

Lesley University

DigitalCommons@Lesley

---

Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses

Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences  
(GSASS)

---

Spring 5-16-2020

## Theatre Crawl: A Series of Community Engagement Projects

Anna Rich  
*Lesley University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses)



Part of the [Acting Commons](#), [Dramatic Literature, Criticism and Theory Commons](#), [Interactive Arts Commons](#), [Performance Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Rich, Anna, "Theatre Crawl: A Series of Community Engagement Projects" (2020). *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses*. 276.

[https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive\\_theses/276](https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/276)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences (GSASS) at DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@lesley.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@lesley.edu), [cvrattos@lesley.edu](mailto:cvrattos@lesley.edu).

Theatre Crawl: A Series of Community Engagement Projects

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

May 1, 2020

Anna Rich

Drama Therapy

Laura L. Wood, PhD, RDT/BCT

### Abstract

This thesis will focus on Theatre Crawl, a devised and immersive theatre experience grounded in the techniques of drama therapy. Beginning as a creative outlet for drama therapy graduate students at Lesley University, Theatre Crawl has provided performance opportunities for students to exercise the creative and theatrical skills which initially brought many of them to the field of drama therapy. From April 2018 to January 2020, four Theatre Crawl events have been facilitated. All events originated from the belief that providing opportunities for drama therapists to engage in personal art-making is an essential practice for the field of drama therapy as well as for the individual's identity as a drama therapist. This thesis will focus on the creation and implementation of Theatre Crawl as well as this author's personal process and reflections.

*Keywords:* drama therapy, drama therapy students, devised theatre, immersive theatre, audience experience

### **Acknowledgments**

This community engagement project would not have been possible without the creativity and support of Gabrielle Arias, Jason D. Butler, Christina Dennis, Amy Larson Laziér, Emily Lunardi, Erin McNellis, Hannah Reclam, Laura L. Wood, and all who have participated in a Theatre Crawl event. Thank you to Jessica Litwak for consulting on this thesis.

## Theatre Crawl: A Series of Community Engagement Projects

### **Introduction**

Theatre Crawl was developed during this author's first year as a drama therapy student at Lesley University. Drawn to the field of drama therapy while studying and working as a professional actor, this writer entered Lesley's drama therapy program still tethered to the creative pursuits of a performer. Theatre Crawl came out of a mission to feed those performance goals while continuing to grow as a clinician within the drama therapy community. A similar desire was observed among drama therapy student peers, and this writer first approached fellow drama therapy students to present the idea of creating a performance event to meet the needs of drama therapists looking for theatrical opportunities. Iliya (2014) marked participating in personal art-making as essential for developing creative arts therapists and for the field as a whole. At its genesis, providing performance opportunities to burgeoning drama therapists was at the core of Theatre Crawl's collaborative mission. Out of this mission came four separate Theatre Crawl events executed in April 2018, May 2019, July 2019, and January 2020.

All Theatre Crawl events have been grounded in devised and immersive theatre with an overarching lens of drama therapy. Each event began with the selection of directors, individuals with a background in devised theatre and drama therapy, who were each paired with a small group of actors on the day of the event. This author took on the role of overall facilitator and was in constant collaboration with the directors throughout the process. Participants, who will be interchangeably referred to as actors throughout this thesis, were invited to join for a twelve-hour event. On the day of the event, this facilitator led participants through a warm-up grounded in the spontaneity of Moreno's (1934) Theory on Sociometry which assisted in taking the pulse of the group, identified the naturally occurring patterns between participants, and divided them into

small groups (Sternberg & Garcia, 2009). These small groups, along with the director they were paired with, were each provided with a set of devising guidelines which differed from event to event but typically included: pieces of text, artwork, overarching themes, song selections, objects, and drama therapy techniques. Each group had their own space within a single building and ten hours to create a piece of original theatre. An audience was invited to join at the end of the day and moved from room to room to witness each piece. While this thesis will reflect on all four Theatre Crawl events, the primary focus will be on the event executed in January 2020.

### **Literature Review**

This thesis touches on a variety of topics relating to drama therapy in concert with various forms of theatrical creation and performance. This literature review will focus on five major themes including: 1) performance opportunities for drama therapists, 2) identity of the drama therapist, 3) broad view of devised theatre, 4) devised theatre and drama therapy, 5) performance and immersive audience engagement. These themes have encouraged this writer to think further about Theatre Crawl as an event when considering future iterations. Much of this literature review seeks to negotiate the many facets of Theatre Crawl by defining the established forms of theatre and drama therapy which have contributed to its development. The writer encourages readers to view this thesis as the beginning of further discussion of the event and the subjects touched on within this review of the literature.

### **Performance Opportunities for Drama Therapists**

The work of a drama therapist can be rich with creativity and opportunities for performance. Many drama therapy methods and interventions call for the drama therapist to

actively perform alongside clients by embodying a specific person in a client's life, taking on a director role, or utilizing projective objects through the creation of a puppet persona, to name a few examples. However, Allen and Hesser (as cited in Iliya, 2014) argued that there is a difference between professional and personal art-making. The art that is created for clinical purposes does not provide the same benefits for the therapist that personal art-making provides. Iliya (2014) emphasized that the only way creative arts therapists can fully understand their work with clients is by exploring their own personal art consistently and purposefully. This personal exploration not only has the ability to support individuals in their careers, but to uplift the profession in its entirety. "The experience and knowledge gained from making art for one's own personal growth, enjoyment, insight and expression deeply enrich one's clinical understanding of the creative arts therapy process" (p. 110). In fact, Iliya (2014) argued that clinicians who do not engage in personal creative practices are not able to perform sufficiently alongside clients. Fish (2012) stated that utilizing artistic response to client work can assist in processing feelings of countertransference. In fact, Allen (as cited in Brown, 2008) coined the term, "clinification" which refers to, "a dual developmental process whereby the art therapist gradually takes on the skills and characteristics of other clinicians, while at the same time investment in and practice of art skills decline" (p. 202). Apart from the impact personal art-making has on the ability of the therapist and the field, Decuir and Vega (2010) found that the personal music-making of music therapists contributed to career persistence. Much of the research focusing on this topic has been done in regard to art therapists, dance/movement therapists, and music therapists; however, Brown (2008) acknowledged that findings can be applied to creative arts therapies as a whole, which includes the field of drama therapy.

