

December, 2017

Self-Evaluation Essay / Academic Specialist Renewal Evaluation

"It is from community that the arts developed, and it is serving communities that the arts will thrive... communities do not exist to serve the arts, the arts exist to serve communities."

- Doug Borwick, BUILDING COMMUNITIES, NOT AUDIENCES, 2012

As I have reflected upon my past two years in my new academic year contract in the Department of Theatre at MSU, the above quote by Doug Borwick continues to resonate and speak to my interest and focus on the arts and community. Whether it be a community of colleagues, students, groups or individuals in the greater Lansing area, or the theatre and arts and cultural community globally, it is with community in mind that I continue to use my skills to educate promoting the exchange of ideas, research and creative production.

Prior to the start of my new contract, I knew that academic years 2016 2017 and 2017 2018 would be challenging for me. I had developed new content for courses that I would be teaching for the first time, I had planned to partner with community groups in various ways, I would work on grant applications that would further my research, and I would begin the journey of creating work specifically for students with ASD and other diagnoses. This was all in the plan, and I was well prepared for the challenges.

Within this time, I also created additional opportunities to propel my work forward. I traveled to NYC to meet with the creative team of Trusty Sidekick Theatre Company/Lincoln Center Education, and on an ACM trip to London, I used the opportunity to set up a meeting with the Artistic Director of Oily Cart Theatre to inform my research and creative activity. Additionally, through contacts of an ACM graduate student from Puerto Rico, I was able to work with artists from [REDACTED] in Puerto Rico in the summer of 2017 to further my study of puppet design and utilization. I also directed *GIANTS Have Us In Their Books and Other Works by Jose Rivera* for the Department—an opportunity that allowed me to work with a new community of students and further develop an aesthetic and form that I explored in my work with the community of artists in Puerto Rico. This combination of planned activity, and my decisions to seize moments of opportunity made for a very full plate. I will reflect on the many different, yet connected, components of my work throughout this essay.

That stated, is difficult for me to separate my curriculum design, teaching, advising, outreach, research and service into distinct sections, because they all overlap and inform each other. I believe that my ability to synthesize all of these areas is one of my strengths.

Teaching

In the spring of 2016 I taught ACM 271: Intro to Arts and Cultural Management (a class that I had developed and had been teaching under my old contract) and ACM 464: Education and Outreach for Arts and Cultural Management. It was important for me to allow the students in

ACM 464 a Teaching Artist opportunity. I was fortunate to partner with the Greater Lansing Arts Council and Post Oak Elementary School in the Lansing School District to provide a five session residency program. The ACM 464 students created lesson plans that integrated performing and visual arts into the second grade Ojibwe Indian unit of study. Post Oak Elementary had lost its arts funding and classes, and were therefore eager to partner with MSU in this manner. The students learned about creating lesson plans, partnering with public school teachers, and integrating arts content.

In the fall of 2016, I taught ACM 462: Promotions for Arts and Cultural Management. I had taught this course once before, and had created a project where the students were assigned an arts or cultural organization to re brand. In the fall of 2016 I was contacted by [REDACTED], with the Greater Lansing Potters' Guild, who had heard about the course from a colleague. [REDACTED] asked if I would be willing to have my students re brand the Guild. This was an excellent opportunity to engage with community and allow my students a hands on, real world application of their skills. I feel that the project was very successful and that the students gained tremendous insight not only about branding, but also working with a client and all of the challenges that that entails. Although I have worked on marketing initiatives, I haven't worked as a marketing director in the past, and feel that I don't have as much expertise in this area as in some of my other courses. I feel that the Promotions course is well developed, however, I don't always feel that it is my strongest area due to my lack of expertise. For this reason, I have augmented with guests currently working in the industry such as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], [REDACTED] at Wharton Center, and colleagues that I worked with in NYC, such as [REDACTED], who is the Marketing Director at Lincoln Center Theater, and [REDACTED], who was the Marketing Director for the Center for Arts Education.

In the fall of 2016 I also taught ACM 801: Graduate Introduction to Arts and Cultural Management. This was a new course for me, and I spent a lot of time developing content and connecting with community organizations through student interviews, skype sessions, and organizing and attending a non profit symposium with the ACM graduate students.

In the spring of 2017 I taught a brand new course for the ACM program, ACM 467: Development and Fundraising for Arts and Cultural Management. Having worked in a high pressure development office in NYC for three years, where my team was responsible for raising over \$12 million annually, I realized that I had a lot of stories and knowledge based on my experience working in the field. I feel a lot of my teaching/lecturing draws on practical experience from working for arts and cultural organizations throughout my life. This provides students with a bridge between theory and practice, and I believe makes the content more relevant. I also engaged with community members [REDACTED] with MCACA and [REDACTED] with Williamston Theatre to speak to the class about funding.

It was also in the spring of 2017, *FARM! A Musical Experience* was born. I can say very proudly that I believe *FARM!* to be some of my best work. *FARM!* was developed in THR 422: Children's Theatre. I had initially talked to [REDACTED] about having the class rehearse and schedule a children's theatre tour, however, after my meetings with Trusty Sidekick and Oily Cart Theatre

professionals, it became clear to me that the class should be used to develop a production specifically for students with ASD and other diagnoses. It was the perfect vehicle to test a new theatrical model and experiment and create in a classroom environment. Seventeen students and myself wrote a piece of musical theatre through devised methods, that was performed at the end of the semester to six special needs students (and their families) that we had previously worked with in our 4th Wall Theatre Partnership. I will speak more about *FARM!* under research and outreach.

