Through The Kaleidoscope Lens - The Affects Of The Dramatic Process And Product On The Lives Of Actors With Disabilities

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THROUGH THE KALEIDOSCOPE LENS - THE AFFECTS OF THE DRAMATIC PROCESS
AND PRODUCT ON THE LIVES OF ACTORS WITH DISABILITIES

by

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ABSTRACT

This case study investigates how participating in the process of drama and the product of theatre affects the lives of persons with developmental and physical disabilities. In the summer of 2008, I documented the experiences of the actors in Kaleidoscope, a five-week musical theatre program in which 18 teenagers and adults created an original musical theatre production through a partnership between Asolo Repertory Theatre and Community Haven for Adults and Children with Disabilities in Sarasota, Florida. In an effort to understand how moving through the rehearsal process and culminating product influenced and changed the lives of the actors within the Kaleidoscope community, I conducted three rounds of interviews with eight selected actors and two rounds of interviews with artistic and clinical staff, as well as documented personal observations through my role as a participant/observer. The major through lines of my data detail how drama, movement, dance, and voice work cultivated change in the actors’ socialization, self-confidence, and self-expression. While participating in the art shaped the actors’ lives in a variety of ways, the production of Dream Out Loud grew from collaborative efforts that challenged and celebrated both individuality and equality within the spectrum of difference among the ensemble. As I also studied Kaleidoscope as a whole to guide the design of my own program, I sought to discover methods of sustaining growth that stem from participating in both the dramatic process and product. Due to their wide spectrum of disabilities, the actors experienced a variety of changes, and for some, no changes at all in socialization, self-confidence, and self-expression. I concluded that while every actor did not walk away from Kaleidoscope having made great changes within The Three Ss, participating in the program was an artistically and socially valuable experience for each actor.
This thesis is dedicated to the actors of Kaleidoscope who inspire me to live my life daily with an open mind, spirit, sense of humor, and heart.
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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

ASD: AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS
ASOLO REP: ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE
BI: BRAIN INJURY
CP: CEREBRAL PALSY
CHAC: COMMUNITY HAVEN FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES
DD: DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY
DS: DEPRESSION-SCHIZOPHRENIA
DS: DOWN SYNDROME
HI: HEARING IMPAIRED
PD: PHYSICAL DISABILITY
SD: SEIZURE DISORDER
SLD: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISORDER
TYA: THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES
The Three Ss: SOCIALIZATION, SELF-CONFIDENCE, AND SELF-EXPRESSION
WS: WILLIAMS SYNDROME
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My desire to extinguish exclusivity within theatrical arts and make drama accessible to all lit the flame for this study. What began as a warm pilot light sparked into a fire as I made the decision to walk the talk. In the spring of 2008, I was hired at Asolo Repertory Theatre (Asolo Rep) in Sarasota, Florida as the summer Education Intern, a position that allowed me to work on a program called Kaleidoscope. Kaleidoscope is a five-week intensive musical theatre workshop where 18 teenagers and adults who have a variety of developmental disabilities and physical disabilities (DD and PD) devise and perform in an original production. The five-week program runs through a partnership between Asolo Rep and Community Haven for Adults and Children With Disabilities (CHAC), and culminates with two public performances on Asolo Rep’s main stage. Discovering Kaleidoscope felt like the missing piece in my artistic and academic world. I hungered to explore the creative process of devising theatre with actors who have disabilities; I yearned to discover how to successfully facilitate the process of drama and product of theatre with said actors; and I desired to learn how Kaleidoscope functions to aid in the design of my own future programming.

Discussing Kaleidoscope with the staff from Asolo Rep and CHAC prior to the summer led me to realize that I ultimately wanted to document the actors’ personal experiences participating in the program. For this study, I sought to give a voice to the three main parties involved in creating a Kaleidoscope summer production. I documented my perspective and my colleagues’ perspectives on the actors’ performances in the program, but more importantly, I examined the actors’ perspectives on their performances in the program, and on Kaleidoscope. Taking into account the trio of perspectives, I employed several questions to guide my study:
how does participating in the process of drama and the product of theatre affect the lives of the Kaleidoscope actors? What happens to the actors’ ability to articulate their experiences by the end of the five weeks? What are the outcomes of fusing both clinical and artistic goals in the program? And how does this program influence me as an artist and shape the design of my own program?

