

Transforming Stories, Driving Change

TRANSFORMING STORIES, DRIVING CHANGE

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Hamilton, Ontario



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At the centre of *Transforming Stories, Driving Change* are the people — advocates for themselves and their communities — who over the past four years have imagined and performed what a better Hamilton might look like for people with experiences like theirs. Their stories offer a potent critique of social conditions in the City and a vital source of guidance and inspiration for what could happen next. Their decisions to share and craft and act out their stories (personally and in collaboration with other advocates and the creative team) represent disruptions to the usual arrangements of who speaks, and who listens, in public discussions about the future of Hamilton. In recognition of their time, labour, creativity, and commitment to the collective good, long and loud applause for: Lee, Cass, Carol, Ngozi, ‘Adwoa’ (*We Need to Talk!*); Lance, Sandy, Sulema, ‘Odessa,’ ‘Lindsay’ (*All of Us Together*); Aref, Leisha, Jo-Anne, Pamela, ‘Leila’ (*When My Home is Your Business*); and Linda, Nicole, Robyn, and ‘Chloe’ (*Choose Your Destination*).

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And finally: Helene Vosters has been the TSDC Project Coordinator for the past two and a half years, and

she is the primary writer and crafter of this workbook. Helene has a rare talent for discerning, and then asking questions about, and then articulating, the implicit forms in all things. Her skills have made it possible for the **magic that was and is TSDC** to take shape as sentences, chapters, this workbook. We are tremendously grateful to her for that, and for her persistently respectful engagement with all the people and worlds TSDC has encompassed.

Catherine Graham,
TSDC Research Team Lead and Artistic Director, School of the Arts

Chris Sinding,
TSDC Research Team Lead, School of Social Work

Team & Contributors

Transforming Stories, Driving Change is a research and performance initiative led by researchers from the McMaster University School of Social Work and School of the Arts, the Good Shepherd Centres, and the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, with collaboration from the Hamilton Community Foundation.

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Canada

NAVIGATING THIS WORKBOOK

There are several ways to navigate through this workbook. A “Contents” menu is located on the upper left of the workbook’s header. To view it, either scroll to the top of the page, or click on the ‘up’ arrow. In the closed position, it will read EXPAND CONTENTS. Click on it, and (Ta Da!) a drop down menu will appear. If you find the expanded menu distracting, you can collapse it by returning to the top of the page and clicking on CLOSE CONTENTS.

To investigate subsections within the numbered chapters, click on the + (plus) sign located next to the chapter. The chapter will expand and the + will revert to a – (minus) sign. To collapse a chapter, click on the – sign.

You can also use the *Previous* and *Next* links in the footer area if you’re reading on the web. If you’re using a reading app you can flip through it as you normally would.

Sections of the workbook vary in length, so be sure to scroll down to the bottom of the page if you don’t want to miss anything. To return to the menu — you know the drill! — scroll back to the top or click on the ‘up’ arrow.

To allow readers to explore freely we’ve also been generous with internal links. When clicked, these will bring you directly to the indicated section. To return to where you were, just hit the ‘back’ arrow in the upper left hand corner of your web browser or return to the contents menu.

And finally, in lieu of an index, the workbook comes with a search feature which will remain accessible on the right side of your web screen as you scroll down a page.

Downloading the workbook:

For reader convenience the workbook is also available for download as an EPUB, MOBI, Digital PDF, or Print PDF. To access downloads follow this link ([Transforming Stories, Driving Change](#)) or return to the header at any time and click on the workbook title there. When you arrive at the workbook’s cover page, click on the drop down menu below the book’s cover image and the download options will appear.

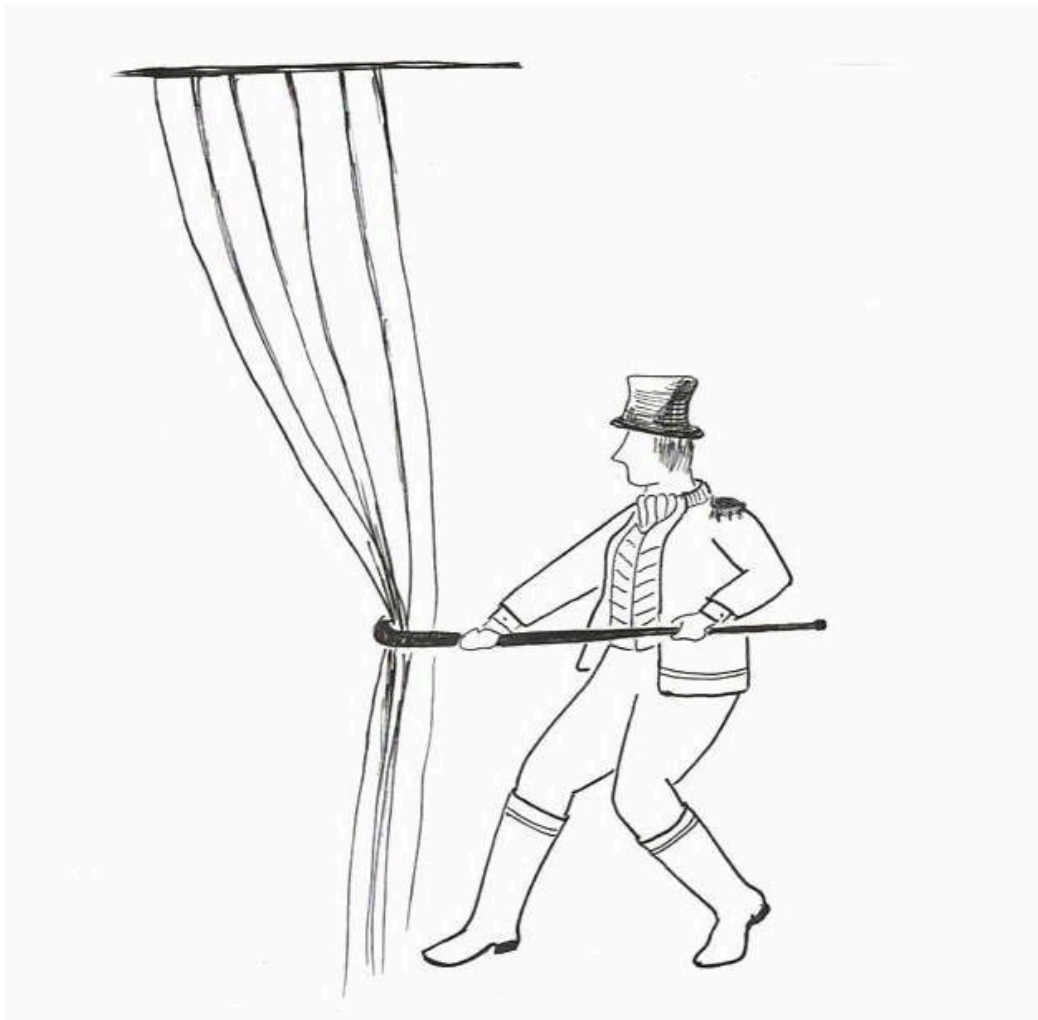
Please note: Design formatting may change and elements of the workbook’s navigation

(accessing glossary terms, internal links, etc.) may be lost depending on the download format you select.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

Can theatre bring new voices into public debate? Facilitating theatre workshops with community members who experience social marginalization is an art that, when done well, feels more like magic. But even the best facilitators are not magicians. With this workbook we pull back the curtain on the magic by taking readers behind the scenes of the Hamilton-based research and performance initiative *Transforming Stories, Driving Change* (TSDC). Since 2015, TSDC teams have worked alongside community partners and performer-advocates to make plays designed to draw attention to the voices and visions of people whose opinions are not often represented in discussions of the future of the City. Through our performances, we have tried to contribute to building the movements that can make public leaders more accountable to people who are affected by their decisions. Five years and four plays later, we offer this workbook as a practical guide to TSDC's creative approach.



DREAMING

“To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality.”

BELL HOOKS. *FEMINISM IS FOR EVERYBODY: PASSIONATE POLITICS*.

We began writing this workbook in Spring 2020. Ontario had just entered the first wave of the Coronavirus pandemic. Now, as we prepare to launch the book, we're deep into the pandemic's second wave. Gathering in public, once a straightforward daily occurrence for most people, has become fraught and complicated in some settings, a distant dream in others. Theatre practitioners are asking if we'll ever have theatre again. Activists, community and self-advocates, and community service providers are working tirelessly to find new ways to organize, connect, and meet the needs of the community.

We find ourselves in the odd position of sharing a practical guide to *working in shared spaces* with community groups to create plays to be performed for *live audiences* — at a time when we know it's not possible. So much of the pleasure of our work in TSDC has come through being together. It's in how we share space, conversation, and food. How we create and imagine together. Yet, for the time being, it's clear that friendship and solidarity involve not being together in these ways we hold dear.

So as we prepare to send this workbook out into the world we're reminded of the closing scene from *Choose Your Destination*, a play we created with youth from Good Shepherd Youth Services. The play's four fictionalized characters speak to one another as they rearrange the seats of their makeshift bus and transform it into a couch that faces the audience:

JOANNE: You know what would be nice right now? Right now! This destination, taking us to a spot where we could just chill, nothing to worry about.

MOON: A place where we could all just relax, somewhere with a huge TV. We could all just watch Netflix and hang out.

SNOW: maybe something like this... (starts to move the seats and the others follow her lead)

JOANNE: Okay, but no horror movies, because I hate horror movies.

AMELIA: ...and popcorn, but the fancy kind — with extra butter.

MOON: Don't have to worry about late bills...

JOANNE: ...late bills, imagine being in a place long enough to set up the wifi ...

SNOW: ...imagine being safe and happy!

JOANNE: Girl, you're dreaming...

SNOW: ...yeah, but isn't it a nice dream...

ALL: [sigh, nod and look out into the audience]



“Dreaming” Sketch by Sarah Adjekum.

A simple desire. Yet, for the characters in the play (and their creator-performers), one that was so far removed from their concrete reality that it seemed like a dream. In visionary fashion, it was a dream they dared to imagine. Likewise, as we struggle to navigate these upside-down times where solidarity means *not* being together, we share this book as an affirmation of the power of the imagination to generate possibilities in the face of limitations.

WHO 'WE' ARE

The ‘we’ reflected in the pages of this workbook is a many layered thing. The writers of this guide are the McMaster University arts and social science scholars, educators, and theatre practitioners who are part of TSDC’s community-based performance research project. But the collective of people who have made TSDC possible is far more extensive. TSDC’s four plays came into being through the collaboration of teams of “uncommon partners”¹ (socially-engaged artists and theatre practitioners, community and self-advocates, and social service providers and social planners). Throughout the workbook we’ll talk a lot more about the many contributions of TSDC collaborators. For now, we want to say a few words about *why* we consider collaboration essential for a project like TSDC.

Collaborators are often drawn (or drawn in) to working on a particular TSDC project because of their relationships to the community members who create and perform the play. Sometimes these connections are pre-existing. Other times, collaborators are invited to join a play’s creative or project team because of their knowledge of the social context of community participants’ lived experience and their shared interest in the issues these **performer-advocates** want the play to address. Individually and collectively, TSDC’s project collaborators — the community and self-advocates who are the play’s creators and performer-advocates, the theatre workshop facilitators, the community partners, and the research team — reflect a complex range of social positions.

TSDC’s collaborative approach is intrinsic to the project’s overarching social goal — to interrupt patterns of exclusion by offering performer-advocates a creative method and a platform through which to address a broader public. In keeping with this goal, as theatre makers we strive to ensure that each play’s story arc and dialogue reflect what participants do and say in the workshops, and what they want to communicate. But we recognize that there’s no such thing as a neutral or all-seeing vantage point. Who we are, the lived experiences we come with (and the lived experiences we *don’t* come with) affect what we’re able to see and what we’re *not* able to see. For example, a white queer woman in her fifties is prepared by her history and socialization to know the world in particular ways, and quite differently than a Black straight woman of 18.

It has also been important that we structure the workshops and the larger collaborative process in ways that support open communication and collectivity. For example, unlike many conventional theatre workshops,

1. We came across the term “uncommon partners” in Jan Cohen-Cruz’s book *Remapping Performance: Common Ground, Uncommon Partners*. See Chapter II for a discussion of TSDC’s uncommon partnerships.

TSDC workshops always begin with a gathering where everyone — workshop participants (and soon to be performer-advocates!), workshop facilitators, community worker, research assistants — sit together, share food, and talk. Other workshop activities like story circles, check-ins, and group reflections are similarly structured to foster a relaxed, open, and hospitable collective atmosphere.

TSDC's team approach to making plays is reflective of the project's social aspiration of cultivating more inclusive public dialogue. By calling in a diverse range of collaborators and creating structures that support communication among collaborators, we strive to expand the scope of things that get noticed, named, and taken up in workshops, in ways that are meaningful for how the plays turn out.

WHO THE WORKBOOK IS FOR & HOW IT WORKS

This workbook is for anyone interested in collaborating on a project that uses community-based theatre as a creative platform for working alongside the people whose voices and visions are essential to, and mostly absent from, public direction-setting for the Cities we live in. We imagine (hope) readers will include:

- Socially-engaged theatre practitioners and artists
- Community and self-advocates
- Social service providers and policy makers
- Arts and social science educators and students

We encourage readers to approach the workbook in the way that is most useful to your position, concerns, and interests. To aid in this, below are brief descriptions of the workbook's chapters. Also note that the highlighted sections below are internal links that, when clicked, will bring you directly to the indicated section. We've placed these here and throughout the workbook to allow readers to explore freely. To return to where you were, just hit the 'back' arrow in the upper left hand corner of your browser or find your place via the 'contents' menu on the upper left in the workbook's header. (For more on the mechanics of navigating these pages see [A note on navigation.](#))

The first two chapters are written with everyone in mind. [About Transforming Stories, Driving Change](#) provides readers with an introduction to TSDC: the project's motivations, goals, and an overview of four concepts that are integral to TSDC's creative approach. The chapter closes with a discussion of prompts, the creative tool we use to set the core concepts into motion. [Collaborating With Uncommon Partners](#) addresses the importance, when developing a TSDC play, of bringing together a range of community partners — theatre facilitators and artists, community and self-advocates, social service providers, policy makers, educators — and the various contributions and roles of each constituency.

The next four chapters take readers inside TSDC's workshop process. While potentially of interest to all readers, these sections are especially geared toward theatre practitioners interested in facilitating performance creation workshops with goals that are similar to TSDC, as well as community partners who would like to learn more about the process. [The Art \(and Craft\) of Facilitation](#) opens with a discussion of the importance of aligning facilitation methods with the project's goals and of working with community partners. We then embark on a discussion of the more pragmatic aspects of workshop facilitation and close the section with

a reflection on how we approach care and accountability within TSDC workshops. [Workshop Activities & Exercises](#) outlines fundamental components of TSDC performance creation workshops including check-ins, story circles, warm-ups, and TSDC's approach to using Image Theatre. We've also included in this section a menu of sample theatre workshop warm-up exercises along with tips for things to keep in mind. In the final two chapters in this quartet, we use examples from TSDC plays to illustrate both the underlying rationale and the 'how' of [Creating TSDC Performance Scripts](#) and [TSDC Set & Prop Design](#).

Chapter seven takes us to [The Performance Event](#) itself! Again, while potentially of interest to all readers, this section is particularly geared toward members of the project team who are involved in promoting, preparing for, and hosting the performance event. It addresses subjects like how to find the right audience and the right space for the event, preparing the audience for their somewhat expanded role, and designing and facilitating post-performance activities. The section closes with a menu of post-performance activities that includes the underlying rationale for the different activities and tips on things to keep in mind.

In our final chapter, [Prompting Ongoing Conversations](#), we step back from the workbook's how-to focus to reflect on ways forward. We talk about some of the things that we think would need to be addressed for a project like this — or the social and artistic processes at the core of projects like this — to be sustained and furthered. We reflect on things we wish we had been able to do more of. Things we set in motion (and still hope to do some day). Things we dreamt/dream of doing. And things we've undertaken in the wake of the pandemic. Our hope throughout the workbook (and made explicit in this chapter) is to spark new connections: between ideas, people, projects, worlds.

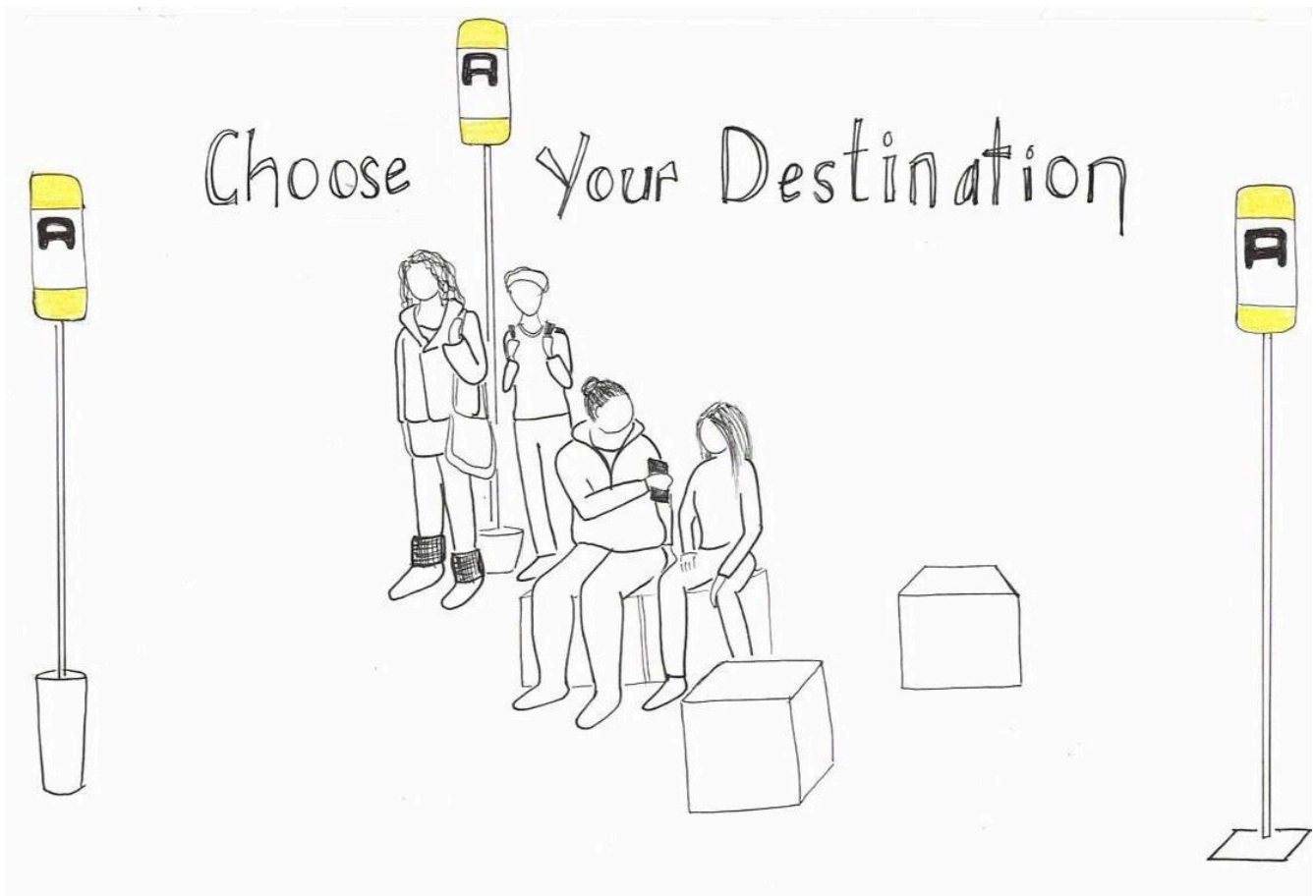
INTRODUCING TSDC'S FOUR PLAYS

One more thing before we launch into the workbook — a peek into TSDC's four plays and the people who created and performed them!

Choose Your Destination

Erskine Presbyterian Church, 19 Pearl St. N., March 6, 2019.

Created with youth connected to Good Shepherd Youth Services *Choose Your Destination* tells the story of four young people from different backgrounds, all living in a City much like Hamilton. While they're not friends at the beginning of the story, they frequently cross paths on a bus travelling the "Choose Your Destination" line. As they get on and off their makeshift bus — frustrated that they can't afford a place to live, trying hard to get more hours at work, navigating food banks and social services, betrayed by many of the adults around them — we come to see why their dream, so simple, is also so powerful: they want the chance to relax together, somewhere safe.



When My Home is Your Business

Gathering on Art, Development, and Gentrification, Nov. 11, 2018.

Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness National Conference, Nov. 5, 2018.

McMaster Centre for Continuing Education, May 2, 2018.

When My Home is Your Business was created with people involved in the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton's [Dis]placements Project — people who know about the difficulties of holding on to decent rental accommodations in a rapidly changing Hamilton. Alice, Sami, Hannah, and Emma, the play's four fictionalized characters, meet every day at the elevator, never knowing if it will go up, or down, or nowhere at all. They are exasperated with the building: things are noisy and broken and the landlord is only interested in renovating empty apartments that could bring in higher rents. Yet still the four work every day to make the building home: fixing what they can, sharing their frustrations, advocating, reassuring each other, bringing beauty to the place. The play asks questions about what happens when you think of a place as home, but to the people who own the building, it's just another business opportunity. Can neighbours work together to make and sustain a home in a profit-centred enterprise? Can they do it even if they're not the best of friends? Whose business is it if they can't, or if they do?



We Need To Talk!

David Braley Health Sciences Centre, McMaster University, (Performance Exchange with *All of Us Together*), June 12, 2017.

Social Work 1A06, McMaster University, Feb. 28, 2017.

McMaster Centre for Continuing Education, (Performance Exchange with *All of Us Together*), June 24, 2016.

Social Work & Labour Studies 2B03, McMaster University, Feb. 8, 2016.

We Need to Talk! was created with women connected to the Women's Housing and Planning Collaborative Advisory of Hamilton. The performance shows five women repeatedly approaching three different social service agencies (Income Support, a Foodbank, and Housing Support) to get help with the many things they must juggle, which are symbolized on stage by the five or six large paper-mâché rocks that each woman carries with her at all times. Unfortunately, as the performance demonstrates, the small boxes the agencies can make available are rarely big enough to contain the rocks and are very hard to access for women who already have their hands full. Frustration mounts through the performance until the women look at each other, drop all the rocks on the agency tables, step out of character, and say directly to the audience: "This isn't working. We need to talk!"



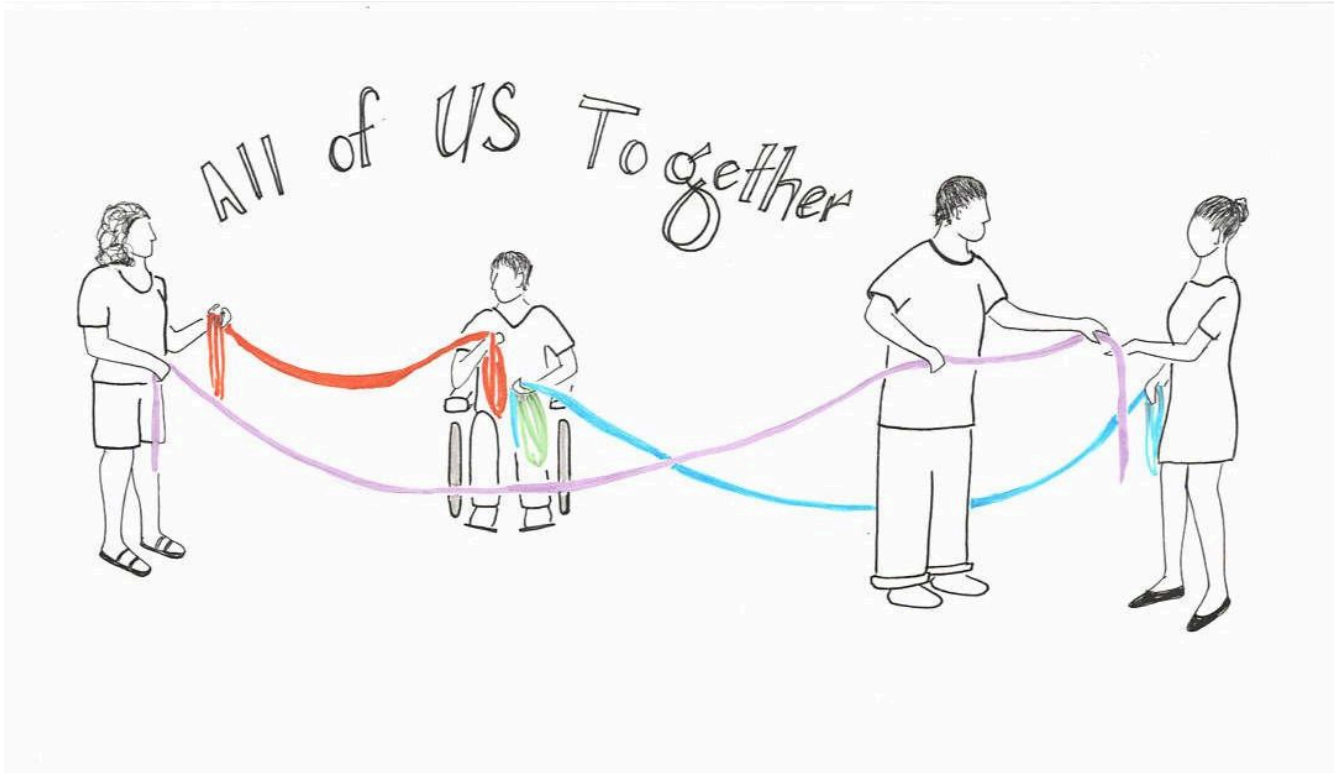
All Of Us Together

David Braley Health Sciences Centre, McMaster University, (Performance Exchange with *We Need To Talk!*), June 12, 2017.

McMaster Centre for Continuing Education, (Performance Exchange with *We Need To Talk!*), June 24, 2016.

Created with community and self-advocates recruited from Speak Now, the Speakers' Bureau of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, the *Transforming Hamilton Stories* pilot project *All of Us Together* explores what Hamilton might look like if people came together to help each other address social concerns. The performance begins with each performer holding a ball of coloured ribbon that contains a story of a City. The ribbons tangle as the play's four characters tell of their struggles with healthcare, landlords, hunger, and parenting in the face of poverty. Dreams for a better future risk being caught within the knotted tangle of difficult social conditions until the performers start to look out for one another by weaving webs of connection. In the performance's closing scene the performers drop out of character, look out at the audience, and ask,

“Who will you stand beside?” and “Whose dreams will you fight for?” The scene ends with the performers tossing their ribbons out to the audience as an invitation to participate in a community web of solidarity.



PART II

ABOUT TRANSFORMING STORIES, DRIVING CHANGE

“What we’re trying to do is get people participating in a mutually meaningful world, recognizing that we all live in the same City. We all live in this world, and we all affect each other. Whether we intend to or not, and whether we know it or not.”

— CATHERINE GRAHAM, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS.

“Art offers an alternative way for people to express themselves in situations where language or conventional or dominant language is ill-suited for what needs expressing, inadequate or constraining or exclusionary.”

— CHRIS SINDING, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK.

COLLECTIVELY IMAGINING A BETTER FUTURE THROUGH PERFORMANCE

“I’ve long struggled as a social service provider who has some responsibility around fundraising, with how the voices and stories of the folks we serve are used in very particular ways. I love the idea of groups of folks coming together and sharing their stories and creating something really meaningful, educational, and invigorating *without having to personally reveal the most painful pieces of their past.*”

— KATHERINE KALINOWSKI, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, GOOD SHEPHERD CENTRES, HAMILTON.

There are many ways of telling stories, many tellers, and many reasons for telling. Stories can build group cohesion. Stories can serve as resources for individual and collective healing. They can educate and advocate. They can be vehicles of personal, cultural, or political testimony. They can generate empathy. They can also expose individuals and groups to harm in the form of negative public scrutiny. They can include. They can exclude. Stories can help us remember. They can bring attention to the conditions of our present. And they can be a way to collectively imagine better futures.

TSDC stories take the form of short plays designed to bring voices that are not currently being heard into public discussions about our collective future. When we began TSDC as a pilot research project in 2014, we wanted to see what would happen if we invited community groups advocating for change to use performance-based storytelling activities to communicate their hopes and priorities for Hamilton, this City we shared. In fact, these questions became the basis of a story prompt that animates our workshops and public events: “Imagine what Hamilton might be like ten years from now if it were to become a much better City. What do you imagine life would be like in that much better Hamilton for people with experiences like yours?” (More on prompts in a bit!)

Hamilton 10 years from now



In the years since that first pilot project, TSDC productions have included performances about living in inhospitable and precarious housing (*When My Home is Your Business*), dealing with the narrow mandates and inflexibility of social services (*All Of Us Together & We Need to Talk!*), and working to overcome barriers and negative perceptions as homeless or street involved young people living in Hamilton (*Choose Your Destination*).

We know that many people have been excluded from conversations about the future of Hamilton. We also know it's not because they have nothing to say. Rather, we believe it's because only certain speakers are recognized as legitimate and only certain ways of speaking are heard or recognized as worthy contributions to the conversation. This problem of exclusion isn't unique to Hamilton. As political theorist Nancy Fraser

argues, communication norms produce a kind of “misrecognition”¹ wherein speakers from marginalized communities can become seen as mere illustrations of social problems, rather than heard and heeded as agents of social change.

This is the impetus behind TSDC: The development of a performance creation approach designed to communicate stories that are grounded in knowledge based on lived experiences to a broader public. By framing stories in a public (social) and collective context, TSDC plays evade some of the limitations and difficulties of autobiographical or individual narratives (see table below). Our intention with this workbook is to share what we’ve learned. We dedicate it to all the performer-advocates whose creative risk-taking has inspired its writing.

Personal Stories:² Value of, problems with, and TSDC’s approach

Value of personal stories	Problems with personal stories	TSDC’s creative approach
Personal stories activate empathy by making potentially distant experiences more emotionally and conceptually accessible.	Public sharing of personal stories places individuals in a position of disclosure and vulnerability to public scrutiny.	Using a <i>fictional</i> approach provides a way for personal stories to be publicly heard, without exposing details about individual participants lives.
Personal stories bring together communities with shared histories, identities, or life experiences.	Personal stories can risk individualizing or localizing broader public and social problems.	Audiences do not know what aspects of a <i>collectively</i> devised story are actually ‘true’ for any individual performer.
Personal stories can help repair or build social relationships between groups and individuals in conflict or crisis.	In many contexts personal stories are easily dismissed or seen as applying only to the individuals and groups directly involved.	Focusing on <i>publicness</i> bolsters community and self-advocates entitlement to be heard and chances of being heard.
Personal stories can counter dehumanizing discourses and images.	Personal stories often orient to immediate daily struggles as individual problems that need to be addressed.	Focusing on <i>future</i> and desire establishes speakers as contributors to wider longer-term conversation about the kind of City they (alongside other residents) wish it to be.

1. Fraser Nancy. *Fortunes of feminism: from state-managed capitalism to neoliberal crisis*. Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2013.

2. See “Personal Stories, Public Voices,” an article written by TSDC researchers for a more indepth discussion of the values and limitations of personal stories.

WHY A PLAY? WHY THEATRE?

“One of the things I thought was really powerful was that while many of us talk about the systemic issues with housing, we often talk about these things in a really abstract way. Hearing these very personal stories, albeit fictionalized, but obviously relating to very real experiences, kind of turned that abstraction on its head. So, we get a sense of the very real material and emotional effects, and the relationships that are built but also suffer as a result of some of these issues.”

— AUDIENCE MEMBER, *WHEN MY HOME IS YOUR BUSINESS*.

We make plays because we think theatre is uniquely well-suited to redress the lack of “parity of participation”¹ in social life. Theatre facilitates an encounter between performers and those attending (the ‘audience’). Theatre creates a space where we exit our day-to-day worlds and enter the world of the play. In TSDC plays, this ‘world’ is not the private worlds of the performer-advocates’ lives. TSDC’s fictionalized and collective play narratives *always take place in the larger public world*. They are based on ways of being in the world, ways of presenting oneself in the world, and ways of experiencing the world that is an expression of the worlds of the performer-advocates and of people with experiences similar to theirs. The play is an uninterrupted time-space in which performers can say and show how they experience their world and their visions for how they want the world to be seen.

What we find particularly compelling about this kind of publicly framed play is its capacity to turn the issue of recognition and misrecognition in the context of public discussion on its head. Performer-advocates are not being asked to navigate the communication protocols and expectations of the institutional worlds they must interact with in order to access resources and services, or those they might be invited to participate in (advisory panels, policy or City Council meetings, speaker panels). Instead, they are the ones doing the inviting. They are the ones who say to the audience, “Let us see the world this way, let it be spoken of with these words.”²

1. See “Nancy Fraser On The ‘Parity Of Participation’” by Robin, Varghese, 3 Quarks Daily, Aug. 3, 2008.

2. This is a paraphrase of something Michael Warner wrote about in the article “Publics and Counterpublics.” *Public Culture* 14(1): 49-90.

TSDC'S CREATIVE APPROACH

“In social work we often have this idea that art can help us ‘walk in the shoes’ of someone whose life and experience are very different from ours. But what I’ve really appreciated about the TSDC approach is how it gets at the value questions. It’s less about walking in the shoes of someone else than perceiving the values that create the conditions of walking! Like, do we all deserve to be able to walk easily, walk comfortably, through the City? Do we all deserve to feel steady on our feet (or on the bus, or using a wheelchair, or however we get around the City)?

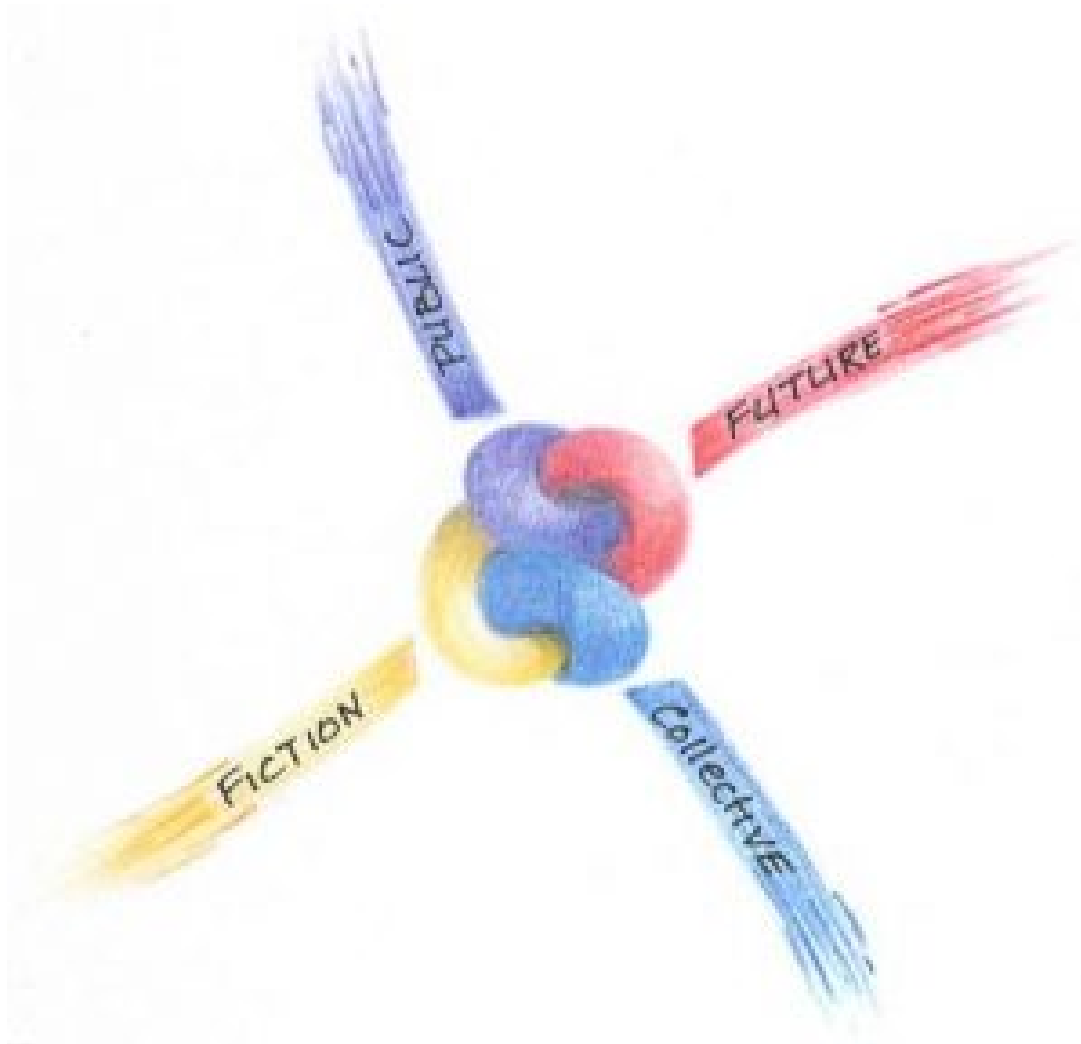
Watching TDSC plays, I think members of an audience come to a more resonant ‘yes!’ in response to these kinds of questions. And that’s the big step. Once we get there, then the questions of how we organize ourselves as a community *to make sure* that everyone has decent shoes (or housing, or food, or clothes, or income, or transportation) follow. Answering the ‘how’ is not easy, but it’s a lot easier if we’re more together on the values part.

That’s the real (and magic) contribution of performance to public debate, from where I stand...”

— CHRIS SINDING, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK.

Just as there are many kinds of stories, there are many ways of creating plays. As we worked on this community-based performance initiative, four concepts emerged as core ingredients in TSDC’s performance creation approach. Workshop activities are designed to focus participants’ imaginations in the direction of creating and performing a story that is — fictional, collective, future-oriented, and focused on publicness.

We’re not suggesting that these four concepts are, or should be, intrinsic to all community-based theatre projects. Rather, we view them as having a direct relationship to the particular goal of TSDC — to make plays that interrupt the usual patterns of public discussion about the City by supporting marginalized populations to speak and be heard on their own terms.



In the following sections we'll share some of the reasons we think the four ingredients are vital to TSDC's creative approach and will close this chapter with a discussion of prompts — the creative tool we use to set the concepts into motion. For the sake of explanation, we'll deal with one ingredient at a time. As you read, however, we ask you to keep in mind that for them to work — as is true with any recipe *or community* — they need to work together.

