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**Stories and Questions: Agentive Artistry and Community-based Youth
Theatre in Regional Theatre Contexts**

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**Stories and Questions: Agentive Artistry and Community-based Youth
Theatre in Regional Theatre Contexts**

by

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Thesis

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Dedication

So praise to innocence, impulsive and evergreen
and let the old be touched by youth's
wayward astonishment at learning something new,
and dream of a future so fitting and so just
that our desire will bring it into being.

—Dana Gioia¹

¹ (Gioia 122)

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Abstract

Stories and Questions: Agentive Artistry, Community-based Youth Theatre, and Regional Theatre Contexts

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

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Regional theatres in the United States of America produce an increasing number of educational theatre programs in which young people generate original performances based on personal and community stories. This qualitative research study employs a reflective practitioner research methodology to examine the experiences of high school students, teaching artists, and education staff during a community-based youth theatre Intensive at McCarter Theatre Center, a regional theatre in Princeton, NJ. The researcher draws data from her recorded experiences as the Intensive's teaching artist in addition to data from student journals, staff interviews and artifacts from the performance-making process. Through thematic analysis, five aspects of the Intensive arise as important to student, staff, and teaching artist experiences: Ensemble, Generating Form and Content, Community Connection, Generating Performance, and Shaping Performance. This study finds that these five components were influenced by study participants' multiple roles throughout the Intensive, roles that determined and enforced students' agency while

generating community-based performance. To conclude, the researcher suggests possibilities for supporting youth agency in future research and practice within community-based youth theatre processes in regional theatre contexts.

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PART ONE: THE RIVER AND THE INSTITUTION AND THE MESS

Sometimes it feels like academia will only attend the party if it's thrown at their house. And I want everybody—practitioners, young people, theatre administrators, and academics—to attend my thesis party. My party is where young artists get to stay in their communities if they want to and leave their communities if they want to and make their communities strong and inclusive and loving whichever way they go. Or maybe it's not about throwing a party, but inviting all of these people to come live in my house, to know each other, to share a laundry machine and dance a kitchen dance in the morning while they get all of their oatmeal and coffee and bananas and pack their lunches to go out, to make work, to know people, and then come back for dinner and wine around the table so we can talk about why young people are silenced, why their art is nowhere to be found in the literature, why their aesthetics are made fun of, why it feels okay to say that this generation is the worst generation in history even though they're doing things that still scare me. I want all the people to live in the same house. And if that house is my thesis, I want my thesis to be the most hospitable one around.

— Cortney McEniry¹

This Thesis is for Failing Revolutionaries

Perhaps it's the moment that every teaching artist has, but no one wants to talk about—that moment when you realize you are absolutely more attached to your power and privilege than you thought. That moment when you realize your actions as a facilitator aren't matching up with your flowery language and radical ideals. That moment when the show opens tomorrow and you don't have time to practice a critical, constructivist, feminist pedagogy, because you just need everyone to find their light, project their voices, and stop talking backstage.

When I began planning this thesis project and document, I thought it was for people who don't believe in the nascent artistry of young people. I was wrong. This thesis is for

¹ (McEniry, "Pre-thesis Reflection")

those who, like me, hold youth agency at the center of our core values. It's for people who find inspiration in the aesthetics of young artists. And it's for people who, as they're holding those values and finding that inspiration, realize that they are still informed by and participating in systems and pedagogies that silence young artists. It's also for people who haven't realized the vast nature of their complicity yet; I certainly hadn't when I wrote my bit of thesis poetry at the top of this section.

Through a reflective practitioner research approach (Taylor 27), this qualitative MFA research study examines a 3-week community-based training intensive for high school students undertaken at McCarter Theatre Center, a large, regional theatre in Princeton, New Jersey. This study asks: What are the experiences of young people, theatre education staff, and facilitators during a community-based youth theatre process in a regional theatre context? The pedagogical and artistic frame for this project was located in the intersection of three distinct fields: community-based performance, youth theatre, and regional theatre. As a teaching artist informed by my background in applied theatre, I intentionally designed this project in order to examine the intersections of community-based performance and youth theatre within opportunities and limitations presented by a regional theatre context.

This study centers and examines the experiences of young artists, education staff, and teaching artists, recognizing that those experiences are greatly influenced by histories and systems of value and power within community-based theatre, youth theatre, and regional theatre. There are three parts included in this thesis, each containing several smaller chapters. Each of these chapters are prefaced by statements from artists, practitioners, and scholar, often including statements from the practitioners and young artists who participated in this study. Part I has five chapters, providing a brief description of the fields and research that shaped the principles, place, pedagogy, and process of this

project and study. This first chapter introduces the document, while the second chapter examines community-based practice and performance. I offer an overview of the fields of community cultural development, Stephani Etheridge Woodson's Theatre for Youth third space, youth theatre, and community-based theatre to justify my use of the term "community-based youth theatre" throughout this document. The third chapter examines regional theatre, and the fourth focuses on regional theatre as a context for community-based youth theatre. In the fifth chapter, I name the pedagogical influences that most contributed to my planning and facilitation of this project, and I contextualize this research as a qualitative study with a reflective practitioner research approach.

Part I is informed by Kentucky writer and thinker Wendell Berry's notion of the past. He says, "The past is our definition. We may strive with good reason to escape it, or to escape what is bad in it. But we will escape it only by adding something better to it" (Berry, *Standing by Words* 14). With this part of the thesis, I aim to understand the definition of community-based youth theatre as it is found in the past, before beginning to imagine something new to add.

The River and the Mess of Community-based Practice

Poetry is a river; many voices travel in it; poem after poem moves along in the exciting crests and falls of the river waves. None is timeless; each arrives in an historical context; almost everything, in the end, passes. But the desire to make a poem, and the world's willingness to receive it—indeed the world's need of it—these never pass.

—Mary Oliver²

Feminism's failings do not mean we should eschew feminism entirely. [...] We should disavow the failures of feminism without disavowing the many successes of feminism. We don't have to believe in the same feminism. Feminism can be pluralistic and messy so long as we respect the different feminisms we carry with us [...].

—Roxane Gay³

As Mary Oliver describes her river of poetry in this section's opening quotation, Richard Owen Geer's definition of community-based theatre as theatre of, by, and for communities was my river (Oliver 9; Geer xxxi). At 21, I discovered many voices in the American community-based theatre movement, including El Teatro Campesino, Urban Bush Women, Free Southern Theatre, and Cornerstone Theatre Company. I became anxious to join the current and add my own voice.

I remember my introduction to the river—the first time I read *Local Acts*, Jan Cohen-Cruz's book detailing the historiography of community-based theatre in the US. I cried; I still see the tear stains and the over-eager highlights when I flip through my copy. In the final few paragraphs of her introduction, Cohen-Cruz illustrates her positionality and her purpose for writing the book, describing her experience with civil rights movements and activism, with religion, with theatre. I saw my story reflected in hers and I was relieved to hear someone else say, "I thought I should be working against injustice full time, that

² (Oliver 9)

³ (Gay para. 13-14)

theatre was just a luxury” (Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts* 12). Before reading Cohen-Cruz’s story, I was naïvely concerned that I might be the only one thinking along these lines.

As a senior theatre major at Furman University in South Carolina, my privilege as a white, Christian, straight, cis-gender woman meant I had the luxury to think that theatre could ever be “just a luxury” (Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts* 12). But my geographical context meant that I was constantly reminded of deep community divisions, often serving as a breeding ground for hate and bigotry. I was enamored by the idea of theatre as a catalyst for social change, and I felt an urgent need to participate in it. After reading *Local Acts*, I consumed whatever information I could find about applied theatre, community-based theatre, community cultural development, and theatre for social change. I felt that I was joining a new, exciting field, and at the same time, joining an ages-old tradition.

Community-based theatre scholarship invited me to consider my own role in the movement for civil rights, and I started to build relationships with and learn from the perspectives of activists in my community. These activists taught me to be aware of my privilege, of change that comes from the community rather than outsiders, of consistent, long-term relationships. I began to try simple and then more complex practices in the field—facilitating a workshop, conducting interviews, creating a documentary performance. Curiously, as I became more civically engaged, I became less interested in the academic field that invited me into civic engagement in the first place. I began to notice that the very forms of theatre claiming to amplify the voices of marginalized communities often exalt the work of the field’s most privileged leaders. I learned that community-based praxis does not come with guarantees or guidelines or even much accountability. And, as community-based practices became more popular among funding organizations, I observed an increase in marketing copy from theatre institutions and grant descriptions containing terms like “community,” “change,” and “engagement.” I was disenchanted with the

imperfection of a field I had once put on a pedestal, even while its popularity surged in the non-profit sector.

Inspired by the wisdom of Roxane Gay in the opening quote of this chapter, I frame the many influences on my praxis and research with the intention to acknowledge and disavow the failures of the community-based performance field while honoring the ethical, important work towards justice undertaken by many community-based artists and scholars. As I place my work in conversation with many researchers who have inspired and taught me—as well as many ideas that have romanced, challenged, and sometimes troubled me—I acknowledge what applied theatre scholar Dani Snyder-Young describes as “theatre’s limits to making social change” (*Theatre of Good Intentions* 4). Gay’s previously referenced reflection on feminism allows for multiple interpretations, adaptations, and nuances. I hope to reflect Gay’s discernment in my own sentiments towards the various fields and contexts of theatre addressed here, respecting the “pluralistic and messy” nature of this work while identifying the theory and practice I carry with me (Gay para. 14).

THE RIVER AND THE MESS: HIGHLIGHTING YOUNG ARTISTS

In *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-based Theater*, Sonja Kuflinec explains, “It is difficult to determine the source of the term community-based theater, and perhaps not entirely necessary in a historiographic approach less concerned with origins” (206). However, perhaps the two most commonly used definitions are from community-based scholars Richard Owen Geer and Jan Cohen-Cruz. Likely inspired by the four basic principles of the Krigwa Little Theatre Movement,⁴ Geer defines community-based theatre

⁴Geer unfortunately did not credit the influence of the Krigwa Theater in his writing, but WEB Dubois’ definition of “a real Negro theatre” (“about us”, “by us”, “for us” and “near us”) was published in 1926, over 70 years before Geer’s definition of community-based theatre mimicked a similar language (Walker 348).

as theatre that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people” (xxxix), while Cohen-Cruz preferences the term “community-based performance” for its inclusion of multiple forms:

It is a collaboration between an artist or ensemble and a ‘community’ in that the latter is a primary source of the text, possibly performers as well, and definitely a goodly portion of the audience. That is, at the source of community-based performance is not the singular artist but a ‘community’ constituted by virtue of a shared primary identity based in place, ethnicity, class, race, sexual preference, profession, circumstances, or political orientation. (*Local Acts 2*)

The essence of Cohen-Cruz’s definition is found in a collaboration between artist and community wherein a community of identity, place, or experience provides the content for an artist-constructed performance to be witnessed and participated in by that same community. Cohen-Cruz continues, “Community-based performance relies on artists guiding the creation of original work or material adapted to, and with, people with a primary relationship to the content, not necessarily to the craft” (*Local Acts 2-3*). In other words, community-based performance is often reliant on a relationship between artists, with their craft and skills in performance, and community members, with their stories and communal knowledge, to create performance about a place, circumstance, or question. This definition of community-based performance relies on a binary—one is either an artist or a member of the community. However, such a binary can’t exist in community-based youth theatre, since young artists are both community members and artists. Borrowing Cohen-Cruz’s language, they hold a primary relationship to both the content and the craft.

The artistic work of young people has historically been left out of research and rhetoric around community-based theatre, and Cohen-Cruz’s principles of community-based theatre are rarely discussed by researchers in the context of youth theatre. However, the fields of youth theatre and community-based theatre have parallel, often intersecting, values, meaning that the merging of these fields of practice produces something both new

and familiar. Heather Ikemire, a community-based practitioner and teaching artist, defines and uses the term *community-based youth theatre* as follows:

I use the term “community-based youth theatre” to situate the work in communities of place, identity or tradition and to designate the work as created and performed by youth, who either identify with these communities or come to identify with them by virtue of participating in a playmaking process that positions them as part of that community. (9)

In other words, Ikemire defines community-based youth theatre as theatre contextualized by a specific community, generated and performed by young people who belong to or, through the process, come to belong to that specific community. Ikemire’s definition does not include the binary of artist-or-community member found in Cohen-Cruz’s writing, but rather merges the two identities, recognizing the dual role of young people in community-based youth theatre.

THE RIVER AND THE MESS: THE YOUNG ARTIST’S DUALITY

The young artist’s dual role disrupts the binary model upon which most community-based theatre scholarship is built, and therefore young people as community-based artists invite a paradigm shift to the field’s vocabulary, methodology, and core values. The reality of readership perpetuates the binary between artist and community in community-based theatre scholarship; most of the people writing, reading, and editing journals about youth theatre and community-based practice are professional, adult artists.

Certainly, some adult community-based artists work in and with their own communities. In particular, artists who work with an identity-based community to which they belong have paved the way for the duality of artist as community member; queer theatre, Black theatre, and Chicano theatre are examples of such bedrocks of the

community-based theatre movement, with artists creating work that represents their own experiences as well as the experiences of others. However, community-based practitioners are often artists paid for their professional skill to work with a community separate from their own. In contrast, young community-based artists often build their artistic skills through telling the stories of their own communities. Community-based youth theatre complicates community-based performance scholarship, as the young community-based artist is both emerging artist and community member, a dual role more often incorporated in youth theatre scholarship.

In their extensive study of best practices in youth theatre⁵, educational theatre scholars Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson describe one category of youth theatre as “community,” a category in which “the ‘reason for being’ is to reflect and represent concerns of specific communities and promote community development through theatre” (62). Practitioners within this category are already finding connections between community-based performance and youth theatre. This dual role of the young community-based artist requires a new understanding of Cohen-Cruz’s articulated principles of the field of community-based theatre: *communal context*, *reciprocity*, *hyphenation*, and *active culture* (*Local Acts* 86). Where Cohen-Cruz’s principles apply to young community-based artists and their dual roles, the fields of community-based theatre and youth theatre are in direct conversation.

Cohen-Cruz states that *communal context* is found when “the artists’ craft and vision are at the service of a specific group desire” (*Local Acts* 96). When applied to young people telling their own stories, the concept of communal context indicates that young people’s artistry is used to meet their own goals, not the goals of a facilitator or

⁵ Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson define youth theatre as “theatre created with young people in non-academic settings” (58).

organization. However, if young people are working as artists to tell the stories of others in their communities as well as to tell their own stories, communal context can also suggest that young community-based artists' craft in performance should serve the goals of other community members as well as their own goals. When considering young community-based artists, Cohen-Cruz's concept of communal context speaks to the same centering of young people's desires that Hughes and Wilson found in their study of youth theatre. They report that, "The creative processes of youth theatre utilize and develop initiative and imagination by providing freedom for young people to plan and carry out their own ideas and intentions" (Hughes and Wilson 63). In short, youth theatre is already using tools that invites young people as artists to serve their own goals—and the goals of their communities—with their art form.

Cohen-Cruz also proposes the principle of *reciprocity*, pointing to "the desired relationship between community-based artists and participants as mutually nourishing" (*Local Acts* 93). Again, if pertaining to young people who serve as both artists and participants, reciprocity maintains the importance of a "mutually nourishing" connection with community members, but it also points to the importance of collaborative ensemble, as young community-based artists in ensembles are with other artists and other community members. Hughes and Wilson point to this same principle as another positive aspect of youth theatre, explaining, "In youth theatre young people develop a sense of self that is rooted in having a visible and congruent role to play in a group" (64). In other words, the connections between young artists engaged in youth theatre are often mutually nourishing, as is the relationship between young artists and outside community members who participate in or attend performances of their work. These connections reflect the community-based principle of reciprocity as defined by Cohen-Cruz.

Cohen-Cruz's next principle of community-based performance is *hyphenation*: "As a hyphenated field, community-based performance draws from other disciplines in addition to theatre" (*Local Acts* 98). Cohen-Cruz goes on to explain that these other fields often include social justice work, community development, education, and therapy (*Local Acts* 98). Community-based youth theatre demonstrates hyphenation by taking into consideration the goals of youth theatre, creating "opportunities for young people to take risks in safe contexts," "to take part in performance," and "to take responsibilities necessary to maintain the organization" (Hughes and Wilson 62). The practices of community-based youth theatre facilitators are also hyphenated, as facilitators balance the needs of young students building artistic skill with the needs of the students' art as it becomes public.

For young theatre artists, artistic growth is not less important than the social and developmental benefits of youth theatre; Hughes and Wilson found that "80% of young people said they attended youth theatre to improve their acting skills or pursue an interest in acting and the theatre" (67). While teaching artists, education staff, and funding organizations often focus on opportunities to support youth in their personal growth, young community-based artists also want to build skills as artists. The hyphenated nature of community-based performance demands that both personal and artistic growth be equally prioritized within community-based youth theatre programs.

The final and fourth principle of community-based performance as defined by Cohen-Cruz is *active culture*, the principle that "people frequently get more out of making art than seeing the fruits of other people's labors" (*Local Acts* 99). In focusing on young artists with this principle, Cohen-Cruz's work could offer that young people learn more from generating performance than experiencing performance by adults or other youth. To be sure, generation of performance is a large aspect of my own practice in community-based youth theatre. For young artists, however, witnessing community-based theatre

performed by youth or adults may be a useful and educational experience. In Kathleen Gallagher's multi-sited ethnographic study of drama classrooms, students witnessed a Verbatim play created from verbatim interviews with homeless youth before completing a class project in which they researched, created, and performed their own original Verbatim play. Gallagher describes the students' attendance at the professional performance as a "watershed experience" (182), stating, "the opportunity allowed us to watch how young people manipulated the genre and became researchers in their own right and of their own cultures" (184). As Gallagher observed, starting off with a clear frame of reference for a specific form, such as devised performance, documentary plays, or dance theatre, might result in giving young artists more creative fodder.

Cohen-Cruz specifically considers performances that are heavily shaped by a professional community-based artist, a relationship that can look different in community-based youth theatre that aims to give young artists more agency in the topic, structure, and aesthetics of a piece. For example, Cohen-Cruz cites community-based choreographer Liz Lerman as an artist who structures and edits a performance into a final piece, taking it from a "free exploration of themes" to "something that can be articulated to an audience" (*Local Acts* 99). In community-based youth theatre, a teaching artist may do this, but often with a great amount of input from the young artists with whom they are collaborating. The tension here arises from the dual role of young participants as both artists who are working to learn and create within their own artistry and as community members whose stories are initially shared with one another, raw and unedited. Both of these roles might benefit from an experienced, outside facilitator, but the question of agency is at play: Who makes decisions regarding the way stories are told? This question of agency arises repeatedly throughout this thesis and in community-based youth theatre practice as a result of the young artist's dual role in generating community-based performance.

THE RIVER AND THE MESS: COMMUNITY-FOCUSED PRACTICES WITH YOUTH

In her book *Theatre for Youth Third Space: Performance, Democracy, and Community Cultural Development*, Stephani Etheridge Woodson introduces Theatre for Youth (TFY) third space, wrestling with the dual roles of young artists as they relate to Community Cultural Development (CCD) practices. A close sibling to community-based theatre, Community Cultural Development is a term coined by Arlene Goldbard and Don Adams to mean “the work of artist-organizers (‘community artists’) who collaborate with others to express identity, concerns and aspirations through the arts and communications media, while building cultural capacity and contributing to social change” (*Community, Culture and Globalization* 8). In short, CCD works within the frameworks and theories of community development, frequently through an artistic expression or reflection of the community.

In parallel to Cohen-Cruz's work in community-based performance, Goldbard writes extensively about CCD, outlining seven core principles of CCD practice in her 2006 study, *A New Creative Community* (43). Etheridge-Woodson merges youth theatre and CCD to newly interpret the principles of CCD, articulating 20 principles of TFY third space that account for the dual role of young people as artists and community members (81). Both TFY third space and community-based youth theatre rely on a model of young practitioners as artists and community members rather than the binary-informed model of artists working with community members (Figure 1). However, CCD and TFY third space operate within the frameworks of community development and social change, whereas community-based theatre is focused on “building community” and “expressing it” (Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts* 100).

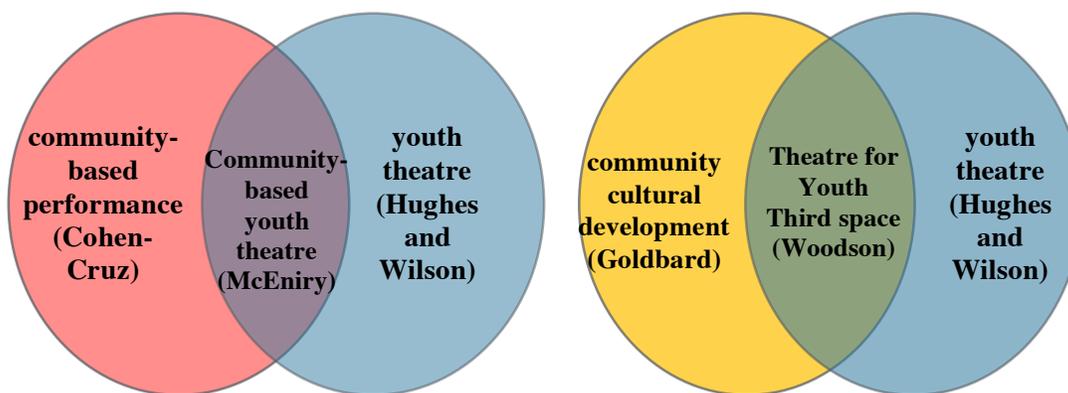


Figure 1: Community-focused practices with young artists

TFY third space overtly sets out to accomplish both aspects of Hughes and Wilson’s “community” category, advocating for and promoting community development; community-based youth theatre is chiefly interested in reflecting and representing the concerns of the community and its individual members, including the young artists. Keith Knight and Mat Schwartzman argue in *Beginner’s Guide to Community-based Arts* that such representation of self leads to conscious ownership of cultural distinctions, offering that this ownership is, in and of itself, social change:

Through community-based art people consciously take ownership of their signs, symbols, rituals and stories to re-connect and extend their sense of common ground. Out of common ground comes learning, and from learning comes the power of human beings to transform society and social life for the better—what we call ‘people power.’ In today’s world, it can take a problem or injustice [...] for people to rediscover their sense of people power—this is where community-based arts often come into play. [...] This ability to unleash our ‘social imagination’—to help us envision the world differently—makes community-based arts a uniquely important type of social change strategy. (xxiii-xxiv)

So, generating performance of, for, by, and with young people can lead to powerful social change through the creation of commonalities, mobilization communities, and activation of innovative problem-solving. But, as dictated in Cohen-Cruz’s concept of

communal context, it is critical that any articulated goals for social change are initiated, determined and defined by the young artists rather than adult community organizers or adult activists. Etheridge-Woodson's described practice of TFY third space relies on collaboration with adult community partners to establish specific goals (168-170), while community-based youth theatre relies on adult facilitators to mentor young people as they build artistic skill and community-based praxis. Additionally, this focus on artistic skill-building distinguishes community-based youth theatre from TFY third space—at least within the parameters of this document and my own practice.

Community-based youth theatre invites young people to take on the mantle of a community-based artist in their own communities, developing relationships, generating new work, making dramaturgical decisions, and considering the relationship of form and content. Educator Dorothy Heathcote's concept, *the mantle of the expert*, influences my definition of community-based youth theatre. Heathcote defines "the mantle of the expert" as a pedagogical approach where "the teacher assumes a fictional role which places the student in the position of being 'the one who knows' or the expert in a particular branch of human knowledge" (Heathcote and Herbert 173). In community-based youth theatre practice, I apply this definition to the role of a teaching artist or facilitator. The mantle of the expert approach asks teaching artists to view young community-based artists as experts in generating performance about their communities.

In *Drama for Learning*, Gavin Bolton lists out three basic principles for the mantle of the expert approach. He begins, "One: The specific thing you are setting out to teach emerges from curriculum tasks" (Heathcote and Bolton 18) In other words, the facilitator creates a challenge derived from learning goals. Through the work of creating performance, young artists learn the artistic skills, relational practices, and ethical considerations that comprise the basis of community-based practice. There are no lectures or targeted

discussions; as questions and learning opportunities arise, the facilitator guides and mentors students towards a more ethical, thoughtful, rigorous artistic practice.

Bolton continues, “Two: The students must be conscious of what they are learning, as they continually record and assess newly acquired knowledge and skills” (Heathcote and Bolton 18). In my practice, this means that students are constantly recording their learning through journal entries and reflecting together through facilitated dialogue⁶. Bolton concludes, “And three: they must become responsible for what they learn, that is, they must make it happen” (Heathcote and Bolton 18). Community-based youth theatre expects that young artists will be responsible for generating, producing, and performing their work. In my ideal version of community-based youth theatre, everything presented to a public audience is imagined and completed by young artists, and they are viewed as legitimate artists—as experts.

The mantle of the expert approach allows community-based youth theatre participants to simultaneously build their skills in artistry and community-based practice. In a manner that differs from TFY third space, community-based youth theatre prioritizes artistic development as highly as community development. However, while I don’t utilize Etheridge-Woodson’s term of TFY third space to describe this project, much of her research influences my own practice. In particular, two of her articulated principles of TFY third space are in direct conversation with my mantle of the expert approach to community-based youth theatre:

- Children and youth are competent cultural producers.
- Children and youth are agents and assets within their communities. (81)

⁶ I describe these practices in greater depth in Part II.

Thus, honoring young people as both members of their communities and generative, agentive artists, I using the term community-based youth theatre within this document to mean a form of theatre created by young people with, for, and about their communities *and* themselves. Community-based youth theatre invites young people to add their voices to the river; it invites young people to pull their own community-based artistic practice from the mess.

