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## Interactionz: Engaging Lgbtq+ Youth Using Theatre For Social Change

Jonathan Jackson  
*University of Central Florida*

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interACTionZ:  
ENGAGING LGBTQ+ YOUTH  
USING THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

by

JONATHAN PARKER JACKSON  
A.A. Valencia College, 2009  
B.S. University of Central Florida, 2010

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
in the Department of Theatre  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Theatre for social change is a term used to describe a wide range of theatre-based techniques and methods. Through implementation of performance techniques, participants are encouraged to creatively explore and communicate various ideas with the specific intention of eliciting a societal or political shift within a given community. Through this thesis, I will explore the impact of applying theatre for social change in a youth-centered environment. I will discuss my journey as creator, facilitator, and project director of interACTionZ, a queer youth theatre program in Orlando, FL formed through a partnership between Theatre UCF at the University of Central Florida and the Zebra Coalition®. I will give specific focus throughout this project to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) youth and straight advocates for the LGBTQ+ community.

For LGBTQ+ Youth

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

What an amazing journey this project has taken me on. I can only begin to thank the following people and organizations for their support in turning my dream into a reality. None of this would have been possible without the inspiration and generous support from the Muki Fund and the Bryce L West Foundation. Thank you to Zebra Coalition® for opening your doors and allowing me to work with your amazing youth. Sybil St. Claire, there are no words to describe how grateful I am for your mentorship on this project. You gave me the freedom to find my way, and always allowed my creative ideas to grow. Earl Weaver, your enthusiasm for my project inspired and reminded me of how important this work really is. Bert Scott, thank you for your invaluable feedback throughout my writing process. Vandy Wood, thank you for challenging me to stand firm in my thoughts and express myself in ways which keep others engaged with my ideas. Amanda Hill, I can't thank you enough for our endless "debriefs" which kept me going through times I felt I should just give up. To my family, for always supporting my crazy ideas and productions, and for helping make my educational quest possible. To all the LGBTQ+ youth from interACTionZ, your contributions to this project and never-ending support along the way have helped me grow just as much as those who participated in the program. Thank you!

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: BUILDING THE PARTNERSHIP.....	4
CHAPTER THREE: IMPLEMENTING THE SUMMER PROGRAM.....	9
Community Building .....	10
Reflection.....	11
Image Theatre .....	13
Reflection.....	15
Forum Theatre.....	16
Reflection.....	18
Playback Theatre.....	20
Reflection.....	23
CHAPTER FOUR: YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT.....	25
CHAPTER FIVE: PRIDE YOUTH THEATRE ALLIANCE CONFERENCE.....	29
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION.....	42
CHAPTER SEVEN: LOOKING FORWARD.....	47
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER.....	49
APPENDIX B: SELECT SESSION PLANS .....	51
APPENDIX C: YOUTH SUPPORT RESOURCES .....	58
REFERENCES .....	61

## **CHAPTER ONE:** **INTRODUCTION**

Why start a queer youth theatre program? According to a school climate survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), “Schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBT students, the overwhelming majority of whom hear homophobic remarks and experience harassment or assault at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression” (GLSEN xiv). Youth are harassed and oppressed on a daily basis simply because of who they are as people. Findings regarding LGBT youth published through the GLSEN school climate survey are disturbing. “63.5% felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation, and 43.9% because of their gender expression. 81.9% were verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year because of their sexual orientation, and 63.9% because of their gender expression” (GLSEN xiv).

Where can LGBTQ+ youth go to find safety and acceptance from oppression placed on them by society? “More than half of the LGBT youth in our survey (58.4%) reported that they did not have or were unaware of an LGBT youth group or program in their local community” (GLSEN 55). With LGBTQ+ youth marginalized by systems designed to protect them, it is crucial these youth find places to network and develop as individuals. Not all schools offer and in many cases prohibit students from forming a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) where LGBTQ+ can organize and network. According to a key finding from the GLSEN school climate survey, “It is important that all LGBT youth have a place where they feel safe and accepted. Both LGBT community groups/programs and GSAs provide opportunities for necessary adult and peer support” (GLSEN 55). Another troubling trend is the number of homeless youth who also identify as LGBT. According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and

the National Coalition for the Homeless, “The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that the number of homeless and runaway youth ranges from 575,000 to 1.6 million per year. Our analysis of the available research suggests that between 20 percent and 40 percent of all homeless youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). Given that between 3 percent and 5 percent of the U.S. population identifies as lesbian, gay or bisexual, it is clear that LGBT youth experience homelessness at a disproportionate rate” (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force 1). Our society is literally throwing LGBTQ+ youth away, out on the street, on a regular basis and something must be done to educate and bring awareness to this epidemic.

Through this thesis project I will discuss my process in creating a prototype for a queer youth theatre for social change program. I will start by outlining the journey of building partnerships in order to gain both support and funding to launch interACTionZ, a queer youth theatre group in Orlando, FL formed through a partnership between Theatre UCF at the University of Central Florida and the Zebra Coalition®. I will specifically detail a model created during the summer of 2013 for implementing a theatre for social change program in a youth-centered environment on location at Zebra Coalition®. Throughout this project I will focus on opportunities provided for youth leadership and development during their participation with interACTionZ programming. I will also include a reflection on my attendance and participation at the 2013 Pride Youth Theatre Alliance (PYTA) conference and how it directly relates to interACTionZ. At the end, I will discuss what is currently happening with interACTionZ and some of the exciting possibilities on the horizon for future programming.

I have provided descriptions of the following terms used throughout this thesis based on how they best relate to my work.

## Helpful Terms Defined

**Conductor:** name for a facilitator in Playback Theatre sessions.

**Devising:** a form of collaborative playmaking, often drawing from personal stories as source material, which honors personal storytelling.

**Forum Theatre:** a problem-solving technique that allows participants to tap into a scene at a crisis point and provide alternate solutions to troubling situations.

**Image Theatre:** a technique where participants play in abstract and creative ways often exploring societal and interpersonal issues. Using still images which transcend the limitations of language, participants can explore situations and emotions based on a given topic.

**interACTIONZ:** an Orlando based queer youth theatre program developed through a partnership with Theatre UCF at the University of Central Florida and the Zebra Coalition®.

**LGBTQ+:** an inclusive abbreviation used to indicate Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer, while still including straight allies and other members of the community.

**Mukti:** comes from Sanskrit and means liberation, and the name of a private fund which exists to fund Queer Youth Theatre programs.

**PGP:** preferred gender pronouns. (masculine, feminine, gender-neutral, intentional-mix)

**Playback Theatre:** an improvisational form of group storytelling which focuses on honoring personal stories and respecting identity.

**Queer:** term used to encompass Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Pansexual, Asexual, Intersex, and Questioning individuals. Many may find this term offensive, however the LGBTQ+ community is working to reclaim the word and the power it holds.

## **CHAPTER TWO:** **BUILDING THE PARTNERSHIP**

In the spring of 2013, I was made aware of an opportunity to gain funding for a queer youth theatre program in Orlando, Florida from an organization existing exclusively to fund queer youth theatre called the Mukti Fund. I was initially skeptical because the opportunity sounded too good to be true. How could an organization exist solely to fund queer youth theatre programs?

After conducting some research I learned, “The Mukti Fund is a small private foundation established in 1983. For many years it funded cultural heritage and environmental projects in the eastern Caribbean on the islands of St. Kitts and Nevis” (“Mukti Fund.”). It was exciting to discover the Mukti Fund had now moved to funding queer youth theatre programs domestically here in the United States. My faculty mentor from the Theatre for Young Audiences program at the University of Central Florida mentioned an idea to apply for a grant from the Mukti Fund and use the funding to do “something” with the Zebra Coalition® in downtown Orlando. I remained both uncertain and hesitant to commit my involvement to this endeavor, because I am not typically the type of person who can take on a project with a nebulous and uncertain design. I personally prefer to always plan things out in detail, maintaining an ability to measure the success of my efforts at pre-defined benchmarks along the way. However, the concept of an opportunity to combine three passions of mine - theatre for social change, the LGBTQ+ community, and youth - was very tempting. I have been researching and developing these three topics throughout my graduate studies, so there was no turning away this chance without further investigation.

The first step in my investigation was a site visit out at the Zebra Coalition® drop-in youth center, the Zebra House. According to their mission, “The Zebra Coalition® is a network of Central Florida social service providers, government agencies, schools, and colleges and universities that provides a full continuum of services to at-risk LGBTQ+ youth and all youth. The Coalition assists young people facing homelessness; bullying; physical, sexual, and drug abuse; and isolation from their families with individualized programs to guide them to recovery and stability. The Zebra Coalition® also operates a 24-hour youth crisis hotline and provides the Zebra Coalition® House as a safe haven and community resource center” (“Supporting Lives of a Different Stripe.”). This site visit provided members from all partner organizations involved with the proposal an opportunity to meet and brainstorm what possibilities may exist between us to serve the LGBTQ+ youth community of central Florida. Along with me at this planning meeting was the Director of Zebra Coalition®, the Associate Director of Development/Grant Writer from the UCF Foundation, the Associate Dean of the Burnett Honors College at UCF/Mukti Board Member, and my Faculty Mentor from Theatre UCF. Once conversations amongst us started, I quickly found myself gravitating to the driver’s seat of the project, with feelings of confidence and motivation.

The questions I was forming in my head no longer revolved around “if” the project would be possible, but rather “how” I was going to make it happen, and how soon the project could launch. After searching for some time for an applicable residency position to satisfy my graduate program requirements, while at the same time trying to breathe life into a rather mundane thesis project, I was now colliding head on with everything I had been searching for. After this meeting I committed to create, facilitate, and direct a queer youth theatre program over the summer for my graduate residency. Soon after, I realized how relevant the process of creating and

implementing this project could be for a thesis project. I decided to reform my thesis abstract around the creation and implementation of this project I was now in the process of creating.