Together, TSDC's four core ingredients work to:

- Draw attention to how our norms of public communication exclude some speakers from public discussion and do not recognize some speakers as agents of social change.
- Engage more and different kinds of people in public talk about visions for their communities and build solidarity between constituencies.
- Extend the reach of performer-advocates voices and deepen the receptivity of audiences to these voices.
- Expand the horizons of our imaginations — as performer-advocates and members of audiences and communities.

Fictional

“My home is off limits and I like my private life. But I also like to participate too and put myself out there and I just was nervous around people. I didn’t want to share too much about me. But the little bit I have shared has been safe and it’s been okay. It’s wonderful that I got to do that.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *WHEN MY HOME IS YOUR BUSINESS*.

A major ethical consideration in having performer-advocates publicly share personal stories is the risk of exposing details of their lives to public scrutiny. TSDC performances focus on fictionalized accounts as an aesthetic tool for transmitting the knowledge that performer-advocates have gained through their lived experience and their understanding of the social context of that experience.

Benefits of sharing experiential knowledge through a fictional creative account stem from the kind of questions we tend to ask of fiction. In response to an objective report, we are expected to ask, “Do we believe this is what *really* happened?” or “Did this really happen *exactly this way*?” In responding to fiction, we ask “Do we believe this is *possible*? *What conditions have to exist to make it possible*?” In this way fiction shifts the audience focus from the authenticity or accuracy of individuals’ accounts to the ways in which the conditions the performers bring to light make different scenarios possible.

“The creative exchange of stories and collective interpretation of shared lived experience enable participants to throw off unwanted labeling and prejudice and become authors of their own lives.” — AMANDA STUART-FISHER. “THE PLAYWRIGHT IN RESIDENCE: A COMMUNITY’S STORYTELLER.”

The use of fictionalization has advantages during the workshops’ **devising** *process*, as well as in the creation of a fictional, collective, future-oriented story to be publicly *performed*.

Advantages of a fictional approach during the workshop *process* include:

- Working with fictional characters in the workshops can make it easier for participants to talk about differences that arise within the group without individual members feeling targeted.
- Working with fictional situations and characters in the workshops can support risk-taking by providing participants with creative resources for exploring new and unfamiliar ways of interacting.
- Working with fictional situations and characters can make it easier to share stories that are personally painful by providing participants with a method for externalizing them without having to expose details of their personal experiences to the group if they don’t wish to.

Benefits of transmitting experiential knowledge through the *performance* of a fictionalized story include:

- Allows aspects of personal, intimate stories to be publicly heard, without requiring individual performer-advocates to subject details about their personal experiences to public scrutiny.
- Produces an element of undecidability, meaning audiences do not know which aspects of the fictional and collectively devised characters and story are actually true for any individual performer.
- Provides participants with an opportunity to experience themselves, and be seen by audiences, as artists, creators, and performer-advocates.

Collective

“Sometimes people feel or say that, ‘I don’t want my story to be out there.’ Well these stories are a combination of people’s stories; it is not just one particular person’s story. My character’s stories are things that I’ve heard from friends, some have happened to me, some I have witnessed.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *WE NEED TO TALK!*

There can be considerable overlap in how the fictional and collective ingredients of TSDC’s performance creation approach work. Through the creation of composite fictionalized characters, performer-advocates are able to enact a collective story that they have personal experience with, or knowledge of through their social relationships and advocacy activities. Collectively framed stories provide performer-advocates with a method for inviting audiences to consider the complexity of their worlds as well as for demonstrating how people’s lived experiences are part of broader social contexts.

TSDC’s performance creation approach is collective both during the workshops’ devising *process*, and in its focus on creating a fictional, collective, future-oriented story to be publicly *performed*.

The workshop *process* supports collectivity by inviting every participant to take part in:

- Identifying and developing themes and descriptions of the conditions that make certain kinds of interaction either possible or impossible.
- The creation of characters, dialogue, and the key images that form the foundation of the play’s scenes.
- Decisions about potential audiences.

Benefits of the transmission of experiential knowledge through the *performance* of a collective story include:

- Situates audiences within the story by directing attention away from autobiographical testimony (which can sometimes lead audiences to see themselves as judges or 'saviours' in relation to the people on stage) and towards a multi-perspective point of view that frames the issues within a social context.
- Resists compartmentalizing issues (health, housing, food security, etc.) that community and self-advocates are often faced with by exposing how interconnected the problems are.
- Supports performer-advocates in telling a story that focuses on the broader social values that they wish to communicate or contest, rather than on the details of particular incidents.
- Helps to disrupt the isolation that is often produced or exacerbated in situations of social, economic, and institutional oppression.

“The way the women constructed the performance, and the way Catherine help them figure out how to convey their experiences using performance, really helped students understand people’s lived experiences of a much broader collective problem around income insecurity, housing and food insecurity. That’s huge!”
 — JENNIE VENGRIS, TSDC RESEARCH AND WORKSHOP TEAM, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK.

Future-oriented

“TSDC is adding different layers of voices to our vision of Hamilton. Hamilton is changing. There are people talking about change, and a lot of times it’s the same people, the politicians and that. So, we need to add new voices that don’t get heard, because they also have a stake in how Hamilton changes.”

— MELANIE SKENE, TSDC SET & PROP DESIGNER.

A perception of community-based theatre productions is often that they are telling stories about past events or documenting bad things that are happening in the present. TSDC’s focus on future-oriented stories offers another perspective. We invite participants to dream, and we work with them to communicate their *desires and visions for a better world* in the form of a play.

One reason for our emphasis on future goals is that when we first heard from community and self-advocates during the recruiting process, they kept saying over and over, “You need to realize how painful it is for us to tell stories of the bad things that have happened to us.” We don’t expect workshop participants to tell us about particular things that have happened to them. Nor do we expect them to offer solutions to specific problems (though both may come up and are welcome in the conversation). Rather, our ‘ask’ is that they participate with

us in envisioning a future social world that would make life better for people with lived experiences similar to theirs, and to imagine what kinds of steps need to happen to arrive at that better world.

This orientation to an imagined better collective future provides performer-advocates with a vantage point from which to examine and bring attention to conditions in the present that are in need of transformation in order for their collective social desires and values to manifest. We also believe it's a perspective that positions audiences in such a way that they are neither learning about a fixed-in-the-past history, nor are they focusing *only* on current conditions. Rather, they are being asked to think about the relationship between the current conditions presented in the play, and the possibilities of the yet-to-become.

Benefits of focusing participant attention on a future-oriented story include:

- Performer-advocates' desires are encouraged and recognized as important in the broader social context.
- Orientation to an imagined better collective future provides a vantage point from which performer-advocates can more clearly examine and reveal the present conditions that impede their desires.
- Orientation to an imagined better collective future provides a frame of reference through which audiences can recognize themselves as collaborators with performer-advocates in the creation of a mutually meaningful world.

Public

“Imagining publicly is socially useful through its capacity to embody alternatives.”

— JAN COHEN-CRUZ. *REMAPPING PERFORMANCE: COMMON GROUND, UNCOMMON PARTNERS*.

TSDC uses the concept of publicness in two intersecting ways: To reference the play's presentation as a vehicle for enhancing the potential of marginalized voices to be *publicly heard*, and to draw attention to the ways in which performer-advocates and audience members are *co-residents of a shared public environment*, a City. For TSDC, this City has been Hamilton. But it could be any City. A public in this sense, speaks to the kinds of political choices we make when we live together.

The concept of publicness is emphasized in all stages of TSDC's performance creation process from its first storytelling activity through to its culminating performance. Within the workshops, participants are invited to frame their stories in a broader collective context, a public where decision-makers can be called to account for their actions. In this way, the process seeks to affirm participants' sense of belonging to a 'we,' or

“A public is a poetic world making.” — MICHAEL WARNER.
“PUBLICS AND COUNTERPUBLICS.”

a public that can demand accountability. The plays provide a platform and a method for performer-advocates to issue their own invitation to an audience to also see themselves as part of this broader shared public.

TSDC plays are also always set in public, rather than private, spaces. The publicness of the play's settings, directs audience attention to the conditions of our shared collective environment, rather than placing the focus on the private lives and individual choices of the play's fictionalized characters or the performer-advocates who created them.

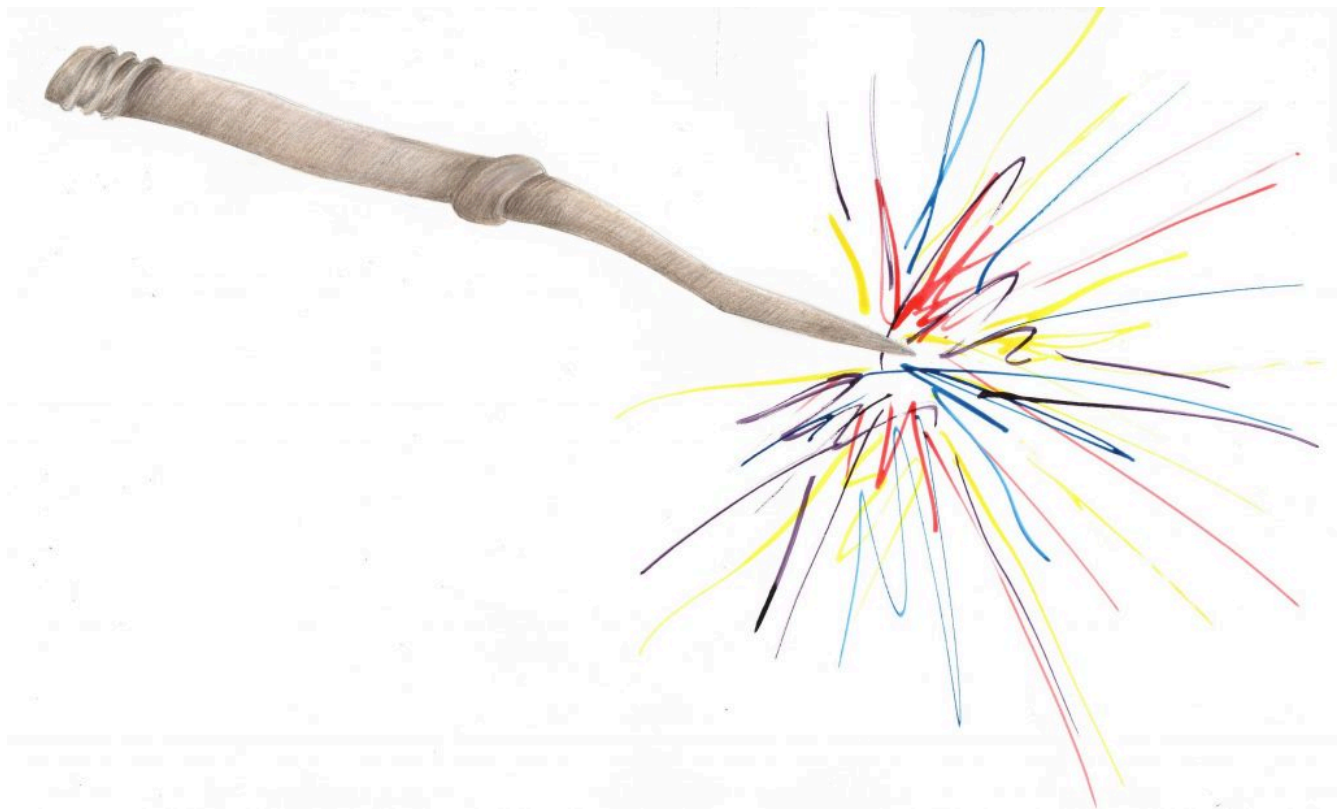
Another important aspect of publicness is how the performance of the play facilitates *a particular kind of public encounter*. Performer-advocates and audiences are brought together as a public, but it's one where the social expectations associated with theatre delays the moment of audience interaction until after the performance's final scene. The uninterrupted nature of the performance provides performer-advocates with the time and space to present the story that will lay the foundation for [post-performance](#) interactions (which are essential components of TSDC performances).

TSDC's focus on publicness:

- Bridges participants' personal experience with their sense of social belonging.
- Draws attention to the values that underpin decisions about shared social worlds.
- Enhances the potential of marginalized voices being included in public discussions about the future of the City.
- Provides performer-advocates with a platform and a method through which to address a broader public.

Prompts

The central creative tool we use to set these four concepts into motion are the one-to-three sentence creative propositions we call *prompts*. A prompt can be thought of as a nudge, a suggestion, or an invitation to some kind of action. TSDC's creative team uses prompts throughout the different stages of the performance creation workshops to invite participants to imagine something which they are then asked to creatively express through storytelling, Image Theatre, a word or spoken phrase, an image or drawing. We also use prompts in post-performance activities. For examples of how we work with prompts see [Story Circle Prompt](#), [First Images](#), or [Fill-in-the-Blank Audience Response Prompts](#). With a touch of theatrical flair we like to think of prompts as imagination-sparking magic wands.



As we discuss in greater detail in [The Art \(and Craft\) of Facilitation](#), it's preferable in theatre-based workshops to match *how* you introduce an idea or an activity with the *kinds of engagement* you're inviting participants to take part in. For example, imagine arriving as a participant to your first TSDC performance creation workshop and the facilitators launch into an explanation of the core concepts. Oh my — Yawn! TSDC prompts are not explanatory. Nor are they simply questions or a set of instructions (though they often contain elements of both). They are designed to inspire imaginative and creative expression.

TSDC's carefully crafted prompts are designed to offer a concise and creative method for introducing participants to the concepts by inviting them to frame their attention and imaginations in a specific way. This is not to say that each individual prompt will overtly address each aspect of a fictional, collective, future-oriented story that is focused on publicness. Taken together, however, they address the concepts and the larger goal of facilitating the co-creation of plays that will amplify the voices of people who are socially marginalized in public conversations about the City.

PART III

COLLABORATING WITH UNCOMMON PARTNERS

“I would say that it’s easy to be too busy to participate in a project like this, especially in a time where human service providers are dealing with increasing demand and static resources. These persistent pressures can limit our openness to creative community engagement. I would encourage other providers to take the time to find creative people in their communities and support and endorse their work. And learn from the work they do. Doing this can change our work for the better. *Transforming Stories* reminds me that there are other ways to look at what’s wrong with the system and how to fix the system.”

— KATHERINE KALINOWSKI, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, GOOD SHEPHERD CENTRES, HAMILTON.

THE COMMON & UNCOMMON GROUNDS OF TSDC COLLABORATORS

“The best collaborations emerge from the recognition of some kind of common grounding between uncommon partners.”

— PAM KORZA, CO-DIRECTOR, ANIMATING DEMOCRACY.¹

We came across the term “uncommon partners” while reading a book by Jan Cohen-Cruz about socially-engaged theatre projects.² It immediately struck us as a helpful framework for understanding the kinds of collaborations that TSDC performance projects rely on and seek to cultivate. Phrases like “It takes a village” highlight pre-established connections among community members. “Uncommon partners,” on the other hand, draws attention not only to the *common* ground on which collaborations are based, but also to the need to build connections across the *uncommon* grounds of the project’s collaborators.

While the focus of this chapter is largely on the community agency partners that gather to support the creation of TSDC plays, we recognize that the idea of common and uncommon ground also extends to the multiple relationships *within the workshops* — between facilitators, community support workers, and workshop participants, as well as among the participants themselves.

The common ground between members of partner organizations who have been involved with TSDC is that we are all seeking to cultivate public discussions about Hamilton’s future that are more accountable to people who are socially marginalized in Hamilton’s present. We seek ethical and effective ways to work alongside the people whose voices and visions are essential to, and mostly absent from, public direction-setting for the City.

The uncommon grounds, on the other hand, are the different social, professional, and institutional worlds of the project’s collaborators, which include:

- Community and self-advocates
- Socially-engaged theatre practitioners and artists

1. QUOTED IN COHEN-CRUZ, JAN. REMAPPING PERFORMANCE: COMMON GROUND, UNCOMMON PARTNERS. NEW YORK: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN. 2015.

2. Cohen-Cruz, Jan. Remapping Performance: Common Ground, Uncommon Partners. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 2015.

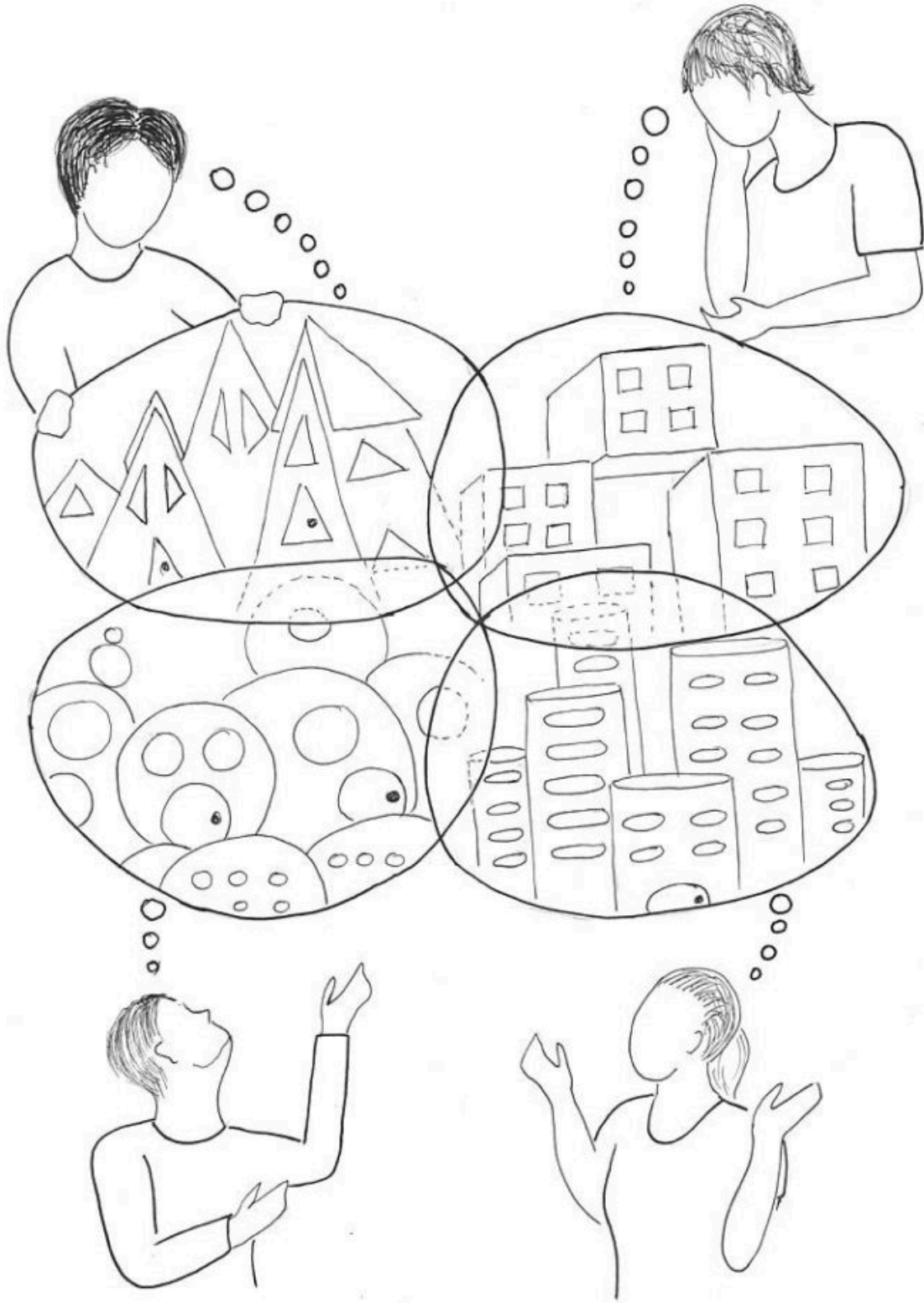
- Social service providers and policy makers
- Arts and social science scholars and educators

THE DIFFERENT WORLDS OF OUR UNCOMMON PARTNERS

At its core, theatre is a collaborative art for the simple reason that without collaboration it would be impossible to create and produce a play. Even solo performances rely on a host of behind-the-scenes partners — people with unique skills like set designers, lighting and sound technicians, directors or choreographers, promoters. These collaborators share both a common vision (the performance) and a common world (theatre). As with all professions, the world of theatre comes with its own practices, values, and vocabularies.

As a socially-engaged theatre project, TSDC collaborations necessarily extend beyond the world of theatre. In addition to theatre practitioners and artists, collaborators on TSDC projects include community members who are advocates for their communities and themselves, social service providers and social planners, arts and social science researchers and educators. Each TSDC collaborator brings their uniquely relevant experiential and professional expertise to the project. Each also comes from their own ‘worlds,’ which, like the world of theatre, comes with its own practices, values, and vocabularies.

To add to this complex array of perspectives, our ‘professional worlds’ and ‘institutional worlds’ are also made up of people who walk and live in multiple social worlds. None of these worlds are homogenous. Many intersect. Some, not so much. What’s clear is that differences abound. How then, do we choose to address and value them?



In our experience, this coming together of worlds is both the wonder and the challenge of uncommon partnerships. On the side of wonder, we've already discussed some of the ways we think TSDC plays can contribute to our shared vision of including a broader range of voices in public discussions about the future of our Cities. In addition to the plays, we consider the uncommon partnerships that are formed to bring the plays into being as beneficial in and of themselves.

TSDC collaborations bring community and self-advocates, socially-engaged theatre practitioners and artists, social service providers and policy makers, and arts and social science scholars and educators into conversation around shared concerns. These conversations work to expand individual partner understandings beyond each of our institutional, professional, and social worlds. Our hope (and belief) is that this kind of exchange of ideas, approaches, and knowledge advances our shared goal of fostering more inclusive and expansive public conversations about the future of our Cities.

... and the challenges?

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES — AND WHY THEY'RE WORTH THE TIME!

“Community workers bring essential knowledge to a project like TSDC! They help facilitate performer-advocates’ participation in the creative process by paying attention to context on (at least!) three levels. Community workers are alert to *immediate personal contexts*: they ask, ‘what do performer-advocates need to know in order to make a decision about their participation, and what social or emotional needs might need tending to first before they can participate fully?’ They pay attention to *structural contexts*: they suggest supports that can be put in place, or ways the process can be adapted, to make it possible for more people to take part. And finally, they pay attention to the *bigger social contexts* of participants’ lives: rather than relying on individual-level or psychological explanations, they draw on knowledge of the violence and exclusions performer-advocates face in the world to understand and respond to what’s happening in the workshops.”

— JENNIE VENGRIS, TSDC RESEARCH AND WORKSHOP TEAM, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK.

When we worked on the play *Choose Your Destination* with youth connected to Good Shepherd Youth Services, we were extremely fortunate to work with Good Shepherd staff through every stage of the project — from project planning through to the project’s culminating performance. Of Good Shepherd’s many contributions to the project, one of its most significant was the commitment of a community worker from the Youth Services program, Paige Butler, to attend every workshop. We were also fortunate to have Sarah Adjekum, a PhD student at McMaster University, join the TSDC workshop team as a research assistant. Sarah’s background as a social worker and community organizer (around issues of housing, community health, and racism) made her contributions to the workshop and research team invaluable.

Reflecting on her experience with *Choose Your Destination*, Sarah speaks about the value of working with community partners — and specifically the involvement of people with backgrounds like hers and Paige’s — for a project like TSDC:

“Workshop participants with this kind of lived experience come into close proximity with really stressful situations. There needs to be an awareness that sometimes participants’ everyday lives will leak into a performance or leak into a workshop session. To make sure that we’re engaging ethically and that we’re going to be able to finish the project, those considerations need to be taken into account.” — SARAH ADJEKUM, TSDC RESEARCH ASSISTANT AND MEMBER OF THE *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION* WORKSHOP TEAM.

Sarah and Paige brought an exceptional capacity to ‘take into account’ the lived experiences of the youth at every moment in the process. More generally, TSDC’s community partners play a crucial role in orienting workshop facilitators to the conditions and stresses that the communities we are working with encounter, and

how these can matter in the workshop process — how these conditions can ‘leak in,’ as Sarah says, and how the process needs to respond or adapt.

The contributions and value of community workers within the workshop is something we’ll discuss in more detail both later in this chapter and in the chapter to come ([The Art \(and Craft\) of Facilitation](#)). For now, however, we want to note that one of the many reasons we look to community workers to educate us (as theatre facilitators) about the lived experience and life contexts of workshop participants is so as not to burden participants with the task.

We understand that since TSDC’s participants come from marginalized populations they are far too often in situations where they’re called upon to explain the circumstances of their lived experience. While participants are welcome to share this kind of knowledge in order to contribute to the play’s story arc, we don’t want to put them in a position where we are relying on them to educate us. We’re also conscious of the dangers of misunderstanding or missing the point of things participants share because we’re not familiar enough with the context.

In the early stages of TSDC, we often underestimated ‘what it takes’ to bring about a sufficient understanding not only of the lived experiences of workshop participants but also of the multiple worlds — among participants, and between participants, community workers, and workshop facilitators — that intersected and, at times, conflicted, during the workshops. Left unexamined, misunderstandings can accumulate, cause confusion, impede the collective creative process, and result in insufficient safeguards for participants.

Without the guidance of community partners, the gaps between worlds and world views that can occur include:

- Missed cues about barriers that may be affecting participation in workshop activities.
- Missed cues about the significance of themes that are emerging from the workshop process.
- Tensions being misunderstood as interpersonal conflicts rather than differences in understanding about what it means to perform a certain image or scene.
- Lack of clear communication about how the narrative of the play is shaped.
- Inadequate ‘safeguards’ in place during and between workshops to address issues and concerns that may arise in response to workshop activities.

Jan Cohen-Cruz identifies “insufficient time” as one of the biggest challenges confronting the kind of uncommon partnerships we are proposing. She goes on to explain that the danger of this time shortage is

that it often results in “insufficient cultural orientation.”¹ Cohen-Cruz is particularly focused on the risks that can arise when arts practitioners work with communities who have been socially marginalized. This is not to suggest that many socially-engaged theatre practitioners don’t already have considerable experience working with marginalized communities. No matter how experienced theatre practitioners are, however, they will not necessarily be knowledgeable about a particular community and the contexts of participants’ lived experience. This is why it’s so important for the creative team to work closely with community partners. And that takes time.

To respectfully balance the time demands collaboration places on our community partners, while also ensuring that the project has the benefit of their expertise, guidance, and community networks, it’s helpful to begin with a conversation about the potential scope and/or limits of what community partners’ involvement might be. As members of TSDC’s creative and research teams we recognize that, in the past, we’ve tended to underestimate the project’s time demands. So, with the benefit of hindsight we offer the following at-a-glance overview of a typical TSDC project’s phases, timeline, and tasks. We hope that this will be a useful resource for clarifying the time demands, limits, and commitments for collaborators on potential future projects. (Note: Each of the project’s phases and the tasks and activities that take place in them are discussed in greater detail in upcoming chapters.)

1. Cohen-Cruz, Jan. *Remapping Performance: Common Ground, Uncommon Partners*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 2015.

Project stages, timeline, and tasks

Project Stages	Timeline	Tasks
Project planning	Planning begins 1 to 3 months in advance of start of workshop series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss project goals, feasibility and potential participants who may be interested • Develop a recruitment plan • Discuss agency involvement throughout planning, workshop, and performance stages • Work out logistics (workshop space, food, transportation, etc.) • Host recruitment session with interested participants
Performance creation workshops	12-15 weeks of weekly 3-hour workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take part in weekly workshops • Meet between workshops to discuss any themes, issues, or concerns • Plan subsequent workshop sessions
Performance preparations	Planning begins approximately 2 months prior to performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss possible audience and site for the performance • Work out performance logistics (space, promotion/ invitations, food, etc.) • Plan post-performance activities

TRANSLATING ACROSS WORLDS

“I remember a meeting at which some of the community workers were concerned that the creative team was leaving vital issues out of the play — for example, the play was not directly addressing lack of affordable housing for youth. Yet when Catherine was able to convey the story arc she was beginning to see emerge from the youth’s stories — the arc from young people having to be vigilant about absolutely everything, to their vision or ‘dream’ of finally having the chance to relax — the community workers immediately saw the value of that, it ‘rang true’ to what they know about young people’s lives, and what they wish for them. That was *one of the great ‘uncommon partners/common ground’ moments in the project*. The community workers expressed their worries (and their sense of what was essential to the story) from ‘their world,’ and the creative team was called on to articulate what they were trying to ‘do’ with the play in a clearer way. Everyone came out of it with a stronger sense of shared purpose.”

— CHRIS SINDING, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK.

The question of ‘cultural orientation’ applies not only to workshop participants’ experiences and contexts — it also applies to the experiences and contexts of *all* of TSDC’s project collaborators. For example, issues of ‘cultural difference’ and the need for translation have arisen even for those of us *within* the TSDC research team, which includes scholars and research assistants from across the arts and social sciences.

To avoid the pitfall of assuming shared meaning we found it useful at times to preface comments with the phrase, “in *my* world.” The phrase can also be turned into a question and an invitation to collaborators to share their perspectives — “What’s does this look like in *your* world?” “What’s true about this in *your* world?” “How would this idea or phrase be heard in *your* world?”

The ‘my world’ metaphor is a way of acknowledging that:

- Our perspectives and ways of seeing things are always reflective of the larger worlds we come from, live, and work in.
- Our perspectives or approaches may be unique to our own field of study, practice, profession, identity, or social location.
- Many other equally legitimate perspectives, or ‘worlds,’ exist.
- Translation may be needed in order to arrive at shared understandings across the different worlds that make up uncommon partnerships.
- Negotiation across the uncommon grounds of project collaborators’ worlds may be required in order to arrive at, or construct, common (or common-enough) ground.

Over the course of the project, and with the help of our community partners, we got better at recognizing moments of uncommon ground. We came to appreciate more fully how specific situations and interactions reveal the multiple and often overlapping ‘worlds’ that can be present within a particular community or workshop series, and how each of these worlds comes with its own practices, values, and vocabularies. When conflicts and misunderstandings arose, we became more able to step back, and use the confusion or tension to prompt reflection and conversation about the different ways we saw the situation, from our different worlds.

This stepping back was tremendously useful at many levels. It often revealed unspoken values or expectations about how the play would come together, the messages it would carry, and how they would be conveyed. Among other things, we came to recognize that we sometimes needed to take more time to explain to participants and community partners how we thought a particular story arc would work better to draw attention to community issues through stage action rather than by describing the issue in dialogue.

Since a distinguishing feature of theatre’s vocabulary is that it uses an embodied and poetic language to show rather than tell, we’ve also found it helpful to invite community partners to take part in some of the core exercises that we use in the workshops. This experiential understanding can be particularly useful for community partners who are involved in helping to identify and recruit potential participants for the project. But while embodied vocabulary is theatre’s strength, we know it’s not always sufficient for communicating across worlds. In addition to letting the ‘work speak for itself,’ there’s also a need for theatre practitioners to articulate what we’re doing and why.

Taking the time to translate across the common/uncommon worlds of TSDC’s many collaborators has played an essential role in facilitating the production of TSDC plays! As we noted previously, we also believe (quite passionately) that the process of sharing perspectives and approaches and of cultivating relationships among diverse collaborators is valuable in and of itself. In the words of our Good Shepherd community partner, Katherine Kalinowski, these collaborations “change all of our work for the better.”

ROLES & CONTRIBUTIONS

Below are descriptions of some key collaborator roles and their associated contributions based on *our* experience with TSDC. Some of these roles are *essential* to creating a public performance that facilitates attention to marginalized peoples' voices and visions. For example, there would be no play without the community members who share their stories, their knowledge, their courage, and their time to create and perform it, and there would be no play without a theatre practitioner to facilitate the process. We believe it's equally crucial to involve staff or volunteers from at least one community partner or advocacy organization — staff or volunteers who are knowledgeable about the structural and social contexts of the lived experience of workshop participants.

Because TSDC emerged in the context of a community performance and research initiative based at a University, the role of arts and social science researchers and educators has been central to *our* experience. We understand, however, that while projects like this one may be initiated through a University, they are very rarely sustained in that setting. They are more likely to flourish over time in the context of community-based networks. In fact, one of the goals of our research has been to share what we've learned with the broader community in Hamilton, and other settings, in the hopes of supporting similar projects. In the final chapter of this workbook — [Prompting Ongoing Conversations](#) — we share some of our visions (and invite yours) of what we imagine it might look like (and require) for TSDC (or projects similar to it), to function as an ongoing and sustainable community arts project.

Partnerships with scholars and educators may not be *necessary* to create the kinds of performances we discuss in the pages of this workbook. However, because of the knowledge and potential access to resources that scholars in these fields have, as well as the immense educational value of the performances, we consider these kinds of collaborations to be invaluable.

One final note: The roles and contributions outlined below are guidelines! They are based on *our* experience with TSDC and offered with the understanding that every project will have a life of its own, and that roles will always need to be worked out by the project's partners.

Community and self-advocates

The community members (community and self-advocates who have lived experience of social marginalization) are the performer-advocates whose creative work is at the heart of this workbook. As we noted previously,

throughout the workbook we use a number of terms when referring to the community members who take part in TSDC workshops and who create and then perform TSDC plays for public audiences. Our intention is to try to capture *some* of the multiple roles, capacities, and contributions of TSDC's community participant-performers.

In the following sections of the workbook you will learn a lot more about their creative risk-taking, their courage, and the amazing plays they created. For now, we offer a glimpse into some of the many contributions these performer-advocates make throughout the performance creation process.

Community and self-advocates roles and contributions:

- Share stories that shape TSDC scripts and performances and reflect knowledge gained through their lived experience and their understanding of the social context of that experience.
- Share in the work of creating a caring collective environment for the creative process to flourish in.
- Take creative risks by participating in a range of new forms of exploration.
- Offer analysis about the current conditions and realities in particular communities (like filling out the bigger picture).
- Share reflections about the meanings connected to stories, images, and scenes that emerge during workshop activities.
- Help to shape the post-performance facilitation design.

Theatre practitioners & artists

A performance creation project like TSDC needs a theatre practitioner who has experience working with marginalized communities and non-professional performers using collaborative theatre creation methods. The theatre practitioner may be the one who initiates the project, or a community service agency with pre-existing connections with community members who have lived experience of marginalization, may seek out a theatre practitioner. Below is an overview of some of the roles and contributions of the theatre practitioner. See [The Art \(and Craft\) of Facilitation](#), [Workshop Activities & Exercises](#), [TSDC Performance Scripts](#), and [Set & Prop Design](#) for more detailed descriptions of what's involved in facilitating the workshop series, devising the script, and preparing for the performance.

Theatre practitioner roles and contributions:

- Meet with representative(s) from community service partner agency to discuss the project and identify potential participants.
- Work with partner agency to identify a community worker who is available to participate for the

duration of the workshop series.

- Introduce the project to potential participants at a recruitment session organized by the community service partner.
- Facilitate performance creation workshops (activities include story circles, theatre games and warm-ups, Image Theatre exercises, etc.).
- Communicate to participants the goals of the workshops and what the process of collectively creating a script will look like.
- Have a conversation with participating community worker after every workshop session.
- Use theatre-based skills to devise focused activities to assist participants in identifying collective themes and developing story narrative.
- Based on workshop improvisations and discussions, develop and present proposed scene configurations to participants.
- Work with participants to develop scenes and create the play's scene map and skeleton script.
- Direct rehearsals with performer-advocates.
- Work with community partners to develop and facilitate [Post-Performance Activities](#) designed to engage audiences as active participants in the ongoing conversation that the play initiates about the future of the City.

As the play's themes and narrative arc begin to develop, an additional artist will be brought in to design and create a simple [Set & Props](#). If at all possible (resources permitting), the artist will be part of the creative team from the beginning and will assist with facilitating the workshop activities.

Arts and social science researchers and educators

As we've said, since TSDC has been shaped as a community-based performance and research initiative, the arts and social science scholars and educators who made up the research team played a central role in the project's initiation, development, and implementation. For the purpose of this workbook, here are some ways we think scholars and educators might contribute to community-based performance creation projects with goals similar to those of TSDC.

Roles and contributions of arts and social science researchers and educators:

- Help find theatre workshop facilitators (or assistants) through faculty and students in theatre program.
- Identify people in their own networks (students, colleagues) who might assist with the project.
- Facilitate access to University community-engagement initiatives and small project grants that might enable particular phases or aspects of the work.
- Invite performer-advocates to present their play to classroom audiences of students who, upon

graduation, will be employed in relevant sectors as community service workers, community arts projects, and related sector area positions.

- Investigate and support performance opportunities at relevant conferences or symposiums hosted by the University.

Community agency partner

TSDC performance projects would not have been possible without the contributions of our community service agency partners. The role(s) of a partner agency are bound to vary depending on its size, area of focus, and access to resources. Below are some of the many ways our community partners contributed to TSDC projects.

Community service partner roles and contributions:

- Meet with theatre practitioner to discuss the project and identify potential participants.
- Facilitate recruitment.
- Work with theatre workshop facilitator to ensure that participants have enough information to make an informed choice about participating in the performance creation process.
- Share appropriate knowledge about structural and social contexts of potential participants' lived experiences with theatre workshop facilitator.
- Designate a staff member from the agency who has knowledge of the context of participants' lived experience to attend all the workshops and consult with the creative team. (See [The Importance of Community Partners](#) for more on this!)
- Provide in-kind donations in the form of workshop, rehearsal, and performance space; lunches for workshops; transportation support; photocopying, and other kinds of office and communications support.
- Draw on community networks to identify and outreach to appropriate audiences for performance.
- Promote performances and participate in hosting performance event and post-performance activities and conversations.
- Participate in conversations about the process and possible remounts of the performance or future projects.

A note on recruitment

TSDC creates plays designed to interrupt patterns of exclusion in public discussion. To do this we use a *facilitator model*. This means that ‘we’ — as ‘facilitators’ of the performance creation process — don’t decide in advance what the play’s story will be about. While TSDC theatre facilitators guide participants through the creative process and apply their artistic knowledge of how to focus audience attention when developing a script and staging the play, the *content of the play always comes from the participants*.

Because the content comes from participants, the nature of the collective story that can be told depends on who is in the room, and the experiences and knowledge each person brings. This is why our community partners’ help with recruiting is such a critical contribution. Drawing on their established relationships with community and self-advocates and the knowledge they have of the context of their lived experience, our community partners help to ensure that people from a range of social standpoints, who bring a diversity of perspectives, participate in the workshops and co-create the story.