The Institution and the Mess of Regional Theatre

Outside of New York there was simply no audience for any kind of theatre except for touring companies with stars. So we looked around and saw a mess, saw that the art of theater was dying and thought of a way to keep it alive.

- Zelda Fichandler⁷

While Heather Ikemire and others have worked to research community-based youth theatre, minimal research exists on the influence of regional theatre as a context for this work. And yet, in a cursory examination of theatre websites, I found 22 theatres among the 72 members of the League of Residential Theatres (LORT) with programming that might benefit a community-based youth theatre categorization⁸. LORT is a professional association of theatres in the United States that work with Actor's Equity to negotiate union contracts with actors and stage managers. LORT does not include many storefront theatre companies or small professional theatres, however; these smaller organizations might be more accurately included in the membership of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), an organization that exists to serve professional theatres and artists through professional development, grants, and research ("Our Mission"). Smaller theatres included in TCG but not LORT may also include youth theatres and theatre organizations focused on producing professional Theatre for Young Audiences. For this study and reflection on the regional theatre context, however I specifically refer to LORT theatres.

Todd London says in his anthology, *An Ideal Theatre: Founding Visions for New American Art*, "Every American theater defines and is defined by a corner of America" (xvii). When community-based youth theatre takes place in the regional context, London's proclamation rings true: regional theatre defines and is defined by the experiences of young

⁷ (Fichandler 303)

⁸ See Appendix A.

people, theatre education staff, and teaching artists who are involved in regional theatre educational programming. In this section, I seek to address the various hierarchies and systems of value that exist in regional theatre institutions, creating an influential and multi-layered context for practicing community-based youth theatre within this context.

THE INSTITUTION AND THE MESS: INSTITUTIONALIZING A MOVEMENT

In 1973, Joseph Zeigler, an arts administrator and professor, wrote *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage*, introducing tensions and triumphs of regional theatre's short history to an academic audience. Zeigler opens the text announcing, "After decades of urging by leaders and visionaries, there is finally in America an alternative to the theatre of Broadway" (1). Zelda Fichandler, co-founder of Arena Stage and a pioneer in the regional theatre movement, echoed this sentiment, recalling in this section's opening quotation the "mess" that inspired theatre leaders to create the regional theatre movement in the 1960's and 1970's (303). Seeing the mess, a group of artists founded theatres in cities throughout the USA, outside of New York. Many of these theatres began as amateur theatres or artistic laboratories for young and emerging artists—including Steppenwolf Theater in Chicago, the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Arena Stage in Washington, DC (London 262, 320, 299), and, of course, McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, New Jersey ("Our History"). However, they soon became institutionalized with the help of the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment of the Arts, and a shift to a grant-funded model for regional theatres, wherein theatre companies became established as non-profit organizations (Bonin 97-112).

London says of the institutionalization of regional theatres, "These institutions teach us ways to stay the course, while the art theaters and little theaters and

collective/experimental/avant-garde theaters send up flares to illuminate the edges of [...] the possible” (xx). The place of regional theatre as the standard for organizational success has deeply influenced the administrative systems of American theatre, but its high-efficiency, revenue-oriented institutional standards have not been implemented without compromise. Zeigler describes this change as a shift towards the Establishment, even while the regional theatre movement “started as reactions to the theatrical Establishment of their time—Broadway” (170). Zeigler explains that legitimacy, not money, was the first motivation for regional theatres to become more institutional:

In each of them, besides the passion for innovation and reform in the arts, there existed a need for making a public mark for themselves. At the same time that they were rebelling against the Broadway Establishment, they were seeking to establish their theatres and themselves in their own communities. [...] Partly to counteract the narrowness of the public’s viewpoint, the early leaders enshrined their theatres as soon as possible in an institutional form which lent propriety. [...] Almost all regional theatres then, chose a structure which their local Establishments already understood because it was like the structure of the university, the hospital, the symphony orchestra, and the community chest. [...] Between 1960 and 1965, regional theatres took on more and more characteristics of Establishment power and influence. (171)

Also at this time, activist, community-based theatre companies such as El Teatro Campesino and the Free Southern Theatre began to develop, rejecting the influence of the “Establishment” and creating spaces for Latino and Black artists outside of Western cultural hegemony. At the heart of their divergence from the regional theatre institution was a firm resistance against racism and “a direct challenge to the normative cultural values of bourgeois society, a challenge that overlapped with a tendency among all group theaters to question the traditional structures of mainstream theater and the authority of the literary dramatic text” (Harding and Rosenthal 7). In other words, resistance to racism for these companies also meant resistance to hierarchies in the rehearsal room and in theatrical

institutions, hierarchies established primarily by white men to bring security, wealth, and success to so many regional theatres throughout the country. This resistance included a different approach for working with and for communities; where regional theatres focused on creating art defined as valuable by a hegemonic set of values, the emerging community-based theatres of the 60's valued the communities with whom they worked and disrupted the systems of value silencing these communities' cultures. James Harding and Cindy Rosenthal describe the nature of these theatre's forms of resistance as follows:

[...] the collective theaters acknowledged models of performance on which bourgeois theater had thrown a disdainful eye. If El Teatro Campesino and Free Southern brought theater to the disenfranchised, the point was not to "educate" them (in the traditional sense of the term) into an appreciation of high bourgeois culture but rather to subvert the high/low cultural distinctions that selectively legitimized only specific traditions and subordinated theatrical practice to Western literary culture. (7)

In other words, pioneering community-based theatre companies looked for a definition of value from their communities, rather than from an elite art culture. Meanwhile, regional theatres considered ways to remain relevant and necessary in their communities as a means of securing legitimacy and stability; Ziegler states, "The theatres sought to justify their existence (and their need for financial support) less by pointing out their intrinsic worth than by listing the various ways in which they served the community" (171).

THE INSTITUTION AND THE MESS: THE VALUE OF EDUCATION

Education proved to be a possible avenue to prove worth to a community, and funders were attracted to educational efforts. W. McNeil Lowry, vice president of the Ford Foundation and, as London describes him, "at first the only [...] supporter of the

regional/resident theater movement” (London 330), was wary, however, of what he called “the educational motive for philanthropic activity in the arts” (Lowry 335). He maintained that funding should be given to support the artist and the artist’s vision, arguing, “Whenever they distort the artistic enterprise, it is because art, when used for nonartistic ends, always risks distortion” (Lowry 335). While I don’t know for certain what Lowry meant by “nonartistic ends,” this statement reminds me of the very clear hierarchy in regional theatres that prioritizes the work of professional artists, from mainstage productions to developmental readings, above the work of education staff, teaching artists, and young people. Lowry’s statement echoes many of the statements I sometimes hear from other artists and administrators, telling me what I can and cannot expect from young artists, admitting their surprise at the quality of young people’s work, and discussing youth theatre as separate from “*theatre* theatre.” It is clear that Lowry felt educational efforts might diminish or detract from the work of professional artists; in my experience, this sentiment still resounds throughout the American theatre.

Money may not have been the first motivation for implementing educational and community-oriented programming, but the need for financial stability quickly followed the need for legitimacy; as Fichandler said simply, “We all need more money than we are getting and we must get it in a different way” (310). Despite this urgent need, she maintained that art must come before community, warning, “For while a theater is a public art and belongs to its public, it is an art before it is public and so it belongs first to itself and its first service must be self-service” (Fichandler 311). The same theme found in Lowry’s writings is found in Fichandler’s words—an emphasis on prioritizing the artist and the art as the mission of the theatre, above community and educational programming. For regional theatres in the 1960’s, funding and attention was spent on either the artist or the community—an echo of the binary of artist versus community member found in

community-based theatre scholarship. The historical differences and similarities between the regional and community-based theatre movements' approaches to community provide insight into their approaches to young people; after all, young people, including their aesthetics and their stories, are a part of communities.

THE INSTITUTION AND THE MESS: A CONTEXT FOR COMMUNITY-BASED YOUTH THEATRE PROGRAMS

As a context for community-based performance today, regional theatres present multi-faceted opportunities. Many LORT organizations are implementing initiatives to diversify staff, produce more works by playwrights of color, and, as previously stated, facilitate community-based youth theatre programs. In 2017, as a response to the divisive rhetoric of Donald Trump's presidential inauguration in the United States, the Ghostlight Project was taken up by regional, academic, and community theatres to "make, or renew, a pledge to stand for and protect the values of inclusion, participation and compassion for everyone regardless of race, class, religion, country of origin, immigration status, (dis)ability, age, gender identity, or sexual orientation" ("The Ghostlight Project"). LORT, the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT), TCG, and Actor's Equity have all published statements in support of diversity among arts administrators, artists, and technicians. At the same time, regional theatres continue to represent white male playwrights, designers, performers, and directors at an overwhelming majority⁹. As playwright Tanya Saracho says, "We have the right terminology, the jargon, the talk in the theatre; [...] we say the right things about gender and that word I hate, diversity, and we feel good about it. But it doesn't show up in the seasons or on our stages. It just doesn't" (para. 11). The current lack of representation for men and women of color, LGBTQ folks,

⁹ See Suilebhan, Jordan and Stump, Lord, and McGovern.

white women, young people, and people with disabilities stems from the same hegemonic Western cultural values that community-based theatres resisted in the 1960's, and it makes for an interesting site of community-based programming today.

In the United States, community-based theatre was created by people of color and other marginalized communities striving to carve out a space for themselves (Leonard and Kilkenny 10-12). British scholar Baz Kershaw, writing of the parallel community theatre movement in the United Kingdom, articulates the relationship between this grassroots performance field and regional theatre institutions:

Cultural institutions and products are clearly central to the maintenance of dominant ideologies, and are frequently the locus for ideological struggle in society. In particular, theatre and performance are major arenas for the reinforcement and/or the uncovering of hegemony. British alternative theatre generally pursued the latter course. (81)

In his writing, Kershaw draws a line in the sand: performance and institutions that produce it can be used to reify harmful systems of power and oppression, or performance and institutions can reveal and dismantle these systems. In the United States, regional theatres institutions are mired in practices, traditions, and ways of thinking that contribute to the former option; community-based performance was and is generated from a motivation towards the latter.

Kershaw's line in the sand does not disappear when community-based performance, meant to interrogate and pull apart systems of oppression, is produced in the context of regional theatre institutions that are constantly called out for reinforcing hegemonic ideologies. Community-based theatre practitioners can begin to dismantle systems of power from within the regional theatre context, or regional theatre institutions can influence practitioners in such a way that neutralizes or redirects their motivations for change. If these practitioners are young artists developing their skills within an educational

framework, they are increasingly vulnerable to altered or dampened ambitions for resisting hegemonic ideology in their artistic practice due to their age and status in that institution.

Keeping a Careful Watch: Regional Theatre and Community-based Youth Theatre

A regional identity should be at the core of each theatre's character. Ultimately, the challenge of regionalism is the challenge to make each theatre of its region rather than of America.

-JW Zeigler¹⁰

Much remains to be understood and written about the origins of education programming in regional theatres, but it goes beyond the scope of my study here. Recognizing that educational and youth-focused programming is not centered in the mission of regional theatres is central to an understanding of community-based youth theatre programs in regional theatres; these institutions are, first and foremost, focused on the work and experiences of professional artists. Youth programming historically functioned to add legitimacy to a theatre's reputation in the community and build revenue for the institution's overall budget (Ziegler 171). If teaching artists and scholars forget these initial motivations, they risk foregoing vigilant research regarding the regional theatre context as a system of power and prestige that shapes the experiences and values of young community-based artists.

In addition to the need for legitimacy and financial stability, Zeigler points to another problem for regional theatres: the "challenge of regionalism," or the challenge of maintaining a local focus in spite of a national tendency to produce the same plays found to be popular at other theatres throughout the country, regardless of geographic or cultural landscapes (247). Today, regional theatres continue to produce the same nationally acclaimed plays.¹¹ Community-based youth programming focusing on local young artists

¹⁰ (Ziegler 247)

¹¹ For example, the Tony Award-winning new play *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* by Christopher Durang was commissioned by and premiered at McCarter Theatre Center ("The Evolution"). The play was

and their own local stories can provide regional theatres with the answer to the challenge of regionalism. As theatres are challenged by foundations and donors to serve their surrounding communities, community-based youth theatre performances, produced apart from mainstage season programming, can meet the requirement for a local focus without disrupting seasons attending to more nationally or internationally prestigious works.

In 1965, the federal government passed an act to bolster cultural emphases in schools called the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Zeigler wrote the following of this time:

...the easy availability of funds prompted many regional theatres to promote programs far beyond their own capacity to deliver. It is difficult [...] to divert time, staff, and resources to activities which are extracurricular to the theatre's main purpose. Nevertheless, the service programs carried with them sure money, and no theatre could afford to say no to any idea which might make its operations more secure. Also, no theatre would deliberately refuse to perform those services which, even if performed only passably, still tended to legitimize it. (173)

Zeigler's emphasis on the lack of attention dedicated to educational programs demands an interrogation of the influence of regional theatre contexts on community-based youth theatre practices and programs today. While there are many highly-trained, deeply invested people working on education staffs in regional theatres across the country, the roots of youth programming in regional theatres were grown in soil alongside the roots of capital, legitimacy, and artistic recognition. The systems and structures grown from those roots are pruned and shaped each year by the evolving and oftentimes shifting demands of funders, especially the National Endowment for the Arts, TCG, and the Ford Foundation. And yet, there remains little to no research that centers the experiences of young people,

subsequently produced by 18 other theatre organizations from winter 2013 to summer 2015 ("*Vanya and Sonia*"), and 9 of these theatres were LORT theatres in diverse communities including Kansas City, MO, Providence, RI, and Chicago, IL ("Member Theatres").

facilitators, and education staff as they navigate these pressures of money, resources, time, and reputation; the ethical quagmires of such “strange bedfellows,” as Zeigler calls regional theatre and education (173), have gone relatively unquestioned by scholars in youth theatre and community-based performance.

For community-based youth theatre programs, there are also significant benefits found in the regional theatre context. Regional theatre institutions have the capacity to apply for a plethora of grants due to their larger budgets, efficient development staff, and classification as a non-profit organization; this is a capacity not always guaranteed to community-based and youth-focused grassroots organizations. As previously stated, the talented staff at many regional theatres today are passionate about their work with youth and communities, with many collaborating through Theatre Communications Group’s teleconferences for arts educators throughout the year (“Arts Education”). Regional theatres provide consistent, well-equipped rehearsal spaces, and they frequently have long-term relationships and histories in the community. They are able to compensate teaching artists at competitive rates¹² and provide scholarships for students who may not otherwise be able to afford an educational arts program. Indeed, regional theatres offer many benefits that traditional grassroots spaces cannot.

In addition to resources, regional theatres often produce innovative, engaging performance for audiences from their community. Studied in this thesis, McCarter Theatre Center’s High School Intensive was based on an exploration of Bedlam Theatre’s acclaimed, movement-based stagings of *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare and *Saint Joan* by George Bernard Shaw. The students interacted with and created performance based on

¹² In my experience, teaching artist pay at regional theatre institutions with large budgets tend to be higher than pay at community-based organizations, but this pay is still unsustainable when contextualized within a freelance career relying on short-term gigs.

the same texts to be produced later in the McCarter season, allowing their artistry to be in conversation with Bedlam Theatre. Steve Ball, Associate Director of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, says that a key educational asset of regional theatres is found in educational programming tied to mainstage programming. He explains that this type of programming “utilises the unique contribution that a producing theatre can make to the learning process. It recognizes that theatres are in the business of making and presenting plays” (156-157). In other words, Ball asserts—and I agree—the standing of cultural producer is a major asset to regional theatres as contexts for educational programs.

However, due to a lack of existing research, practitioners in the field and regional theatre staff have limited insight into community-based youth theatre’s potential for harm and/or benefit to young people—particularly when programs are housed in a regional theatre context. When considering alternative theatre produced in conservative institutions in the United Kingdom, Kershaw states, “the whole panoply of performance came into play as part of the ideological negotiation” (79). To put it another way, every aspect of the performance-making process—including the institution where it takes place—influences the ethical intentions and impacts of process and performance. Kershaw’s assertion regarding institutional influence sheds light on the potential implications of community-based youth theatre programs in regional theatre contexts. In these programs, there are multitudes of factors that affect the experiences of staff, facilitators and young people who are working together to create performance with, for, and about their communities. While regional theatre institutions are often able to offer high levels of support, they are also able to influence the motivations of young artists as they develop community-based performance practices.

A short story comes to mind when I consider my reasons for undertaking this study in a regional theatre context. When I was young, my favorite pastime was pretending I was

on the Home Shopping Network, selling a new cleansing solution to clean everything from hair to cars to dishes. Naturally, in order to sell such a magical product, I needed to create the product first. I spent hours and hours at the kitchen counter, mixing dish soap with shampoo, glass cleaner with silver polish. My mother, always gracious in the midst of my strange imaginings, allowed me to do so with one stipulation: I must always do it where she could watch me. Her fear was that I might mix ammonia and bleach, a chemical combination that would emit a noxious gas. Rather than stifling my experiments (perhaps I may have found my all-purpose solution, after all!), she simply kept a careful watch.

When I consider community-based youth theatre in regional theatre contexts, I think of my mother's careful watch. I do not suggest that the regional theatre context is an unviable context for community-based youth theatre; much to the contrary, I suggest that—with careful awareness, thoughtful research, and context-specific pedagogy—regional theatres can support young people as artists in a new, revolutionary way. I believe, however, that it is critical for researchers to begin turning to regional theatres as a site for study, using research and analysis to articulate the possibilities for harm and benefit to young artists in community-based youth theatre programs within these contexts. My practice and research are motivated by the belief that young artists within regional theatre contexts have the potential to change systems of power and prestige, reconnecting institutions with their communities through process and performance. As community-based youth theatre programs continue to be produced in the context of regional theatre, I believe it is important to simply keep a careful watch.

Study of McCarter Theatre Center's High School Intensive

Research is never an end in itself a plan to nurture grassroots arts expression. The art, or the search for artists and the preparation of a compatible soil for their growth, is the main consideration always.

—Robert Gard¹³

At a time when racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and xenophobia dominate the political landscape in the United States, it's critical for those working with and for regional theatres to be vigilant in reflection. In this study, I work to reflect upon and identify the ways in which my own practices might be sustaining harmful systems of power, inviting youth to reify these systems in their artistic, collaborative, and activist practices. Regional theatres may continue to develop new programs for youth and communities, but if adult practitioners do not closely attend to our pedagogy and praxis with young artists, we risk losing the potential for new systems of hope and dismantled systems of oppression in the future of theatre. At worst, we risk reinforcing systems that oppress young people, lead to discriminatory programming and practices at large, and create division in our communities. I designed this study to take advantage of an opportunity to be vigilant in my own reflection and to learn from young artists at McCarter Theatre Center.

McCarter Theatre Center's High School Intensive: Exploding the Classics summer program is a community-based youth theatre program located in the context of a major regional theatre in Princeton, New Jersey. I worked at McCarter Theatre Center (McCarter) as an intern in their Education Teaching Artist internship, and then as a teaching artist in another summer youth theatre program. I have tremendous respect for the staff at McCarter,

¹³ (Gard, *Grassroots* 210)

particularly the education staff, and in many ways, this thesis would not be a glimmer in my eye without their influence on my pedagogy and practice.

McCarter Theatre Center became a producing theatre and part of the regional theatre movement in 1960 and received a Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1994 (“Our History”). McCarter prioritizes new work and reimagined classics; they define their mission as “a unique commitment to creating, developing and producing new work for the stage, reinvestigating classical theatrical repertoire, and bringing the best of the world’s performing artists to Central New Jersey” (“Mission”). It has an extensive education and community engagement program housed within the Artistic department and led by Erica Nagel, a community-based practitioner and dramaturg. I proposed this project to Erica and Lily Junker, the Curriculum and Instruction Manager at McCarter. Lily and I applied for and received the Ann Shaw Fellowship to fund our attendance at the 2-Day Institute at Cornerstone Theatre, a community-based theatre in Los Angeles, California. We chose Cornerstone’s training program to gain an understanding of what community-based training might look like, and I began to plan the curriculum for McCarter’s annual 3-week summer program, the High School Intensive, after that training in February 2016.

McCarter called the project “Exploding the Classics,” and kept the description rather open, stating, “Using what they find in their own community and inspired by plays from McCarter’s main stage season, the ensemble will collaboratively create and rehearse an original piece to share in a final performance” (*Theatre Camp* 4). The project is a community-based youth theatre project because the young artists involved in the project were also a part of the community for which they created; they were both emerging practitioners in the craft and skill of performance and community insiders with stories of their own. However, the age and experience of the artists served to define my intentions for and expectations of the project, as they were neither seasoned, professional artists nor

amateur theatre-makers. Each of the artists were involved in the Institute in order to gain further training in their practice as performers, and this dedication to performance and youth participation in theatre-making places the project firmly in the field of youth theatre (Figure 2). Finally, the regional theatre context offered levels of resources, prestige, community relationships and administrative support that shaped the experiences and expectations of the artists and also influenced the intentions and outcomes of this combination of youth theatre and community-based performance, or community-based youth theatre.

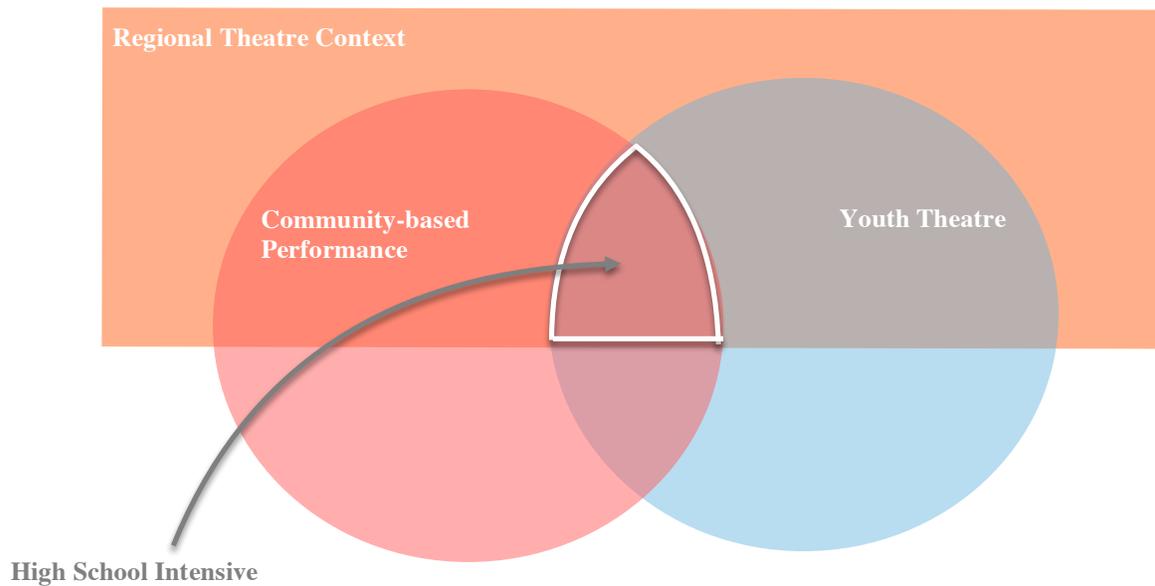


Figure 2: Location of McCarter’s High School Intensive in the fields of community-based performance and youth theatre.

The Intensive fit into McCarter’s summer educational offerings, one of two programs for high school students. Originally, there were 17 students enrolled, with one student leaving the class before the end of the first week. We spent the rest of the Intensive

with 16 students, and a total of 7 students participated in the study. The Intensive was 3 weeks long; class was held Monday-Friday, from 9 to 3 each day, with a 30-minute lunch break, giving us approximately 80 total hours of time together.

Mission	To equip young artists to make art with, for, by, and about their neighbors.
Vision	Young artists will research, devise, and perform community-based theatre, reflecting on their identities as artist-neighbors and analyzing the impact of those identities on their work and lives. They will finish the Intensive with the tools, understandings, and confidence they need to create performance in their own contexts and communities.
Enduring Understandings	An artist’s personal identity shapes the form, content, and context of community-based performance. A community has many different assets in its histories, stories, and aesthetics that can be used to generate performances. Artists can use performance to create space for and dialogue towards more inclusive communities.
Essential Questions	How does my personal identity and community of location impact my work and my relationships? What are my core values as an artist? How can I create artistically innovative community-based performance? How can I research my community in an ethical manner? How can I make community-based work as an artist with integrity? What is the role of an artist-neighbor? What are the core values of an artist-neighbor?
Summative Assessment	Participants will devise a performance to be shared with McCarter staff, family, friends, and other community members. Participants will write a personal artist statement and a proposal for a community-based project.

Table 1: McCarter High School Intensive Curriculum Overview.

The Intensive was organized with a curricular arc for each week, and the overall goal for the 3-week process was “to equip young artists to make art with, for by, and about their neighbors” (McEniry “Curriculum Overview” 1) while generating new work in conversation with *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare and *Saint Joan* by George Bernard Shaw, two plays in McCarter's 2016-2017 mainstage season (Table 1). Week One was

focused on learning the fundamentals of devising, developing ensemble, analyzing *Hamlet* as a source of inspiration for our guiding question, and using that guiding question to prepare for Story Circles with folks outside of the ensemble at the end of the week. Week Two was focused on generating devised scenes based on community and ensemble members' stories, ending with a developmental sharing to garner feedback from participating community members. During Week Three, their original performance, *Our Stories*, was refined and rehearsed in preparation for the final performance at the end of the Intensive. While I prepared a structured curricular arc and lesson plans before the beginning of the Intensive, each day brought new surprises. The curriculum evolved in response to the participants' interests and skills.

