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# Your Story Matters: Theatre for Community in Practice with the Boys and Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal

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**Your Story Matters: Theatre for Community in Practice with the Boys and Girls Club of  
Bloomington-Normal**

**Sarah Menke**

**Research Honors**

The current education climate is clouded with meager financial backing, an absence of fundamental resources, and government pressure. Despite these disparities, one must not forget what is at the core of education: a student and a teacher. This relationship is necessary to the growth of society. But, it is a relationship that fosters unequal power dynamics. Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator and philosopher, describes the normal education system as, “the ‘banking’ concept, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing deposits (46).” According to Freire, the current system promotes the notion that teachers are the most knowledgeable, that the teacher’s voice is the only one that deserves to be heard.

One way to break this authoritarian approach to education is through theatre. When a student is given the opportunity to create, the student is given permission to speak up and to share part of her mind and soul with the world. Laura Bates, author of, “The Play’s The Thing, Literary Adaptations For Children’s Theatre,” states the significance of theatre for children as, teaching, “children such important life lessons as tolerance and respect for diversity” also saying, “the act of acting itself teaches skills as collaboration, teamwork, trust, and self-confidence (37).” As students strengthen this skill set, they begin to discover more about themselves and their peers. In a sense, they begin to take back the power for themselves, and in doing so, recognize the need for action. This type of theatre leans towards a theatre that is committed to making a change.

“Applied Theatre” is a useful umbrella term for all committed to the power of theatre in making a difference to the human life span (Taylor 93). It is played in spaces that are not traditionally defined as theatre buildings. The performances include participants who may or may not be skilled in theatre arts and audiences who have a vested interest in the issue taken up

by the performance or are members of the community. One category of Applied Theatre is “Theatre for Community.” Community is vital to one’s sense of humanity; to be human is to weave through the web of beautiful, complicated, and essential relationships. This theatre provides a platform for individuals to come together, share in stories that unite them, and explore their differences.

A strong community leads to a unified people who believe in each other to make change. Bethany Nelson, theatre educator, recalls the essential role of community while playmaking with urban youth,

The role of community was an unanticipated foundational component of the outcome of this research that was connected, according to the participants, to their emerging understanding of societal discrimination and the need for change, as well as their sense of themselves as people with something to say that deserves to be heard (165).

Nelson’s case study and countless others led me to ask several questions: Can this work? What are the challenges surrounding Applied Theatre in practice? What are the advantages? I set out to research the place in which I lived, Bloomington-Normal, Illinois. I partnered with the Boys and Girls Club and completed a five month residency as a teaching artist; working with teens ages eleven through fifteen.

My goal for the project was for the teens to discover the power of their voice through a devised theatre performance chronicling their experience in Bloomington-Normal. Through this program and performance, I wanted them to walk away with the belief that their stories matter. Their stories deserve to be told. My own story as a first-time teaching artist is one of imperfection. Through my time at the Boys and Girls Club, I have learned that one cannot *know* this work, until she *does* this work. Applied Theatre in practice positioned me atop small hills of

victory and at the bottom of mountains of defeat. My research led me to discover that my role was not to be their mouth piece, but to be their microphone.

When I first set out to do this project, I had thought my audience would be students from Illinois Wesleyan University. I wanted to educate my peers about what the faces of this community actually looked like. But, this presented a problem. This suggested the notion that *I* was an expert about the Bloomington-Normal community and the teens who lived there. A “Theatre for Community” performance must include the community in all aspects: performer and audience. How was I in a position to educate my peers when I really had no clue myself as to the daily lives of the teens I would be working with?

The practice of Applied Theatre works under the assumption that both facilitator and participant are equally knowledgeable. Monica Prendergast and Julie Saxton articulate this well when they say, “Key to applied theatre facilitation is the recognition that the community participants – both actors and spectators – hold the knowledge of the subject under investigation, whereas the facilitator holds the aesthetic knowledge of the theatre form (18).” This is another way in which this type of theatre works toward breaking down the disproportionate power dynamics between teacher and student. As students tell their stories, they are teaching each other and their teacher.