In the weeks following, I found myself in numerous meetings with advisors within Theatre UCF at the University of Central Florida. The university is home to over 200 different majors and reported enrollment of 56,376 students for the 2012-13 year (“Institutional Knowledge Management.”). According to the program goals for Theatre UCF, “A well-rounded education involves an understanding of our place in the universe, and insights into the human condition, without which it is impossible for artists to interpret dramatic works accurately, sensitively, and with true artistry” (“Theatre UCF.”). I felt strongly this project would directly align with the Theatre UCF program goals, providing a unique and meaningful experience while assisting those involved understand their place within the universe.

My motivation for the project kept me focused while gaining the needed support and required approval to move forward with a proposal for this project to serve as both my residency and graduate thesis project. With my department granting the needed approval for me to proceed, all that remained was deciding how this queer youth theatre project would be formatted in order to complete the Mukti Fund grant application. Since summer was just around the corner and many youth would be out of school, I felt it made the most sense to focus the launch of the project during the summer months. I would be using theatre for social change techniques and ideas to target specifically the youth from the Zebra Coalition® through weekly workshop sessions. Since the Queer Youth Theatre grant from the Mukti Fund is an annual grant, and initial budgeting for the project was all being focused to the summer time period, there was some concern for the longevity of the project after the summer ended. Representatives assisting with the initial grant proposal from the UCF Foundation helped me feel confident additional funding

could be leveraged from other donors to assist with keeping the project running after the summer. With a basic outline and budget for the project now in mind, I was able to continue the process of developing the Mukti Fund grant proposal required for the project.

I had multiple meetings and brainstorming sessions with the UCF Foundation in order to plan, write, and revise the grant application package required for the Queer Youth Theatre grant offered from the Mukti Fund. According to their mission, “The UCF Foundation, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization that enhances the mission and vision of the University of Central Florida through its fundraising activities. Through the foundation, private support has helped UCF establish itself as a major metropolitan university. Donors to UCF have assisted in the growth of many university facilities and innovative research programs that accommodate UCF's diverse student body” (“UCF Foundation.”). Throughout the grant development process I also consulted my faculty mentor from Theatre UCF, along with representatives from the Zebra Coalition® for feedback on overall content. It was during this period of development I officially named the project interACTionZ. In early drafts of the proposal I called the project tranZform. The goal behind this original name was to maintain branding already in place with other Zebra Coalition® groups, while at the same time addressing the transformative power of theatre for social change. In conversations with representatives from Zebra Coalition® there was concern this name spoke exclusively to a transgender specific group, which was not the goal of the project. Zebra Coalition® spoke with youth and came back to me with interACT as a possible name for the program, accentuating ACT in an effort to focus on the theatre aspect of the project. I was personally concerned this name spoke directly to acting and that youth with no theatre background may choose not to attend. I finally landed on interACTionZ, which I felt blended the elements of theatre (ACT) and LGBTQ+ youth from Zebra Coalition® (Z) into one name.

Collectively we decided the best option was for the UCF Foundation to file the final grant application on behalf of Theatre UCF and Zebra Coalition®, since this type of work is something their team is trained to handle on a daily basis. Working with the UCF Foundation I learned if funds awarded to the project resided in one of their accounts, the Foundation would have the ability to continue leveraging additional funding for the project from other potential donors. Through the process of working with the UCF Foundation, I learned interACTionZ would be one of the first LGBTQ+ projects the foundation had ever leveraged funding for within the university. This truly meant interACTionZ was trailblazing the way for LGBTQ+ projects of the future within the university! In April of 2013, we were notified by Mukti Fund that \$10,000 had been awarded to officially launch interACTionZ, a queer youth theatre partnership project between Theatre UCF and the Zebra Coalition®. In June of 2013, the UCF Foundation notified us an additional \$10,000 of funding was pledged from the Bryce L West Foundation to support and continue interACTionZ programming.

### **CHAPTER THREE:** **IMPLEMENTING THE SUMMER PROGRAM**

With funding approved to launch the project, interACTionZ moved from a theoretical idea to a solidified reality. It was now time to lock in dates for meeting sessions and start recruiting youth to participate in the summer project. I quickly found it more difficult than I had anticipated translating on paper the whirlwind of ideas spinning in my. I wanted to include participating youth in as much of the project creation process as possible, without fully defining everything ahead of time for them. My working goal for the summer project became encouraging open communication by exposing and engaging youth, using theatre for social change techniques and ideas.

In the beginning stages of planning for the project I realized consistent attendance was going to be an issue. During three workshop sessions used to test out the new program before the official launch, no more than a couple youth attended each session. It was clear attendance was driven primarily based on what youth happened to already be at the location on the day of a workshop. After discovering this issue with inconsistent attendance, I explored how I might be able to integrate students from Theatre UCF at the University of Central Florida into the project, almost as a backup plan. Through many conversations with my faculty mentor and others within the department, we discovered a way in which we could offer upper-level elective college credit to any student from the university who participated in the project. Having this option available provided a needed “buy-in” encouraging UCF students to commit their time participating in the summer project. The hands-on and thought-provoking program was designed specifically for LGBTQ+ youth as well as youth identifying as straight advocates for the LGBTQ+ community ages 13-24. The summer group consisted of an excellent mix of youth from diverse backgrounds. While still meeting the key demographics defined for the program I had effectively created a

committed, core group of students who would be at each session, allowing work to move forward regardless of fluctuating drop-in attendance generated from Zebra Coalition® youth.

### **Community Building**

I started our early sessions using theatre games and activities to assist in building a community which supported a safe and welcoming working environment for all participants involved. During these sessions, I chose activities that would not physically challenge those participants who may have initially felt uncomfortable getting up in front of the group. I selecting activities such as “cover the space” and “enemy/defender,” both of which are designed to have participants move throughout the room in different ways based on directions from a facilitator. It was my thought that participants would be less likely to feel shy or isolated when they saw everyone else doing the same activity together. This tactic also encouraged participation from all people in the room, as opposed to creating an environment which allowed participants to easily choose not to engage in a given activity. I essentially had the group working together all on their feet at the same time in a group, rather than as individuals.

Once the group was introduced to the project and my working goals of encouraging open communication and youth leadership development, I focused on getting group members acquainted with one another. At the beginning of each session, participants were invited to “check-in” and share how they were feeling using only a single word. If they desired, youth were permitted to follow up their word choice with a few sentences offering explanation. I found both youth from UCF and Zebra Coalition® truly appreciated and even looked forward to checking in with the group at each session. This opportunity provided not only a chance for youth to share with the group, but also allowed youth a chance to self-assess their own feelings, and reflect by having to assign a single word to everything going on in their life at the time.

Another component I added to the process of community building was allowing youth the opportunity to lead the group in a warm-up activity. I provided some guidance and resources for youth in the program to reference when selecting their activities. Recommended reading for selecting appropriate warm-up activities included Michael Rohd's *Theatre for Community Conflict and Dialogue* and Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Michael Rohd is the artistic director of the Sojourn Theatre in Portland, Oregon, whose work focuses on community-engaged and devised theatre. Augusto Boal was a cultural activist from Brazil who developed "theatre of the oppressed" to engage communities in communication and conflict resolution. My thought behind this process was if youth were leading the warm-ups, others in the group may feel less threatened and more inclined to participate. Having the youth lead an activity also provided key insight for me as a facilitator on the specific interests and levels of technique for youth involved with the program.

### **Reflection**

One of the biggest challenges I faced while trying to build community was inconsistent attendance at workshop sessions. I really hoped during my conception of the project I would have the ability to sustain a group of regular people who would meet from week to week. This would have allowed participants to use knowledge from previous sessions as building blocks to further develop ideas as we moved through the summer project. I found very quickly a downfall of doing work at a "drop-in" style center like the Zebra Coalition® is that youth attend sessions when they are able to, which may not be as consistent as I would like. I had to remain flexible while building our interACTionZ community because the priorities and expectations I desired to place on the group didn't align completely with those of youth attending the sessions. I think the lack of commitment helped illuminate several different factors youth were experiencing in their

own lives preventing them from full commitment to attend the program. Several of the youth involved were out on a daily basis looking for jobs to support themselves. Many of the youth were homeless and living in transitional living centers requiring additional commitments, which at times prevented them from doing all the things they might desire.

When looking specifically at the importance of warm up activities in my community building process, selection of the right activities for this specific group was critical to success. According to Michael Rohd, “The purpose of warm-ups is threefold: to get a group of people playing together in a safe space, to energize that space, and to create a sense of comfort in the collective doing of specific and structured activities” (Rohd 4). I agree wholeheartedly with this statement, and found by using warm-up activities mixed throughout my sessions, I was able to continuously engage youth in ways they may not have otherwise desired to participate. Through my community building process with the interACTionZ group, I was able to assist the group in pushing themselves to find ways to interact and build energy for each session. Creative expression is something many youth involved with the project had never experienced prior to attending interACTionZ. The community building process allowed youth to try new things and take creative risks, while still remaining in a supportive and accepting group environment. At the end of one of our community building sessions, a youth participant from Zebra Coalition® commented, “interACTionZ will keep you laughing and smiling for days” (Zebra Coalition® Youth).

During early sessions I encountered youth who would not want to verbally express any personal feelings or thoughts on topics discussed within group sessions. I recall a specific situation where a young man would actually stand by the door, so as not to feel physically trapped inside the space. I later discovered this likely stemmed from previous encounters with

the juvenile correction system and time this youth had spent in jail. The group of youth I had assembled in this space was unique because some were college students with a fair amount of perceived privilege, while others were highly oppressed and marginalized youth, many homeless. This dichotomy initially worried me moving into the project as I was concerned youth would not be able to connect with each other within the group. I quickly learned how wrong I was, and not to doubt the power possessed by theatre for social change and the program I was creating. With primary goals of community building, communication, and acceptance, interACTionZ was designed with a goal of bringing all kinds of youth together through theatre. According to a student participant from UCF, “The individuals who attended from Zebra come from a very different background and many have very different life situations than us. The UCF students were regarded both as knowledgeable people with respect and a degree of reverence, but also as friends and peers by the Zebra youth. For youth whose lives are often so delicate, this kind of position is honestly a big responsibility” (UCF Student).