MCCARTER'S HIGH SCHOOL INTENSIVE: APPLIED THEATRE PRAXIS IN COMMUNITY-BASED YOUTH THEATRE

While the structures of a regional theatre context and the intersecting values of community-based theatre and youth theatre greatly influenced the participants in this study, my own pedagogy and core values as an applied theatre practitioner also shaped the design and implementation of the Intensive. Additionally, my focus on devising new work with young people led me towards a devised theatrical form, a choice that further shaped the timeline and experiences of students, staff, and facilitators.

Applied theatre scholars Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston define the term applied theatre as follows:

a broad set of theatrical practices and creative processes that take participants and audiences beyond the scope of conventional, mainstream theatre into the realm of a theatre that is responsive to ordinary people and their stories, local settings and priorities. The work often, but not always, happens in informal spaces [...]. (10)

In other words, applied theatre and drama use performative and dramatic skills and concepts in contexts outside of the traditional theatre context. This can mean that the performers, participants, audience members, and performance spaces are different than the traditional theatre context of professional theatre artists, theatre spaces, and paying audiences found in the regional theatre setting. Applied theatre includes the use of theatre and drama to meet the goals of a specifically defined community, and is frequently measured by its effectiveness in meeting those goals, whereas performances in a regional theatre are frequently valued for their emotional or aesthetic affect, critical reception, and box office revenue.

Prentki and Preston continue to explain the motivations and values of applied theatre practitioners, noting, “Frequently those who engage in applied theatre are motivated by the belief that theatre experienced both as a participant and as audience, might make some difference to the way in which people interact with each other and with the wider world” (10). My practice is motivated by the hope for justice and equity, and I believe that theatre can be a tool for achieving such ends. However, in practicing applied theatre within a community-based youth theatre program, I am aware that I bring additional values into an already complex mixture, and the impact of this addition is difficult to anticipate. Applied theatre scholar and practitioner Helen Nicholson speaks to this unpredictability, stating that applied theatre “may be experienced as an expression of hierarchy, an imposition of values that are not to be shared” (16). As I navigated curriculum design and facilitation for McCarter, my approach and values as an applied theatre practitioner influenced how I measured success, prioritized our time in class, and guided discussions.

As a teaching artist, I also gravitate towards devised performance as a theatrical form that reflects my commitment to participation and collaboration. Formerly known more commonly in the United States as “collaborative creation,” devising can be described

as “a mode of work in which no script—neither play-text nor performance score—exists prior to the work’s creation by the company” (Heddon and Milling 2, 6). In 1994, Alison Oddey published the first book on devised theatre; she characterizes the product of devising as “work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people,” explaining that the process “enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product that directly emanates from assembling, editing, and re-shaping individuals’ contradictory experiences of the world” (Oddey 1). I find this emphasis on performer agency to be critical in youth theatre, and I find that community-based youth theatre is a particularly well-suited field for this form, as it builds on both the personal stories and the artistic assets¹⁴ of young people.

While Oddey’s definition provides a foundational understanding of devising, Govan et al. claim that devising “defies neat definition or categorisation,” (7), as the term “devising” has come to mean many things to many people. For the Intensive, devising meant the generation of a scene, image, or movement sequence without a script, based on the performer’s personal experiences and stories and experiences from community members. This community-inspired generation of new material, injected into a scene from *Saint Joan* at key moments, allowed the artistry and narratives of the young artists to be in conversation with Shaw and McCarter’s mainstage programming. Therefore, the form of devising reflected the goals of the Intensive and my goals as a teaching artist in supporting youth agency, reflecting community story, and disrupting traditional power structures in which young artists are given an adult-generated script.

¹⁴ Hughes and Wilson state, "Young people's energy and agency is the main asset in youth theatre." (63) As a form that demands both agency and energy, devising is poised to emphasize these gifts.

MCCARTER’S HIGH SCHOOL INTENSIVE: STUDY METHODOLOGY

I engaged heavily with applied theatre and devised performance in my facilitation during this Intensive because I believe they are practices that disrupt the hierarchical power system found in traditional youth theatre models and regional theatre models. This same motivation led me to design this study as a reflective practitioner research study. I ascribe to what John W. Creswell calls a “transformative worldview,” a worldview which “holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression at whatever level it occurs” (9). In other words, I recognize that this Intensive was entangled in a massive web of power and status and value, and I hope that this research might work to make that entanglement a bit more visible for practitioners and a bit less oppressive for young people. Reflective practitioner research allows for a view of the entanglement in addition to the Intensive; applied theatre scholar Phillip Taylor asserts, “the reflective practitioner stance demands a discovery of self, a recognition of how one interacts with others, and how others are read by this interaction” (27). In other words, a reflective practitioner approach leaves space for relationships, impressions, and reflection—critical aspects when aiming to understand experiences within a certain system of power and prestige.

This reflective practitioner study is guided by three key questions: What are the experiences of young people in a community-based youth theatre process within the context of a regional theatre education program? What are the experiences of theatre staff? And finally, what are the experiences of teaching artists in these contexts? Due to my desire to reflect on my own experiences as the Intensive’s teaching artist in addition to the experiences of students and staff, a reflective practitioner approach was a clear choice for this study. In this reflective practitioner research study, I identify my own biases and my

own navigation of systems of power as they relate to the experiences of the Intensive's staff, students, and teaching artists.

To gather data in response to these research questions, I documented the experiences of myself, the young people, and the staff through a facilitator logbook, student journals, interviews with staff, work samples, and photography and video. I kept a logbook of my own reflections each day after the Intensive, detailing my thinking on the day's events. The students also maintained journals in which they were asked to write down moments they were continuing to think about or ideas they wanted to remember. They were also asked to record their daily response to the following prompt: "Today, as an artist, I am...". The students' journal data came primarily from Weeks One and Two; as the project became more focused on the public sharing in Week Three, class time for journal writing was less prioritized. Finally, following the Intensive, I interviewed Erica Nagel, Mary Gragen, Lily Junker, and Joe McGranaghan to learn more about their experiences as theatre education staff and Intensive teaching artist. Six weeks after the Intensive concluded, I sent a short survey to students to gather their thoughts and reflections on the process. In addition to verbal and written reflections from study participants, I documented the project and the final performance through photos and video. These methods of data collection received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin.

Six weeks after the project concluded, I began to code my data through a thematic analysis process. Johnny Saldaña says of thematic analysis, "Unlike content analysis, which begins with predefined categories, thematic analysis allows categories to emerge from the data" (140). Keeping in mind my research questions regarding my own experiences and the experiences of the study's participants, I read through all of the student journals and my reflective logbook entries, and I listened to all of the interview recordings. I then looked for moments that multiple participants reflected upon, therefore allowing me

to triangulate the data. I also looked for outliers, where only one participant related a particular story, but they did so at length. From this collection of stories, I developed three thematic categories that arose from the data. I then pulled relevant data under each of these categories from student journals, staff interviews, and my logbook, and I used lesson plans, artifacts, photographs, and video from the process to understand what was happening in the classroom as stories described by participants took place. As I began the writing process, I reflected on the themes and stories in relationship to the review of literature informing my research.

During this time of analysis, I also reflected deeply on my own role in the process. I realized that my dissatisfaction with some perceived outcomes of the process may have restricted my perspective when coding my data. Three months after my initial coding process, I revisited the data, keeping the initial themes in mind but remaining open to additional themes that might arise. Taylor nods to the possibility of emotion as an inhibition to reflection, admitting, “The most effective facilitators are able to reflect on the kind of teaching artists they are and the possible ones they can become. Reflection, though, requires distance” (71). As I revisited the data with the distance of time, I was able to reflect on my own reflections from the initial round of coding with a new understanding. Initially, I wanted to find the solution to the problems and tensions that arose throughout the Intensive. During the second round of coding, I was more open to the experiences and reflections of students and staff, and I was also able to consider my former reflections, driven by a desire for solutions, as another set of data.

To move my analysis into the structure of Part II in this thesis document, I used the emerging themes, including added themes from the second round of coding, as organizing principles. I identified key assertions arising from the coded data set under each key theme, again noting common experiences in addition to individual ones. Taylor reminds the

reflective practitioner, “Sometimes the lone voice who disagrees with the crowd has made just as perceptive an observation as the others” (130). In my research, lone voices helped me to better understand the multiple facets of each theme, contributing to more specific, crystallized key assertions (Taylor 130).

Reflection played a key role in my understanding of the Intensive and myself as a facilitator. Dawson and Kellin write, “The journey of reflection and reflexivity is expansive and enervating. It is also wholly worthwhile. Reflective practice has the potential to make you a better, more engaged and ultimately more satisfied Teaching Artist” (“Final Reflections”). My experience engaging in reflective practitioner research leads me to wholeheartedly agree.

McCARTER’S HIGH SCHOOL INTENSIVE: THESIS DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

In this thesis, I explore youth agency within community-based youth theatre practices in a regional theatre setting. I examine the potential of youth agency to lead towards more just, inclusive artistic practices, and I examine the potential within traditional practices of youth theatre to indoctrinate young artists within hierarchical, discriminatory understandings of status and power within the field of theatre. In Part I, I detailed the background and significance of the project as a community-based youth theatre program within a regional theatre context and articulated the values and challenges of a reflective practitioner methodology within this context. I also articulated the influence of applied theatre on my own pedagogy and praxis as well as an overview of the project’s three intersecting fields: community-based performance, regional theatre, and youth theatre.

In Part II, I analyze experiences of the young artists, teaching artists, and education staff as we created an original performance in conversation with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and

George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*. Part II is organized into the themes that emerged from analysis of the data—Ensemble, Generating Form and Content, Community Connection, Generating Performance, and Shaping Performance. I conclude Part II with an analysis of the roles young artists, teaching artists, and education staff operated within during the Intensive, exploring how these roles relate to power and youth agency in community-based devising processes with young artists. Finally, in Part III, I name key assertions from my findings and reflections. I offer practical steps for supporting youth agency for myself and other teaching artists and regional theatre staff planning community-based youth theatre programming. I also address the limitations of a reflective practitioner research methodology in a regional theatre context and offer possibilities for future practice and research.

It should be noted that, throughout this document, I refer to the students participating in the Intensive as “students,” “young artists,” and “artists,” a cue taken from Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook*, in which she simply states, “Throughout the book I have used the following phrases interchangeably: the student, the beginning writer, the writer” (5). I choose this language with the intent of reminding readers and myself that these young artists and their peers are the future of our art form and of our communities. Simultaneously, they are also a part of our field and our communities now, in this moment. We have much to learn from them and their artistry, stories, and questions.

PART TWO: STORIES FOR REVELATION

A liar's somebody trying to cover things over, mainly for his own private benefit. But a storyteller's somebody trying to uncover things so everybody can get something good out of it. So I'm a storyteller. It's a heap of good meaning to be found in a story if you got a mind to hear.
— John O'Neal as Junebug¹⁵

Origin Stories

I sent Lily Junker, McCarter's Curriculum and Instruction Manager, an email with the vague subject line, "Chat this week?" in October 2015. Lily—an immensely thoughtful community-based artist, director, and educator— supervised me as an intern at McCarter from 2013-2014 and as a teaching artist during the summer of 2015. I had an idea—a bit of a far-flung idea—and I needed her wisdom and insight (as I usually do). We found a time that week, and I presented Lily with my idea to teach a community-based devising class at McCarter during the summer of 2016. Lily offered the High School Intensive, McCarter's annual three-week class for teens, as a possible space for this work, and I agreed, overjoyed at the possibility. Together, we applied for the Ann Shaw Fellowship through TYA/USA, and we received the Fellowship to fund attendance at a weekend training opportunity with Cornerstone Theatre Company, a community-based theatre in Los Angeles, California.

While at Cornerstone, Lily and I thought critically about what a training model might look like for young people. Cornerstone's Two Day Intensive is meant for adult theatre professionals who are already engaging in personal artistry and ideas around the intersection between community and theatre. We knew that McCarter's High School Intensive Students would have varying levels of experience and comfort with performance

¹⁵ (qtd. in Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts* 64)

and devising, and few of them would have previous experience in theatre reflecting their own lives or communities. As a result, the experience needed to be carefully scaffolded and informed by a generous sense of ensemble. In the past, the High School Intensive included an emphasis on student-generated work, but this year's Intensive would require an emphasis on student-generated thoughts, forms, and stories, resulting in a performance informed entirely by student artistry.

This part of the thesis document relates the stories and experiences of facilitators, education staff, and high school intensive students at McCarter Theatre Center during the High School Intensive. To analyze these experiences, I draw from student journals, interviews with facilitators and staff, my own reflective log and lesson plans, and video, photography, and other artifacts from the McCarter Intensive. I use this variety of data to gain a qualitative understanding of the manner in which young artists developed an agentive community-based practice within a regional theatre setting. I also note tensions that arose in the McCarter Intensive, specifically at the intersections of youth theatre, community-based theatre, and the regional theatre context. I point to areas where facilitators, students, and administrators navigated status and power within this intersection, organized under five categories that emerged from a thematic analysis of the data: Ensemble, Generating Form and Content, Community Connection, Creating Community-based Performance, and Shaping Performance. Throughout Part II, I reflect on the influence of a regional theatre context within each of these categories, and I reflect more fully on the regional theatre as a context for a community-based devising process with young artists. I conclude Part II with an analysis of the multiple roles played by facilitators, education staff, and young people within community-based youth theatre programs, and I consider the factors of limited time and multiple roles as influences on student agency.

Throughout this thesis, I use *devised performance* to indicate performance created collaboratively by the young artists without the use of a script; while we used *Saint Joan* as a framing device, the artists simply performed a reading of the classic text, so it falls outside of my definition of devised performance here. Davis Robinson's definitions of devising and ensemble devising informed my approach to this Intensive; he defines devising as "the process of inventing material for performance together" (Robinson 9). Ensemble devising, Robinson adds, takes place "when problem-solving work is done collaboratively with everyone in the company in the same room—whether steered by a director, teacher, writer or consensus" (9). The Intensive was an example of ensemble devising, which motivated my prioritization of a communicative, collaborative ensemble.

Also in this thesis, *community-based devising* includes performance created collaboratively by performers based on the story of a community member; I also use this term as an umbrella term to include performance collaboratively created based on the story of a performer. The latter type of performance is better described as personal theatre, or "theater in which the content of the performance consists of material from the actual lives of the performers," specifically personal theatre in an autoethnographic form ("concerning the actor's ethnicity, class, gender, or social grouping") (Pendzik et al. 2). However, because I emphasize the dual role of young people as both artists and community members, I group both autoethnographic personal performance and community-based performance together. Because both of these performance forms were created using a facilitated devising process, all of the students' work and process is called community-based devising throughout this document.

Finally, *agency* and *youth agency* are terms used frequently throughout these documents. I explore agency more deeply in the conclusion of Part II, but for the purposes of this document, I define agency as the power to freely make decisions and see those

decisions to fruition. I use this definition understanding that systems and structures operate as restrictions on individual agency; these restrictions are, indeed, a key takeaway from this research study.

ORIGIN STORIES: INTENSIVE PARTICIPANTS AND TIMELINE

McCarter's 2016 High School Intensive included 17 high school students, with one student leaving the Intensive after the first week. We met each day at McCarter Theatre Center, rehearsing in various classroom and theatre spaces throughout the building; our main rehearsal space was in the 1100-seat auditorium, the Matthews Theatre. Ten out of 17 students participated in the study: Adhara, Lauren, Camillo, Nico, Sean, Elena, Eva, Ritika, Laura, and Harry. The students themselves brought a great depth of skills and talents to the project; our ensemble included musicians, filmmakers, performers, athletes, writers, and thinkers from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Several of the young artists participated in McCarter's other education programs and in arts classes and extracurricular activities at school. In addition to the students, three staff members and the Intensive's Associate Teaching Artist participated in the study: Erica Nagel, Director of Education and Engagement; Mary Gragen, Education Projects Manager; Lily Junker, Curriculum and Instruction Manager; Joe McGranaghan, the Intensive's Associate Teaching Artist (Table 2).

Student Participants		Staff Participants	Teaching Artist Participant
Adhara	Lauren	Erica Nagel (Dir. of Education and Engagement)	Joe McGranaghan (Associate Teaching Artist)
Camillo	Nico	Lily Junker (Curriculum and Instruction Mgr.)	
Sean	Elena	Mary Gragen (Education Projects Manager)	
Eva	Ritika		
Laura	Harry		

Table 2: Study Participants.

The Intensive was structured as a compressed version of my own approach to devising community-based performance. Week One was focused on ensemble-building, research and story, including dramaturgical explorations of *Hamlet* and Story Circles with the community. Week Two focused on devising short scenes inspired by stories and research gathered in the first week in small groups. We arranged those scenes into an organizing framework that I will describe more fully later in this document. The second week culminated in a Developmental Sharing, an opportunity for students to share some of their devised work with community members, many of whom participated in Story Circles at the end of the first week. Week Three, the final week, was spent refining the student’s generated performance, incorporating production elements and adding a student-generated song. For the first two weeks, the students had 10 minutes at the end of each day to reflect in their journals, including a statement to complete the sentence, “Today, as an artist, I am...”. At the end of each week, students had 30-40 minutes to reflect in a facilitated dialogue on their experiences and growth during the prior week.

Week	Activities included	Culminating Experience
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensemble-building games • community scavenger hunt • asset mapping the community • Hamlet art installations • short devising sequences • developing a guiding question 	Story Circle with members of the community
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • independent devising work in small groups • applying an organizing framework • rehearsing for Saint Joan reading 	Developmental Sharing with members of the community
Week Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing and rehearsing an original song • adding costumes, lighting, sound, set • crafting an action plan 	Final Performance for family, friends, and community members

Table 3: Curricular Structure.

While I crafted a detailed curriculum for the first two weeks of the Intensive, after the first three days, every lesson plan was created the evening before each class. I typically planned in collaboration with Joe in response to the previous day’s events and dialogues with students. As we followed the lead of the young artists in our explorations, each day introduced new areas of inquiry and new possibilities for artistic discovery, making advance planning a futile exercise. Many of the plans changed in the moment or during our lunch break, as well, in an effort to remain as responsive as possible to student initiatives. My lesson plans were turned into Lily each day for her review, and we had a daily check-in with McCarter education staff at the end of each class day. Most days, Joe, Katie and I were with the students on our own, but Erica, Mary, and Lily visited our class during the Story Circles, Developmental Performance, and during the final week of the Intensive.

Ensemble: Ritual and Risk

Today we were introduced to our new friends/ensemble and were also introduced to amazing creativity. All of these new people will bring something new to the table. I feel that I will learn a lot not just from the instructors, but from these unique individuals.

— Harry, Day 1¹⁶

Community-based performance is as much about building community as it is about expressing it.

—Jan Cohen-Cruz¹⁷

While we especially focused on facilitating a close-knit learning community during the first week of the Intensive, we spent time every day in dialogue, reflections, and games designed to build collaborative relationships among the Intensive ensemble. Because we were exploring ensemble-based devising, and because we would be working together for three weeks, I believed it was critical for our group of young collaborators to foster a nurturing environment for one another and for themselves. I hoped that a positive working environment would increase their investment while mitigating any fear instigated by the unpredictable devising process. Joe, the Intensive's Associate Teaching Artist, agreed that an emphasis on ensemble building was critical due to the context and content of the Intensive, stating:

You can't just walk into a room with high school students and say, 'For the next few hours we're going to generate content and then we're going to start shaving it.' [...] The underpinning of that creative work was getting people to trust each other, people getting to know their artistic voices, people getting to be inspired by things. And I love that process, it's such an ephemeral process, but you really can't rush or prescribe it. You just have to sort of plant all the seeds and then like water them assiduously. (McGranaghan)

¹⁶ (Harry "Journal #1")

¹⁷ (Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts* 100)

To borrow Joe's metaphor, I relied on a number of rituals and games paired with reflection in order to plant and water the seeds for a strong ensemble. The ensemble grew on its own, however, and became a space that, from my perspective, warmly celebrated risk-taking and difference.

A sense of community might not come without compromise, however. Dani Snyder-Young aptly summarizes the danger of community, explaining:

In community—in relationship with the 'other'—individuals face and find their limits, defining 'self' in relation to 'not me' and making conscious or unconscious choices on how to define 'in' in relation to 'out' on both personal and group levels. Individuals sacrifice a degree of autonomy and become responsible to the groups to which they belong, and in return, receive the benefits of belonging. (*Theatre of Good Intentions* 98)

This conclusion, which Snyder-Young discusses in *Theatre of Good Intentions: Challenges and Hopes for Theatre and Social Change*, elucidates the possibility that students chose to suppress or hide difference in order to collaborate with and belong in the ensemble. As I analyze the stories and experiences of ensemble from the High School Intensive, this possibility of individual self-suppression leaves me with an awareness that open and inclusive collaboration cannot be identified with surety in a research process.

ENSEMBLE: THE PRACTICES OF ENSEMBLE

Our dedication to ensemble and our efforts to cultivate collaboration were inspired by both youth theatre and community-based theatre traditions. We started each morning with a check-in, a nod to the feminist, grassroots theatre company At the Foot of the Mountain and their practice of feeling circles (Greeley 52). Check-ins consisted of a quick statement of what each person was bringing into the space— this often included sleepiness, excitement, confusion, or detailed updates about the weekend or a swim meet. Check-ins

were our first action in the rehearsal space and set the tone for our work and our ensemble. In her research on community-based youth theatre programs, Heather Ikemire posits that check-in rituals serve a number of purposes:

This dialectic supplied the ensembles' internal repertoire with a range of possibilities and productive differences that kept the process of building community vital and tactical. It also helped the youth begin to understand their personal experiences as political and to recognize social and cultural systems as existing through the interactional activities of individuals and groups who are responsible for both their maintenance (i.e. reproduction) and transformation. And perhaps, most importantly, these sustained practices also balanced the youths' sense of structured work time and time for free association and play. (382)

Within our three-week Intensive, we would typically follow each check-in with a warm-up game, chosen to introduce a skill (such as rhythm) and build communal capacity. These games were different every day, but after our lunch break, we always came together to play "Zoom, Zorch," an improv game whose rules depend on the facilitator (in our case, Joe, who knew 27 rules in total). The students learned one or two new rules to incorporate each day; after a few rounds, we would play a round where players who made a mistake were eliminated from the game. I initially thought that an elimination round would detract from the unity of the group, but instead, the young artists used the opportunity to cheer each other on and comfort each other.

Often, the stakes of "Zoom, Zorch" felt like the final game of the World Cup—if everyone in the stands wanted both teams to win. Students stood outside of the circle after they were eliminated, watching the game while displaying intense facial expressions, crouching to contain their excitement, putting their arms around one another in anxious joy. The moment another student "lost" and was eliminated from the game, the outside crowd would erupt in cheers, greeting the "loser" with a group hug and words of

encouragement. In *Teaching Community*, bell hooks describes the modern classroom as being highly informed by domination, a quality that can create an unhealthy and unproductive environment for devising. hooks claims, “Competition in the classroom disrupts connection [...] The predation that is at the heart of dominator culture emerges when students feel they must symbolically destroy one another in order to prove that they are the smartest” (130). While playing “Zoom, Zorch,” the students were highly invested in their own success *and* highly supportive of one another, reimagining and enacting a world in which competition was possible without dominance.

Each day of our Intensive was an opportunity for students to consider and model their own definition of a healthy community, and the young artists verbally articulated this definition through a collaborative contract. In *The Performer’s Guide to the Collaborative Process*, Sheila Kerrigan advocates for a clearly articulated agreement on collaboration, stating, “Group agreements clarify your working process and eliminate secrets and hidden agendas. When everyone helps to compose them, everyone assumes responsibility for sticking to them, and everyone has a stake in reinforcing them” (86). While we didn’t regularly refer to our group guidelines, there were many times throughout our Intensive when students would remind one another of the contract by cheerfully saying, “#beabro,” a supportive phrase offered up by Harry during our initial brainstorm.¹⁸ On Day 4, we revisited the Collaborative Contract to finalize its contents and sign it as a whole group; its principles guided our process throughout the Intensive (Figure 3).

¹⁸ While this is a gendered statement, I asked Harry to explain what he meant for the group, and he did so in such a way that the whole ensemble nodded and agreed enthusiastically. I asked everyone if that should be our “class hashtag” and they all said yes, without question, acknowledging the gendered nature of the phrase but signing onto the intention of kindness and generosity behind it.

Collaborative Contract
created by High School Intensive Artists

- focus on explaining and improving instead of dismissing
- make space for many to speak
- check with the generative artist
- be open to changing/adding to ideas
- come ready to work and collaborate
- don't be scared to try others' ideas
- don't get stuck on your own ideas
- be respectful—don't interrupt, don't shut down ideas, courtesy
- don't be afraid of judgement—don't judge others
- what happens in the theatre stays in the theatre
- don't take things personally, don't make things personal—don't judge ideas by the person who had them
- be professional
- don't judge a book by its cover
- give everyone a chance
- best effort
- ask questions

For Joe and Cortney:

- be respectful
- be clear with directions
- be open to creativity
- help develop structure
- help, but don't take over

Figure 3: Collaborative Contract.

ENSEMBLE: MAKING SPACE FOR DIFFERENCE

The differing nature of students' experiences and backgrounds was both a challenge and an asset for our collaborative ensemble. Some students knew each other from years of participation in McCarter's education programs, while others knew no one. Some students participated regularly in theatre programs at school and in other contexts, while others were trying theatre for the first time. Group games gave us an opportunity to create an equal playing field for everyone; most of our games were new to all the students, so they were all required to learn together. In addition to their different experiences, students carried

many differing identities intersecting across race, class, gender identity, sexuality, and nationality (several students were from countries other than the United States).