My first visit to the club led me to examine my privilege and role as a teaching artist in a way I had not experienced before. I waited to observe a class with excitement and anticipation. I couldn’t wait to make the transition from reading about this work to participating in it. Once I got there though, I wanted to retreat back to the safety of my tiny campus. I didn’t know this

community as I thought I did. During my time at the Boys and Girls Club, I kept a journal after every session. The following is my journal entry from October 9, 2014,

Yesterday was my first day at the Boys and Girls Club with the kids. It was wild. And I'm not talking like big roller coaster, high drop wild. For that at least you're strapped in. I'm talking chaos, and the chaos didn't end. When I first arrived there were kids running around and screaming. I just figured it was due to the time- we were in-between classes. But the frenetic energy persisted into the hour. The group leader couldn't get control of her group. All of the kids were far too spread out and over stimulated. There were so many things to draw their attention away from what they were supposed to be doing- books, comfy bean bag chair, yarn, curtains, jumping on and off the stage. I felt helpless. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't near tears watching everything unfold. Many kids trailed away from the group and I didn't see them for the rest of the hour. For the kids that remained, I grabbed a book off the shelf and we came up with different voices and characters for different colors. They really enjoyed it I think. As I was walking out, Grant Anderson looked at me and said, "So, how was it?" I responded with, "It was a lot!" "More chaotic than you thought it was going to be?" "Definitely. But I can handle a little chaos." What I was actually thinking: "Holy shit. Can I do this?" I know I can. When I was actually doing an improv lesson, connecting with the small group of boys and girls that would listen, I felt great. It was a feeling of familiarity and control. I was in the zone. But the ever looming question: how do we get there from the very start? Every lesson for sixteen weeks? How do I assert my authority? If this this the atmosphere that they are accustomed to, how do I bend without breaking? How can we meet in the middle? What I want to accomplish can't be done if I have no one's attention, if no one is listening or engaged. I left with a lot more questions than answers. But that's ok. I'm a problem solver. I love to ask questions, work and search to discover the answer, and then ask more questions. One thing's for certain: I was very aware that I was an outsider today. I didn't fit in. As I rode my bike off campus, past the business men of downtown, farther and farther west, I felt a feeling I've never felt before. I felt foreign. I would pass men and women on the street and they would look at me like, "What is this white girl doing here? Shouldn't she be back at that nice college I'm sure she's from, reading some book?" Don't worry, I peddle and I ask myself those same questions. Amidst the screaming children and suspicious looks, I wanted to get back to the comfort of my tiny campus. A campus where no one questions my being there and loudest the students ever get is when someone tells a funny joke. I was aware that I was white and possessed this privilege that I thought and claimed I knew I had. You can't get that feeling from reading a

book, picturing yourself there. You have to go there. I'm in it – I'm in this community that I've lived in for three and a half years. I'm experiencing it like never before. And I'm not turning back.

Two of my personal goals were to be curious throughout this process and to get out of my comfort zone. I spent the past three years working with mostly white, liberal, upper middle class to middle class college students. Group discussions were met by eager individuals who had a plethora of insights but quietly listened until it was their time to speak. At the Boy and Girls Club, I was now trying to get the attention of teens who cared more about what color marker they were going to use than about what I had to say. I was very much out of my comfort zone. This led to an examination of myself and how I related to those around me. I knew a large part of this project would include being curious about the lives of the teens, I didn't expect I would have to be curious about my own life. In my search for an identity as a teaching artist, I had to ask questions such as what does privilege mean? How am I going to relate to the teens? What is getting in the way of that connection? I often grappled with the striking truth that the answer could be me.

Despite my reservations about working outside my comfort zone, I began my work as an independent teaching artist. The first two weeks of the program went great! The first week, I had seven enthusiastic, bright, and creative girls. My first lesson centered on the theme of, "you have a story." I asked the girls to think about their day as a story. Who was the hero and villain of their day? What was the beginning, middle, and end? They were open and excited to devise mini scenes based on their own stories. The three scenes that were presented were reflective of the teens' inherent humor and intelligence. I left that first week feeling encouraged that this project could be something.

The second week, we came up with classroom rules. Instead of going into the Boys and Girls Club with a list of do's and don'ts, I asked the teens to come up with rules that should govern our classroom. What was important to *them* in terms of having a safe, productive, and fun learning environment? The group grew from about seven to eleven. It was more of a challenge to get the collective to focus, but not impossible. The first few weeks were a great lesson in seeing how parts of my education could be put into practice in the real world. On November 13, 2014, I wrote,

All of these things I've been working on, crafting during my time here are being put to use. I have to take control of the room and be that voice of authority. I have to think quick on my feet and problem solve in the moment or else I'll lose the group. It's all about reacting and acting off of what I'm getting.

