

## Theatre for Liberating Social Work Education

[ALEXIS JEMAL](#)

HUNTER COLLEGE, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

[TABATHA R. LOPEZ](#)

[JENNY HIPSCHER](#)

[BRENNAN O'ROURKE](#)

CUNY SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

### ABSTRACT

*Four graduate students ("company") explored the use of applied theatre to facilitate liberation-based social work education. This paper is an anecdotal, critical reflection on the authors' work and experience providing a forum for social work students to explore social and racial justice and innovative strategies for using drama to stimulate dialogue, interaction and change at this time. Within the devising process, the company, occupying multiple intersecting identities, reflected on our lived experiences of inconsistencies between the intended purposes of social work practice and the actual process and effects of the services provided; all of which connect to social work education. The central questions that the company and participants (i.e., social work students)*

*explored through the Theatre in Education (TIE) project were: What is Freirian praxis (i.e., critical reflection and critical action) in clinical social work and what are its implications for social workers and their clients? These questions investigated how siloed processes can lead to oppressive practices and outcomes. By integrating applied theatre with social work's Transformative Potential Development Model, a philosophical and practice-based framework, the company invited participants to engage in praxis on multiple levels. The intrapersonal level requires self-awareness and assessment, entailing reflection on individual identities and lived experiences. The interpersonal/relational level requires an intersectional approach, cultural competency, empathy, and humility. The macro/systemic level requires analysis of how dynamics of power (such as racism and transphobia) transpire; and, an understanding that individuals' behaviors do not exist in a vacuum of personal responsibility, but are informed by systemic and structural oppressions (i.e. macro processes have micro consequences). The bridging of reflection and action at these multiple levels of analysis comprises a liberatory pedagogy, a more holistic approach to social work education and practice in the field.*

The term, "artist," is used to identify those who locate themselves at the intersection of artist and activist as they use their craft for social and racial justice (Sandoval, 2008, p. 82). Many times, artistic activists will find themselves in non-creative community organizing spaces or in artistic spaces that are not socially conscious. One educational program that may produce artists is the Master of Arts in Applied Theatre (MAAT) program at CUNY School of Professional Studies (SPS). The program is grounded in Liberatory Educational Theorist Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The program leads by example as it follows the problem-posing educational model it teaches. Thus, students are being taught how to be liberatory educators while engaging in a liberatory education process. A major component of Freire's education for liberation is *praxis*. Freire defines praxis as: "the action and reflection of [humans/people] upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2000, p. 51). This paper will provide an overview and reflection of a student company's project that questioned and explored the following with social work students through Theatre in

Education<sup>1</sup> (TIE): “What is praxis in clinical social work? And what are the implications of it for social workers and their clients?”

In June 2020, an original student-developed and led TIE program, *The File*, was implemented in a field simulation class for Master’s level social work students. Social work is a field that has much overlap with applied theatre. One major commonality is that both fields of study may work with marginalized populations and engage with social justice theory and practice. One claim to fame for the field of social work is that it is the only profession that has a professional and ethical mandate to oppose oppression. Yet, similar to all professional fields, it is not free from racial bias and problematic action that perpetuates white supremacy. For example, on a listserv of professional social workers, in response to an inquiry about how the field of social work could support the Black Lives Matter Movement, some social workers responded, “All Lives Matter.” This response demonstrated an extreme lack of awareness regarding how the lives of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) have been historically devalued in the US and how the continuation of that devaluation has led to the many deaths of Black people at the hands of law enforcement. As such, it is important that social workers and other helping professionals provide services that are accessible, inclusive and culturally responsive.

One of the field’s barriers to socially-just practice is that clinical social work interventions often focus on individual-level factors and behavioral change without understanding or addressing the ways in which macro structures of oppression affect and inform clients’ behaviors (Windsor, Alessi, Jemal, 2015). This limited scope of focus and intervention may perpetuate oppression through the false narratives of choice. The train of thinking is, “if they just made a better choice, then...” However, a critical interrogation of this thinking that examines systemic-level causal factors that limit individual-level choices will reveal that the choices one has are not usually without systemic limitations. For example, when a Black person is confronted by white armed individuals (whether police or vigilantes) should they

---

<sup>1</sup> The term TIE generally refers to the use of theatre for explicit educational purposes, closely allied to the school curriculum and mostly taking place in educational contexts--schools, colleges, youth clubs, sometimes in museums and at historic sites. It tends to be a highly portable form of theatre, using minimal sets and lighting (if any), but practiced by specialist professional companies who aim to bring high-quality performance work into the classroom, school hall, or other venue. Above all, it will usually involve some element of interaction with the audience. (Jackson, 2008, p. 133)

stand their ground like Trayvon Martin or should they run like Ahmaud Arbery or should they cooperate like George Floyd? When a person's choices leave no other options but to be harmed, then we have a clear measure of the civility of a society.