### **Identity of the Drama Therapist**

This author was once asked, “Are you a therapist who uses theatre, or a theatre artist who uses therapy?” This is not an uncommon question for those in the profession of drama therapy. Frydman, Segall, and Wood (2018) emphasized that the intersection of artist and clinician roles for a drama therapist can lead to confusion surrounding professional identity and questions of ability in both fields. Involvement in community is cited as helpful in resolving some of these questions of identity. Especially as many drama therapists come to the field from performance careers, being engaged in a performance community could be helpful in meeting other drama therapists who wish to access performance opportunities while leading with the role of clinician. Landy (2006) encouraged drama therapists to pursue their own forms of creative expression for reasons of aesthetic interest and personal community. He stated, “I believe it is important for drama therapists to return to the source of their work from time to time, for nourishment and inspiration” (p. 142). In the same breath, he encouraged drama therapists to expand their scope of practice to reach clinicians outside of the drama therapy sphere and contribute to the field by bringing it to outside parties. This range points to an additional caveat of a drama therapist’s identity; the hierarchical struggle between creative arts therapists and non-creative arts therapists and the internalized feelings of inadequacy and shame surrounding that hierarchy (Johnson, 1994). A similar thought is reflected in the work of Aliaga (2003), as cited in Brown (2008), “...performing dances helps me maintain my equilibrium while working in dysfunctional bureaucracy that undervalues the work creative arts therapists do” (p. 202). As Feen-Calligan (2011) wrote in connection to art therapists, they are required to hold the same skills of counselors outside of the arts-based therapies in addition to having an understanding and skill within their own medium, modality, or media.



For drama therapy students at Lesley University, practical experience is mainly taken from internship sites, and due to the lack of local practicing drama therapists available for on-site internship supervision, these experiences are often supervised by professionals outside of the creative arts therapies. Although this supervision is often highly-skilled and essential to training, the expertise provided within field training experiences does not typically involve the encouragement or opportunities to exercise one's personal art-making or professional identity as a creative arts therapist (Nichols & Owens, 1995, as cited in Feen-Calligan, 2011).

Butler (2017) found that experiential learning is a vital aspect of the education of drama therapists, especially experientials involving a performance component such as self-revelatory and autoethnographic performances (Emunah, 2015; Pendzik, Emunah, & Johnson, 2016) which both utilize the performer's personal material. Butler's (2017) work also highlighted the difficult intersection of education and therapy present within a drama therapy classroom citing the "...complex experience of boundaries and responsibility" (p. 29) which accompany a drama therapy education. Drama therapy students are frequently asked to participate in experientials in front of professors and peers. This requires students to hold the complexity of multiple relationships, taking on roles including but not limited to student, friend, and colleague.

### **Devised Theatre**

The ephemeral and transient nature of devised theatre makes it impossible to communicate a single definition or theory for how it's created (Oddey, 2013). In its most basic definition, devised theatre originates from a collaboration between a group of people as opposed to a pre-written script and comes with a sense of possibility for something that has never existed before (Magnat, 2005). The catalyst for this collaboration can come from anywhere, and devised work can exist at any time and in any space with an unknown end product (Oddey, 2013).

Shirley (2005) spoke of devising not as a style or formal approach but, “A chosen means of working together to create something original for the stage” (p. 96).

**Origins.** The origins of devised theatre can be traced back as long as humans have existed within community (Syssoyeva, 2013), and a detailed history of devised theatre is therefore beyond the scope of this literature review. However, these origins reflect the nebulous nature of the method itself. The 1960s saw a surge of devised theatre throughout the United States, Europe, and Australia. At the same time, marginalized groups were protesting the status quo, seeking spaces to exist as a collective, and pushing changes of policy through the government. This counterculture and iteration of participatory democracy took form with an emphasis on grassroots involvement and informed a fair amount of reforms, movements, and policy throughout the 1960s and 1970s, including Community Action Agencies, The Stonewall Riots, and The Black Power Movement to name only a few (Hall, 2008; Mueller, 2004). A form of theatre was needed to mirror these times, something “...participatory, process-oriented, and non-hierarchical...” (Magnat, 2005, p. 75) where the collaborative and communal nature of theatre could be focused on while challenging the power structure of the director-playwright relationship (Heddon & Milling, 2015). Devised theatre put the power in the hands of the collective, the performers, with the ensemble acting as director, playwright, actor, and beyond (Oddey, 2013; Heddon & Milling, 2015). Contemporarily, the role of the director has been accepted and is often referred to in terms such as “facilitator,” with a conscious effort made to maintain the concept of participatory democracy, even with an established leader (Parsons, 2009).

