

Exploring Theatre for the Very Young with Cache Valley Infants
Project Proposal
Alyssa Landroche

RESEARCH QUESTION / GOAL

This proposal is to fund the development and performance of a Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) performance at USU and in local child care centers. I believe experiencing art is a human right. Whether it be a stunning painting, a magnificent opera, or a piece of riveting theatre, art can be educational and personally beneficial to the person viewing it. That is why I am exploring a new and upcoming form of theatre called Theatre for the Very Young--or simply TVY. TVY is specifically theatre for children ages 0-5. It is not just a verbal performance but a multi-modal one. It includes vocal sounds, facial expression, bodily gesture and expressively animated props and puppets (Young, 19). There have been many theatre companies that have produced successful TVY plays. The Oily Cart Company produced a show called *Clouds* which had young people explore different animals and objects you would find in the sky (Young, 17). Other productions include *Balloonacy*, done by The Children's Theatre in Minneapolis, which follow the story of a lonely old man on his birthday who befriends a balloon and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* a play adaptation taken from the beloved children's book. One mother says about her experience taking her kids to see an adaptation of Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* says, "it has been one of my great joys to watch my children as they react and respond to the actors, the music, the sets and the other audience members. I am reminded with each performance that I am seeing their minds and hearts grow in real time, that a distillation of what they are, what they believe and their capacity for joy is right in front of my eyes. And that is what theatre is all about, after all: shared joy" (Ridenhour, para. 6). Through research, collaborating with professors and peers, and the experience of producing a TVY play, I would like to have a better understanding of TVY and its potential benefits to young people and communities. My play called "Alice's Garden" will be a show about the wild and quirky nature of bugs, flowers, and nature in a garden. Accompanied by upbeat music, it will feature brightly colored butterflies, sassy garden gnomes, beautiful flowers, and other things found in a garden.

SIGNIFICANCE

First, why is TVY important and worthwhile? At first glance, it may seem trivial to go through all the trouble to produce a play for a group of infants who will likely forget the experience the second they leave the performance. L.S. Vygotsky, a developmental psychologist, theorized that, "imaginative play and creative activities [allow] very young children to stretch their capabilities and learn to further their understanding of the world" (Vygotsky, 93). Understanding the world through sight, sound, and touch is a big part of the developmental process for an infant. (Hill, para. 3) TVY productions center their content around these experiences by actively engaging infants through visual, aural, and kinesthetic approaches. Theatre is about understanding the world. Why limit understanding to just the "adult world"?

Providing quality and relevant education for these young people is important but unfortunately is often not done as effectively as possible. In an age where phones, iPad, and “kids” YouTube, are available, it is easy to think that to teach a child one can just park them in front of an iPad for a couple of hours playing Baby Einstein. Why go through the trouble of creating a whole theatre production for their entertainment and learning when you can, in thirty seconds, pull up a colorful video, and call it good. The American Academy of Pediatrics warns against “screen time” for kids under two. They state on their website, “What infants and toddlers need most to learn is interaction with the people around them. . . they need to touch things, shake them, throw them, and most of all to see the faces and hear the voices of those they love the most. Apps can teach toddlers to tap and swipe at a screen, but studies tell us that these skills don't translate into real-world learning” (Hill, para. 5). TVY was created for kids to learn at their own developmental capacity while giving them an opportunity to experience art. TVY provides an interactive live experience through dramatic play. For example, the children’s theatre Oily Cart, produced a TVY play entitled *Clouds*. In this play, actors use colorful bird puppets that interact directing with the young people watching the play. They also have each parent hold a feather to lightly tickle their child’s face. (Young, 12). Another key feature of TVY that makes it more interactive is the structured opportunities that offer potential, playful interaction between the adult carer and the child. (Young, 14).