Another potential oppression perpetuation trap is the "white savior" complex. One of the ethical principles listed in the Social Work's code of ethics is that "Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person" (NASW, 2017). This entails that social workers support clients' social determination; that is, the clients' will, capacity and opportunity to meet their needs in a way that does not harm themselves, others or society. The issue with executing this principle is that social workers may use white, Eurocentric perspectives to interpret clients' behaviors and decisions; thereby, unintentionally perpetuating white supremacy. The "white savior" complex is grounded in white supremacy, as it stems from the belief that marginalized and disempowered cultures must be saved by their white superior counterparts from their ways of thinking, believing and doing in order to be better humans and have better lives. For this reason, the skill to think critically about one's own thinking and act critically against oppressive forces is a crucial skill to implement in social work practice, which must be taught with social work education.

Developing awareness of systemic inequalities and dynamics that abound in professional fields of practice, especially those like social work and applied theatre, is important because of the potential to (re)traumatize and harm marginalized and disadvantaged populations. A practitioner that lacks awareness of oppression and privilege, of their social location and its impact on the work, is a dangerous practitioner. This is how a field mandated to do anti-oppression work perpetuates oppressive practices in education and practice (Jemal, 2017b). For this reason, fields that have direct impact on human lives have a responsibility to participate in continuous social and racial justice education, so practice can be culturally competent, congruent, and considerate of the ways in which practice can support liberation or commit further harms.

Social work education and, by extension, practice can either uphold the status quo, reinforcing and perpetuating systemic inequalities, or employ critical/radical approaches to address these macro-level forces and their effects on clients' lives. Paulo Freire (2000, p. 34) noted,

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which people deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

Likewise, social work education can either function as a means to integrate social work students into conformity with systems and institutions that perpetuate white supremacy or create social workers who will work to dismantle systems of inequity. To accomplish these dismantling objectives, scholars have contributed to the integration of Applied Theatre and social work education. Applied theatre practitioners used the work of Augusto Boal with social work students to analyze and effect change in situations in which social work practitioners encounter daily contradictions (e.g., how to protect children and support families?) (Spratt, Houston, & Mahill, 2000). Also, a verbatim theatre project created performances developed from interviews of parents of sexually abused children which provided social workers the opportunity to try interventions, reflect and modify (Leonard, Gupta, Fisher & Low, 2016).

Similarly, the TIE program, *The File*, was created and facilitated by a group of four students from the MAAT program at CUNY SPS to explore how applied theatre could use innovative strategies to stimulate dialogue, interaction, and change within social work education. *The File* was conducted in a field simulation class for Master of Social Work students at an urban school of social work in the northeast. *The File* explores issues of social and racial justice through its use of liberatory pedagogy and exploration of anti-racist practices in three ways:

1. Bridging the micro-macro divide
2. Using an intersectional approach
3. Incorporating the Transformative Potential Development Model (TPDM)

## BRIDGING THE MICRO-MACRO DIVIDE

*The File* incorporated the Liberation Health Model for participants to examine the individual (micro) and the systemic (macro) causal factors as a means to reflect with participants on their positionality and agency as future clinical social work practitioners. The Liberation Health Model is a tool that raises awareness of the connections between the micro and macro domains by helping participants to think on multi-levels (personal, institutional and cultural). This analysis leads to an integrated understanding of factors that contribute to the identified problem (Kant, 2015). This is important because macro processes have micro consequences which then shape communities and policies. For example, the parent-child relationship in the home usually reflects the oppressive social structure and cultural conditions (Freire, 2000).