In the fall of 2017 I taught ACM 462 and ACM 801. I also directed *GIANTS Have Us In Their Books and Other Works* by Jose Rivera (Freshman Showcase) for the Department. I will speak more on GIANTS later in this essay, however, I mention it under teaching because Freshman Showcase entails much teaching! I worked with over forty students and was able to foster relationships that connect them to the department and to the art form. There is much teaching as far as work ethic, time management, acting, and ensemble.

Research and Outreach

In the spring of 2016, Theatre Graduate student [REDACTED], and Theatre undergraduate student [REDACTED], who I had obtained a CAL URI for, accompanied me on a trip to NYC to meet with the [REDACTED], Artistic Director for the Trusty Sidekick Theatre who was commissioned by Lincoln Center Education in 2014 to produce a show specifically for an audience of students with ASD. This was the first commission for this type of work in the US. Through our work with the 4th Wall Theatre Company, we had already been conducting workshops for this population.

In May 2016, while in London for the ACM program, I met with [REDACTED], Artistic Director of Oily Cart Theatre in London, England, who has been creating and producing this type of work for over 30 years. Oily Cart, Lincoln Center Education, and Trusty Sidekick Theater Company have been leading this impressive work world wide.

I received additional CAL URI funding for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (who was instrumental in the success of our collaboration with the 4th Wall Theatre Company, providing workshops for students with ASD) to return to NYC in the spring of 2017 to further our research.

Furthermore, in the spring of 2017 I taught THR 422: Children's Theatre, where I began devising *FARM! A Musical Experience* with a team of MSU Department of Theatre, and Department of Education students. The format for *FARM! A Musical Experience* was based on the pioneering multi sensory, participatory model developed by both Oily Cart Theatre of London, and Lincoln Center Education/Trusty Sidekick Theatre Company, that utilizes techniques such as breaking the fourth wall, individual performer/audience member interaction, live music, pre performance workshops, and guided passage through the storyline with use of social stories and timeline markers.

FARM! A Musical Experience also integrated puppets into the production. Puppet builders [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] designed and built puppets specifically for this production, and trained MSU students in the artistry of puppetry. Sensory training was also conducted with a partnership with the MSU Department of Psychology, and workshops were conducted with ASD students in the greater Lansing community. The production was performed for students with ASD and their families on April 21, 2017. The next phase of this project includes touring the production to local special education classrooms, and producing the show for families in the greater Lansing area in 2017-2018. The tour to local elementary schools for spring 2018 is already completely booked.

FARM! truly exemplifies the synthesis of my experience, research and talents. The creation of *FARM!* allowed me to work as an educator, researcher, playwright, lyricist, director, and arts integration and community engagement specialist. The creative work is definitely what drives and fulfills me, and I am delighted that all areas of my professional life were able to be manifested in this production, in which MSU students took center stage with the creation and performance. I look forward to continuing this work and the development of this theatrical model for future productions, and again, engaging with community in this forum.

Service

In the past two years I have participated in work for MAEIA (Michigan Arts Education Instruction and Assessment), been a member of the Greater Lansing Arts Council Creative Committee, and conducted professional development training sessions for teachers involved in the Wharton Center Education programs. I have served on the season selection committee for the Department of Theatre, search committees for an Academic Advisor and ACM Program Director, served as Head of Theatre Studies while [REDACTED] was out on sabbatical, served on the Citizen Scholars Advisory Board for CAL, and been a judge at the META recruitment event. I also consider directing Freshman Showcase as service to the department, as this is not in my contract. I volunteered to direct when we were short on directors due to colleagues being out on sabbatical or other leave.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

I feel that I can handle a lot, however, I will admit that there were times this past fall where I definitely felt my limitations specifically, with Freshman Showcase. The show had many moving parts, with many students participating, and it often felt like a Herculean task to pull off on my own. That said, I am pleased with the result and felt that I raised the bar as far as expectation for the students, and they, in turn, rose to my level of expectation. I don't feel I would agree to direct again unless I had a design team too much design falls to the director with this current model.

In the spring of 2018 I will teach a new course I have created, AL 210 Theatre and Social Justice. This course is for the Citizen Scholar's program, and will have a community engagement

component. I will continue my work with puppetry and the use of puppetry to create democratic dialogue. I will also teach ACM 464 and hope to once again partner with the Greater Lansing Arts Council and Post Oak Elementary School. In late April 2018, I will attend the Big Umbrella Festival in NYC. This is a festival for artists involved in creating work for students with ASD. I have received a CAL URI grant to take [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] with me, and present some of our work to professionals in the field. I feel this is an incredible opportunity for students to engage with a professional community of artists and share their pioneering work.

In US18, [REDACTED] and I will lead a NYC Study Away for CAL. I look forward to working with MSU students and introducing them to a city that I lived and worked in for many years. I also hope to travel to Puerto Rico in the near future, and continue my work with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (political theatre and puppetry) and bring back knowledge to share with my AL 210 class.

While my emphasis will shift to ACM Program Director duties for academic year 2018 2019, I will still continue my research and focus on publication, and a partnership with Dr. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in the Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology, to develop research protocol for the impact of theatrical work on students with ASD and other diagnoses, and the students who work with them.

I feel extremely fortunate to have a career in the theatre department, and to have support of my endeavors by my department chair and colleagues. I feel that through my varied work, I am able to connect with the community of theatre and arts and cultural management students and community professionals and serve them in remarkable ways. Thank you for the opportunity!