The power structures protested against in the 1960s remain today, presenting continuous opportunities for devised theatre to work towards the dismantling of structural oppression. As

Oddey (2013) stated, “The group cannot devise in a vacuum; work originates and progresses within the broadest context of culture and society, the changing world and all its events” (p. 2). For this author, these origins of devised theatre, which encourage participants and witnesses to look beyond mere aesthetics and product to focus on the process and impact on those involved in the art-making, point toward an inevitable relationship between devised theatre and drama therapy.

**Devised theatre and drama therapy.** Drama therapy, “...the intentional use of drama and/or theater processes to achieve therapeutic goals” (NADTA, 2020), focuses on the process of using theatrical techniques, whether it is through the use of role, projective techniques, improvisation, storytelling, performance, or embodiment. The process-oriented approaches of drama therapy and devised theatre lend themselves to each other. Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski believed that devised theatre is linked to presence as opposed to the cognitive expression of language (as cited in Magnat, 2005), and in reference to drama therapy, Casson (2004) posited that insight is not necessary to produce change and therapeutic goals can be reached within drama therapy practice without talking directly about a client’s presenting problem(s).

Some drama therapists and theatre artists have utilized both devised theatre and drama therapy techniques to create theatre. Jessica Litwak (2018), creator of The Fear Project defined the project as “...a theatrical action based on interviews” (p. 252) which utilized “...drama therapy, education, social justice/activism, and theatrical art” (p. 250). Script creation focused on interviews surrounding what people fear, with an overarching goal of providing space for artists and audiences to engage in community healing, develop solutions to personal and social challenges, and produce meaningful theatre. At the performances, audience members were asked

the same questions asked in the initial interviews, and these answers were incorporated into the script. A discussion was moderated after every show so that performers and audience members could share their experiences (Litwak, 2018). On her body of work as a whole, all of which is rooted in social activism (J. Litwak, personal communication, February 20, 2020), Litwak (2019) wrote, "By engaging audiences, we can explore how the creative process helps to bring about social change and transform human relationships" (p. 277).

Drama therapist Maitri Gopalakrishna (2017) created a devised performance entitled *Positively Shameless*, which explored the impact of childhood sexual abuse of five women in Bangalore, India. The piece was devised using the personal experiences of the women, and this mix of theatre and therapy "...allowed for the development of a rich and complex performance" (p. 85). Gopalakrishna (2017) emphasized the importance of working in a collaborative and non-hierarchical way, echoing the original intentions of the devised theatre space. The aesthetic value of using an actor's personal material had to be balanced out by the use of therapeutic principles such as aesthetic distance in order to allow actors to perform while dealing with their own trauma (Gopalakrishna, 2017; Landy, 1996).

Aesthetic distance refers to when the client is able to access potent feelings and personal information while still being able to observe their own internal process or, as Landy (1996) described, "...emotional expression that is clarifying and relieving rather than obscuring and overwhelming..." (p. 367). Being able to play with distance and recognize both extremes is a desirable place to be within a drama therapy space, and it is the therapist's job to negotiate between the two extremes. Even within conventional theatre, personal material is likely to be brought into the rehearsal and performance process, especially when dealing with the stories of those close to the piece. Due to the concept of dramatic projection, a drama therapy core process

which assumes that personal material will be projected onto any dramatic material (Jones, 2007), an actor's personal material is being brought into the rehearsal space no matter the form of theatre, script, or storyline. The use of a drama therapist within all rehearsal processes, for even the most conventional and commercial pieces of theatre, could aid actors in negotiating how their own trauma and personal material is brought into the theatre and how to process it. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, further research on the use of drama therapy within rehearsal and performance processes is called for.

**Devising process.** Oddey (2013) stated, "... devised theatre may start from any number of possible sources or stimuli, be they oral reminiscences, text, image, music, concept, or an audience" (p. 125). Oddey (2013) herself reminisced of a time she began a devised piece with only the word "water" (p. 26). In the cases presented above, Litwak (2019) and Gopalakrishna (2017) used the deeply personal stories, words, and responses of actors and audience members. Joan Schirle (2005), Director of the Dell'Arte Company, wrote that the company used a method they called "paper walls" to begin their devising process, covering the walls with paper on which they wrote and recorded ideas under various categories such as "themes," "intent," "characters," "scenes," and "resources" (p. 94). Fairy tales and mythology also lend themselves to the role of devised theatre catalyst. Lilley (2012) pointed to the accessibility of fairy tales and cited the work of theatre companies Kneehigh Theatre and Cartoon de Salvo in utilizing widely known stories to create devised theatre. She wrote, "...it is easy to see the fairytale genre as rife with sets of cultural references and interpretive strategies that are commonly known and shared, providing common roots from which...processes of individual interpretation grow" (p. 2).

Regardless of materials, themes, or stories used to begin devising, what remains at the core of this process is the collaboration between participants. Unlike conventional theatre where

the heart of the process lies with the script or the style of the director, in devised theatre the process *is* the heart. Devising can begin with the group simply existing within the creative space together and engaging in collective exercises from which themes, words, and images can emerge to guide the process. Dymphna stated, “Chaos is a necessary process of devising” (as cited in Magnat, 2005, p. 75), alluding to the idea that there is not one way to begin devising a piece of theatre. Radosavljevic reported that Kneehigh Theatre has often begins their devising process with each participant sharing personal memories and viewpoints surrounding the story being focused on, so that everyone has a connection to the work from the beginning (Lilley, 2012). Schirle (2005) advocated for groups to have a credo or manifesto, general guidelines under which to begin working in collaboration, writing:

...there is a greater chance of success if the group establishes and adheres to basic guidelines for working together. Collaborative principles encourage artists to develop trust and respect, come to a common understanding of the challenge, and to be clear about intention, roles, and agendas. By creating a shared space, generating and manipulating models, and using outside resources and strategies, the capacity for making decisions is expanded. (p. 91)

She also encouraged specificity by asking the questions: “What is the intent? Why make this? Who is it for? Why does it matter?” (p. 97) and for groups to limit the amount of material they use to devise in order to preserve clarity for the audience.