### **Image Theatre**

Image Theatre is a technique where participants are encouraged to play in abstract and creative ways often exploring societal and interpersonal issues. Using still images which transcend the limitations of language, participants can explore situations and emotions based on a given topic without verbally expressing their opinions. I specifically used the topic of bullying during one session to allow participants an opportunity to communicate emotions and ideas associated with the topic using only images. By eliminating words from communication, participants were forced to think in more abstract and subconscious ways to represent their feelings on different issues and ideas. I worked with the group to break down different emotional and physical components of common characters in a bullying situation. The characters we

discussed and activated included the bully, victim, bystander, and someone who steps into the situation either for good or bad. Using images helped assist youth in removing the back and forth arguments which often stem from verbal communication on topics where participants have divided views.

During the very first interACTionZ session of the summer, I asked all the youth to share their name, a gesture, and a sound of their choosing with the group. After everyone had an opportunity to share, I divided the overall group into smaller groups with about three people in each group. I instructed the smaller groups to find a working space to create what I called a “mini-scene.” In collaborating on these thirty-second long mini-scenes, youth were permitted to only use the names, gestures, and sounds created previously by those in their own group. I gave no further restrictions limiting how or who in the group used the names, gestures, and sounds; only the group must end their mini-scene with a still image including all members of the group. Something I stressed while the groups were working was the importance of finding a story in what they were creating. I explained the story could be abstract or literal in nature as long as the end product still represented the members of the group.

Each group was given the opportunity to share their mini-scene in front of everyone two separate times. After watching each piece, I encouraged the youth to first comment on what they saw in each group’s final image. I instructed those watching to focus on things they could literally see in the image, rather than attempting to assign any emotions or feelings to the image. Examples of things depicted in the images included “arms crossed” or “hand raised” to name a few. In his book *Theatre for Living*, artistic director and theatre for social change advocate David Diamond writes, “By not naming the images we start to break down the artificial barriers between the individual consciousness and that of the group. In doing so, we bridge the mind/body gap and start

to awaken the group consciousness” (Diamond 98). After each person had a chance to share something they saw in the final image, the group was then permitted to assign emotions and/or what they thought was going on in each piece to the final image. During this phase is when comments like “he looks angry” or “she is crying” were mentioned. After everyone watching the piece had commented, I provided an opportunity for the group sharing to comment on their intentions behind what was created together, and how accurate the rest of the group was in their interpretations of the piece.

### **Reflection**

During the first few applications of Image Theatre, youth were skeptical about what I was asking them to create. David Diamond says, “Working with the living community, it is essential to discover that images can emerge in an organic way, and that this process can be fun, even when the images are about very serious topics. It is possible, even on the first day of a workshop, to create an environment in which the group consciousness can express itself, sometimes at a subconscious level, using the language of the image” (Diamond 93). The process of making Image Theatre challenged youth who didn’t come from a theatre background; however, I worked hard to find ways to ease apprehensions until everyone felt comfortable enough to participate at their own pace. I recall during the first interACTionZ session of the summer, youth were already showing excitement in creating images to share with the group. I think it was a surprise how much discussion could stem from creating a seemingly simple image. Throughout the course of the summer, youth appeared to become more comfortable and expressive using Image Theatre techniques, and even requested we use the techniques during other sessions

I found Image Theatre one of the most valuable methods I used throughout the summer program. I was easily able to adapt many activities instinctively using image and tableaux work.

Since Image Theatre is often done silently, I was able to use this method as a starting point when the group was not ready to communicate verbally on a given topic. I found starting with images helped to organically guide the verbal conversations amongst youth. Using Image Theatre to begin exploring a new topic also assisted me as facilitator to know what specific areas were of interest to the youth in the room, based on the images they were creating.

### **Forum Theatre**

Another method of exploration I introduced to the group was Forum Theatre, a method allowing participants to actually tap into a scene at the crisis point and explore problem-solving techniques. Youth are then encouraged to respond by providing alternate options for the characters involved in the situation based on ideas generated from within the room and their own personal thoughts. David Diamond talks about Forum Theatre stating, “Forum Theatre is a form of participatory theatre developed by Boal. It is an opportunity for creative, community-based dialogue. The theatre is created and performed by community members who are living in the issues under investigation” (Diamond 39). Forum Theatre scenes work best when based on stories that include a protagonist, antagonist, and at least one bystander. The goal of Forum Theatre is to positively explore problem-solving techniques using both the actors on stage, along with members of the audience who are often referred to as “spectator actors” or “spect-actors.”

In order to prepare youth I was working with to participate in Forum Theatre pieces, I started by introducing them to basic improvisational theatre techniques. I conducted a few different activities requiring the youth to think on their feet, and make quick choices on how they would interact with a scene playing out, or being created in front of them. The next thing I worked on with youth in the program was how to use machine-based activities to develop abstract ideas. When creating a human machine, youth are asked to step into an empty space and

create a movement they are able to repeat indefinitely based on a general topic such as love or family. One by one other youth are encouraged to join the machine, creating their own unique movements, continuing to find ways to interact within the machine. Using machines continued having the group work together as one, without singling out any individual youth. Machines also assist youth in focusing and reflecting on how they fit in and interact with the rest of the machine. This idea of finding ways to fit into a bigger picture serves as a great metaphor for what happens when youth interact within our own society.

In his book, *After-School Theatre Programs for At-Risk Teenagers*, Philip Zwerling speaks of how relevant theatre for social change ideas can be when working with youth. Zwerling specifically includes a quote in his book about encouraging youth to actively participate in life experiences directly from Augusto Boal. According to Boal, “I want the spectator to act, not watch. It is obscene for a human being who is fully capable of doing to merely watch. The first principal in my Theatre of the Oppressed is the liberation of the spectator” (Zwerling 75). I felt it very important for youth not only to share personal stories of conflict they were facing in their lives, but also provide them an outlet to explore and gain tools in order to assist youth in navigating those conflicts.

Forum Theatre initially challenged the group, because it asked them to find stories involving conflict. The Forum Theatre sessions were also the first time many youth got up in front of a group and essentially became actors. Having theatre students from UCF participating in the program was a huge benefit, specifically in these sessions. The Theatre UCF students were always willing to step up and volunteer to demonstrate each activity. Having such a committed group participating in this project allowed other youth an opportunity to watch each activity to see and understand what would be happening before they actually participated on their own.

Integrating Forum Theatre into the interACTionZ programming was important because it truly helps youth develop ideas for problem-solving, and encourages participants to take action. In *Theatre for Living*, David Diamond writes, “In the Forum Theatre experience the metaphorical image of getting rid of what we don’t want is very different from the metaphorical image of getting what we do want. For instance, not wanting to get beaten up sets up a very different set of desires, fears, and actions in us than wanting to create safety or wanting a healthy family” (Diamond 40). It was exciting during our sessions taking time to explore both the protagonist and the antagonist in each story. During my session on bullying, we paid specific attention to the bully and the emotions associated with the bully’s character. Looking at all the characters, not just the victim, helped youth gain a broader understanding of where people might be coming from, and how they actually interact with one another in their own lives.

### **Reflection**

Forum sessions at interACTionZ were very exciting because we got to activate some very personal stories from the group, and explore them all together. Exploring personal stories was a huge success for both me as a facilitator and for the participants in the program. I find it so important to give youth an outlet to share and explore their experiences in the safest environment I can create for them. I was very excited to introduce the method of using Forum Theatre, because of how powerful the results tend to be for all parties involved in the work. Since Forum Theatre requires the audience to participate in finding solutions for the conflict presented on stage, it served as a great way to not only explore conflict, but also demonstrate effective communication skills for youth involved.

Forum Theatre is often referred to as a “rehearsal for life.” Forum Theatre helps empower youth to speak up and make positive changes within their community and in their own lives. It is

very important for youth to understand how much power they possess in any situation. There is a huge movement through anti-bullying campaigns pushing bystanders to become upstanders. The GLSEN school climate survey reports, “84.9% of students heard “gay” used in a negative way (e.g., “that’s so gay”) frequently or often at school, and 91.4% reported that they felt distressed because of this language” (GLSEN xiv). Essentially what this means is youth can choose to be part of the solution or part of the problem. Either way they must make a choice, even if the choice is to take no action and do nothing to help their peers. Forum Theatre allows youth a chance to see alternate, non-violent ways which they can become upstanders when they find themselves witnessing uncomfortable or harassing situations.

In speaking with youth from Theatre UCF, I learned how exciting Forum Theatre was for them both as students and individuals. Many of these students were entering their senior year of college and mentioned they had never been introduced to anything like Forum Theatre prior to participating with interACTionZ. This lack of experience with the technique created some educational stimulation within them, and their eagerness to learn and practice was evident in the work we created as a group. Something truly resonated with me in a statement from one of the Theatre UCF students on their own realization of the power they felt Forum Theatre possessed. “At our last workshop, a youth brought forward an issue he had been having with his boyfriend, who was present, for exploration using Forum Theatre. At first the idea made me anxious—there are many negative ways this story could end. What I came to realize later is that this youth had learned throughout the course of his time with us that he can positively explore potentially negative situations in his own life and discover how to make more positive choices through theatre, specifically Forum Theatre” (UCF Student).

Exploring all characters involved in a conflict situation was extremely effective and productive for the group. As mentioned earlier when addressing the topic of bullying, specific time was spent focusing on the bully. I have found so often youth programming on bullying focuses on the negative impact left on the victim of a bullying situation. I personally feel it is equally important to understand what the bully is going through, and Forum Theatre helps us understand how all parties can connect and communicate with each other in non-violent ways. It is also important to encourage those serving as bystanders when that type of behavior occurs, to stand up and be active in effecting change within their own communities.

I found that in many sessions I would play the devil's advocate in order to assist youth in solidifying their thoughts on different topics and ideas. It is easy to agree and speak your mind when everyone in the room is on the same page; however, this is not how life always works. I wanted youth to understand that not everyone will always have the same opinions on things, and that's okay. I stressed the importance of honoring all viewpoints of an issue and always listening to what others have to say. In order to maintain good and effective communication, youth must understand that while they may not agree with each other's view points, this lack of agreement doesn't invalidate the other's perspective. Each individual is entitled to their own opinion, and all individuals should be treated with respect.