When considering difference in an ensemble, a tension exists when cultivating a “safe space” for difference, terminology often found in youth theatre scholarship. Hughes and Wilson state, “Good youth theaters ensure that this risk taking happens in a safe context, where young people are thoroughly prepared and supported” (64). Our process required personal storytelling, constant sharing of ideas, and a great deal of artistic and social risk; the young artists created a safe context for one another to take these risks through their collaborative contracts, rituals, play, and commitment to the ensemble. Social justice facilitators Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, however, challenge “the degree to which safety is an appropriate or reasonable expectation for any honest dialogue about social justice” (139). They explain, “it is our view that the agent group impulse to classify challenges to one’s power and privilege as actions that detract from a sense of safety is, in itself, a manifestation of dominance” (Arao and Clemens 140). Arao and Clemens continue to advocate for the use of “brave space” as a frame for dialogue, “to emphasize the need for courage rather than the illusion of safety” (141). In other words, they are against the use of “safe space” terminology as it may serve to silence differing opinions or erase marginalized identities. Safety can often imply predictability, and predictability relies on maintenance of hegemonic values and systems. Alternatively, “brave space” terminology may serve to promote disruption of hegemony.

As I was already wary of “safe space” terminology before facilitating our collaborative contract discussion, I did not ask students to consider ways to make our classroom a safe one. However, without prompting, their contract almost duplicated Arao and Clemens’ list of the “commonly used ground rules [that] may contribute to the conflation of safety and comfort and restrict participation engagement and learning” (143),

including “‘agree to disagree,’ ‘don’t take things personally,’ ‘respect,’ and ‘no attacks’” (143).¹⁹

Despite Arao and Clemens’ suspicion of the type of rhetoric found in our contract, Lily witnessed a respect of difference within the ensemble, saying, “I think we saw students celebrate being who they are within the group as opposed to becoming a sort of homogenous group—they were all free to be who they were and were supportive of one another” (Junker). I also witnessed this, particularly around issues of gender identity and gender expression. On our first day, we introduced ourselves using our names and pronouns. One student expressed gratitude for the space to provide their pronouns, while other cis-gender students openly embraced the introduction in an almost reverent manner. The students almost unanimously chose gender roles and gender expectations as a theme to explore during our devising process, indicating an interest in exploring concepts of gender and patriarchy. The young artists’ willingness to openly wrestle with issues around gender hints at a possibility that, while they were using “safe space” language, their actions may have created a “brave space” ensemble. These were not phrases that we were using as an ensemble, so the young artists didn’t use this language to describe their experiences, but the artists overwhelmingly spoke to their gratitude for the ensemble. The students created their collaborative contract on the first day, before they began to fully engage with the roles of artist, community member, and ensemble member within the Intensive. I am left wondering what their contract may have looked like at the end of the Intensive, after taking on the mantle of the expert as a community-based artist and a collaborative ensemble member.

In the final performance, one scene in particular pointed to the possible existence of an ensemble characterized by bravery and a celebration of difference. In response to a

¹⁹ See highlighted text in Figure 3.

writing prompt on gender expectations, Laura and Lauren both wrote stunning reflections on appearance in their journals. Noting the thematic connection, I asked the artists to find a way to juxtapose and connect their writings as two separate monologues. Their collaboration with one another and with Joe resulted in the following scene:

LAURA: No!! For the last time, I don't want to go to the mall and get a makeover, just shut up for five minutes and LISTEN TO ME!

LAUREN: How am I a slut for wearing red lipstick? It's just a color, I don't see how it's your business. Every day I walk in with it on and you all give me the nastiest looks.

LAURA: I'm sorry for yelling. But please just let me say this. I think fashion is stupid. It makes people judge you for something as easily changeable as a dress. I want people to be my friends because we like the same books and TV shows, not because they think that some clothing a group of girls I barely know picked out for me looks "cute." If clothing is a form of personal expression, but it's someone else putting clothing on you, then it's not me expressing myself, it's you expressing yourself. I know you mean to help. You see this like a realistic fiction novel where you help the nerdy duckling become a sexy swan and all the boys ask her to the high school prom. But that's not what it's like for me. I feel like a little girl's dress up doll, a dancing puppet with no voice or choice.

LAUREN: (*secretly, to the audience*) I actually love wearing makeup and have since I was a kid. In elementary school I used to go to school with sparkly blue eyeshadow all the way up to my eyebrows and baggy jeans. In 6th grade, I bought my first tube of lipstick. It was a 99 cent Wet n Wild brand and it was metallic purple and I loved it. I put it all over my oversized lips and I felt powerful. There are many days when I feel unmotivated, uninspired, sad, and even worse. But I can just put glitter on my eyes and feel better. A bold red lipstick makes me want to get up in the morning and fight.

LAURA: If asking me to the mall with you is your way of asking me to be your friend, I'm sorry but it's not going to work on me. But here's something that might: how about I introduce you to some podcasts that I love.

LAUREN: No, I'm not saying I don't love my natural face. I do, really. And I understand that you don't like makeup and that dresses make you

feel uneasy and in fact I respect you for that. So why can't you respect my choice? All I want is to spend every day in dramatic eyeliner and neon cocktail dresses because it makes me so happy. I just need my war paint to keep fighting. (*Our Stories* 16)

These two separate monologues were performed side-by-side, with each performer speaking directly to the audience. After Lauren's final line, the two performers walked towards one another and shook hands, holding eye contact with one another. Many audience members during the Developmental Sharing commented on the power of that moment, when two people with contrasting views and different identities demonstrated respect and support to one another. Their differences were allowed to be heard onstage together, and their artistic collaboration was strengthened for it.

ENSEMBLE: THE RESULTS OF PRIORITIZING ENSEMBLE

The students' care for one another as an ensemble was unmatched by any process I have ever been involved in, both as an artist and a facilitator. At the end of each week, I facilitated a reflection activity intended for the students to consider their own growth as artists, but instead these activities became a time when students expressed their gratitude for one other. On Friday of the second week, I invited the students to participate in a reflective ritual called Perspective Web (Drama for Schools). The students passed a ball of yarn from person to person, holding on to a portion of the yarn to create an image of a web. Each young artist was asked to reflect on their growth over the week and then toss the ball of yarn to another person in the circle. I wrote in my reflective log that this activity "basically became a big love session," adding, "I asked how they have changed as an artist and person and 80% of responses were about becoming friends with one another and having friendships deeper than ever before" (Reflective Log #10). In his journal, a young

artist named Sean echoed my impression of the web, observing, “The yarn-web thing was also a very deep and connected moment between us” (“Journal #10”).

The students also wrote about the value of the ensemble in their journals. Ritika pointed to the value of ensemble-building games for her artistry, reflecting, “I’m really glad that we didn’t just jump into acting, and spent some time getting to know each other. This way, I felt really comfortable presenting” (“Journal #1”). Adhara commented on the small-group devising activities that we facilitated during the first week, analyzing its impact on group communication: “We made more group activities, which I think I love the most; since it allows deeper communication between us and brings us together” (“Journal #2”). Harry quickly became recognized as a leader in the group because of his great love for every individual (and penchant for starting group hugs). His leadership seemed to give everyone permission to be equally passionate about the ensemble. The following journal excerpt illustrates the excitement that he brought to the group each day, as well as the benefits he experienced from a collaborative ensemble:

I have never in my life met the most kindest, most creative, and most whole-hearted people. These people bring hope for tomorrow, both literal and figuratively. The instructors are the best that I will ever see because they don’t box creativity they let it roam around and are willing to try new ideas. But my colleagues [sic] are incredible people with the capability to say I have an idea, let’s find a way to combine it with yours. Everyone is willing to step up to the plate and perform at their very best. The activities that we do inspire us to go above and beyond the call of duty. [...] The only thing that I wish we had was more time to be with each other. (“Journal #5”)

The students found that the relationships within their ensemble led to brave art-making, effective communication, and rigorous collaboration. McCarter’s education staff witnessed similar outcomes, despite limited time spent with the Intensive students. Lily and Joe both worked with Intensive students in past McCarter programs, and they both

noticed a difference in the students' collaborative choices during this year's Intensive. Lily explained, "the students seemed so energized. When I did interact with them [...] I saw students working together who didn't typically work together" (Junker). Joe agreed, saying, "We could divide people into groups and never have a problem group. We could trust them to work really hard, and any assignment they were really game for" (McGranaghan).

Mary, McCarter's Education Projects Manager, pointed to McCarter's goal of developing collaborative ensembles in all of its classes, but she found the culture of the Intensive to be "exemplary" in "how open the students felt and how they really felt like they could really expose themselves—how they could really open up and invest in each others' ideas and express themselves in whatever way they felt like" (Gragen). Throughout the Intensive, I made the daily decision to devote at least an hour to the rituals and games that supported this culture within our learning community. While I sometimes doubted the choice to spend so much precious time on building ensemble, the energy, investment, and bravery facilitated strong relationships between our Intensive artists and allowed for a generative process that included risk-taking, positivity, and hard work.

Generating Form and Content

Cultural expression is a means of emancipation, not the primary end itself; the process is as important as the product.

-Arlene Goldbard²⁰

Ensemble devising is an unwieldy topic to teach.

- Davis Robinson²¹

FORM AND CONTENT: PRACTICING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF DEVSING

In my work, and often in devising processes planned for young people, a limited time frame can mean that there is no time to learn the incremental elements of craft. It can be challenging to know where to begin. In *A Poetry Handbook*, Mary Oliver reflects on the form of education for poets:

It has always seemed to me curious that the instruction of poetry has followed a path different from the courses of study intended to develop talent in the field of music or the visual arts, where a step-by-step learning process is usual, and accepted as necessary. In an art class, for example, every student may be told to make a drawing of a live model, or a vase of flowers, or three potatoes for that matter. Afterward, the instructor may examine and talk about the various efforts. Everyone in the class recognizes that the intention is not to accomplish a bona fide act of creation, but is an example of what must come first—exercise. (2)

Oliver continues to describe her approach to teaching poetry, in which she creates a series of exercises that focus on the craft of poetic writing. In *A Practical Guide to Ensemble Devising*, Davis Robinson agrees that skill-building is critical to a successful artistic process, explaining, “Good carpenters don’t just bang pieces of wood together with a few

²⁰ (Goldbard, *New Creative Community* 54)

²¹ (Robinson 15)

nails and hope for the best. Good collaborators know how to move together, listen to each other, and develop and support a shared vision of where they are going” (Robinson 19).

For the Intensive at McCarter, I scaffolded this skill-building process with the hope that students would be ready to engage fully in the devising process once we received stories from the community on Day 5. In the mantle of the expert approach, Heathcote and Herbert insist that teachers should “set up ways in which the experts will discover what they know while at the same time protecting them from the awareness that they do not as yet have this expertise” (174). Influenced by this concept, I invited students into devising practices before challenging them to devise with community stories; I facilitated an experience in which they might discover their nascent artistry before holding the responsibility to ethically represent the stories of another. I designed short devising sequences to culminate in casual sharings with the class, providing an opportunity for dialogic reflection on each performance. As a part of building ensemble and preparing to devise performance based on community stories, the young artists created and shared at least one devised scene each day for the first four days of the Intensive. Howard Rheingold, researching participatory media as a means of civic engagement for young people, points to these informal sharings as “social scaffolding,” explaining that “other peers in the class and the teacher must act as the first “public” that reads/views/listens and responds” (99). In other words, informal class sharings prepare young artists to share in front of larger audiences in the future; this preparation is key for equipping young community-based artists, as their work will always be presented to a community.

As students listened and responded to one another, they affirmed one another as artists, offering appreciations for the work of others and articulating discoveries they made during the devising process. Lauren evaluated the impact of these short exercises on her own experience, reflecting, “Making the group piece really helped me get weird and let

go” (“Journal #1”). Later, Joe reflected on the relationship of these first few days to the artistry visible in the final performance, stating, “I think we spent the majority of our time, in my opinion, cultivating trust and cultivating a belief in the sort of magical creative process [...] the underpinning of that creative work was people getting to trust each other, people getting to know their artistic voices” (McGranaghan). Lily echoed Joe's reflection, observing, “I don't know that they could have created the work that they did had they not had that really intensive time for exploration and discovery and sort of a crash course into different techniques for creating work” (Junker). The young artists grew as artists and ensemble members through exploring different forms of performance, sharing work with a supportive audience of ensemble members, and reflecting on choices and opportunities within each scene.

I also benefitted from these short devising sequences, as they gave me an opportunity to identify aesthetic choices bubbling up from the ensemble's collaborative process. While students practiced the craft of devising, I kept notes of performance forms and ideas that received a lot of interest from students. For example, one group of students devised a short performance involving frozen images, transitional movement, and strong gestures. They performed this sequence of images and movement in a specific order, then reversed that order, creating the performed equivalent of a palindrome. It was an incredibly interesting choice, and many of the students brought it up later in their reflections. The next week, I was able to assign a story from our Story Circle to another devising group, asking them to use the same palindrome-like form. Even without my prompting, many of the groups devising with community stories returned to aesthetic choices we explored during the first few days of the Intensive.

Erica pointed to the difficulty of honoring student aesthetics while reflecting on the challenges of community-based youth theatre in a regional theatre context. She offered that finding teaching artists suited for this work was often an issue, explaining:

We've been finding that there are a lot of teaching artists who are like totally comfortable with the material generation and the sort of group bonding and exploration [...] Or there are people who come from more of a directing background and then later in their [...] own interest try to steer the course in where the themes and the material generation go. (Nagel)

I certainly struggled with the balance between supporting students with the structure they asked for in our collaborative contract and ensuring that the majority of ideas included in the performance originated from them (“Collaborative Contract”). Starting with open devising prompts gave me the opportunity to structure devised scenes for our final sharing while honoring student-generated performance choices. I was therefore able to function as a mentor, guiding the young artists towards a finished product with a fuller understanding of their inherent artistry and aesthetic intentions.

From my perspective as a mentor, teacher, and director during this process, taking time for the young artists to develop their aesthetic vocabulary and craft as an ensemble was one of the best curricular choices I made for the Intensive. It took time, and the students generated many performances and ideas that weren't included in the final performance. But I better understood the students as artists after these first few days of devising exercises, enabling me to guide the rest of the devising process in a manner that complemented their artistry. For example, I noticed during the first few days that the young artists crafted really engaging gestures (“I’m talking full body, really energetic, expressive gestures” (“Reflective Log #2”). As a result, I asked students to create full-body gestures to serve as transitions throughout the final performance.

The artists' choices also informed our use of the large Matthews Stage, our space for the final performance. I observed during the first week of devising exercises that students tended to stage scenes using the whole width of the Matthews Stage, but they tended to only perform in the center of the stage in terms of depth. This helped me to consider where to place the platform for the *Saint Joan* staged reading. Additionally, while I typically tend to stage scenes in smaller areas on stage, creating separate spaces for separate stories, the young artists' use of width ultimately contributed to an expansive staging style. The choices of young artists in form became a critical tool for translating their stories and the stories of their communities into performance, ensuring that our final performance was community-based both in form and content.

FORM AND CONTENT: DEFINING A GUIDING QUESTION

I anticipated needing the first four days of the Intensive to practice devising without any specific content or objective, but, after seeing the students' focus and energy, I decided to introduce our first classic text inspiration on Day 3. We dove into Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, exploring aesthetics and the purpose of a guiding question. In my own practice, I aim to develop a guiding question as a central meaning and connector of stories. Rather than relying on a theme or a message, I choose stories and research that responds to a guiding question, and in doing so aim to portray a multi-faceted understanding of that question. Robinson describes a similar concept as a "spine," or "an organizing principle to guide the work" (87). For me, a guiding question is an open question about the human experience that underpins the content of a performance. This is a tool I use for creating community-based performance, but I believe it can be found in an analysis of almost any dramatic text, and it is particularly well-suited for Shakespeare's pensive character, Hamlet. After two

days of ensemble-building and aesthetic exploration, I perceived that the young artists were ready to engage more deeply in the meanings and intentions of performance, so it was a timely day to introduce the concept of a guiding question.

After a quick check-in and warm-up in the morning of Day 3, Joe led the students through an introduction to reading Shakespeare, an intense download of information delivered expertly and succinctly to young artists hungry for more than what they received in English class. (“They’re really, really smart students,” said Joe, “and I could tell [...] that they wanted to ground themselves in theory” (McGranaghan).) After this training, students divided into small groups, and each group received an envelope with copies of a soliloquy from *Hamlet*. To help prompt their thinking about both form and content, we also provided the following prompts for their consideration:

- Summarize what Hamlet’s saying in your own words.
- What’s the theme of this soliloquy?
- What’s the mood of this soliloquy?
- How is Hamlet interacting with the audience here, or is he?
- What’s the form of the soliloquy? Consider rhythm, length of words, sounds of words/
letters, punctuation choices, types of words and vocabulary used, metaphors or questions.
- What’s the guiding question? (“Lesson Plan #3”)

The artists wrestled with the content of their soliloquy for about 30 minutes, brainstorming with colorful markers on large sheets of paper. Some groups focused on the language and images, while others were prodding at questions and themes, but each group was asked to articulate the guiding question of their piece before time for brainstorming ended. After time for discussion, I called for everyone’s attention and ceremoniously unveiled a table full of craft supplies—yarn, newspaper, painter’s tape, butcher paper, fabric, props from McCarter’s education closet, etc. I invited each group to choose a space

in the theatre to house an installation inspired by their soliloquy's guiding question. I asked them to use the supplies to create a space to experience and a task for the audience to accomplish ("Lesson Plan #3").

While I set this activity was challenging for the students, many of whom had never experienced installation art before, they completed the work wholeheartedly; I noted that evening, "Everything we throw at them, they embrace and use and thrive in" (Reflective Log #3). Joe also observed the artists' agency and creativity on this day, stating that they "took that formal foundation [in Shakespeare] and just, like, blew the box open" (McGranaghan). Ritika reflected on her own participation, describing herself as "feeling willing to do crazy things" and "kind of surprised (in a good way)" ("Journal #3"). Like me and Joe, she also noticed the innovation of her peers, adding, "It was really interesting how everybody expressed their creative ideas" ("Journal #3").

After an hour of time for designing and building installations, we walked through four evocative, extremely detailed spaces. One installation led audience members down the stairs, requiring one audience members to cut through a web of yarn strung along the path while balloons fell from the balcony above us. Another installation displayed different objects as representations of the multiple paths available in life. A less participatory installation, pictured in Figure 4, utilized bold colors, balloons, yarn, and a human body in tableau to explore emotion. The final installation required each audience member to make a decision; based on audience responses, the group was sorted into three areas that reflected imagery of heaven, hell, or the present time.

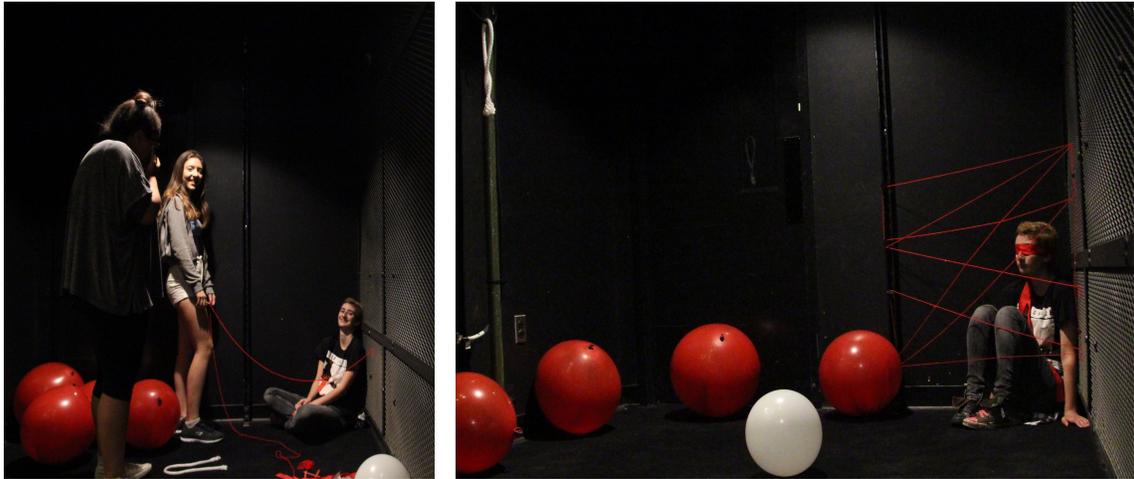


Figure 4: Installation Photographs. Lauren, Adhara, and Nico creating their installation reflecting the guiding question, “Why are we unable to feel what we’re supposed to feel?”

After experiencing each installation, each student who acted as the audience for the installation offered a word or phrase that captured an idea resonating with them, followed by the phrase “It made me think” (Rohd qtd. in Alrutz 102). The installation’s generative artists then explained their thought processes behind the installation, including the guiding question that inspired their work. The guiding questions for each piece were as follows:

- What is the purpose of life?
- What's right and what's easy? Who do your choices impact?
- Why are we unable to feel what we're supposed to feel?
- What do you do in times of uncertainty? (“Reflective Log #3”)

After a conversation about these four questions, the artists generated ideas for aesthetics, themes, and characters, writing a wide range of thoughts on notecards that we sorted, categorized, and crystallized through further dialogue. By the end of Day 4, the ensemble voted to use the question, “How do you choose between what’s right and what’s easy?” as the guiding question for our final performance. The artists also articulated interest in exploring gender roles and expectations.

After the first two days of exercises that provided skill-building in fundamentals of devising, our guiding question choice initiated the process of building a final performance. We could begin the devising and research process, focusing on the influence of gender roles when considering how one might choose a "right" and "easy" choice. This focus seemed to ground the students in a way that they were starting to need after two days of devising without a defined objective ("Reflective Log #2"). After the Shakespeare Installations and finding our guiding question, Adhara commented, "I'm so happy to see the beginning of what our final production will be like, and putting all our ideas together was really fun" ("Journal #3"). The final performance became a way to focus our energy in class; Erica explained that, for all McCarter youth theatre classes, a culminating experience provides "a common goal so that throughout the three weeks there's an end of the tunnel that is always a touch point" (Nagel). Deciding on a guiding question for our collective work gave me some relief as well, giving me an opportunity to start designing devising activities around the group's interests. We also needed this question in order to prepare for our Story Circles that would include community members outside of our ensemble; the timing worked well for developing and refining inquiries. Ultimately, the guiding question served to communicate the intentions of the young artists to teaching artists and education staff, defining a unified goal for our final performance.

Community Connection

Today was another magical day. The story circle was so intense and beautiful, it was a truly amazing thing to experience. [...] Today, I am a very grateful artist.

- Adhara²²

It is in these moments of relation and negotiation, however small or temporary, that we create the conditions for belonging.

- Megan Alrutz²³

The McCarter staff and I shared several goals for the Intensive, but a central goal was to foster connection between the young artists and their community (or, at least, to the Princeton community in which McCarter is located), connection between McCarter's mainstage season and the lives of the young artists, and connection between the generated work itself, the students' lives, and individuals from the Princeton community. Lily described this multi-layered goal in detail:

I want to see the students make connections to work that will be happening here on McCarter's mainstage, I think that was an important part of this one in particular, to have them thinking about how the work on the mainstage here applies to their own life or to their community. And a goal for this one too was to gain a sense of the students' place in the community and where they feel their role in the community is. [...] And then thinking about this process, gaining a sense of who the community thinks the young people are and what their place in the community is. (Junker)

This focus on connection is foundational to community-based performance; as Jan Cohen-Cruz declares, "the artist is nourished by the people she chooses to live and work with and the place she chooses to settle" (*Local Acts* 92). While these students didn't choose to live in Princeton or the surrounding areas, and while they signed up for the

²² (Journal #5)

²³ (Alrutz 107)

Intensive without knowing our focus on community, we found that the artists were generally receptive to this goal of connection. This section aims to describe the nature of connection throughout this process and the resulting implications for community-based youth theatre in a regional theatre context.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION: ARTISTS AND THE COMMUNITY

On Day 4, we voted on a central guiding question for our sharing performance: “How do you choose between what’s right and what’s easy?” Next, for the upcoming Story Circles, the students each generated one or two questions designed to invite a story in response to this broader guiding question. They then moved into pairs, selected two questions written by other students, and began telling each other stories in response to their peers’ prompts. After testing out the questions, the artists made minimal edits and chose one question to add back into our bank of questions. This resulted in nine student-generated questions, and I added one question that tied together their expressed interest in gender expectations to round the number of questions to 10. The questions were as follows:

- Has there been a time in your life when you’ve regretted a decision that you made years before?
- Do you remember a time when you or someone you knew was a hero?
- Has there been a time when you felt completely powerless about an important choice?
- Do you remember a moment when you had to make a difficult choice but you felt like there were neither easy nor right options?
- What’s a time when the easier decision has had consequences later in your life?
- What’s a time when you knew something was wrong but still did it?
- Do you remember a moment when you were stuck in a situation and you didn’t know where you were heading?
- Was there a time you didn’t feel like you belonged to any group? What did you do?

- Have you ever chosen between being loyal to a friend and doing the right or moral thing?
- (Created by McEniry) Has there been a time when you decided to go against society's ideas of what it means to "be a man/be a woman"? ("Story Circle Questions")

After lunch on Day 5, the students went into the Matthews Theatre, McCarter's 1100 seat auditorium, to sit on the stage in circles of chairs. We had three circles of ten chairs; six students, one facilitator, and three community members would sit in each circle. While it was not ideal for the artists to make up a majority of the Story Circles, a Friday afternoon in the summer proved a challenging time to invite community members to stay inside and share stories. Those who did arrive were participants in other McCarter engagement and education programs, and they were warm and generous towards the students.