### **The Audience**

The presence of an audience has been an integral part of every Theatre Crawl experience. Without an audience, Grotowski (2002) wondered if the theatre can even exist (p. 32) and Osipovich specifically (2006) defined theatrical performance as the interaction of performers and

spectators within a shared space (p. 461). The audience brings with them an array of possibilities, providing validation for the performers and a heightened energy not always present within the rehearsal process. In relation to drama therapy, the act of being an audience to yourself or others is referred to as witnessing (Jones, 2007). The role of the witness in drama therapy is a dynamic one, and can manifest in a variety of ways, "...as support; as confronter; as guide; as companion; as a pool for individuals to take part in enactment" (p. 102). Clients can take on both witness and performer roles multiple times within a singular session. For a drama therapist, the role of witnessing a client's experience can be the most important role they take on (Jones, 2007).

**Immersive audience experience.** Within an immersive theatre experience, the audience is not a passive recipient but an active part of the theatrical journey, and how the audience experiences the performance and how their role is manipulated is essential to any performance. Immersive theatre "...caters for an audience that enjoys opportunities for community and conviviality where verbal and physical interaction is actively encouraged; an audience that is hungry for emotional and physical human connection" (Machon, 2016, p. 37). Similar to devised theatre, defining immersive theatre is not straight-forward, as the label has become widely used, and the definition dependent on its source. The majority of definitions hone in on the role of the audience as an integral part of classifying a piece as immersive. Machon (2016) wrote that immersive theatre requires a contract, whether explicit or implicit, between performer and audience before entering the performance. The audience will be entering a new domain, "...where space, sound, scenography, and duration are palpable forces that comprise this world" and "The audience is...a living part of the aesthetic..." (Machon, 2016, p. 36). Similarly, Sophie Nield defined immersive theatre as when the audience is in the same space as the actors (as cited in Biggin, 2017) and Felix Barrett, founder of the immersive theatre company Punchdrunk,

described immersive theatre as when the audience is at the center of the action so much so that they forget they are a part of the audience at a theatrical experience (Machon, 2013). This strain of theatre puts more onus on audience members as they are asked to improvise, interact, explore, and touch. In fact, many immersive practitioners have given audience members new titles such as “audience-participants” or “guest performers” to better fit their role (Machon, 2016, p. 38). Punchdrunk’s work strives to provide individual experiences to each audience member by encouraging the audience to explore on their own, having audiences wear white, bird-like Venetian masks to provide a sense of anonymity and encourage interaction. This gives life to the show after it is over, with audience members re-joining the group they entered with and excitedly recounting their individual experiences within the immersive experience (Biggin, 2017).

### **Method**

Theatre Crawl was created by drama therapy students to provide immersive performance opportunities for fellow drama therapy students outside of any clinical or academic setting. None of the events were intended to be therapy and rather focused on enhancing the artistic wellbeing of the performer. For student participants, the events provided a space to engage in an experiential performance without the conflicting intersection of the drama therapy classroom. Although fellow Lesley students were often present, the presence of professors and the pressure of a grade was not a part of the experience, and participants were working outside of an academic environment.

All Theatre Crawl events utilized devised theatre techniques, creating original pieces of theatre within a collaborative environment aided by the language and techniques of drama therapy and presenting them to an audience. Theatre Crawl should not be considered immersive theatre as the way the audience was asked to interact with the established space was dependent



on each piece and event and cannot be guaranteed or defined singularly. However, all events did ask the audience to forgo any conventional passive role and immerse themselves in the experience, which called upon constant movement, renegotiation of space, and active participation.

### **Event Preparation**

The fourth Theatre Crawl event took place on January 25, 2020 at Lesley University Hall in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Five rooms were reserved two months prior to the day of the event, including two dance studios and three academic classrooms. Participants were recruited through emails sent to previous Theatre Crawl participants and the larger Lesley University drama therapy community as well as through a Facebook event invitation and word of mouth. A Google Doc form was included in these emails and on the Facebook event, and interested individuals were asked to fill out the form stating their name, email address, whether they would be attending the event as an actor or audience member, and their affiliation with the event (e.g. Lesley University drama therapy student, Lesley University non-drama therapy student, faculty, drama therapist/expressive therapist, actor, or community member). Twelve individuals responded to the Google Doc that they would be attending the full event, and all of them showed up on the day of the event to participate. Two additional actors who had not completed the Google Doc arrived on the day of the event. Six individuals were invited to direct and were contacted two months before the event through email and text message in order to confirm availability.

### **Participants**

At the January 2020 event, there were a total of twenty-one participants including fourteen actors, six directors, and this facilitator. As this was not formal research, demographic information was not recorded. All Theatre Crawl events were open to all interested in participating, despite levels of experience. Apart from the roles of the directors, who were required to have exposure to devised theatre and drama therapy, actors were not required to have any experience in either field. Most participants, however, had experience in either theatre or drama therapy. Especially as the majority of participants across all four events were Lesley University drama therapy students, a program which suggests experience in both fields. In fact, half of the total participants of all four events have been Lesley University drama therapy students. In addition, actors in the Boston area, practicing drama and expressive arts therapists as well as curious community members have participated. This open participation policy allowed participants to meet new people and connect with individuals they may not have encountered in any other setting. Specifically, in regard to Lesley University drama therapy students, Theatre Crawl encouraged the mingling of cohorts, facilitating connection between drama therapy students at the University. As of May 2020, Lesley is home to three On Campus cohorts and two Low Residency cohorts. Members of the Low Residency cohorts are not all local to the Boston area and attend the majority of their classes online. Theatre Crawl provided a unique space for individuals from Low Residency and On Campus cohorts to meet and collaborate.