### **Playback Theatre**

Playback Theatre is an improvisational form of group storytelling which focuses on honoring personal stories and respecting identity. Playback Theatre allows for youth to take on various roles including storyteller, actor, musician, conductor (facilitator), or audience member. Through this theatrical process, youth are given the opportunity to get up and share personal stories, which are then activated by their peers, in role as actors, and played on the spot as a form

of both catharsis and enjoyment. When stories are shared that don't have positive endings, the storyteller is given the option of having the actors work to create a transformative ending to the story, serving as inspiration for the storyteller and others in the room.

Playback Theatre lends itself to assisting youth in defining and conforming to consistent rituals. When participating in a playback troupe, each piece developed must follow a very specific order of events allowing ritual elements to occur. According to Jo Salas, co-founder of Playback Theatre, "In Playback Theatre, ritual often means the repeated structures in space and time that provide stability and familiarity, within which can be contained the unpredictable. Ritual also helps to summon the heightened perception of experience that can transform life into theatre" (Salas 104). None of the stories presented through Playback Theatre are pre-determined or rehearsed; however, format and ritual remains the consistent skeleton for creative development.

There is no requirement or pre-qualification for stories presented using Playback Theatre. Any participant can share any story which they desire to see presented through this creative theatrical format. Salas writes, "We are, all of us, storytellers. Story is built into our way of thought. We need stories for our emotional health and our sense of place in the world. All our lives we see opportunities to hear and tell them" (Salas 22). Once a story has been shared by a participant, the conductor of the session will ask the storyteller to select from the actors someone to portray them in the recreation of their story. This is where the fun begins, because after selecting the main role for the story, the storyteller then gets to cast the remaining roles necessary for playing out the story. If there are more actors than character roles, those without a specific role have an opportunity to take on abstract ideas, emotions, or background elements of

the story. These supporting roles to the main story were often equally as exciting to watch as the main characters in the pieces.

The entire process is guided by a person called the conductor. According to Salas, “The conductor is the conduit through which audience and actors can meet” (Salas 65). The conductor assists with interviewing the storyteller and asking questions, informing the actors recreating the story for the stage. The conductor may also slightly take on the role of director, giving some feedback when setting up the story for the actors. This could include sharing spatial information, reminders of specific details, and an overall recap of the key elements in the original story before the piece begins. “The double metaphor of the name “conductor” points to two aspects of the conductor’s job. It refers to the role of the orchestral conductor – directing a group of performers so they can work together and so the pieces they collectively create are organized and beautiful – and also to the conduction of energy between all those present (Salas 65).

Actors are not permitted time to rehearse the story; they simply gather props or costumes and proceed to their starting position for the piece. After actors have been assigned roles, they have only a few moments to visit the prop area and select from boxes, pieces of fabric, and other random items available. “With the audience’s imagination already engaged a piece of fabric can be a convincing bride’s dress or animal skin. It is also perfectly possible for the boxes to be believable as television sets, birthday cakes, or sand castles” (Salas 59). Just before the piece begins, abiding by ritual, the conductor will announce to the room “let’s watch,” and the piece will begin. The actors recreate the story shared using improvisation, creativity, and teamwork. Once the re-creation of the story had ended, actors involved reach out their arms and ritualistically give the story as a gift to the person who shared.

## Reflection

Playback Theatre was a huge hit during summer sessions at interACTionZ. The youth really engaged once they found stories shared could truly be about anything at all. Many of the youth had initially thought in order for a story to be valid in our sessions, it had to contain deep rooted ties to an issue facing the LGBTQ+ community. The example I always gave to the group when asking them to think of stories to share during Playback Theatre sessions was an encounter I had while visiting a McDonald's drive-thru. I talk about how I pulled up to the drive-thru and discovered two paths I could choose from when ordering my meal. I shared my fascination with the idea of a double drive-thru option and how it brought a smile to my face while ordering my dinner. While this story is very simple, it demonstrates there are still plenty of elements to begin developing the story for the stage through Playback Theatre.

Another fascinating outcome of introducing Playback Theatre to this group of youth was how much they came out of their shells while engaging in the work. When speaking to a youth from Theatre UCF who participated in the summer program, they reflected on the power of what Playback Theatre can mean for an individual. "A youth, who joined interACTionZ closer to the end of our summer workshops, started off her time with us very shy and withdrawn. She told us that she didn't like speaking in front of people and was very hesitant to participate. However, at just her second session with us, she was declaring how surprised she was that she was getting up in front of people, performing in a Playback Theatre piece, and having fun with it! She continued to very proudly express her opinions during our sessions and was anything but shy (UCF Student). This youth found a way to break out of their shell through Playback Theatre which was incredibly exciting for me to witness. Similar to working with Image theatre, Playback Theatre also opened the door for many youth to begin thinking in more creative and abstract ways.

Through participation in various scenes and stories, youth began introducing characters and ideas not typically visible in our everyday lives. Some memorable examples of this include “hatred,” “lust,” “promiscuity,” and “stomach flu” to name a few. In a reflection, a participant commented, “Initially we didn’t have a clue how to enter a Playback Theatre scene as an abstract or metaphorical, background character. By the end of the summer we were all coming up with some truly creative and unique ways of contributing to each story or scene in which they participated” (UCF Student).

## **CHAPTER FOUR:** **YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT**

When creating the interACTionZ project, a key through line I wanted present during each session was youth development. I wanted to create a positive forum to assist youth in developing leadership skills they could apply both in our sessions and in their own lives. Going into the project I wanted to consider the youth perspective at every stage of the development process. Since youth would be attending and interacting with each other throughout the summer, I wanted them to have ownership in what was created by the group. My goal as facilitator for the project was not only to guide the group through each session, but to also help cultivate the youth involved to gain an improved ability leading and collaborating on session elements of their own.

All the youth from Theatre UCF were asked to collaborate with Zebra Coalition® youth to collectively create, organize, and facilitate original workshops within the community. This truly challenged and brought the group closer together as they worked out who would handle each section of their workshops. The group brainstormed together and landed on three different topics which they desired to further explore through individual workshop sessions. The working themes of these three workshops were Gender Stereotypes, Healthy Relationships, and Positive Images of Sexuality. Students from the university worked with youth from Zebra Coalition® to secure locations in which the group could come together and present each workshop. Throughout this process I witnessed all youth involved communicating ideas for the sessions with each other using discipline-specific terminology they had learned through earlier interACTionZ sessions. Youth not only were engaging during the session activities took place, but were also retaining the knowledge of processes used to build and develop those activities. Youth were actually using higher-order thinking, meaning they were not just passively observing and listening, but actually applying the cognitive knowledge they learned during earlier interACTionZ sessions.

Once youth selected the activities for each workshop, I solicited interest from the group on who would like to assist in facilitating each activity. Seeing the youth each latch on to different elements of each workshop was very exciting for me as a facilitator. Up to this point the youth had the opportunity to watch me facilitate all the different activities from their workshop session plans. During that time youth were acting as participants in each of the activities. Now it was time to pass the torch onto the youth, allowing them to take what was learned and practiced, and present it for others. I had not anticipated such an overwhelmingly positive response from the youth when I told them they would get to lead the workshops together. If I would have come into the first session and told the youth the goal of our sessions was for them to lead workshops, I don't know how many would have ever come back. It was great to see the youth present the workshops for each other in a safe environment. While there weren't huge numbers of people in attendance at each workshop, I feel each was still successful. Not only did the few who attended each workshop get to participate, but youth from interACTionZ got experience leading sessions of their own as a collective team.

Another important goal for interACTionZ was to provide a safe space for youth to communicate with each other. During each session youth were given the opportunity to check-in with the group. They were invited to share a single word to sum up how they were feeling at the time, or to describe what was going on in their own life. Youth were always given the option to justify their word choice with a quick sentence or two of explanation. Though this was a brief process, it was something many youth looked forward to at each session. In early sessions the check-in time went very quickly, with youth not spending much time to self-reflect on how they were feeling. As one youth participant stated, "At the beginning of the summer I was incredibly nervous to try this new type of theatre. I did not think I would be able to contribute much to the

group because of my lack of experience and knowledge on some of the subjects we would be discussing” (UCF Student). As the sessions progressed, we started to hear more of a through line in youth check-in statements. Some youth were applying for jobs and would give updates at each session on their progress, receiving positive reinforcement from the group. It was great to see youth shift from surface-level statements they made during early sessions, to now making reflective statements on things happening in their own lives.

During one of our first sessions I asked the group the following question: “What is interACTionZ?” This was a daunting question for the group at the time, so early in the summer. I explained my working goals for the project to the group of encouraging open communication and youth leadership development, and asked them to stay with me on the journey as we create the metaphorical detestation for the program on the way. Since interACTionZ was being created through the course of the summer, there was no existing verbiage or marketing material describing the program. I tasked the group with working together to create an original logo for the program. The group went through many versions of the logo through their development process, each week presenting updated drawings of the logo. As facilitator for the project, I continued working to problematize elements of the logo for the group. I wanted the group to focus on what perceptions people not familiar with interACTionZ might make when they see the logo. I worked with youth implementing similar tactics used with Image Theatre to focus on what people viewing the logo (or image) would initially see and think when viewing the logo.

The group also worked together to create a promotional video for the project which was another challenging, yet rewarding process for all involved. Youth recorded clips and photographs from our sessions and worked to compile them into a thirty second video. This video was specifically designed by youth to introduce interACTionZ to those unfamiliar with the

project. Youth collaboration and peer feedback was crucial to success in creating all promotional items for the project. I continued to push youth in the group to all have a strong voice in deciding the final versions of all marketing pieces. I wanted all final products created by the group to remain representative of the individuals who created them. In a reflection, one student commented, “One of the key things I learned through interACTionZ is not only should I step up in more leadership roles, but once I get comfortable with them I could actually be good in that position. I always thought that I was just a good little soldier, who would never be a productive or helpful leader. I now believe I could be, and should try for more management and leadership opportunities in my own life” (UCF Student). It was a challenge for both me and the youth to transfer so much of the creative process for these materials over to the youth. However, I feel lessons youth learned on collaboration and peer review throughout this development process will carry into other areas benefiting their own lives. Another student reflected, “The process has been real-world experience because it has given me practice in communicating with diverse groups of people as well directing activities and teaching why theatre is relevant to this kind of work” (UCF Student).