Theatre for the very young has become increasingly popular for this reason. Originally started in the UK 25 years ago, TVY has made its way over the the United States and is increasing in popularity throughout professional and regional children’s theatres. (Kingsley, para 3) The goal of the project is to influence the local community by demonstrating the ways in which TVY is entertaining, effective, and educational. My work writing and producing a TVY play will also give the young people in the Cache Valley community a chance to experience theatre in way that is best suited for them.

METHODOLOGY

For the first part of my project, I will write a TVY play--a process I have already begun. I have researched the different components and mechanics that make TVY effective and unique. The characteristics of a TVY play are that of being a high-sensory, participatory experience. There is usually little to no worded dialogue and the script relies heavily on interesting sounds, intriguing movement, and captivating lighting. What is unique about TVY is that it is full of audience participation (Alrutz, 125). Traditional theatre has an unbroken fourth wall. That is not the case with TVY. It prioritizes the sensory experience for the kids over the storyline (Kingsley, para. 10).

The TVY play I will develop is set in a lush garden where bugs of all types exist. The kids watching will be able to explore with their eyes, ears, and hands the interesting kinds of things found in a garden. The actual show will go approximately twenty-five minutes long.

The writing process will take approximately three months, as it will likely go through several rounds of revisions in order to ensure it is of high-quality and meets the unique

characteristics of a TVY play. Throughout the writing I will consult with peers and faculty mentors.

Directing the play will involve finding cast members from Utah State's theatre program, thus providing them a unique opportunity to be involved in a TVY play. It will broaden and enhance their appreciation of theatre for all ages. I, along with other classmates of mine, will then proceed to design the creative elements of the play. This includes lighting, stage design, sound design, and costume design. I plan on using a variety of techniques to create a high-sensory experience for the young people. Some of these techniques include bright and colorful set pieces, wind, puppets the kids can individually interact with, as well as rhythmic and upbeat melodies.

After the design process, I will continue to build a show. This will involve many hours of labor and volunteers from my fellow classmates. The supplies I need will primarily be things to create costumes, puppets, and set pieces. I plan on having the majority of the bugs in the show be puppets or stylized costume pieces. The set will be flowers, grasses, trees, clouds, and garden ornaments. I will hold rehearsals 3 times a week to give the actors enough time to prepare for their performance. I plan on having a creative team to help me with this process.

Then, I will produce the play at USU and around Cache Valley at different day-care centers. For example, I have contacted The Cozy Little Cottage which has expressed interest in the play. Other centers I plan to contact include Morningside School, Little Wonders Learning Center, and Doodlebug Academy. During these performances, I will hand out surveys to the adults to explore how TVY has impacted their view on theatre.

After the performance, if my project is accepted to these organizations, I plan on presenting my project at the Summer Research Symposium and AATE, which is a national conference of theatre educators.

FEASIBILITY

This project is realistic because it involves a limited cast and technical elements. Furthermore, there is an interested pool of volunteers from USU's Theatre Education Program and potentially USU's BFA acting program. The set is simple and can be made with limited materials in the budget provided. As far as interest in the community goes, Logan has many child care centers to potentially partner with to get this play out to as many young people as possible. Advertising for the show will be simple and will be done through posters, Facebook ads, and personal invitations. For these reasons, I believe this project to be very feasible.

Challenges may include parents not wanting to participate in the theatre with their child and the possibility that some children will not be engaged in the show. These challenges were experienced by the Oily Cart Company when they did their production of *Clouds*. Susan Young, the director, reflected on the parental involvement, "some parents and practitioners had misunderstood what was expected of them or felt overwhelmingly inhibited" and that the intimate nature of the space created some awkwardness between audience members (Young, 23). These challenges can be easily overcome by addressing the parents/guardians either at the

beginning of the play or in the program, explaining how TVY is a highly participatory experience and they may be pulled into participating in playful behavior with their child. This will give the parents expectations as well as decrease the potential awkwardness of the intimate setting. Another challenge may be creating a set flexible enough to be set up in a variety of locations. I plan on having minimal set and costumes that can easily be transported in a car as well as technical elements that I can provide myself such as speakers and a music player.