Additionally, *The File* used an original convention called 'Role-in-a-File'<sup>2</sup> to explore factors at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, micro, mezzo, and macro levels. The file contained various documents that explored different angles of the issue. The student company placed the participants in-role as social worker professors on a committee and tasked them with deciding what to do about a student whose academic standing was in jeopardy. Through the performance of a scripted scene followed by the drama convention of Role-in-a-File, participants learned the main MSW student character ("Grey") had taken actions with a client in their field placement that perpetuated oppression and were problematic (i.e., Grey did not follow agency policy and called child protective services on their client's mother). Furthermore, the character, Grey Marling, had not been well-supported by their academic institution or field supervisor. As the drama unfolded, the participants gradually moved from an initial overt criticism of Grey and approval of the professor's actions in the scene toward a more holistic view, recognizing the systemic pedagogical issues to be addressed and the challenges of addressing them. In the next part of the session, the company-facilitators explicitly challenged participants to develop multi-level protocols, or action steps, to address these issues. These

---

<sup>2</sup> An adaptation of 'Role-in-a-Room,' which is a convention that invites participants to reflect on objects found in a fictional character's room to surmise what those objects might reveal about that person and interrogate initial assumptions (C. Vine, personal communication, September 28, 2019). In our adapted 'Role-in-a-file', participants explored the contents of Grey Marling's student file. Through questions and discussion, they investigated the details of what happened in the scenario, learning more about the character and their socio-political context.

protocols allowed participants to explore the relationship between the individual (micro) and the systemic (macro) in the field of clinical social work. The convention worked as a means to reflect with participants on their positionality and agency as future clinical social work practitioners. This multi-level understanding is necessary for holistic problem solving.

## **INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH**

One approach that is holistic at its core is intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). Dehumanizing forces break people into single identities or, at the opposite extreme, stereotype an individual based on group membership. A person is not seen or valued for their authentic self. Then the world interacts with the person based on this single, stereotyped identity as ex-offender, student, employee, on public assistance, female, black, trans; and not as a whole person who occupies a variety of oppressed and/or privileged identities. Every person and, by extension every group, is intersectional and to deny that complexity is to dehumanize. Because all oppressions are connected and rooted in systemic experiences of access to and deprivation of power to meet one's human needs, dehumanization attacks a person's wellness as a human being simply for being human. As such, the dehumanization process strips every person of identity, imagination and initiative (Menakem, 2017).

To support the devising process, the company acknowledged their intersecting identities, such as being a person of color and/or a sexual minority or from other marginalized identities. We also used our lived experiences with social work or holistic wellness to inform the devising process. For example, member(s) of the company are in the field of social work or have a background in holistic healthcare/massage therapy, or have experience working with social workers as clients or colleagues, or have had a more familiar relationship with a social worker as a close family friend.

*The File* incorporated an intersectional approach through the development and use of complex and multi-dimensional characters. One of the main characters in the scene, "Grey," is white and transgender and has a non-apparent disability. This character is a graduate social work student in a field placement at an agency that

serves trans youth. Grey is working with a young transgender, non-binary client who is a black LatinX high school student. One way to explore social and racial justice issues is to have multi-dimensional characters that occupy various and intersecting, marginalized social identities and explore relational aspects within historical and socio-political contexts. The scene also allows the exploration of issues, actions and reactions to occur that are integrally related to the identities and social location of the characters. Thus, the scene provided familiar occurrences in a social work context: For example, Grey may have misinterpreted the client's mom's communication through a white lens; Grey was abruptly asked to leave the client's home; Grey felt the need to call the Administration for Children's Services (ACS); Grey's field placement was in jeopardy of being terminated; Grey had another altercation in their MSW clinical class with a LatinX woman of color student; Grey may be at risk of not graduating. Through reflection questions and problematizing as facilitators and participants in-role, we unpacked these dehumanizing interactions to reveal the hidden dynamics, often overlooked because of (un)conscious bias and the automatic response to impose punishment. Participants (i.e., social work students) engaged in dialogue to determine how to prevent oppressive social work practice and ways to respond that allow practitioners to be held accountable in a restorative and redemptive, rather than, a punishing manner (e.g., cancel culture). The invitation that our program offered to engage in praxis with this content tested the participants' ability to respond to these occurrences in a holistic manner that did not isolate or disconnect these events from their larger sociopolitical and cultural contexts. What *The File* hopefully demonstrates is that when we interact with slices of identity rather than the wholeness of our humanity, we cut ourselves off from genuine connection, support, and sense of belonging—necessary components for racial justice.