We followed Roadside Theater's Story Circle guidelines, with myself, Joe, and Erica as facilitators (Roadside Theater, "Story Circles"). The Story Circles were simple, with each participant—including young artists, facilitators, and community members—sharing a story that was either prompted from the story prompt or the previous storyteller's sharing. We stayed in these circles for a little over 30 minutes, eating pizza together and passing around the tape recorders. At the end of my own Story Circle, the conversation concluded and the tape recorder was switched off, leaving us in a brief moment of awkward silence. I later captured in my reflective log the moment that filled the quiet:

After the recorder was off, an older lady in my group told my students they were the exact opposite of what the media wanted us to believe they were. My students were so excited and happy to hear that. Apparently, each Story Circle had a similar reflection from community members. (Logbook #5)

This moment spoke to Lily's hopes and motivations for community-based youth theatre in regional theatre contexts: "I think it can change people's perceptions, for better or for worse, about young people" (Junker).

Sean wrote of his experience during the Story Circles: "It was a phenomenal experience [sic], everyone had their own different stories and each told me a lot about the person speaking it, even my own" (Journal #5) One student anonymously included in their post-Intensive survey, "I love listening to other people's stories and about how they've lived their lives, so that was something I definitely enjoyed and will remember for a pretty long time" ("Survey Response"). In our reflection following the Story Circles, many students were surprised at the degree to which they enjoyed and appreciated the experience. Roadside Theatre writes of the Story Circle experience for artists, "The stories we're able to tell ourselves and others, those we can understand and imagine, define not only what we believe to have already occurred, but what we believe to be possible in our individual and collective lives" ("About Story Circles"). In other words, through telling stories, Story Circles allow the young artists and older community members to collaboratively cast visions for possibility and enact the qualities they hoped to see in their communities.

The young people in my Story Circle spoke openly about their fears and hopes for the future, while the older community members listened and told their own stories in response. Ritika reflected this in her journal, where she wrote about the day in the form of a letter to her future self:

It might be interesting to you that we even talked about the future in our story telling circles today. It was interesting and I found it intriguing that we had people from all different experiences and ages sharing their opinions. We most definitely have a lot to start a play. Different types of people are all alike in one way. They all have worries, and in some way can relate to each other. This is something that has particularly captured my attention. ("Journal #5")

Ritika’s learning experience stemmed from sharing with community members outside of our small Intensive ensemble, and I believe this interaction with community members outside of the ensemble is critical for community-based youth theatre. Schwartzman, Knight, et al. describe these two types of engagement as Contact²⁴ and Research,²⁵ explaining, “If Contact can be thought of as looking inward, then Research is about looking outward. Here, the focus is on listening, observing and learning from others beyond your immediate community” (30). In my experience, many community-based youth theatres focus on the stories of the youth ensemble rather than those of outside community members. Because we focused on both the stories of performers and other community members, we were able to add additional experiences and understandings to the guiding question of our final performance.

Providing the opportunity for students to take on the mantle of a community-based artist in their Contact and Research required a great deal of additional labor and thought from McCarter’s education staff, however. Typically, summer classes at McCarter are rather self-contained; the teaching artist is responsible for facilitating all of the creative work, and the education staff works to support the teaching artists and produce the final sharings. Erica used the Story Circle experience to illustrate the layers of consideration that can make community-based training for youth a labor-intensive undertaking for regional theatre education staff:

ERICA: There’s an additional sense of responsibility about the community members’ experience within the project when it’s also reflecting—when for some of those people, maybe it’s their first time walking into McCarter, or even if not, they have a certain perception about McCarter—and having to

²⁴ “Cultivate trust, mutual understanding and commitment as a foundation for your creative partnership” (Knight, Schwartzman, et al. xxv).

²⁵ “Gather information about the people, places and issues you are working with” (Knight, Schwartzman, et al. xxv).

think about their larger interfacing and experience with the Theatre, and how that connects with their experience with the students and with the project.

CORTNEY: How do you think that played out specifically in our project this summer?

ERICA: I think it ended up playing out really well in terms of their experience. I do think that in terms of staff time to make it happen, it was an added layer that I think we anticipated being simpler, or... I don't know. It felt like there was more administration of the community member involvement. [Usually], the things that need to happen that are about the students' learning are like, a little more internally bound within the class, if that makes sense? [...] Because we as an organization have those contacts with the people, even though it's part of the project to have the community involvement, the theatre really ends up sort of managing the community involvement until they're in the room. (Nagel)

While students were engaging with community members as artists and fellow neighbors, the education staff was similarly engaging in a multiple roles: as representatives of McCarter to the community and as producer and supporter of the students' experiences. Erica's reflection points to the responsibility of education staff, as representatives of the regional theatre institution, to facilitate a certain type of positive experience with community members in order to ensure continued engagement in the future. At the same time, the education staff was invested in providing a real community-based experience for students. The navigation of these roles ultimately required a more intensive level of both labor and time.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION: ARTISTS AND REGIONAL THEATRES

When I first began planning the Intensive, I tried to anticipate what communities the students were already involved in. I guessed that these communities would include teammates, neighborhood friends, religious communities, and lunch table buddies. When I was in high school, there was only a small theatre program in my school. Because of my

own personal experiences, I was surprised when many of the students included McCarter or high school theatre programs as communities to which they belonged. On the first day, I asked students to list their communities. One student wrote McCarter, which was agreed with by two other students through check marks. Overall, there were 11 entries indicating a theatre organization as a space of community for the students. Included in the list were drama classes and clubs, as well as Papermill Playhouse, Downtown Performing Arts Center (DPAC), and McCarter.²⁶

In their journal entries, several students echoed this idea. Camillo wrote, “One of my favorite communities is the theater community” (“Journal #2”). Elena said that her dance class was her community, as she grew up with other participants at her studio (“Journal #2”). Harry explained that, while he was a part of many communities, he favored his school’s music department (“Journal #2”). Eva included sports teams and friends in her community entry, but also included her school theatre group and McCarter (“Journal #2”). Lauren wrote, “One community I have is my theatre program in my school. We’re all very comfortable around each other and we help each other out a lot. [...] But this is hard [because] I don’t know if I have a community to belong in” (“Journal #2”).

Perhaps the most noticeable entry for me on this day was Ritika’s entry, where she talked about an experience with a different theatre:

I have experiences in both positive and negative communities. Last year I participated in an overnight theatre program and by the end of it, the instructors didn’t know my name, even though I had learned theirs. I understand that they had other kids to worry about, but couldn’t help get irritated when they kept calling me “you there.” I love this [HS Intensive] community because it makes me feel comfortable [...]. (“Journal #2”)

²⁶ It’s clear that these three organizations were all listed by the same person, as they’re all written in the same color and handwriting, but the additional checkmarks were added by others.

Ritika’s journal entry reminds me of the desire to be known that underlies community-based practice as a whole. In facilitating a process where Ritika’s name and story was known and included, we were able to model the kind of inclusive community she might hope for in other spaces.

As we practiced communicative, inclusive community with one another, the students also practiced new visions for other communities—and their own personal roles within those communities. The young artists demonstrated vulnerability as they opened themselves up to feedback from peers and teaching artists. They practiced communication about their feelings during their daily check-ins and reflection during their check-outs with one another. In our daily game of “Zoom, Zorch,” they practiced competition without prioritizing dominance. Through the ensemble’s modeling of these characteristics, McCarter had an opportunity to engage with young people within newly envisioned frameworks for community. Lily cited this as a key asset of the Intensive, explaining:

I think it gives us greater insight into what it is that they’re going through... what they value, what they want. And then those of us in the community who are in a position to offer them support, create programs for them, shape the world that they live in—it gives us a better sense of how to do that in a way that actually serves their needs and wants as opposed to what we think is best for them. (Junker)

The possibility for exchange between young artists and regional theatres speaks to Cohen-Cruz’s concept of reciprocity as a community-based practice (*Local Acts* 93); young artists are challenged and nurtured by their teaching artists and the work they see in the mainstage season, while they also challenge and nurture the institution that makes space for their work and their voices. I reflected on this reciprocity after the first four days of the Intensive:

During their check-in a lot of [the students] were like, it's day 4, I can't believe it's going by so fast, I'm so sad. I thought that was so interesting, because like, we are filling them to the gills, we don't take breaks, we work hard all day long, and they're taking it, they just keep taking it, and like, taking it and loving it [...] it's also reminding me so much of myself when I was in high school [...]. I had so much guts and so much love, love, love for the art form. And that's what these students have. And when you have that, even if you don't have formal training, or if you don't have whatever you need, I don't know, whatever people think you need—if you have that, you have the magic. And then they're being met with this super high rigor training in a really professional space that has all the resources they need, that has staff that supports every need that they have, and it's just—it's magic for everyone in the room. (Reflective Log #4)

My description of McCarter education staff as highly supportive producers of the High School Intensive echoes my experiences working with McCarter in multiple capacities over the past four years. I know that each member of McCarter's education team knows the names of every student in every class, knows what their assets are as artists, knows what kind of work they'll respond to as performers. There is a thoughtfulness that characterizes their relationships with the young people who come through McCarter's doors, a thoughtfulness that challenges me as a teaching artist to constantly re-examine my own biases.

Discussing a community-based youth theatre project in New Orleans, Jan Cohen-Cruz recalls the many unexpected changes that happened throughout the project as a result of the needs and interests of the young people. Cohen-Cruz reflects, “A vision generated solely by an individual artist [...] would not have been as good a fit in this situation. The artist has to be on the ground, in a relationship with the other participants, allowing the project to take form as a result of the actual engagement” (*Engaging Performance* 126). For the Intensive, McCarter staff chose to position themselves as an institution “on the ground,” a community in which young people could be heard and challenged, and the young people felt that enough to articulate it. I have always believed that, in order for a

theatre to establish a reciprocal relationship with young artists, they must fully honor and believe in young people as legitimate, important artists, worth the effort of being “on the ground.” My work at McCarter for the High School Intensive affirmed this belief, and I suspect that reciprocity is what leads to several students recognizing McCarter as community to which they belong. Reciprocal exchange between young people and regional theatres models a community-based practice within a regional theatre context, a practice that ultimately benefits both parties. Regional theatres seeking these benefits may be required to prioritize youth agency in ways that aren’t traditionally considered in youth theatre processes.

McCarter’s education staff were able to absorb the values and desires of these young artists through both the process and the performance. The process was characterized by artistic experimentation and strong ensemble, while the devised performances featured careful movement choices, strong statements to society, and a desire to be heard by adults. All of this information can be incorporated into McCarter’s education programs, but—if McCarter chooses to prioritize young people as audience and community members—this information can guide McCarter’s choices for mainstage productions and engagement efforts. This reciprocal relationship reminds me of Steve Ball’s assertion that mainstage productions in regional theatres are an asset to programming for young people; I contend that young people are also an asset to regional theatres as they program mainstage seasons.

What does it look like to reposition an institution so that it can engage with young people on an ongoing basis, opening itself up to input from young artists in their communities? Caron Atlas says of the decision for community-based dance company Urban Bush Women (UBW) to establish a permanent home in the Brooklyn community, “[...] it would make it possible for UBW to engage with its Brooklyn community on an ongoing basis—and grow by being simultaneously challenged and nurtured by its

neighbors” (Atlas 17). Ultimately, the work of young artists within the physical walls of McCarter's space has the potential to challenge and nurture McCarter as a regional theatre institution. Their work invites McCarter to face its community—and particularly its community's youngest members—with the same vulnerability, communication, inclusivity, and attentiveness modeled by the young artists towards one another.

As the young artists created their devised performances, they prepared to perform their own stories and the stories of their community in the public sphere. Anna Hickey-Moody's posits that when young people share stories in public, they create *little publics*, “a theoretical frame [...] to show how the acts, styles, and life choices of young people are civic actions that have, or can have, political significance” (58). Hickey-Moody writes, “I want to suggest we take young people's actions in making little publics seriously, that the materiality of their arts practices constitutes a form of citizenship” (62). When the artists designed questions, shared stories, and devising community-based performance, they engaged in agentic self-expression as an act of citizenship Camillo reflected on this departure from traditional educational theatre processes, writing, “We've done more internal searching than I'm used to for theatre. It's interesting. I've always related a piece to myself, and not the other way around” (Journal #4). Many of the other students also expressed interest in and excitement for the possibility of telling community (“Reflective Log #5”). The students' performance contributed to the community's understanding of itself and to McCarter's understanding of young artists. To borrow Hickey-Moody's language, during this Intensive the young artists acted as citizens of their communities and a regional theatre context through their artistic practice (62).

Generating Performance

In our nation most colleges and universities are organized around the principles of dominant culture. [...] Concurrently, students are encouraged to doubt themselves, their capacity to know, to think, and to act. Learned helplessness is necessary for the maintenance of dominator culture. Progressive teachers see this helplessness in students who become upset when confronting alternative modes of teaching that require them to be active rather than passive.

- bell hooks²⁷

[In the] community-based theatre world [...] you're sort of always oriented towards creating this performance, and the process is towards that culmination. And I think, something that I feel like I observed being hard for you— I think it's hard for every community-based artist ever—was that moment of sort of like, 'Now I need to be a director and get this thing up.'

- Erica Nagel²⁸

GENERATING PERFORMANCE: DEVISING IN YOUTH THEATRE PROGRAMS

At the beginning of the second week, a student dropped out of the Intensive. My reflection on that day was as follows:

We also had a student drop out today. [...] this process is very difficult for students who are used to receiving a script and being told where to stand. It's something you can see in their journals. This student told her parents we just played games all day and made animal noises. Unfortunately, she did miss *Hamlet* and *Saint Joan*, so she did miss some of the heavier content... (Reflective log #7)

As a teaching artist in this project, this student's decision to leave the Intensive was not the first time that I realized my work was in conversation with the young artist's experiences in other youth theatre projects. This particular student was a long-time McCarter student, participating in several summer programs, but always working with a written, published

²⁷ (hooks 130)

²⁸ (Nagel)

script. Community-based devising was a very different process, and the students said as much in their check-out conversations each day.

Joe also noticed this, and he noticed that some students were at different points in their journeys. He reflected,

The most beautiful thing for me, and what I did want to say, is that I watched high school students who [...] had been told they don't have that agency or that authority yet—they're there to learn, to be sponges—sort of blossom and take ownership [...]. And like, you could tell that they were trepidatious about it at the beginning [...] but then more and more, just in practice, they did understand intuitively and they were doing it. [...] I watched it happen and I watched it happen to varying degrees. And I wanted everyone to get to that sort of actualized place, where they were like, this is mine, I made it, and I'm proud of it, I'm going to share it with you. [...] A lot of students did take that away from it, and the students that maybe didn't, it still sort of sticks in my craw, and I'm sure it does yours. (McGranaghan)

It does, indeed, stick in my craw. While I worked to ensure that the devising sequences at the beginning of the Intensive created a space of learning for everyone, there was some clear insecurity and hesitation around collaborative artistry (and perhaps dislike). Few of the students articulated this in their journals, but Joe and I noticed it in discussions with the group and with individuals. High school students, many with years of experience in youth theatre programs, struggled to assert their artistry in a generative, ensemble-based process. Lauren, who is a part of the theatre program at an arts-based magnet school, wrote carefully about her struggle with this process:

As an artist, I've really grown over the past few days. It really excited me that I got to collaborate with others because most of the time when I create, I'm going off of my own ideas. I also really loved just trying things out without a plan. I think I'm now more willing to take risks and try absolutely everything. At first, I struggled with making my ideas heard and getting others to listen to me. I feel like it was hard for me to share my ideas without feeling like I was taking over or not saying enough. Now, I can find a balance but I can also accept that I'll sometimes take over naturally without meaning to + it's okay. ("Journal #8")

While Lauren was able to work through her difficulties with the process, other students in the Intensive weren't as comfortable. During the generative phase, I noticed that in Eva's journals, she frequently excluded herself from the group, writing short reflections such as "Today as an artist I realized how creative they want a play to be" ("Journal #3") and "Today as an artist I realized how people can create such an inspirational piece without speaking" ("Journal #4"). Eva's reluctance to claim ownership in her own work—even while praising the work of her peers—leads me to consider what notions of quality Eva brought to the process. In his classic community arts development text, *Rebuilding the Front Porch of America*, Patrick Overton states that the majority of people in our communities are "art scarred," scarred from a negative artistic experience (often as a young person), and "art scared," scared because they were "told early on that art was so profound, so important, so beyond them, they could never understand it" (27). With my years of work as a teaching artist, I am somewhat resistant to this notion, not wanting to believe that I or my fellow arts educators would ever communicate this to a young person. And yet, in this process, I bore witness to the residue of former artistic experiences; I bore witness to many young people celebrating and articulating their artistry for the very first time.

The experiences of young people in this process suggest to me that there are systems of power and definitions of quality—deeply felt by young artists—that remain unacknowledged or unquestioned by practitioners and administrators. Even as a facilitator who holds youth agency as a core value, I found myself surprised by the young artists' initiative and agentic decision-making in the process. On Day 2, I reflected, "I think I'm constantly underestimating them" (Reflective Log #2); on Day 4, I wrote, "the humbling thing about this project is that I really am working with people who are artists, and I'm having to reconsider my internal expectations or, even, understandings of what is possible

for these young people” (Reflective Log #4). Youth theatre, community-based performance, and regional theatre contexts all hold differing internal expectations of what is possible for young artists to accomplish. The Intensive brought these three contexts and practices together with a great degree of scaffolding and a supportive environment, and student creativity flourished. Day 3, the day of the Shakespeare Installations, yielded several journal entries reflecting nurtured artistry and an anticipation for the rest of the process.

- “Today, as an artist, I am excited to create.” —Lauren (“Journal #3)
- “Today, I’m an artist excited for what is coming.” —Adhara (“Journal #3)
- “Today, as an artist, I am someone who can create from just reading.” —Sean (“Journal #3)
- “As an artist today I am collaborative.” —Harry (“Journal #3)
- “As an actor today I am intrigued.” —Camillo (“Journal #3)

Connected to creativity is the need for risk-taking, a willingness to see one’s creative ideas shared with peers in the ensemble. I do wonder if students who have been conditioned to participate as a cog in the wheel of youth theatre productions will be heard as fully in community-based youth theatre as their peers who see the value of risk-taking in their artistry. This risk-taking can be connected to young people’s identities, as spaces for young artists have the tendency to erase identity in favor of a safe space approach to theatre-making. Megan Alrutz explains, “Unfortunately, theatre with and for young people often attempts to ignore realities of racism, sexism, and homophobia” (58). Alrutz adds that “The difficulties of this practice become especially poignant [...] in sites such as schools and other state agencies, which rely on the maintenance of often hegemonic ideologies” (58). My experience as a facilitator in schools and juvenile detention centers leads me to agree with Alrutz’s assessment of institutionalized spaces, and I add regional

theatres as a site where, in my experience, hegemonic ideologies are sometimes used to dictate notions of quality. In a diverse range of youth theatre contexts, young peoples' artistry can be suppressed based on previous experiences of participation without agency; agentive artistry can also be suppressed based on identity—including race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and yes, age. When generating performance, agentive artistry can be limited by identity, notions of quality, past experiences, the nature of collaborative ensemble, and to individual personality. The Intensive young artists were navigating all of these limitations with one another, with teaching artists, and with staff throughout this process.

GENERATING PERFORMANCE: NAVIGATING STRUCTURE IN AN AGENTIVE PROCESS

As we began Week Two of the Intensive, we began devising scenes for the final performance, armed with stories from our Story Circles. My intention was to encourage the artists to note the skills and forms they developed in Week One and apply them to perform community member's stories. On Friday of Week One, immediately after the Story Circles, I asked students to write stories that resonated with them the most on notecards. Over the weekend, I used this to discover what stories were sticking most with students while also paying attention to their generated guiding question, "How do you choose between what's right and what's easy?" and their chosen theme of gender roles. I thought it might be possible to use a scene from Shaw's *Saint Joan* as a framing device for the stories, with lines throughout Shaw's scene triggering devised performances based on community stories.

Hesitant to bring in my own artistic ideas after a week full of facilitating student discovery, I spent Monday trying to discover how the students might approach devising

their story-based scenes. I used a workshop model that I've used several times to facilitate community-based devising. First, we listened to a section of recordings from the Story Circles, and I asked students to write resonating words and images from the recordings onto a large sheet of butcher paper. They then added to words and images from others on the paper. Finally, they grouped the words and images into themes, and then into questions. We chose two questions that seemed to most correspond to the guiding question before separating into two groups, one group with me and one with Joe. I chose to present myself as a member of the ensemble, offering little guidance and a lot of listening in the process. I noticed that Joe was more involved, offering a director's voice and asking questions to guide the process. I found myself concerned with the slightly chaotic process my group followed and the lack of specificity in their performance. I was also comparing our work to that of the other group, which rehearsed and finished their process far before we did. I wrote later:

It was a little bonkers. I was really unhappy with the piece we created—it didn't feel like the right tone or the right artistic maturity—it involved lots of frozen images and sort of a crappy improv. The other groups' scene was really interesting, though, and I think that was slightly helpful. (Reflective Log #6)

Even though it was only one exercise and the process was as determined by the groupings (my group was much larger than Joe's) as by adult involvement, I reacted with a disproportionately high level of anxiety and concern. I started to feel the pressure to find a productive balance between helping to structure the performance and allowing it to be totally student-generated. After witnessing the difference between my group's unfocused process and the streamlined, guided process in Joe's group, I was convinced that it was time for me to start leading with more structure and guidance. However, I was still anxious about providing *Saint Joan* as an organizing framework. I reflected:

I tried to present [*Saint Joan*] as a framework for the piece, but the students were really confused. I found myself apologizing a lot. I felt I was trying to force my idea onto the students. But then, I thought, they might feel like they need something to lean on. They're making so much, they want to know what's coming from it. However, by the end of this day, I was panicking about what we would make. I spent a lot of time charting out the plot of the scene and figuring out exactly how the idea would work so that I could present it confidently and clearly the next day. (Reflective Log #6)

I spoke briefly with Lily the next morning, and she encouraged me to move forward, adding that the students already had more agency than they normally would in a process. She also reminded me that their collaborative contract asked me and Joe to “help develop structure” (“Collaborative Contract”), and in that moment I decided to shift from our student-led devising to a more adult-directed process.

I wrote out a proposed framework for the performance on a long piece of butcher paper (Figure 5). The framework integrated a scene from *Saint Joan* with stories from the Story Circles that I chose for students' devised, story-based scenes. This performance structure involved a staged reading of Act I scene 2 from George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*. Throughout this scene, specific lines became *trigger lines*, or lines that prompted the devised scenes. The performers of each devised scene would, in effect, interrupt the *Saint Joan* scene to perform a community-based devised scene that corresponded to the trigger line. For example, Lauren and Laura's monologues about makeup and appearances were triggered by the line, “I look like this because I am a soldier” (“Our Stories”). I pulled out lines from the *Saint Joan* scene that would trigger the devised scenes, wrote down what stories we would perform, and added a prologue and an epilogue to the structure of our whole performance. I also divided the class into small groups, assigning each group a story from which to devise or a prologue or epilogue to write. On Tuesday, some students also worked on cutting down the *Saint Joan* text, taking on a more dramaturgical role. We spent

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday working in this structure, with students coming back at the end of each day to share their work with one another and respond with ideas.

I constructed and facilitated three distinct structures for the young artists in the Intensive. The *curricular structure* of the program determined the way our three weeks were spent and the way each day’s class was run—including check-ins, warm-ups, and journal reflections (Table 4). The *devising process structure* established the process by which students would create their scenes, including their small working groups and the elements they were asked to incorporate in their work²⁹ (Table 5). Finally, the *performance structure* organized the devised scenes into a final performance, incorporating the artists’ community-based scenes with text from *Saint Joan* (Figure 5). Within each of these structures, teaching artists and students navigated different roles and different levels of agency.

Week	Activities included	Culminating Experience
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensemble-building games community scavenger hunt asset mapping the community Hamlet art installations short devising sequences developing a guiding question 	Story Circle with members of the community
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> independent devising work in small groups applying an organizing framework rehearsing for <i>Saint Joan</i> reading 	Developmental Sharing with members of the community
Week Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> writing and rehearsing an original song adding costumes, lighting, sound, set crafting an action plan 	Final Performance for family, friends, and community members

Table 4: Curricular Structure.

²⁹ These elements were based on the young artists’ devising exercises at the beginning of the Intensive, as described in pages 17-18.

Group	Story	Elements to Include
Sean, Elena, Harry, Eva, and others	Draft Letter Story (Story Circle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use Viewpoints vocabulary • either include the audio recording of the story or tell the story in 3rd person perspective • incorporate music • incorporate trigger line: “Oh, if only I dare!”
Ritika and others	Ritika’s Tennis Match Story (Story Circle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 seconds of silence • something in unison • incorporate trigger line: “Do you suppose such a girl can be allowed in the court?” • Ritika can tell the story or the recording can play
Lauren and Laura	Appearance Monologues (Journals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one significant pause • one inhale or exhale • one gesture

Table 5: Devising structure as planned for Day 7 (Lesson Plan #7).³⁰

The idea of creating structures relates to Heathcote’s mantle of the expert approach, in which the teacher uses their skills to facilitate students’ discoveries of prior knowledge (Heathcote and Herbert 174). In this case, I used my experience as a teaching artist and director to guide students in discovering their nascent artistry. However, embedded in the design and introduction of each structure was a choice: How should I relate to the young artists within this structure? Were they students taking on the mantle of the expert, or were they already actual experts in their own artistry and stories? Each time I created a structure, it seemed that I was framing their experiences as either learners or as experts. This was a simple decision in the curricular structure, as the young artists signed up and paid for an educational experience, and I was hired in part due to my training and experience as a teaching artist. The devising structure also seemed like a straightforward choice at the time; choosing groups and stories in advance saved us precious time and allowed us to start our

³⁰ Some students are not listed because they did not consent to be study participants.

community-based devising work right away. In reflection, I wonder how things might have gone differently if we took two days to choose the stories collaboratively, if I collaborated with students to create working groups. Perhaps we would have run out of time at the end of the process, but perhaps the increased communication might have reduced some of the tension that arose in Week Three.