### **Devised Recipe**

Theatre Crawl utilized a “devised recipe,” a list of guidelines and materials used to begin the devising process (C. Dennis, personal communication, 2018). Each Theatre Crawl event has consisted of a different devised recipe and the process of creating this recipe has changed from event to event with an overall goal of providing participants a balance between freedom and

restriction. Directors needed enough guidelines to be able to begin the devising process, especially in such a limited time frame, but not so many that they felt overwhelmed or limited by the requirements. This has been a fluid and constant balancing act throughout all four events. For the first two events in April 2018 and May 2019, directors and facilitator met in the months leading up to the event and engaged in various improvisational exercises, collective movement, open discussion, and projective exercises to form the devised recipe. Examples of devising requirements from these first two events include: the use of the painting *Ophelia* by Sir John Everett Millais, focus on the theme of community vs. isolation and the theme of being seen vs. not being seen, a moment where an actor is witnessed experiencing a moment alone, and the use of audience choice.

For the third event in July 2019, a different approach was used, and this facilitator selected two objects and one Shel Silverstein poem for each group, which participants received the day of the event. Some of these objects included a headlamp, a pool noodle, a lava lamp, and a hammer. Additionally, each group picked a drama therapy technique (e.g. play, doubling, witnessing, use of projective items, role reversal) randomly out of a hat on the day of the event and were asked to utilize that technique in the creation of their piece. This event was in direct connection with Lesley University's Low Residency summer program, and many first-year drama therapy students were participating in their first drama therapy associated event. Incorporating the use of specific drama therapy techniques so directly was in response to the attendance of these new drama therapy students, to provide them clarity on drama therapy terms that could be new to them. Directors and participants responded positively to this more spontaneous approach and more direct use of drama therapy techniques, so a similar method was taken into the fourth event in January 2020. For this event, directors were asked to bring the

following items to the event: 1) an object, 2) a children's book (with the title written on a slip of paper), 3) a song listened to alone (written on slips of paper), 4) a piece of text that evokes anger, and 5) a favorite drama therapy technique (written on a slip of paper). Actors were also asked to bring the piece of text and name of a song in an effort to include more actor input into the devised recipe. All devised recipes were looked at as opportunities or suggestions for beginning the devising process, and it was not required for groups to utilize every aspect of their devised recipe in the final piece. The recipe was viewed by this writer as a jumping off point, a place from which to move from and generate ideas within the collective space provided by the event. The following is a sample of a devised recipe used by one of the small groups on the day of the event, taken from contributions from directors and actors.

Book: "Harold and the Purple Crayon" by Crockett Johnson

Drama Therapy technique: Distancing

Songs listened to alone: "Pompeii" by Bastille and "Lost in the Wilderness" from *Children of Eden*

Text that evokes anger: A love note written to one of the participants during a past relationship

### **Introductions, Warm-Up, Group Selection**

On the day of the event, all participants gathered at 8:30am for a pot-luck breakfast and meet-and-greet in an effort to ease into the day and allow participants a chance to meet and share a meal together. At 9:00am, all participants formed a circle and introduced themselves. They were asked to share their names, preferred pronouns, whether or not they had attended a previous Theatre Crawl event, and if they were to classify themselves as a body of water, what body of water they would be. This question was used to spark conversation within the group and give this

facilitator a sense of each individual as well as group dynamics through the use of a projective, imaginative check-in before moving into embodiment.

Warm-up began with participants finding a comfortable space to lie down on the floor, with modifications offered for those not comfortable doing so. Participants were led through a guided visualization aimed at orienting them to the space, moving their bodies, and engaging their breath (Linklater, 2006), eventually transitioning to standing and beginning to move about the room. Participants were asked to move in various ways around the space, experimenting with speed, size, and distance between participants in order to mobilize the group and facilitate interaction (Emunah, 1994). Next, sociodramatic exercises (Sternberg & Garcia, 2009) were used as participants were asked various prompts such as “put your hand on the shoulder of someone you would like to get to know better” or “put your hand on the shoulder of someone you would like to go skydiving with,” and then encouraged to discuss why they chose the person that they chose. Spectrograms, a sociometric tool originally used by Moreno (1934) to assess where individuals fall along a continuum, were used to gauge participant’s experience and comfort level with devised theatre and drama therapy. Throughout these exercises, this facilitator focused on the patterns occurring within the group and observed that the group was often congregating in small circles in the middle of the spectrum as opposed to being separated by the distinct poles. Throughout all spectrogram prompts, participants were encouraged to discuss their place on the spectrum with the people around them, which led to lively conversation which this facilitator continued to encourage in order to facilitate group cohesion.

