



**Devised Theater  
& Social Change**

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Born and raised in Puerto Rico.

Attended Haverford College and Yale Drama.

Past 7 years: Theater Teacher at PVPA Charter Public School (South Hadley, MA).

This fall: Dramatic Arts Teacher at High School of Commerce (Springfield, MA).

This summer: Western Massachusetts Writing Project (at UMass Amherst)



# Context

1. Responding to moment of social / racial unrest
2. Attempting to avoid canonical plays
3. Looking for plays to teach in HS that are:
  - a. Age and school appropriate
  - b. Of interest to students
  - c. Feature large, ensemble casts
  - d. Represent diverse social identities
  - e. Reflect the experience of students
  - f. Confront social justice issues



# HS of Commerce

School demographics:

- 70.8% Hispanic
- 19.3% Black
- 6.8% White
- Economically disadvantaged: 79.7%

Launching a drama program this fall.

Students expressed interest in doing theater of protest.



# THEATER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Are you passionate about social justice? Looking for a platform through which to make social change? Theater is a powerful tool through which artists can share their experiences and inspire a dialogue with an audience, often provoking spectators to reconsider their own perspectives and long-held beliefs. In this class, we will together create a theatrical performance from scratch — we will explore topics in social justice, select one that the ensemble is fired up about, develop characters and stories around that topic, craft a script through improv and writing exercises, and finally, stage, rehearse, and perform our own original production. This course will take you through the whole theatrical process from start to finish — from brainstorming ideas for a production to its final performance — and you'll gain essential skills in acting, improv, and playwriting. We will study examples of political theater and devised theater to inspire our creativity and guide our collective creative process. You'll also learn how theater can both entertain and educate, as you contribute to the making of a theatrical piece that seeks to draw attention to a social issue of great importance to you and the rest of the ensemble

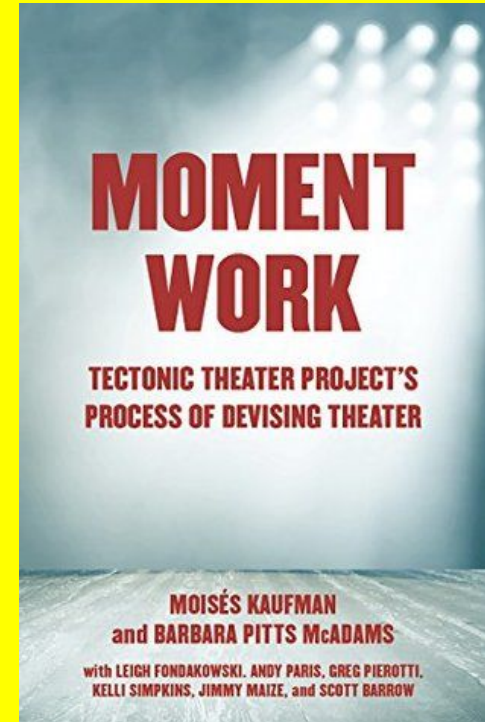
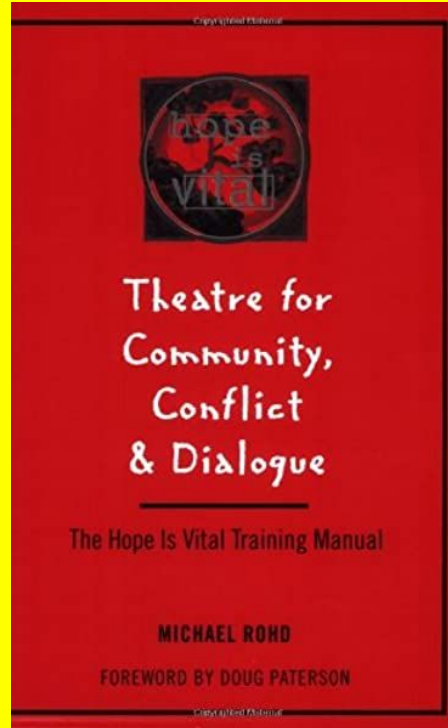
# Why devised theater?

1. It can prove less expensive to produce.
2. It allows you to tackle topical issues in a more timely fashion.
3. It builds collaborative skills.
4. It exposes students to the theatrical process from beginning to end.
5. It can serve as an introduction to new theater-makers, and challenge more experienced ones.
6. It enables theater-makers to share their own experiences, perspectives, and passions.

## Research inquiry

What devised theater methods lead high school students to a more effective collaborative process and polished final product when collectively creating a political theater performance?

# Research (so far)





# ***FRANTIC ASSEMBLY***

*Book of Devising Theatre*  
by  
Scott Graham and  
Steven Hoggett

## **Residencies**

Work closely with a group for four days.

Start off with only a theme.

Make an original show with them.

## **Questionnaires**

“It is a way of opening up worlds unknown and tapping into the experiences of your collaborators.” (176)



# Sample questionnaire

1. Race. What is it?
2. When did you first learn about race?
3. What was a time when you were aware of your race?
4. Recall a social media post (a meme, a photo, a video, a comment) that reflected (positively or negatively) on the topic of race. Why do you think this post has stuck with you?
5. Did you participate in any of the Black Lives Matter protests that took place after the murder of George Floyd? Why yes or no?

# HOPE IS VITAL

*Theatre for Community,  
Conflict, & Dialogue*  
by  
Michael Rohd

“[The audience] needs to see a clear opportunity to get involved and to explore options. An activating scene does not show **what to do**. It does not have a message. It asks **what can be done.**”

--Rohd, “Theatre for Community”, 97.

## Activating scene

A believable situation.

Structured but not scripted.

A moment of decision.

Poses questions, does not provide answers.



# Activity - Part 1

**Make a list in response to each of the following questions.**

1. Why would someone choose to participate in a Black Lives Matter protest?
2. Why would someone choose to NOT participate in a Black Lives Matter protest?

# Activity - Part 2

1. Pick a reason off either of your lists — why someone would attend a BLM protest or why they would not.
2. Create a character, point of view, and story that goes along with that reason. Spend 2 minutes writing a monologue in which the character explains their choice — that is, their reason to participate or not in a BLM protest.
3. **Reminder:** The character should be fictional.

# MOMENT WORK

*Tectonic Theater  
Project's Process of  
Devising Theater*  
by

Moisés Kaufman and  
Barbara Pitts McAdams

“If we want to explore how *theater--not just text--* is able to tell a story, it behooves us to create that story in the rehearsal room using all the elements of the stage.”

--Kaufman et al, *Moment Work*, 20

**Moment:** A unit of theatrical time; a building block of teatrical narrative; a structural unit of performance

**Moment work:** A process of creating and analyzing theater one *moment* at a time



# One-person moment

***I begin.***

A performer stands in the center of the stage. She looks at the audience. She walks to the back wall and stands facing it. She turns around, leans against the wall, and slides down into a crouch.

***I end.***

# Two-person moment

***We begin.***

The performers slowly cross to each other, center stage. When they arrive center, they stop and face each other. Then they embrace.

***We end.***



# Text moment

***We begin.***

The performers slowly cross to each other, center stage. When they arrive center, they stop and face each other. The woman looks at the man and says, “I tried to warn her”. Then they embrace.

***We end.***

# Thank you!

Full presentation:

<https://app.peardeck.com/student/trzgqwzea>

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