My hesitation around introducing a performance structure was perhaps most informed by my perceived binary between learner and expert. By Week Two, the students were experts in the performances they were creating; they knew their intentions and community stories (especially their own stories) far better than I could. At the same time, I was hired by McCarter to be the expert, particularly when it came to putting together a final performance. At the time, I neglected to remember Paulo Freire's assertion: "Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*" (65). I viewed the structures I created as impositions rather than instigative problems for me to understand in dialogue and collaboration with students; I forgot that we were all becoming together. I now realize that our status as learners and experts was fluid throughout the process, often concurrently contributing to our roles as students, teaching artists, generative artists, directors, and more. I was never only the expert; I learned constantly from the ideas and impulses of the students. The students were never only learning; they were also engaging as experts, as the artists who held the greatest knowledge of their own aesthetics, their own stories, and their own communities.³¹

³¹ See Nicholson 56-60 for Nicholson's related reflections on the location and value of knowledge in applied theatre practice.

Saint Joan Act I Sc. 2

(Staged Reading)

La Tremouille: What the devil does the Dauphin mean by...

to

The Archbishop: ... rides around the country with soldiers. Do you suppose such a girl can be allowed in the court?

The Archbishop: Do you suppose such a girl can be allowed in the court?*

to

The Archbishop: We are all going to die, Captain.

La Hire: I hope not.

The Archbishop: We are all going to die, Captain.

La Hire: I hope not.

to

Bluebeard: Is it likely that this...

Story-based Scenes

(Devised, fully staged)

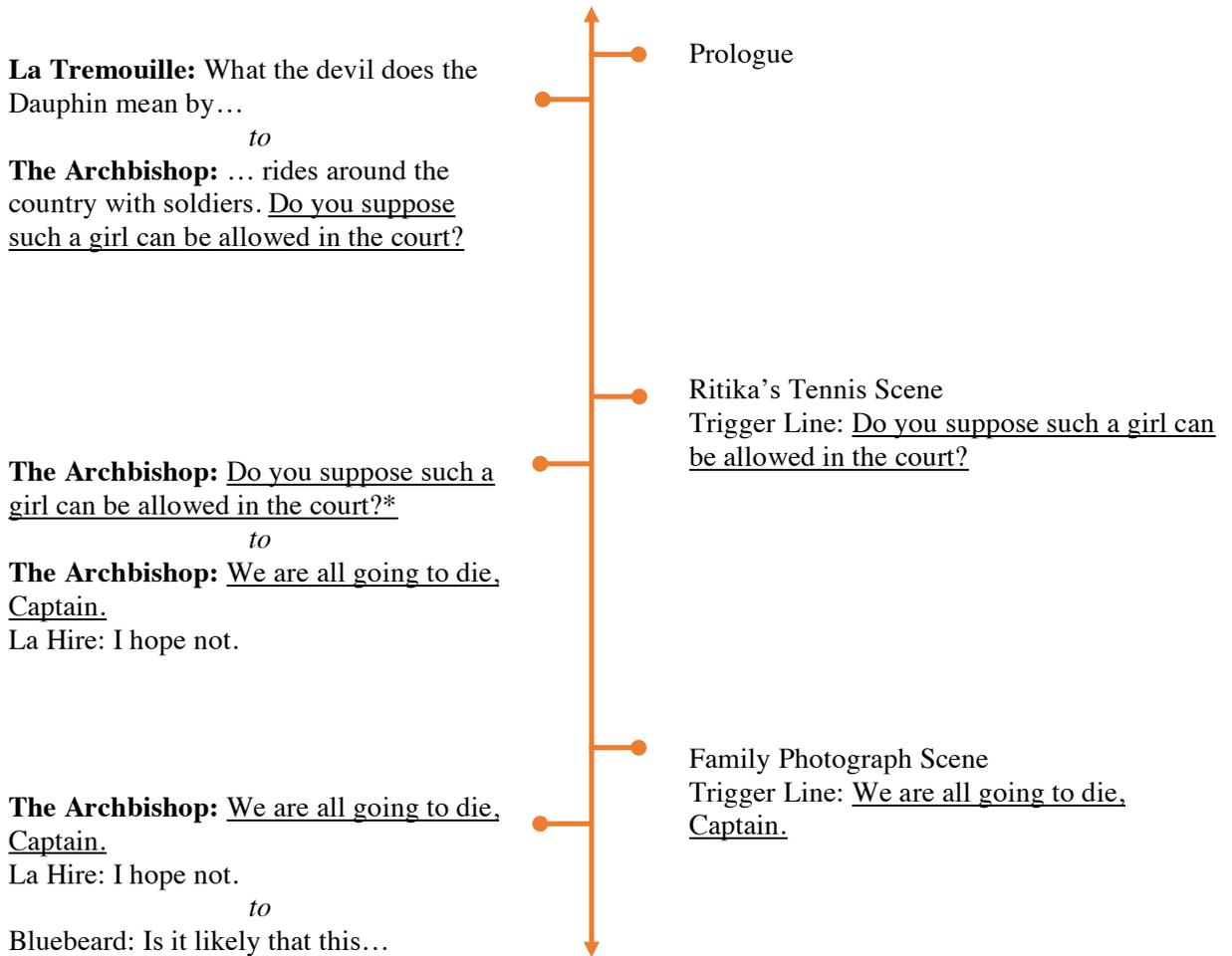


Figure 5: Excerpt of performance structure (“Our Stories”).

As we moved into Day 7 of the Intensive, we continued to unconsciously practice becoming together. The artists spent much of their time generating new work in their small working groups while I visited each working group to offer my artistic perspective and experience in the form of feedback and questions. The atmosphere seemed to return

to its former buzzing, creative, collaborative state. Adhara wrote, “As the days go on everything is becoming more clear, and is coming together. Although some were doubtful about “Saint Joan” as our backbone, I think it’s a great idea, especially if we insert as many creative scenes as possible” (“Journal #7”). Lauren admitted, “At first I was really scared that we would all be on different pages after yesterday’s brainstorming time but I feel like we’re all heading in the same path” (“Journal #7”). The whole ensemble wasn’t in agreement, however. One student reflected that they were “afraid we may have sacrificed some of the better ideas we had in order to make the show more coherent” (Survey), and Harry hinted at some discord when he vaguely wrote about his peers, “They make the most out of what they have. Makin [sic] lemonade out of lemons” (“Journal #10”). I was aware of the differences of opinion that were cropping up, writing in my own journal, “One thing I’m starting to find a challenge is that while the students get along splendidly, they are not all similar artistically. [...] Bringing it all together into a cohesive whole may prove to be a touch challenging” (Reflective Log #9). The tone in the room was still positive and generous, but there was tension arising that I couldn’t identify or articulate at this point of the process.

Shaping Performance

It was just difficult to keep all the balls in the air where we wanted to make sure ideas were respected, where the students had the voices coming through as their own loud and clear, but also taking the form of the final performance and just giving it the attention to detail that it deserves. And that has to come from an outside eye, and letting the students know that it's not that their ideas are wrong or that this change is coming about because they messed up, but because this part of the process requires an outside eye to help tell the story.

- Joe McGranaghan³²

I feel like with something where you're asking artists to be so vulnerable and artists to really be exploring who they are and what they're doing—and especially some of these students it's their first time to be given that opportunity, too—to then have people who weren't in the room from the beginning coming in and giving feedback can be jarring [...]. And maybe the feedback wouldn't have to be given if it were someone who had been in the room. Perhaps that voice of the outside eye doesn't have a place in this kind of work.

- Lily Junker³³

As we finished Week Two and began Week Three, rehearsals consumed our daily schedule. The curricular structure itself changed to focus entirely on the final performance. We arrived each morning, had a check-in and a warm-up, then split into small groups for rehearsals. Joe and I worked separately with one group at a time, working quickly so that we could see the work of every student. For the rest of the Intensive, the greatest amount of time I had with a small group was 30 minutes, and it always felt rushed. The performance structure, with its short devised scenes and staged reading, allowed the students to work more closely with one another in their small groups; I, however, was unable to have any significant amount of time with any performers. The close connection I had with the students earlier in the process was changing, as I relied on them to encourage and challenge

³² (McGranaghan)

³³ (Junker)

one another during the process, only supported by brief meetings with me and Joe, as well as our brief ensemble rituals in the morning and afternoon.

During this point in the process, a major point of tension arose around the multiple roles staff, young artists, and teaching artists were playing in the process. As the performance drew nearer, students became performers, rehearsing and implementing feedback as directed by me and Joe. Joe and I took on the role of directors, and our role as mentors or facilitators seemed to lessen; rather than exploring along with students, we were working with a script and my student-informed vision for the performance. This lack of exploration and openness to new ideas was a major shift from Week One and even Week Two. Mary, Lily, and Erica were much more present this week, as their roles were changing as well; they were working to provide a set, lights, and costumes to support the final performance. At times, however, we were all in different roles still. During morning rituals, teaching artists and young people were ensemble members together. During one-on-one rehearsals, young people still functioned as generative artists while also taking notes as students and performers. When we were discussing the final performance, I was director, mentor, and employee to the McCarter education staff, while they were employers and producers of the final performance. We rarely took the time to discuss these changing roles, much less the varying responsibilities, priorities, and levels of agency each role entailed.

SHAPING PERFORMANCE: NAVIGATING THE MAZE OF TEACHING ARTIST ROLES

My own priorities felt both contradictory and complimentary. As a facilitator in the process, I prioritized space for student discovery and reflection. As the director of the final performance, I concentrated on technical elements of performance, such as volume, physical choices, and clarity of intention in storytelling. I was constantly switching from

the role of facilitator to director, often without articulating the shift in my roles and priorities. Because of our limited remaining time, I became less communicative and dialogic in the last week. While most of the content for our performance was fully generated by the students, I ultimately took on tasks that we ran out of time for in class, including meeting with designers after students went home. I also made many directorial choices, framing the devised pieces with a performance structure, making casting decisions, and collaborating with staff to produce the final performance. This troubled me due to the initial goals of the Intensive, and I worked hard to keep things agentive and generative while also preparing a polished final performance.

While trying to balance these priorities and roles, I became exhausted—physically, emotionally, and artistically. With eight small devised scenes, a prologue, an epilogue, and a staged reading of *Saint Joan* that was split into two casts, I was managing eleven mini-casts. Each class day was chaotic, and after class, my day was full with editing scripts, planning rehearsal schedules, and production meetings with education staff. Comments on a lack of time and my own personal exhaustion began to seep into my reflective entries:

- Honestly, it's all a blur, but it all happened somehow (Reflective Log #7).
- And now, I'm so tired. I'm going to bed. It's been a 16 hour day" (Reflective Log #8).
- "We had this incredibly complicated rehearsal schedule that gave me 15 minutes with each devised scene cast on stage. That was bananas. I felt like I was barely able to give any feedback, just do quick fix-its." (Reflective Log #10)

In my reflective log, I wrote several times that I was continually juggling roles, admitting at one point, "I'm feeling a little lost in the hierarchy today" (Reflective Log #12). As the performance neared and I held multiple roles, from director to facilitator to McCarter employee, I became less sure where my own power and agency was located in

the process. Did I have the power to say “We need to slow down and maybe reduce the length of the performance”? Was it possible, at this point, for me to suggest that we only perform our devised story-based scenes and forget about a staged reading of the *Saint Joan* text? The class was marketed as “Exploding the Classics” (*Theatre Camp*), and I inferred from this title a requirement to incorporate the classic *Saint Joan* scene. I was uncertain of the expectations parents, students, and McCarter staff had for the final performance, and I was uncertain of my own freedom to create a final performance outside of those expectations.

Joe, Mary, Lily, and Erica also spoke about the pressure of time on our constantly changing roles in their interviews. Mary grappled with this issue at length:

It’s such a balance, and how do you find that time. It’s also like, in a three-week process of devise, devise, devise, create, create, create, okay now hone, hone, hone, hone, hone—when do you start the hone? When do you start pulling back? When do you start taking control? When does it all happen? [...] How do you articulate that to the students? There’s all of that. I don’t know. And I’m not even sure when the best time to make it happen happens. Like, sometimes it could happen naturally, but I think more than often, you kind of have to fine—you just have to make it. Do it. Force it. (*Making an “Ewww” noise*). (Gragen)

I repeated the “ewww” noise after Mary said it in the interview. During my change in role from devising facilitator and artist mentor into a more traditional director, I was extremely reluctant to make my own decisions without student input. I wanted to ensure that our work was responsible community-based performance, produced in an innovative, exciting way, generated by the students. However, I also wanted the final performance to showcase all of the young artists’ hard work in a way that made them feel successful. I wanted their families and community members sit up and take notice of the amazing young

artists I had come to know and learn from. I chose to contribute my skills and experiences directly and with authority order to meet these objectives within our limited time frame.

Because we ran out of time for students to reflect in their journals every day, I could only guess what the young artists were thinking or feeling in regards to the way I exercised power in the room. The lack of student reflection at this point in the process deeply influenced my practice and experience at the time, and it also limits my reflections now. They may have recognized and appreciated my student-centered motivations, or they may have received my artistic authority as oppressive to their artistic agency. While it is unclear how students' experiences were impacted by my choices at this point of the Intensive, my leadership as the teaching artist undoubtedly influenced the students' agency, input, and experience in the process and performance.

SHAPING PERFORMANCE: THE DEVELOPMENTAL SHARING

For Friday of Week Two, I wanted the students to experience a Developmental Sharing, a performance for the community that shares what has been generated and solicits audience feedback. This is a part of my own process as a community-based artist, and I believe it's a part of an ethical process. Community-based performance artist Don Bouzek agrees, "[...] since you're representing people with a community of interest to others in the community, you want to know that they consider your portrayal of them accurate" (3). Lily organized invitations to the event, inviting McCarter staff, Story Circle attendees, and participants in a few of McCarter's engagement programs. On this Friday afternoon, approximately 20 audience members gathered to see the story-based scenes that were based on community members' stories.

The semi-public sharing went quite smoothly. Prepared and eager to share their work, the performed without missed cues, forgotten lines, or extended transitions. After

their performance, I explained to the audience that we would move through a facilitated feedback session. I asked the audience to first share moments that were “popping” or resonating for them from the performance. One woman raised her hand eagerly, and I invited her to speak first. I noticed that she was one of the few community members in the audience who was not involved in the Story Circles during Week One. She chuckled for a moment before directing her comment to me, saying, “Don’t take this in a derogatory way, but it just made me think about myself at their age, and it’s just comical, how much young people think they know” (Reflective Log #10).

I was shaken by this response, recognizing that this audience member perceived the young artists through the lens of inexperience and naivety. Because my pedagogical approach is so informed by a desire to treat young people as experts in their own stories and artistry, I was frustrated to hear such a demeaning comment voiced in front of the ensemble. Her condescension was hurtful, leaving one student in tears.

After this comment, other audience members provided the students with feedback based in respect and celebration of the performance. One community member thanked the young people for sharing his story. Another community member whose story was included in the sharing engaged in an excited dialogue with the young people about the possibilities of sound design for the performance. One Story Circle participant asked the students what they were learning from the process. Adhara framed her experience with the eloquent phrase, “We’re all telling different stories about the same questions,” while Lauren talked about learning that she had more in common with others (Reflective Log #10). Laura said that she learned more about perspectives that were different from her own. I wrote in my log that “Harry asked the audience if they felt it was ‘philosophical,’ and when they affirmed that it was, they all beamed. It’s so obvious that they want to feel heard and valued in their communities” (Reflective Log #10). The week before, Harry had written in his

journal that he felt “philisophical [sic]” (Journal #5). In this moment, he offered that to the community for their affirmation, and they encouraged him generously. The community members who interacted with students during the Story Circles were particularly engaged and conversational, but two McCarter staff members from a different department found me after the discussion to tell me, in a surprised tone, “That was really quite good!” I was grateful for their appreciation but taken back by their surprise.

During this feedback session, I aligned myself with the young artists; I sat with them onstage as I facilitated our dialogue. I realize in reflection that I often subconsciously separated myself from other adult spectators, including McCarter education staff, just as I separated myself from the small audience at the Developmental Sharing. I forgot that I am just as informed by and vulnerable to oppressive notions of young people as the woman who laughed at them. I forgot that I, too, was initially surprised by these young artists’ wisdom and talents (Reflective Log #2). Because my identity as an adult is a privileged identity, it was easy for me to forget that my privilege impacted every role I played in the process. The young artists’ role as a marginalized member of their community also impacted every role they played, as a generative artist creating a new scene, as a performer following the director’s blocking, as an ensemble member dictating a collaborative contract. Our relationship, my actions, and their experiences were inextricable from the identities of adult and young person.

My perception of the Developmental Sharing and my reflections on the Intensive as a whole suggest a challenge for the young artist who is also a community member: even as they navigate the multiple roles of a generative artist in an educational program, they also navigate oppression and marginalization from their communities. In 1975, Chester M. Pierce and Gail B. Allen coined the term *childism* to name this form of discrimination, describing it as “the automatic presumption of any adult over any child; it results in their

needs, desires, hopes and fears taking unquestioned precedence over those of the child” (266-270). My challenge as the teaching artist was to acknowledge and dismantle patterns of my thinking that was informed by childism. Unfortunately, as the final performance neared, I became increasingly aware of my role as a McCarter employee with a deadline. My desire to be hired by McCarter again and my hope that parents and community members would be impressed by the young peoples’ work began to take “unquestioned presence” over the hopes and desires of the ensemble (Pierce and Allen 270).

SHAPING PERFORMANCE: ADDING VOICES AND IMPLEMENTING FEEDBACK

As we worked towards the final performance, I talked to Joe and Lily frequently about my concerns that I was taking too much control in the room. I felt uncomfortable with my responsibility to direct the performance, and I wrote in my logbook, “These last few days are just going to be difficult. I’m starting to be sad that we’re done generating. I miss that phase. This part isn’t as exciting to me” (Reflective Log #11). I was unsure if it was possible to shape the performance and give direction without inhibiting youth agency, but I also wanted the students to learn about the process of improving performance. Lily described my dilemma well, explaining, “You want the work to be driven by the students. But because it is an education process, there’s also the responsibility to guide the work” (Junker). I still wanted to hold onto the excitement of the first two weeks, when so many students claimed their creativity and artistry for the first time. I feared that moving from a generative process to a shaping one might create tension, but I had no time to hesitate. As the Institute’s teaching artist, my responsibility was to facilitate an educational process through developing and refining a final performance, and we were running out of time. Due to our lack of time and my discomfort, there was no dialogue with students about my

shifting role in the Intensive. Joe reflected later, “I don’t know that we made it clear enough that [...] we’re going to have to start setting things, and you’re going to have to trust Cortney as the captain of the ship to just put everything together so we can have a final sharing” (McGranaghan).

I started class on Tuesday with a detailed rehearsal schedule, determined to guide the young artists with a clear vision and a steady hand. Mary noticed that something changed on this day, stating, “I certainly feel like the students had full agency the entire time until maybe Tuesday of the final week” (Gragen). Unfortunately, it’s unclear how the young artists experienced the change; on every day of Week Three, we ran out of time for journaling. As a result, I source much of the data for the following analysis from the education staff, Joe, and my own reflections.

There were a number of circumstances that made Tuesday a different experience. Joe was unable to be in class, so I had all of the students on my own. I scheduled extremely short, 15-minute rehearsals with each group, hoping to give basic notes around volume, pacing, character choices, and staging. We scheduled a stumble-through for our lighting designer to attend, and it was the students’ first time incorporating the reading of *Saint Joan* into the performance, practicing transitions, and performing their newly-written song. It was a day full of firsts and plenty of hard work for all of us.

After class on Tuesday, I put together sound cues using student suggestions before meeting with Lily and Erica to hear their notes. While the Developmental Sharing took place several days earlier—on Friday of Week Two, we were unable to connect on Monday to share notes. Erica attended Tuesday’s stumble-through, however, and she had a good sense of the final performance. Because Erica and Lily were both my supervisors when I interned at McCarter, I was grateful to have the opportunity to meet with them and share ideas. We sat outside on the loading dock, happy to be together but exhausted due to the

demands of our various responsibilities. In this two-hour meeting, we shared pages of notes with one another while simultaneously realizing that we didn't have what we needed in terms of a set or costumes. Both of the designers hired for the summer camp were consumed with the other classes' needs, and we weren't getting much attention. I wasn't worried about it, as I was rather focused on the performance itself, but after talking with Erica, I realized that the delay was not intentional and that we might not get everything we needed for the final performance. Erica and Lily also offered their feedback from the Developmental Sharing. Their notes were mainly focused on clarifying storytelling choices, articulation and volume, but there were a few specific notes that might change or edit the initial impulses of the students.

One particularly large change proposed by Erica and Lily involved the song written by the young artists on Monday of Week 3, the day before this meeting. The students collaborated with a guest artist to write the song based on the concept of "signature." The lyrics, originally written by students, were as follows:

Millions of voices, just one song
In a beautiful tangle
In a beautiful tangle

This is what the world remembers us by
No one can take it from us
No one can take it from us

This is our story. It's our time now.
This is us and only us. (x2)

Telling stories, living stories in gorgeous Technicolor
A better world, reflecting you
Unique like a fingerprint
This is me and only me
A symbol, a word, a name.

Traits and emotion

Action and devotion
This is a notion of who we are (x2)

This is our story, it's our time now.
This is us and only us. (x2) (“Lyrics”)

Erica and Lily felt, and I agreed, that these lyrics may have the impact of alienating audience members—particularly audience members whose stories were featured in the play. Because the students chose the phrase, “This is us and only us,” it was possible for folks to feel excluded, as if the young artists were setting up a line between the ensemble and the audience. I knew this wasn't a part of the students' intentions, and so did Erica and Lily. A short dialogue around impact and intention might have guided the young artists towards making a dramaturgical change to the lyrics. However, we simply didn't have time for an ensemble discussion—or, at least, that's how I felt in the moment.

On Wednesday, I scheduled 30-minute rehearsals with groups for which I had several notes. The cast for the *Saint Joan* reading worked with Joe. I swiftly, directly implementing five pages of notes from my conversation with Erica and Lily. I quickly explained to students that we were changing the lyrics right before we practiced their original song. The young artists didn't protest, but they weren't excited either. At this point, I offered little opportunity for the artists to engage more deeply in my decisions or in feedback coming from outside of our ensemble. In reflecting on their reactions, I realize that the young artists were used to a much more agentive role in our process. Instead, I told them what to do without much room for dialogue. I wrote that evening, “Basically I made everyone upset today, and I was upset, too” (Reflective Log #13).

During Lily's interview after the project ended, we talked at length about this point in the process and the nature of feedback for the Intensive. It was our first time discussing the conversation on the loading dock, and our reflections were still relatively fresh.

Cortney: I just remember [thinking], I am so many people to so many different people right now [...] As someone who was advocating for my students, it was tricky, because some of the things I thought, “Well, we’ve messed with this already,” or “I know that student’s going to be defensive,” so that can be tricky. And then, at the same time we were thinking about design and production, and there was this reality for me of, “I literally don’t have time to bring the students in on this conversation and I just have to make these decisions and I know that’s wrong.” And then there’s also this mentality, [...] this reality of like, “No, I am... this is not... I don’t have like, a long-term contract with these folks. If I want to work with McCarter again, this needs to sort of all end up being okay.” [...]

Lily: It’s funny... that Tuesday on the loading dock is where I was really like... Oh man, I let Cortney down. And don’t even know why, I think it’s because we were all so exhausted, I think Erica and I were so used to like, “Let’s find a quick fix, let’s find a quick fix,” which we had been doing all summer. [...] And we ended up giving you all of those notes, which I hadn’t even intended. [...] And I think, upon reflection, perhaps some of those didn’t need to happen, or could have been a conversation, [...] We just were like, (*laughing*) “Here are all the things you need to change.” And like, I don’t know, I should have known better, we should have paused, we should have—let’s pick our like— what is actually most important [...].

I recognize in Lily’s words a tone of surprise regarding the quantity of notes she and Erica suggested during our meeting that Tuesday. However, a list of small changes was more efficient than an intensive dialogue, and Lily and Erica needed to be efficient due to the needs of multiple, simultaneous summer camp programs. During the weekend of our final performance, there were four other camp programs with final performances for Lily, Erica, and Mary to produce; each of these final performances reflected McCarter and the quality of its educational programming to parents and families. I absorbed a sense of high stakes for the final performance from our conversation on Tuesday, realizing that the performance also reflected my skill and capability to McCarter staff. As a result, I also focused on giving feedback quickly and efficiently to the students.

I realize now that at this point in the process, I struggled to balance the desires of the students, the needs of the institution, and my own hopes for continued employment

with McCarter. It may be possible to give five pages of feedback without undermining the students' agency in the process, but I lost sight of youth agency as the central goal of the Intensive due to the many objectives in my different roles as director, employee, and teaching artist.

