



# HARNESSING JOY, PLAY, AND CREATIVITY TO BUILD POWER WITH YOUNG PEOPLE



**MONROE COUNTY CHILDHOOD  
CONDITIONS SUMMIT 2023**

Presentation by **Evren Wilder Elliott**



# WORKSHOP AGENDA



## **01** introduction

who am I? what is this? why?

## **02** play

play is a learning and doing tool

## **03** debrief

how can you put it into practice?







# ABOUT ME

I am a storyteller and collaborator interested in pursuing liberation by imagining new ways of being and doing using the tools and language of theatre.

I am unswervingly curious about the creativity of our communities – How do we pursue joy, creativity, and play to center the voices of those most marginalized in decision-making? How can we harness ingenuity for collective, sustainable success?





# Introduction



**PEDAGOGY AND THEATRE  
OF THE OPPRESSED**

**Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) explores the ways in which communities can engage in speculative play to spark new ways of thinking, doing, and inventing, and uses art as a generative tool in the pursuit of justice.**

**In the 1960s, Augusto Boal began to develop Theatre of the Oppressed as a way to bring communities together to organize against oppression in Brazil. Since then, Theatre of the Oppressed techniques have been and continue to be utilized around the world.**

**No experience is necessary to come heal, play, and grow a more intimate understanding of your community and**





# OUTCOMES

1

Gain an understanding of some Theatre of the Oppressed practices and how they can be utilized to harness joy, play, and creativity for building power with young people within systems.

2

Explore the various ways in which our intersectionalities demand for more open dialogue and collaboration - **we will always need many paths through any obstacle.**

3

Experience firsthand the transformative potential of participatory action and theatre techniques in addressing systemic challenges and fostering inclusive, community-driven development.



# CHECK-IN!



## DISCLAIMER:

**TO** work can feel very therapeutic. **IT IS NOT THERAPY!**  
Be aware of your own boundaries. This is a great place  
to practice them.



## MOVEMENT:

This work involves movement, in many senses of the  
word. I will do my best to offer adaptations. Please feel  
free to do what you need to honor your capacity -  
everyone is invited to take breaks for the head, heart,  
or body's sake.





# PLAYING & PLOTTING



## PLAYING

We play games because they're fun and silly. And those things are important. Making mistakes is important. Fellowship and togetherness are important. We also play games because it helps us free ourselves from patterns and access imaginative and inventive ways of being with one another.

## PLOTTING

We have to be willing to think audaciously in order to invent new systems. Moving from playing to plotting helps us build power through collaboration and centered on joy. We're better equipped to put our ideas into

**"It is forbidden to walk on the grass, it is not forbidden to fly."**



# opening games

Get people moving and connecting in physical ways, if possible.

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Look for the opportunity to make mistakes together.

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Use simple games as a way to begin conversations on larger themes.





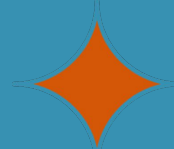
# STORIES AND IMAGES



We can use our bodies to create images of our feelings and experiences. We can share our stories in new ways and see what our struggles look like from many angles.

Physical movement is always required of change work. Making images of what systems look like now and of what we desire for the future can help us practice the many ways to move from one place to another.

**The importance of building power with the**



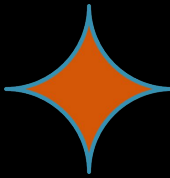


Young people who are seeking services are already experts in inventing new systems of care.



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# FORUM



## **Tell the story of the struggle.**

Come together to discuss your community's struggle. Explore what it looks like and feels like, the reasonings and the power structures. By sharing personal experiences, the group builds a short story to perform that shows where a protagonist is getting stuck.

## **Share the story of the struggle.**

Perform this story for an invited audience of decisionmakers, community members, and other stakeholders - or even one another. Facilitate a process for your "spect-actors" to discuss the stories shared, speak from their own experiences, and to physically try new interventions in the play to attempt to change the outcome.

## **Plot a new future for the struggle.**

Track the ideas that come from these community gatherings. Ask decisionmakers present to follow through on the potential interventions that were devised through this collaborative process. Everyone should leave with action items in-hand.





cooperation  
releases  
abundance



IT IS FORBIDDEN TO WALK ON THE  
GRASS; IT IS NOT FORBIDDEN TO FLY

Augusto Boal







**Further  
Resources:**

PTOWEB.ORG

Theatre of the Oppressed, by Augusto Boal

Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paulo Freire

Games for Actors and Non-Actors, by Augusto Boal

Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue, by Michael Rohd

Rainbow of Desire, by Augusto Boal

# DEBRIEF & DISCUSSION

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