I felt like I was beginning to hit my stride.

Throughout my fourteen weeks, I struggled to find the balance between being the authority in the room and being someone the teens could trust. I had to command the space, but I also had to be fun and engaging while doing it. Week Three left me walking this tight rope. The teens didn't feel comfortable putting the stories of their own lives on stage for all to see. They wanted to have lines, wear crazy costumes, and play pretend. They wanted to create theatre- their idea of theatre. During Week Three, I scratched what I had planned for the day and listened. We sat in a circle, and I asked them about what types of movies, books, and plays interested them. They started spitting out their favorite parts from *Mr. Peabody and Sherman* and *Maleficent*. For the first time, I genuinely *listened* to what they wanted to say. I had to let go of the expectations that I had placed upon them and this project. They would discover the power of their own voice through an adaptation of a classic story. I learned the value of the lesson

described by Prendergast and Saxton, “the emphasis being on the experience itself and the process of creation rather than the product of creative acts” (9).

The next few weeks were spent in choosing a story to adapt. We did activities exploring their favorite stories and had brainstorming sessions. The teens came up with a list of possible shows and voted on doing an adaptation of *Sleeping Beauty*. From there, we jumped into explorations of character and plot. Some lessons were only mildly successful. Others were a big hit! Here is an example of a theatre lesson I used during Week Seven.

#### Week 7

Title: Retell the Story

Number of Participants: 11

Age of Participants: 11-15

Length: 60 minutes

Goal: To explore structural points in *Sleeping Beauty* and *Maleficent*

Hook: Cover the Space (created by Michael Rohd)

10 minutes

I will set up a big rectangle in the room, using four chairs to mark the four corners. Everyone will start walking around the designated space. The rules are no talking, no contact, and to keep moving. After a little while I will tell everyone to be aware of their own body, the bodies around them, and the space on the floor. I may ask them to begin to make certain that the space on the floor is covered. They need to keep moving at all times, get corners and sidelines, and to always move to empty spaces to “cover the space.” I will shout “Freeze!” and point out how they are doing, and send them right back to covering the space. It’s a game of freezing, getting new instructions, and finding their rhythm again.

Belief Building: Retell the Story

20 minutes of Plan and Rehearsal

Students will break into groups of three. Each group will be assigned a key plot point of *Sleeping Beauty* or *Maleficent*. The group will create a short skit retelling that plot point. The skits can be whatever they want it to be! Which characters does this plot point include? What happens at this point in the story? What new characters would they add, if any? Do they want to have a narrator and have others in the group act out the narration? They decide!

#### Plot points

- Fairies grant child gifts of Beauty, song, and Maleficent puts curse on Aurora
- Maleficent lures Aurora to touch the spindle and Aurora falls asleep
- Three fairies and Phillip slay the dragon to get to Aurora
- Aurora restores Maleficent's wings and their kingdoms are united
- Maleficent captures Prince Phillip and puts him in prison

#### Problem Solving

15-20 minutes

#### Presentation of skits

#### Reflection

10 minutes

We will discuss our favorite parts of both movies and what we want to include in our adaptation.

Week seven was the first time I felt that my lesson had flowed smoothly. Each activity went right into the next with solid transitions. I felt like we were really on the right track in working towards our adaptation. They were taking the framework of *Sleeping Beauty* and giving it their own unique twist. My success can best be described from a journal entry on January 8 2015,

They loved the warm up- which never happens. And they also loved the small group work and devising their own little scenes. It was cool being able to kind of sit back and watch them create, their crazy minds thinking a mile a minute. One group had an ending to their piece but needed help constructing the rest. I helped them to work backwards and to understand how one action leads to the next. I saw that light bulb go off! I smiled and let them finish their work... At the end of the lesson, I asked the groups to write down their favorite part of their scene so

we could possibly include them in our adaptation. One paper read, ‘all of it.’ That made me so happy. Small victories folks- I’ll take them where I can get them.