SHAPING PERFORMANCE: ACKNOWLEDGING LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORTING AGENCY

Wednesday was a problem-solving day, and we were efficient, if not dialogic in our approach. Mary solved all of our production problems, with Erica, Lily, Joe and I staying late to help her complete the set. Joe and I worked through notes with the students all day. As previously mentioned, there was pushback and frustration with specific notes, but students were, in general, incorporating all of the feedback quickly. We continued in a similar fashion on Thursday, with a tech rehearsal and some major revisions proposed for Adhara's working group. As I worked with small groups on their notes, I hadn't worked with Adhara's group; I realized on Thursday "I just always rely on them as my strongest performers, so I don't always fuss over them" ("Reflective Log #14"). However, there were some dramaturgical issues in their scene, and I proposed that they spend some time on Thursday night making adjustments. It was very late in the process to make a change, but the group's initially charming scene was losing some of its delight. I hoped that a few changes might reinvigorate the scene in alignment with the young artists' initial intentions.

On Friday, as I walked by Adhara's working group during rehearsal time, I overheard whispers filled with concern and hurt. I stopped in my tracks and sat down across from the whispering students to ask what was wrong. The students explained that I asked for too many changes, that they didn't even feel it was their original work anymore. They added that, because they were only in one devised scene and the epilogue, they didn't feel

like an important part of the play. The students in this group were initially assigned the adaptation of the *Saint Joan* scene, so they weren't incorporated into as many scenes as some other students were. I recorded the interaction in my Reflective Log and captured some of my surprise from the interaction: "They said that they didn't care because they enjoyed the process so much, but that it was difficult to realize they wouldn't have big roles in the show. I felt like they did have important roles, so I was quite surprised" (Reflective Log #15).

While I anticipated frustration about casting and some resistance to feedback, I was still surprised to hear these remarks from this group. Their scene was the longest devised scene in the performance, and they were featured prominently in the epilogue—a part of the performance that the ensemble was especially enthusiastic about. Furthermore, the changes I proposed to their scene were proposed with the hope of preserving and cultivating their initial intentions, not changing their impulses. Out of all the groups I worked with during the shaping stage of the process, this was the group I was least concerned about. I was left wondering if other groups were feeling the same way, but as it was the end of the last day, I had no way to be sure.

Before Adhara's group left, I asked them to perform the scene onstage in the way they wanted to see it. They started the scene, but two of the performers had a small, animated argument about which foot to start walking with. Their scene was comedic, and their two characters were a play on the bully archetype with a hint of the mobster archetype added in. As I listened to them argue, I started to laugh and asked them if they might consider starting the scene that way, keeping the argument as a part of the opening. They thought I was joking, but then liked the idea. The next day, one of the artists rewrote their monologue with my previously suggested edits while Adhara decided to restore her monologue to its initial form. They added the short argument at the beginning of the scene,

getting a huge laugh from the audience. But most importantly, they told me that they liked the scene again. In reflection, I realize that my assets as a teaching artist had the potential to contribute to youth agency during the shaping phase of our process. By giving Adhara's group notes in an open way during this last-minute rehearsal, the young artists were able to agree with some feedback and disagree with other ideas. They were challenged to think deeply about their piece as they advocated for it. While we might have all preferred a less challenging conversation with fewer tears, I certainly learned from this moment, and Adhara's group gained experience in standing up for their artistic work.

Reflecting on her influence during a community-based devised process with young artists, Elizabeth Brandel Horn admits that "As the adult—arguably more knowledgeable and experienced in theatre than my students—I privileged my voice over that of the students" (198). Like Horn, I felt that I privileged my adult voice over youth voices during the last few days of the Intensive. With preconceived notions of quality theatre based on my identity, culture, education, experiences, and personal taste, I entered into the final week of our Intensive with a list of "fix-its." I found myself taking a more authoritative voice as director, consciously changing my feedback from "What if we try this?" to "Let's try this." I didn't heed Robinson's warning about this stage, when he notes, "This is always a delicate time for morale" (155). Robinson's warning indicates that time is needed to navigate this period carefully, but I was out of time. I forgot to consider the value of my skills and experience for the process, and instead I was guilt-ridden for taking on authority in the ensemble. At the same time, I felt that I needed to efficiently pull everything together into a cohesive product. As a result of my sense of guilt and a rush to the finish line, I made the choice to avoid a dialogue with the students regarding feedback.

In *The Performer's Guide to the Collaborative Process*, Sheila Kerrigan describes circumstances that can lead to a "Kill the Leader" dynamic, explaining, "In collaborative

groups, kill-the-leader games often result when the leadership goes unacknowledged” (114). As I shifted from the role of facilitator to the role of director, I neglected to acknowledge the nature of my leadership. While the students in Adhara’s group were honest with me about their concerns, I suspect other students were quietly disgruntled. In the last two days of the Intensive, it did seem like the originally open and vulnerable ensemble became guarded with me. Their check-ins were shorter and their verbal reflections were limited. I will avoid characterizing their actions as kill-the-leader games, as the students were still kind and generous; we still played “Zoom, Zorch” together each day with plenty of laughter. But I recognized a difference in their disposition, and I believe it was related to the lack of acknowledgement that our process had changed a great deal. On the day of the final performance, I wrote in my log, “I felt like the nature of the project changed so much this week, and like it was so out of my hands” (Reflective Log #16).

Even as I was utilizing a more authoritative approach to the rehearsal process, I felt out of control. In reflection, I realize that this is due to the same constantly shifting roles that I named in my conversation with Lily. Just as the students navigated changing levels of agency, moving from student to generative artist to performer, I also navigated changing levels of agency. In the last few days, I navigated varying levels and expressions of power in my roles as teaching artist, mentor, director, employee, and facilitator. Even while I was practicing a great deal of power as a director with the young artists, I had less power in the circumstances that led to delayed production aspects. At the same time that I was telling students where to move and what lines to change, I was receiving feedback from Erica and Lily in my role as employee. Erica, Lily, Mary, and Joe were all juggling their own various roles and responsibilities as well. The additional demands of a short rehearsal process meant that much of these negotiations of power happened without communication or reflection in the last few days of the Intensive. In reflection, I believe that a lack of

communication led to what I perceived as a breakdown of student investment, even in a process designed to highlight their artistry, interests, stories, and communities.

Quick Change: Shifting Roles in an Agentive, Community-based Devising Process

Perhaps most significantly, working in drama often requires a change in institutional culture, a shift in thinking from the idea that professionals control the situation because of their expert disciplinary knowledge, to recognising that participants have specialised knowledge of their own situations and experiences which are central to the work.

-Helen Nicholson³⁴

I am really noting that I talk too much—this is a subject I’m so passionate about, so it can all come out too fast.

-Cortney, Day 2³⁵

I took dance classes in ballet, jazz and tap dance for eight years, from Kindergarten to 8th grade. As I entered middle school, I particularly enjoyed our end-of-semester dance recitals as an opportunity to hone the makeup and hair skills I wasn’t yet allowed to apply on an everyday basis. I specifically remember preparing one evening for a recital for which I performed four dances. Each dance had its own costume and hairstyle and dance shoe required. My mom purchased hairspray, hair gel, and hair mousse in an attempt to equip me for taming my unruly hair, and I spent quite some time shellacking every flyaway hair into a perfectly smoothed bun hairstyle. When the performance started, I was grateful that I put so much product into my hair; every hair stayed in place through each costume change. As I walked offstage from my third dance, however, I realized I made a grave mistake. With a little over two minutes, I had to change costumes from my ballerina tutu into a pajama set for my jazz performance—and I had to change my glued-together hair from a slicked-back bun into two separate pigtails. With no time to spare, I pulled a brush through the mounds of hair product as quickly as possible, ripping hair right out of my

³⁴ (Nicholson 51)

³⁵ (“Reflective Log #3”)

scalp. I made my entrance with two perfect pigtails, but I couldn't touch my head for days afterward without feeling pain.

I'm not the only one with a story like this; the quick change is a beloved tradition in the performing arts. But this study leaves me curious about the quick changes we undertake throughout community-based theatre processes. I wonder what kind of pain might be involved as teaching artists, education staff, and students work to "make our entrances," pulling together all of the required deliverables and meeting our deadlines? In this conclusion of Part II, I aim to articulate the roles many played by young artists, teaching artists, and education staff during the Intensive. Furthermore, I consider the implications of a limited timeframe as this study's participants navigated their various levels of agency throughout the three weeks of our Intensive. I interrogate the quick change.

SHIFTING ROLES: THE CONSTANT NEGOTIATION OF YOUTH AGENCY

Throughout this community-based youth theatre process, students, teaching artists, and staff navigated varying roles with varying levels of responsibility and diverse sets of expectations. A limited time frame for accomplishing those expectations added pressure and decreased opportunity for dialogue around decision-making and shifting roles. I found this pressure of time to be especially present in my conversation with Lily and Erica and in the fallout with Adhara's working group. For this analysis, I define "role" as the position taken in the process as defined by responsibilities, priorities, and power to make decisions. Tension or discomfort arose when individuals shifted their roles or were required to shift roles quickly and without acknowledgement, reflection, or dialogue.

I believe that tension and discomfort emerged especially towards the end of the Intensive because of the changing nature of structural agency for the young artists within our creative process. For this analysis and in my practice, I embrace a relational understanding of youth agency, recognizing that agency is socially constructed and can be supported by youth-allied adults.³⁶ I ascribe to DeJaeghere et al.'s assertion that "It is through relations with others or with structures surrounding these youth that agency is imagined, shaped, enabled, or suppressed" (4). In our Intensive, young people were placed into roles as ensemble members, generative artists, performers, students, and community members. In addition to the limitations of each role, the students' experiences in each role were influenced by their identities. Their commonly held identity as young people intersected with their many other, diverse identities.³⁷ I also recognize that the identities of adults involved with the Intensive intersected with our other identities to inform how we navigated power structures throughout this process.

To further explore a relational understanding of agency as it pertains to shifting roles in McCarter's High School Intensive, I turn to Kenneth R. Jones and Daniel F. Perkins' research on community-based youth programs, where they outline a continuum of youth-adult relationships to describe possible locations of agency in community-based youth programs. Because my analysis in this document relies on a socially constructed understanding of agency, a more critical view of relationships between teaching artists and students during the Intensive can serve to name the location of agency throughout the

³⁶ Citing the research of Goldman, Booker, and McDermott, Alrutz defines a youth-allied adult as "a partner who understand that my own (adult) liberation is simultaneously bound with that of young people" (24).

³⁷ I draw my understanding of intersectionality from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1299). For more information on youth and intersectionality, see Gutierrez and Hopkins' article, "Introduction: Young People, Gender, and Intersectionality."

process. The five types of youth-adult relationships on this continuum include the following:

An *Adult-Centered Leadership* relationship consists of programs that are conceived and driven completely by adults, without employing any youth decision making. An *Adult-Led Collaboration* includes programs or situations where adults provide guidance for youth, but the youth have some input in decision making, albeit limited by adults' discretion. The *Youth-Adult Partnership* category is located centrally on the continuum. This is a point of stasis where a partnership is achieved between youth and adults. Youth and adult participants have equal chances in utilizing skills, decision making, mutual learning, and independently carrying out tasks to reach common goals. *Youth-Led Collaborations* are programs or projects where youth primarily develop the ideas and make decisions while adults typically provide needed assistance. *Youth-Centered Leadership* includes programs or activities led exclusively by youth, with little or no adult involvement. (Jones and Perkins pars. 12-15)

This continuum provides a useful framework to understand agency as it relates to the shifting roles of myself and Joe as teaching artists and the shifting roles of the young artists throughout the process.

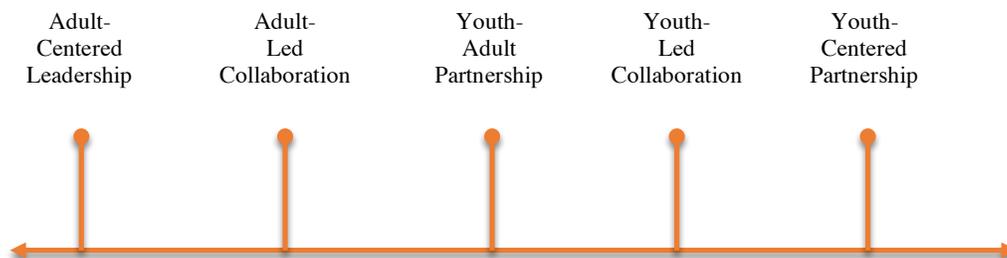


Figure 6: Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships (Jones and Perkins pars. 12-15).

Because of pre-determined curricular structure of the program, from my perspective, the students' relationships with Joe and me can be characterized as a Youth Adult Partnership, an Adult-Led Collaboration, or an Adult-Centered Leadership, depending on the roles we were operating in at any given moment during the Intensive. For

example, when students freely devised independently as generative artists and I offered feedback in a mentor role, we engaged in a Youth-Adult Partnership. After I proposed the performance structure and assigned stories for the students to devise around, we shifted into an Adult-Led Collaboration. Once we entered into Week Three, with limited time for dialogue or reflection, the relationship between teaching artists and young people shifted into Adult-Centered Leadership. I categorize these relationships from my perspective, however; it is possible that the young artists may hold different perspectives of their agency throughout the process.

O'Donoghue and Strobel observe, "The roles of youth and adults in CBYOs [community-based youth organizations] that are striving to be egalitarian are continually negotiated" (478). From my experience in this Intensive, I am led to agree with O'Donoghue and Strobel, but I suggest that a regional theatre context for a community-based youth organization further complicates this constant negotiation. Jones and Perkins, as well as O'Donoghue and Strobel, are speaking to and researching relationships between facilitators and young participants. In our Intensive, however, we had an additional level of participation composed of the education staff, namely Erica, Lily, and Mary. Even further, their agency and role within McCarter influenced their relationship to the Intensive itself, as was evident in Erica's reflection on the administrative difficulties of the Story Circles.³⁸ In taking these levels of influence into account, I realize that my relationship as a teaching artist to the young people in the Intensive was not my own relationship to negotiate, but rather was subject to the changing roles expected of me as an employee. My roles and therefore my relationship to the students was also influenced by the changing roles expected of Erica, Lily, and Mary as both representatives of McCarter to the community and service providers to parents who paid student tuition for the Intensive.

³⁸ See page 71 for Erica's reflections.

There were times when the goals of staff, teaching artist, and young people were in total alignment. An example of this was around building ensemble. Mary, Lily, and Erica were all supportive and encouraging in their roles as producers, providing space and resources for whatever was needed to build ensemble among the young artists. As teaching artists, Joe and I brought our skills in facilitation and our knowledge of ensemble-building games and rituals to the group, while the young artists brought their previous experiences and their willingness to fully engage as ensemble members. We built an ensemble together in what Jones and Perkins might call a Youth-Adult Partnership, and the young artists reflected positively on this experience. I believe that our aligned goals were due to our clear expectations. McCarter's education staff explained to me before the Intensive that they expect teaching artists to cultivate collaborative, supportive ensembles in camp classes. On the first day, the students spent over an hour discussing the collaborative contract with me and Joe as the teaching artists, and we participated in daily activities to build ensemble. We talked openly, clearly and consistently about our appreciation for one another. Communication and clear expectations seemed to be a key for success in our roles as ensemble members.

There were times during the Intensive when a role shift for one group of people created a ripple effect, causing sudden role shifts for another group without communication or articulated expectations. One example of this was my conversation with Erica and Lily, where I shifted from a mentor for the young artists to a mentee of Lily and Erica, and where my relationship to them as an employee came into play. My responsibility to guide the students quickly to a finalized performance product became forefront in my mind; O'Donaghue and Strobel noted in their observation of community-based youth workers that "being held to an outside standard, such as getting a piece of work completed by a given deadline, negatively affected the egalitarian nature of youth-adult relationships"

(480). For me, this deadline meant a change in role from facilitator to director. My shift then meant a change in role for the young artists, and our relationship suddenly became one defined by Adult-Centered Leadership (Jones and Perkins para. 12-15). As this happened, our limited time frame restricted the opportunity to talk through expectations or goals in these new roles; we instead moved forward with minimal dialogue without acknowledging the shift. The young artists therefore had little power in their ability to navigate their roles as performers unless they explicitly advocated for their work, as Adhara's group did. As this shift happened later in the process, when O'Donaghue and Strobel explain that youth desire increasing levels of agency, the resulting decreasing level of youth agency led to a loss of morale and investment in the Intensive (478).

SHIFTING ROLES: A PLACE FOR ADULTS

While Jones and Perkins might suggest that a process entirely defined by Youth-Centered Leadership or Youth-Led Collaboration would produce a more positive experience for young people and teaching artists, adult skill and experience is useful in community-based youth theatre processes. Adult teaching artists can lend a critical understanding of systems, build knowledge in performance through scaffolded learning opportunities, and use their experiences to facilitate student discovery.

Alrutz and Snyder-Young argue that adult facilitators can provide a critical lens that challenges hegemonic practices in youth theatre (Alrutz 49; Snyder-Young "Rehearsals for Revolution?" 42-43), leading me to consider how I might have lent a more critical analysis of our collaborative contract while the students were writing, rather than simply scribing their responses freely. This did happen to some degree when I checked in with the students regarding the phrase "#beabro," but I wonder if our contract would have

so closely reflected concepts of safe space if I had contributed my understandings of Arao and Clemens' work on brave space terminology. Throughout the Intensive, however, I had several conversations with students about power, ethics, and representation onstage. We discussed identity in performance and questions about representing stories of marginalized communities. As we discussed gender identity and gender roles, I clearly defined terms like "gender identity" and "gender expression," providing some students with new vocabulary to express their ideas and questions. My position as the adult facilitator and my own personal interest in knowledge in social justice issues contributed to the students' growth as engaged community members. It should be noted, however, that I was able to do this because McCarter allowed free dialogue in our process. In other regional theatre contexts, it is possible that teaching artists may be prevented from introducing specific vocabulary or concepts around controversial issues.

My background and experience in building performance also contributed to the group's shared artistic knowledge. In her reflections on the role of adults in community-based youth devising processes, Horn offers, "adults should not be so hesitant to impose upon students that they miss opportunities to teach about artistic integrity" (198). Linda Camino's research on Youth-adult partnerships (Y-APs) compliments Horn's conclusions; she asserts that one major false understanding of Y-APs is the belief "that youth should do everything of importance" (Camino 77). During the Intensive, I felt a deep sense of guilt when introducing my own ideas, but I also completely took over aspects like design and performance structure when I felt we were running out of time. Camino explains, "youth desire to share responsibilities and tasks with adults, rather than do everything themselves. Moreover, youth welcome adult participation through coaching, guidance, modeling of behaviors, and sharing tasks" (77). Horn also argues that adult facilitators should invite input and dialogue around their artistic contributions (198-199). In other words, while my

experience and insights were valuable to the process, I could have collaborated more with students through facilitating dialogue around my ideas and articulating my thought processes to students.

Camino's explanation of a collaborative Y-AP reminds me of Heathcote's caveat regarding a mantle of the expert approach. Heathcote clarifies that young people engaged in mantle of the expert work "must never be asked to create the actual objects. If they had to do this their inexperience would become immediately apparent" (18). Here is a major tension between community-based youth theatre and a mantle of the expert approach: mantle of the expert work is based in an artificial set of circumstances that can be contrived for learning to take place within a classroom through what Jones and Perkins might call a Youth-Centered Partnership (para. 15). The learning opportunity revolves around the interests and learning of students with little adult intervention, but the learning opportunity holds little to no consequence for the world outside of the classroom. Community-based youth theatre, however, is neither artificial nor contained within a classroom. It is based in the real stories of the young artists and others in their communities, and their work has the potential to influence their communities and the producing regional theatre institution.

Researchers Reed W. Larson et al. state that there is greater complexity around youth agency when a program is also focused on skill-building, as the High School Institute was, admitting, "the priority given to youth agency may be tempered by the goal of having youth learn sophisticated skills within a field or by a high priority placed on the outcomes of the work" (860). In our Intensive, the experience and understandings that Joe and I brought to the process were assets, and we were able to use these assets to support the young artists as they discovered new paths of creativity and artistry in their work. Camino reminds us that this diversity of experience is an asset to Y-APs, saying, "If only youth are engaged in tasks of importance, a full range of human resources, specifically that existing

among adults, is not being used for the collective effort” (77). We encountered tension, however, when the pressure to produce a final performance led me to lean on our expertise and overlook assets and input from the students.

In their analysis of adult direction and youth agency in community-based youth programs, O’Donaghue and Strobel make room for a more adult-directed process, but they warn, “adults have to create balance in their own roles and continually check their sense and use of power. [...] such intentionality comes not only from adults but also from the organizational features and structures that support and constrain adult staff” (481). O’Donaghue and Strobel point to not only the responsibilities of teaching artists and education staff to acknowledge their privilege as adults, but also to the need for structural adjustments that allow teaching artists and education staff to support increasing levels of youth agency. In the case of the High School Intensive, we experienced a structural constraint of time, and it is possible that adjustments in the timeframe for our process might have eased pressure on the adult staff as we sought to support youth agency. The structural constraint of time for our process was also informed by other structural constraints within McCarter as an institution, however; Erica pointed to the institutional limitations that prevented a longer time frame for this Intensive in her interview:

[...] at least within the structure that exists for us, everything is pretty short-term compared to what I would consider optimal for a community-based project. [...] I think our longest class is 17 hour-and-a-half or two-hour sessions, which is like just not enough time to do [community-based youth theatre] in a responsible way. (Nagel)

Indeed, at 15 day-long sessions, the High School Intensive currently has the longest timeframe of any other McCarter education program. Erica’s constraints as an administrator—due to the needs of McCarter’s budget, spaces, and schedule—influenced my constraints as a teaching artist, ultimately impacting experience of the young people as

agentive artists. The agency that each of us experienced at any given moment during the Intensive was tied to the regional theatre context as well as the roles within which teaching artists, staff, and young people operated.

Our interconnectedness was on display throughout the Intensive. On Day 3, when students created Shakespeare Installations, the work of staff to pull together craft supplies and provide space for our installations allowed me to facilitate an activity directly related to McCarter's goal for the Intensive to include classic texts from the upcoming season. I gave students clear expectations for the activity and plenty of time to discuss the text, generate new ideas, and translate their ideas into performance. The young artists supported one another through dialogue and reflection on each installation, and many of the students reported a heightened sense of creativity on Day 3. In contrast, during the last few days of the Intensive, young artists articulated a loss of ownership, I felt a sense of helplessness, and the staff worked to problem-solve. With limited communication and unstated expectations, a sense of disappointment pervaded our work. Every choice made by each participant influenced other participants, leading to both positive and negative experiences for teaching artists, young people, and education staff. From generating a guiding question to performing personal stories on stage, communication and clear expectations around these roles shaped our relationships to one another and shaped our investment in the work itself.

PART THREE: QUESTIONS FOR ADVANCEMENT

Activist artists face the classic legacy question—is the next generation meant to be true to the spirit or the letter? How to strike a balance between upholding the most important principles discovered by a previous generation and allowing each cluster of artists to define its own priorities for its own times?

- Carol Martin³⁹

We try to teach our children certainties. [But it is] better to teach them nothing at all because the world is an uncertain place and it is facing serious issues. It's better to be honest and say we don't have the answers. It's better to work out what to do together.

— Purni Morell⁴⁰

When I remember the High School Intensive at McCarter, I must admit that I think of the performance day first. I think of the pit that sat in my stomach—not a pit of nerves, but of disappointment. I think of the faces of students like Sean and Nico and Adhara, students who were so excited and full of energy for the first two weeks of the Intensive. They were deflated on that final day, sorry to see the ensemble split up. And there seemed to be something else, too.

I walked up to Harry right after the performance: “Congratulations! Great work, Harry. How do you feel? Are you happy?”

“Of course I'm not happy. I'm...” Harry trailed off, looking down and shaking his head. He took a breath and mustered up a smile for me before walking past me towards the lobby and his family and friends.

I don't know what made Harry shake his head. The final performance was beautiful, parents were stunned by the work of their children, and the young artists received enthusiastic applause from the audience. I was haunted, however, by the sense that students

³⁹ (Martin 103)

⁴⁰ (qtd. in Gardner para. 7)

were disappointed by the path to that final moment of applause. It took me months to look openly at the data I collected during the Intensive. I had to remember that I will always be a failing revolutionary, that I will always make mistakes as a teaching artist and as an adult working with young people. This project allowed me, however, to consider the systemic and relational influences on my work as a teaching artist in devising processes. I wanted to know about the experiences of young people, teaching artists, and education staff in a community-based youth theatre process within the context of a regional theatre education program. I ultimately found that time, communication, and agency majorly influenced these experiences within this context, leading to some head shakes in addition to moments of pure joy. The Intensive wasn't a disappointment by any means. Sixteen brilliant young artists provided me, McCarter, and the field, with the valuable opportunity to consider an institutionalized setting for a grassroots process.

In Part III, I articulate the key understandings I gained through this research study in addition to possible areas for future research. I reflect on my methodology and the limitations of a Reflective Practitioner Research approach in a regional theatre setting. Finally, I offer suggestions for regional theatre education staff and community-based youth theatre practitioners, considering how attention to time, communication, and reciprocity might create space for exploration and collaboration beyond the generative phase.

Recommendations: Supporting Youth Agency in a Community-based Youth Theatre Process

Cultural democracy is about providing access to the means for cultural production and decision-making. It expresses localized culture, the cultural diversity of a community, through which art becomes a forum for community engagement.

- Diane Conrad, Peter Smyth, and Wallis Kendal⁴¹

As I consider the experiences of teaching artists, students, and education staff during the High School Intensive, I recognize the need for constant communication, flexible time structures, and reciprocal exchange between theatres and young community members. My experiences working with the young people in McCarter's High School Intensive deeply influenced the way I consider young people as artists and as students. Furthermore, I came to know these young artists as partners in creating performance that honors communities and celebrates difference. I am excited to further explore my role (or my many roles) in equipping and supporting emerging community-based practitioners as I move forward in my practice.

