didn't have to do that...but I didn't think so at the time...there came a point when I had to say to myself...I feel bad about putting my hands on their material...and I had to say to myself, this is the theatre program that you started, Harbor Theatre Group is under your name and so if this is what you need to do, then do this thing and stop feeling so bad about it. It's the first year and maybe you'll be doing it differently next year. So I feel like the more ideologically pure way of creating devised work is to collaborate with an ensemble so that they end up creating the entire piece and it is purely their own voice...but in Harbor's first year I don't think that we were idealistically pure in that way. I will say that as their director and coach I worked really hard not to insert my own points of view and not to insert my own dramatic voice.

I wanted to preserve what they had created, but I wanted to help them to get it to a place of performable finality.

What techniques do you use to create an environment where every person feels like an integral part of the process?

I start out by doing it explicitly. There are a set of expectations that we recite at the beginning of every single rehearsal. Some people like to craft those expectations as an ensemble. I believe at the beginning of our process...because most of our performers are strangers to each other it is up to me to assert myself as a protector of their emotional safety, and that as we can continue we can open that process up and see if there is anything we want to add or subtract from those expectations...but at the beginning I feel like it's my job to say I've got your back and here's how. So our expectations at the beginning of a rehearsal process are kindness, confidentiality, openness, honesty, non-judgment, and right to pass. I think saying those things and making sure everybody is clear on them is important, but I also lead a series of exercises that illustrate each of those principles. For example, for kindness I use an exercise that was created by Joe Bernard...a game called Loser Ball where you start off by miming a ball and throwing it to each other and catching it and in the second round of the game you throw the ball and we miss it every single time. Whoever misses it is supported in ridiculous ways by the rest of the group...so if it hits me in the head, everybody else goes...oh my gosh, are you okay? I was watching the ball as it came toward you and I have to say, your eye was on the ball! Ridiculous praise in an unrealistic way just so people can get used to supporting each other. I feel like a huge piece of why Harbor feels like such a safe creative home for our participants is because improv is at the heart of what we do...and not just in some bullshit kind of way. I feel like there are a lot of theatre groups that use improv as a way to create material, but they never actually study it. They're like...oh improv is just making things up as they go along...and I think that is selling it really short. I think that's like a ballet dancer saying...okay I

spent fourteen years training as a ballerina and now I want to do modern dance...modern dance appears to be less disciplined and more improvisational so because I took all those years of ballet class I must be able to do modern as well...which is nonsense. I take improv very seriously. I've studied it really hard over the last half of a decade and in various different ways before then. So as our company members are forming their sense of ensemble for the first two months we work together, they are also being trained rigorously in improv. If you truly learn about improvisation as a philosophy, not just as a performance approach, then you are learning about how to accept everybody's ideas regardless of what you had in mind originally. You are learning about how to support other people by offering your own ideas to the collaborative process and you're learning about how to advance and expand a scene. An improv scene is a collaborative endeavor. So I feel like by the time we get to a place where all of our company members are strong improvisers they also have strong bonds with each other because you can't go through that without doing that. I don't teach improv in a combative way either...some people do that, but it's just not my style.

In what ways do you go about “checking in”/ “reading the pulse” of the group?

There is a book called *A Teachable Moment* which is just techniques that you can use to debrief exercises and check in with how people are doing after an experience. I use a lot of those formal techniques. To give you an example...we might do something like Shigi cards. A deck of cards that just have images on them and nothing else and the images don't mean anything independently, but you lay them all out and then you say at the end of a rehearsal or experience, pick a card that says something about the time that you spent with us today. Everybody picks a card and then they show the card to each other and they have the opportunity to share why they picked it...or not. That's way more revealing to me than saying...how is everybody doing? Also, because I get to work with the kids so much I get to know them really well and I can observe their social patterns in rehearsal and if somebody seems

removed when I take a break I'll take that person aside just to make sure everything is okay today. I collect information about them as well...what they do in their free time, what their family situation is...that kind of thing...so I am able to say how is your mom doing?...one of my guys got suspended last year for a fight that he was is...and if I know about that, then if he withdraws I can ask him, you know...how is it going with this?

What cues (verbal/physical) help you discern when the group has something to say and when they need direction?

I feel like some point in my life as an educator...I might have said to you that if they're silent then they probably don't have anything to say, but I don't think that's true anymore because I'm aware of so many ways of processing information and emotions. I know that some people process things internally. What I'm inclined to do is to put together a rehearsal plan...I try to make it appeal to as many different kinds of learning and processing as I possibly can. That way I don't have to make assumptions about whether somebody has something to say. I do in fact have a kid in my group that is a very internal processor and it's very rare that he will ever share anything with the rest of the group simply by speaking...it's just not his style. So I have to make sure that while I'm creating the devising session that I can include something that includes writing, or breaking them into pairs and small groups before coming to the big group, and then I might hear something from him. But I won't hear something from if I just sit with the group and ask them what they think because that plays only to one style of participation and intelligence. I just feel like I can't make assumptions about when they have something to say and when they need guidance from me...if I think about it in terms of farming...I have to plant crops in lots of different kinds of soil and I have to plant lots of different kinds of crops so no matter what the weather is, something is going to grow. If I don't do it that way, then I'm leaving something out.