Doing this project will give young children access to live theatre--an experience that has been denied to them due to the lack of TVY plays available. I hope you will see the benefit in producing such a play at Utah State University and throughout Cache Valley. Thank you for taking the time to review my proposal. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I encourage you to visit <https://vimeopro.com/atvydigitalfestival/festival> with the password "TVYDIGFEST" to see examples of TVY done in professional and regional theatres around the United States.

Citations

- Alrutz, M. 2009. *Visionaries Wanted! Theatre for very young audiences in the United States.* Theatre for Early Years. Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften. Frankfurt, Germany.
- Hill, D. 2016. *Why to Avoid TV for Infants & Toddlers.* Retrived from <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Why-to-Avoid-TV-Before-Age-2.aspx>
- Kingsley, L. 2013. *Filled with Wonder: 5 Attributes of Quality Theatre for the Very Young.* Retrived from <https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2013/03/19/filled-with-wonder-5-attributes-of-quality-theatre-for-the-very-young#comments>
- Ridenhour, K. 2018. *Why Theatre for the Very Young.* Retrieved from <http://www.nextstoptheatre.org/news/why-theatre-for-the-very-young/>
- Vygotsky, L. 1978. *Mind in Society.* Harvard University Press.
- Young, S. 2004. 'It's a bit like flying': developing participatory theatre with the under-twos: a case study of Oily Cart, Research in Drama Education, 9:1, 13-28, DOI: 10.1080/1356978042000185885

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Education Plan
Alyssa Landroche

As discussed in detail below, there will be two main components to my education plan. The first involves research and consultation with faculty advisors; the second includes the experiential learning derived from the actual process of creating the play and reflecting on its outcomes.

- Learning objective 1: I will understand the creative process of writing an original play as well as the mechanics of playwriting with the intention of publishing the play and performing the play.
 - I will research existing TVY plays to explore their form and content and will continue to review academic and practical writing on the process of playwriting.
 - Under the guidance of a faculty member, I will write an engaging, relevant play for infants ages 0-18 months by using material theatrical forms that will immerse them the most which includes sensory experiences such as auditorial, tactical, and visual engagement according to their brain development.
 - After writing my play, I will engage in the revision process by asking colleagues, faculty mentors, and TVY professionals in the field to review my work.
 - I will then seek opportunities to publish the play by surveying publishers in the field, engaging with their submission and review processes, and responding according to the feedback I receive.
- Learning objective 2: I will understand the creative process of directing a play specifically for ages 0-24 months of age.
 - I will contact experienced practitioners in TVY and review productions that have been produced through an online archive of TVY work.
 - I will cast the show with actors appropriate for the play, run rehearsals 3 times a week, and instruct actors regarding body movement, voice, and stage presence.
 - I will oversee the entire creative process from start to finish. Throughout the process I will ask faculty and peers to observe the work and provide feedback.
 - I will present the play to multiple daycares around the valley as well as the center for early childhood education and solicit feedback from professionals at these centers.
- Learning objective 3: I will understand the creative process of designing the costumes, set, sound, lights, and props for the play that will directly engage ages 0-18 months.
 - I will continue to research best practices for TVY in order to, under the guidance of faculty mentors:
 - Design & create functional puppets that will be visually pleasing to the audience.

- Design & create costumes for the actors according to what roles they were cast as.
 - Collaborate with my artistic team to design the set and environment to best immerse the audience in.
 - Collaborate with my artistic team to design the lighting and sound effects for the show.
- Learning objective 4: I will understand the mechanics and importance of theatre for the very young and become a better advocate for the very young in having theatre available to them in more areas.
 - I will research the impact theatre for the very young has had on other communities of young people through continued literature review and consultation with professionals in the field.
 - I will invite the parents at the performance to fill out a survey exploring how TVY has impacted their views on theatre.