TSDC'S COMMUNITY AGENCY PARTNERS

“Transforming Stories created a space in which women who don’t necessarily get heard can be heard. And collective action is very powerful. Poverty, homelessness and oppression of all types thrive on isolation. So, when you can breach that isolation and get disparate people together and find their commonalities that’s transformative for individuals but also for the community. It’s also the audience that is transformed. The audience, who may think that they are quite knowledgeable about an issue, is challenged to question assumptions and create new understandings of really complex, really difficult issues.”

— KATHERINE KALINOWSKI, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, GOOD SHEPHERD CENTRES, HAMILTON.

Since the early days of our project, we’ve been extremely fortunate to have strong support from a number of people in Hamilton’s non-profit social service and policy sectors. Two of our most passionate advocates who signed on as part of TSDC’s Leadership Team are Katherine Kalinowski (Good Shepherd Centres) and Patti McNaney (Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton). Katherine and Patti shared our concerns about the exclusion or under-representation of the voices of marginalized populations in public discussions

about our collective future. To our delight, they were also enthusiastic about exploring how a performance-based approach to storytelling might be used as a creative mechanism to address the issue of exclusion in an ethical way.

If you're reading this, we take it as a positive sign that you might be considering collaborating on a performance-based project. Yay! If you're a member of a community service organization, we recognize that with the multiple demands on your time, considering this kind of collaboration is no small thing. So, to further entice you to continue reading (or to seek out potential collaborators!), here are some ways our community agency partners have told us that they believe TSDC plays contribute to their work and benefit the communities they serve:

- The plays present personal stories in a way that focuses audience attention on the cultural and structural conditions that lead to social problems, rather than on individual choices.
- The plays work to activate solidarity and self-reflection in audiences, rather than blame or pity for the storytellers.
- The plays have the potential to contribute to democratic participation in rapidly diversifying post-industrial centres like Hamilton.
- Service users and community members have experienced the performance creation process and the performances as transformative and empowering.
- Engagement with embodied creative practices introduce new tools for collective problem solving in communities and in agencies.

TSDC, and the plays it facilitated, would not have been possible without the multiple contributions of our community partners! The creative team relies on our community partners in so so so many ways including:

- Helping to identify and recruit participants with lived experience who might be interested in developing a play.
- Sharing their knowledge of the structural and social contexts of the lived experience of the participants.
- When possible, providing the support of a community worker with knowledge of the lived experience of

“We often understand that asking a person with lived experience to stand in front of a room to tell their story can be tokenistic yet we rarely come up with a different way to include their voices. This is the way we know how to give voice to people with lived experience even when we recognize the inherent issues. TSDC was completely different. The participants were performers and we were watching them be artists. The process transformed them into performance creators and artists.”

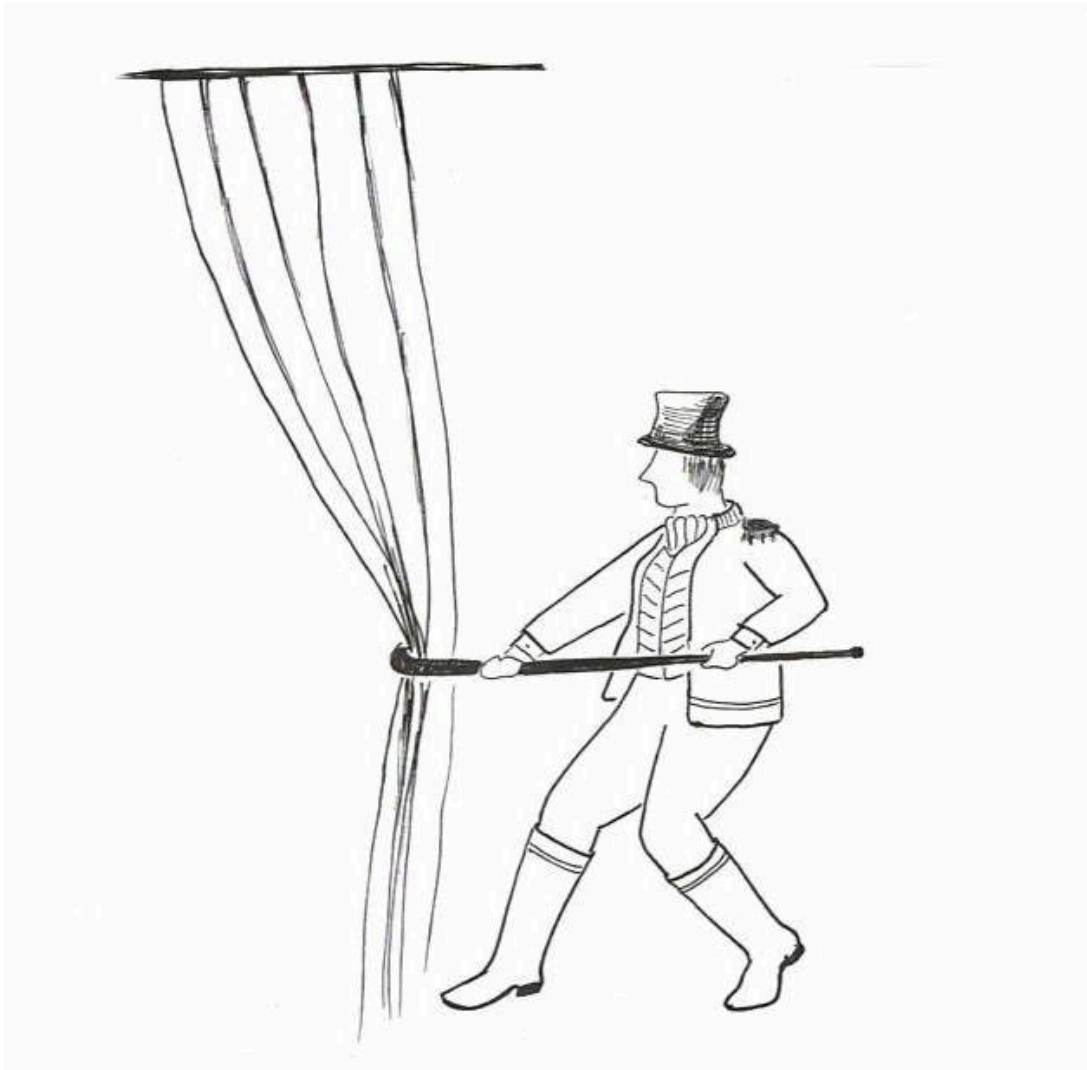
— PATTI MCNANEY, SOCIAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH COUNCIL OF HAMILTON.

the participants to take part in the workshops and post workshop conversations (see [Importance of Community Partners](#)).

- Drawing on institutional networks to mobilize structural support for the project (meals for workshops; workshop and performance spaces; transportation support for participants; etc.).
- Helping to identify suitable audiences for performances, and taking part in hosting performance events (see [The Performance Event](#)).

PART IV

THE ART (AND CRAFT) OF FACILITATION



ALIGNING METHODS WITH GOALS & MOTIVATIONS

Facilitating creative processes in community-based theatre is an art that when done well feels more like magic. But even the best facilitators are not magicians. They are experienced practitioners whose skills are honed through preparation and practice, and through carefully listening to community workshop participants and community partners. One of our motivations for writing this workbook, is to pull back the curtain on the magic. In this and the following chapters ([Workshop Activities & Exercises](#) and [TSDC Performance Scripts](#)), we will share not only the *kinds* of exercises and activities used in TSDC community performance creation workshops, but also:

- The *partnerships* that support effective facilitation
- The *considerations* that go into the selection of activities
- The skills that contribute to the *artful craft of facilitation*

The role of theatre practitioners in relationship to community participants varies among different kinds of community-based theatre projects. Professor of Applied Theatre, Amanda Stuart Fisher, suggests that the range of roles can be defined as mediator, interpreter, and facilitator.¹ Roughly speaking, an interpreter-playwright is someone who gathers stories from a community and weaves them into a play. A mediator-playwright works with the community using structured written and improvisational exercises to generate dialogue that the mediator-playwright then uses to write the play. In both of these models the community is involved in the story gathering and/or development stages of the performance creation process.

The facilitator model extends participants' involvement to all stages of the performance creation process, from the creation of a collective story through to its public performance.

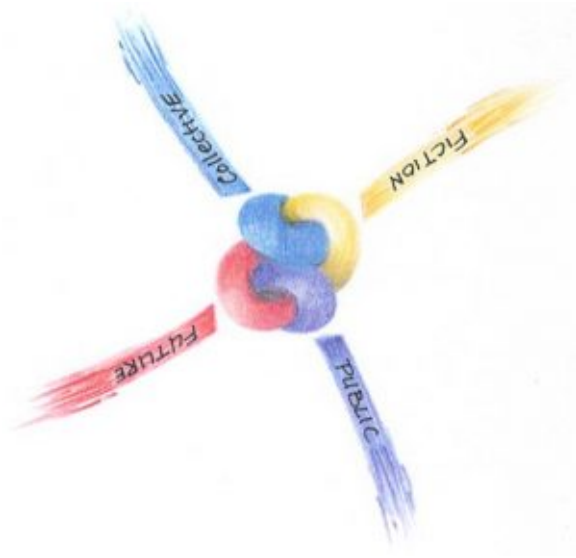
TSDC's theatre practitioners adopt the role of facilitator. This means that TSDC's creative approach works to enhance the potential of marginalized groups to be publicly heard *directly through their own voices*.² This isn't to say that the facilitator doesn't play a substantial role in guiding the process and helping to shape the play. In fact, one reason it's important to have an experienced theatre practitioner in the role of facilitator, is precisely

1. See Fisher, Amanda Stuart. "The Playwright in Residence: A Community's Storyteller."

2. See Fisher, Amanda Stuart. "The Playwright in Residence: A Community's Storyteller."

because of the artistic skills they bring. For example, theatre practitioners know how to keep the audience's attention focused on the story by ensuring that they aren't distracted by activities that aren't significant to the play's narrative arc (more on this when we get to [TSDC Performance Scripts](#)).

The design of TSDC workshops, and the selection and facilitation of workshop activities, are done with two related goals in mind:



- To work alongside participants to create a play that communicates a publicly-framed, fictional, collective, and future-oriented story that draws on the knowledge participants' have gained through their own lived experience and through witnessing and talking with others in similar circumstances.
- To provide participants with enough of a foundation in performance skills to enable them to hold the attention of an audience so that the play can be performed by the participants themselves.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS

One of the first considerations for community-based theatre workshop facilitators is understanding who is in the room:

- Who are the participants and why they have decided to take part in the workshop?
- What do they need in order to take part in the workshop process?
- How can workshop activities be adapted to minimize potential barriers?
- What are the personal, social, and political concerns that participants bring to the process?

These are not questions that a theatre facilitator can answer on their own. As we discussed previously (See [Collaborating with Uncommon Partners](#)) facilitating TSDC performance creation workshops requires more than theatre practitioner skills. It's important to bring together a team whose areas of experience and knowledge complement one another in order to mitigate against the kinds of oversights that can occur when theatre practitioners work in isolation and to provide sufficient support for the workshop participants.

In most instances, the facilitator identifies one community agency to partner with on the project. Typically, one or two staff at the agency are intrigued by the possibilities of theatre workshops both as opportunities for service users, and as a chance for the agency to draw attention in a new way to the social problems that create the need for its services. It can also work the other way around; Community agencies that are intrigued by the idea of creating a play may seek out a theatre practitioner to work with *or* community members who experience marginalization and want to explore theatre as a creative resource for their community and self-advocacy work might start the ball rolling by approaching either a community agency or a theatre practitioner.

Ideally, a community worker with knowledge of the lived experience of the participants and their social and political contexts attends all the workshop sessions. They take part by facilitating check-ins and the workshop's closing reflections. They also participate fully in some workshop activities including the opening circle where we gather together to eat and visit, story circles, warm-ups, and response rounds. In this way the community worker helps to close the potential gap between the theatre facilitation team and the workshop participants both in terms of relationships and in terms of understanding the context of participants' lives. (More on the value of this kind of involvement in a moment!)

The community worker also meets with the theatre facilitator between workshops. Some of the questions we ask during these conversations include:

- How did the workshop go? What did participants take from it? How do we think it affected them?
- How did we do as facilitators? What was useful, what might we have done/said differently?
- What themes emerged from the stories, theatre images, and reflections that the participants shared?
- With attention to participants' privacy, are there things that can be shared to help the team understand the dynamics in the workshop?
- Any worries or hopes about the process and the play that are coming forward?

We also intentionally design the workshops to include informal as well as more structured opportunities to check-in directly with participants. For example, each workshop includes time to share a meal and chat in addition to more formal check-in activities (See [Gathering, Checking-in & Wrapping-up](#)). As we previously noted, however, we're aware that people who are socially marginalized often face excessive demands to explain the circumstances of their lived experience. This is one of the reasons we ask some of the above questions of the project's community worker rather than of the participants. We recognize how tiring it can be to have to explain over and over again what it's like, for example, to be on OW (Ontario Works, the Ontario social assistance program), or to experience institutional racism or transphobia.

Participants are *always* welcome to share any information they wish, especially in relationships to things they want to see represented in the play. But we never want to put them in a situation where they feel that they are responsible for educating us.

Community workers who takes part in TSDC workshops contribute in many ways:

- Share relevant knowledge about the social context of participants' lived experiences with the theatre facilitator.
- Support individual participants who may feel a need or desire to step back from an activity for a moment during workshops.
- Check-in with participants between workshops if something arose that may have been triggering for them.
- Assist participants in accessing structural or practical support they might need in order to continue to participate in a workshop series.
- Support the theatre facilitator between workshops by reflecting on what's taking place during the workshops.

TIMELINE

Another important consideration for TSDC facilitators is the project's timeline. Unlike theatre practitioners who define their role as interpreters or mediators (and work with communities to gather stories and write a play that will then be performed by professional actors), TSDC practitioners need to facilitate the creation of a play *while simultaneously training community participants as non-professional performers*. That's a lot to pack into 12 to 15 weeks! Oh, and did we mention that this should be done in a way that creates a relaxed environment and communicates a sense of confidence in the group's ability to achieve their goal of creating and publicly performing a play?

This is where the art and craft of facilitation sometimes masquerades as magic. To enable the creation and performance of a play in a 12 to 15 week timeframe TSDC facilitators rely on both structural and performance-based tools that include:

- Workshop plans
- Prompts
- Tone and performative modeling
- Script development skills
- Integrating relationship-building social activities — like sharing food, visiting, checking-in, and so on — into *every* workshop session!

WORKSHOP PLAN

While there's a creative approach and an overarching logic to how a TSDC workshop series is structured, the plan for each individual workshop is never pre-determined. It's always created in response to the stories that have emerged in previous workshops, and with attention to the needs and concerns of the workshop participants. Information shared in the conversations between the theatre workshop facilitator and the community worker helps the facilitator to create a plan for the next workshop session which they share with the community worker a few days prior to the workshop for any additional feedback.

Keep in mind that the workshop plan isn't meant to be a scripted set of directions to be read out during the workshop! It's to be used more as a map to prepare facilitators for the workshop journey, and to keep track of roles, activities, and time, so that adjustments can be made when needed.

The workshop plan takes into account the following considerations:

- The overarching goals of the phase of the performance creation series the workshop session is taking place in (getting to know one another, gathering material, structuring material, rehearsing).
- Information from the facilitation team conversations about the previous workshop(s).
- Video, still images, and notes on what stood out from [Image Theatre](#) explorations and participant reflections from the previous workshop(s).

Elements of a TSDC workshop plan include:

- Name and a description of activities
- Notes about facilitation approach
- Focused prompts to initiate and activate images and group reflection activities
- Estimated time allotted to each activity
- Name of person(s) who will lead the activity

SAMPLE WORKSHOP PLAN: WEEK 3 WORKSHOP PLAN (2:30-5:30)

Activity	Description	Notes	Time
Check-in & food (M & S)	Start informally with, <i>What stuck with you from last week? What were you excited about?</i> 1-10 scale check-in: <i>How do we feel about getting started today?</i>	(M) touch base with (S) about facilitating the check-in and check-out	2:45-3:15
Slide show (C)	Here are the images you created; here are the images from a good place, bad place; What do you notice looking at these images again?		3:15-3:25
Brainstorm (M)	Where do youth meet now? Where are the kinds of places in the City where these types of thing might happen? Where would you imagine these kinds of things could happen? These places might not exist but where would you imagine them?	Go back to negative image Go back to positive image (P) write places onto flip-chart	3:25-3:35
Warm-up (P)	The Great Fanzinis!	video record with iphone (M)	3:35-3:40
2 sets of sculpted images with newspaper headlines (C)	Tell youth we're going to have them do two types of images: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images in the kind of place where youth have to protect themselves. • Image of youth in a place where people take care of each other. <p>Sculpting, each youth gets to sculpt the rest of the youth into an image. One at a time a youth steps out of the image (P steps in and takes youth's place).</p> <p>From outside the image ask: <i>If this were an image in a newspaper, what would the headline on the article be?</i></p> <p>Youth steps back in, next youth steps out, give newspaper headline.</p>	Begin with images of people needing to defend themselves Record headlines on flipchart (M)	3:40-4:00
Break			4:00-4:10

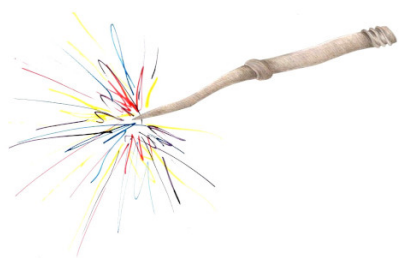
Activity	Description	Notes	Time
Put the 2 images together (C & P)	Explore how you would move from one image to the next (5 claps). <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Just move• Non-verbal sound• Say one sentence• Inner monologue	Look at photos of images before starting sculptures. Take still photos (M)	4:10-5:10
Check-out (S)	1-10 scale check-out		5:10-5:30

PROMPTS

If TSDC workshop facilitators *were* magicians (they're not — really!) prompts might well be their magic wand! We've discussed the role of prompts as a central tool (See [TSDC's Creative Approach](#)) and will elaborate more on specific prompts when we talk about [Story Circles](#), [Image Theatre](#), and [Post-Performance Activities](#). For now, here's a brief recap: TSDC facilitators use prompts throughout different stages of the performance creation workshops (as well as in post-performance activities) to invite participants to imagine something which they are then asked to creatively express through storytelling, Image Theatre, a word or spoken phrase, an image or drawing.

To illustrate the role of prompts, let's return to the magic wand analogy for a moment. As Harry Potter fans know, a wand is a tool for focusing and directing energy (similar to a concert conductor's baton). The facilitator-as-magician uses their prompt-as-wand to channel what we might think of as creative-impulse spells. Each individual prompt works to focus specific exercise activities. Taken together, the overarching goal of the prompts is to assist the workshop participants in creating a play that communicates a fictionalized, collective, future-oriented story set in a public context.

Here's an example of a getting to know one another activity and prompt that we used during a recruitment meeting with youth who were connected through Good Shepherd Youth Services. Everyone (including the community worker and members of the project's creative team), was asked to find a partner (preferably someone they didn't know too well). They were invited to introduce themselves to their partner by saying their name and describing to one another what the handbag (or knapsack, or carryall) they most often carry looks like. Then, the facilitator gave this prompt:

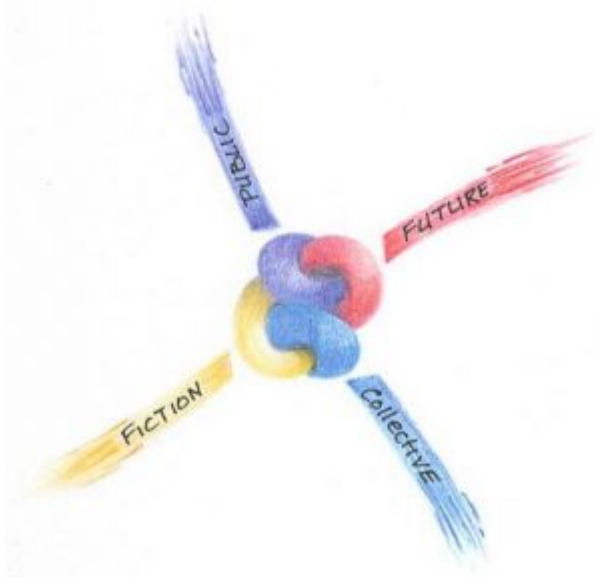


Your handbag or knapsack has seen the places you go in Hamilton.

If your bag could talk, what would it say?

In addition to being a playful way to do introductions, the prompt facilitated a creative experience that engaged three of TSDC's key concepts: Having participants take on the voices of their bags invites them into a process

of *fictionalization*, and asking them to tell us what their bags have seen about a shared *public* environment (Hamilton) invites them to create a *collective* story.



What we had no idea of at the time, was how central the idea of traveling through the City would end up being to the story arc of the play they created about a group of youth who frequently cross paths on a bus travelling the “Choose Your Destination” route.

Using prompts to initiate workshop activities:

- Helps focus the group’s collective imagination, which is particularly important in a time-limited performance creation workshop process.
- Provides a performative way of introducing participants to the four core elements — fictional, collective, future-oriented, and public — of TSDC’s performance creation process.
- Gives participants a chance to shape a story, image, or response in their imaginations prior to sharing out loud or expressing it through the creation of an embodied still image in workshops.
- Aids in generating material and in filling in missing pieces or gaps in the dramatic composition that is emerging.

tone & rapport

Facilitator tone goes a long way in helping to relax people and is a big part of any workshop activity. This is important for several reasons. At the beginning of a workshop series, participants are often quite anxious about the idea that they are going to perform publicly or even in front of those attending the workshop. Most people are nervous about speaking publicly. Because TSDC participants often encounter stereotypes and negative judgements in daily life, they are understandably wary about what might happen if they share their stories publicly.

Creating a relaxed atmosphere is also important because during TSDC workshops we often find ourselves discussing things that can be painful. While as a facilitator, you never want to take what is being said lightly, with tone you can communicate that though it's not all going to be fun, it's all going to be okay. Nobody's going to get judged, and if somebody is hurt or feeling that this is too much, we'll respect that and deal with it on the spot.

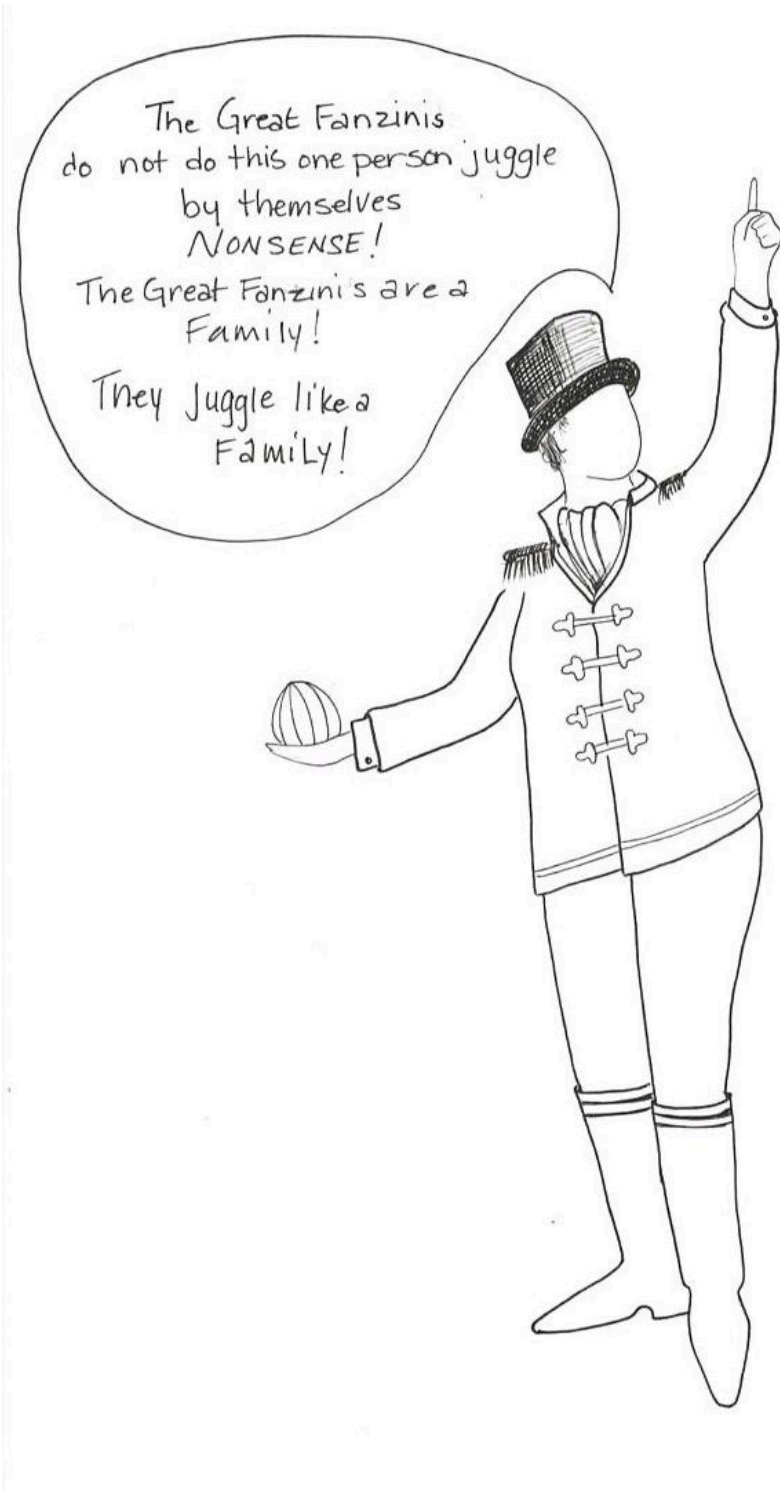
In large part, the relaxed and sociable tone of the workshops is established during the weekly activities focused on [Gathering, Checking-in & Wrapping-up](#). In both informal as well as more structured sharing activities it's important to recognize that tone and rapport are reciprocal exchanges. Facilitation requires paying attention, reflecting, and responding to the tone of both the group and individual group members. It's helpful to remember that while, as facilitator, you may be inviting participants into your world (the world of theatre), through their contributions in informal exchanges as well as the structured creative activities, workshop participants are also inviting you into their worlds.

With tone, the facilitator is also able to convey a sense of confidence in both the group and the creative process. Since one of the norms of theatre workshops is that we are always trying out new ideas, tone becomes an important tool for communicating that this means things aren't always going to work out as planned — and that's okay! Really, it is! In fact, it's necessary. Supporting participants to become comfortable with creative and collective experimentation (which includes doing stuff that flops), is a big part of facilitating theatre workshops.

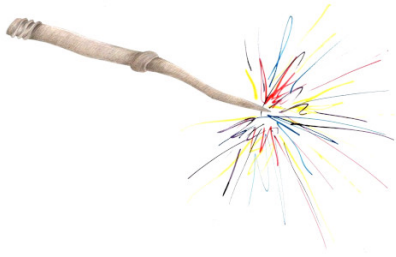
PERFORMATIVE MODELING

As with any theatre project, a premise on which TSDC is based is that theatre is a valuable and effective tool for communicating ideas, feelings, and visions. It follows then, that in addition to tone other elements of performance — posture, gesture, story, character — are useful communication resources when facilitating performance creation workshops.

Wherever possible, TSDC theatre facilitators introduce workshop exercises and activities using their performance-based communication skills — a performative kind of show and tell. For example, when introducing a warm-up exercise like [The Great Fanzinis](#), the facilitator can take on the role of a Circus Ringmaster as they explain how the exercise will work and stay in character as they facilitate the exercise. Here's a lovely example of how Catherine, embodying a flamboyant Circus Ringmaster persona, communicated one of the take-away values of The Great Fanzini's while she introduced the exercise:



Similarly, introducing and facilitating a character or story development exercise can be an opportunity to model storytelling skills and to reinforce story elements like character, place, and action. For example, prior to a COVID-era Sustaining Connections virtual (Zoom) gathering we sent everyone an email with a prompt that invited them to:



Find an object in the place you're living that reminds you of something that makes you happy, even for a moment, or that you have developed a new appreciation of.

Invent a character who might interact with this object in a way that would help an audience understand why or how it could make someone's life easier or bring them a moment of joy.

As facilitators, during the virtual workshop we took on the role of lively and hospitable radio hosts interviewing the participants' invented characters about their objects. With this approach we were able to model a kind of storytelling while also performatively reinforcing elements of the story by using our radio host personas to ask follow-up questions to support participants to more fully develop their characters and stories. Taking on the roles of Circus Ringmaster and radio hosts, also gave the facilitators a way to performatively communicate an attitude of solidarity and care, a way of saying we're here with you.

KNOWING WHAT TO PAY ATTENTION TO IN A COLLECTIVE DEVISING PROCESS

In addition to the definable skills required to facilitate accessible and engaging community-based theatre workshops, there is the more elusive skill of knowing what to look and listen for in regard to group process and **devising** a public performance with marginalized communities. *What's needed?* and *What's missing?* are familiar questions to anyone who has ever developed a script. On one level, they're questions of dramatic composition. When working with people who experience marginalization across a number of dimensions in our community, they're also questions about the ethics of knowing *how* to make personal stories public in a way that honours the performer-advocates' stories and their desires for a public voice while preserving their privacy.

Devising is not a predictable model. It involves a lot of experimentation and repetition. We'll go into more detail about TSDC's devising process when we get to [Creating the Performance Script](#). For now, here are some overarching themes that the facilitator pays attention to:

- How the stories that emerge in the workshops reflect or conflict with widely believed stories that circulate in dominant culture. (For example, the idea that hard work leads to security and success, or that being good neighbours depends only on the goodwill of individuals.)
- What kind of public space will allow characters who may be relative strangers to encounter one another, and accommodate the action of the play.
- What are the 'pivot points' that took place during Image Theatre improvisations — moments when people make new choices or decisions.
- In projects with a mandate like TSDC's, devising also requires paying attention to making sure every voice is represented in the narrative of the play, and avoiding oversimplification while ensuring that the story arc is focused on issues connected to public discussion.

A TIME TO 'STAND WITH' — A TIME TO 'STAND BACK'

“Many researchers think it’s very important to ‘stand back’ — to keep our own values out of the picture, and not to share much of ourselves with participants, as (the thinking goes) these things interfere with a researcher’s capacity to see or ‘know’ a situation clearly. TSDC researchers have a different view: we think that acknowledging our commitments, and being involved (sharing things about ourselves, allowing ourselves to be affected) helps us better understand the stories the people we’re working with tell... plus it just feels more real and respectful!”

— CHRIS SINDING, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK.

TSDC facilitators have a clear role, and with that role comes responsibilities. But this doesn’t mean that facilitators are just our roles. We are real people, and we bring our own values and commitments to the project. We mentioned earlier that community workers regularly take part in some of the workshop’s weekly activities. TSDC theatre facilitators also take part in these activities. During informal conversations over meals and during check-ins, for example, the community workers and workshop facilitators often share personal stories and information based on their lived experiences. We don’t pretend that we don’t need food, we don’t have struggles, we don’t need comfort. We don’t only listen and observe (as researchers with other kinds of commitments and approaches do). Rather, we seek to cultivate and contribute to an environment of collective care and sociability.

Workshop facilitators (and community workers) also take part in [story circles](#) and [warm-up games](#). These activities act as bridges between the space of informal gathering and the period of the workshop that’s focused on physical creative exploration. Participating in these activities allows workshop facilitators to performatively model the exercises. It also gives them an opportunity to ‘play’ alongside participants. It’s a way of saying, “Even though you’re going to be doing some things that might feel new, strange, maybe even scary, we’re with you, and we’re going to have fun along the way.”

There are also activities that workshop facilitators and the community worker *do not* take part in. Activities designed to generate the play’s story arc are respected as the domain of the performer-advocates. This ensures that the embodied images and stories that emerge through these explorations, and from which the play’s narrative arc is created, are those of the performer-advocates. As facilitators, we don’t enter these images as ‘performers’ except in situations where someone from the workshop team might need to stand-in for a participant who is unable to attend that session. But though workshop facilitators and the community worker don’t actively participate in story development activities, they also don’t retreat as indifferent observers. We

always remain present as a warm, encouraging, and attentive audience and are active contributors during the group reflections that follow story development activities.

The challenge in facilitation is trying to recognize and affirm the common ground we have with participants while never minimizing or denying the differences between us (differences in our roles in the project, and also in social status). Although we structure some workshop activities in ways that disrupt social hierarchies, workshop facilitators nevertheless have power in the process (and typically much more power in the wider world). This is yet another reason it's important that facilitators don't work alone. By sharing their knowledge and expertise with workshop facilitators, community workers assist the creative team in addressing potential oversights or unrecognized power dynamics and providing guidance for the facilitators, and sufficient support for workshop participants. In return, members of the creative team often help community workers see familiar situations in new ways, which can allow for the development of new kinds of approaches in their community work.

CARE & ACCOUNTABILITY

We've all heard the expression — “The show must go on” — a saying that speaks to the idea that a performance should proceed despite any difficulties that arise. In TSDC, we don't accept this as a foregone conclusion. Instead we ask ourselves:

Does the show need to go on? If so, why? Who and what are we accountable to, and for, in getting this show into a public venue?

Our answers to these questions shape how we approach care in the context of facilitating TSDC workshops. At its worst “the show must go on” can suggest a lack of care for performers by placing the importance of the show over their well-being. It's worth remembering that the phrase seems to have originated in the circus entertainment world of the 1800s, when it was used to insist that the paying customer must get the entertainment they had paid for, whatever the cost to performers. Since TSDC doesn't define its relationship to its audience as a commercial contract in a marketplace of entertainments, this sense of the phrase isn't applicable to our work.

At its best, however, “the show must go on” can be seen to reflect a commitment to the performers' creative voices and their rights to be publicly heard. The saying is also often understood as an affirmation of theatre's capacity to improvise in the face of challenges. This is how TSDC understands it. Just look at our current situation. Covid-19 may have put an end (for now) to live performances, but the show-must-go-on principle prevails with creative vigor via online experiments. (See [Exploring New Frontiers, Going Virtual](#) for a peek at TSDC's efforts in this arena.)

In early circus work, the performers themselves may have had another understanding of the “show must go on” idea: that they must support each other if something went wrong. In a spirit of solidarity, a performer could trust that others would step in to distract the audience and create space for the performers in difficulty to recover. They would look after each other, no matter what. This is the basis for a kind of accountability among workshop facilitators and participants that we work to encourage.

We want TSDC workshops to be a place where group members engage in solidarity, treating each other with respect and care. We commit to ensuring that people in positions of power within the group nurture solidarity and act to make the group environment as safe and caring a space as possible for all participants. We expect to be held accountable on this point.

In many theatre-making processes, theatre directors expect performers to leave their life struggles at the door.

That's not the case at all with TSDC: in this project, the stresses and struggles of participants' everyday lives are *a part of the story* that needs to be told. As we noted previously (see [Potential Challenges](#)), in projects like TSDC, performer-advocates' lived experience often puts them "into close proximity with really stressful situations."¹ These stresses and struggles also affect the creative process.

Both the embodied explorations that are a part of TSDC workshops and the group work of collective creation can stir up feelings, memories, and conflicts. The multiple worlds and perspectives present can also lead to tensions within the group. So for us, "the show must go on" implies that we must pay attention to how making the show is affecting every participant. To carry out our commitment to solidarity and care, facilitators and community workers need to take the time to reflect on what's happening for participants *and ourselves*, and to plan carefully how we adapt and respond.

But this approach to solidarity and care is not an end in itself in the context of this project. Rather, it creates the conditions that allow people who experience marginalization within our communities, and who are working hard to advocate for justice, to address a broader public in a way that *invites that public into a more accountable relationship with the groups that the community and self-advocates represent*.

TSDC organizers don't insist that any particular show must go on; the choice always belongs to the performer-advocates. But people who take part in TSDC workshops do so largely because of their desire to have a public voice. Because of this, as workshop facilitators we see ourselves as accountable to working with participants to create and perform a play to a broader public. For us then, the challenge is how to create a caring environment and address barriers in order to continue to do the creative work that needs to be done in order to create a public discussion of conditions and issues the performer-advocates want to see addressed.

Since theatre facilitation is our area of expertise, we look to elements of theatre and its creative process to work with the difficult feelings that sometimes emerge, recognizing that:

- Focusing attention on the collective storytelling process fosters a sense of group accountability where everyone recognizes that for us to collectively reach the goal of creating and performing a play, everyone needs to work together.
- Theatre offers a unique opportunity for speaking collectively because a play's range of characters can demonstrate differences within a group.
- Since TSDC performances are intended to prompt public discussion about our collective futures, through their creative work performer-advocates often model to audience members ways of communicating and finding solidarity across differences.

1. Sarah Adjekum, TSDC research assistant and member of the Choose Your Destination workshop team.

TSDC workshops require a certain amount of emotional labour from everyone, participants *and* facilitators. Some observers perceive the creative process and the care that's offered by facilitators as a kind of therapy for individual participants. We don't see it that way. For us, the emotional work is part of a process of *developing social solidarities and exploring differences of perspective*. The healing some participants have identified from the experience emerges in part, we think, from the connections that develop and deepen between participants, and from the validation of concerns that are often ignored.

For some potential participants who are facing significant immediate stressors in their lives, a TSDC workshop or performance may require too much emotional labour at that particular moment. Participants for whom group work or public performance is very difficult at a given time, or who are unable to regularly attend workshop sessions may be better served by other forms of artistic expression that don't require the same level of collaboration.

Throughout this chapter we've discussed some of the ways we approach theatre facilitation and structure workshops in order to cultivate a supportive environment for collective creativity. An awareness of the participant-performers' life situations, and of the potential for the creative process to generate strong emotions, has led us to these practices:

- Before beginning a workshop series, check-in with a community partner to ask for their reflections on what we need to keep in mind as facilitators when working with groups of participant-performers who share similar experiences of social marginalization.
- Structure in time for meal-sharing and an informal gathering within each of the weekly workshops as a way to build relationships and trust (a topic we'll continue to discuss in the following chapter, [Workshop Activities & Exercises](#)).
- Have everyone (theatre facilitators, the community worker, and workshop participants) take part in appropriate workshop activities to cultivate group solidarity and as a way of building an awareness of changes in participants' willingness or capacity to participate.
- Consistently ask participants: what they need in order to take part? What information or supports are meaningful to them?
- Provide and make visible multiple avenues for participants to give feedback both within the workshops and privately.
- Let participants know that they can stop an activity (or withdraw from the workshops or the project altogether) at any time and without explanation.
- Slow things down. Set realistic goals, especially for the first time people try out an activity.
- Take time to reflect on our own responses as facilitators to interactions within workshops and to work with community partners to help us understand the themes or dynamics that are unfolding in the workshops.