My reflections from this study have left me eager to incorporate a more transparent acknowledgement of roles and agency throughout theatre-making processes with young people. I believe that, as we acknowledge the differing responsibilities and priorities that define our roles, we can also co-construct expectations for collaboration within those roles. Additionally, I am anxious to consider structural shifts in regional theatre contexts that might add space for abundant dialogue as young artists navigate devised processes. Finally, I am left further convinced of the need for reciprocal exchange between young people and regional theatre institutions. I believe that these recommendations ultimately support one another; as Conrad and Sinner point out in the above epigraph, supporting cultural

⁴¹ (Conrad et. al 23)

production—where young people can create work and practice agentic decision-making—leads to community engagement through art, incorporating theatre organizations into the fabric of their neighborhoods (23).

During community-based devising processes with young people, dialogic communication around shifting roles with young people can prevent a loss in investment and morale as they navigate differing levels of agency. Drama therapist Ted Rubenstein points to the power of acknowledgement as a means of claiming agency, maintaining, “Naming is a process of knowing and of agency. Once we put a name to something, we can begin to understand it and exert some agency, if not control over it” (qtd. in Alrutz 45). I suggest that creating rituals for reflection and dialogue around agency throughout community-based youth theatre processes can prevent resentment in the Youth-Adult Partnerships that feature in these processes. Indeed, Jones and Perkins point to the need for naming perceptions and adjustments resulting from shifting roles. They advise, “perceptions of both youth and adults must be examined on an ongoing basis to form adaptations to a group’s structure and decision-making process”(104). In other words, for teaching artists to support communicative ensembles, we must also engage deeply in vulnerable communication regarding our level of authority in the room. During the High School Intensive, my hesitancy to do so became a hindrance to the project. Camino admits that the idea that “adults just need to get out of the way and give up their power” is common among adults working towards agentic youth processes (78). She elucidates the underlying misconception of this conception:

The belief that adults need to ‘give up power’ is predicated on a legitimate concern that real power differentials between adolescents and adults make youth passive and disengage. The value orientation is clear and positive: to transform asymmetrical relationships between youth and adults into more symmetrical ones that are characterized by an atmosphere of equality. [...] The fallacy of this perspective is that it conceives of “power” as part of a

zero-sum equation. That is, the only way youth can gain power is for adults to give up power.

I have observed that adults frequently confuse the concepts of institutional and personal power. Wishing to cede some of their institutional power, adults often also abdicate their personal power—which is grounded in their experience and wisdom. (Camino 78)

Teaching artists can both contribute their expertise and support youth agency in community-based youth theatre processes. The key is regular, open, honest dialogue around power and how it is functioning in the room. I contend that education staff and teaching artists might also benefit from consistent, almost ritualized acknowledgments of their shifting roles with one another, clarifying expectations along the way.

SUPPORTING YOUTH AGENCY: FLEXIBLE TIME STRUCTURES

Writing about staged personal narratives, performance studies scholars Lynn Miller and Jacqueline Taylor explain:

Many of the creators directly address the absence of stories such as theirs; they desire to move from the position of misrepresented and passive subject to a more powerful position of creative agency, through the shaping of lived experience into performance. (216)

Miller and Taylor's analysis directly relates to the staged personal narratives of young artists in the Intensive, who declared to the audience in their epilogue, "We hear what's said [about us]/We don't agree" ("Script"). As they created community-based performance based in their own stories as well as stories from community members, the young artists were able to move from "misrepresented and passive subject to a more powerful position of creative agency" (216). In community-based youth performance, the very act of creating personal performance is a means of claiming agency. Hull and Katz support this notion,

arguing that “people can develop agentive selves” through semiotic means including generative performance (47).

In this study, I found that tension arose when we moved generated work into a period of refinement that was characterized by rushed feedback. While I have limited data from student reflections during the last week of the Intensive, my own experience as a teaching artist was more positive during the first two weeks of generating performance than during the last week of the Intensive. Strict deadlines can put pressure on teaching artists and negatively impact collaboration between adults and young people (O’Donogue and Strobel 480). This leads me to wonder if the deadline of a final performance places limitations on youth agency. However, culminating performances also focus a process, provide a rewarding experience for young people, and move the stories of youth into the public sphere within a genuine community-based performance context. Additionally, regional theatres typically market their youth theatre programs as both a process and a product that includes the opportunity for young people to perform onstage.

Recognizing the complexity at hand, I suggest that regional theatres consider exploring different time structures for community-based youth theatre. Theatres might employ a structure of a six-hour workshop once a month during the school year, culminating in a two-week summer class that ends with the final performance they’ve created over a year. Another option might be an after-school class that meets twice a week throughout the school year. Theatres wanting to avoid a full-year model might structure a community-based youth program with several mini-Intensives, perhaps ten weekends with two full-day workshops, that take place over a 6-month period. To limit the program to summer dates, perhaps the Intensive could be on a 6-week or 4-week timeline to allow more room for discovery, feedback, and refinement. A study that researches how a similar curricular structure is experienced within varying time structures may provide deeper

insight into the influence of time on youth agency in community-based youth theatre processes.

Overall, however, I believe that community-based youth theatre requires more time than most other youth theatre projects. Community-based practice requires intensive research, deep reflection, generative artistry, and careful craftsmanship; young artists in community-based youth programs need time to learn how to create community-based performance, and they need time to learn through refining their work. Short time frames provided for young artists to produce original work neglect to leave space for the depth of meaning and intention found in the artistry of young people.

SUPPORTING YOUTH AGENCY: LEGITIMACY AND RECIPROCITY

At the intersection of community-based theatre, youth theatre, and regional theatre is a commonly-held desire for legitimacy. Regional theatres initially produced educational programming motivated by a need for greater legitimacy and relevancy in their communities (Ziegler 171). Community-based artists constantly struggle with a perceived lack of legitimacy as artists, attempting to resist what Cohen-Cruz calls “the stereotypic conception of community-based art as an oxymoron” (*Performing Democracy* 223). Young people hope to be seen as legitimately contributing artists and community members, desiring structural agency that recognizes them “not just consumers of services but full partners contributing to their own development and that of the community” (Jones and Perkins 105).

Viewing this commonly-held desire from a capitalistic lens, we might imagine that there’s not enough legitimacy to go around. Legitimacy, as well as the funding and prestige that might accompany it, might be seen as a fixed resource. I propose, however, that young

people, regional theatre institutions, and community-based artists can grow legitimacy together, building power for one another. To do this, leaders and practitioners in these groups must adjust our mindsets to recognize that providing resources for others to create performance does not come at a loss to professional artists, as Zelda Fichandler once feared (Fichandler 311).

In an overview of the field of community development scholars Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker describe a *women-centered model of community development*, as opposed to the Alinsky model that views “society as a compromise between competing self-interested individuals in the public sphere” (203). They describe the women-centered model as follows:

Rather than a morality of individual rights, women develop a collectivist orientation and learn a morality of responsibility connected to relationships. [...] Women-centered organizers view justice not as a compromise between self-interested individuals but as a practical reciprocity in the network of relationships that make up the community. (203-204)

In this description of a women-centered model, Stall and Stoecker reference the practice of reciprocity that informed relationships between McCarter and the young artists throughout this study, as institution, staff, teaching artists, and students embraced the needs of one another as connected to their own. Camino celebrates the potential of reciprocal relationships between youth and adults, asserting, “youth and adults can work on issues that matter to them both. [...] The vision is to locate ways for youth and adults to join together for shared action, and in the process create environments for individual development, as well as for the common good” (84). I believe that, without setting aside their own needs, regional theatre institutions, community-based artists, and young people can harness their assets to build a more equitable and just society for one another, for themselves, and for their communities. It is particularly critical to work towards a goal of

mutual benefit through reciprocal relationships at this time when federal funding structures and supports for young people and arts institutions are at risk.

While teaching artists may not have the agency to affect institutional change towards reciprocity with young people, we are uniquely positioned to support young people and regional theatre staff as they dismantle harmful systems of value together. To do this, teaching artists—particularly white teaching artists—facilitating community-based youth theatre processes must continue to attend to and dismantle our deeply embedded biases and discriminatory perceptions. We must be vigilant to uncover the layers of privilege that allow us to navigate systems of value and legitimacy differently than the young artists with whom we collaborate. We need to educate ourselves to know how to center young artists, especially young artists from marginalized communities of identity. This is our constant, never-ending work. In my own life, this self-education means following and listening to community organizers, particularly women of color, who are working to address injustice on both personal and systemic levels. It means reading articles and books by marginalized folks about their experiences, avoiding books by privileged folks who are speaking for marginalized folks. It means asking for accountability and remaining open to criticism. This is work that must be ongoing, rigorous, and vulnerable, for it is far too easy for me to return to notions of supremacy and actions/inactions of complacency that are based in my privileged identities. And, at the same time we are centering students with marginalized identities, we must also challenge and support young, community-based artists with privilege to do the same rigorous work. As current members and future leaders of our field, young community-based artists must be trained and encouraged to acknowledge and change individual discriminatory patterns and behaviors while dismantling institutional structures of oppression.

Limitations and Possibilities

I have found my greatest struggle in remembering that the process is how you connect your practice to theory. So eager was I to put the theories I had learned in school to work, that I often forgot that there would be no “finished product” but an ongoing and ever-changing journey.

— Julia Di Bussolo⁴²

This research document reflected upon the 2016 High School Intensive Class at McCarter Theatre Center, asking three central questions: What are the experiences of young people in a community-based youth theatre process in a regional theatre context? What are the experiences of their teaching artists? What are the experiences of education staff producing a community-based youth theatre process in a regional theatre context? I draw my definition of community-based youth theatre from Jan Cohen-Cruz’s articulated principles of community-based performance and Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson’s research on youth theatre. This thesis expands Heather Ikemire’s consideration of community-based youth theatre programs by specifically examining the context of a regional theatre institution and including the experiences of education staff as a site for inquiry and reflection.

The community-based youth theatre project at McCarter used devising strategies and community-based practices such as Story Circles, interviews, and personal storytelling to create an original performance integrated with excerpts of a classic text, *Saint Joan* by George Bernard Shaw. To reflect on the process and its context in a regional theatre, I gathered data through interviews with staff, student journals, artifacts and photographs from class, lesson plans, recorded and filmed conversations, a student survey, and my own reflective log. Through a thematic analysis of this data, I found that the experiences of students, staff, and teaching artists were centered around five aspects of the community-

⁴² (Di Bussolo para 1.)

based devising process: Ensemble, Generating Form and Content, Community Connection, Generating Performance, and Shaping Performance. Through a reflective practitioner research approach, I discerned that students, teaching artists, and education staff took on different roles, or different positions in the process as defined by responsibilities, priorities, and power. These roles of youth, teaching artists, and staff are intertwined and interdependent; as one person's position in the process changes, the roles of others are also shifted.

I believe that when theatres prioritize the agency of young people as artists and community members, they make room for reciprocal exchange and authentic relationships with their youngest neighbors. Because of this belief, I noted the location of youth agency as roles of students, teaching artists, and education staff changed, intersected, and merged in this study. I suggest that communication and clear expectations between staff, students, and teaching artists can serve to support youth agency in the midst of these interdependent shifts, and that ample time is necessary for dialogue, co-constructed expectations, and acknowledgement of change in leadership.

This reflective practitioner study intentionally took place in a regional theatre context, and as such was limited by several concerns. However, the specific context also allows for specific suggestions for future research and practice, and the experiences of young people, teaching artists, and staff at McCarter hold implications for regional theatre institutions implementing community-based youth theatre programs. In this section, I identify the limitations of this study and I propose areas for expanding research and refining practice in community-based youth theatre in a regional theatre context.

LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

The regional theatre context creates limitations for reflective practitioner research. Because students paid to be a part of the Intensive, it was important for their learning and artistic experiences to be prioritized over gathering data for research. In short, I was hired by McCarter to be a teaching artist, not a researcher. Because it was a tuition-based course, students needed to have similar opportunities, regardless of their participation in the study. This meant that there could not be separate activities for participants—such as group or individual interviews—during the class day. Additionally, because relationships with parents are maintained through McCarter, not teaching artists, it was difficult to obtain consent forms and get responses for a follow-up survey to students (only one participant completed the survey). Finally, the rushed nature of the Intensive during the last week meant that I did not follow through with the initial design for this study. I was unable to make time for student journal entries during the last week, and two students (Nico and Laura) are less represented throughout the study because I was unable to scan their journals and collect the data before the journals were taken home. These challenges reflect drawbacks to reflective practitioner research within a regional theatre context, even while I recognize the value of this methodology for addressing my research questions.

While the reflective practitioner research methodology was highly useful for reflecting upon practice and my experiences as a teaching artist in the study, I am interested in using an ethnographic research approach to study community-based youth theatre programs in other regional theatre institutions in the future. An ethnographic approach will allow me to gather rich, detailed information and data that is difficult to record objectively as a teaching artist. An ethnographic methodology will also allow me to learn from different teaching artists and their diverse practices in community-based youth theatre while paying close attention to agency and shifting roles throughout the process.

POSSIBILITIES IN PRACTICE

As a practitioner, the High School Intensive students challenged and encouraged my practice on a daily basis. In my future work, I hope to respond to their challenges by being more communicative, transparent, and dialogic. During any future collaborative contract-building conversations, I plan to communicate openly about the many roles that we play in community-based youth theatre. I hope to invite future young participants to name those roles and construct expectations for each role in order to be transparent around the nature of agency and collaboration during any point of the creative process. I will explore more practices for giving feedback in a dialogic, reciprocal, agentic manner with young generative artists. Finally, I am eager to explore more research in the area of Youth-Adult Partnerships as a means of growing my practice and engaging with community-based youth theory outside of the arts. The research I encountered around Youth-Adult Partnerships during this study has already led me to question my entrenched patterns in the rehearsal process, especially within youth theatre contexts.

For my own future work and for teaching artists, staff, and young artists engaging in community-based youth theatre, reflection following the performance is imperative. Because I did not reflect on the final performance in this document, I do not reflect on our lack of a post-show dialogue with the audience and post-show reflections with one another. However, this was a critical step that we missed because of the time structure of the Intensive. Erica reflected adding time for a post-show dialogue with the audience would be a key change should McCarter take on a project like this again, adding that such a dialogue “[...] can sort of knock down some of the process-product binary because they do their whole thing and then they can articulate how they got there” (Nagel). I know for my own reflective praxis and for the students’ praxis, additional time after the performance for

conversation within the ensemble about the performance and the process as a whole would have aided our growth as artists and collaborators. We did take time before the performance to engage in some reflective activities, but without space for reflection after that on-stage experience with an audience to witness the work, the reflection was not about the whole process. As I work towards communicating more throughout the process, I also plan to make time for more communication after the culmination of processes, recognizing that perceptions change and grow as artists move into public performance.

Education staff looking to support youth agency in community-based youth theatre processes can also work towards practices in transparency, communication, and dialogue. Education staff and teaching artists can practice the ideas of acknowledging roles, co-constructing expectations, and engaging in dialogue around feedback in their own collaborations. I found that the summer camp model, with its multiple simultaneous processes and final performances, placed constraints on staff's capacity to engage with the young artists in our Intensive and facilitate dialogue around proposed changes. Therefore, I suggest that community-based youth theatre projects might be best served when situated during a time period unburdened by other large programmatic demands for education staff.

POSSIBILITIES IN FUTURE RESEARCH

Education staff in regional theatres are extremely busy, and while many use assessment tools to understand the needs of their students and teaching artists, it is challenging, if not impossible, to undertake qualitative research studies without outside help. However, regional theatres are producing and facilitating community-based youth theatre programs all across the country, providing a site for critical research. How are these programs influencing attendance and engagement in other programming? How do young

people define their communities, and where do regional theatres fit in those definitions? How can these programs construct possibilities for equipping young community-based artists with the theory, tools, and artistic experience to create work independent of adults? Teaching artists, education staff, and students alike possess a wealth of wisdom and experience regarding grassroots practices in institutionalized contexts, and much of this wisdom is transferrable to the fields of community engagement and community-based performance as a whole.

Youth theatre processes, particularly community-based youth theatre processes, provide a rich area for future research. I look forward to continuing to explore youth agency during the rehearsal process using theoretical frameworks and assessment tools from research in non-arts community-based youth programs. I am particularly interested in the usefulness of Jones' Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale (84-86) to invite the perspectives of teaching artists, young people, and education staff regarding youth agency throughout devising processes. This rating scale allows young people and adults to evaluate their own perceptions of youth agency, and can serve as a helpful tool for further understanding the five aspects of community-based youth theatre processes that arose in this study. How is agency functioning as young artists generate form and content versus when young artists are refining their performance? Do young artists perceive that they have more agency when in role as ensemble members as opposed to when in role as performers? This scale will provide an opportunity for understanding how each of these roles are experienced by youth, teaching artists, and staff at various points of the process.

For the purposes of this thesis research, I did not study the final performance generated by Intensive artists. Snyder-Young advocates for youth performance as a site of critical inquiry ("Youth Theatre as Cultural Artifact" 177); I agree, and I plan to use data collected during this study as well as my experience of the final performance to study the

work of these young artists. In the future, I hope to design a multi-sited ethnographic study to lift up the work of young artists in regional theatres throughout the United States, and to continue observing the experiences of teaching artists, students, and education staff. I will make these observations with an ethnographic research methodology, over varying time periods and with multiple community-based youth theatre projects. For this future study, I look to Diane Conrad's collaborative research methodology to consider ways to add young artists as researchers rather than participants (Conrad et. al 26-28). I am excited to shift from a reflective practitioner approach to a collaborative, youth-centered research methodology, aiming to include the voices of young people in both performance and scholarship.

Young Neighbors, Big Questions

A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the space define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves.

—Wendell Berry⁴³

Throughout this thesis, I have used stories from my own youth as metaphors and illustrations, not because I was a particularly interesting young person, but because I believe that the stories of young people—myself included—are valid and useful for exploring big questions. As I conclude this thesis, I offer one final story and many big questions that I hope to investigate alongside young people for many years to come.

My parents made the decision to move from West Palm Beach, Florida to Greenville, South Carolina on the day of my sixteenth birthday. Our house immediately went on the market, and my parents, desperate to sell in a declining housing market, frequently sent my brother, our dog, and me out of the house for long walks when potential buyers came to visit. One day, we changed our route and walked to the other side of our suburban neighborhood. We were a quarter of a mile away from our house, and we met a boy, younger than us, dribbling his basketball on the sidewalk. He welcomed us to the neighborhood enthusiastically.

“Oh, thanks, but we're not new here. We're actually moving out.”

“Really? I've never seen you before. When did you move here?”

“Well... eleven years ago.”

“No way. I've been here for eight years. How have I never seen you?”

“I... I don't know.”

⁴³ (Berry, *Long-Legged House* 71)

“Oh. I’m sorry you’re leaving. We could have been friends.”

This moment was the turning point for my relationship to community. I realized that without intention and without exploration, I risk losing opportunities for deep connections with others.

In sharing their experiences, the High School Intensive artists and McCarter’s education team invited me to further explore the possibilities of community-based youth theatre in regional theatre contexts. My research leaves me with a number of questions regarding young artists and the implications of context for their work. To borrow language from Berry, what is my role as a teaching artist, as someone who “defines and limits the possibilities” of young people’s artistry? How can regional theatre institutions and young people align their purposes and build power together? How can young people influence their communities through performance? What does it mean for adults to support the goals young people have for their communities, and how can we best collaborate with them to express those goals through performance?

As professional artists, theatre is an art form we share with young people and community members of all identities and backgrounds. Theatre can become a site for community, a site for possibility, when—as Berry says in *The Long-Legged House*—we know each other, we are concerned for each other, we trust each other, and when we make room for freedom and agency. As Adhara reflected during the Developmental Sharing, “We’re all telling different stories about the same questions” (Reflective Log #10). Let’s tell stories and ask questions together.

Appendix A: Community-based Youth Programs in LORT Member Theatres

	Theatre Name	Name of Program	Program Website Address
1	ACT: A Contemporary Theatre	Young Playwright's Program	http://www.acttheatre.org/Education/Program
2	Actor's Theatre Louisville	A Living Newspaper	https://actorstheatre.org/make-plays/living-newspaper/
3	Alley Theatre	First Draft	https://www.alleytheatre.org/education/for-community/first-draft
4	Alliance Theatre	The Collision Project	http://alliancetheatre.org/content/palefsky-collision-project
5	A.C.T. American Conservatory Theatre	Stage Coach	http://www.act-sf.org/home/education/stagecoach.html
6	A.R.T. American Repertory Theatre	Proclamation	http://americanrepertorytheater.org/page/proclamation-ensemble
7	Arena Stage	Voices of Now	http://www.arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now/
8	Arizona Theatre	My Story	http://www.arizonatheatre.org/education-programs/
9	Asolo Repertory Theatre	Faces of Change	http://asolorep.org/education/faces-of-change
		Kaleidoscope	http://asolorep.org/education/kaleidoscope
10	Barter Theatre	Project Real	http://www.bartertheatre.com/education/project-real
11	Dallas Theatre Center	Public Works	http://www.dallastheatercenter.org/subpage2.php?sid=229
12	Goodman Theatre	PlayBuild	http://www.goodmantheatre.org/Engage-Learn/education-programs/playbuildyouth/
13	Hartford Stage	Project: Transform	https://www.hartfordstage.org/project-transform
14	Huntington Theatre	Not Waiting on the World to Change	http://www.huntingtontheatre.org/education/not-waiting-on-the-world-to-change/
15	Kansas City Repertory Theatre	Youth Summer Intensive	http://kcrep.org/youth-summer-intensive

16	Long Wharf Theatre	Moments and Minutes	http://longwharf.org/moments-minutes-festival
17	Manhattan Theatre Club	Giving Voice	http://longwharf.org/moments-minutes-festival
18	Merrimack Repertory Theatre	Young Company	http://www.mrt.org/young-company-0
19	The Milwaukee Rep	After School Program	https://www.milwaukeeep.com/Engage--Learn/Education-Programs/After-School-Program/
20	The Northlight Theatre	Speak Up!	https://northlight.org/programs/speakup-on-campus/
21	Seattle Repertory Theatre	Public Works Seattle	http://www.seattlerep.org/Programs/PublicWorks
22	Syracuse Stage	Random Acts	http://syracusestage.org/randomacts.php
		artsEMERGING	http://syracusestage.org/arts-emerging.php

Appendix B: Unpacking Terminology

These terms are included throughout the document without definition. Below, I include definitions from key scholars for each term, and I explain how the term is used in this document.

Community

Helen Nicholson writes extensively about the definition of community as it relates to applied theatre and community-based performance in *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*. She delineates two forms of community: “communities of location” and “communities of identity” (Nicholson 90, 97). Nicholson says of community of location, “identity is created and performed in dialogue with others and with the emotional geography of place.” She goes on to explain, “communities of identity are constructed when people recognize their own experiences in others, and share an understanding of each other’s values or stories” (Nicholson 97). In this thesis document, my definition of community wavers between the young artist’s community of location in Princeton and the surrounding areas and their community of identity as young people.

Ethnography

Creswell defines ethnography as “a design of inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time” (14). In my proposal of a future ethnographic study, I am considering a qualitative study in which I will observe processes and interview study participants, gathering rich, descriptive detail without taking part in the actual process as a teaching artist.

Hegemony

Kay E. Cook defines hegemony for *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* as follows:

Most basically, hegemony refers to the domination of one group of people over another. More specifically, and more relevant to critical qualitative research, it refers to the domination of the ideas of one group over those of another. As such, hegemony refers to the mainstream deployment and acceptance of ideologies that justify the inequities inherent in modern society including capitalism, sexism, racism, and so on. Hegemonic domination can take place with or without the use of physical force; however, it is often domination achieved not by force, but through ideological means. (385)

In this document, I frequently refer to cultural hegemony in institutional and performance practices, by which I mean practices that serve Western, white, cis-gender, heterosexual, ableist, patriarchal, adult-centric understandings of legitimacy and value.

Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw originally coined the term intersectionality to frame Black women's experiences of oppressions as intersections of race- and gender-based oppression. In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," she describes intersectionality as "the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color" (1244). Crenshaw added that oppression based in other forms of identity can also intersect in a person's experience of oppression.

Praxis

Dawson and Kellin describe praxis as “an ongoing, reiterative cycle of reflection and action that moves the individual toward a new critical awareness. It *is* about what one does; but also, why one does it, and how choices reference and impact larger systems of power and the people/policies/structures within them” (Dawson and Kellin 215). In this document, I speak mainly about my own community-based praxis and applied theatre praxis. My work in both of these fields of practice is informed by reflection and an eye towards systems, and I aim to invite young people into community-based praxis to reflect on and examine the systems in their own lives.

Privilege

Rita Hardiman, Bailey Jackson, and Pat Griffin summarize the work of researchers like Peggy McIntosh and Allan G. Johnson to provide the following definition of privilege: “exclusive advantages or benefits afforded to certain people, based on their identity or status (Johnson, 2006; McIntosh; Wildman 1996). These advantages are largely unearned and are often invisible to the people enjoying them” (eds. Adams et. al 38). In this document, I often talk about my age-based privilege as an adult working with young people; this includes such privileges as being heard in public spaces, having the opportunity and agency to make my own choices, and having my privacy respected by others. I also reference white privilege, cis-privilege, heterosexual privilege, and my privilege as an able-bodied person.

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Vita

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This thesis was typed by Cortney Elizabeth McEniry.