Educational theorist Paulo Freire asserts that, "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (2000, p. 72). As such, a participant centered educational and artistic focus directs TIE facilitators to consider a wide range of factors that impact clients', students', participants' (including the facilitators) own identities and agendas, and to trust and acknowledge the lived experience of folks

from marginalized and oppressed communities. Participant centeredness also allows practitioners to generate relevant material specific to the target population and to avoid overgeneralization and stereotyping. In this way, relationship-building becomes integral to the foundation of knowledge-building for liberating education.

Cultural invasion, as defined by Freire, is a “phenomenon [in which] the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter’s potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression” (Freire, 2000, pp. 152-154). It is also part of the legacies of colonization and slavery: institutions that dehumanized millions and attempted to strip those oppressed people of their imaginations (Carruthers, 2018, pp. 25-26; Menakem, 2017, pp. xiv-xv, xviii). Many applied theatre conventions allow participants to reverse/erase/undo narratives pre-imposed upon those who are most in need of radical social justice orientation, education and practice. For example, participants were encouraged to use their developed protocol from an earlier section of the TIE program to interact with Grey. In their roles as professors, the participants were given the opportunity to practice thinking critically about issues, themes, and obstacles that often plague marginalized communities and center the lived experience of those most impacted. This empowered stance can help social service providers and educators circumvent Freire’s concept of “cultural invasion” in “be[ing] clear that an agenda of change from the outside is more often an imposition than an act of liberation” (Thompson, 2012, p. 17). By acknowledging and working personal identities into praxis, facilitators and participants can critically examine their relationship to the work and to each other, with greater awareness of how their identities shape perspectives and influence their practice.

## **INCORPORATING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

*The File’s* content was greatly informed by the Transformative Potential Development Model (TPDM) that consists of five prongs:

1. Relationship-building
2. Consciousness

3. Accountability/Responsibility
4. Efficacy/Capacity
5. Action (Bussey, Jemal, & Caliste, 2020)

Transformative consciousness has three levels to consider: denial, blame, and critical consciousness. Transformative action also consists of three levels: destructive, avoidant and critical action (Jemal, 2017a; Jemal & Bussey, 2020). The content of the piece aimed to portray a student and social work professor at the non-critical consciousness (denial and blame) and non-critical action (destructive and avoidant) levels. By interrogating the actions and interactions of these models in conjunction with the use and application of the liberation health framework, participants were challenged to identify ways to facilitate the student and social work professor's ascendance to critical transformative consciousness and action. The combination of critical consciousness and critical action creates critical transformative potential (Bussey et al., 2018). One way for participants to develop their transformative potential, the goal of the project, is to approach the issues presented from a critical consciousness perspective and respond with critical action. However, scholars have noted that a gap exists between critical consciousness and critical action in that people who may have a critical awareness (i.e., a structural understanding and analysis of individual-level issues) may not always act in a critical way (i.e., work to address oppression) (Bussey, Jemal, & Caliste, 2020). To bridge that divide, TPDM offers two prongs:

1. Accountability/Responsibility, which helps people to see a role for themselves in perpetuating the problem and/or enacting solutions.
2. Efficacy/Capacity, which provides opportunities to improve skills, reinforce strengths of know-how, and build capacity. (Bussey, Jemal, & Caliste, 2020)

Bussey et al. discusses the use of applied theatre to work on each prong.

Sections of *The File* developed each prong of TPDM to accomplish the project goal: To explore with participants the relationship between the individual (micro) and the systemic (macro) in the field of clinical social work as a means to reflect with participants

on their positionality and agency as clinical social work educators. The scene and the post-scene questions facilitated consciousness-raising. The critical questioning about the scene begins to excavate assumptions and ways of thinking at denial or blame levels. The review of the virtual file facilitated accountability/responsibility. Participants interrogated the file for a fuller socio-cultural context that compelled the identified problem to occur. The Liberation Health framework challenged participants to work on accountability/responsibility and efficacy/capacity and to excavate multi-level (personal, institutional and cultural) factors while simultaneously learning and practicing the skill of multi-level assessment. The developed protocol intervened on the action level by having participants think about ways to address this situation and similar situations in the future. The last part included an escalation in events that gave participants the opportunity to put their protocols into action by stepping into role and using forum<sup>3</sup>-type theatre conventions.