PART V

WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES & EXERCISES

In this section, we'll take a look at what happens inside TSDC performance creation workshops. As we mentioned in the introduction, while this section may potentially be of interest to all readers, it's primarily geared toward theatre practitioners who are considering facilitating a workshop series using TSDC's creative approach.

As you read, we encourage you to keep in mind that though we've presented the material in this section in a particular order, in our experience, the process of creating a TSDC play is never linear. It's better understood as a series of overlapping phases, or waves. While taking into account the ebb and flow of the phases, it's also important that facilitators remember the project's time limitations and goals.

Roughly speaking the workshop phases include:

- Gathering, where the focus is on getting to know one another and familiarizing the group with the kinds of activities and exercises that will be used throughout the workshops.
- Generating material and identifying themes using theatre-based exercises.
- Developing scenes and creating the performance script.
- Rehearsing and preparing for the performance.

During the initial phase of the performance creation workshop process the focus is getting to know one another, building trust, and developing a shared creative vocabulary.

Activities introduced during this phase include:

- Informal check-ins over food
- Story circles
- Physical warm-up activities
- Image Theatre exercises
- Group reflections

Most of these activities will be repeated weekly (in some form) throughout the performance creation process. In this way, they become an important part of the group's ritual of being together while also introducing

participants to the creative tools they will use to co-create the performance script as the workshop series progresses.

GATHERING, CHECKING-IN & WRAPPING-UP

“Before the workshop began, the women shared stories. One woman had just lost her brother the week before but had also celebrated her aunt’s 100th Birthday: she passed the photos on her phone around and described the letters that her aunt had received from various dignitaries with obvious happiness. The women’s love for one another could be seen and sensed. As one woman came in at the beginning of the workshop, another teased her: ‘Are you going on a date after this? You look so good.’ And turning to her neighbor, the woman who had called out continued ‘she always looks so good, with her makeup and her hair, and she doesn’t believe it! You should tell her!’ Everyone seemed relaxed and that established an atmosphere of trust with us — though I have no doubt the ease with which Catherine and Jennie interacted with the women really made that possible so that was great that rapport was pre-existent.”

— ELYSÉE NOUVET, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM, SCHOOL OF HEALTH STUDIES.

Meet, Greet, Eat

We always begin our workshops with the same social ritual: We sit and talk over food. Because of their casual feel, these opening gatherings can be viewed as not really being *part of* the workshops, or worse, as potentially taking time away from the workshops’ more formal creative activities. In fact, the above quote about the gathering phase of the first workshop in TSDC’s pilot project begins with the words, ‘Before the workshop began...’ Reading on, however, it’s clear that the point of Elysée’s reflection is the value of this way of coming together.

Here are some of the reasons we consider beginning workshops by gathering in a hospitable and informal way to be a crucial element of the workshop process:

- In the first phase of the workshop process, it’s an opportunity for *everyone* to get to know one another through a familiar social activity.
- In situations where workshop participants already know one another, it’s a chance for them to ‘welcome’ the facilitator(s) and community worker into their pre-existing community.
- In situations where workshop participants are meeting for the first time, it’s a chance for the facilitator and community worker to set a tone and atmosphere for the workshops.
- Beginning with a familiar and hospitable activity helps to relax the group before entering into physical creative activities, which are likely to be less familiar to participants.
- As the workshop series proceeds, the trust and comfort of these gatherings make them ideal times and

spaces for the group to reflect on how things are coming along, and to discuss any adjustments to either the workshop process or the play's storyline.

The facilitator and community worker are full participants during these gatherings. This means that they eat with the group and contribute to the conversation in a way that feels authentic for them. While doing this, they also keep in mind their overarching roles as workshop facilitators by paying attention both to what's happening within the group as well as to the overall purpose of the workshop. For example, the facilitator or community worker may notice that a participant is particularly quiet, or that they've shared something that is quite vulnerable. In such cases, the facilitator might make adjustments to the workshop plan, or they may make a point of following up informally with the participant after the workshop. In some situations, the community worker might also find a way to touch base with the participant during the workshop.

To say that these gatherings are social and informal, is not to suggest that they never focus on workshop content. After the initial workshops when everyone is getting to know one another, the opening gathering often includes an invitation to reflect on the previous week's work with questions like, "What stuck with you about last week?" or "What were you excited about?"

Checking-in

After everyone has had a chance to visit, and before transitioning to the structured physical and creative exploration part of the workshop, the facilitator initiates a more formal check-in. We think of this a kind of taking the temperature of the room, and frequently use the question: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how do we feel about starting today?" This exercise is an overt invitation to participants to let the group know if they are feeling low energy (without having to disclose details). Participant responses alert the facilitator if someone is feeling particularly low energy and can help guide the facilitator's tone. With their own check-ins, the facilitator and community worker also have an opportunity to model that it's okay to feel low, or conflicted, or super excited, that they too come with a range of feelings and energy levels.

Wrapping-up

We wrap-up each workshop similarly to how we begin — with the group sitting down to talk. The first part of the wrap-up is an extension of the workshop's creative activities and are focused on collectively identifying themes that emerged. The length of time and the prompts used during these reflections vary depending on the activity and the phase of the workshop series.

The purpose of the next part of the reflection is to give everyone an opportunity to say how they felt about their experience. At its simplest, this can take the form of a 'check-out' that mirrors the check-in: "On a scale of

1 to 10, how do you feel about what we did today?” If either the facilitator or the community support worker feel it would be helpful, or is necessary, more elaborate or directed questions can be asked.

STORY CIRCLES

“It brings a sense of community. Because you are in a circle. There’s nobody above or below. We are one. And I think that kind of sets up this catalyst of actions. All the women, ten of us, we were open and a lot of stuff came out when we were doing this. And that evolved into something else.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *WE NEED TO TALK!*

At its most basic, a story circle is a group of people sitting in a circle sharing stories. Story circles can range from informal gatherings around kitchen tables, living rooms, or campfires, to more formalized and structured events organized with a particular focus in mind. Since most of us have some experience of taking part in either an informal or formal storytelling activity, story circles offer a familiar and convivial entry point into the performance creation workshops.

One common element of formal story circles is that there is no crosstalk. When the storyteller is speaking, everyone else listens. This is often facilitated through the use of an object that the storyteller holds until they are finished with their story. Once they have completed, the teller either passes the object along or sets it down.

TSDC performance creation workshop series usually begin with a story circle. While the facilitator and community worker do not participate in *all* workshop exercises, as with most Gathering, Checking-in, & Wrapping-up activities, it’s important they always take part fully in the story circles!

Each story circle involves:

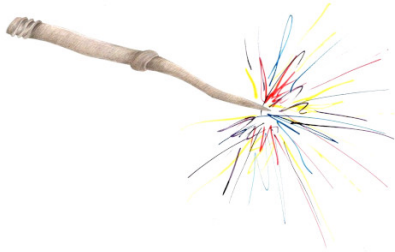
- A prompt: a few sentences that invite a specific kind of story that is sent to participants prior to the workshop.
- Objects: we invite participants to bring an object to focus their stories.
- A welcoming space: a low table with a cloth covering and a few chairs allows people to sit on the floor or in a chair, as they wish.

The story circle itself has these key components:

- Each person has a chance to tell their story.
- A response round, where each person has a chance to respond to each other person’s story.
- A collective reflection discussion wraps up the story circle.

A TSDC story circle prompt

The story circle begins prior to the first workshop when participants are sent a prompt. Here's one that was created for participants who were recruited because of their knowledge of the difficulties of holding on to decent rental accommodations in a rapidly changing Hamilton:

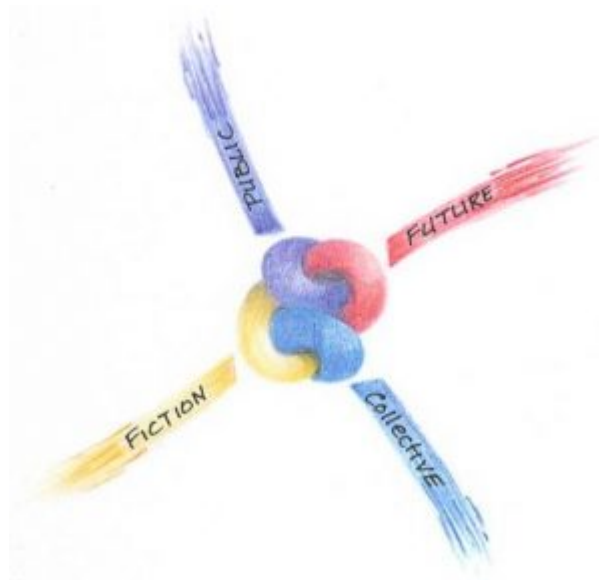


Imagine what Hamilton might be like ten years from now if it were to become a much better City.

What do you imagine life would be like in that much better Hamilton for people with experiences like yours?

Please bring an object that will help you tell a 1 to 3 minute story about something a person with experiences like yours might do in a much better Hamilton 10 years from now. How would life be different for them?

At times, lived experience can be a very individualizing and isolating thing. By inviting participants to consider their personal experience in a collective context (*people with experiences like you*) the prompt honours participants' experience while acknowledging them as observers and analysts of the social world. It also recognizes them as being involved in networks of mutual care and support from which they draw knowledge.



The future-oriented aspect of the prompt invites participants to shift their focus from what has or is happening to *the kind of world they envision* for people with experiences similar to theirs. The prompt's emphasis on a future vision lets participants know that we are

not asking them to report their experience of a particular situation, or their proposed solutions to a particular problem. We are asking about their desires and the kind of world they imagine creating together.

The story circle provides participants with a performative experience of [TSDC's creative approach](#) and gives them a glimpse into the kind of collective story the process will enable them to co-create and present to a public audience.

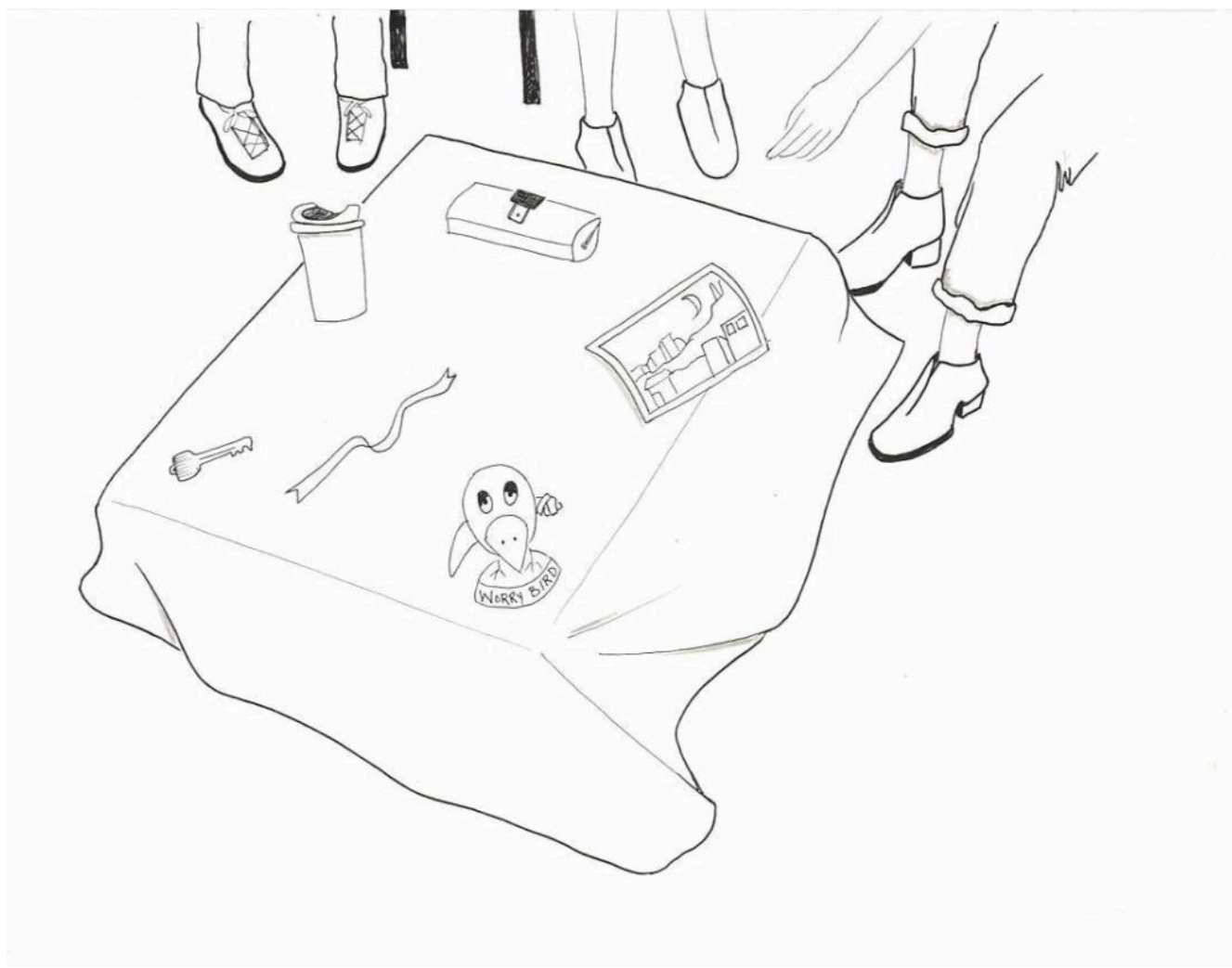
The story circle

“It was an amazing feeling to come together around what we dream, and not just around the problems we need to solve. Some people remarked that sharing stories in this way was a deeper emotional process than they had expected. Others felt that the fact of actually handling each other’s objects created a special kind of attention.”

— J. ADAM PERRY, TSDC RESEARCH AND WORKSHOP TEAM MEMBER, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS.

After checking-in and sharing food (something we do at all TSDC workshops), the group sits in a circle. At the centre is a small cloth-covered table for everyone to place their object on. The table acts as an altar, a special place for the story circle objects. A place that says, “These things are important.” “These things, and the stories we tell deserve attention.”

To say that the objects are important doesn’t mean they’re lofty items. They can be anything — a coffee mug, a postcard or photo, a key, a stone, a bus pass. The objects ground us in our material worlds. They communicate that there are things in all of our lives, our worlds, in the stories we tell, that could be the material for building this new world, for building this new vision.



The facilitator briefly explains the storytelling process and then models it by picking up their object and telling a story based on the prompt. Throughout the story circle, only the person holding the object speaks. Everyone else is asked to listen but are also told that they will have an opportunity to respond after the speaker has finished with their story.

The response round

“The very first time we get together in the story circle, everybody gets heard, and everybody gets told that what they said was meaningful, and yet, there is no authoritative meaning imposed. There is no moment of discussion about whether you got it or not, whatever you got is what needs to be gotten from your point of view. It’s one of the things I love about the idea of the circle, we’re all exactly where we should be, seeing exactly what we should see from that position.”

— CATHERINE GRAHAM, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS.

After each story, the storyteller's object is passed around the circle until everyone, including the storyteller, who goes last, has a chance to respond to the following questions.

What colour is this story?

What emotion do you associate with this story?

Complete the sentence: *"This is the story of a person who..."*

These ritualized responses to each story by every listener help shift attention, and thus potential judgment, away from the person telling the story and towards the story itself, along with the social and cultural values it affirms.

We start with the colour question because it makes it clear that there is no 'correct' response. Nobody thinks *their* favorite colour should be *everybody's* favorite colour. The neutrality of the colour question lays a foundation for the following question about what emotion the responder associates with the story. Without interrupting the creative flow of the story circle with a lecture about there being no right or wrong answers, the questions are a way to performatively demonstrate that it's possible to respond to something out of your own feeling about it, and to own, 'this is *my* feeling about it.'

It's not just the content of the stories that are important. It's the practice of being together, of paying attention, of valuing everyone's story, and trying to honestly respond. Through the story circle the group enters the collective practice of creating a complex story, or a story with layers of meaning. For example, one person might say, 'This is the story of a person who is really suffering.' Someone else might say, 'This is a person who is really courageous.' Both things can be true. As we go around the circle, we get a fuller picture of what this story might mean. Other times, as we go around the circle something is re-enforced. If everyone says 'This is a story of someone who is really courageous,' we start to understand the story of a single mother who is struggling to raise kids on social assistance as a story of courage, not as the story of failure that it is often portrayed as in the wider world.

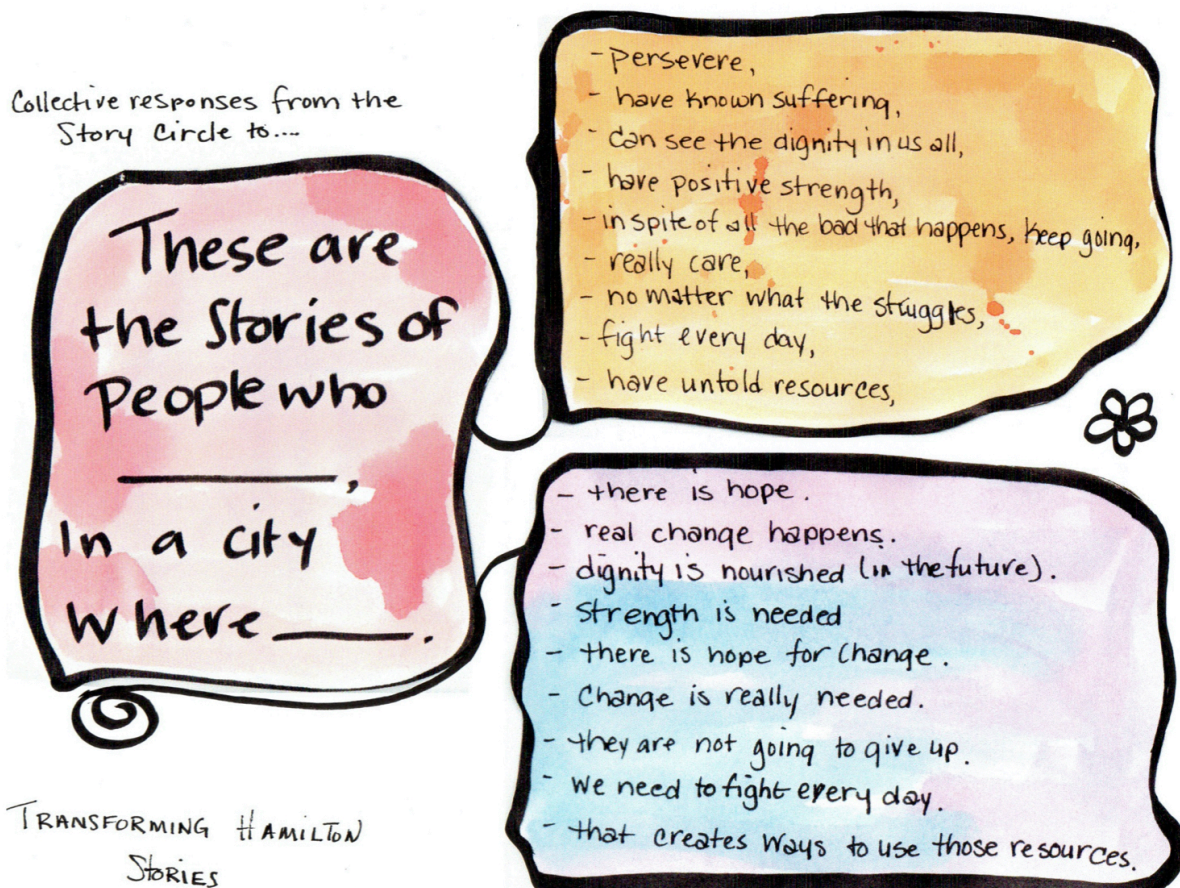
Group reflection

Once each person's story has been shared and responded to, the group brainstorms responses to the fill-in-the-blank sentence:

*These are stories of people who ...
in a City where ...*

The sentence and responses are written on a whiteboard or a large sheet of paper and become the foundation

for a post-story circle meaning making discussion exploring the questions: “What do these statements tell us about the kinds of stories we want to tell and the kind of City we want to live in?”



Things to keep in mind:

- Keep the story circles small (usually no more than 6-8 people) to ensure that people don't feel rushed or overwhelmed. This might mean dividing the group in half with the workshop facilitator and the community worker each facilitating a circle.
- The story circle facilitator introduces the exercise by modeling the different stages of the process.
- Remind participants that only the person holding the object speaks, but that later they will have a chance to respond.

- Be sure to document both the stories and responses as these become sources for identifying themes that emerge.

WARM-UP GAMES

“Sometimes people feel that if there’s too much stuff flying around, I can’t catch any of it. This is something I like about using the Great Fanzinis with non-actors. It provides an opportunity to point out to people, ‘You don’t actually have to be paying attention to all of it, you just have to be paying attention to the thing that’s going to require you to respond.’ This is what makes warm-up games interesting. They are fun but also full of teaching moments.”

— CATHERINE GRAHAM, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS.

TSDC workshop warm-ups are designed to transition the group from the informal gathering and prepare them to enter a phase of physical creative exploration: After a period of sitting, warm-ups provide participants with a playful opportunity to gently wake up their bodies and get their breath flowing (fun games that generate laughter are great for this!). Warm-ups help participants learn a range of performance-related skills. They can also act as workshop scaffolding that supports participants as they enter the creative **devising** portion of the workshop. If we think of performance as a language, warm-up games are a playful way of providing participants with an opportunity to practice simple sentences before you ask them to practice something that’s more complex.

TSDC warm-up games serve several purposes:

- They energize the group.
- They foster a sense of familiarity with participation in structured collective physical activities.
- They are a playful and embodied way of learning performance-related skills.

Things to keep in mind when selecting warm-up activities for TSDC workshops:

- The project’s focus is to facilitate a process that will enable participants to perform a collective created story based in their experiential knowledge to a public audience — The goal is *not* to train professional actors.
- Activities need to take into account the physical, emotional, and cognitive capacities and wellbeing of participants.

Menu of warm-up activities

Below is a small sampling from the multitude of warm-up exercises available to theatre practitioners and teachers through a range of theatre workbooks and online resources. The first three are some of our go-to warm-up activities, followed by two examples of ‘scaffolding warm-ups.’ Complete the Image, for example, is an ideal scaffolding warm-up exercise for introducing participants to Image Theatre’s basic *method* of creating physical still images; and Group Walk (with imagination prompts) is designed to introduce participants to the *content* of the creative devising process they are about to engage in.

The Great Fanzinis

The Great Fanzinis

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials: A bag of soft silly objects

Source: Luc Gaudet of Théâtre Mise-au-Jeu in Montréal.

The Fanzini Family’s juggling ‘rules’:

1. The Great Fanzinis assemble in a circle and toss a large soft stuffed ball from one person to another until each member of the Fanzini family has had the ball passed to them.
2. Each time a Fanzini passes the ball, they first say their own name, followed by the name of the person they are passing the ball to: “*Catherine Fanzini to Paula Fanzini; Paula Fanzini to Melanie Fanzini...*”
3. The last Fanzini to receive the ball passes it to the first Fanzini to pass the ball.
4. The pattern created in the first round is repeated until the game ends.
5. As the game continues, the “Ringmaster” adds additional silly soft objects (dish scrubbers, stuffed animals, folded garden gloves, hair rollers) which the Fanzinis integrate into their juggling pattern. As the senders pass each additional flying object, they continue to announce their name and the name of the object’s intended receiver.

Take-aways:

- The first thing participants learn from playing The Great Fanzinis juggling game is — *They are*

not alone! They are part of a performance family that works together.

- They learn each other’s names and how to connect through a performative activity.
- They practice recalling spatial patterns.
- They are provided with a playful opportunity to embody a character who is confident and deserves attention.
- They warm-up their bodies and voices.
- As it inevitably becomes impossible to keep all the silly objects in the air, they learn that the workshop is a space where it’s okay to ‘fail’ — nothing bad will happen.
- Through laughter, they breathe deeply which both relaxes and energizes the body/mind in preparation for the deep-diving play/work of generating performance scenes.

Things to keep in mind:

- Tone and posture are very important when introducing this exercise. Using their voice and posture the facilitator should demonstrate *how* the “Great Fanzinis are a proud people!” as they introduce the Fanzinis juggling rules.
- Pay attention to participants’ physical and mental comfort and adapt the game accordingly. Variations might include doing the game from a seated position, juggling in slow motion, placing the object in people’s hands instead of tossing them.
- Introduce new objects slowly so that participants don’t become overwhelmed.
- After a few initial rounds of passing objects, invite participants to share reflections about what helps them to successfully perform their juggling task.

Zip Zap Zop

Zip Zap Zop

Duration: 5-15 minutes

Source: Michael Rohd

The game:

1. Invite participants to come together in a circle.
2. Have everyone to repeat the words “Zip, Zap, Zop” 4 or 5 times in unison.
3. Ask everyone to imagine that they have a bolt of energy in their hands.
4. Demonstrate how the game will work by telling everyone that you will pass a bolt of energy out of your body to someone else in the circle (using your hands and voice) and saying “Zip.” Make eye contact with the person you are passing the energy to.
5. Explain that the person you passed your “Zip” bolt of energy to, will take that energy and immediately pass it to someone else saying “Zap.”
6. The game continues as the Zip, Zap, Zop sequence is repeated and energy passes around the circle.
7. Encourage everyone to imagine they are receiving and sending energy with their whole body. Remind them to make eye contact.
8. Practice game and try to maintain a steady rhythm.

Take-aways:

- Because of its simplicity and playfulness, this a good game to use when introducing the idea of theatre games to non-performers.
- The game energizes and focuses a group and is a great activity to do after a break or period of sitting.
- The game generally creates laughter and enjoyment that brings the group together.
- The game helps to develop the ensemble skills needed to perform as part of a collective.
- When repeated through different phases of the workshop process, the game provides participants with a sense of collective agency as they see their performance, ensemble, and concentration skills increase.

Things to keep in mind:

- Can be played standing or seated.
- As an energy raising activity, Zip, Zap, Zop is usually played at a quick pace. If speed is a barrier to participation, the game can also be played in slow motion while still working to collectively maintain a steady shared rhythm.
- Messing up can also be fun! If someone says Zop instead of Zap — make a game of it. Have everyone put their hands up in the air while saying Woooga (or some other silly sound) and then start again.

Go!

Go!

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Source: Unknown

The game:

1. Invite participants to stand in a circle.
2. Demonstrate (show and tell) how the game will work by telling everyone that first you will make clear eye contact with someone in the circle and then you will point to them and walk toward them while firmly saying “Go!”
3. Explain that as soon as you say “Go!” the person you made eye contact with and pointed to will make eye contact with someone else in the circle, point, walk toward them and say “Go!” The person who points and says “Go!” always takes the (vacated) place of the person who they pointed to.
4. As the game continues, encourage everyone to try out different tones of voice and emotional expressions when they say Go! Encourage them to notice how this affects the way they move.

Take-aways:

- The game energizes and focuses a group and is a great activity to do after a break or period of sitting.
- The game helps to develop the ensemble skills needed to perform as part of a collective.
- The game supports participants to project their voices.
- During the rehearsal phase of the workshop the game helps with character development and with the spatial and relationship awareness that is important to performing.

Things to keep in mind:

- The game can be played at any speed.

Complete the Image

Complete the Image

Duration: 15-30 minutes

Source: Augusto Boal (adaptation)

The game:

1. Everyone sits on one side of the room facing a large open 'playing' (or performance) space.
2. Ask for two volunteers and invite them to come into the playing space, stand, face one another, shake hands, and then freeze.
3. Turn to the group and tell them to imagine that the two people in front of them are an image in the newspaper.
4. Ask the group to say what they see by completing the sentence, "This is a story about people who ... in a City where..."
5. Unfreeze one of the people by tapping them and ask the other to remain frozen. The person who was tapped leaves the image.
6. Invite another volunteer to enter the playing space and "complete the image" by placing themselves in a new position in relationship to the frozen person.
7. The two bodies create a new image.
8. Ask the group, "If this was a story in the newspaper what would the headline say?"
9. Repeat several times using various prompts.

Take-aways:

- This is a great scaffolding activity to introduce participants to the Image Theatre work they will be doing throughout the performance creation workshop series.
- Participants get a taste of how they can 'tell' (perform) a story by using their bodies.
- Since the images can be read in multiple ways, it performatively communicates to participants that there are no wrong answers in image work.

Things to keep in mind:

- Encourage participants to expand their explorations by using the entire playing space.
- Remind them that their full body is part of the image, including their face.

Group Walk

Group Walk

Duration: 15-30 minutes

Source: Unknown

The exercise:

1. Prior to beginning the exercise, place chairs at random locations in the workshop 'playing area.'
2. Introduce the activity with this imagination prompt: "You are in Hamilton 10 years from now (it's a better City). Imagine that you're going to your favourite place to hang out with friends in this much better Hamilton."
3. Ask everyone to start walking, but without saying where they're going.
4. Encourage participants to notice the other people who are also walking to their favourite places, and to imagine that, like you, they are characters in a play about a better future Hamilton.
5. Tell them, "When you encounter another character, do an action and freeze for 2 seconds, (like starting a conversation through gesture), then let it go and continue to walk."
6. Have participants repeat the encounter action a few times.
7. Invite them to "Imagine you've reached your destination and arrived at a place where you really feel like you belong" and then to sit (or stand) and enjoy this space.
8. Give participants a moment to sit (or stand) in their place of belonging and then ask them to complete the following sentences: "What I like about this place..." and "It's so much better than it used to be because..."

Take-aways:

- This is a great scaffolding activity to introduce participants the future-oriented content of an Image Theatre exercise.
- Participants get to experience how gestures can be used as a way of communicating.
- Provides participants with a non-verbal opportunity to explore character development.

Things to keep in mind:

- As in most TSDC workshop activities, prompts are an important element of scaffolding warm-ups.

IMAGE THEATRE

“One of the reasons that we really focus on the silence piece during Image Theatre exercises is that we don’t want the stories to develop too soon and we don’t want it to be any one person’s story. We’re really trying to build a collective vocabulary of telling stories through your body. The stories can be verbalized later. Often, when we explain how the exercise is going to work, we tell participants, ‘We’re going to talk a lot about this, just not right now.’”

— J. ADAM PERRY, TSDC RESEARCH AND WORKSHOP TEAM MEMBER, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS.

Developed by Brazilian theatre maker Augusto Boal, Image Theatre can be thought of as a theatrical application of the adage, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” The basic idea is that working in silence, participants use their bodies to create an ‘image’ or a frozen sculpture. (For full description of the technique see Augusto Boal’s book *The Rainbow of Desire*.)

In TSDC performance creation workshops Image Theatre is used as a live **storyboarding** technique, where a collective story is developed through a series of still images. Participants create images, or group tableaux, in response to prompts that are designed to focus their imaginations. These embodied images are then developed through the use of prompts that elicit words and dialogue from within the images and by having participants physically transition between images.

Image Theatre is an excellent resource for working with non-actors to develop a public performance because it:

- Requires no prior acting experience.
- Gives participants an immediate and embodied experience of how theatrical images can communicate a complex range of meanings.
- Helps non-actors build performance skills.
- Allows for multiple, even conflicting, expressions within a single image.
- Generates material that can be used in the creation of the performance’s story arc (more on this when we get to [Creating the Performance Script](#)).

A TSDC workshop's first images

Since Image Theatre is the key devising technique used in TSDC performance creation workshops it’s important to introduce it early in order to give participants the maximum opportunity to develop a sense of

comfort and agency with the method. The first two images that participants are invited to create are usually done in the second workshop in the series, after the initial story circle workshop.

As always, when introducing a new (and perhaps somewhat strange) workshop activity to non-actors we find it helpful to use familiar non-theatrical language. For example, here's how we introduced the idea of Image Theatre in a workshop series TSDC did with a group of youth living in precarious conditions in Hamilton: *“Think of it like a postcard that you would send your friends to show them what a great place this is for people like you.”*



The first image TSDC workshop participants are invited to create is of what a *better future Hamilton* would look like for people with experiences similar to theirs. As with the story circle prompt, beginning with a future-oriented image prompt is important because it invites participants to shift their focus from what has or is happening to what they want. The *better future Hamilton* image is then followed by a second image that focuses on *what life is like now*.



TSDC first images exercise

After providing the first image prompt and introducing the postcard-like concept of Image Theatre, the facilitator explains how the exercise works:

1. Tell participants that the exercise should be done in silence, while assuring them, “We’re going to talk a lot about this, just not right now.”
2. One person starts the image by entering the ‘playing space,’ taking a position, and freezing.
3. One at a time, each additional person adds themselves to the image by creating their own gestural response and freezing.
4. Once all participants have inserted themselves into the image, explain that you will place your hand on each person’s shoulder one at a time and ask each of them to complete a phrase that you will speak out loud.
5. Two sample phrase prompts for the *better future Hamilton* image are: “It’s much better than

- it used to be because ...”, and; “What I really like about this place is ...”
6. After everyone has had a chance to be the first person to start a new group image of what a *better future Hamilton* might look like, the facilitator shifts the focus to the present with a second image prompt: “Now that you’ve seen the future, everyone at the same time create an instantaneous group image of *what life is like now*.”
 7. Repeat the process until everyone has initiated both a *better future Hamilton* image and *what life is like now* image.

Bringing the images to life

Once the group has created their *better future Hamilton* and *what life is like now* images, the images can be brought to life and further developed. One method for doing this is to have participants transition between the images.

Transitioning between images exercise

1. Begin by reviewing documentation of all the images and ask the group to select a *better future Hamilton* image and a *what life is like now* image they’d like to start with.
2. Have the group recreate their selected *better future Hamilton* image. Ask them to remember their posture and their relationship to others in the image and then to step out of the image one at a time to see what they created.
3. Then have them recreate their selected *what life is like now* image.
4. Tell everyone that you are going to have them transition in slow motion from this *what life is like now* to their *better future Hamilton* image by making one movement and freezing each time you clap.
5. Let them know that you will clap 4 times, and after the final clap they should be in back in position for their *better future Hamilton* image.
6. After each clap place your hand on each participants’ shoulder and have them complete a phrase. Phrase-prompts can include, “I hope...” “I wish that...” “I’m afraid that...”

Group reflection

After Image Theatre sessions it's important to give participants an opportunity to reflect on the images they've created. This can be done by asking participants things they noticed about the positive (better future Hamilton) and the negative (how things are now) images they collectively created.

The collective reflection process:

- Allows participants to articulate what was meaningful for them about the images.
- Makes visible the differences in worldviews that are present in the group.
- Builds participants' sense of agency with embodied story telling.
- Provides facilitators with valuable information about the kinds of explorations that might be important to integrate in upcoming workshops.
- Helps in the identification of themes and narrative threads for the development of a performance script.

Creative tension as the ground for story development

As with the story circles, the prompts for the first two images that participants are invited to make are introduced in the first phase of the workshop series, which is focused on getting to know one another and getting to know the work. The prompts for these first two images remain fairly consistent in all TSDC performance creation workshops: 1) What a better future Hamilton would look like for people with experiences similar to theirs, and 2) how things are now. Taken together these two prompts are designed to tap into what this particular group of people desires for themselves in the world and to begin a collective embodied exploration of the social obstacles that get in the way of those visions.

The first two images establish a creative tension between participants' vision of a *better future Hamilton* and *what life is like now* for people with experiences like theirs. When participants transition between the images they embark on an active and embodied exploration of this tension. The process is slowed down and elaborated by asking participants to freeze at four points on their transition as they move from one image to the next and respond to the phrase prompts that are introduced by the facilitator.



This slowing down provides participants with multiple opportunities to both make choices (what to do next, and next, and next...) and to articulate (by responding to the phrase prompts) their experience from the point of view of their shifting position(s) in between the images.



The prompts and their embodied expression through the images provide participants with some grounding not only in the methods that will be used throughout the workshop series, but also in the kind of dramatic narrative they are working to collectively create: A story that focuses audience attention on their collective vision for a better Hamilton while also exposing what and how they (and people with experiences similar to theirs) experience the present day social conditions that persistently impede their desires.

Moments of change and choice-making

As participants are asked to transform an image either by transitioning between images (as described above), or through other Image Theatre improvisation activities, they always have choices to make. During these exercises the facilitator pays close attention. In particular, the facilitator watches for moments when people pivot. Sometimes this is quite literal. Their balance changes. They change directions. Sometimes shifts become visible through what participants say in response to prompts or to one another during an Image Theatre improvisation exercise. What are the moments when people gesture or move toward another situation? What are the moments that make somebody shift from feeling alone and isolated in their own problems, to thinking, *this is a shared problem, we need to work together?*

The facilitator may not recognize moments of change as they occur. Or, if they do recognize a pivot point, its significance to the emerging narrative may not be immediately apparent. This is especially true in the first phase

of the workshop series. During this time, the primary focus is for the group to meet one another and to become familiar with the kinds of activities and exercises they'll be taking part in. As the workshop series progresses, exercises are repeated, more stories and patterns emerge, and with them, pivotal moments become clearer.

Repetition, representation & public speech

One of the ways public speech comes to be public is through the process of how things are taken up — or not taken up. In this sense, TSDC workshops can be looked at as a microcosm of a larger public. During workshops, themes that get repeated and picked up by the group, either physically during the Image Theatre exercises or in group reflections, shift from being individual narratives to becoming adopted as part of the group's public speech. Our intention (or hope) is that the story these community and self-advocates tell about the City will prompt the audience to consider their own roles in that story. When (or if) audiences take up the story in this way, the story and the issues it addresses extends beyond the public domain of the performer-advocates to become part of a larger shared public.

The downside of this process of ideas making their way into a group's (or a City's) public speech is that just as some important things get taken up, other important things can get dropped. This is why, as participants create images and engage in discussions, facilitators need to pay attention not only to what gets taken up by the group. They also need to be aware of moments where something may be trying to get articulated that has to do with an identity or an experience that is either a minority voice or isn't well represented in the room. Again, working closely with [community support worker](#) can help ensure that there will be a diversity of standpoints and perspectives in the workshops and assist facilitators in picking up on missed cues.