Week eight and nine came and went. I continued to gather material for our adaptation through their improvised scenes. I drew on the characters they created and the language they were using. Week nine was an eye opening week, not in what happened during the lesson, but in what happened after. Instead of leaving right at 6pm, I stuck around while the teens ate their snacks. This was an opportunity for me to really get to know them. I got to talk to them about school, friends, and interests. How am I going to relate to the teens? What is getting in the way of that connection? Connection comes from genuinely hearing and understanding someone. For the past nine weeks, I had been so preoccupied in the work, in producing a product that I had neglected to really understand where any of the teens were coming from. Why does Aaliyah let the other members in her group do all the talking? In conversing with her, I learned it’s because she has stage fright. Because I was only there for an hour, and because there were so many of them and only one of me, I had a difficult time in fostering a personal relationship with each of them. But, I learned that a little goes a long way. Being a good teaching artist isn’t about being an expert disciplinarian or director. “Being a teaching artist is being a good listener and encourager. It’s about glorifying their strengths and supporting them in working on their weaknesses” (Menke).

I took what the students had given me and I wrote our adaptation of *Sleeping Beauty*. I wrote the script to fit our group’s needs. The teens were unaware with what a spindle was, so we changed the way in which Aurora fell asleep. Maleficent gets her to touch an iPhone. In addition, we didn’t have enough boys to fill all the male roles, meaning, *Sleeping Beauty* wouldn’t wake up with a kiss from her true love. We changed the story so that Maleficent was the only one who could undo the spell. Based upon their improvised scenes, the teens had a lot

to say about friendship. Our *Sleeping Beauty* would be a story about friendship, what it means to be a good friend and what it means to feel excluded. I broke the story up into three parts so that there would be three groups of actors. This way no one had an extensive amount of lines or felt like their part didn't matter. During week ten, I gave the students the script to read and make any changes they saw fit. I encouraged them to look for places where they could add or take away things and adjust the language. I went back and revised the script to be shorter, so that the words fit better in their mouths. The following is the final script:

### *Sleeping Beauty*

#### **Part One**

Narrator: In a faraway land, long ago lived a King and Queen. They really wanted a child and soon their wish was granted. A daughter was born. They named her Aurora. They named her after the dawn because she filled their life with sunshine. The King and Queen wanted to have a big party to celebrate the new baby!

Full Cast: And our story begins on that joyful day!

Queen: I will send out the invitations right now!

King: Don't forget the three good fairies! They give awesome gifts!

Queen: Our guests must feel special and welcomed.

*Enter Three Fairies*

Fauna: Thank you so much for inviting us King and Queen!

Flora: We are so excited to be here!

Merryweather: We have gifts for the baby.

Narrator: And the fairies gave the child gifts of

Flora: Love.

Fauna: Joy.

Merryweather: Sweet girl, I give you *Interrupted by the entrance of Maleficent and her sidekick, Crow*

Fauna: It's Maleficent!

Merryweather: What does she want?

Maleficent: Wow, look at this great party! (Evil laugh) Why wasn't I invited?

Merryweather: You weren't wanted! *Flora and Fauna hold Merryweather back from charging at Maleficent.*

Queen: You're not mad, are you Maleficent?

Maleficent: Of course not! And to show that I'm not mad, I'll give the child a gift as well.

Narrator: Maleficent then cast the spell on the child. Before the sun set on her sixteenth birthday, Aurora would touch an iPhone and

All: DIE.

*Maleficent casts the spell on Aurora. She evil laughs and exists. Merryweather goes to the child and gives her gift.*

Merryweather: Aurora, if you are cursed, you will not die. You will only fall asleep.

King: I do not feel safe raising Aurora here at the castle.

Queen: It's way too dangerous! What if Maleficent returns?!

Fauna: We will raise Aurora!

Queen: What do you mean?

Flora: She'll live with us in the forest.

Merryweather: She'll be safe with us.

King: Are you sure?

All three fairies: What are friends for?!

## **Part Two**

Narrator: And so for sixteen long years, no one knew where to find Aurora. Deep in the forests, the three good fairies had raised the child as their own. On her sixteenth birthday, the three fairies had planned a very special surprise for her.

Flora: I want Aurora's sixteenth birthday to be extra special!

Fauna: Me too!

Merryweather: I think we should... *Interrupted by Sleeping Beauty's entrance*

Aurora: What are you all doing?

All Three Fairies: Nothing!

Merryweather: We want you to go out and uhhh

Flora: Pick up some chicken for dinner.

Aurora: But I did that yesterday.

Fauna: But you know how we love chicken!