Positioning My Study In the Field

In the field of Disabilities and the Arts within the United States of America, I maintain that a void exists in current (last five years) scholarly and practical publications regarding the use of drama and theatre with special needs populations. My research revealed some wonderful sources detailing specific drama games, exercises, and activities that have been successful with students who have disabilities in drama across the curriculum settings, drama classes, and rehearsals (see Bailey, Cattanach, Kempe, and Peter). While these resources proved valuable in terms of providing examples of games, exercises, and activities, as well as teacher success stories, I found a void of documentation of students’ and actors’ perspectives on participating in the dramatic process and product. I conducted this study because I wanted to know how the theatrical process and product influenced and changed the lives of the actors, specifically from their points of view.

For the purposes of this project, disabilities refer to the wide range associated with or assigned to the actors from this summer’s Kaleidoscope program (see Appendix B). These include: Developmental Disabilities (DD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Cerebral Palsy (CP), Hearing Impairments (HI), Depression-Schizophrenia (DS), Brain Injuries (BI), Down Syndrome (DS), and Williams Syndrome (WS). At the beginning stages of my research, it

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appeared that the Kaleidoscope facilitators emphasized both process and product with their actors. For this study, I defined “drama” as the creative process the actors experienced in acting, dance, visual art, and music classes, and all group rehearsal. I defined “theatre” as the product that arises from the creative process of drama. While I do not always believe that the process of drama should result with a product of theatre, both facets prove integral to the Kaleidoscope program. As a Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) practitioner, the notion of process versus product filters into the bulk of my work. As a teaching artist, I place a strong emphasis on process, while as an actor/arts administrator/stage manager I place a strong emphasis on product. Prior to Kaleidoscope, I particularly believed in the importance of process over product when working with individuals who have disabilities, and I wondered which would hold more value with this specific population upon program completion.

In addition to emphasizing both process and product, the programs’ mission and vision statements further define the program’s priorities. Kaleidoscope literature states: “The mission of the workshop is to unlock and celebrate the unique voice, intelligence, and creative expression within our disabled community through music and theatre arts. Our mission will be realized through a collaborative relationship between CHAC and the Asolo Repertory Theatre” (Kaleidoscope Volunteer Training). Addressing their vision, Kaleidoscope literature states: “We will evolve a process of learning that will result in a piece of theatre that is created and performed by the disabled community based on their viewpoint of the world” (Kaleidoscope Volunteer Training). The artistic possibilities appeared limitless to me as the program welcomed individuals with all kinds of disabilities. Creating a show from the perspectives of actors with a wide variety of abilities piqued my interest because I desired to learn how the spectrum of
difference would impact their personal journey in this arts-based program and the final production.

My background research for this study grew from theoretical and practical education and theatre books and journals, clinical articles off the Internet, and theatre-based documentaries. I knew going into this study that research on drama education with young people shows positive social and personal development. And while there is a great deal of literature on using drama and theatre in the classroom and in rehearsal with students who have special needs, it presents the perspective of the facilitator, not the student and/or actor. Sally Dorothy Bailey, a drama therapist, playwright, director, and advocate for using drama with and for special needs populations addresses specific skills which drama develops in her book *Wings to Fly: Bringing Theatre Arts to Students With Special Needs:* “Listening, eye contact, awareness of the body in space, physical coordination, physical expressiveness, facial expressiveness, verbal expressiveness, focus and concentration, flexibility and problem-solving skills, social interaction, and self-esteem” (19-21). She details drama’s impact on each of the aforementioned skills. In *Drama for People with Special Needs*, Drama and play therapist Ann Cattanach writes, “People with special needs have often developed a high degree of skill in a specific area which can be harnessed in drama” (19).