PROPOSED URCO BUDGET & COMMITMENT

Student Name: Alyssa Landroche

Department: Theatre

Student A#:

Faculty Supervisor: Matt Omasta

Student Email:

Project Title: Theatre for the Very Young

Group submissions should use the Group Budget & Commitment form.

Expenses (Optional)

Each proposal may include an optional expenses budget of up to \$1,000 provided there is a 1:1 match (up to \$500/\$500).

EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES/RESEARCH TRAVEL BUDGET

TRAVEL

Description of Items

Budgeted Amount

Total Travel Budget

\$ _____

SUPPLIES/EQUIPMENT

Description of Items

Budgeted Amount

Puppets

\$	150.00
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Props

	\$50
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Set

	\$200
--	-------

Costumes

	\$150
--	-------

Publicity

	\$100
--	-------

Scripts / Photocopying

	\$45
--	------

Tech

	\$50
--	------

Total Supplies/Equipment Budget

\$	745.00
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By signing below, the mentor certifies that they have reviewed this proposed budget and find it to be reasonable for the project proposed. If funded, this budget is subject to review by the Office of Research & Graduate Studies to comply with URGO regulations.

Mentor Signature

EXPENSES MATCHING FUNDS COMMITMENT

As part of the URCO program, a 1:1 match is required for this optional additional funding.

The faculty mentor, department, college, or program that will commit to match the budget portion of this URCO scholarship is:

Theatre

The matching support may come from any source, but RGS requires an **F&A or E&G fund** index number to transfer our matching funds to you.

If this URCO application is approved, I authorize the Research and Graduate Studies (RGS) office to transfer 50% of this proposed budget to this index to match the 50% of available funding from this source. If this URCO application is approved these matching funds will be made available for this URCO project's expenses. The faculty mentor's department will be responsible for overseeing the expenditures for this URCO project. RGS's funds will be transferred to the department.

Signature of Person with Direct Budget Authority

transferred to the department.

Scholarship (Required)

SCHOLARSHIP MATCHING FUNDS COMMITMENT

As part of the URCO program, a scholarship match is required.

The faculty mentor, department, college, or program that will commit to match the scholarship portion of this URCO scholarship is:

CCA Dean's office

The matching support must be in the form of F&A or E&G funds. The index that these funds will come from is:



If this URCO application is approved, I authorize the Research and Graduate Studies (RGS) office to transfer \$250 in funds from this index to match the \$750 in funds from the RGS office to award the student a \$1,000 scholarship.

Signature of Person with Direct Budget Authority

[Signature]

Total Budget

Overall Scholarship Summary

Scholarships are mandatory and require a scholarship match.

Total RGS Support	\$	750.00
Total Matching Support	\$	250.00
Total Scholarship	\$	1,000.00

Overall Equipment/Supplies/Travel Summary

Each proposal may include an optional expenses budget of up to \$1,000 provided there is a 1:1 match.

Total Travel	\$	-
Total Equipment/Supplies	\$	745.00
Total Equipment/Supplies/Travel Budget	\$	745.00

Total

Total RGS Support	\$	1,122.50
Total Matching Support	\$	622.50
Total Student Award	\$	1,745.00

	September	October	November	December
Playwriting and Revising				
Attend URCO Orientation				
Receive Scholarship & Budget				
<i>Schedule Shows with USU Theatre and local daycares</i>				
<i>Finalize Script</i>				
<i>Establish Production Crew (Assistant Directors, Designers, etc)</i>				
<i>Start Design Research for production</i>				
<i>Make Final Design Choices</i>				
<i>Cast show</i>				
<i>Rehearsals Begin</i>				
<i>Build Set, Props, and Costumes</i>				
<i>Advertise using posters, emails, FB event, personal invites</i>				
<i>Perform Play</i>				
Submit project for presentation				
Present project				
Submit final & financial URCO reports				

PROJECT TIMELINE

[illegible]

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