How do you (facilitator) share growing connections/themes you may see without imposing your ideas on the group?

I'll ask questions or I might say something like...I'm hearing this word a lot, why do you think that is? Another thing I do at the end of a rehearsal...I always try to write for myself after rehearsal. I try to always sit down and journal, even if it's just for five minutes...and if I notice something is coming up, then maybe I will plan a sequence to help us unpack that in the next session. I also try to teach them how to do that too. So in some of the improv games that I use require participants try to locate recurring themes to begin a scene with. Hopefully, that's a skill that you can help them build, which will then keep me from imposing my own stuff!

What do you do when/if a group is unable to come to a consensus about a piece?

I use this thing...again that I stole from Michael called the Democracy spectrum. I will try to define for the company members where we are on that spectrum. So if they are having difficulty reaching consensus, I might just let that play out for a long time...but if we are on a timeline or something I might say something like...we've been over here on the Democracy Spectrum and we're going to shift over here. I just heard you all tell me what you feel we should do...I'm hearing this and I'm also hearing this. Does that capture it? Is there anything else I should be saying? They might be like...yeah I think this is true and I start to recover more ideas. Finally we get to a point where we can't go any further. I'll say...so I hear this, this, this, and this. Do I have that right? Yeah. What are we going to do? We're going to do this. So if we actually reach an impasse, I make sure that I'm hearing everything, but I'll say alright I'm going to switch to be your director right now and I'm telling you we're going to make this call. Really though, it depends on how much time we have, the strength of a group, and the character of a group. Last year I had a group that reached consensus pretty quickly...they like, fell in love with each other and by the time we got to January they really listened to each other and they wanted to

agree. So if somebody shared an idea that they didn't agree with they wanted to find a compromise. I didn't see any consistency in who constantly won those kinds of struggles. They all came to see Harbor as this incredibly supportive and loving environment that they looked forward to coming to, so they didn't want to see a lot of discord. But it could be totally different this year! I could have a group that likes to fight and I'll respond differently to that.

Do you ever get the sense that participants are trying to please you/give you what you want? What do you do to deter this behavior?

Yes...that is something that I see sometimes, but I work to facilitate in a way where it's not what I endorse. So my taste might be this and this, but my CLIMB training and the training I gave at CLIMB teaches to affect an objective demeanor. There are teacher pleasers in my group and it frustrates them that they can't because I try very hard not to let them know what I might think may be the right answers. What I might try and do is better clarify for them what the choices are. It's usually going to be one thing or another for me. I will either be very open and say, I'm noticing this...this is how I'm seeing what you're showing me, is this what you intend? Okay, I see your choices as being this, this, or this, maybe you'll see something else. I leave it very up to them and they might say something to me like, which one do you like? And I say...I don't know! Or I'll feel like a choice needs to be made now and I'll say, we can go this way or this way...and if they don't say anything I'll just say...go with this one. Some kids say thank you! And others say that they don't want that from me. I had one kid who resisted my input, so I didn't give it to him very often.

What other types of training do you think might be necessary for this type of work?

I don't know! I feel like...and I definitely think that other facilitators feel this too, but I often feel an imposter complex all the time. I feel often like I don't know what I'm supposed to know, I haven't read what I'm supposed to read, I didn't go to the right schools. I've worked with an organization that

trains facilitators...and they brought me in to teach and I was like...why are you bringing me in? These facilitators came from wide and varied facilitation backgrounds and I didn't think I had anything to teach them...but I did...I really feel like a theatre artist who hasn't trained in improv is depending too much on somebody else's voice. I also feel like it helps you to face and end your fear...or you won't beat it, but you'll incorporate it into who you are and you'll understand it more fully. I think it's huge as a community builder. I think it's great for understanding of themes and being able to recognize patterns. I have talked to people who have been part of some cool-sounding training programs and there isn't a lot of discussion about how to relate to your group...the actual, physical mechanics of it. How do you phrase a question...we use to talk about taking a question down. That's not a thing that a lot of people learn how to do. People don't learn about how to organize directions in your head and when you give those directions in a sequence. Nobody talks about teacher persona that I'm aware of. I feel like a solid training in that kind of thing is super important, but I haven't been informed about other places where you can receive it. I feel like a lot of people treat facilitation that it has to go with "giftedness". It treats ability as though it is innate as opposed to something that is a result of effort and practice. I think a lot of people think that teachers who are really good facilitators have an "innate gift" and you either have it or you don't. I think that's such a shame because I think that a lot of people who could be wonderful educators for our kids are disenfranchised because they don't think the way that you and I do...people that find it natural to be able to facilitate effectively. So, facilitation training...there needs to be a slew of it and everybody should do it!

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