Aurora: Ok, I guess I'll go. Goodbye! *Aurora exits. The three fairies begin to set up for the party.*

Narrator: Meanwhile, the crow was on the hunt for Aurora.

*The crow comes through the audience looking for Aurora. She finds the three fairies setting up for the birthday party and watches for a moment.*

*Aurora re-enters.*

All three fairies: SURPRISE!

Aurora: What is this?

Fauna: It's a birthday party for you!

Flora: Let's celebrate.

Aurora: Thank you so much! You are the best friends.

*The fairies and Aurora freeze in a celebration pose.*

Narrator: The crow runs back to Maleficent to tell her about Aurora.

Crow: Maleficeenttttt!

Maleficent: What?!

Crow: I found her! I found Aurora!

Maleficent: WHERE?

Crow: She's deep in the forest. She has been raised by the three good fairies.

Maleficent: She has has she... They will never leave me out again. It's time for revenge!

Narrator: With the news that Aurora was alive, Maleficent traveled to the forest to put the curse on Aurora.

*Maleficent causes Aurora to touch the iPhone and to fall asleep.*

All Three Fairies: No!

Maleficent: You poor simple fools! Thinking you could defeat me?! Think again!

Crow: Yea, think again!

*Maleficent and crow exit*

Flora: I'll never forgive myself.

Merryweather: How could this have happened?

Narrator: The fairies did not want the King and Queen to find about their sleeping child. They put the entire kingdom to sleep and promised to fix this problem.

### **Part Three**

Fauna: We have to see Maleficent! She's the only one that can help us break the curse.

Merryweather: We can't go there!

Fauna: We have to!

Flora: Fauna's right. We have to go to the forbidden mountain.

*The three fairies travel to the forbidden mountain.*

Maleficent: Good work Crow!

*Crow pretends to be asleep, snores, etc. They both laugh.*

Crow: Wait, did you hear that?

Maleficent: Hear what? Is it the sound of victory?

Crow: No! I hear people.

Maleficent: Don't be silly. No one ever comes up to the forbidden mountain.

*Enter Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather*

Maleficent: YOU THREE. What are you doing here?

Fauna: Maleficent we need to talk.

Maleficent: Crow, go and guard this castle. I don't want any other intruders coming in.

*Crow exits*

Flora: Maleficent, please help us to wake up Aurora. She doesn't deserve this.

Maleficent: Are you serious? I'm not helping anyone. I didn't deserve to be left out. YOU all started stuff.

*Merryweather charges toward Maleficent. The two other fairies break up the fight.*

Fauna: Stop! Maleficent, why did you put the curse on Aurora in the first place?

Maleficent: Because the King and Queen were acting like they owned it. They thought they were so great. They didn't invite me to party for their new baby. I felt left out.

Flora: Why didn't you just say that? You didn't have to go and cause all this drama. Now Aurora is asleep and there's nothing that we can do about it.

Merryweather: We're sorry for excluding you. We really are. But, please! We need your help. You're the only one that knows how to break the curse.

Maleficent: Are you really that sorry?

All Three: YES!

Maleficent: Fine. I'll help you. On one condition...

Fauna: What's that?

Maleficent: After we wake up Aurora, we have another party. And we all can celebrate!

Flora: Deal.

Narrator: And so, the three fairies took Maleficent to a sleeping Aurora. Maleficent undid the curse and the sleeping beauty wasn't so sleepy anymore.

*Aurora awakes.*

Aurora: Huh? What happened?

Merryweather: Don't worry girl! Everything is alright. You were asleep for a little bit and now you're awake.

Aurora: But Maleficent?! Why is she here?

Fauna: Everything is good with Maleficent. She can hang with us now!

Flora: And we're about to celebrate your sixteenth birthday in style! Come on!

*Full cast comes out and watch the dance group perform for the party.*

## **The End**

In the final weeks, my plan was to get the play on its feet. The teens would come up with initial movement in their individual groups and I would then make adjustments. We would devote part of our rehearsal time to set building: create trees and signs indicating location. Once the final week arrived, we would rehearse for several days straight and my time at the Boys and Girls Club would end in a final performance. Things did not go according to plan; the final production of *Sleeping Beauty* never got put up. As my end date quickly approached, the challenges of this particular field site became prominent. Over the fourteen weeks, the number of students grew from seven to twenty eight. The number of me did not change. It was impossible to get the entire group focused and listening. I attempted to facilitate small group work, but the moment I gave a group direction and turned away was the moment they started acting out. They couldn't remember what group they were in or what part they had been assigned. On February 19, 2015, two weeks prior to the project's conclusion, I came to this realization,