*The File* convention asked participants to critically reflect on how the structural and systemic issues of white supremacy and power are perpetuated in the field of social work and academia; how these power structures affect their own social work education and practice; and, how their implicit biases, social identities, trauma, and unexamined “stuff” perpetuates the very -isms they are trying to eradicate. The facilitators, in role, interacted with the participants in their Zoom breakout rooms to discuss what actions to take with Grey. Participants reflected on and shared their experiences as social work students when they felt unsupported by the institution. It seemed that the participants, who occupied various social identities and positionality on a spectrum of privilege and oppression, identified with the student in the story. However, even though participants did not agree with Grey's behavior, the participants empathized with Grey, and also thought Grey should be held accountable in some way. A potential result of this reflective engagement was the realization that accountability is needed at multiple levels of the institution and that levels of accountability were missing. This led to an exploration or inquiry into what “multi-level accountability” meant or might look like in terms of action. Participants

---

<sup>3</sup> Forum theatre is a type of theatre created by Augusto Boal that engages spectators in the performance as actors, creating “spect-actors,” influencing alternative outcomes (Boal, 1974). Spect-actors step in for the company's actors, which Boal identified as rehearsing for the revolution.

were given the opportunity to practice potential action steps in the forum-type component of the TIE project

Lastly, the social work student-participants reflected on the action they took and assessed how it worked, allowing the students to accomplish the project's objectives: 1) to question the meaning and application of liberation-based social work practice; 2) to share at least one concrete way to make their interactions more radical (i.e., rooted in a socio-political context); and, 3) to explore the value of liberation-based social work practice within a macro-social cultural context for themselves and their future clients. The TIE structure and content of *The File* combined Freirian praxis, the Liberation Health Model, and the Transformative Potential Development Model, while supporting participants to engage with the practical implications of the discovered possibilities via an embodied experience.

## CONCLUSION

This paper explored the potential ways that engagement in the TIE project created space to observe, articulate and implement praxis as understood by the social work students. When engaged in this work, what becomes immediately apparent, however, is that not only are we (the applied theatre practitioners) facilitating the transformative potential development for participants, but we are also participating in our own transformative potential development. As activists who use applied theatre to promote social and racial justice, we created *The File* using a three-tiered approach. First, we recognize that we have biases and knowledge gaps to which we need to attend. Developing *The File* required us to draw from our lived experience to serve the social work students with whom we would be working. Thus, self-reflection, awareness and critique on how we move through the world are necessary components of work in social and racial justice. The second tier is understanding our role as educators and the need to be aware of how we affect individuals who are also situated in larger sociopolitical contexts. Lastly, we are educators whose educational practices influence participants, who, like social workers, will practice in the field and will need to reflect on their own practice decisions. Thus, the beneficiaries of this work are social work students or, more broadly, practitioners (i.e., people who work with people) and the clients of these practitioners.

Our student company identified gaps in the educational approaches and training processes of social work students from a radical pedagogical perspective. The team infused social work education with applied theatre during a field simulation class with MSW students by devising a TIE piece that incorporated praxis and liberation frameworks. This integration allowed participants various opportunities to reflect on racial and social justice themes and issues using a multi-level analysis. The TIE program used an interdisciplinary approach to expand opportunities for participants to explore potential action through an intersectional lens. Future research will be necessary to determine whether liberation-based social work education creates social workers with liberation-based methodologies and praxis.

### **SUGGESTED CITATION**

Jemal, A., Lopez, T. R., Hipscher, J., & O'Rourke, B. (2020). Theatre for liberating social work education. *ArtsPraxis*, 7 (2b), 116-131.