It's also crucial in the workshops to cultivate an attitude of collective responsibility for addressing issues of marginalization so that responsibility doesn't land on the shoulders of individual participants. TSDC's focus on creating a collective story is one of the ways we cultivate this attitude. TSDC's collective storytelling approach signals to participants that they aren't limited, or expected, to focus on telling 'their own' stories. Instead they're being asked and supported to tell stories that focus on the broader social values that they want to communicate or contest. This collective storytelling framework creates opportunities for the group to address issues they're aware of, even if they don't belong to a population that's directly impacted or targeted by a particular form of oppression.

For example, all of the youth we worked with on the play *Choose Your Destination* had experience with issues related to seeking shelter and housing. They also expressed, however, interest in depicting a broader range of issues than those they had personally experienced. As TSDC research assistant and member of the *Choose Your Destination* workshop team Sarah Adjekum writes:

“The conversations that emerged [in the workshops] were ones that touched on the difficulties of being queer

or trans while homeless. They captured the difficulties of seeking shelter and couch surfing while being exposed to prejudice and at times violence. The youth demonstrated that while they had not walked in the shoes of their peers, they had a window into some of the difficulties that face LGBTQ youth.” — Sarah Adjekum, TSDC research assistant and member of the *Choose Your Destination* workshop team.

Since none of the cast identified as queer or trans, the challenge then became how could we appropriately include stories of gender diversity and sexual orientation? Using [offstage characters](#) and conversations between onstage characters is one method we’ve used to integrate issues into TSDC plays without individual performer-advocates having to play characters that are part of the targeted or marginalized population. This scene description is an example of how we did this around the issue of queer youth and housing in *Choose Your Destination*:

‘Joanne’ answers a phone call from her friend. Her friend’s parents have kicked her out of their house for coming out as a lesbian. Joanne promises to try and find her friend a place to stay for the night and calls her roommates asking if she can stay at their house. Her roommates tell her ‘no’ and make homophobic remarks. Joanne gets angry at their homophobia and hangs up the phone.

Facilitators also need to pay attention to things that don’t get expressed at all. Sometimes, when people are in a minority position in the group, they may refrain from speaking out for a number of reasons — self-protection, resistance, discomfort or uncertainty about how others will respond, or frustration with having to educate others.

If the facilitator thinks someone may be choosing not to speak up about something that they want to see addressed in the play, it’s important to offer support while being careful not to put them on the spot. One approach is for either the facilitator or the community support worker to take the participant aside or call them up later. We might say something like, “I’m thinking about how homophobia (or racism, or ableism...) might be at play in these kinds of situations. Is that something you’d want to highlight in this scene, or would you prefer not to go down that path at this time?” Since theatre is a physical and live medium, we need to be especially careful to make sure individuals don’t feel pressured to publicly ‘represent’ an identity group that is different from the other performers.

Documentation, process, and script development

Documentation is a critical tool during the performance creation process! Documentation allows participants to see what they’ve created and to recall the words and phrases that were generated during the exercises and the collective meaning-making reflections. Digital photos that can be readily accessed are extremely helpful as visual prompts when participants are recreating images. Documented images and text can also be compiled into a PowerPoint presentation to be shared during the next session. Or, if there happens to be a sketch artist

on the team, simple drawings of the images could be made. In addition to refreshing everyone's memory, this method provides participants who missed a session with a quick way to see what took place.

Video documentation is also important for both workshop planning and script development. In tandem with the workshop debrief session with the project's community support worker, documentation provides the workshop facilitator with a means of reviewing and reflecting on what took place during the workshop. This helps them as they consider what activities and prompts would be the most useful for the next workshop.

In terms of scene and script development, video documentation is absolutely crucial! Even the keenest of theatre facilitators will miss things like pivot points and story themes that emerge. As the material that the group generates through the workshops accumulates video documentation allows the facilitator to revisit previous sessions. Through this process of review and reflection, they can begin to recognize important moments and connections that may not have been apparent in the moment.

It's helpful to think of Image Theatre as a kind of '[live storyboarding](#)' where embodied images can be seen as snapshots of more developed scenes. Key phrases that emerge when the images are brought to life through the combination of transitions and phrase prompts, as well as through group-generated scene titles, can be added to the documented still image. These images then can act as cue cards (kind of like movable comic strip panels) that the creative team and participants can arrange, rearrange, and add to, as they work together to construct a skeleton script (more on this in [TSDC Scripts: Why & How](#)).

Things to keep in mind:

- Show don't tell! Remember that as a facilitator, introducing the exercise is an opportunity to performatively model what you are asking participants to do and helps minimize the amount of time spent explaining the exercise while also demystifying the exercise.
- Remind participants to remain silent throughout the image building exercise. Since, for most participants, talking will be a more familiar method of communicating than physical creative exploration, you will likely have to reinforce this idea throughout the workshop series.
- Remind participants that when they are completing a phrase or taking part in an image, they are not speaking or acting 'as themselves,' but from their position, or character, in the image.
- Pay attention to the choices or decisions participants make as they transition between images and to how those choices shift the collective image.

- Be sure to document the Image Theatre explorations, participant phrases, and group discussions.

PART VI

TSDC SCRIPTS: WHY & HOW

“I really liked when the script started to develop. That was really nice for me, because I got to see the things that we were talking about kind of be born or be created into something. It was really fascinating, the things we came up with.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION*.

As any theatre practitioner will attest, creating a script is never a linear or a formulaic process. In fact, of theatre’s many mysteries the script development process may well be its most mysterious. While we don’t have a one-size-fits-all TSDC script development formula to offer, one thing we’re certain of is, *how* we create scripts has an integral connection to *why* we do it. So, before we get to the nitty-gritty of our *how*, here’s a quick review of some of TSDC’s fundamental goals and intentions.

TSDC begins from the recognition that public discussions about the City’s future tend to exclude people who are socially marginalized in its present. TSDC plays are designed to:

- Offer community members (community and self-advocates who have lived experience of social marginalization) a platform and method through which to address a broader public.
- Interrupt usual patterns of public discussion by prompting an encounter between the plays’ performer-advocates and members of the audience.
- Shed light on the social expectations that shape our interactions, and the tensions and contradictions in them.

SCRIPTING FOR ENCOUNTER

“In this age of populism, when too many media and political figures try to exploit the dissatisfaction of people who are feeling unheard, it is crucially important to create forums where marginalized voices can take their rightful place in public discussion. We are working to create events where people from different social locations can speak to, not for or at, each other, and where nobody feels like they’ve been written out of the discussion before it even starts.”

— CATHERINE GRAHAM, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS, “[THE WORLD’S A STAGE — FOR ALL.](#)”

TSDC plays always focus on public engagement. They seek to open a dialogue that’s organized around the values at play in the situations presented in the performances, and about what we (performers and audience) value, and also would want to change, about how those situations unfold in our City. In this way, an overarching intention to keep in mind throughout the script development process is that *we are working to create a narrative arc that prompts a public encounter.*

We begin from the conviction that performer-advocate voices are important to public discussion. This is why, from the outset of the project, TSDC theatre practitioners take on the facilitator role in our approach to the performance creation process. As facilitators, we don’t come to the workshops with a preconceived idea of what the story will be about, where it will be set, or who the characters will be. In terms of script development, this means that it’s important to us that the play’s story arc and dialogue come from what performer-advocates do and say the workshops.

We also consider it essential that the plays be performed by the community participants who co-create them. There was a moment during the project when someone suggested that if we worked with professional actors the plays might reach a broader audience. In some ways, their rationale was sound. Whereas relying on the availability of performer-advocates can limit when and where the play is able to be presented, professional actors can be hired whenever and wherever they’re needed. Trained actors’ higher degree of performance skill could also potentially draw a broader audience to the plays.

Yet to hire professional actors would undermine TSDC’s core purpose. As political theorist Nancy Fraser asserts, when marginalized voices are ignored in public discussion, the problem is often not *what* they say but *how* their presentations are seen and heard (or misheard) in public venues.¹ This is why we think performance

1. Fraser, Nancy. *Fortunes of feminism: from state-managed capitalism to neoliberal crisis.* Brooklyn: Verso Books; 2013.

is uniquely well-suited as a means of interrupting usual patterns of exclusion from public discussion — and why we feel it's necessary that participants perform the plays. Performance offers a platform for participants to show and tell their stories through their own words, expressions, and embodied actions and interactions.

Just as TSDC plays seek to interrupt norms of communication related to public speech, we're also aware that adopting an encounter-based approach disrupts some of the expectations related to *viewing* performances. Like TV or movies, theatrical performances are something we look at and take in. Regardless of the content, there's no obligation to engage.

After going to a movie or the theatre we leave and talk about what we liked or didn't like. We might talk about the artistry (or lack thereof), the skill of the performers, the aesthetics of the play. If we discuss the story, the characters and their intentions and actions, it tends to be with the people we attended the performance with (partners, family, friends, colleagues — people from our own social worlds) and most often the discussion takes place in the comfort of our familiar worlds. Structurally, we're called to judgement (it's the nature of the genre). Even in post-performance theatre talk-back sessions, rarely are audiences in a position where they have a chance to speak *with* the people whose lives are being represented in the play. Most often, they are speaking to the professional theatre makers (playwrights, directors, actors) who are responsible for the representation of those lives.

Our goal with TSDC plays is not simply to represent a situation that the audience may or may not be aware of. Nor is it to invite audiences to make judgements about the play's characters, their choices, and their actions. It's to *invite audiences into a discussion with the performers, not about them*. Moreover, since community and self-advocates are the ones who create and perform the plays, they're also the ones who set the terms of the encounter. They're the ones who say, "We're here to have a conversation about this"; "This is how we see it"; "The judgements you make about this must be made in dialogue with us."

In the script, one of the ways we work to interrupt the norms of both public discussion and viewing a performance, is in how the plays begin. Each performance starts with the performers introducing themselves and then introducing their characters, as in "Hi, I'm Jess and I'm playing Joyce. Joyce is..." What they say about the character provides the audience with background information that's relevant to the kind of action the character will be involved in. Sometimes the character introductions by the performers are really important to understanding the action of the play. But sometimes, they are simply a way of underlining to the audience that the performer-advocates are choosing to show them particular things and not others. The introduction sets up the performers as real people, who are playing roles and telling a collective story that they worked to create about events and situations that they are knowledgeable about, while also making it clear that the play isn't autobiography.

TSDC's encounter-based approach is also always underlined in the final scene of the play, which generally involves some kind of call to action from the performers to the audience. This last scene indicates our

expectation that audiences assume some of the responsibility for welcoming more community voices into discussions of the issues the play raises. Interestingly, in two of our plays, we found that having the characters simply sit and silently stare out at the audience was as strong a way of doing this as a demanding monologue. In two others, performers ask the audience directly some version of the question: “What will you do about this?” As with all of our decisions about scripting, the decision about how to frame this question to the audience is made with the participants and in relation to the material that comes out of our workshop process. (See [The Performance Event](#) for a discussion of some of the ways we organize the performance event to facilitate a public encounter.)

TSDC’s encounter-based approach is designed to:

- Prompt a public conversation where people from different social locations can speak to and with, not for or at, each other.
- Reorganize the social hierarchy of typical performance and storytelling events so that performer-advocates are visible both as people with lived knowledge related to the events and situations presented in the play, *and* as analysts of those events and situations.

CREATING THE PERFORMANCE SCRIPT: THE 'HOW' OF IT

Okay. Now that we've gone over some of the reasons we create TSDC performance scripts the way we do, let's get down to the 'how' of it.

In the following sections we'll look at:

- Things we pay attention to during the workshops
- Identifying core cultural stories
- Choosing a physical setting for the story of the play
- Developing the action of the scenes
- Defining and developing characters
- Working with offstage characters
- Creating a story arc
- What TSDC scripts look like and how we work with them
- Shifting from workshopping to rehearsing

PAYING ATTENTION

Our first step in building a script for performance is to pay close attention not only to the situations, events, and interactions the participants describe, but to the ways they tell stories about them.

Some of the things we look for during workshops and while reviewing workshop documentation include:

- Images or ideas that people respond to with energy and enthusiasm, that seem to capture something important to the group.
- Images, actions, or phrases that get repeated (sometimes with variations) even if, at first glance, they don't seem particularly relevant to the play's emerging themes.
- Actions and interactions, the gestures, expressions, words and tone that participants use to tell their stories.
- Stories that participants repeat or come back to during workshop discussions.
- How stories that come up in workshop exercises and discussions relate to broader, or more dominant, 'cultural' stories.
- Unstated norms, beliefs, and assumptions that participants may be expressing through their actions.
- People who are heard from less frequently, or concerns that come forward and then slip away, that may need additional support to come forth.

IDENTIFYING CORE CULTURAL STORIES

“The title, *Choose Your Destination*, had many meanings to all of us involved in the project. But among them was the idea that as people navigate the everyday hustle and bustle of the City, they are employing agency. That agency can be constrained by the City and the barriers that it imposes, but it can also shape the City itself, how it is viewed and how it is experienced. For me, *Choose Your Destination* has a more literal meaning. It is an invitation to think about the kinds of spaces we create and to think carefully about the impact on the young lives forming here. It is an invitation to build spaces centered around comfort and warmth, learning and growth. It is an invitation to build spaces that can turn into meaningful places for everyone.”

— SARAH ADJEKUM, TSDC RESEARCH ASSISTANT AND MEMBER OF THE *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION* WORKSHOP TEAM.

Stories do not, and cannot, operate outside of the larger shared social contexts we reside in (town, City, nation). In every society there are stories that float to the surface and get taken up for different purposes. These core ‘cultural’ stories shape our perspectives and expectations. They create a sense of what’s important to pay attention to and of how to make meaning of situations. They influence the decisions we make about how we construct our shared social world. Often, they take the form of popularized adages.

Here’s a small sampling of dominant stories that shape our expectations about how people should behave:

- People get what they deserve
- Anyone who tries hard will succeed
- We don’t need others: we can (and should) pull ourselves up by our bootstraps
- Sacrifice now, leads to rewards later
- The cream rises to the top (leaders in our City are the smartest, most capable people in the City)
- Don’t rock the boat

Of course, cultural stories change over time. They are also often contradictory and can mask unspoken social and political biases. So, when creating scripts for TSDC performances one of the first things we look for are the broader cultural stories (or dominant discourses) that are being used to make the events that participants describe meaningful to different audiences. We then create a story framework that re-frames these cultural stories by telling it from the point of view of the play’s performer-advocates. To do this, we look for tensions, contrasts, and contradictions between what participants show and tell us about their lived experiences during workshop improvisations and discussions, and what the dominant cultural stories tell us about their lives, situations, and experiences.

In some cases, this means noticing the contradiction between themes that are emerging in the workshop and a dominant story. For example, as we developed *We Need to Talk!*, the facilitators were struck early on by the overwhelming amount of work and planning participants are required to do to get the most basic resources, and the apparent lack of motivation of many service providers to help them in meaningful ways. One reason this stood out to us is because of how it conflicted with the stories we often hear in broader public discourse that imply that people who live in poverty do nothing all day, are unmotivated to change their situations, or are just lazy.

Other cases, like in *When My Home is Your Business* workshops, showed two conflicting stories operating in the same physical environment (an apartment building). Tenants tell stories about trying to be good neighbours in buildings where repairs are never done, and everyone is on edge because they live with the constant threat of eviction. Landlords and superintendents of rental buildings tell a very different story. They speak of being efficient and responsible businesspeople by charging the maximum rent possible while minimizing spending on the building. Or, in times of ‘urban renewal,’ they speak about how the positive impacts of ‘redevelopment’ projects justifies the displacement of tenants.

Some conflicting stories or contradictions are immediately visible through the workshop exercises. This was the case in one Image Theatre improvisation we did with participants from *All of Us Together*. The image began with one workshop participant lying on the floor. As other participants joined the image, they leaned over the person on the ground and gestured as though offering to help. The last workshop participant to join the image stood behind the gathered group and raised her fist in the air.



The collective image poignantly captured the dilemma anti-poverty activists often face: the tension between how much energy we put into helping individuals who are hurting, and how much energy we put into challenging or undoing the system causing hurt. In this case, the tension was less about opposing or contradictory narratives, and more about drawing attention to the different pathways or strategies available to resolve or address social problems.

Keep in mind that, often, neither the facilitators nor the participants are immediately aware of the core and conflicting stories as they emerge in workshop exercises. This is why repetition and documentation are so important! It took us a long time to figure out the core story when we were working with a group of precariously housed youth on the performance, *Choose Your Destination*. It was only after paying attention through multiple workshops and reviewing the documentation of many Image Theatre improvisations that we began to recognize the core story: the youth who had been let down by the adults in their lives were constantly on guard against threats and disappointments, and yet consistently looked for other solutions and worked to move towards them, often supporting each other.

CHOOSING A SPACE OF PUBLIC ENCOUNTER

“All struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by redefining what had previously been considered ‘private,’ non-public and non-political issues as matters of public concern, as issues of justice, as sites of power which need discursive legitimation.”

— SEYLA BENHABIB. *SITUATING THE SELF*.

Because we work in theatre, after getting a sense of the broader cultural stories that the script will engage, our next step is to choose a physical setting that the story will unfold in. We never set plays in intimate spaces that reflect the characters’ private lives. This is because we don’t want audiences to focus on how individuals might change. Rather, we’re interested in drawing audience attention to how relative strangers are invited (or not invited) to take part in the collective environment of the City. So, we ask ourselves, ‘what kind of public space might the characters that are emerging in the workshop exercises encounter each other in?’

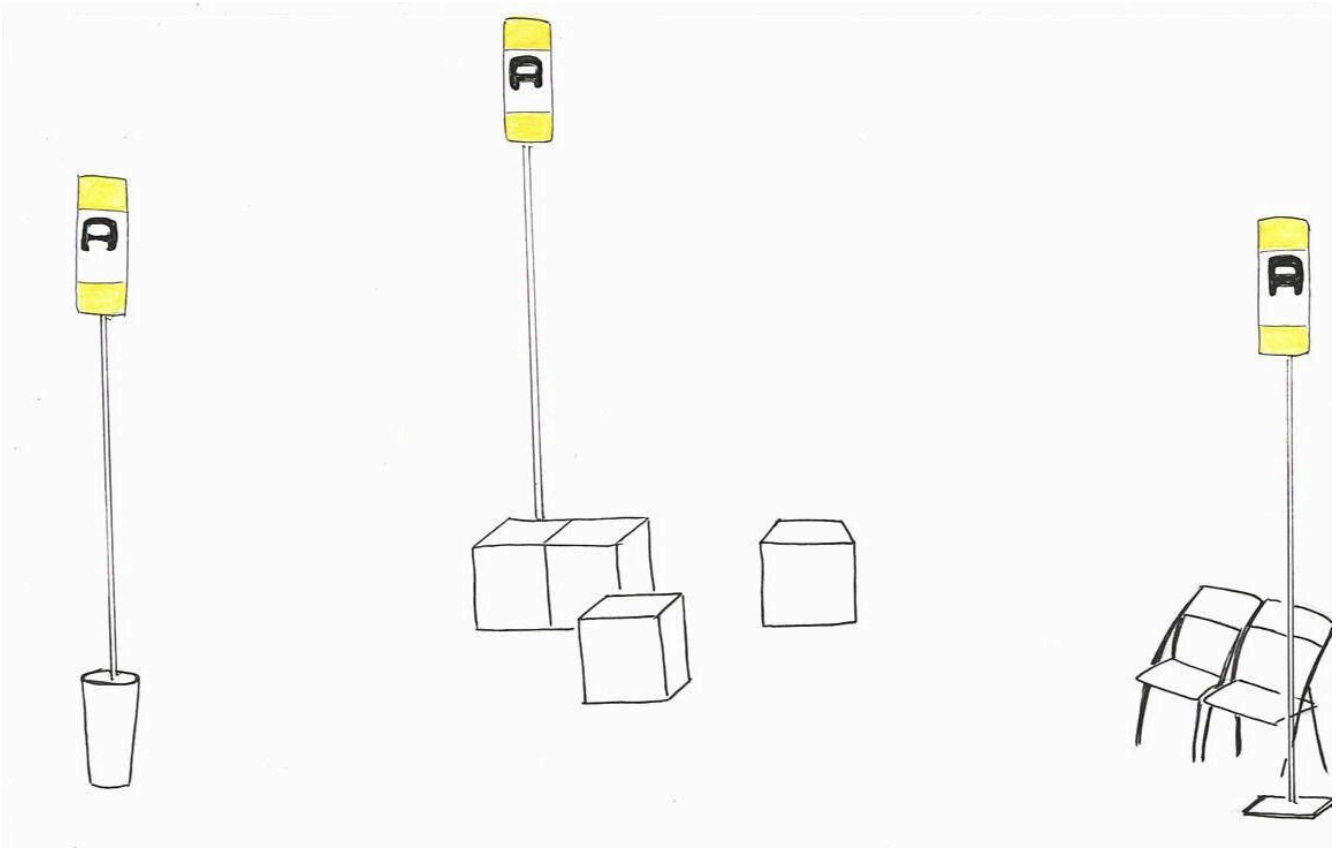
The choice of setting always influences the kinds of interactions that are possible in a performance. Over time, we’ve come to discover that this, in itself, is an important part of the story of how public life is organized. In *When My Home is Your Business*, for example, it quickly became clear that tenants only really have a right to use the space of their own apartment. Participants told us that landlords often discourage tenants from gathering in shared spaces out of fear of tenant organizing. So, areas that at first glance appear to be shared spaces — lobbies, the mailroom, the area outside the elevators — are, in reality, not intended to be ‘shared.’ They’re designed as temporary spaces for tenants to move through. Through conversations with participants, we saw that the design of the apartment block meant that residents were supposed to remain isolated individuals and were not supported to become neighbours in any real sense. As a result, when characters paused in these spaces to talk, the conversation itself became a kind of challenge to the story the apartment building was designed to tell.

A similar thing happened in the social services offices portrayed in *We Need to Talk!* The performance space was arranged so that the audience could see multiple characters sitting in an area marked ‘Waiting Room.’ Only one client/character at a time was able to leave the waiting area to approach a case worker. The pattern of movement forced by this spatial arrangement emphasized the limited range of motion available to clients in the face of established bureaucracies.



At the end of the play, the characters moved the chairs so they could sit close together and face the audience. This simple rearrangement of the performance space called attention to how the bureaucratic arrangement of everyday spaces limit possibilities and potential alliances.

For *Choose Your Destination*, the performance space was organized around several large wooden boxes that were used to represent seats on a City bus. Three bus stop signs were also placed in different areas of the space. During the workshops, the youth had created scenes that took place in multiple different locations.



The choice of a City bus as a focal point where they might meet helped us address two of the play's practical storytelling problems:

- The bus provided us with a space where characters who didn't start off knowing one another could meet and develop relationships.
- The bus stops allowed us to stage action in multiple locations around the City without having to create a set for each location.

The bus also contributed in significant ways to the play's narrative and meaning. On a tangible level, the bus reflected a reality of everyday life in Cities. Public transit is one place people encounter each other. When people travel the same routes regularly strangers may come to know each other a bit even though they lead very different lives. But importantly, the bus also gave us a way to metaphorically point to the core repeating narrative of the play: the youth were constantly trying to take care of themselves after being let down by adults in their lives. Despite being let down, time after time, they 'got back on the bus,' tried again, and helped one another while they continued on their journeys.

DEVELOPING THE ACTION OF THE SCENES

“I think the process of getting to what was really our message, you know it wasn’t something that was overly guided, and you know, it was our voices that were being heard and that was the piece... It was the process of getting there that made it feel empowering because we were the ones creating it.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *WE NEED TO TALK!*

In order to identify the overarching story framework and determine a physical setting for the play, the group had to first create a lot of images. Now, it’s time to see what those images will look like in the setting we’ve chosen and to develop them into scenes. To initiate the scene development process, the facilitator suggests a ‘scene configuration’ to the group. Scene configurations are created by taking images that were derived during previous [Image Theatre](#) exercises and linking them together into a kind of scene **storyboard**.

To create scene configurations:

- Review documentation from previous Image Theatre explorations and conversations with participants to identify core images and ideas.
- Combine and layer several images into a scene storyboard, placing the scene in a physical environment.
- Identify a key Image (a moment of choice making) to act as the focal point for the scene development exploration.

We begin scene development sessions by introducing and discussing the proposed scene configuration or storyboard. This is done both by revisiting the documented images from previous workshops and through a brief verbal description (see below) of the images that make up the scene configuration. This is an opportunity for everyone to review the images and share thoughts, concerns, and questions. Sometimes, these discussions lead to adjustments being made prior to exploring the scene. They can also generate ideas for additional scene explorations to be taken up in the subsequent workshops.

At times, beginning the scene development process can trigger anxiety. A danger, as the group enters this stage in the creative process, is that the anxiety can compel some participants to try to ‘figure everything out’ before *trying it out*. It’s helpful to remind participants that we’re still exploring and will be using methods that are familiar to them — like prompts and Image Theatre. As participants become comfortable with exploring scenes, they usually become increasingly active in the process of developing and refining scenes.

To illustrate how we go about developing a scene we’ll look at a scene we worked on with the youth for the play *Choose Your Destination*. The proposed scene configuration was composed of two images from previous

workshops: One, of a character who finds a wallet on the ground and, after checking to see that nobody is looking, picks it up. A second, of a character who is trying to get on a bus but doesn't have enough change and is arguing with a bus driver. These two images were combined and layered, and a third concluding image was added to create a three-image scene storyboard:

- Image 1: Character finds a wallet on the ground and tries to pick it up without anyone noticing.
- Image 2 (key image): One character sitting on the bus, a second arguing with the bus driver as they try unsuccessfully to find enough change to pay their fare, and a third person trying to push past them to get on the bus.
- Image 3: We proposed that at the end of the scene, all the characters needed to be seated on the bus to allow them to transition to the scene that would follow (including a fourth character who catches the bus at the last minute).



Once the group is on board to explore the proposed scene, the facilitator explains how the exercise works and guides participants through the process:

Developing the action of the scene exercise

1. Explain that we won't stage the scene in order but will start with the key image where the performers must make a critical choice of action. This helps performers get a clear idea of what's at stake in the scene and to think through why their characters do what they do.
2. Ask the performers to create the key image of the scene without speaking, showing us an image that might be a still photograph of the key moment where the choice is made.

One person is frozen in the act of arguing with the bus driver while trying to find change to pay their fare and a second person is frozen in the act of trying to push past them. A third person seated further down the bus, watches warily.

3. Ask each performer to focus on the decision they must make at that moment in the scene. The facilitator then asks every character to speak out loud what might be going on in their own head at that moment. We emphasize that this is not dialogue between characters, but a statement of each character's inner thoughts. As in brainstorming, it's important to keep this exercise going long enough that performers have stated all the obvious thoughts their character might have and start to dig a little deeper into their motivations. All the characters speak simultaneously. This helps participants start the process of acting without worrying about being watched, or 'not doing it right.'

The purpose of this exercise is to deepen our understanding of why the characters are doing what they do. We often make discoveries in this process. In this case, we discovered that the character who is searching for change to pay her fare is frantic because it's her first day at a new job and if she misses this bus she will be late. We also learned that the person pushing to get on is afraid that someone will notice that she just picked up a wallet she found on the ground at the bus stop. The person seated on the bus is keeping an eye on the situation in case a fight breaks out.

4. Once everyone is comfortable with their character's action in the key image, the facilitator sets up the opening image of the scene in the same way.

One character is rushing onto the bus, digging in their pockets for coins. The second character is waiting at the bus stop when she sees a wallet, which she pulls towards her with her foot. The third character is already seated on the bus.

5. At this point, the focus shifts to the transition between images. Tell the performers that you will clap your hands five times. Each time you clap, they should move once and freeze. On the fifth clap they should be in the key image they just practiced. Repeat this process three times, to allow

performers to remember the pattern of action and deepen their understanding of why they are moving the way they do.

6. Once the transition from the opening image to the key image is clear, repeat the process for the transition from the key image to the final image.

Sometimes we discover new possibilities in these transitions. For instance, we discovered in the movement process that the character with the wallet pays the first character's fare because it's the fastest way to get past her. This was not planned before we started working on the scene. The process of solving the problem of the scene through movement showed us something important about how the youth sometimes help each other in order to help themselves.

7. After observing the transitions, choose moments in between the three initial images when a choice is made. This can often be seen in a physical pivot or shift of balance as a character changes direction slightly. Clap through the images again, but this time, freeze at one of these pivot moments and do the inner monologues again.

8. Ask everyone to keep their inner monologue going silently as you tap each person on the shoulder, one at a time. With each tap ask the character to finish a sentence like: "I want..." "I'm afraid that..." "I wish..." "It pisses me off when..." "I'm pretty sure that..." Be sure to give all the characters a chance to finish each sentence before you move on to the next one. Try to alternate more positive (I want...) and negative (I'm afraid...) reactions. This allows performers to demonstrate the mixed or complex feelings their characters may have about the situation and the choice they are about to make. Remind performers again that these statements are not dialogue for the play, but an exploration of their character's reaction to what is happening.

9. Starting with the opening image, ask the performers to run through the scene (the three images with transitions) from beginning to end, repeating the pattern of action they've created. Remind everyone to keep the motivation for their actions clear. In this phase, characters should use as much dialogue as they need to make their choices and actions clear to an audience.

10. Celebrate the fact that you have just written a scene together!

At this early stage in scene development, we encourage participants not to 'own' their characters. Instead, we often ask them to perform the scene again with different people playing different roles. Since our responses to situations differ, having multiple people play a single role creates layers of interpretations, and helps us to see and show possibilities that might otherwise have remained unseen.

We finish scene development exercises by asking participants what struck them most about the scene, what seemed important to them, what they would like to explore more, or what they would want to change if they

did it again. We often start this reflection process by asking everybody in the room to give the scene a caption, as if it was an image in a newspaper, or to finish the following sentence: “This is a story of people who....”

Sometimes we also ask people who observed the scene but didn’t perform in it to ask one question about the situation (in addition to participants who may not have been in the scene, this includes members of the TSDC team). The point isn’t to have the performers answer the questions. Rather, we consider the questions to be indications of what audiences are likely to focus on in a given scene, and what kinds of contextual information they might need to better understand what’s happening.

Things to keep in mind:

- Participants may be nervous as they enter the scene development process. Remember that facilitator tone and attitude go a long way to convey a sense of confidence in the group and the creative process.
- During scene development exercises prompts are used in a way that’s less about initiating an imaginative process, and more focused on setting up (by describing) a scene that’s based on prior Image Theatre exercises or previous workshop discussions.
- While the prompt sets up the scene, it doesn’t tell participants what to do. Once the scene is set, each character is invited to say or do something in response to embodying the image and in relation to one another.
- Remember to use claps to slow down the movements as participants transition between images. This helps to heighten their awareness of the choices they’re making and gives them time to react to one another’s choices.
- Like all workshop exercises, scene improvisations are performative opportunities to teach performance-related skills. As participants transition between images, remind them that when they’re performing in public, they will need to slow down the movement into a sequence of readable actions so that audiences have time to absorb what’s happening.

DEFINING CHARACTERS

After we've done several initial scene improvisations, each performer often begins to spontaneously play a relatively consistent character. At this point, we shift attention to collectively defining each character. This process allows us to think about how characters will appear to others, not just how the performer/character might understand their own actions. Collective character defining activities also provide individual participants with additional resources they can use to develop their fictionalized characters.

We start by working through one of the initial scene improvisations. This time we ask each performer to give their chosen character a fictional name.

Giving characters fictional names:

- Makes it easier for participants to think in terms of what a person might do in a given situation without feeling that they have to decide whether they would personally do that, or not.
- Makes it easier to hear suggestions for change without taking them personally or as criticism.
- Creates a clear distinction between the performer and the character, which is important because during the performance it discourages audiences from taking a voyeuristic attitude and intruding into the personal lives of the performer-advocates.

Here's a documentary-style character development exercise we like to use that Catherine learned from the Théâtre Parminou and the Théâtre du Campus.

Character development exercise

1. Ask for a volunteer to offer their character to start us off (For purposes of this description, we'll work with the character 'Jude'.)
2. Place a chair at the front of the room and explain that we're going to proceed as if a documentary filmmaker or a television reporter is doing a story about Jude. The filmmaker/reporter is going to interview people who know Jude to find out more about them and what

people appreciate about them.

3. Ask the group, “Who, aside from the other characters in the play, might know Jude?” A best friend? A former roommate? A boss? A former teacher? A coworker? A brother or sister?
4. Together, choose one of the relationships the group suggests (let’s go with Jude’s boss).
5. Explain that, everybody in the room, including the person who has been playing Jude, will take a turn at playing Jude’s boss for the purpose of this exercise.
6. One by one, ask participants to sit in the chair and, speaking as Jude’s boss, to say 1-3 sentences about Jude. Remind them to keep in mind the things we’ve seen Jude do and heard them say in the initial scene improvisations. This ensures that there is a logic to the character.
7. Repeat until everyone in the group gets to occupy the chair and the role of Jude’s boss. Remember, it’s important to make sure that the person who usually plays Jude is also invited to speak about Jude as if they were Jude’s boss.
8. When everyone has had a chance to play Jude’s boss, we choose another of the suggested relationships and repeat the exercise. Depending how long this takes, we might even choose a third relationship, but it is important to leave enough time to ensure that the group is able to discuss all the characters. This often takes the better part of one workshop session.

Defining characters through this kind of fictional and collective process discourages an emphasis on personal psychology. Instead, it encourages the group to imagine the characters they’ll be performing as people who have an impact on the world around them. We come to know the characters as people who are part of, and involved in public life, and public discussion. This is an important step towards facilitating the kind of inclusion in public debate of people whose voices are rarely heard that TSDC performances seek to encourage.

It needs to be made clear, however, that the performer playing Jude doesn’t have to take everything that’s said about the character to heart. This too, reflects the nature of public discourse. After all, sometimes people say things about a person in public that aren’t true, or that represent a misunderstanding based on the speaker’s perspective or agenda. It’s worthwhile, though, to encourage performers to think about how they could use some of the things they’ve heard to give their character a certain depth, while drawing on their own personal story only to the extent that is comfortable for them.

There are ethical dimensions to this approach too. Through this process, participants are invited to create characters that include some characteristics of their own (if only their physical appearance). They are also invited to include characteristics that are not true of them. The goal is to make it impossible for the audience to feel sure that they know what might be true about the performer and what might be purely fictional.

The main intention of this exercise is to develop a deeper sense of how characters might function in the broader

world and the kinds of relationships they might have. Sometimes, though, things come out of these exercises that contribute in significant ways to the play's narrative. In *When My Home is Your Business*, for instance, someone described how one of the characters (Emma) purchased flower seeds for other tenants in the building. The interviewee explained that even though Emma had very little money, she bought the flowers because she hoped they could work together to beautify their surroundings. This became an important plot point. It allowed us to show how, despite constraints, neighbours can work together for everyone's benefit. It also led us to include in the script an invitation to the audience at the end of the play to think about what they might want to plant in their community.

OFFSTAGE CHARACTERS

TSDC scripts include characters who are referred to, but never seen or heard from. These characters have included case workers, building superintendents, difficult relatives, employers, cashiers, security personnel, people who have helped on-stage characters in the past, and people who are engaged in drug dealing and sex trafficking. We made a conscious decision not to have community performers represent these characters on stage. Our reasoning was two-fold:

- On a practical level, the number of performers in each show are limited and they are generally not trained as actors. It would be difficult for them to jump from one character to another, especially given our relatively short production periods.
- More importantly, we want the play's focus to stay on the kind of community members who are less often represented (and often misrepresented) in public debate. While we want to show their interactions with others, we want the audience to see these relationships from the point of view of the community members whose version of what happened is rarely heard.

So how do we deal with these unseen characters? In three different ways:

Representing unseen characters

Representatives of social roles such as case worker, landlord and their representatives, cashiers and so on:

Performers speak to a spot on the stage as if this person was there. They establish what the invisible character may have said or asked through their responses to them. Here's an example from *We Need to Talk!*:

"So, what's in the bag this week? [pause as if listening] White bread, pasta, candies, a dented can of tuna. But I told you, I'm diabetic. I can't eat these things. Can you substitute something else?" [pause]
"No. Well I guess I'll just take the tuna. Yeah. See you next month."

Someone an onstage character has an emotional relationship with:

We often use phone calls, where the audience hears only the onstage character's side of the conversation. This allows the performer to demonstrate the emotional effect the unseen character is having on them while also conveying information that may be important to the play's narrative. For instance, in this scene from *When My Home is Your Business*, 'Alice' talks to her brother, who has once again come to her apartment building drunk in the middle of the night:

"Well I hope you're happy. You come in here drunk, crashing into the walls all the way down the hall and banging on my door in the middle of the night. You woke up all the neighbours and now they won't even speak to me. Don't you ever embarrass me like that again!"

People whose interaction with an onstage character is important to the plot:

Their actions are often described by one character in the play to another. For example, in *Choose Your Destination*, while sitting together on the bus, 'Amelia' describes to 'Snow' how a really nice customer she met at work who has beautiful clothes and a fancy car invited her to a party at her home but told her to come alone. When the play's other characters overhear the conversation, they recognize the address as belonging to a 'trap house' and suspect that Amelia's 'nice' customer may be luring her into a sex trafficking situation. On the other end of the spectrum, in *All of Us Together* 'Sapphire' describes an older man who believed in him and helped him in his youth and how much the memory of that still means to him.

CREATING THE STORY ARC

After we've done enough scene improvisations to generate material for the play and developed stable characters, the facilitator puts the scenes together in a kind of scene map. This consists of scene titles followed by a series of prompts that identify which characters enter the scene, what they talk about, and how they leave the scene. Brought together in this way the previously autonomous scenes create a story arc for the play. The style of story arc for each of the four plays we've produced has been quite different. This is because each play was trying to show different kinds of contrasts between layered stories that made up the overall story arc.

In some groups we worked with, most of the members pretty much agreed on what was wrong in the City for people in their situation. There was also an overarching consensus on what needed to be done, though the problems affected them differently. In these cases, repetition with variations allowed us to show the audience that a trouble-shooting approach to each individual issue wouldn't solve the underlying structural problem and conflict of values. Seeing a problem repeat with variations encourages audiences to question the broader social values and beliefs that support the current situation. When this happens, an opening is created to consider that there may be another way of understanding these events and this, in turn, opens ground for actively listening to the people who want to tell the story of what those events mean in another way.