One of the more moving statements from the summer was made from a Zebra Coalition® youth who attended interACTionZ sessions on a regular basis. According to this youth, “I wish I would have known about theatre earlier, because I wouldn’t have done drugs, I would have done theatre instead” (Zebra Coalition® Youth). Hearing this reflective statement from a youth who early in the summer didn’t even speak during sessions was rewarding for me as a facilitator. This statement made during a check-out of an interACTionZ session proved how powerful participating in the program was for this youth. This youth was able to recognize an issue from their past, and discover positive alternatives to apply in their life moving forward.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:** **PRIDE YOUTH THEATRE ALLIANCE CONFERENCE**

A requirement for organizations receiving a Queer Youth Theatre grant from the Mukti Fund is to attend the annual Pride Youth Theatre Alliance (PYTA) conference. According to the Mukti Fund, “PYTA was formed to provide and promote successful models for LGBTQ youth theater programming, both nationally and internationally. Most importantly, PYTA is an opportunity to support the insight and resilience of LGBTQ youth and provide them with safe spaces for creative expression to tell their own stories” (“Mukti Fund.”). The PYTA conference is designed primarily to bring together key leaders in each organization funded from a Mukti development grant. The conference offers a variety of sessions designed to engage members in discussion on issues happening within PYTA member organizations around the country. The conference also offers mentorship from established organizations, who can share best-practices with newer groups just getting their program off the ground.

Attending the PYTA conference provides an exciting opportunity to share and network with other theatre artists committed to working in the field of queer youth theatre. Currently, membership to the alliance is granted based solely on receiving funding from the Mukti fund. The format of the conference allows for individual members and organizations to share things they are experiencing in their own local queer youth theatre programs. PYTA also provides professional development opportunities for staff through working sessions offered over the course of the conference. Sessions may include topics ranging from basic theatre games to in-depth discussions on honoring intersectional identities. Each year the conference rotates to a different member organization’s home location. Hosting the conference provides the local organization an opportunity to share some of their own work with other alliance members. Youth

from an organization hosting the conference also benefit by getting to work with alliance members in hands-on activities surrounding queer youth theatre.

Returning from the 2013 Pride Youth Theatre Alliance (PYTA) conference in San Francisco, I was left feeling challenged, enlightened, and connected. I never dreamed I would be able to participate in organizing with so many different individuals and organizations, all of whom are creating queer youth theatre. The discussions and working sessions I actively contributed to throughout the conference allowed me to grow as both an artist and an individual. Arriving at the conference, I was immediately met with a sense of purpose and excitement. Though I was one of the first-time attendees to the conference, I knew I belonged and was welcome in the room from the moment I arrived.

Past conference participants/members were extremely welcoming during a new member orientation designed just for assimilating people like me in to the alliance. This session enlightened me on how much the Pride Youth Theatre Alliance (PYTA) has grown in such a very short period of time. I learned PYTA held its first conference meeting in 2010. Conference attendees gathered in Orlando, FL with a total attendance of 10 participants. In the following two years attendance grew only slightly with 12 participants attending in 2011 and 17 in 2012. The fourth annual conference, which I attended in 2013, included 31 individual participants from 21 different queer youth theatre groups. The 2013 San Francisco conference was the largest to date, nearly doubling the growth from the previous year.

PYTA offers an incubator program which exists primarily to provide mentoring and funding for emerging queer youth theatre organizations. During the orientation, new members of the alliance were broken into smaller groups led by mentors from existing organizations. Evaluation is a topic I discussed during one of the breakout sessions I attended. Finding ways to

measure the effectiveness and reach of any arts program can be a difficult challenge. I was introduced to a tool used in Boston called *The Boston Youth Art Evaluation Project*, a published handbook created specifically to explore ways to measure an arts program.

Another discussion topic I introduced to my breakout group centered on what age range each organization considered “youth.” Determining the age of youth is an interesting issue organizations must clearly define. However, by defining a clear age range for a program, additional issues are created when youth age out of a program or no longer meet the requirements for participation. Organizations are now faced with the challenge of finding ways to support youth who don't fit into programming criteria, however maintain a desire to engage with the work.

Listening to other participants I learned many organizations operate on a “drop-in” style setup similar to interACTionZ, where youth have the option to come and go as they please, obtaining services they desire from the organization. Other participants spoke of written agreements they require youth to complete detailing their commitment to their program. I feel both the drop-in and committed attendance models for programming serve specific purposes for youth who attend. Something I took away from the discussion was by using a model where youth commit their involvement, work can build from session to session moving in a defined direction. While I was initially drawn to the structure of committed attendance, I believe there is also a way to engage youth who are not fully able to commit. Creating supplemental programming and workshops which maintain the working goals for an organization allow youth who are unable to attend on a regular basis an opportunity to still engage with the work. Youth are still learning and developing even if they only attended one session. If youth are willing to open their minds to explore, they will reap the benefits of their contributions.

Something fascinating I discovered on my first day at conference was not all organizations believe in using personal stories to explore with youth. In my opinion, the integration of personal stories can heighten the level of work created to a truly transformative place for both the youth creating and the audience reached with the work. It was interesting hearing how others focused specifically on the ideas of form and technique when introducing theatre to their youth. One group referred to this method of exploration, which excludes personal stories, as maintaining “the veil of role.” According to Mukti Fund, “Many youth development theater programs do not address the serious issues that LGBTQ youth face, including bullying, rejection by families, homelessness, discrimination, violence, depression, and suicide” (“Mukti Fund.”). While keeping youth distant from the content being explored may potentially help protect them, it’s important to recognize this protective distance may also threaten to stifle creativity in the work trying to be accomplished with youth.

The second day of the conference began with a tour of New Conservatory Theatre center, the host location for the conference. Walking through the building and seeing history on the walls of past productions and programming the theatre had offered was truly inspiring. It was clear to me this space was safe for youth to come explore and learn without a threat of oppression. This model of allowing youth to learn and grow through programming that challenges both youth and the community around them is something so important for all involved. It is important for youth to understand the power they possess to help bring change to the community in which they live. I was truly moved and inspired hearing the artistic director of New Conservatory Theatre speak about his history with the organization. Every community should offer a space like New Conservatory Theatre for LGBTQ+ youth to organize, learn, and develop as artists.

After the tour, each of the returning organizations who attended the conference in 2012 were given an opportunity to report back to the group on what has been happening through the course of the year within their organization. Mukti Fund describes the Pride Youth Theatre Alliance (PYTA) as, “A national network of arts organizations from across the U.S. and Canada with programs focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) youth theater” (“Mukti Fund.”). It was interesting hearing how each of the organizations was community specific to the youth they were working with. I was inspired by something different in each presentation. I also felt challenged on how to incorporate some of the ideas with my own desire to re-imagine the programming model for interACTionZ in Orlando. Once existing organizations were finished presenting, all new organizations to the alliance were given an opportunity to share a preview or report on their programs. I was again inspired to see each organization, all in different stages of development and growth, all working towards a common goal of engaging and working with queer youth within their communities.

A common through line in almost all presentations was an idea of youth leadership and development. This idea is something very important to me, as I recall being a youth very determined to exceed, with opportunities to learn and grow few and far between. Creating accessibility for youth to acquire skills to achieve their own goals and desires is something critical to a successful queer youth project. My excitement and inspiration continued as I heard how many children’s theatres were incorporating queer youth programming into their seasons.

A very interesting question was raised to all PYTA members at the end of presentations, “How do you navigate working in a community you don’t come from?” This question struck me because I have never tried to fully integrate myself into a community I was working with. I think it is important to assist youth in communicating with each other, but also remain professionally

distant making clear I am not actually in their shoes. I don't personally believe this makes me better than the youth; however, I do acknowledge society would often place me in a role of authority, being the director of the project. In discussion, someone asked, "Should we be working with a population which we are not part of?" I personally feel it's all in how one chooses to navigate the journey working within a community that determines how the community responds. I would not walk in and claim to be an expert, who has arrived with all the answers, if I can't even relate with specific issues of the community. This would create a divide even greater than the natural divide which inherently exists if I wasn't from the same community. I don't need to be a homeless youth in order to work with homeless youth. I believe anyone with good intentions can facilitate and work towards bringing about social change within any given community, as long as youth remain the center and focus of all actions. A benefit of working with a community you also identify with is an opportunity to serve as a role model for youth involved. Even though I allow youth to guide session discussions, I am often looked upon as someone who may have first-hand experience with many of the issues they are currently facing. Someone who is not from the population would not have the benefit of this internal support structure generated from within the community, which could potentially make building community within the group more challenging.

After a short break, we moved as an entire group right into Session 1 of the conference, titled *Using Activism and Theater for Social Change to Give Youth a Voice*. I was co-facilitator of this session with the project director of YouthAware Out & United (Y.O.U.) from New Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. The session was exciting because the topics were of great interest and relevance to me personally and for my work. One of the key things brought up in discussion was the importance of youth checking-in at each session, specifically having youth

state their preferred gender pronoun (PGP). This meant youth would state for the group how they prefer others to address them (i.e., masculine, feminine, or intentional-mix). Another great idea recommended through discussion was having a question box anyone could anonymously drop feedback, questions, or ideas into either before, during, or after a session.

Something ironic came up during a conversation in the session of using spectrum-based activities with youth to help gauge where their heads are at on a given issue. This was ironic because I had already pre-planned to lead a spectrum activity at the end of our workshop session around the topic “issues facing today’s youth.” I facilitated a modified version of a spectrum activity, using only the following three statements as prompts for participating members of PYTA to respond. “San Francisco is my favorite city. Bullying is the biggest issue facing LGBTQ+ youth today. When speaking to LGBTQ+ youth about issues that affect all youth (Bullying, Harassment, Suicide etc.) LGBTQ+ specific examples should be used.”