### **REFERENCES**

- Boal, A. (1974). *Theatre of the oppressed*. Theatre Communications Group.
- Bussey, S., Jemal, A., & Caliste, S. (2020). *Transforming social work's potential in the field: A radical framework*. Social Work Education, in press.
- Carruthers, C. A. (2018). *Unapologetic: A black, queer, and feminist mandate for radical movements*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989 (1), 139–167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43 (6), 1241.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (30th anniversary ed). New York: Continuum (original work published 1970).
- Jemal A. (2017a). *Critical consciousness: A critique and critical*

- analysis of the literature, Urban Review*, 49 (4), 602–626. doi: 10.1007/s11256-017-0411-3
- Jemal A. (2017b). The opposition. *Journal of Progressive Human Services: Radical Thought and Practice (JPHS)*, 28 (3), 134–139. doi: 10.1080/10428232.2017.1343640.
- Jemal, A. (2018). Transformative consciousness of health inequities: Oppression is a virus and critical consciousness is the antidote. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 3 (4), 202–215. doi: 10.1007/s41134-018-0061-8
- Jemal, A., & Bussey, S. (2018). [Transformative action: A theoretical framework for breaking new ground](#). *EJournal of Public Affairs*.
- Kant, J. D. (2015). Towards a socially just social work practice: The liberation health model. *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 3 (2), 309-19.
- Leonard, K., Gupta, A., Fisher, A. S., & Low, K. (2016). From the mouths of mothers: Can drama facilitate reflective learning for social workers? *Social Work Education*, 35 (4), 430-443.
- Menakem, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies* [Kindle]. Retrieved July 12, 2020.
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (approved 1996, revised 2017). [Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers](#). Retrieved March 1, 2018.
- Thompson, J. (2012). *Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and beyond*. Oxford: Peter Lang (original work published 2003).
- Sandoval, C., & Latorre, G. (2008). Chicana/o activism: Judy Baca's digital work with youth of color. In A. Everett (Ed.), *Learning race and ethnicity: Youth and digital media*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 81–108. doi: 10.1162/dmal.9780262550673.081
- Spratt, T., Houston, S., & Mahill, T. (2000). Imaging the future: Theatre and change within the child protection system. *Child and Family Social Work*, 5, pp. 117 - 127
- Windsor, L., Jemal, A., & Alessi, E. (2015). Cognitive behavioral therapy and substance using minorities: A meta-analysis. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 21 (2), 300-13.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Alexis Jemal, LCSW, LCADC, JD, PhD, assistant professor at Silberman School of Social Work-Hunter College, is a scholar, writer, activist, educator, social entrepreneur and critical social worker whose mission is to recognize and respond to oppressive policies and practices to prevent and eliminate domination, exploitation and discrimination that pose barriers to life, wellness, liberty and justice. Dr. Jemal's research integrates participatory action research methods, critical theory and the creative arts to develop and test multi-level and multi-systemic socio-health practices that incorporate restorative justice frameworks, radical healing and liberation health models to address structural, community and interpersonal violence.

Tabatha R. Lopez (she/her/hers; they/them/theirs) holds a B.A. in ethnic studies and philosophy of the arts, and is a Queer, brown, Latinx, final year M.A. in Applied Theatre student. Tabatha's mission is to collaborate on artistic educational projects that aim to bridge and mend gaps between communities and generations through culturally responsive practices, critically engaged methods, and art-forms that facilitate community-based solutions through the power of story-telling, theatre, and community centeredness and participation. Of particular interest to Tabatha are the roots of systems, and community agency through empowerment and cultivation of decolonized knowledge.

Jenny Hipscher (she/her; they/them) is a Brooklyn-based theatre artist and massage therapist, pursuing a Master's in Applied Theater at CUNY. With a BA in American Studies from Wesleyan University, she has trained with [Double Edge Theater](#), [Pig Iron Theatre Company](#), and [Bont's Independent Republic of Failure](#) in Spain. She's been a member of [Readymade Dance Theater](#) in Albuquerque and [GreenHouse Theatre Project](#) in Columbia, MO, and is currently with Agile Rascal Bicycle Theatre. Integrating theatre, education, and the healing arts, Jenny continues to deepen her understanding of trauma-informed care and the ways systemic oppression is held and healed in individual and collective bodies.

Brennan O'Rourke (they/them; ze/zir) is a white, queer, trans-femme theatre practitioner, sexuality health educator, teaching artist and poet

dedicated to queer inclusivity and anti-oppressive practices. Brennan holds a BA in Dramatizing Justice from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study, which explored theatre and its relationship to communities' histories, identities and memories in efforts to create and imagine justice. As a director and facilitator, Brennan commits themselves to stories that challenge and expand definitions of performance in ways that uplift the project of liberation. Brennan is currently pursuing an MA in Applied Theatre at CUNY School of Professional Studies.