The final performance will never be what I had envisioned. This is the first time as an artist where I feel that things will most likely not come together. I thought I knew what embracing the chaos meant before this process. I had no idea. My idea of chaos was a very safe, contained chaos. This won't be perfectly wrapped up, neat and tidy. Does that mean it's not successful? If I reach one or two of them is that enough? Is planting the seed enough? At this point in the game, I would like for this show to be up on its feet, for the teens to be loud and expressive, for them to try their best. But, I now realize their best isn't the best I've been accustomed to. And that's ok. I have to remember that this isn't easy. I knew this was going to be out of my comfort zone. Stepping out of your comfort zone is scary and messy and confusing and filled with failures. More failures than triumphs. That's something I'm not used to. So, here we are... This

lesson. Not one that I thought I would learn. Important nonetheless. Actually very important to learn before I graduate. Projects will end. Chapters in your story will come to a close. Sometimes you're not ready and sometimes you want the ending to be different. That doesn't mean every sentence, comma, word in-between was for nothing. They matter. They have to matter.

My project concluded with the teens doing devised scenes from whatever stories they felt like telling that day. The scenes ranged from Little Red Riding Hood getting eaten by a wolf to a rousing rendition of "It's a Hard Knock Life" from *Annie*. As I walked away from the Boys and Girls Club on that final day, I felt as though I was walking away from someone in midsentence. I was disappointed in the project's conclusion and couldn't help but think, "It could have gone better." This feeling of defeat is not new to the field of Applied Theatre. In "'It could have been so much better': the aesthetic and social work of theatre," authors Kathleen Gallagher, Barry Freeman and Anne Wessells, draw on Judith Butler's notion of 'melancholia' to explain the feeling of disappointment that sometimes follows difficult work. They describe this feeling as such, "In our ethnographic research we too have such laudable goals, but here as well, there is a certain melancholia, as what is 'captured' is partial, halting, interrupted; and what is shared, a mere shadow of what was imagined or experienced" (6). The progress that I did make with certain students, two girls intently studying their lines after class or the young female who was inspired to audition for her school's play because of our work at the club, felt insignificant compared to my original goal for the *entire* group to walk away being empowered to shout their stories from the rooftops. Where once I viewed the disheartening aspect of this work from a distance, I now stood in solidarity with these authors at the finish line.

The biggest problem I encountered as my project developed was how to transform inconsistency into a cohesive product. How does one create a structured piece of art out of materials that are constantly changing? When working with low-income areas, teaching artists

face the same challenges as educators in the classroom: poor facilities, lack of resources and support. But, the assumption is that theatre classes can overcome these difficulties. Kathleen Gallagher and her colleagues give light to this notion saying, “the prevailing wisdom about drama/theatre classes in schools suggests that it engages the disengaged, it reaches all students, and it creates trusting, caring, and empathetic classroom environments” (9). Despite my best efforts, many weeks at the Boys and Girls Club were an uphill journey in an attempt to engage students, to gain their trust, and to create a safe collaborative space. As the number of students fluctuated each week, so would their engagement. One week, I had a class of enthusiastic students who were eager to participate in lesson. The next week, five new members joined and suddenly the class transformed into students who deemed themselves “too old” for baby games. My experience made clear the fact that progress in this type of work is not linear; a teaching artist can take one step forward, and then two steps back.

This feeling of melancholia led me to ask the question, “Is this how these kids feel every day?” Many of their lives are filled with inconsistency, filled with people who show up and then disappear. The main difference between me and them is that I get to walk away from this chaos. I get to go back to a life of structure and calm. This difference may be the biggest hurdle to overcome in the work of Applied Theatre. What is needed for a teaching artist to become a part of the community in which he or she is working? To truly work with the community, not for them? As I move forward in this work, I look towards this idea, “a project in de-centering ourselves in the interest of opening channels of communication – through performance and through dialogue – among youth theatre-makers, teachers and researchers in diverse contexts” (Gallagher 10). Opening this channel must begin from the moment of conception, to start from a place that centers on the community’s needs. It’s about getting out of the way, recognizing that

the magic emerges from collaboration. Moving forward, the most important lesson I am taking is that I am not the sole magician.

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