The final aspect of the warm-up was asking participants to embody their response to the first part of the day, creating a group sculpt collectively in the center of the space. A group sculpt asks participants to position their body amidst the group to depict a response to a specific

prompt. In this case, participants were asked to embody how they were feeling about the Theatre Crawl experience so far. The group appeared to be connected in a circle, with very few outliers, and most body positions low to the ground and connected to each other through physical touch. Many participants were lying on the ground facing each other or standing with their arms reaching towards the middle of the circle. They were asked to observe how others were positioned within the sculpt and take a collective breath before releasing their bodies from the sculpt. Participants were then given a ten-minute break during which this facilitator took observations from the warm-up and, with assistance from directors, divided participants into small groups. Four small groups were created, with six directors, and fourteen participants. Two groups had co-directors, and two groups had one director each. Actors and directors then had a brief moment to introduce themselves to their small groups and moved into choosing their devised materials.

The slips of paper indicating book titles, song names, drama therapy techniques, and text were all sorted into their own bags, and objects were placed in a pile. One individual from each small group was invited up one at a time to randomly select their materials. The objects were available for all groups to use as many or as few as needed. Additionally, art supplies (markers, crayons, paper, scissors, etc.) and lighting materials (clip lights, gels, twinkle lights, etc.) were available for use throughout the devising process. Each small group was randomly assigned a separate room to begin their devising process.

## **Rehearsal**

The process of small groups devising their pieces began around 10:30am, and groups had until 7:00pm with breaks for lunch and dinner. Directors were in charge of overseeing their

groups of actors, and this facilitator remained present to answer any questions, obtain any needed materials, or provide artistic input. Throughout all four Theatre Crawl events, this facilitator made it a priority to check in on each group periodically to ensure that everyone felt supported and to get a sense of the kinds of pieces being created. Understanding the content and intention of each piece was necessary to create a sequence for the performance, organizing the transitions between each piece, and curating an arc for the audience to witness. For instance, a piece encouraging the audience to interact with one another may be asked to close the evening in order to continue audience conversation even after the performance has ended. Two pieces dealing with very personal and direct themes may not occur back to back, but rather be separated within the sequence by another piece taking a more distanced approach to material. Having the role of the facilitator allowed these details to be considered while directors and actors focused on devising. During the May 2019 event, however, this writer took on both a facilitator role and an actor role, due to low numbers of participants and during the January 2020 event, one director became ill half-way through the day and had to leave the event. This facilitator took on that director's small group to assist actors in finishing their piece.

Before beginning the performance, actors, and directors gathered and were led through a warm-up. This facilitator observed that energy throughout the group was low, and the warm-up was aimed at building energy and encouraging spontaneity after a long day of creating. This facilitator thanked all participants and asked everyone to engage in another group sculpt, similar to what was done during the warm-up at the beginning of the day. Similar to the first, this sculpt showed physical connection between participants in one large mass of people, and many participants were reaching their hands upwards, making eye contact, or hugging each other.

**Performance**

Audience members were invited to the performance through social media invitations as well as personal invitations and word of mouth. Actors were encouraged to invite witnesses to the performance. As Lesley's University Hall, where the performance was taking place, is quite large, members were directed to the space in the building where the performance was taking place through use of signs and arrows. The show began at 7:30pm.

**First piece.** The performance started in a dimly lit room with the walls covered in paper and a large geometric shape draped in twinkle lights in the center of the room, shown in Figure 1. As the audience mingled in this space, waiting for the show to start, they were invited to draw on the paper with purple crayons provided at the door. This writer observed and interacted with audience members as they covered the paper on the wall with messages, drawings, and games of Tic Tac Toe. This author gave a quick statement welcoming audience members and letting them know that they would be moving through multiple rooms and to keep their belongings with them. Audience members were asked to sit or stand along the front wall, creating a proscenium effect as the performance began. The piece was a combination of spoken poetry and movement, featuring a playful octopus puppet and a mischievous character holding a large purple crayon. Two other actors interacted through movement while reading their own deeply personal and poetic writing. As the piece ended, the audience was led to the next room by the playful octopus.





*Figure 1.* Photo taken by Anna Rich, 2020.

**Second piece.** Audiences arrived for the second piece in a room fashioned to feel as if one had stepped into a post-apocalyptic dimension. Strings of lights hung from the ceiling, accompanied by pieces of fabric, masks, pieces of paper, and string, which is shown in Figure 2. The floor was strewn with sheets of paper and various objects ranging from a dried bouquet of roses to a lantern. Actors were already positioned in the space, some lying on the ground, others sitting in chairs or leaning against the walls. Audience members were instructed to sit or stand anywhere in the space, putting them in close proximity to the actors. The actors interacted with the audience to find a way out of this dimension and back into the “real world.” At one point during the performance, actors came up to every audience member and asked them “how are you feeling?” These responses were then incorporated into the remainder of the piece. As they left the dimension, they encouraged the audience to follow them down the hallway to the next piece.



*Figure 2.* Photo taken by Hannah Reclam, 2020.

**Third piece.** The audience entered a room where they were all asked to sit directly across from a large wall to wall mirror. A row of objects, including hats, water bottles, clothing, cards, lights, and puzzles, were placed on the floor directly in front of the mirror. Hanging from the center of the ceiling was a large circle made of twinkle lights, see Figure 3. The piece featured actors reflecting on and embodying true stories from their own lives and taking on roles such as their past, present, and future selves. These stories were interwoven through the use of props and the mirroring of each other's movements.



*Figure 3.* Photograph taken by Hannah Reclam, 2020.

**Fourth piece.** The final piece featured a cast of zany animal characters including, a chicken who couldn't lay eggs, a shy tiger, an otter who couldn't float, monkey who couldn't swing on trees, and flamingo who couldn't balance on one leg. The piece began with a video, urging audience members to donate to this peculiar zoo, projected onto the wall. One by one, the animals helped each other obtain the skills they so desperately wanted to master, and the piece ended with the audience joining these animals in dancing the Macarena.