Participants were asked to respond on a spectrum within the room based on statements read aloud. They had the choice of “AGREE/ALWAYS” on one side of the room, “DISAGREE/NEVER” on the opposite side of the room, or anywhere else in between. Participants physically moved within the space to signify their answer and some were asked to justify their positions verbally for the group. I intentionally chose loaded and charged questions to use with this group to challenge them to find a distinct place on the spectrum. The statements worked fantastically because they challenged the group to think within their own set of values on how to handle situations and why. It was interesting to hear responses from all sides of the spectrum, because the responses were coming from very real places and experiences for those speaking.

Session 2 for the conference was titled *Best Practices for QYT Program Sustainability*.

The session was about further developing and advancing our own queer youth theatre projects. The session was led by the director of Pride Players, a queer youth theatre program located at the Rose Theatre in Omaha. Something interesting we did during the session was go around the room and speak on what we felt was our organizations greatest success and biggest challenge. When speaking of what the biggest challenge for interACTionZ was, the first thing in my mind was stability and longevity for the project. Anticipating my imminent graduation, it worries me what will happen next with interACTionZ. Part of me really wants to build a sustainable project without the backing of the university, allowing me to continue doing this type of work after my graduation. After attending this session at PYTA, I am motivated to hear many other organizations were also in the same spot as I am now and have pulled through doing great work.

Another interesting concept introduced during the session was an idea of remaining present while others were speaking. While this idea may seem easy, so often we want to think of what we are going to say next, or how we might respond to a person speaking. When this happens, we don't actually listen to what is happening around us because we're too focused on ourselves. This made me wonder what youth might be thinking when participating in activities requiring them to step into a scene, or even when just going around the room in a sequence for a check-in or check-out. It is important to remember this concept of being present is and pass it on to the youth I am working with. When participating in group discussions youth must understand it is not about sounding smart or rehearsed, but instead important to hear and connect with what other participants are saying.

Another important item discussed was the importance of knowing what the objectives are for your project. Just like in education, when developing a lesson plan, if you don't know what

your objectives are when you begin, how can you measure the success of your program? Some great tips were shared for building community support in securing attendance for a queer youth theatre program. Examples of locations mentioned to contact were local chapters of American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Parents, Family & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), and even Unitarian churches.

The third day of the conference started with a check-in consisting of our name, preferred gender pronouns (PGP), and favorite dessert. This was an easy demonstration of how to work the idea of PGP's into a standard check-in activity without making other participants feel ostracized. By simply including a few elements that everyone is going to respond to, it potentially allows for those with non-binary PGP's to feel less isolated. The next activity was truly stimulating to participate in. A teaching artist from New Orleans led the entire group in a choral song of "We're the ones, we're the ones, and we've been waiting." This was then combined with a segmented portion of the group singing "We're the ones we've been waiting for." On paper the words don't do the activity justice. It was truly moving and motivating to walk around the room singing/speaking this song in unison with other participants all singing different parts. It was an experience I had not recently felt, where it didn't matter what my voice sounded like, or if I could even sing, I felt a part of this community. I felt power in the group and became more and more comfortable as we moved through the activity. I would imagine my inherent response to this activity was also enthused in part because of my overall state of mind at the time, having been so inspired by events of the previous two days.

Session 4 was titled *Honoring Our Intersectional Identities: Class, Race, Gender, Disability, etc. in Ensemble Performance*. The ideas behind this working session really excited me because I found myself struggling with the idea of intersecting identities within my own

organization. The activity the group facilitator began with was a “step-in, step-out” style activity. Wherein someone would say a statement, (i.e., Step into the circle if you like ice cream) and anyone for whom the statement was also true should also step into the circle. The facilitator used very charged statements like step in to the circle if you are a white male, if you are LGB (omitting TQ+), or if you have HIV. There was an immediate sense of discomfort in the room, especially once one member of the group decided to sit down and disengage from the group activity. At one point someone also stepped forward and said, “Step into the circle if this activity makes you feel uncomfortable” and the majority of the room stepped into the circle. The person who had stepped out of the activity began to make comments from the outside, which I personally believe led to the group breaking down as a whole on the topic.

While facilitating an activity, I personally do not allow people to comment on an activity they choose to disengage from. I am more than happy to discuss with the individual what caused them to disengage one on one, but not during group facilitation. When the facilitation stopped focusing on the group overall, everything became about a single individual, effectively derailing the activity and focus of the group. David Diamond addresses the focus of theatre for social change stating, “In the making of theatre, though, we are not creating a play about one person’s life. We are not there to serve an individual. We might use one person’s story to attract people who have similar experiences... but from those exercises we are then creating a theatrical fiction that tells the truth of the community’s experience. We are always moving from the singular to the plural and using theatrical language to make art” (Diamond 59).

Once someone outside the discussion was assigned to a facilitator role, we were able to reorganize as a group and break down the issue into two major questions we desired to discuss further in smaller breakout groups. “How do we navigate the levels of privilege within the

alliance, and how does this translate into our work with youth in our own communities?” There were some great discussions in my breakout group along with further deconstruction of ideas and questions associated with the topic of intersecting identities. I personally reflected on how isolated I felt once the activity stopped being about the group, and shifted to the viewpoint of an individual. Just as I don’t want to be defined or placed into a box because of my sexuality, I also don’t want to be limited because I was born a Caucasian male. This incident occurring also helped me understand the value and importance of good facilitation. I had not previously been involved in an activity where the facilitation had gone so wrong. It was enlightening to experience this breakdown in order to bring awareness of how not to allow this to happen in one of my own sessions, or perhaps recognize the signs of facilitation breaking down. Another great idea that came from our breakout session was a notion of zooming out from the personal aspect of the activity to appreciate and understand the global perspectives of privilege.

The next activity of the afternoon was an opportunity to devise along with youth who performed in a queer youth theatre production at New Conservatory Theatre the previous night. The topic my group tackled was the idea of help and helping others. We started with a brief check-in with PGP’s, followed by a game of Colombian Hypnosis, an activity designed to demonstrate feelings of power/control, and a few rounds of a Complete the Image, an activity where participants freeze and one at a time reposition themselves into a new image.

Our group facilitator divided the room into smaller groups of three and asked us to share a story of a time when we helped someone, or ourselves asked for help. After sharing our stories, we selected one to explore further as a group. Each of the small groups was given specific assignments on how to further devise on the selected story. Devising is a form of collaborative playmaking which focuses on using personal stories. One group was asked to sing their entire

story, another was asked to tell the story from varying viewpoints, and my group was asked to communicate the story using only images. These were activities I was familiar with and was very excited to see varying ways of facilitating using similar ideas and techniques. I often feel like I am operating in a “UCF bubble” because most of the material I have learned stemmed from similar sources. It felt refreshing to see I am on track with what others in the community are also doing.

The work we created as a group was amazing, especially for only having around twenty minutes from start to performance. I was left thoroughly inspired to bring these types of thoughts back to my youth, encouraging them to explore their stories more in-depth. The opportunity we had to work with a youth from the local queer youth theatre group made the experience even more powerful. We regarded this youth as just another member of the group, with no delineation between us and this youth. No one needed to pander at any time to the fact a young person was in the room, which I would imagine made this youth feel empowered.

The final day of the conference we met in different committees and discussed a plan of action for the upcoming year. Members then had an opportunity to share plans with the larger group in mini-committee presentations. One idea I brought to the table for the newly formed membership committee was the idea to have quarterly reports from organizations sent out in a single document updating all members. This would share the challenges and the strengths of each organization allowing all to further network and discuss what is happening in our own communities.

The last activity of the 2013 conference was a visioning session where we all had the chance to imagine where we would like to see PYTA go in the future. During this session we had the option to share what strengths and assets we as members were able to bring to PYTA. This

was symbolized by writing our ideas and dreams onto paper leaves, then taping those leaves onto a large paper tree. This project will be further deconstructed by the governance committee in an effort to create an overall vision for the Pride Youth Theatre Alliance (PYTA).

During our final check-out from the conference each member was invited to express their feelings from the week using a maximum of three words. The words I chose to use were “challenged, enlightened, and connected.” Reflecting on this long weekend has further inspired me to solidify my thoughts and ideas on how I am going to contribute to the movement of queer youth theatre. I realize how important and necessary this outlet is for all youth in many communities, and I want to play a big part in continuing to bring this work to as many youth as possible.

## **CHAPTER SIX:** **CONCLUSION**

What an amazing and inspiring experience to work with university students furthering their education, while at the same time incorporating an underserved population of LGBTQ+ youth from Zebra Coalition® using theatre for social change. This project began as a daunting task, attempting to blend two separate populations of people through the medium of theatre. Throughout the program I worked to find ways to meld these two groups together, without drawing focus to an implied social division between the university and Zebra youth. The result was the formation of a supportive community of LGBTQ+ youth, willing to communicate and creatively engage with each other using theatrical techniques. Essentially, interACTionZ created a unified group of LGBTQ+ youth with a common goal of using and creating theatre for social change. While I deem the summer interACTionZ project a success, there were a number of challenges I had to confront and navigate throughout the process.

The biggest hurdle I experienced throughout the program was inconsistent attendance. Drop-in attendance from youth was a major issue for interACTionZ programming. One goal I had for the project was to create a solid and consistent group of LGBTQ+ youth committed to attending sessions on a regular basis. I quickly realized a need to re-imagine the format for programming after the first week of sessions because of drastic shifts in attendance. I don't feel individual sessions suffered from this drop-in effect; however, I do feel inconsistent attendance limits the ability to create a final product or performance. When youth attendance is not consistent from session to session, each session must maintain the ability to stand alone, while still engaging both new and returning youth. As project director and facilitator for the program, I became rather adept at re-working my own facilitation and lesson plans to accommodate the unexpected shifts and lack of consistency in attendance. Throughout the course of the summer,

interACTionZ reached twenty-five individual youth. Even though youth were not able to attend every session, many attended multiple sessions. Youth often shared during the check-out portion of our sessions positive things which they desired to take from the session and apply in their everyday life.

The interACTionZ program was specifically marketed stating youth did not require any previous theatre experience to participate. However, an unavoidable factor when integrating Theatre UCF students into the program was they possessed a stronger assertiveness at times towards participating in theater-based activities than other youth in the program. One technique I used as an attempt to mitigate this divide was implementing a group approach to activities. I crafted activities the whole room would participate in at the same time, meaning there was no separation between audience and participant. I felt by leveling the playing field, each youth was able to participate at a pace they felt comfortable with. I found this approach extremely successful as it engaged the majority of youth attending in all session activities.

