

LMDA Conference 2018

Crossing Borders: From the Academy to the Profession

Good afternoon everyone!

My name is Collette Radau and my pronouns are she and her. I am originally from Alberta where I grew up on a farm 1 hour north of Calgary and 2 hours south of Edmonton. I am an emerging freelance dramaturg, as well as a performer and director. And I graduated from school one year ago.

Three ‘steps’ that I took to help me move from university into professional work were:

#1: Doing dramaturgy work before knowing what dramaturgy actually was

#2: Connecting with peers who wanted to write or create new work

#3: Connecting with a mentor in the industry

Step 1

Even if you haven’t formally studied dramaturgy, that doesn’t mean you can’t start honing your craft. Even before I attended York and took a two-year series of courses in new play dramaturgy, I was curious about it while I was studying acting at Red Deer College in Alberta. For our acting practicums, we often had to do research projects on the play, playwright, and world of the play of whatever production we were currently acting in. In my second year of college, my classmates and I got into the Edmonton Fringe Festival and we wanted to do a

devised show. My friend who was going to direct the piece asked me to be the dramaturg and I said yes, having no idea what new play dramaturgy was and how different it was from production dramaturgy. But from this process, I learned that I had good instincts, an observant eye, and I knew how to ask provocative questions. I continued to do new play dramaturgy while studying at York, dramaturging work in development by my playwriting classmates, as well as other peers and old college classmates who were submitting work to festivals. What I learned was that you can't know how to dramaturge until you try it. The best way to learn and see if it's something you really want to pursue as a career is to work with as many people as possible and practice, practice, practice. Even practicing your play analysis skills can be so helpful. Learning how to articulate what you see as an audience member and what choices you think do or don't serve a piece is vital in developing your skills as a dramaturg.

Step 2

Find people who are interested in writing or producing new plays. Then let people know you're a dramaturg, because, to put it bluntly: the writing process is hard and people want help. And then let word of mouth spread from there. For me, being part of a playwriting/dramaturgy program made it easy to create connections with peers who wanted to write plays. And thanks to that word of mouth, I've been lucky in that most of the work I've done up to this point has been people approaching me looking for a dramaturg. I had a lot of friends in devised theatre courses at York who wanted to create new work for festivals, like the playGround Festival at York, but weren't in the playwriting program. The playGround Festival is an annual student-run festival of new works in development, and participating in this festival allowed me to collaborate with others and continue to practice my dramaturgical skills outside of the classroom. Continually building your resume, even while in school, can give you the upper hand of having practical experience to bring into the professional world. If you're an emerging dramaturg who is interested in new play development and dramaturgy, I can't stress enough how

important it is to get involved with theatre festivals. So many of these festivals are fantastic platforms for being able to experiment, collaborate, try new things, and get some production experience under your belt. And having a new play be put up in front of an audience and actually be seen and heard can be one of the most useful development tools for playwrights and dramaturgs. Additionally, working on plays that are 15, 30, or 45 minutes in length feels much less daunting than trying to develop full-length plays, especially when both you and the playwright are emerging creators trying to make some of your own work for the first time. What I learned was that creating these bonds early in your theatre career is so important because people that you've worked with once will more than likely end up being people that you'll work with again and again. Working on lots of different projects is great but I think it's even better to find other people in school who have the same interests, aesthetics, and opinions on theatre as you do, and continue to work with them. Doing this helped me foster life-long creative partnerships.

Step 3

During my last year of school, my dramaturgy professor Judith told me about the Playwrights Guild of Canada's creator exchange where emerging and established dramaturgs and playwrights could connect and network. I ended up connecting with Stephen Colella, Dramaturg and Associate Artistic Director at Young People's Theatre here in Toronto. I had developed a relationship with Young People's Theatre over the years having done an Educational Programming internship while I was in college, as well as having spent some time volunteering as a Drama School Assistant. After the Guild exchange, I reached out to Stephen to see if he would be interested in taking me on as a script reader. By reading and discussing unsolicited script submissions with Stephen, I began to learn about the roles and responsibilities of a company dramaturg and how these can greatly differ from that of a freelance dramaturg. As well, Stephen invited me to sit in on professional play workshops at YPT which gave me insight into the new play workshop process, which I did not have much experience in other than our

playwriting class when the playwrights would bring their work into class and we would discuss it. Recently, I participated in a three-week workshop at YPT developing a new play by Mary Ellen Maclean about dyslexia. This was a valuable experience for me in that I was able to work with and connect with a professional playwright like Mary Ellen, who uses devised and physical theatre methods to create her work. Working with a professional mentor in the industry is one of the best ways for any emerging artist to bridge the gap from school into their profession. If you haven't had the opportunity to train in dramaturgy like I did at York, I would highly encourage you, for your next step, to look into non-institutional training/mentorship programs. This type of experience can be so valuable in a profession like dramaturgy where having practical knowledge and experience is vital to the work.

Recent Project

A recent professional dramaturgy project that I undertook this year was dramaturging and co-directing *Midnight, Toronto*, which premiered at this year's Rhubarb Festival at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. This process began at the end of last summer, when my colleague from York, Curtis te Brinke, asked me to dramaturg and co-direct a play he had written with the festival in mind. His concept for the show was to create a post-apocalyptic concert with storytelling by a 3 person band about the end of Toronto as we know it. The festival focuses on producing new, experimental art in a variety of mediums and genres, with most pieces being about 25 minutes in length. He wanted the piece to involve live music and soundscape created by the actors in an integral way, which was something that neither of us had much experience or knowledge in, but something we were both excited about. Rhubarb seemed like the right kind of setting to take this sort of risk in our creative work. Having almost no music training, I had no idea how to dramaturg or direct any kind of music element. But I've always loved live music and theatre that incorporates live soundscapes. Which brings me back to Step 1, about doing stuff that you have no idea how to do but just trying it. As both dramaturg and co-director, I had to bring in more of my production dramaturgy skills and think about how to create a script where the text and the sounds would

complement each other, instead of repeating information we already knew. With a doomsday type of text that included sounds of sirens and helicopters, as well as romantic queer scenes and a longing to return to a pastoral, pre-industrial world, we had to figure out how to balance gentle acoustic underscoring alongside indie rock songs composed by Daniel Bagg for the show. During rehearsal when we would come across a word or a sentence that invoked a sound or we wanted to underscore a monologue, we would experiment with our limited instruments of a keyboard, guitar, and microphones and figure what mood or tone we wanted to achieve. Working within a 25 minute time frame was also challenging, but luckily I had the experiences of Step 2, working on new plays with other emerging artists mainly in festival settings, to guide me. This was by far one of the shortest time frames I've had to work in to get a script ready from page to stage to be developed for a scheduled production, which required both new play dramaturgy and production dramaturgy simultaneously. This was a new experience for me and something I would love to continue doing in the future. By far this was the most creative and artistic I've felt as a dramaturg. And what I learned was that as I continue to shape my dramaturgy career, I really want to continue developing new works like this that involve me from start to finish during the creative process.

I'm excited to see what the future has in store for me as I continue to emerge as a dramaturg.

Thank you!