Bailey and Cattanach both outline skills that drama brings out in special needs populations. In addition, my research revealed much literature on how to approach facilitating drama with individuals who have special needs. British Lecturer in Early Childhood and Special Needs Dr. Melanie Peter discusses her approach in *Drama for All, Developing Drama in the Curriculum With Pupils With Special Educational Needs*. Peter writes, “Many pupils with sensory or physical disabilities may well be capable of engaging in the same sort of drama as
their able-bodied peers, although presenting logistical challenges to the teacher contemplating drama with pupils with learning disabilities or emotional and behavioral difficulties may face particular problems” (7). Peter also discusses potential problems that arise from the necessity in drama to willingly suspend disbelief:

The greatest difficulty facing the teacher of drama with many pupils with special educational needs, concerns the actual nature of drama itself. Essentially, the whole thing hinges on make-believe play: the core of the drama process. For various reasons, this is problematic for many pupils with special educational needs. (8)

Bailey, Cattanach, and Peter also raise concern regarding spatial logistics, as well as actual abilities to create within the art of drama. Keeping in mind how to tackle such challenges, the aforementioned authors found varying degrees of success in carrying out drama with special needs populations. I kept such concerns in mind as I moved forward with this study and documented challenges and questions through reflective journaling. While there are a growing number of programs implementing drama and theatre with special needs populations in the United States, accessible documentation of qualitative educational studies over the last five years about such programs remains limited.

In addition to the aforementioned literature, I discovered online articles with famous actors who have disabilities such as academy award winning actress Marlee Matalin who is deaf, and Chris Burke, an actor who has Down syndrome (DS) who is best known for playing the character “Corky” on the television show As Life Goes On. Aside from interviews with famous actors such as Matalin and Burke, I did not find studies that included the perspective of individuals with disabilities who participate in drama and theatre. While I champion successful
actors such as Matalin and Burke, I would like to see documentation of actors’ perspectives from community and/or professional based programs similar to Kaleidoscope. I believe tapping into their personal points of view will help educators, artists, and clinicians enhance community and/or professional based artistic experiences.

While published studies remain limited, I viewed two documentaries capturing the process of rehearsing and performing theatrical productions with individuals who have developmental and physical disabilities: HBO’s *Autism The Musical* and *Yellow Brick Road*. *Autism The Musical* follows an LA based theatre company called The Miracle Project and is based on the actual “Miracle Project,” which was an original theatre production created with children who have Autism. *Yellow Brick Road* follows a Long Island based organization called A.N.C.H.O.R., (Answering the Needs of Citizens with Handicaps through Organized Recreation), and focuses on the process of rehearsing and performing *The Wizard of Oz* with a cast of adults who have a variety of special needs. These documentaries furthered my perspective as to how and why other theatre companies and organizations carry out drama and theatre with special needs populations. While these documentaries offered me glimpses into the actors’ experiences through interviews and observations of performances and rehearsals, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of their personal point of view, beyond what the documentaries showed. As an advocate for Disabilities and the Arts awareness, I realized through these two documentaries that Kaleidoscope belongs to a growing community where others recognize the value of employing theatrical arts with special needs populations. In addition to opportunities to gain an insider perspective into programs such as A.N.C.H.O.R. and The Miracle Project, I continue to seek documentation of the perspectives of actors.
In 1977, the United Kingdom’s Dartington College of Arts professors Bruce Kent, David Ward, and Keith Yon conducted a three-year study through the Carnegie UK Trust. The Arts For Young People With Special Needs, The Report of the Three Year Carnegie Research Project ‘The Arts in the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People’ aimed “to explore how the arts can contribute to the education and enrichment of life of handicapped children and young people” (Kent et al. Forward). The study describes the 27 projects and how the researchers integrated visual art, movement, and drama into their teaching practice. The through line of therapy appeared in this study in addition to my other research. Kent, Ward, and Yon wrote, “We would suggest that others who specialize in nursing, therapy, teaching or the arts, could be aware that the boundaries between their concerns are not distinctions but overlaps” (Kent et al. 327). I went into my study knowing that we were not attempting to do art therapy with the actors, but I estimated that through the art, therapeutic-like results could naturally arise. Kempe addresses this topic in his book Drama Education and Special Needs: A Handbook for Teachers in Mainstream Schools:

Any reservation about the applicability of drama therapy for children with special educational needs should not be confused with the belief that any well structured and carefully monitored work in the arts can be therapeutic by merit of the fact that it can give the individual a greater sense of competence and self-worth. The act of externalizing and making concrete some inner impulse so that it can be reflected upon, proves to us that we have an independent existence which draws from and feeds back in to the world around us. Aesthetic activity proves we are alive (just as anaesthetetic will send us to sleep); it doesn’t have to be a treatment, but it is a manifestation of our humanity. (11)
Setting artistic and/or clinical goals before facilitating the arts with this population may assist teachers, directors, and administrators in deciding if therapy remains a program objective. However, Kempe made me realize that the visceral act of participating in the dramatic process and product has the potential to be therapeutic regardless of whether therapy is set as a program goal.