Something I discovered through my journey with interACTionZ this summer was a newfound understanding and respect for the importance of gender identity. Even though I have conducted extensive research in grad school on transgender people and issues, I had never stopped to self-reflect on how I speak in my own life. Knowing the statistics of this population, I wanted to ensure I was not forwarding any further oppression on any youth participating in the program. According to the GLSEN school climate survey of LGBT youth, “Students who were gender nonconforming not only experienced higher rates of victimization based on gender expression, but also higher rates of victimization based on sexual orientation. Also, even LGBT students whose gender expression conformed to traditional norms experienced gender

expression-based victimization. It may be that non-traditional gender expression makes one a more visible target for various types of anti-LGBT harassment” (GLSEN 95).

One idea brought to my attention during an early interACTionZ session was stating preferred gender pronouns (PGP) while checking in with the group each session. This allowed for youth to self-identify their preferred gender identity at each session, knowing the group would respond with respect and acceptance. Addressing ideas of gender identity directly also allowed for education on how to correctly speak and show respect to this population. While I have worked extensively with the LGBTQ+ community, I continue to learn new things all the time. I won't deny difficulties I experienced trying to change my engrained way of thinking and speaking. A common phrase I use when addressing a group of people is “you guys”, regardless the gender identities of the group. While I have no malice intent behind my choice of words, I have come to realize that I could be more inclusive with my language, incorporating those who legitimately don't fall into binary gender identities. The GLSEN school climate survey specifically touches on gender issues experienced by youth while attending school. “Transgender students were the most likely to feel unsafe at school, with 80.0% of transgender students reporting they felt unsafe at school because of their gender expression” (GLSEN xix).

Even though I personally struggled with integrating gender neutral pronouns when addressing someone with this preference, I knew the importance of individual identity, and understood I needed to adjust my way of thinking. Contextually, I found myself struggling to use they, them, and their as opposed to binary masculine and feminine gender pronouns. However, I kept an open mind throughout the program and am happy to say I have progressed leaps and bounds as I continue to educate others on the importance of understanding preferred gender pronouns.

At the end of the summer I spoke to staff from Zebra Coalition® in an attempt to measure the effectiveness and reach of the interACTionZ summer program. According to the Director of Zebra Coalition®, “The work conducted in interACTionZ has had a meaningful impact with incredible outcomes. Participating youth have improved their verbal and non-verbal communication skills, have become more engaged in school and have improved their confidence levels.” According to the Clinical Manager of Zebra Coalition®, “interACTionZ was the first opportunity provided at Zebra Coalition® to make such a huge impact for our youth. This was evident in both attendance at group sessions and in hearing feedback from youth while outside of the group sessions. Improved socialization has also been noticed for many of the youth who participated with interACTionZ this summer.” I can’t begin to explain the overwhelming sense of accomplishment I felt receiving this feedback.

Knowing the program I created through has made such a huge impact for the youth involved makes all of the hard work worthwhile. I strived throughout the project to keep the youth I was working with at the center of everything we created. interACTionZ is the result of a group of dedicated, hard-working youth with a desire to create change for both themselves and their community. I am proud of the work and workshops created throughout the summer program. I have learned and grown tremendously as a facilitator, director, and human being through my journey with interACTionZ. Throughout the program, I successfully maintained my working goal of encouraging open communication by exposing and engaging youth, using theatre for social change techniques and ideas.

I end this chapter circling back the question I posed at the beginning of this thesis, “Why start a queer youth theatre group?” The following statements from youth who participated in the interACTionZ summer program help begin to answer this question.

“interACTionZ is an eye-opening, enlightening experience which engages theatre and the LGBTQ+ community” (UCF Student).

“I love interACTionZ” (Zebra Coalition® Youth).

“interACTionZ is a place to let go and be yourself” (UCF Student).

“Overall interACTionZ is a fun place to be! Participants of the group work to create an environment that is pleasant to be around, while working and exploring topics (Zebra Coalition® Youth).

“What I ended up getting from interACTioNZ was a tremendous confidence boost, a renewed interest in story development, and a new perspective on a type of theatre that I think I will work into my life from now on” (UCF Student).

“interACTionZ makes acting up fun” (Zebra Coalition® Youth).

“interACTionZ is the most inclusive theatre group I have ever participated in” (UCF Student).

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:** **LOOKING FORWARD**

Since the interACTionZ summer project wrapped in August 2013, many amazing opportunities have developed, allowing the program to evolve in new ways. I am continuing to seek additional partners to assist in growing the overall reach of the program. I anticipate many great developments to continue in the very near future for interACTionZ.

In the Fall of 2013, interACTionZ launched a re-imagined model of programming in an effort to target a larger scope of youth. The program still meets twice a week; however, now it meets once on campus at the University of Central Florida and once at Zebra Coalition® in downtown Orlando. Dinner is now provided for all youth before each interACTionZ session held at Zebra Coalition®. Adding a meal has increased the level of social interaction between all group members, allowing time for everyone to socialize outside the structure of the actual sessions.

Though I experienced major challenges with attendance during the summer program, it is important not to abandon the drop-in population as the project moves forward. There is a way to engage youth who are not fully able to commit their attendance by the use of supplemental programming and workshops that still inform the larger picture of what interACTionZ is attempting to achieve. Engaging students from UCF in the project continues to maintain a solid base of youth furthering the development of interACTionZ programming.

In November of 2013, interACTionZ will launch a test program called “interACTionZ @ The REP,” designed explicitly to target youth ages 13-18 who identify as LGBTQ+ or straight advocates for the LGBTQ+ community. Sessions for this program will take place at Orlando Repertory Theatre, a professional Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) also in partnership with

the University of Central Florida. Focusing on theatre for social change techniques, youth will creatively explore their personal stories in order to devise an original piece. The program will culminate with a collaborative showcase of work created by youth participating in the interACTionZ @ The Rep program along with youth from the existing interACTionZ partnership between Theatre UCF and Zebra Coalition®.

It is my desire to continue the growth of interACTionZ programming, while engaging as many youth as possible. There is a desperate need for this type of work within the Orlando community, and interACTionZ currently is the only group offering the work specifically for LGBTQ+ youth. I hope within a short period of time youth from all over Central Florida will be lining up to join interACTionZ. I'm also excited to see the accomplishments of youth who participated in interACTionZ as they apply lessons learned throughout the program into their own lives.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**IRB APPROVAL LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

From : **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To : **Jonathan P. Jackson**

Date : **June 04, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 6/4/2013 the IRB determined that the following proposed activity is not human research as defined by DHHS regulations at 45 CFR 46 or FDA regulations at 21 CFR 50/56:

Type of Review: Not Human Research Determination  
Project Title: interACTionZ  
Investigator: Jonathan P Jackson  
IRB ID: SBE-13-09425  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

University of Central Florida IRB review and approval is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are to be made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, please contact the IRB office to discuss the proposed changes.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 06/04/2013 02:35:04 PM EDT

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Muratori".

IRB Coordinator

**APPENDIX B:**  
**SELECT SESSION PLANS**

Tuesday 5/14/13

**Check in: (15 minutes)**

Participants are invited to share a single word to sum up how they are feeling or what is going on in their life. They may justify their word with a quick sentence or two.

**Introduction of Syllabus and Course: (10 minutes)**

Review the course outline for UCF students and preview the work that will be accomplished throughout the course of the summer for youth from Zebra Coalition®

**Spectrum of Difference/Values Clarification: (15 minutes)**

Participants are asked to respond on a metaphorical spectrum within the room based on statements. They have the choice of “AGREE/ALWAYS”, “DISAGREE/NEVER”, or anywhere else in between. Participants move within the space and some are then asked to justify their positions after each statement.

Select Statements: “McDonalds has the best French fries.”  
“I know what Theatre for Social Change is.”  
“I know what theatre outreach is”  
“I am familiar with the Zebra Coalition®”  
“I am comfortable speaking in front of a group”

**How did you get your name: (10 minutes)**

Partner up the group and ask the pairs to briefly share the story of where they got their name. Participants are then asked to introduce their partner and the story of their name with the whole group.

**Name/Gesture: (20 minutes)**

Participants are asked to again share their name along with a single gesture to represent them. After all have shared the group is divided into smaller groups and are given 10minutes to create a brief series of tableaux images and movements using only the gestures and names of the participants in their groups.

**Reflection/Sharing: (20 minutes)**

Participants watch as each group shares. Participants are encouraged to comment first on what they actually see, rather than assigning emotions or feelings. After each person has had a chance to share something that they actually see, the group can then attempt to assign emotion and/or what they think is going on in the scene. After the audience has commented, the group sharing is provided the opportunity to comment on their intentions behind the scene they created.

**Check Out: (10 minutes)**

Participants are asked to choose one thing from their life that they don't need any more or that is holding them back, and metaphorically leave it in behind. Participants are then asked to choose one thing from the session that they would like to take with them, and apply in their daily life. Both the action of leaving and taking should be physically ritualized by the each person while they speak.

Tuesday 5/28/13

**Check in:** (15 minutes)

Participants are invited to share a single word to sum up how they are feeling or what is going on in their life. They may justify their word with a quick sentence or two.

**What are you doing?:** (15 minutes)

Participants are placed in a circle with one person in the middle. The person in the middle should act out the gestures of doing an action (IE Making a sandwich). The person in the middle should continue these actions until someone on the outside steps in and says “What are you doing?” At this point the person in the middle must say anything OTHER than what they are actually doing. The person, who asked, must not begin acting out whatever the person stated they were doing. The cycle continues until all participants have had an opportunity to try it out.

**Breaking down bullying:** (15 minutes)

Participants are asked to assign emotion characteristics of the four parts of bullying. Some examples of what this might look like are below:

**BULLY:** Mean, Bigger, Selfish, Ignorant, Violent, Aggressive, Abused, Powerful

**VICTIM:** Broken, Lost, Self-Loathing, “Why”, Empty, Sad, Vengeful

**BYSTANDER:** Frightened, Split, Helpless, Confused, “Not My Problem”

**PERSON WHO STEPS IN:** Brave, Help/Save, Friend, Sibling, Teacher, Guilty, Seeking Something, Scared

**Image Theatre:** (25 minutes)

Participants are placed in groups and asked to create a series of three still images with fluid transitions.