In other groups, participants had different experiences of the City and consequently they had different understandings of how to improve the situation. This often led to story arcs where characters found ways to build some kind of unity despite differences of approach. For instance, when we were working on *When My Home is Your Business* a disagreement emerged during scene improvisations. Many of the scenes were about trying to build a sense of neighbourliness in downtown high-rise buildings. One participant's experience of dealing with unruly and disrespectful neighbours, however, helped us think through a real difficulty of tenant organizing in situations that are already tense because of conflict with the landlord. In creating the play's story arc, it was important that we not ignore the different experiences, concerns, needs, and desires of tenants. Including these different narratives allowed participants to bring attention to the complexities of building solidarity.

On the scene level, we've found that combining elements from different improvisations in order to reflect more than one issue in each scene is crucial if we want to avoid coming across as telling the audience what to think. This can be as simple as having one character struggling with an unreliable elevator while another looks for her lost cat. Social life is complex, there is rarely only one thing happening in a public space at a time. When the structuring of our storytelling reflects this, it encourages a kind of public discussion that recognizes that solutions must take social complexity into account.

Unlike the narrative arc of a book, theatre is a live art. This means we can't rely on the audience's imagination to transport characters from one scene to another. We need to think about how characters will physically move into and out of scenes. Though we're not married to a 'realist' style that tries to reflect life 'as it actually is,' we do find that transitions need to make sense within the world of the play.

Transitions also need to be relatively quick in order to keep the flow of the action going and community participants often find this easier to do if they understand the logic of the movement. The [set and props](#) further supports the logic of the movement between scenes by providing physical and spatial anchors for both the performer-advocates and the audience. For example, the Waiting Room in *We Need to Talk!*, the bus in *Choose Your Destination*, the elevator in *When My Home is Your Business*, and the ribbons in *All of Us Together*, all provided the performers with a way to transition from one scene to another while also situating the different scenes in the shared world of the play.

WHAT SCRIPTS LOOK LIKE AND HOW WE USE THEM

TSDC scripts do not look like conventional literary play scripts. As we discussed above, the first way we present the play's 'script' to performers is as a kind of scene map.

Here's an excerpt from a *When My Home is Your Business* scene map:

S2. Everyone frustrated the elevator doesn't work.

SAMI pushes buttons but elevator doesn't go where he wants, elevator is crazy, computer chip doesn't work

EMMA waits for elevator

ALICE comes out of apartment, EMMA turns her back on Alice, ALICE returns quickly to apartment

HANNAH waits for elevator, why does she always have to wait so long, they're always using one of them for the construction...



Once we're pretty clear on what the scenes will look like in the performance, we review video documentation of the individual improvised scenes and write a skeleton script (see sample below) that includes key dialogue and stage directions for each scene. Looking over the documentation gives us a chance to consider how dialogue and action could be tightened up to maintain a strong flow of action while keeping the audience's focus where we want it. This is not something that's easy to do when improvising scenes, since the point of improvising is for performers to feel free to explore.

We also try to capture those moments from improvising when performer-advocates had particularly good ways of expressing something that make the situation clearer and provide audiences with the context they need to understand it in the way the performers intend. For instance, at one point in *We Need to Talk!*, a performer pointed out the serious consequences of inaccurate information being recorded in social welfare files. At a crucial moment in an improvisation of the scene when she was asking why her benefits had been cut off, she said: “No. I don’t OWN a Chrysler, I used to WORK at Chrysler!” Because the line captured the problem quickly and clearly, we wanted to remember to use it, so included it in the dialogue of the skeleton script.

Once we’ve established a pattern of action and speech, we write up the skeleton script. This is helpful for rehearsals, even though performers are not expected to say their dialogue exactly as it is written.

A skeleton script with ‘just enough’ written-out dialogue and stage directions:

- Helps performers remember what they wanted to say in each scene without having to reinvent it every time they go onstage.
- Establishes verbal cues that are prompts for action.
- Helps performers remember particularly well-phrased expressions from prior improvisations of a scene.
- Allows another performer, or a member of the artistic team, to replace a performer who is unable to go on stage at a scheduled performance due to illness or other personal issues.

The scene map during the performance

A revised final ‘scene map’ is also used as a reminder of the order of scenes and what happens in each of them during the final performance. These are strategically located on the set in places where they aren’t visible to the audience but participants will be able to read them (like the back of the doors in *When My Home Is Your Business*, or on the documents that characters from *We Need To Talk!* carried from agency to agency).

“Having the scene template on the door so we have an idea of what’s gonna happen, like anchors of who is going to be there. That really calmed me down.” — PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *When My Home is Your Business.*

Sample skeleton script scene with dialogue and stage directions: *When My Home is Your Business*

2. Everyone frustrated the elevator doesn't work.

SAMI leaves apartment and goes to Elevator. He pushes the button and then gets in.

SAMI : What is happening with this elevator. I pressed lobby and we're going up!

EMMA leaves her apartment and stands in front of the elevator to wait for it.

SAMI: So now we are going down to the parking garage!! No, no. I want to go to the lobby!

ALICE comes out of her apartment and moves towards the elevator. **EMMA** sees Alice and turns her back on her. **ALICE** is embarrassed about what happened last night and doesn't want to talk about it, so she goes back to her apartment to wait for Emma to get on the elevator and leave.

SAMI: This elevator is just crazy! When I want to go down it goes up, when I want it to go up it goes down. There is something seriously wrong with the computer chip that runs this thing!

3. Explaining What Happened on Emma's Floor Last Night

Elevator arrives and **EMMA** gets on.

EMMA (to Sami): Good morning.

SAMI: Good morning. It was very noisy on your floor last night.

EMMA: Yes. That Alice and the man who visits her. When they get to drinking they always end up in the hallways yelling and screaming at each other. She needs help.

HANNAH: (checking her watch) How long will I wait this time? It's always like this. It's so slow. It's so inefficient. I cannot believe they cannot coordinate these elevators the way they should. There's always one "in service" for the construction!

HANNAH gets on the elevator. Everyone greets each other.

ALICE: (on the phone with her brother). Well I hope you're happy. You come in here drunk, crashing into the walls all the way down the hall and banging on my door in the middle of the night. You woke up all the neighbours and now they won't even speak to me. Don't you ever embarrass me like that again! I don't care what Mom said to you! No, there's nothing to talk about it. Don't show up here drunk again! (She slams down the phone and sits heavily on her chair, head in hands.)

REHEARSING

“The most important thing is the flexibility. For example, when I say a statement and I wanted to say it another time, maybe I can’t say the same words in the second or third time. Therefore, there was a flexibility to stick to the meaning and the idea, but to express it as I can on the spot.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *WHEN MY HOME IS YOUR BUSINESS*.

By now, we have a setting, a narrative arc, and a skeleton script for the play. Yay! As we said, memorization of dialogue isn’t one of the goals of our rehearsals of the script. This is why, when we present the skeleton script to performers, we always remind them that they don’t have to say exactly what’s written on the page. That said, in order to coordinate action, performers need to know what others are likely to do and say in a scene. To make this possible, at a certain point, we shift from workshopping scenes to rehearsing them.

When rehearsing, we work to:

- Establish a pattern of speech and action that’s reliable enough so that all the performers know what they need to do or say, and when they need to do or say it.
- Ensure that everyone knows their key phrases, cues, and actions.
- Prepare participants for performance by doing exercises that help them project their voices.
- Orient performer-advocates to what the performance setting will look like and where the audience will be seated.
- Make adjustments to the set, script, or performance plan to eliminate or minimize any potential barriers that might arise for performers.

PART VII

SET & PROP DESIGN

“Because this is theatre, we needed a set. Contrary to what many people might initially assume, a theatre set is not so much about replicating the ‘look’ of a particular space. What is more important is to create the space in which characters can move into and out of particular kinds of relationships.”

— J. ADAM PERRY, TSDC RESEARCH AND WORKSHOP TEAM MEMBER, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS.

TSDC SETS & PROPS: INTRODUCTION

As we've tried to demonstrate, the devising or collective script development process doesn't resemble a straightforward mathematical equation where *performers + script + set + props = performance*. Rather, devising a play requires a lot of repetition and a kind of simmering to see what bubbles up through the workshop exercises and the (formal and informal) group reflections. The set and props contribute to the process of script development in many important ways. This is why, ideally, the set and prop designer is brought in either from the beginning or early in the performance's development phase.

Usually made up of everyday objects like tables and chairs or constructed using accessible and affordable materials like cardboard and paper-mâché, the simplicity of TSDC sets and props can make it difficult to grasp their full value and the multiple purposes they play in both the performance and the performance creation process.

TSDC sets and props work to:

- Create a believable world for the audience.
- Provide performers with visual and physical resources to help them act as their characters in the world of the play.
- Orient performers in space by providing visual anchors for knowing where they have to be during each scene.
- Assist in the performance creation process by providing workshop participants with resources for creative exploration.

THE SET & PROPS AT WORK DURING THE PERFORMANCE



To illustrate some of the ways the set and props work, let's look at *We Need to Talk!* Often performed in classroom or community settings, the set design is necessarily simple and adaptable. Here's one version of the set up: The 'stage' is set with three tables marked 'Income Support,' 'Housing,' and 'Food Bank.' There are several small boxes on each table and empty chairs on the audience's side of the tables but facing away from the audience. There is also a 'Waiting Room' sign accompanied by a row of chairs and, close to the audience, a trolley full of paper-mâché rocks.

The play opens with the performers introducing their characters. They describe their characters' strengths, things they're proud of, and some of the burdens their characters 'carry': histories of violence, hidden disabilities, care responsibilities, and so on. As they speak, they pick up paper-mâché rocks from the trolley.

Each character carries their armload of rocks throughout the play as they repeatedly approach the different agencies in their efforts to access social services.

This opening scene imprints the rocks with meaning. As the play proceeds and the audience listens to the words of the story, the rocks act as a sustained visual reminder of the contexts of the women's lives. Though physically lightweight, the armloads of rocks are cumbersome. They are difficult to balance and hinder the performer-advocates' movements. This physical struggle to carry and balance the rocks as the performers' characters travel from agency to agency becomes a way of making visible the labour of carrying burdens that can often go unseen by social service providers. It's obvious from the play's actual dialogue that interactions with service providers are difficult for the women; the symbolically imprinted rocks allow the audience to better understand *just how difficult* (and exasperating, and unjust). We can imagine more accurately the effects of the providers' words and actions because we are able to 'see' what the women are really carrying with them.

In addition to enhancing audience understanding, from a dramaturgical (or storytelling) perspective, the rocks also allow us to compress time. The play's characters don't need to have entire scenes about how they fled domestic violence with a child under their arm, or how they were diagnosed with a serious illness. They can just mention those things, pick up the rocks, and that whole past is carried in the play's unfolding story about the challenges of accessing social services.

"I liked that there was such a diverse group of women and experiences represented. I also liked that when sitting in the crowd as a social work student I felt like I could be in that seat in the future either helping or hindering." — AUDIENCE MEMBER, *WE NEED TO TALK!*

"The rocks really give you a visual of how much you're struggling, how they are hard to balance." — AUDIENCE MEMBER, *WE NEED TO TALK!*



The impact of the rocks themselves is further amplified by the rest of the play's set. As the performers approach each agency and attempt to fit their rocks into the available boxes they face and speak to the empty chair that accompanies each agency table. Since *We Need to Talk!* was performed for audiences largely made up of current or future social service providers, audience members had an opportunity to imagine themselves occupying the chair. This indirect confrontation with the audience is made overt in the play's final scene when the women look at each other, drop all their rocks on the agency tables, drop out of character, and say directly to the audience: "This isn't working. We need to talk!"

Performing without a set or props would be tall order even for professional actors. For non-professional community-based performer-advocates whose theatre training is limited to a short workshop series, performing without a set and props would be particularly daunting. During the performance, the set and props support the performers in communicating an action-based and visual story. Now let's look behind the scenes at some of the ways that the set and props support the performers during the workshops and throughout the devising process.

THE SET & PROPS AT WORK IN THE WORKSHOPS

The primary role of some elements of the set is practical. They serve the play by orienting the performers and audience to the world of the play's characters, as is the case with the three signs from *We Need to Talk!* that indicate the names of the social service agencies. The 'Waiting Room' area serves a dual purpose. In addition to orienting the audience to what the space represents, it's a visual reminder throughout the play of how much time people who are accessing social services have to spend waiting.

Other objects have a more meaningful and evocative role. For example, the empty chairs and the rocks were integral not only during the performance itself, but also in how they contributed to the performance creation process. The empty chairs from *We Need to Talk!* entered the process early. In our first workshop with participants we did an activity called 'Talk to the Chair.' Participants were invited to speak to an empty chair while imagining they were trying to access needed services.

When the women first approached the chairs, they said the kinds of things that they felt like they needed to say. They were polite and careful not to offend. When they were invited to repeat the exercise, this time saying what they really wanted to say, not what they thought service providers wanted to hear, the group responded with enthusiasm.

Below is a small sampling of some of their statements:

"Transforming Stories actually helped us to tell exactly what we wanted to say... instead of saying what they wanted to hear." —
PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *WE NEED TO TALK!*





At the time of the exercise we had no idea that the empty chairs would become part of the final performance and that the activity of speaking to them would generate large portions of the play's dialogue. Devising a performance like this is a process of experimentation. Some things click, others don't. The chairs clicked, but they weren't enough.

As we listened to what workshop participants were saying, both during the theatre exercises and in the group reflections, it became clear that they were dealing with multiple issues *and* that each issue demanded a lot of their time and energy to figure out how to access the resources they needed (housing, health care, food, and so on). We felt that telling the story of what it was like going to your caseworker or to a food bank receptionist and not getting what you need, wasn't fully capturing the reasons for the women's frustration. We needed something to convey how overburdened they were. We needed some way to *show* what they were carrying. This is where the rocks came in.

After many conversations about what was needed, Melanie (our set and prop designer and co-facilitator of the workshops), made a bunch of 'rocks' out of rolled up newspaper and masking tape and brought them

to the next workshop. We invited participants to repeat the activity of approaching the different agencies and speaking to the chair, but this time to do it carrying an armload of the newspaper rocks. Everyone loved the rocks! We later added the scene where each performer introduced their character. This allowed them to attribute more specific meanings and histories to the rocks they carried with them throughout the play.

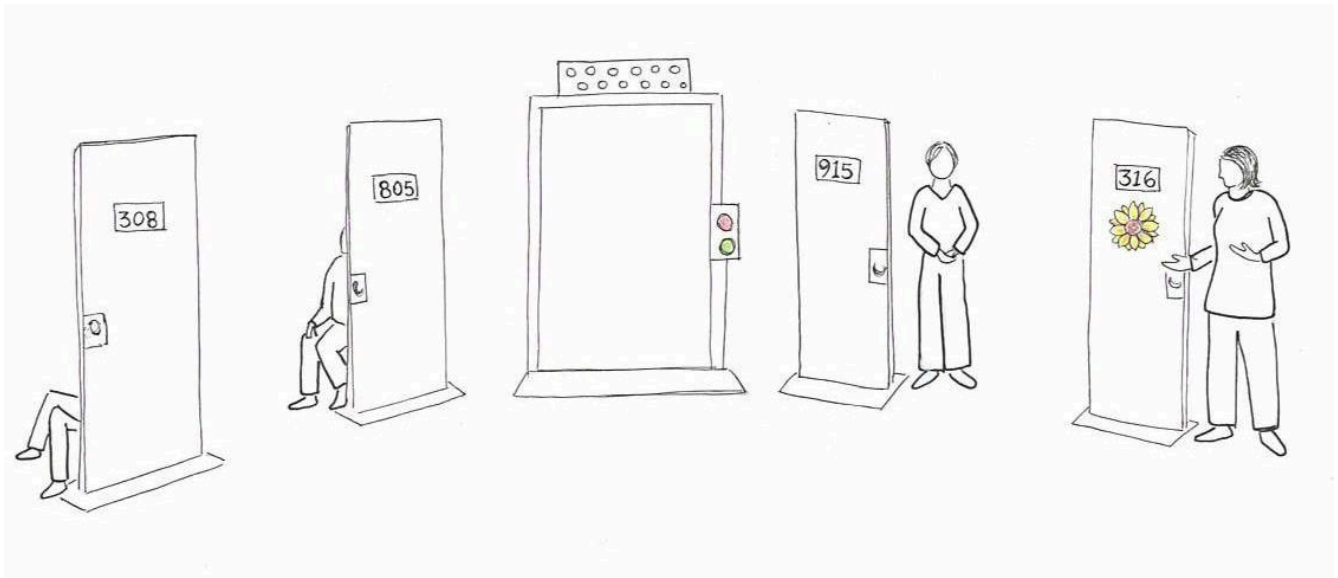
PRAGMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to solving creative or dramaturgical problems, there are many other pragmatic considerations to keep in mind when designing sets. For example, since TSDC performances don't take place in traditional theatre settings, there is no 'off stage' area for performers to sit between scenes. This is an important consideration especially when working with performers for whom standing for long periods may be challenging.

In addition to furthering the narrative of the story, the 'Waiting Area' in *We Need to Talk!* provided a place for performer-advocates to sit in-between scenes.



In *Choose Your Destination*, a 'bus' made of large wooden blocks served as both a site for the play's characters to interact in as well as a place for them to be between scenes that were taking place off the bus. Likewise, chairs placed behind the performers' apartment doors in *When My Home is Your Business* provided them with a 'home' where they could sit and rest in between scenes.



There are also practical considerations that are not directly related to the dramatic needs of the play. Sets and props need to be:

- Easy to transport to and from the performance site
- Safe for performers to interact with
- Readable — large enough for the audience to see and recognizable as objects
- Constructed out of affordable and non-toxic materials

PART VIII

THE PERFORMANCE EVENT

“The feeling when we were performing. We brought the story to life. We all got really, really into it. We remembered our lines and we were bringing it all together. That feeling of like, we all kind of connected through the story that we were showing. I’ll always remember that. And when people were clapping and standing up, I was like ‘Wow! That’s really sweet!’ I think that’s what I remember the most.”

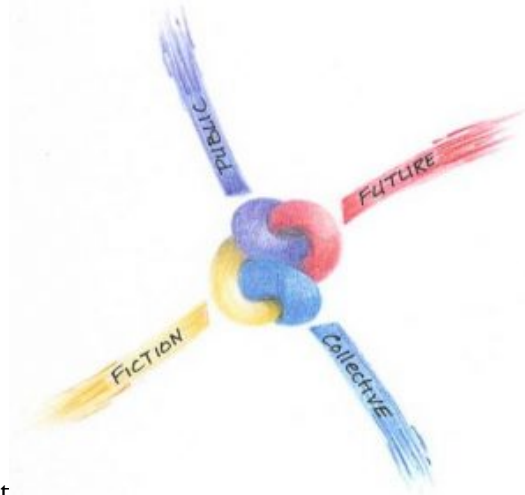
— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION*.

TSDC PERFORMANCE EVENTS: INTRODUCTION

“I’m really fascinated by what art does and can do in the world...there’s a magic in it.”

— CHRIS SINDING, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK.

In this section we’re going to talk about all the activities that contribute to and are part of TSDC performance



events. But

first, a few words about the performance itself. As we said in the introduction, TSDC performances take the form of short plays that are fictional, collective, future-oriented, and focused on publicness. TSDC plays are usually presented to a select audience in a non-theatrical venue. Though there is no stage, no lighting to dramatically conceal and reveal the action — the plays adhere to a dramatic structure in two important ways: Each play has a narrative arc with a beginning, middle, and end, and; in keeping with theatre protocol, from the play’s opening through its final scene, the audience’s role is to give their attention to the performers.

Despite the absence of theatrical bells and whistles or a raised stage, we view the performance as an elevated and protected space — an uninterrupted time and place from which the performer-advocates, who have spent months working out what they want to say using the creative form of theatre, are able to share their ideas and desires.

After the play’s final scene (and the resounding applause!) audiences are encouraged to participate in a series of [Post-Performance Activities](#) that are designed to:

- Provide performer-advocates with feedback
- Creatively engage the people who have attended the play
- Foster sustained participation in a collective conversation about how people want their City to function

But before the magic, the preparation...

PREPARING FOR THE PERFORMANCE

While the performance itself has a marked beginning and end, it is also part of an event that is nested in a larger series of activities involving many ‘actors,’ playing *often overlapping roles* that include:

- The *performer-advocates* who have worked for weeks creating and rehearsing the play to be presented at the performance event.
- The *creative team* who, in addition to working with the performer-advocates to develop and rehearse the play, are also responsible for the design and creation of the set and props.
- The *logistics team* who secure an appropriate venue, create and send invitations, and organize refreshments for the event.
- The *post-performance activities team* who develops activities to creatively engage audiences as actors in an ongoing conversation about the future of the City.
- The *audience*, who are invited to consider themselves as both attentive listeners and viewers of the performance *and* as actors in the ongoing story that the play addresses.

Approximately two months prior to the performance, while participants and the creative team are hard at work/play generating and refining material for the play, it’s time to begin working out logistics and thinking about post-performance activities! (Again, keep in mind that there will most likely be substantial overlap between the different ‘teams.’)

Finding the right audience

“I’m really happy that the entire audience, the room was all there because *they wanted to be there and wanted to hear what we had to say*. It wasn’t just like, random people that bought tickets from somewhere, they don’t care what teenagers are doing on a bus. I don’t know how to explain it. But I’m really happy that the group of people that were there that got to see it, got to see the result of what we worked for. Like, got something out of it.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION*.

Participants have a say not only in what the play’s story is about and how it’s told but also in *who* they want to present it to. Once participants have had an opportunity to gain some confidence in their performance-related skills, and have begun to generate content for the play, time is set aside during the workshops to talk about who they would like to invite to the performance event. In these conversations a range of wishes and concerns are voiced. A common theme during these discussions is participants’ eagerness to present the play to people

in decision-making or service-provider positions. Since most participants have never performed before, some are also understandably nervous about performing to an audience of strangers and therefore express a desire to keep the audience small with invited friends and advocacy community colleagues. Yet others, like some of the youth who worked on *Choose Your Destination*, expressed concern about performing for peers who are not close friends out of fear of being teased or bullied.

Community partners involved in supporting the workshop or who work in the sectors that the participants are engaged with are also important contributors to the conversation about audience make-up. Like the participants themselves, community partners are in an excellent position to understand who might benefit from seeing the performance and how the performance might affect audiences who are in positions to further the dialogue and affect change. Community partners are also likely to have access to contact lists to send invitations through and have inside knowledge about important logistical considerations. These might include things like location, time and duration of the performance event, and potential conflicting events that might interfere with sector-specific community workers, community and self-advocates, and policy-makers' ability to attend.

Another way that audiences are determined is via specific requests to perform (as always, the decision of whether to accept an invitation is in the hands of performer-advocates). Sometimes, the invitation is connected to the recruitment process and the relationship between community partners and the community and self-advocates who create the play and become its performer-advocates.

This was the case with TSDC's pilot performance project, *We Need to Talk!* The five women who performed were from the self-advocacy group Women's Housing Planning Collaborative Advisory (WHPCA) in Hamilton. Jennie Vengris, who has been with the TSDC project from the beginning and had previously worked as a senior policy analyst in Housing and Homelessness for the City of Hamilton, suggested that WHPCA would be a good group to approach about the possibility of creating a performance. An Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at McMaster University, Jennie participated in the workshop series and invited the

“When presenters stand at the front of a class and bring PowerPoints, students are either distracted by the PowerPoint or tune out fairly early on. Arts based research and dissemination affects people differently. They *experience* the information. You feel invested, you feel more empathetic because their emotions are on display. I think I paid attention for a lot longer, I wanted to hear what happened next, I wanted someone to say ‘yes’ to them. I remember better what I heard and learned because I wasn’t writing anything down or sitting at a desk.” — AUDIENCE MEMBER FROM MCMASTER SOCIAL WORK CLASS, *WE NEED TO TALK!*

women to perform *We Need to Talk!* for social work students enrolled in a mandatory social welfare course that Jennie teaches and where some of the women had previously been invited as guest speakers.

Other times, the invitation comes from community partners who are familiar with the play and become aware of an event where they feel the performance could make a contribution. This happened with *When My Home is Your Business*, a TSDC production created with participants recruited through the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton's (SPRC) [Dis]placement Project. Community partners from SPRC, Good Shepherd, and McMaster University who were familiar with the play invited the performers to present it at the 2018 Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness national conference and the *Gathering of Art, Gentrification, and Economic Development* (GAGED).

Finding an appropriate audience involves a number of considerations:

- Input from performer-advocates and community partners
- The relationship between the audience, the performer-community, and the social concerns the play addresses
- Attention to ensuring that it will be a receptive friendly audience
- Finding the right venue

Finding the right venue

TSDC performances can take place in a range of community or public spaces. At times the space is determined by the event that's hosting the performance, as is the case with invitations to present on University campuses or at conferences. Often, community partners draw upon their community networks and institutional connections to help secure a venue. Keep in mind, it's important that someone from the creative team who is familiar with the set and production is involved in the discussions and decisions about the venue.

If a performance is presented in a more porous public space (like a public library) special attention needs to be paid to ensure that a significant portion of those attending will be a supportive audience who is predisposed to be interested in the issues being presented. This can include family and friends of the participants, community allies, social service providers, sector workers, policy makers, and educators who are working on issues that the performance addresses. The advantage of these kinds of public spaces, however, is that they open up the performance to a more accidental audience and therefore have the potential of expanding the 'public' that the play is intended to engage.

Logistical considerations when securing a performance venue include:

- Will the stage set fit?

- Is there an extra room for the performers to use as their ‘green room’ (a place where they can gather before the performance and where they can safely secure their belongings during the performance)?
- Is the room’s sound quality adequate for a performance (not too much echo, no sound coming from adjacent spaces)?
- How many people can the space comfortably accommodate?
- Are chairs and tables available?
- Is it accessible?
- Is the space available the for rehearsal(s), set-up, and clean up?
- Cost?

The day of...

It’s the big day! Everyone is busy with final preparations. Performer-advocates and the creative team gather early. In addition to the time they’ve spent rehearsing the play, they’ve also had conversations to prepare for the mix of feelings that can arise for anyone who is performing (even seasoned professionals!). Together, the group grounds their excitement and pre-performance jitters by going through some of the by-now-familiar rituals of checking-in over food and doing warm-up exercises, before rehearsing — one last time.

Preparing the space

While the performers and the creative team prepare to perform, the logistics team prepare the space which is actually two related yet different spaces: the performance space and the audience space. Set-up varies depending on the venue. In some situations (like a conference or a classroom), where there is minimal time prior to the performance, a separate nearby rehearsal space may need to be booked and the set-up of the physical performance space will have to be done at lightning speed (sometimes even while the event facilitators are introducing the performance). In these situations, it’s especially important to have someone who is *very familiar* with the play’s set and props take charge, and to rally volunteers to support them.



Melanie and Sarah preparing the space before *Choose Your Destination* performance.

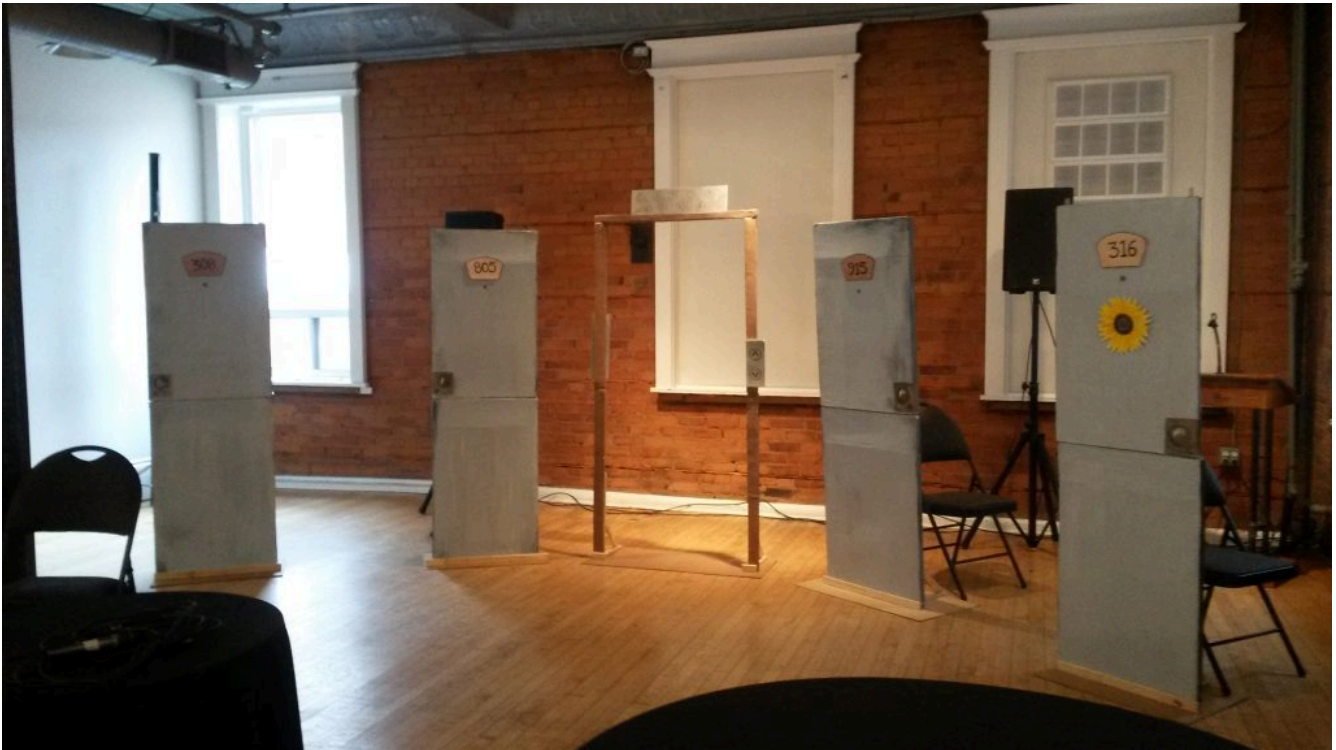
When not presented at conferences or in classrooms, TSDC performances tend to take place in community or public spaces. Though it's important that performers have a clearly delineated performance space (and time) from which to address the audience, the rooms are also set up to minimize the sense of separation between performers and audience and to create an environment that fosters a sense of collectivity among audience members.

Where possible, audience seating is arranged around tables 'cabaret style' to encourage conviviality. As in the workshops, refreshments are always on hand. This focus on creating a sociable collective environment is itself a performative act. It mirrors the collective nature of both the workshops and the performance and lets the audience know that we don't see them as isolated individual 'spectators.' Our intention in setting up the environment in such a way is to invite the audience to see themselves as we see them — a caring collective who have gathered to witness the play that the performer-advocates have created as a focus for our attention.

Audience members are given information about the play they are about to see. This can be as simple as a paper version of the email-invitation or it can be more elaborate when time, resources, and community connections can be mobilized. For example, the performance program can take the form of a 'zine.' These zines can themselves be community arts projects that are created in workshops with community and self-advocates connected to the performers and to the issues the plays address.

Preparing the audience for their role

The audience's first encounter with the play is through its set. As with any theatrical production, the set is designed to situate the performers within an environment and to orient the audience to the context of the play: When audiences arrive to see *We Need to Talk!* three tables marked 'Income Support,' 'Housing,' and 'Food Bank' signal to the audience that the action of the play will centre around these social service agencies; *Choose Your Destination's* three familiar Hamilton City bus-stops signs let the audience know not only that the action of the play will traverse the City, but also that the characters use, meet, and talk on public transportation, and; The side-by-side doors of *When My Home is Your Business* visually situates the action of the play in an apartment block.



When My Home is Your Business set at the Gathering of Art, Gentrification, and Economic Development.

Ideally, the welcoming address and introduction of the play is done by a community partner who has either participated in the workshops themselves or who has been involved in the broader organizing around the event. The important thing is that they be knowledgeable about the context of the participants' lived experience and about the audience's relationship to that context.

The event host invites those attending to think of themselves not only as an attentive audience, but also as actors. Drawing on theatre metaphors, they might say: "We consider the performance 'Act I' of a larger

social performance that we all play a role in.” The host then goes on to suggest that the audience think of the post-performance activities that will follow the performance as ‘Act II’, and that the play’s ‘Act III’ will unfold in the ways the audience-as-actors continue to engage the play’s themes in the days, weeks, and months following the event. In addition to possibly being actors in the particular sector that the play’s content addresses (housing, anti-poverty, youth services), audience members are invited to see their roles extending to their families, neighbourhoods, and communities.

Introducing the play

In addition to preparing the audience for their expanded role, it’s important to let them know a little about how the play was created. Here’s an example of what Catherine told the audience about using theatre to address social issues at a performance of *When My Home is Your Business* at the National Conference to End Homelessness in Hamilton, Ontario:

“With theatre, we take up the question ‘How do we end homelessness?’ not in policy or service terms — that’s not where our expertise is — but in ‘cultural’ terms: We ask, “What are the cultural beliefs and habits that lead to homelessness becoming a problem in our Cities? Where are the contradictions between those beliefs and habits? How could we show the contradictory values that are driving thinking about things like housing and homelessness and make the values and habits a subject of discussion? The title of this play reflects one of the contradictions we noticed in the theatre workshops: for some people housing units are evaluated as profit centres, for others they are evaluated in terms of the basic human right not only to have a roof over your head, but to have a *home*.” — CATHERINE GRAHAM, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS.

Prior to the performance, the host also tells the audience that while the play is based in people’s experiences in the City, the performers are playing *fictional* characters and that the stories in the play are not only about their own lives, but also about things they have observed. As noted earlier, one reason for this kind of [fictionalization](#) is to produce a kind of undecidability, wherein audiences don’t know which parts of the collectively created characters and story are actually true for any individual performer. This is particularly important in situations where some of the audience members will be community workers who know something about the performers’ lives and experiences.

TSDC’s focus on creating fictionalized performances, and on ensuring that the audience is aware that the plays are fictional, is grounded in both ethical and political considerations. In terms of ethics, fiction is a way of allowing personal, intimate stories to be publicly heard, without requiring individual participants to subject details about their personal experiences to public scrutiny.

Politically, fiction positions performer-advocates as authors, creators, and public interveners who control what information about their personal lives that the audience knows, or thinks they know, even if the audience

knows the name and/or physical appearance of the participant. Through the creation of a fictionalized collective story, audiences are encouraged not to seek 'authenticity' or 'truth' by looking into the performers' personal lives. Rather, they are encouraged to look at the believability of the performed story and the argument it makes.

THE PERFORMANCE: A POETIC WORLD-MAKING PUBLIC

“When it comes to speaking to the people who can actually make a change, I don’t think they really listen when you have a speech. Whereas I feel like the theatre performance that we did, it gets at a different part of the brain and it forces a different reaction out of you that is harder to ignore. You become more engaged in what you’re listening to and it felt very powerful.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *ALL OF US TOGETHER*.

There is a magic to art. Art touches our hearts as well as our minds. It stirs us in a way that information alone does not. Admittedly, as performance-based researchers and artists, we’re biased. Still, we suspect that few people haven’t experienced being moved by a performance or some form of art.

Theatre’s particular version of art-magic is often inseparable from its spectacular presentation — lights, costumes, sets — and the virtuosity of the actors. But at TSDC performances there is no spectacular lighting. The [Sets & Props](#) have a do-it-yourself aesthetic and are mostly constructed out of everyday materials like cardboard and paper-mâché. To the extent that there are costumes, what hasn’t come from the performers’ closets has been gleaned from friends’ closets or second-hand shops. The performers are not experienced actors. They are community and self-advocates who within an incredibly short 12 to 15 week time-frame have not only generated the play’s content, they have also undergone a crash course in performance basics. And yet, (and again, we’re biased) at each presentation of TSDC’s four plays — *Choose Your Destination*, *When My Home is Your Business*, *We Need to Talk!*, and *All Of Us Together* — magic was afoot.

So, where does the magic of TSDC performances come from? First and foremost, it comes from the performers. It comes from the collective story they’ve crafted that is grounded in the knowledge they carry from their lived experiences, their visions of what a better City would look like for people who have experiences similar to theirs, and the tensions between what is and the yet-to-become. It comes from their courage to speak, to take risks, and to share their knowledge, desires, and visions. It comes from the fact that *they are not simply actors playing a part*. Though it’s true (and important!) that they are performing fictionalized characters, it is equally true (and equally important!) that *they are the authors of the collective story* they are presenting, and that the story reflects aspects of their lives and the lives of people with experiences similar to them.

Theatre’s art-magic is also in the face-to-face encounter that takes place between performers and the audience, as well as among audience members. Unlike viewing visual art or a movie, watching a play puts audiences face-to-face with those who are presenting the work, as well as with others attending the performance. In this way,

the magic of TSDC plays are also in the way they invite audiences to be part of a public who, together with the performer-advocates, are engaged in the task of what philosopher Michael Warner calls “poetic world-making”¹ — a way of thinking and talking about our shared futures that integrates imagination into conversations about pragmatic policy considerations.

In many ways, the absence of theatrical bells and whistles enhances the shared sense of publicness. The performers real-life attire, the familiarity of the locations the plays take place in, the accessibility of the materials used in the sets, the absence of special effects, stage, and dramatic lighting, all work together to remind the audience, that though they may occupy radically different positions from the performer-advocates, they are co-residents in the public — the City — of the play.

Similarly, the dual role that performer-advocates play, as ‘actors’ in the play, and as real-life ‘actors’ who live with and address the issues the play brings attention to, amplifies the attitude of accountability that can be cultivated through face-to-face encounters. Audiences are not witnessing professional actors perform a role. They are watching co-residents of *their* City perform a story they created that sheds light on some of the values, inequities, and challenges of that City.

“I wish this [play] could be a snapshot into a meeting, at the beginning, before we even begin to discuss programs.”— AUDIENCE MEMBER, *WHEN MY HOME IS YOUR BUSINESS*, NATIONAL CONFERENCE TO END HOMELESSNESS IN HAMILTON, ONTARIO.

Many of TSDC’s audience members work in social service sectors or institutional settings in which they are confronted with aspects of the issues addressed in the play on a daily basis. The play offers them an opportunity to view this world, not so much through the lens of their social service or institutional setting, but through the poetic lens of the play. Using the poetic language of their fictional, collective, future-oriented story, performer-advocates propose not only a policy or an action: they invite the audience to see the world in the way they see it.

1. Warner, Michael. “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* 14(1): 422.

PUTTING THE AUDIENCE IN THE PICTURE

“*Choose Your Destination* ... is an invitation to think about the kinds of spaces we create and to think carefully about the impact on the young lives forming here. It is an invitation to build spaces centered around comfort and warmth, learning and growth. It is an invitation to build spaces that can turn into meaningful places for everyone.”