The above descriptions only reflect the personal lens of this writer, and the experience of live theatre and the nuances of each piece cannot be adequately captured in writing. It is the hope of this author, however, that these brief descriptions give a sense of the range of pieces created during this Theatre Crawl event. After the final piece of the evening, audience members were asked to join actors in creating a final group sculpt to respond to their experience at Theatre

Crawl. Audience members were also given the option to stand next to someone within the sculpt whose embodiment they resonated with, if they did not feel comfortable participating in the full sculpt.

### **Reflection**

Before, during, and after the event, this author reflected through writing. During the event, it was not always feasible to sit down and process, so a majority of reflection occurred either before or after. As these events took place from 2018 to 2020, this author collected written reflections from personal journals as well as a private Google Doc. All written reflections were compiled and coded for themes. No participant or audience feedback can be used in the thesis, so all direct quotes come from this author's personal written reflections.

**Excitement and pride.** The enthusiasm surrounding all events was apparent throughout the reflections written by this writer such as “We made some beautiful, chilling, hilarious pieces of theatre today,” and “I think this is the first event where my excitement has outweighed my nerves.” There is a sense of pride that also comes up within this author's reflections, such as “I am proud of what I created, and proud that I did it despite all of my doubts.” Taking on such a leadership role was not something this writer had ever done before organizing the first Theatre Crawl event, and these writings reflect a bit of surprise and thrill that the event ended up happening at all.

**Difficulty recruiting actors.** A strong sense of disappointment surrounding the difficulty of recruiting actors was present as this author wrote, “...it feels like I'm having a big party and inviting anyone who wants to come, but only a few people show up.” During the second event in May 2019, eleven actors dropped out of the event. Although actors, directors, and this facilitator collaborated well together, and the event was able to be executed beautifully, the frustration

surrounding that day is evident in written reflections. This is helpful information when looking toward future events as the full-day format can be a large barrier for those who wish to participate but are not able to commit to a full day. Many interested participants were unable to take off work or had to commit to completing school work. For the May 2019 event, many Lesley University students withdrew their participation because of a need to complete final papers and other school work. Many also expressed that they were wary of jumping into such a big commitment without truly knowing what they were getting themselves into.

**Community.** This writer's personal reflections throughout all four events focused on observations of community being built among participants. This author wrote, "I witnessed community being built," "It was really nice to move and breathe with people," and "I felt a sense of community, which is something I haven't felt lately." Being a part of Theatre Crawl provided a shared goal for its participants, many of whom went into the event not knowing each other but were asked to collaborate for an entire day on a common goal. As mentioned, Theatre Crawl provided a space for Lesley University students from all cohorts to collaborate, often for the first time. Additionally, the event attracted community members and actors from outside the Lesley community. On a personal level, creating and facilitating these events immensely altered this writer's graduate school experience, becoming closer with cohort members, faculty, and feeling more grounded within the Boston theatre community.

### **Discussion**

Theatre Crawl was created during this writer's first year of drama therapy graduate study at Lesley University. A significant career change from professional actor to drama therapy student had just occurred, and there was a sense of loss of artistic identity surrounding that time.

Theatre Crawl came from a desperate need to create and perform again, while still continuing to cultivate a new career and professional network as a clinician in training. Once it was clear that this need was mirrored in other drama therapy students, the event became more specifically geared towards using devising and drama therapy techniques in concert. However, the initial impulse behind this event's conception was a rush to create, perform, and connect. Specific intentions and a mindful method have been built upon with each iteration, and this thesis does not pretend to be a complete summation of all that Theatre Crawl has been and will be.

Throughout the execution of each event and the writing of this thesis, this author has tried to organize the concept and implementation of Theatre Crawl specifically and thoroughly. This has been a difficult process due to the ephemeral and fast-paced nature of each event. Theatre Crawl's goal to provide performance opportunities for drama therapy students and the surrounding community at Lesley University, however, remains the same.

Throughout the exploration of Theatre Crawl and work on this thesis, this writer is left with several questions. These questions mainly surround how the event can continue to engage and immerse the audience and build upon the reactions and responses the audience is having during the performances. In the future, specifically for the upcoming virtual Theatre Crawl event in May 2020, this writer would like to put more of a focus on audience response and involve them in the process more intentionally. From observing the audience during the January 2020 event, most witnesses were more inclined to participate in the opening activity of writing on the walls with purple crayons, than the closing activity of participating in the group sculpt with the actors. A discussion-based aspect of processing could also have been offered since many audience members did not seem willing to jump into an embodied response and may have been more comfortable responding verbally. Litwak viewed engagement with the audience as

paramount and always included a post-show discussion, asking the audience direct and specific questions relating to the performance that they just witnessed (J. Litwak, personal communication, February 20, 2020). For future Theatre Crawl events, this author would seek to explore additional ways to involve the audience in both warming them up for what they are about to experience and then processing what they have witnessed.

A larger curiosity that surrounds this thesis is how drama therapy and drama therapists can influence the creation and performance of theatre without specific therapeutic intent. It is the hope of this writer to use the observations gathered from Theatre Crawl to continue exploring the efficacy of drama therapy within the rehearsal and performance process for both actors and audience. This writer's larger vision is to encourage theatre companies to include drama therapists on their creative teams to serve as consultants throughout the process and as a resource for actors and audience members. Creating a space for drama therapists to perform and hold the roles of therapist and artist has instilled so much curiosity in this writer. There is certainly more room in the literature for further exploration surrounding how drama therapists can influence the world of performance as both container and catalyst.