Image #1 – What is happening with bully and victim?

Image #2 – Someone steps in (Either making things better or worse by doing so)

Image #3 – Resolution, with a preferably positive ending of how situation was handled.

**Sharing/Reflection:** (20 minutes)

Participants watch as each group shares. Participants are encouraged to comment first on what they actually see, rather than assigning emotions or feelings. After each person has had a chance to share something that they actually see, the group can then attempt to assign emotion and/or what they think is going on in the scene. After the audience has commented, the group sharing is provided the opportunity to comment on their intentions behind the scene they created.

**Check Out:** (10 minutes)

Participants are asked to choose one thing from their life that they don’t need any more or that is holding them back, and metaphorically leave it in behind. Participants are then asked to choose one thing from the session that they would like to take with them, and apply in their daily life. Both the action of leaving and taking should be physically ritualized by the each person while they speak.

Tuesday 7/9/13

**Check in:** (15 minutes)

Participants are invited to share a single word to sum up how they are feeling or what is going on in their life. They may justify their word with a quick sentence or two.

**Devising Stories:** (15 minutes)

Participants are asked to go around the circle and begin to tell a story, however each person is only permitted to say one word or sound. The goal is not to derail the story but to work as a community to create a cohesive story.

**Devising from a Newspaper Image:** (25 minutes)

Participants are placed in groups and given newspapers as source material. They are then asked to select a single image from the paper to create a scene from. From the image they are instructed to decide what they think is happening and create a scene directly from the image.

**Devising from a Newspaper Article:** (25 minutes)

Participants are asked to randomly select and read a brief article from their newspaper. They are then asked to create a scene using as many quotes and words from the article as possible.

**Reflection/Sharing:** (15 minutes)

Participants watch as each group shares. Participants are encouraged to comment first on what they actually see, rather than assigning emotions or feelings. After each person has had a chance to share something that they actually see, the group can then attempt to assign emotion and/or what they think is going on in the scene. After the audience has commented, the group sharing is provided the opportunity to comment on their intentions behind the scene they created.

**Improvising Using Newspaper Quotes:** (15 minutes)

Participants are asked to walk the space in the room communicating with each other, as if they were at a cocktail party. The only restriction is that participants may only use words and sentences directly from the page of newspaper they are holding.

**Check Out:** (10 minutes)

Participants are asked to choose one thing from their life that they don't need any more or that is holding them back, and metaphorically leave it in behind. Participants are then asked to choose one thing from the session that they would like to take with them, and apply in their daily life. Both the action of leaving and taking should be physically ritualized by the each person while they speak.

Tuesday 7/23/13 (Created in collaboration with interACTionZ Youth)  
**GENDER STEREOTYPES**

**Check in:** (15 minutes)  
Participants are invited to share a single word to sum up how they are feeling or what is going on in their life. They may justify their word with a quick sentence or two.

**Word Association:** (15 minutes)  
Break down what jumps to mind when you think of “gender,” when you think of “stereotypes”  
Compile a list and segue into Body Sculpting.

**Body Sculpting:** (15 minutes)  
Create images that fit certain words, phrases, or emotions from the list generated in Word Association activity. Work in groups or pairs. Let everyone circle a given sculpture and call out what they think/feel from the image. Allow volunteers tap out a person from the image to mold themselves into different versions of it.

**Machines:** (15 minutes)  
Working together as a group, build machines containing contrasting emotions. Ex: Build an insecurities machine, then without leaving the scene find how to change your action to switch it to a self-confidence machine. Use words, phrases, emotions generated from the last few activities or otherwise suggested from our participants as activating material for the machine. Allow the group to reflect afterward and share some of the actions they chose.

**Playback Theatre:** (35 minutes)  
Have volunteers tell stories that are issue specific to gender or any of the topics that have been brought up during this session. They must be realistic, have clear characters/relationships, and include a clear conflict. Have others volunteer act out the scenes in the standard playback format. Encourage participants to use as many props as possible! If a story has a negative ending, ask the group if anyone wants to volunteer to tap out an actor and change the scene from a different perspective. This may or may not translate into some Forum Theatre opportunities to close out the session.

**Well of Confidentiality:** (5 minutes)  
Participants are encouraged to keep all items discussed within the group and not speak of personal stories outside of the group. This is ritualized by creating a well with all participants.

**Check Out:** (10 minutes)  
Participants are asked to choose one thing from their life that they don’t need any more or that is holding them back, and metaphorically leave it in behind. Participants are then asked to choose one thing from the session that they would like to take with them, and apply in their daily life. Both the action of leaving and taking should be physically ritualized by the each person while they speak.

Thursday 7/25/13 (Created in collaboration with interACTionZ Youth)  
**HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

**Check in:** (15 minutes)

Participants are invited to share a single word to sum up how they are feeling or what is going on in their life. They may justify their word with a quick sentence or two.

**Mind Meld:** (10 minutes)

Participants make a large circle around two people in the middle. The two in the middle both think silently of any word, when they have their word they shake their hands and the outside circle counts down from 3, at which point the two in the middle share their word. The goal of the game is for the two in the middle to continue rounds of the game while attempting to land on the same word, using previous words as a guide. A list of words generated during the activity should be compiled on the board.

**Spectrum of Difference:** (15 minutes)

Participants are asked to respond on a metaphorical spectrum within the room based on statements. They have the choice of “AGREE/ALWAYS”, “DISAGREE/NEVER”, or anywhere else in between. Participants move within the space and some are then asked to justify their positions after each statement.

Select Statements: “Healthy relationships include constructive criticism.”  
“Trust is essential for any relationship.”  
“Monogamy is a required component of any healthy relationship.”

**Image Theatre:** (15 minutes)

Form groups and allow the groups to choose three words from the list generated in previous activity. Instruct them to use the three words chosen to create three separate images representing how they feel about the words. There are no restrictions to how the images are presented, what order the words are used, or if the words are verbally told to the audience. No other speaking (other than stating the three words) is permitted during the presentation of the activity.

**Recipe of Healthy Relationship:** (10 minutes)

Using the words on the board, or any other words participants feel are relevant, lead the group in creating a “Recipe” for a healthy relationship.

**Relationship Machine:** (10 minutes)

Instruct participants to step in one at a time as the recipe created above is read out loud. They should physically embody the emotions brought to mind by the recipe within the machine.

**Check Out:** (10 minutes)

Participants are asked to choose one thing from their life that they don’t need any more or that is holding them back, and metaphorically leave it in behind. Participants are then asked to choose one thing from the session that they would like to take with them, and apply in their daily life. Both the action of leaving and taking should be physically ritualized by the each person while they speak.

Tuesday 7/30/13 (Created in collaboration with interACTionZ Youth)  
**POSITIVE IMAGES OF SEXUALITY**

**Check in:** (15 minutes)

Participants are invited to share a single word to sum up how they are feeling or what is going on in their life. They may justify their word with a quick sentence or two.

**Shake Out:** (10 minutes)

Participants are led through a physical warm-up where they are counting down from 10 on each of the following body parts, shaking each one at a time. (Right Hand/Arm, Left Hand/Arm, Right Foot/Leg, and Left Foot/Leg). Once the countdown ends on the last body part in the sequence the participants are encouraged to let out a vocal cheer and shake everything out for a few seconds.

**Spectrum of Difference:** (15 minutes)

Participants are asked to respond on a metaphorical spectrum within the room based on statements. They have the choice of “AGREE/ALWAYS”, “DISAGREE/NEVER”, or anywhere else in between. Participants move within the space and some are then asked to justify their positions after each statement.

Select Statements: “Sex with more than one partner is wrong.”  
“Sexual fetishes are wrong, and should not be practiced.”  
“Homosexuality is normal.”  
“Heterosexuality is normal.”

**Forum Theatre:** (35 minutes)

Invite tellers to share a story about a conflict that was perhaps sexual in nature. A time when you were bullied, harassed, or made to feel abnormal because of sexuality. This may also be a time when you felt that standing up for your sexuality was necessary. After the story is shared, stand-in actors will play the scene up to the crisis point, and then allow other participants to tap into the scene to explore alternate endings or solutions to the conflict being presented.

**Check Out:** (10 minutes)

Participants are asked to choose one thing from their life that they don't need any more or that is holding them back, and metaphorically leave it in behind. Participants are then asked to choose one thing from the session that they would like to take with them, and apply in their daily life. Both the action of leaving and taking should be physically ritualized by the each person while they speak.

**APPENDIX C:**  
**YOUTH SUPPORT RESOURCES**

### **GLSEN: Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network**

“The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GLSEN seeks to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes in creating a more vibrant and diverse community. We welcome any and all individuals as members, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity/expression or occupation, who are committed to seeing this philosophy realized in K-12 schools.”

(“GLSEN.”) [www.GLSEN.org](http://www.GLSEN.org)

### **PFLAG: Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays**

“PFLAG promotes the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.” (“PFLAG: Parents, Families, & Friends of Lesbians and Gays.”)

[www.community.pflag.org](http://www.community.pflag.org)

### **The Trevor Project**

“The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. The Trevor Project is determined to end suicide among LGBTQ youth by providing life-saving and life-affirming resources including our nationwide, 24/7 crisis intervention lifeline, digital community and advocacy/educational programs that create a safe, supportive and positive environment for everyone.” (“The Trevor Project.”) [www.TheTrevorProject.org](http://www.TheTrevorProject.org)

### **The Zebra Coalition®**

“The mission of the Zebra Coalition® is to foster hope, dignity and self-respect in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth and to provide them an opportunity to grow-up in a safe, healthy and supportive environment. Partners in the Zebra Coalition® support youth in need of shelter, emotional or spiritual guidance, medical services, or education support regardless of their personal, economic or social circumstances. These fundamental services are financially supported by the Zebra Foundation for Youth.” (“Supporting Lives of a Different Stripe.”) [www.ZebraYouth.org](http://www.ZebraYouth.org)

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