— SARAH ADJEKUM, TSDC RESEARCH ASSISTANT AND MEMBER OF THE *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION* WORKSHOP TEAM.

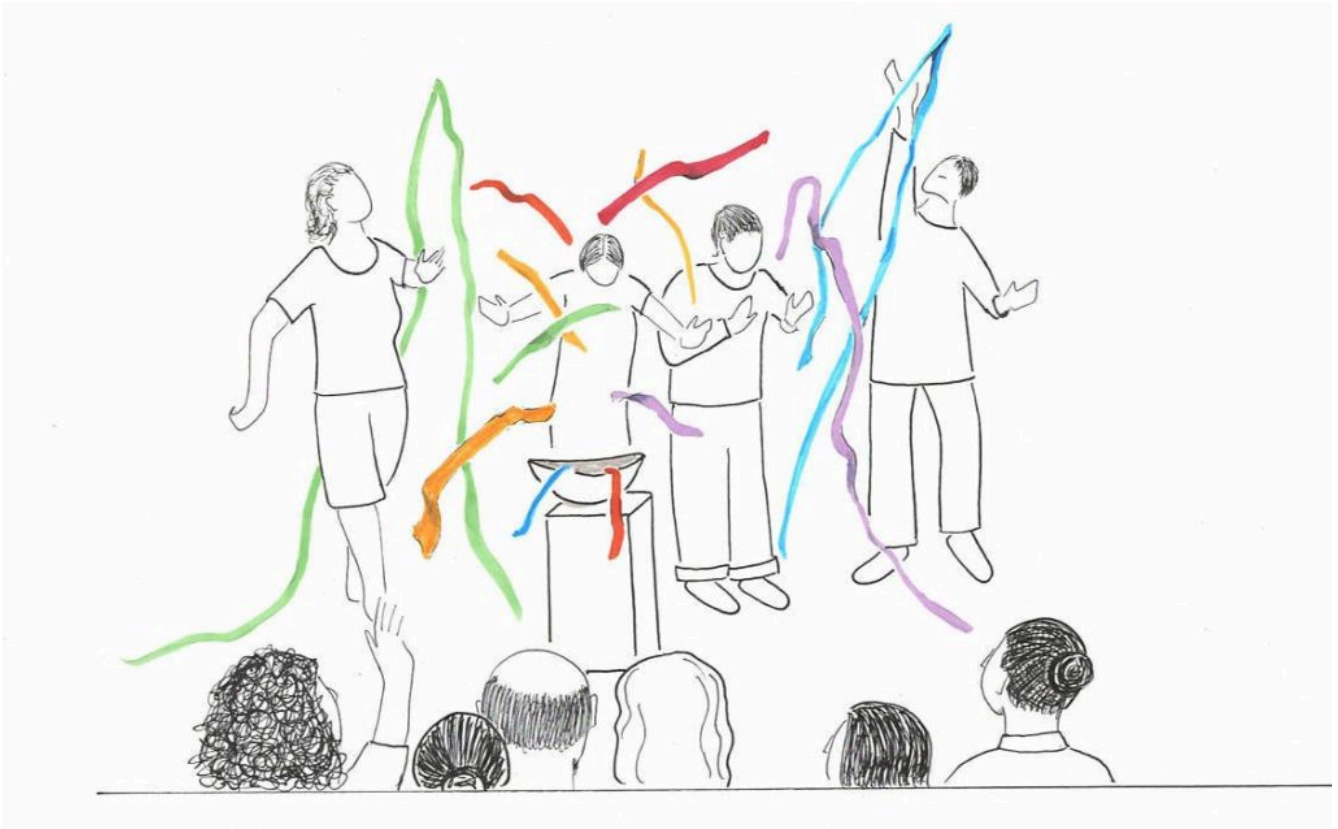
Through the plays, performer-advocates poetically invite audiences to join them in an ongoing collective world-making conversation. In fact, many TSDC performances end with performer-advocates requesting something of the audience. This request can be issued in the form of a “direct address” — a moment at the end of the play when the performers look out at the audience and issue a statement. For example, in *We Need to Talk!* the women drop the armfuls of rocks they’ve been carrying from agency to agency, step out of character, and say to the audience: “This isn’t working. We need to talk!”



Similarly, the fictionalized apartment dwellers in *When My Home is Your Business* stand beside their doors and share their hopes in a direct appeal to the audience. The play closes with these words from “Alice”:

“We need you to tell us which flowers you want to help to grow. We need you to be part of our garden.”

In the closing scene of *All Of Us Together* the performers drop out of character, look out at the audience, and ask, “Who will you stand beside?” and “Whose dreams will you fight for?” before tossing the coloured ribbons they’ve been using to weave their stories together out to the audience as an invitation to participate a community web of solidarity.



In *Choose Your Destination*, the appeal was less direct, but no less powerful, when the four fictionalized youth sit facing the audience and share their ‘dream’ of having a place to chill and watch TV together, a place where they can relax.

PERFORMANCE EXCHANGES

“There’s a lot of different groups in the City where you can go and sit in a room and talk about your story with other, you know, like-minded people who’ve experienced it. And that can be really cathartic, but that’s about it. Whereas this [Performance Exchange] really gave us the opportunity to feel like there could be change happening if we continue to have different... our performance, other performances in the same method, that if the right people will listen then change can happen.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, TSDC PERFORMANCE EXCHANGE WITH *ALL OF US TOGETHER* AND *WE NEED TO TALK!*

From the project’s outset, we recognized the value of bringing the plays, and their performer-advocates, into conversation, *not only with audiences, but also with one another*. One way we did this was through Performance Exchanges, events where a single audience is invited and two plays are performed. We hosted two Performance Exchanges with the TSDC plays *All of Us Together* and *We Need to Talk!* Unfortunately, we were unable to do our intended Performance Exchange with TSDC’s last two plays *When My Home is Your Business* and *Choose Your Destination*. There were assorted reasons for this, but the one that presented the greatest obstacle was performer availability. (We’ll talk more about these obstacles and our thoughts about alternative ways to remount plays while remaining accountable to their performer-creators in [Prompting Ongoing Conversations!](#))

Performance Exchanges provide both performer-advocates and audiences with an opportunity to consider the relationships between the concerns raised in performances by different constituencies. This kind of cross-pollination of ideas and visions for the future can broaden performers’ and audience members’ sense of the social importance of the stories created, and the ways social movements might form around them. When a Performance Exchange isn’t possible, another way we work to facilitate this kind of cross-pollination is by inviting performer-advocates from previous plays to attend more recent productions and participate in post-performance activities and conversations.

Whether part of a Performance Exchange or not, all TSDC plays are meant to act as creative platforms that work to foster more inclusive and expansive engagement in discussions about the future of the Cities we live in. At its core, this is a movement building goal. This means we don’t see the plays as isolated or independent events. We deliberately frame performances and post-performance activities in a way that we hope will cultivate ongoing conversations (with performer-advocates and audiences) about the themes that the plays address.

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

“Service providers are often mandated by their funders to do program evaluations and sometimes it ends up being little more than a box to check-off as a requirement. Often, there’s not enough money or time to do it in a meaningful way. There is a standard list of evaluation methods: surveys, feedback forms, focus groups and consultations can look very similar. TSDC’s post-performance activities were very creative and different. There is a world of possibility, you can do it in completely different ways, you can get people’s thoughts drawing pictures! *It is really inspiring to connect with community in a more engaging way. This idea of the audience as participants who contribute to research in creative ways may nudge service providers to look at evaluation processes in a new way.*”

—PATTI MCNANEY, SOCIAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH COUNCIL OF HAMILTON.

Another way we invite audience members to participate is through post-performance activities. These activities are designed to creatively engage audiences as actors in the ongoing conversation that the play initiates about the future of the City. Just as the performance repositions participants into the role of creators and performers rather than ‘victims’ in need of ‘saving’, post-performance activities recast audiences as co-creators of a shared public environment that needs to have meaningful places for everyone.

Our approach to post-performance activities is guided by several factors: First, since TSDC audiences are often largely made up of community and self-advocates, service providers, sector workers, policy makers, and educators, the social content presented in the plays may not be especially surprising or new. In fact, because of the amount of knowledge and information held by both the performers and the audience members, post-performance discussions that focus specifically on content risk becoming repeats of familiar debates. These are important and necessary conversations, but they are also conversations that take place in other spaces.

TSDC performances are intended to invite a *different kind of conversation*. It is a conversation that asks audience members to step out of their professional role and their professional mode of communication. Instead we invite audiences to engage in a creative exchange where, like the performers, they are part of an ensemble of actors on the stage of a shared public environment — the City. They are co-creators of an ongoing collective story about how to make that environment a more inviting place for everyone.

A second factor is our concern with the limiting ways we are conditioned to behave as ‘audiences.’ Most of us have been deeply impacted by a movie or play or some other kind of performance that addresses social issues. But to what end? Does it prompt you to act in some way? To tell a friend, or colleague? To want to learn more about the subject? To meet with others to see what they think? Perhaps it sparks some kind of action. That’s great! Perhaps not. That’s sad, but not surprising.

Though performance has the ability to reach beyond the numbness that can be a by-product of our information-saturated world, our response-role as audiences is often limited. We can applaud. In some circumstances, we participate in a post-show Q&A with the cast. Maybe after the performance we go out for a bite to eat with friends and reflect on what we saw. Maybe the performance stays with us and we talk about it with family, friends, work colleagues, neighbors — *and maybe not*. Maybe our moment of being moved extends to some action, or maybe it remains just that, *a moment*.

As the performer-advocates make clear with their closing requests, TSDC performances ask more of their audiences than being emotionally moved. They also ask them to *engage* and, like the performers themselves, to take risks in *how* they are willing to engage. Framing the performance and the post-performance as parts of an ongoing series of ‘Acts’ recognizes audience members as actors in the themes of the play. With this framing we invite audiences into a collaborative activity over time and place linked with the performance event and the experience of participating in it together. Looked at in this way, both the play and the post-performance activities become part of a larger “conversation piece,”¹ a socially engaged artwork organized to foster and facilitate dialogue.

1. See Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

DEVELOPING POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

“Nobody is going to create a world that we all really want to live in if there is no pleasure in doing it. I’ve really come to believe that our emotions tell us where we fit in the world at any given moment. If you’re miserable doing something, something is wrong, something needs to be corrected. So, I’d say play together and *pay attention to what pleasures arise through this kind of purposeful play, because how everyone feels will be an important clue about what a mutually meaningful world might look like.*”

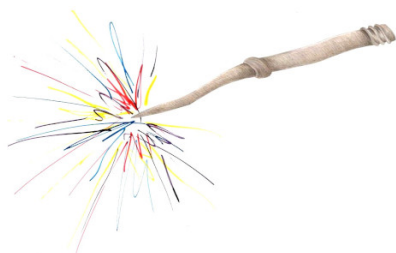
— CATHERINE GRAHAM, TSDC RESEARCH TEAM LEAD AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS.

As theatre-based practitioners and researchers we believe that creating a mutually meaningful world is a creative, collective, and durational undertaking. So, when designing post-performance activities, we ask ourselves two questions:

- How can we use acts of purposeful play to extend the moment during which audiences are emotionally moved beyond the performance event itself?
- What activities might best invite audiences into a durational project of co-imagining a better Hamilton?

The post-performance activities team starts thinking about suitable post-performance activities at a point when a clear overarching theme has emerged (though the play itself is still being developed). This gives the team time to devise activities that have a thematic connection to the story of play. Some of these activities are versions of exercises used in the workshops. Using activities that are familiar to performer-advocates provides them with an opportunity to recognize (and be recognized by audience members for) the degree of agency they’ve developed with the activities. It also opens up the possibility of participants taking a leadership role in introducing or demonstrating the activity.

Some activities have been used repeatedly in TSDC workshops and post-performance activities. For example, the fill-in-the-blank response prompt:



These are stories of people who...

in a City where...

These activities create a kind of ritualized through-line for the project and its goals. Other activities, like Image Theatre exercises, are adapted to address the specific world of the play. Yet others, like Storyboarding, are designed to extend the audiences' imaginations beyond the immediate post-performance moment to consider ways of creatively engaging the themes of the play after they leave the performance.

In addition to paying attention to the play's themes, activities are always designed with a particular performance or audience in mind which is why it's crucial to include community partners in this discussion. For example, when we were planning post-performance activities for the presentation of *When My Home is Your Business* at the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness national conference, our Good Shepherd community partner Katherine Kalinowski suggested that we design the activities to provide the audience with some insight into the theatre-creation process (since most people attending the conference were already well-versed in the issues related to precarious housing and homelessness). Based on these conversations, after the performance we decided to facilitate a short Image Theatre exercise where we invited the audience to join with performer-advocates in creating two images.

Post-performance activities that are deliberately designed to extend engagement beyond the performance event itself can also take the form of a social media action, a prompt that is linked to a symbolic object, or a creative exercise that can be taken home and shared with others. In addition to often being actors in the particular sector that the play's content addresses (housing, anti-poverty, youth services), audience members are invited with these activities to see their roles extending to their own neighbourhoods and communities.

Post-performance activities:

- Provide performer-advocates with an opportunity to hear audience reflections and to creatively engage with audience members.
- Introduce creative modes of dialogue.
- Encourage audiences to see themselves as part of an ensemble of actors on the stage of a shared public environment and as co-creators of collective story about how to make that environment a more inviting place for everyone.
- Focus attention on how participation in creative acts of reflection might enhance existing practices and expand our collective capacity to co-imagine a better City, a better future.

Things to keep in mind:

- Location of the performance (classroom, conference, community centre, public library)
- Who is in the audience?
- Activity's thematic connection to the content of the play
- Time (Resist the urge to include all the amazing ideas the post-performance activities team came up with!)

MENU OF POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

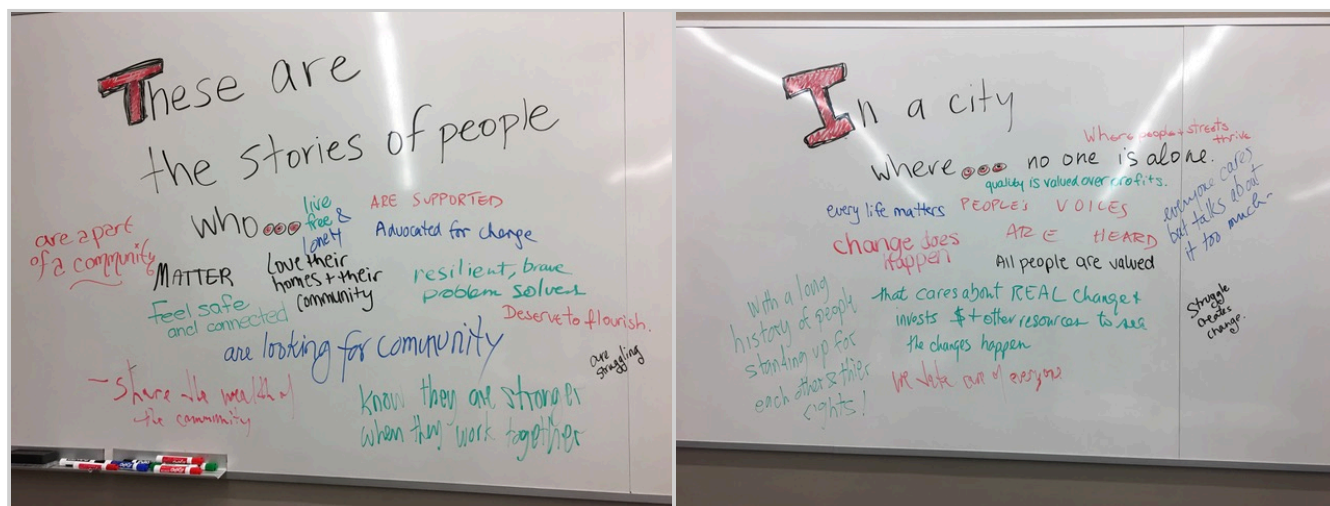
“The story of *When My Home is Your Business* didn’t end with the performance. Discussions between audience members, the comments they left on index cards, their graffiti-like posts about what they thought life could be like in Hamilton if things changed for the better, all added to the story the play had started to tell.”

— J. ADAM PERRY, TSDC RESEARCH AND WORKSHOP TEAM MEMBER, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS.

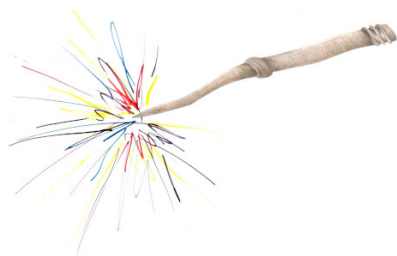
In our efforts to extend the moment during which audiences are moved beyond the performance event itself and to creatively engage audiences in co-imaginative acts of purposeful play we are always exploring ways to expand our repertoire of post-performance activities.

Here’s a menu of some post-performance activities we’ve used (and a few that are ideas in progress):

Fill-in-the-blank audience response prompts



Our number one go-to post-performance activity is the fill-in-the-blank response prompt:



These are stories of people who...

In a City where...

One reason we consider this such a valuable post-performance activity is that it provides audience members with a simple and immediate way of publicly honouring the performers and sharing information about what meaning they are taking from the performance. Another reason we often begin with this prompt is that it signals to audience members that we are asking them to shift from their work-related modes of reflection and engagement by inviting them to focus not on the ‘problems’ of the play’s characters, or on institutional and policy-related questions, but on the broader collective meaning of the story they witnessed.

Because of the prompt’s familiarity to performer-advocates, using this prompt during post-performance reflections helps establish a dynamic wherein the performer-advocates are situated as experienced participants in the kinds of creative post-performance activities that we are introducing. On another level, the prompt’s repeated use throughout the workshop process has imbued it with the quality of a group ritual. Inviting the audience to take part in this ritual is a way of saying, “Come, be part of our creative world-making public.”

In order to accommodate different communication styles, responses to the prompt can be elicited in a variety of ways:

Fill-in-the Blank post-performance activity

- Call-and-response, wherein the event facilitator calls out the first part of the sentence — *These are stories of people who...* — several times, pausing after each time to give audience members a chance to respond by calling out a word or phrase to fill-in-the-blank. They then repeat the process with the second part of the sentence — *in a City where...* Using colored markers, volunteers write the responses on a white board or a large sheet of paper that has the prompt written across the top.
- Audience members can be encouraged to write their responses onto post-it notes that volunteers collect and place on the large sheet of paper. Once all the responses have been gathered, the volunteers can then read aloud the prompt along with the responses.
- Seating can be set-up cabaret-style with the tables covered in paper and colored markers on hand. Audience members can be encouraged to begin by first writing out their responses on the table. Then, when the facilitator calls out the prompt, anyone at the table can read a response out loud. In addition to offering audience members an opportunity to formulate

some thoughts before speaking, this model also supports audiences to think collectively.

Whichever approach we choose, it always includes a mechanism for documenting audience responses. This provides the performer-advocates with a chance to revisit the comments at the end of the evening (and to document them if they choose). This is important because, as anyone who has performed knows, it can be difficult to fully absorb information in the immediate aftermath of a performance.

These are the
stories of people who...

are smart &
strong, resourceful

have families
face challenges.
Want to be safe

deserve better

are coping the best
ways they know how

are resilient
brave
talented
diverse

have voices that
need to be heard

together make a great
difference

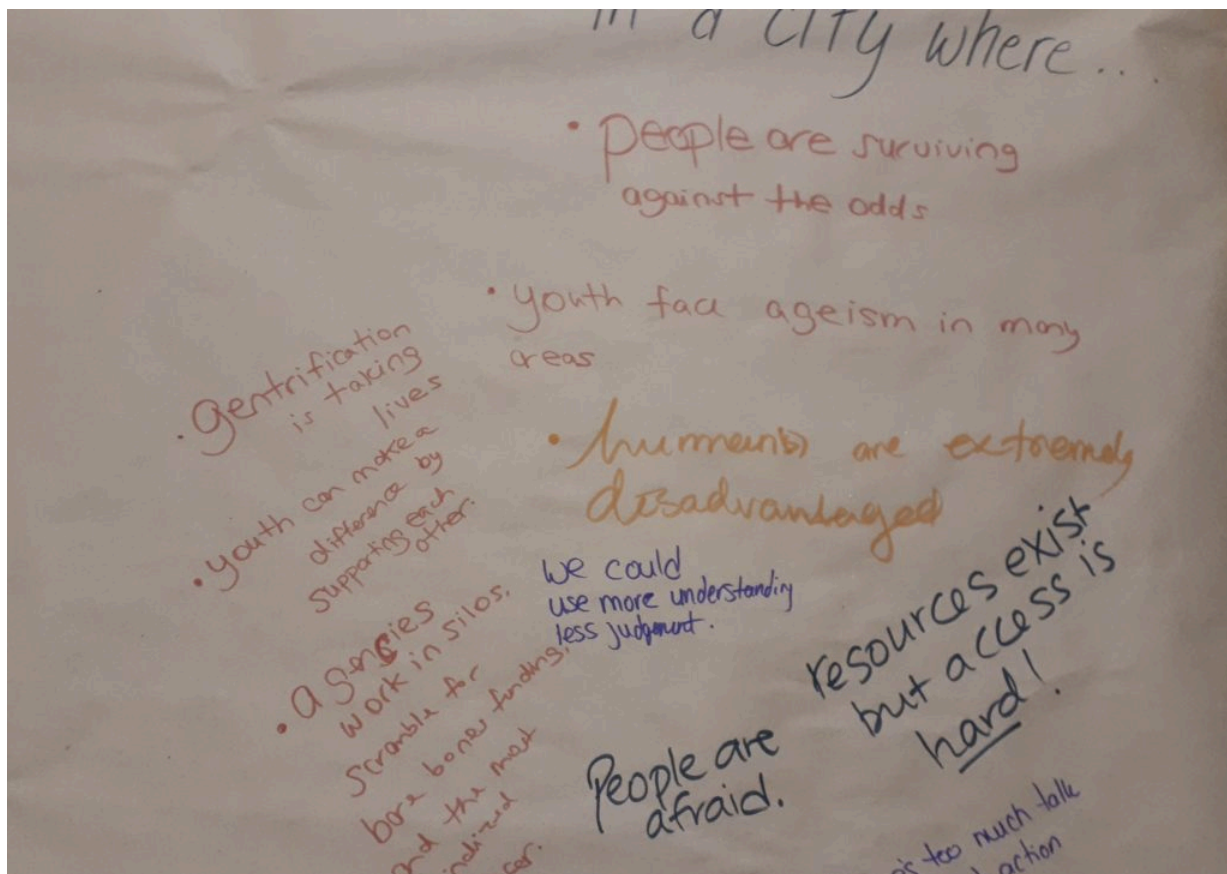


Image Theatre

“After the first performance of *When My Home is Your Business*, there were group discussions and, while successful, it was similar to what we typically do. It doesn’t matter how skilled the facilitator is, you end up having some voices being heard and some not being heard. There’s not an equal opportunity to participate, because only some people feel comfortable speaking in particular group settings. But some of TSDC’s post-performance activities were really different and addressed the barriers inherent in group discussions. For example, the ‘complete an image’ [Image Theatre] exercise — while not everyone is comfortable doing it, it’s not a hard task, just a different one. With a focus group, it can be intimidating because service providers have a certain language for talking about these topics. *Asking us to complete an image was a good way to shake things up, to try to do things a bit differently. TSDC offered different ways to engage the community, do research, do evaluations, and give voice.*”

— PATTI MCNANEY, SOCIAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH COUNCIL OF HAMILTON.

Like the fill-in-the-blanks response prompt, Image Theatre is a technique that’s used throughout the TSDC performance creation workshop process. While the basics of the post-performance Image Theatre activity is similar to how it’s done in the workshops, the goals are different. In the workshops, Image Theatre is used as a form of live storyboarding, or a way of constructing the story of the play.

As a post-performance activity Image Theatre is used to:

- Provide insight into the creative approach used to create the play.
- Introduce an embodied mode of collective world-making.
- Give audiences an opportunity to step outside of habitual modes of communication.
- Create an opportunity where performer-advocates occupy leadership roles by modeling the activity.

When we were planning post-performance activities for *When My Home is Your Business* at the National Conference to End Homelessness in Hamilton, we were acutely aware that the audience would be made up of people who were very knowledgeable about many of the issues and concerns the play addressed. We were also aware that over the past days they had spent a lot of time in rooms discussing policy related to housing and homelessness. A post-performance Image Theatre activity seemed like a wonderful opportunity to both give the audience a peek into the process of making the play, while also inviting them to ‘get on their feet’ and try something new.

Catherine began by explaining that we’d like to do an Image Theatre demonstration so we could give the audience a sense of how the material for the play was generated using theatre-games, and without pre-planning *content*, as might be done in a training session. Here’s what the exercise looked like:

Image Theatre post-performance activity

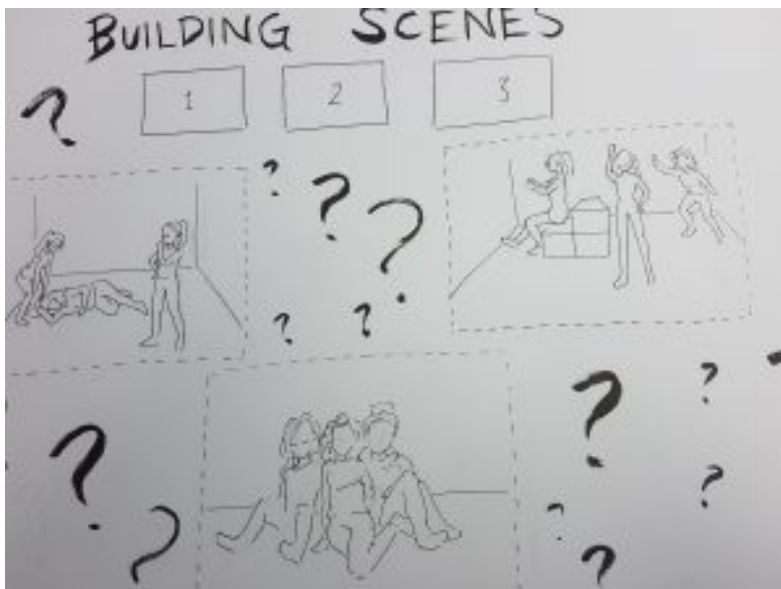
1. The play’s performer-advocates initiated the exercise by re-enacting two of the first images they created in the workshop. One of what a *better future Hamilton* would look like for people with experiences similar to theirs, and a second of *what life was like now*. (Sketches of the images were also available on the program flyer).
2. Once the image was recreated, Catherine invited audience members to come up and join the performer-advocates in the “what life was like now” image which we dubbed ‘the apartment building from hell’: They were encouraged to “add themselves to the image, put someone in this image, and show us how people act and react when it’s really bad.”
3. After a number of people had added themselves to the image, Catherine let them know that she would put her hand on people’s shoulders and ask them to respond to complete a phrase. Phrase-prompts included: “I wonder...” “I want...” “I am afraid that...” “It really pisses me off that...”

4. They were then invited to imagine what it would be like if the conference achieved its goal and we ended homelessness, ended precarious housing: “Show us what it would look like, when you see people interacting like this, you know things are good.”
5. The rest of the audience were invited to respond to the following questions: What title would you give this image?

Here are some of the audience headlines the conference audience generated:

Power and solidarity!
A HOME — Not just a house
Community building
Safe and affordable!
Rental dreams come true!
A happy home = Less stress
Meeting the needs of a variety of people
Welcome to a more free and safe home
Smile, you are in our building
Isn't this great — I'm so happy to be here

Storyboarding



As with many post-performance activities, our Storyboarding activity developed out of our experience working on a particular play with a particular group. While working with youth connected to Hamilton’s Good Shepherd Youth Services to develop the script for *Choose Your Destination* a member of our research and workshop team, Sarah Adjekum, began sketching the youth (with their permission of course!).

The youth loved Sarah’s sketches! Also, perhaps because of the familiarity of comics and graphic novels, the sketches became a useful way of talking about the creative process of developing the play’s story arc. We explained that the embodied images and vignettes they created using Image Theatre was a kind of live storyboarding, similar to a comic strip and Sarah’s sketches.

The following Storyboarding exercise was inspired by Sarah’s sketch “Dreaming,” which documented a live image the youth created early in the workshop series that became the play’s poignant final scene. In the scene, the play’s four characters — Joanne, Moon, Snow, and Amelia — step away from problem-solving in their fictional world, sit facing the audience, and describe their ‘dream’ of having a place a place to chill, a place where they can sit and watch Netflix together, where they feel safe and happy.



“Dreaming” Sketch by Sarah Adjekum

Just as the sketches became a useful way of talking with the youth about the relationship between Image Theatre exercises and the construction of the story of the play, we figured it could also be a useful resource for

providing the audience with some insight into the workshop process while simultaneously engaging them in a creative world-making activity.


Here’s what the storyboarding activity looked like...


We began with the performer-advocates leading a short Image Theatre (live storyboarding) demonstration (and inviting any ‘brave souls’ to join them). Jennie, as event facilitator, then segued from the Image Theatre exercise to an introduction of the storyboarding activity: “You’ve seen the live storyboard image on the stage. Now we’re going invite you to participate in storyboard drawing exercise.”

In addition to verbally explaining the exercise to the audience, everyone was given a sheet of paper with a four-panel *Choose Your Destination* storyboard (below) on one side...

CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION

A creative storyboard brainstorming exercise:
no drawing skill or experience needed!



			<p><i>A place where youth can relax and feel safe</i></p>
<p>The final scene of the play <i>Dreaming...</i></p>	<p><i>Transfer #1</i></p> <p>Imagine two ‘transfers’ or stops on the way to our collective destination</p>	<p><i>Transfer #2</i></p>	<p><i>Your Destination...</i></p> <p>What would a better Hamilton – a place where youth can relax and feel safe – look like?</p>

Sketches by Sarah Adjekum.

...and the following written information/directions on the reverse:

Creative storyboarding post-performance activity

Imagining some stops along the way from here to there!

Square 1:

'Dreaming' — Final scene of play.

Next: your own images! No drawing experience necessary! If you can imagine, draw stick-figure people, and create speaking/talking bubbles, you have what you need to participate. Or you may want to team up with one person doing the drawing.

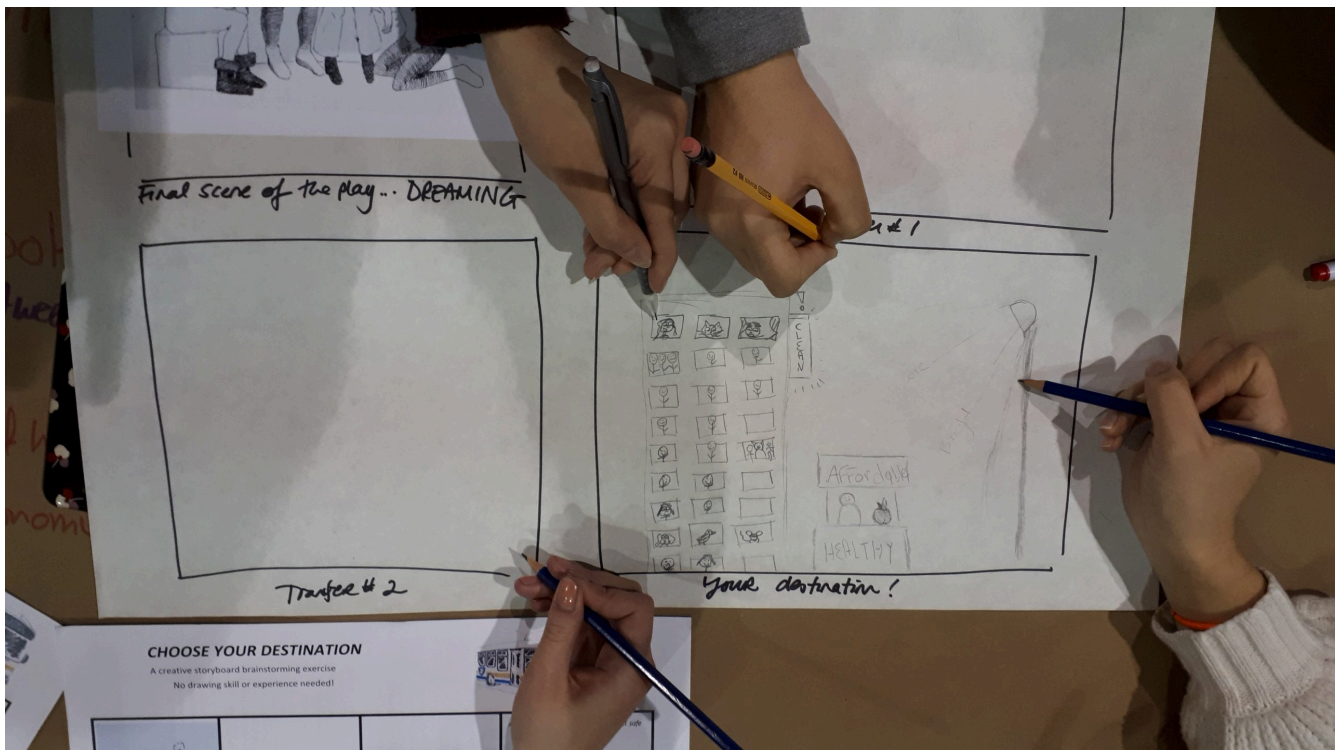
Squares 2 & 3:

Imagine two 'transfers' or stops on route to our collective destination. *Where are you? Who is here with you? What are you doing? What is the intention that collectively moves you toward your destination?*

Square 4:

Image of your imagined destination. What would a better Hamilton for youth, a place where youth can relax and feel safe, look like?

Larger sheets of paper divided into four panels, with the 'Dreaming' sketch taped into the first panel were also available at each table for those who wanted to work collectively on creating a storyboard.



Audience members working on collective post-performance storyboard.

When they were done, audience members were invited to take a photo of their storyboard and email it to us so we could post it on the TSDC blog and twitter accounts or to share via Twitter. Audience members were also invited to take home a blank storyboard sheet (or two or three or four) and continue the exercise of imagining stops along the route to a City where the problems confronting youth have been solved or, “To tell a friend about the performance and invite them to join you in imagining stops along the route to your future destination.”

In addition to giving audience members a sense of how the Image Theatre process was used to develop the play, the storyboard activity:

- Gave people an experience of a creative activity that could itself be taken forward into other settings.
- Interrupted typical communication patterns and moved towards a kind of [parity of participation](#) by allowing people for whom speaking in groups is less comfortable to assume a more central role in the response process.
- Creatively invited audiences to think about the multiple different kinds of relationships they have with youth in the City — besides being frontline workers, or theatre artists or researchers, we are friends, neighbours, sisters, aunties, peers, parents, citizens, activists.

Things to keep in mind:

- Since ‘drawing’ can be an intimidating activity for many people, it’s very important to stress that, “[No drawing experience is necessary!](#)” — People are invited to draw stick figures, etc.
- Extending the play’s metaphor of the bus supports collectivity by emphasizing that there is no single correct or direct route to the destination, and you will certainly encounter others on route.
- This activity is only possible in a setting that has tables which are necessary to provide a drawing surface while also facilitating collaborative creative exchange.
- Ideally, instructions should be given both verbally and in writing. The written instruction sheets with the four-panel storyboard template offer an opportunity for audience members to share the activity.

Below are some examples of post-performance storyboards created by *Choose Your Destination* audience members.

CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION

A creative storyboard brainstorming exercise
No drawing skill or experience needed!



The final scene of the play
Dreaming...

Transfer #1

Transfer #2

A place where youth can relax and feel safe

Your Destination...
What would a better Hamilton – a place where youth can relax and feel safe – look like?

Imagine two 'transfers' or stops
on the way to our collective destination

Sketches by Sarah Adjekum.

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A creative storyboard brainstorming exercise
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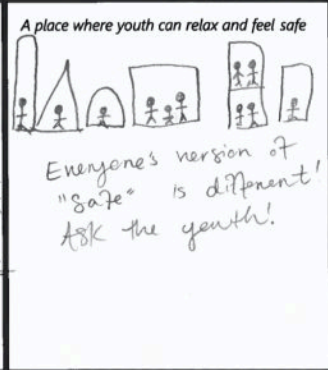
The final scene of the play
Dreaming...



Transfer #1



Transfer #2



Your Destination...
What would a better Hamilton – a place where youth can relax and feel safe – look like?

Imagine two 'transfers' or stops
on the way to our collective destination

Sketches by Sarah Adjekum.

Symbolic objects as prompts: Seeds, doors, rocks, and ribbons

Simple and usually reflective of our larger everyday world, the objects that make up [TSDC Sets & Props](#) are rich with symbolic meaning. Post-performance activities can build on and extend the themes of the play by taking advantage of the everydayness and symbolism of these objects and their relationship to the play's story. For example, our Storyboarding activity extends the metaphor of the bus as a vehicle that can take us to destinations of our choosing but one that requires us to encounter others and make transfers along the route. Likewise, when we do Image Theatre activities after performances of *When My Home is Your Business*, doing the exercise on the stage, allows participants in the activity to make use of the set's doors as a symbol of 'home.'

Here are a few other ways we've used (or considered using) symbolic objects as prompts to invite audience members to carry forward the themes of the play:

Seeds & Doors: *When My Home is Your Business*

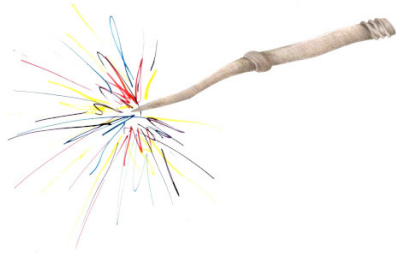
In the final scene of the play, after "Emma" has shared flower seeds with her neighbours (even one who she had been in conflict with throughout the play), the performers break character to speak directly to the audience. The play closes with these words:

“A beautiful garden is made out of many flowers — and all great gardens need rich soil and time to grow. We want to imagine our City as a beautiful garden, but we need your help.”

Audience members are given flower seed packets to take with them. This simple offering adds weight to the final words of the play by creating a tangible link between those attending and those performing. If resources permit, instead of seed packets, advocacy communities can create seed bombs and invite audiences to think of a neglected place in the City where they might plant and nurture their seeds.