## References

- Biggin, R. (2017). *Immersive Theatre and Audience Experience*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brown, C. (2008). The importance of making art for the creative arts therapist: An artistic inquiry. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 35(3), 201–208. <https://doi-org.ezproxyles.flo.org/10.1016/j.aip.2008.04.002>
- Butler, J. D. (2017). The complex intersection of education and therapy in the drama therapy classroom. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 53, 28–35. <https://doi-org.ezproxyles.flo.org/10.1016/j.aip.2017.01.010>
- Casson, J. (2004). *Drama, psychotherapy and psychosis: Dramatherapy and psychodrama with people who hear voices*. Routledge.
- Decuir, A. A. and Vega, V. P. (2010), ‘Career longevity: A survey of experienced professional music therapists’, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 37:2, pp. 135–42.
- Emunah, R. (2009). The Integrative Five Phase Model of Drama Therapy. *Current approaches in drama therapy*, 2, 37-64.
- Feen-Calligan, H. R. (2005). Constructing professional identity in art therapy through service-learning and practica. *Art Therapy*, 22(3), 122-131.
- Fish, B. (2012). Response Art: The Art of the Art Therapist, *Art Therapy*, 29:3, 138-143, DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2012.701594



Frydman, J. S., Segall, J. and Wood, L. L. (2018), 'Themes of career advancement among North American drama therapists: A secondary qualitative analysis', *Drama Therapy Review*, 4:2, pp. 271–86, doi: 10.1386/ dtr.4.2.271\_1

Grotowski (2002) *Towards a Poor Theatre*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hall, S. (2008). Protest movements in the 1970s: The long 1960s. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43(4), 655-672.

Heddon, D., & Milling, J. (2015). *Devising performance: a critical history*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

Iliya, Y. A. (2014), 'The purpose and importance of personal creativity for creative arts therapists: A brief literature review', *Journal of Applied Arts & Health* 5: 1, pp. 109–115, doi: 10.1386/jaah.5.1.109\_1

Johnson, D. R. (1994), 'Shame dynamics among creative arts therapists', *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 21:3, pp. 173–78.

Jones, P. (2007), *Drama as Therapy: Theory, Practice and Research*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Landy, R. J. (1996). Drama therapy and distancing: Reflections on theory and clinical application. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 23(5), 367-373. doi:10.1016/s0197-4556(96)00052-4

Landy, R. J. (2006). The future of drama therapy. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 33(2), 135-142.

- Lilley, H. (2012). 'everyone in the room has a Connection to the story': Fairytale adaptations in devised theatre. *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, 5(2), 149-166.
- Linklater, K. (2006). *Freeing the natural voice: imagery and art in the practice of voice and language* (Rev. and expanded [ed.]). Drama Pub
- Litwak, J. (2019). Audience Engagement in Theatre for Social Change. *Engaged Scholar Journal: Community-Engaged Research, Teaching, and Learning*, 5(2), 275-295.
- Litwak, J. (2018). The Fear Project/LE PROJET FEAR/EL PROYECTO FEAR. *Drama Therapy Review*, (2), 249. [https://doi-org.ezproxyles.flo.org/10.1386/dtr.4.2.249pass:\[\\_\]1](https://doi-org.ezproxyles.flo.org/10.1386/dtr.4.2.249pass:[_]1)
- Machon, J. (2013). *Immersive theatres: Intimacy and immediacy in contemporary performance*. (1st ed.). New York.
- Machon, J. (2016). Watching, attending, sense-making: spectatorship in immersive theatres. *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 4(1), 34-48.
- Magnat, V. (2005). Devising utopia, or asking for the moon. *Theatre Topics*, 15(1), 73-86.
- Moreno, J. L. (1934). *Who shall survive? A new approach to the problem of human interrelations*. Washington, D.C.: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co.
- Mueller, C. (2004). Ella Baker and the origins of "participatory democracy". In *The black studies reader* (pp. 91-102). Routledge.
- North American Drama Therapy Association (2019). What is drama therapy? Retrieved from <http://www.nadta.org/what-is-drama-therapy.html>

- Oddey, A. (2013). *Devising theatre: A practical and theoretical handbook*. Routledge.
- Osipovich, D. (2006). What is a theatrical performance? *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64 (4), 461- 470.
- Parsons, R. (2009). *Between the Director and the Spectator: Decision-Making and Devising Theatre*.
- Pendzik, S., Emunah, R., & Johnson, D. R. (2016). *The self in performance: autobiographical, self-revelatory, and autoethnographic forms of therapeutic theatre*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reclam, H. (2020).
- Schirle, J. (2005). Potholes in the Road to Devising. *Theatre Topics*, 15(1), 91-102.
- Sternberg & Garcia (2009). Sociodrama In Johnson, D.R, & Emunah, R. (Eds.), *Current approaches in drama therapy*.(80-116). Springfield, Il: Charles C. Thomas (ebruary)
- Syssoyeva, K. M. (2013). *A history of collective creation*. Springer.

***THESIS APPROVAL FORM***

**Lesley University  
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences  
Expressive Therapies Division  
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Drama Therapy, MA**

**Student's Name: Anna Rich**

**Type of Project: Thesis**

**Title: Theatre Crawl: A Series of Community Engagement Projects**

**Date of Graduation: May 16, 2020**

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

**Thesis Advisor: Laura L. Wood, Ph.D**

**Electronic Signature 5.1.2020 3:24pm EST \_\_\_\_\_**