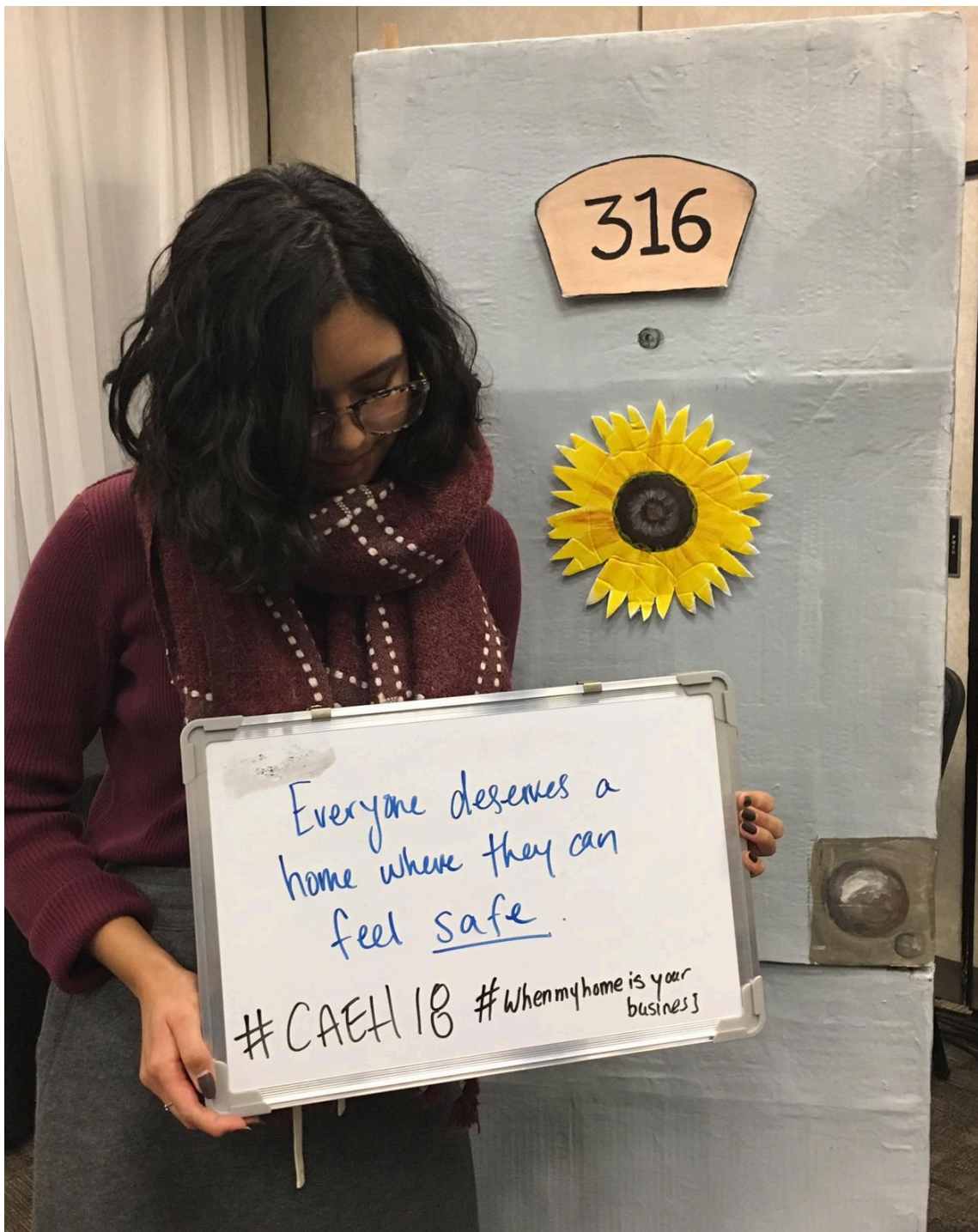
In addition to interacting with the doors when audience members participated in Image Theatre exercises at the National Conference to End Homelessness, we also invited them to use the doors as a backdrop to send a message via social media. Drawing on the play’s metaphor of seeds, as part of the post-performance ACT III we invited audience members to participate in a “Twitter seed planting action” by writing a message on a white board and then having their photo taken holding the message while they stood, sat, or poses in some way with one of the doors from *When My Home is Your Business*.

The prompt we gave them asked them to:



Think of a door in a building you know.

If this door could speak, what would it say?



Sabrina Sibald, Assistant Social Planner with the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, holding a sign in front of Emma's door.

Rocks & Ribbons: *We Need to Talk!* and *All of Us Together*

“I think those stones are the kind of things that some of those people are going to take with them into their career, as like look, ‘This is really something that’s going to remind me to think about the people that I’m dealing

with, that they're not just numbers. And that the system may not work for them, but I'm here to work for them, you know.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *WE NEED TO TALK!*

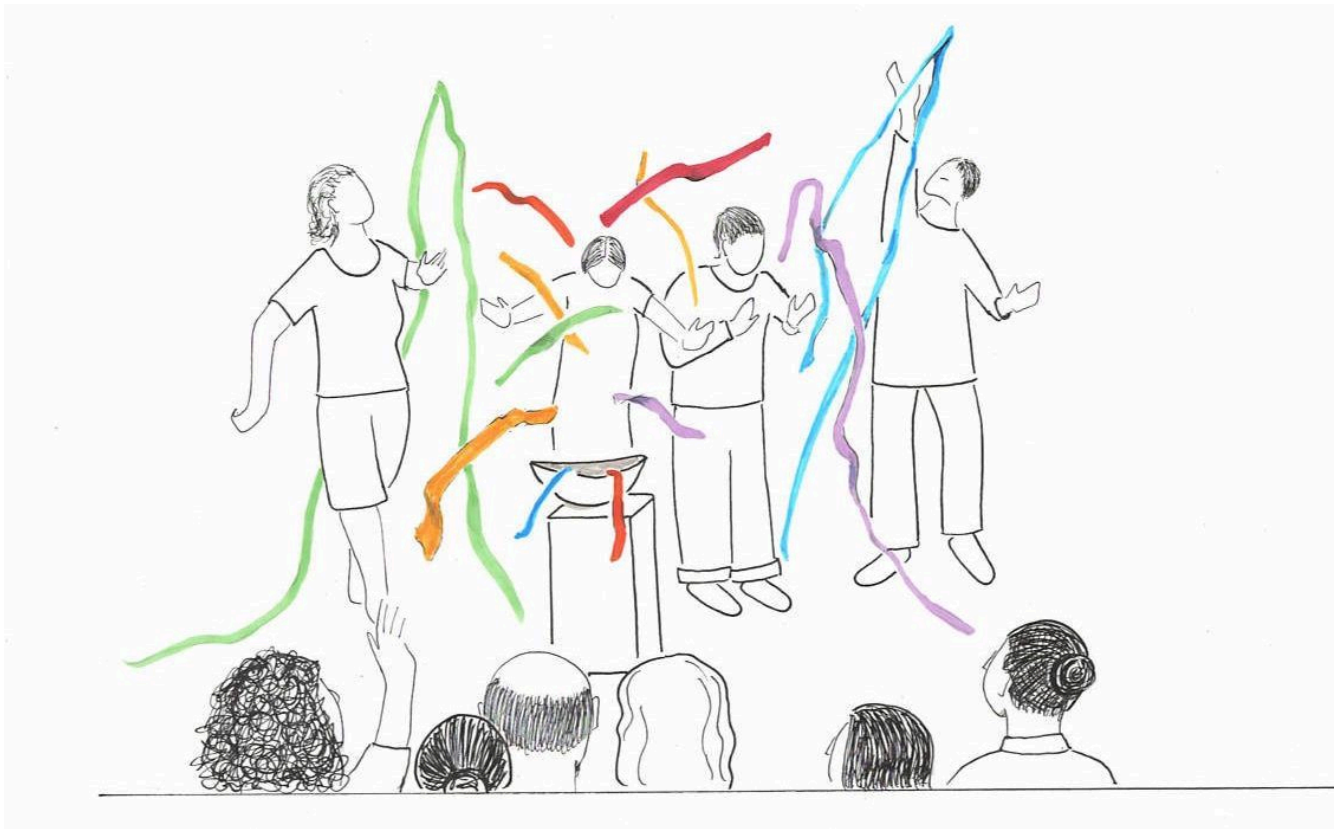
In addition to being performed as individual plays, *We Need to Talk!* and *All of Us Together* were presented together as part of a [Performance Exchange](#). We consider these exchanges to be wonderful opportunities for performers and audiences to consider the relationships between the concerns raised in performances by different constituencies. At the event, audience members were given symbolic objects from each of the plays — stones (aka mini-rocks) and ribbons.

First a little about the role of the objects in the context of the plays...

Rocks: The five women who performed in *We Need to Talk!* carried armloads of paper mâché rocks with them throughout the play as they repeatedly approach three different social service agencies (Income Support, a Foodbank, and Housing Support). For the women, and the audience, the rocks symbolized the multiple things they needed to juggle. They were also a creative resource for dramatically illustrating how the small boxes that the agencies make available are rarely big enough to contain the all rocks each woman carries, and how difficult it is to navigate multiple agencies for women who already have their hands full.



Ribbons: At the end of *All of Us Together* the performer-advocates dropped out of character and asked the audience, “Who will you stand beside?” and “Whose dreams will you fight for?” They also tossed the coloured ribbons they had used throughout the play to weave their stories together. The ribbons became a metaphor for solidarity and connection.



Here's how we used the objects both as a way of initiating discussions about the performances and as an invitation to audience members to carry forward the themes of the play in the days to come:

We Need to Talk! was performed first. Each audience member was given a small stone (a mini rock) to take away with them and remember the performance by. The stone was accompanied with this prompt: "As you think about leaving with this stone what will it mean to you? What are you carrying away today?" The audience was also invited to reflect on the meaning of the play and the stone by taking part in a post-performance dialogue in response to a prompt that was inspired by the play's final scene: *What do we need to talk about?*

"I want my rock to keep reminding me to challenge my preconceived notions of what it is to be successful. Like, if you want to work, you can work, and then you have money. That's what we're told all the time." — PERFORMANCE EXCHANGE AUDIENCE MEMBER.

After the second play — *All of Us Together* — was performed, audience members were given ribbons and once again invited to participate in a post-performance conversation where they were invited to bring the stones and the ribbons as symbolic and literal objects into dialogue with each other:

"You've all received a ribbon. Unlike the stone which is for you to keep reminding you of what you learned today,

the ribbon is meant to be given away. Our hope is that you will share the ribbon and what you learned with someone in your world. It could be family, neighbours, co-workers, decision makers... Given that, we'd like to hear from you: *Who might you share the ribbon with? Who do you think needs to understand what you learned from today's performances? Why them?* Thinking about both performances: *What would you tell the person you are sharing the ribbon with? How would you describe what you've seen today and why it's important for them to know about it?"*

Zines

Our work with storyboarding inspired us to think about zine-making as a possible post-performance activity. The more we talked about the zines as a resource for potentially extending the performance beyond the performance event, the more excited we became!

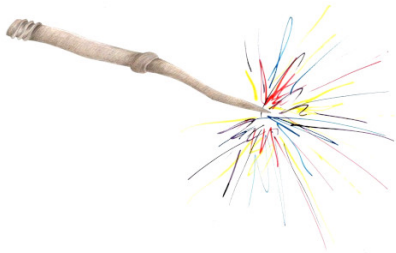
Here are some of the ways we've thought about using zines:

- Recruitment flyers
- Performance invitations
- Informational flyers created by community and self-advocates around an issue
- Performance programs
- Templates for post-performance activities
- Chapbook-zines of play scripts that performer-advocates and community partners could share

Unfortunately, like so many, we had to put all in-person gatherings on hold in response to COVID-19, which also meant temporarily shelving our plethora of collective zine-making plans. At the time, we were working on a plan with community partners from the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton to have participants in the Tools for Tenants' Rights project create an informational zine about tenants' rights to be presented at a performance of *When My Home Is Your Business* that was scheduled to take place at the Hamilton Public Library. We remain excited about the potential of zines as a resource to creatively extend the world-making moment of the performance.

PART IX

PROMPTING ONGOING CONVERSATIONS



Imagine what Hamilton might be like ten years from now if it were to become a much better City, a City where the arts are used widely to encourage lively, welcoming, inclusive conversations among many different groups of people.

What do you imagine it would be like for people with experiences like yours to step on to a road that leads to this future? Who else is on the road with you?

What steps are you taking, or trying to take, to move together toward this future?

“EVERY CHANGE STARTS WITH A CONVERSATION”

“Every change starts with a conversation. [The TSDC Performance Exchange] provided a forum or an avenue for that conversation to happen.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, TSDC PERFORMANCE EXCHANGE WITH *ALL OF US TOGETHER AND WE NEED TO TALK!*

Our Cities (and worlds) are shaped by conversations. The breadth of our visions for our collective futures determined by the people who are included in, or excluded from, these conversations. Encouraging inclusive, creative, ongoing exchange about our shared futures as co-residents of a City (or Cities), has been TSDC’s guiding principle and purpose. Just as TSDC plays are intended to prompt conversations between people with different points of view or from different social locations, the *process* of bringing the plays into being has been shaped by conversations across and between the many worlds of our uncommon partner collaborators:

- Community and self-advocates, activists, and performer-advocates
- Theatre practitioners and artists
- Social service providers and policy makers
- Arts and social science researchers, educators, and students

With this workbook, we’ve strived to share some of what we’ve learned on our journey over these past five years. What we’ve written reflects *our* perspectives and experiences, and the writing (and conversations around the writing) have deepened our own understandings of ‘what went on’ in TSDC. We share these in the spirit of expanding existing collaborations and the hope of sparking new connections: between ideas, people, projects, worlds.

*How do things look from your worlds?
What would you add to the creative mix?*

As a research project, TSDC had a set of goals that were time-limited. But we recognize that in order to do this kind of a project in a way that would introduce more (and more, and more) voices into conversations about the future of our Cities, the process would need to be ongoing. In this final chapter, we’ll talk about some of the things that we think would need to be addressed for a project like this — or the social and artistic processes at the core of projects like this — to be sustained and furthered. We’ll reflect on some of the things we’ve done so far — *and wish we had been able to do more of*. Some of the things we set in motion — *and still hope to do*

some day. Things we dreamt of doing — and (also) still hope to do some day. And, things we've undertaken in the wake of the pandemic.

RECIPROCITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

In spring 2019, as TSDC's research completion date grew nearer, our conversations about project reciprocity and sustainability took on increased urgency. *How could the project give back to the communities we worked with in a sustained way? How could a project like TSDC exist outside of a research framework, and without research funding? How could TSDC transition from a community-engaged performance research project to a community-engaged arts project?*

We didn't (and don't) have answers to these questions. As with many good questions, however, they prompted us to imagine and explore. In our discussions with community partners two things became clear: Reciprocity and sustainability are interdependent *and* both would require situating TSDC into the broader community in a more integrated way.

Here are some of ideas we explored and initiatives we set in motion to work towards this:

- Alternative approaches to re-mounting plays.
- Plans to integrate a performance creation workshop series into the curriculum of Good Shepherd, Notre Dame House School.
- Creating chapbook-zines of play scripts that performer-advocates and community partners could share.
- Networking with people at the Hamilton Public Library to discuss hosting upcoming re-performances of *Choose Your Destination* and *When My Home is Your Business* to be accompanied by related educational activities and installations at the library.
- Zine-making workshops with past participants and tenant rights advocates to create visual materials to support the issues addressed by performer-advocates in TSDC plays.
- Monthly meetings with past participants (we call these 'Sustaining Connections' gatherings).

Then came COVID-19. All of TSDC's in-person activities were placed on hold. So, we did what we do as theatre makers. We improvised. Our first priority was to figure out a way to transition our Sustaining Connections gatherings onto a virtual platform (more on this in a bit!). The second thing we did was start writing this workbook. As we pivoted to embark on these two new (ad)ventures — virtual Sustaining Connections gatherings and the workbook — we were struck by how they are both motivated by the same principles as the in-person activities we had put on hold — reciprocity and sustainability.

Reciprocity and sustainability are not only questions of giving back to the community and self-advocates who created and performed the plays and the community partners who provided guidance and support. Nor

are they simply about project survival. They are integral to the broader goals of TSDC that we've discussed throughout the workbook:

- Draw attention to how our norms of public communication exclude some speakers from public discussion and do not recognize some speakers as agents of social change.
- Engage more and different kinds of people in public talk about visions for their communities and build solidarity between constituencies.
- Extend the reach of performer-advocates' voices and deepen the receptivity of audiences to these voices.
- Expand the horizons of our imaginations — as performer-advocates and members of audiences and communities.
- Creatively engage audience members as actors in the ongoing conversation that the play initiates about the future of the City.

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF RE-MOUNTING PLAYS

“When I first started it, I didn’t think I’d be moving out of Hamilton. I thought maybe in the summertime I’d be performing with other people. And like showing people, maybe in my age group, how they’re not alone.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION*.

In addition to the activities we were forced to put on hold because of the pandemic we also encountered some hurdles around re-performing plays. As we mentioned in our discussion of [Performance Exchanges](#), the greatest obstacle we encountered was performer availability. Though at times we’ve had a member of the creative team stand in for a performer-advocate who was ill or unable to attend a particular performance, we’ve always made it a priority to have the plays performed by the community and self-advocates who created them. Over time, we began to see how this commitment had the unintended consequence that in some situations — as with *Choose Your Destination* — we were only able to present a play once.

Our work with the youth who created *Choose Your Destination* made apparent the precarious circumstances that some performer-advocates’ experience (lack of access to housing, geographic relocations, intermittent phone service and limited or no access to email, unpredictable work hours). At times, the circumstances of the youth’s lives made it difficult for them to attend workshop sessions which resulted in the workshop series taking place over an extended timeframe. By the time we were able to mount the play, we were uncertain if all (or any) of the youth would be available for a re-performance.

We explored the questions of re-performance and performer availability in our post-performance interviews with the youth. We first asked them how they would feel about re-performing the play. All said they would love to re-perform the play and would make every effort to be a part of it. We then asked, if circumstances arose where they weren’t available to perform how they would feel about somebody else stepping in to perform their character. Though the responses were more bittersweet, once again, the youth felt strongly that the play should live on to reach a broader audience:

“I feel like my character could be played by different genders as well. It doesn’t have to be a female. So like, I think that as long as the person reads the play and knows how to portray the character and personality, I wouldn’t mind at all. As long as the point gets across, there’s a good outcome. Right? So obviously it’d be bittersweet because obviously I’d love to perform that character, because I made the character. But there’d be no, I’d have no restriction, there would be no — I would be fine with anyone performing the character if the time worked out.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION*.

EXPANDING COMMUNITY NETWORKS

PART ONE: NOTRE DAME HOUSE SCHOOL

“That performance should have been something mandatory to watch. I know it sounds a little pretentious, but I think it’s something mandatory to see.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION*.

With the bittersweet blessings of the play’s past performer-advocates, we began to explore the possibility of remounting a version of *Choose Your Destination* with a new group of youth. In our discussions we identified two issues that we felt needed to be addressed:

- How to ensure that youth who were new to the project were also given an opportunity to contribute as co-creators.
- How to provide the youth with a stable (or stable-enough) infrastructure to support them through a 12 to 15 week performance creation workshop process.

Since TSDC scripts are not constructed of rigidly prescribed dialogue we felt comfortable with the idea of using the original play as a starting point. Through the workshop activities, we could introduce the youth to performance-based skills while also exploring their ideas and experiences to see how they would fit with the play’s characters and themes. Scenes, dialogue, and characters could be adapted or added.

Based on what we had come to know about the barriers to participation that precarious circumstances create for some of the youth we worked with in *Choose Your Destination*, we realized providing a stable-enough infrastructure meant deepening and expanding our community networks. In conversations with our community partners at Good Shepherd, we talked about how we could use the creation of *Choose Your Destination2* as an opportunity to explore putting more sustainable structures into place. We met with teachers from Good Shepherd’s Notre Dame House School, Katie Friscolanti and Domenic Riverso, and started hashing out details of how we could integrate the performance creation workshop process into their curriculum. We hosted information sessions for interested students and were setting into motion a plan to launch our first workshop series with youth from the school in the fall of 2020. We had also begun conversations with Naomi Brun and Erica Conly from the Hamilton Public Library, about the possibility of presenting the play at the library and leveraging library resources to support the youth.

Then (familiar refrain) along came COVID.

The potential advantages of integrating TSDC workshops into Notre Dame House School are as numerous as they are valuable! Offering TSDC workshops in the context of the school:

- Provides youth with opportunity to receive high school credit for their work.
- Ensures an experienced teacher who is knowledgeable about the students' lived experiences is available during *and between* workshops.
- Extends youths' learning experience through classroom assignments linked to the play.
- Provides support for youth to process their workshop experiences through in-class discussions, teacher-student meetings, and assignments.
- Creates opportunities for youth who don't wish to perform to participate in prop and set design or the design of promotional materials for the play.
- Provides workshop facilitators with consistent access to the invaluable knowledge-based reflections of an experienced teacher who is familiar with the students' lived experiences.

Another one to file under the category, *Things we set in motion, were unable to complete, but still hope to do one day!*

PUBLISHING SCRIPTS

“I was so proud of our project that I wanted, our names. I wanted to be credited. This was us! Like this was the youth that did this.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION*.

In conventional theatre contexts, plays are most often written by a playwright and performed by professional actors. In situations where a play’s script is collectively created, the performance collective is often given authorship of the published script. But since TSDC is a performance-based research project that works with marginalized populations, we had an ethical mandate to protect participants’ privacy. This means that we never share images or the names of a play’s performer-advocates unless we are given informed consent to do so, and for a specific purpose.

For the most part, authorship of TSDC plays wasn’t an issue because at performances the performer-advocates were acknowledged and recognized as the play’s creators or authors. But if we were to pass an existing skeleton script onto a new group, the original creators of the play would no longer be visible as its authors. So, the idea of re-performing a play with cast that was not necessarily made up of play’s original creators presented us with new challenges.

During the workshop process some the youth were very protective of their identities and therefore very appreciative of TSDC policies around confidentiality. However, when it came to the performance, many expressed a desire to be able to share photos from the play on social media. Others wanted their names to be included in information associated with the play (performer-advocates from other TSDC plays shared a similar desire).

So, we asked the youth, “Say we were to publish the script; would you want to be associated with that? Would you like to have your name on that?” Of the three youth who were available for post-performance interviews, their responses were unanimously and enthusiastically affirmative:

“I would love it! That would mean that we’re getting somewhere.” — PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION*.

“One-hundred percent!” — PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION*.

“I would love that! That would be amazing. You’d have to give me a copy published; I don’t know how publishing really works. But I’d love that! Because that’s just our work — our hard work coming to fruition.” — PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION*.

The youth's responses prompted us to think more broadly about publishing scripts not only as a way of facilitating re-performances of TSDC plays, but also as way to give back to the play's performer-creators and our community partners. We became excited about the idea of creating a series of illustrated chapbook-zines that present abbreviated story arcs for each of TSDC's plays. The beauty of adopting a zine model for publishing play scripts is that they would be easy and cost-effective to reproduce. TSDC could post downloadable PDF's that performer-advocates and community partners could access and print.

File this one under the category — *Things we dreamt of doing, and still hope to do some day!*

EXPANDING COMMUNITY NETWORKS

PART TWO: HAMILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

“This performance needs to be done more — in the schools, in the colleges, in the universities — to raise awareness about the rights of the tenants.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *WHEN MY HOME IS YOUR BUSINESS*.

While we were busy hatching plans with our Good Shepherd community partners, we were also planning a re-performance of *When My Home is Your Business* with partners from the Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC). The play’s previous performances had taken place as part of larger events organized around issues related to displacement, tenant rights, affordable housing, and homelessness. A huge advantage of these kinds of venues is that they have built-in audiences of stakeholders who are invested in the issues that the play addresses. But with no similar events on the horizon, we set out to explore new options.

At the time, we had also been thinking about ways to integrate TSDC into the broader community and (as we discussed above) had just started talking with Naomi Brun and Erica Conly at the Hamilton Public Library about collaborating with TSDC and Notre Dame House School on *Choose Your Destination 2*. So, we discussed the idea of the library as a venue for *When My Home is Your Business* and decided that it was excellent choice for a number of reasons:

- Many of the play’s performer-advocates had expressed a desire for the play to reach broader audiences.
- Unlike conferences, which are temporary spaces, libraries are permanent and designed as sites for public engagement and exchange.
- Libraries (especially City Centre libraries) are fantastically public spaces that host a diverse range of communities.

When we began imagining the kinds of pre- and post-performance activities that might be possible at the library, we became almost giddy with excitement! We had long worked with post-performance activities to offer audience members creative ways to extend their engagement beyond the performance. With the library, it struck us that the kinds of activities we could consider were no longer limited to those we could initiate immediately after the performance. Activities to support the play and the community engagements it sought to foster could extend over a much longer timeframe, taking place *before*, as well as *after*, the performance. Our imaginations ran with the possibilities. (We’re talking processions of people through the

library wearing sandwich board signs painted with the question, “What does home mean to you?”) Because of time constraints, we reined ourselves in to land on two projects:

Zine-making workshop with tenant rights advocates:

We were extremely lucky to have Merima Menzildzic on our performance planning team. In her role as project coordinator of the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton’s Tools For Tenant Rights project, Merima facilitated workshops and training sessions for tenants facing displacement due to gentrification. Since the themes of the play intersected with the issues addressed by Tools For Tenant Rights we began talking about creative ways that the two projects could support one another.

Here’s what we came up with: Merima and Melanie (TSDC’s set and prop designer) would work together to offer a couple of zine-making workshops to tenants at risk of being displaced and tenant rights advocates. The idea was to create single page zines that could be cut and folded into an eight-page storyboard. The zines could include both promotional information for the play and information addressing tenants concerns and tenant rights. They could be made available at the library before, during, and after the performance. The zines would also be available to the zine-making participants to share in their own communities and as part of their tenant rights advocacy activities.

Interactive community art installation:

As we met in the food court near the main entrance to Hamilton Public Library’s Central Branch to brainstorm pre- and post-performance activities, we had an *Aha!* moment. A queer youth advocacy group was hosting an interactive art exhibit at the entrance. It was visible to us in the food court and anyone who used this entrance to the library passed by it. We decided to follow their lead and plan an interactive exhibit that would promote and support the play by fostering public discussion and engagement around housing related issues.



Here's what we had come up with: Melanie would create a door — like the doors from the set of *When My Home is Your Business*, with a one exception. The door would have a mail slot. We would have two sets of postcards available for people to fill out and drop through the slot. One would have an image of a door on the front with the question, *If your door could speak, what would it say about housing in Hamilton?* The second would have a drawing of door mat, with the question, *How could we make Hamilton a more welcoming place for everyone?* Postcards would be gathered and put on display in the library.



Plans for the zine workshops and installation were still works-in-progress when we had to postpone the performance (insert COVID refrain). Though we were unable to bring our plans into fruition, what became abundantly clear to all of us was what an incredibly valuable partner libraries could be to projects like TSDC!

As public institutions that serve a broad range of communities, libraries open up an exciting range of new possibilities that include:

- Inviting a broader public into the conversations plays foster by presenting them in a public forum that engages a broad spectrum of communities.
- Creating interactive art installations to accompany plays as a way of cultivating ongoing public discussion and engagement around themes of the play.
- Leveraging library resources and regular library activities to help spur a deeper conversation around some of the themes that emerge from the production.
- Expanding infrastructural networks and developing reciprocal relationships.
- Mobilizing library resources (like ‘maker spaces’) for community members to create zines or digital stories related to the plays’ themes.

SUSTAINING CONNECTIONS GATHERINGS

“Some of us didn’t know all the history of the other people in the group. We knew each other from either sitting on a different committee or living in the same building, but we didn’t know all the story. And it sort of cemented things, like, ‘Okay, now I understand why you walk this way on a certain day, or how you’re struggling or’... But because we’ve done it together, we’ve done the workshops, we’ve done the performances, when we do see each other together, then we’re able to, if necessary, cry on each other’s shoulder.”

— PERFORMER-ADVOCATE *ALL OF US TOGETHER*.

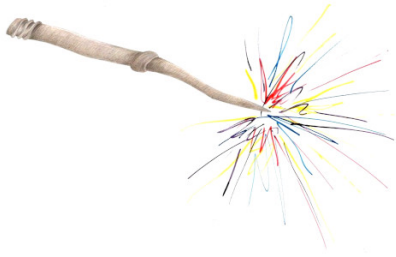
We’ve been very moved by the connections and relationships that have been forged through TSDC performance creation workshops and performances. Sometimes, they’re extensions of pre-existing relationships. Sometimes, they’re new. But because TSDC was project-based (which meant we worked on one performance creation workshop series at a time), we had no existing infrastructure to maintain and nurture the community connections that were cultivated through the workshop and performance process. This also meant we were missing a valuable opportunity to build on the momentum of change that the performer-advocates set in motion through the plays they created. So, we decided to try something new.

In August 2019, we sent an invitation to everyone who had performed in a TSDC play over the last 5 years “to come share some food, chat, and play a few theatre games.” We let folks know that we were currently not in a position to consider new performances or re-mounting performances we’ve already done, but that we wanted to explore how people might want to stay connected to the project. With no promises, just an invitation to gather, eat and explore together, we weren’t sure what to expect.

Within hours, RSVPs affirming participants’ desire to attend began rolling in. Good Shepherd generously offered to provide food and a space to gather. At our first meeting we collectively decided to get together for monthly Sustaining Connections gatherings throughout fall and open the group to invited guests. For our September meeting, we invited everyone to bring an object and consider the following prompt as preparation to share in a story circle:

“I see that this project is a ball of snow that should be increased. There should be another level of this project in order to make the change. Therefore, I think there should be another level. Second, third, fourth and not stopping! A continuous process in order to make a change.” —

PERFORMER-ADVOCATE, *WHEN MY HOME IS YOUR BUSINESS*.



Imagine what Hamilton might be like ten years from now if it were to become a much better City.

What do you imagine life would be like in that much better Hamilton for people with experiences like yours?

Please bring an object that will help you tell a 1 to 3 minute story about something a person with experiences like yours might do in a much better Hamilton 10 years from now. How would life be different for them?

At the gathering we held story circles and closed the evening with a group response round:

These are stories of people who...

Strive for justice, equal rights, and visibility
 Are caring people who want all to have love and respect to be themselves
 Care about the future
 Are wise
 See an inclusive society
 Are resilient and powerful

In a City where...

There is potential
 Change is afoot
 Wisdom is rewarded
 Everybody gets along
 People support each other and no one is left out
 People are treated with dignity, respect and of value

In October, we did some Image Theatre. One highlight was when participants staged an improvised tag-team soapbox speak-out in front ‘City Hall’ where they shared their passionate visions of what a better Hamilton would look like and what we might do to get there. In November Melanie Skene and Jennie Vengris led us in a zine-making exploration — a daring new venture for many/most of us! We concluded our fall gatherings with a December potluck that was as rich with offerings of spirit and conversation as it was with food and made plans to reconvene in the new year!



While everyone seemed to enjoy getting together and the open-ended explorations, the participants also voiced their desires to perform again. With this in mind, we brought scripts from all the TSDC plays to our first gathering of 2020 and began looking for connections between the plays. The group decided to spend our next three to four meetings using the same methods we had in the workshops, to see if we could come up with a story arc for a new performance.

Then came the pandemic, and so, we did what so many have done, we went virtual...

EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS, GOING VIRTUAL

When we were forced to cancel TSDC's in-person activities, we were very aware that the pandemic's effects would be patterned (as so many things are) by social privilege and disadvantage. We were concerned about what life would be like for the Sustaining Connections' participants. It felt important to touch base with everyone and see if we could figure out an alternate way to sustain our connections while maintaining physical distance.

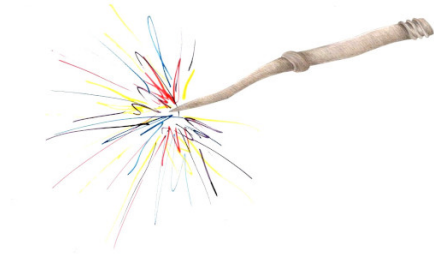
We sent out an email to the group letting them know that the University had made Zoom available to us. We knew that some participants had neither computers nor internet access, so we proposed using Zoom as a combined video and phone conferencing platform. We asked participants if they would be interested in trying out this option. For those who were unfamiliar with the platform, we offered to meet one-on-one to figure it out together.

During our first couple of gatherings we focused on checking-in. After a few meetings, however, we began looking at ways to adapt some of the workshop activities that were familiar to participants. Not only were we unable to explore *together* in a shared physical environment, many of the workshop's virtual participants had only enough space to be seated in front of a computer. Others were only able to connect by phone. This ruled out [Image Theatre](#) — a mainstay in TSDC's performance creation toolkit. But we still had [prompts](#) — which, as we've said, we like to think of as 'magic wands' for channeling creative-impulse spells.

With one prompt we asked participants to find an object that reminded them of something that makes them happy, to invent a character who might interact with this object, and to share a 1 to 3 minute story about their character's interaction with the object when we next met (See [Performative Modeling](#) for a glimpse at how we used this prompt).

In subsequent gatherings, since we were unable to use the collective character development [documentary exercise](#) that's based on images created during Image Theatre explorations — we came up with a new prompt. We invited participants to *imagine how characters might react to an action that we could not actually see*. (This approach also had the advantage of allowing participants who could only phone in to Zoom to fully participate in the explorations.)

Building on the characters participants previously created, we asked each participant to imagine how one of their fictional characters might react to an imaginary gift left at their door by another fictional character. (This had the advantage of reflecting how folks were getting things delivered during the period of lockdown.)



Why would Joyce leave a ball of orange chalk outside Trish's door?

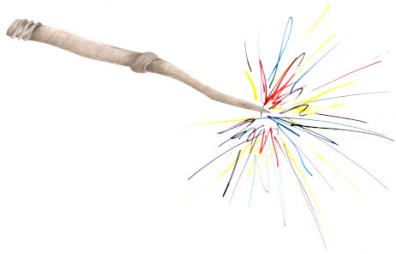
Each participant answered before we moved on to another imagined gift and another imagined giver/receiver combo. Participants often responded by referencing something that had been said in the previous workshop, where participants shared objects that might bring them joy. Because of the collective nature of this exercise, however, a sense of possible characters who had different experiences and motivations than the actual participants began to emerge, just as they had in the live exercises.

Admittedly, as theatre facilitators, the process of going virtual has been/is quite daunting! As always, we continue to be grateful for, and inspired by, performer-advocates' generosity, courage, and willingness to take risks and try new things.

IN CLOSING (AND OPENING, AND HANDING OFF...)

While the pandemic moved this workbook to TSDC's front burner sooner than we had anticipated, we have always thought of it as resource for reciprocity and sustainability. As a collective of community and self-advocates, community partners, theatre practitioners and artists, and arts and social sciences scholars and educators, we share a common interest in creating plays that are designed to facilitate attention to voices and visions for the City that often go unheard or heeded. We hope this workbook will be a resource to communities who want to support one another and connect through this medium. We hope you'll stay in touch with us to let us know how you use this workbook, or how our ideas and practices intersect with or shape yours.

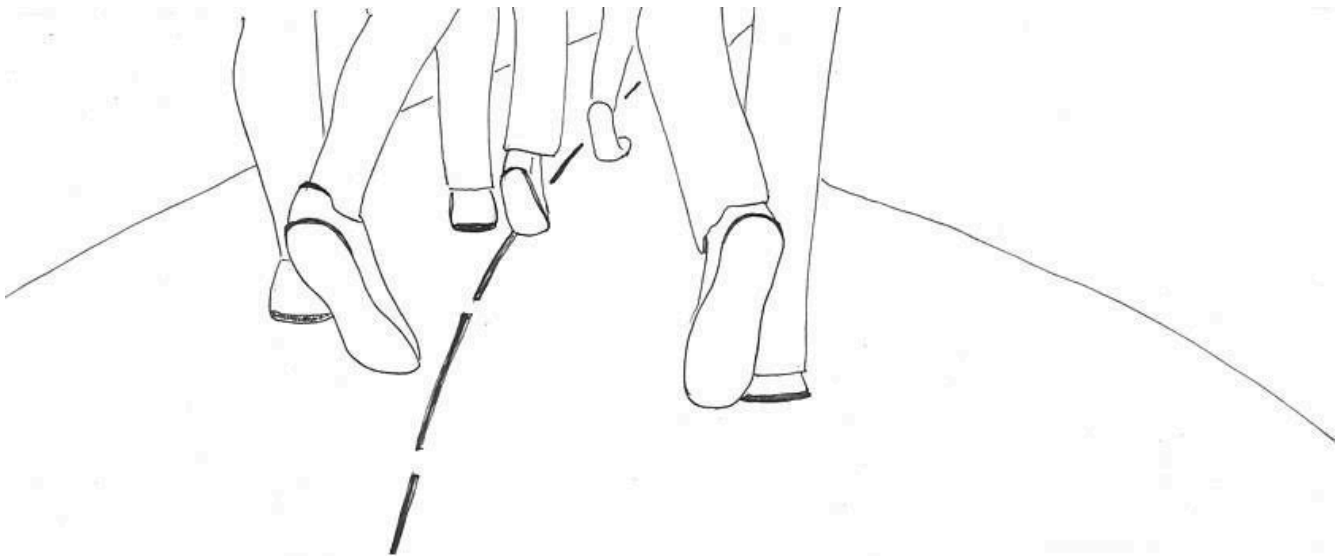
And so, in TSDC fashion, and in lieu of final curtain, we offer these prompts:



What's your dream of where this could go?

What steps will you take to move toward this dream?

Who will you walk and talk and play with along the way?



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GLOSSARY

devising

“Devised theatre is theatre that begins without a script. The script gets ‘written’ as the rehearsal process takes place through a series of improvisations and collaborations.” — Vanessa Garcia, “The Paradox of Devised Theater on the Twenty-First Century Stage.”

magic that was and is TSDC

Editorial comment from Chris: When I write about ‘the magic that was and is TSDC,’ I really mean: the passionate, smart, skillful-wise craft that is Catherine’s approach to community theatre.

performer-advocates

Throughout the workbook we use a number of terms when referring to the community members who have lived experience of social marginalization who take part in TSDC workshops and create and perform TSDC plays for public audiences. These terms include community and self-advocates, workshop-participants, performer-advocates, performer-creators. Our intention isn’t to confuse you! It’s to capture some of the many roles and capacities of TSDC’s community performer-advocates.

storyboard

a panel or panels on which a sequence of sketches depict the significant changes of action and scene...
(Dictionary.com)