As I consider designing my own drama and theatre program with and for individuals who have disabilities, I want to gain insight into the artistic experiences of the participants. I believe that their opinions are valuable and beneficial to everyone involved in the process. The Kaleidoscope vision says that the program is “based on their [the actors’] viewpoint of the world,” and to create the best programming possible for all parties involved, I want to take the process one step further and document the Kaleidoscope experience from the actors’ viewpoints. Kaleidoscope is not unique in its efforts to use drama and theatre with special needs populations; however, the partnership between CHAC and Asolo Rep is unique in many ways. While the concept of devising work with individuals who have special needs is not new, this study adds to the literature by documenting the actors’ perspectives on participating a program like Kaleidoscope.

This study offers the field access to the voices of the Kaleidoscope actors--voices that in many ways are unique, intelligent, and vital to assessing the challenges and successes of the Kaleidoscope program. The actors’ abilities to articulate their own experiences moving through this program also proves integral to assessing growth, as well as increasing their own level of engagement within the program. I hope that documenting the opinions of my colleagues, as well as my own reflections, will elevate the artistic and clinical components of Kaleidoscope.
As an arts educator and theatre for social change activist, I would love to stand up on my soapbox and state that “I want to change the world through drama and theatre!” While I might not be able to change the world, I might be able to change some lives--including my own--by documenting the experiences of both the creative process and product from this program. Through this study, I hope to raise awareness about programs like Kaleidoscope and to inspire others to create their own programs and/or document and publish their own experiences with special needs populations. Furthermore, in the not-for-profit arts world, funding remains a huge issue, and documenting our efforts will help improve access to funding.

Kaleidoscope began in 1995 through a grant from the Selby Foundation, and grew out of a meeting with The Selby Foundation. Marla Doss, the current Development Director of CHAC has been with Kaleidoscope since its inception. During our first interview, Doss shared with me what occurred at the meeting where the idea for Kaleidoscope was born. There was interest in creating opportunities to couple social services with the non-profit arts community in Sarasota. Artists Ann Morrison and Susan E. Ott approached the Interim Artistic Director of Asolo Rep, Bruce Rogers, and shared their desire to carry out a musical theatre project with persons who have disabilities. Rogers, CHAC CEO Peggy O’Connell, Morrison, and Ott created Kaleidoscope. It was born from a combination of things: artists in the community who wanted to experiment with theatre and special needs populations, $2,500 from The Selby Foundation, and the foresight to see the need for this kind of program in the Sarasota community.

The partnership between CHAC and Asolo Rep strives to set artistic goals for each actor while simultaneously addressing clinical needs. The staff from CHAC often refers to the actors as “clients,” a continuation of the vocabulary employed on CHAC’s campus. Kaleidoscope is one of several services CHAC offers to its clients. Other services CHAC provides include
“Early Childhood Intervention, School-to-Work Transition, Occupational Rehabilitation, Work Force Development, Employment Opportunities, and Community Living” (“Programs”). The actor’s from this past summer were involved in several of CHAC’s other programs, specifically the School-to-Work Transition, Work Force Development, Employment Opportunities, and Community Living. While CHAC provides the actors and the clinical component to the program, Asolo Rep provides the rehearsal hall, main stage, and artistic and technical components to the program. Asolo Rep is the first State Theatre of Florida, a LORT Theatre, home to Florida State Universities renown FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training, and one of the only true rotating repertory theatre companies in the country.

Pre-Project Work

I applied to conduct this study through the University of Central Florida’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was approved for my study at the 11th hour. IRB wanted to make sure that my study was not medical, and that I was not taking advantage of my actors and coercing them into participating in my study since they had a variety of DDs. My study, “Dramatic Impact: Exploring the Affects of Drama and Theatre with Actors Who Have Special Needs” was approved on July 2, 2008.

In addition to gaining approval from IRB, I participated in two Kaleidoscope meetings before the program began on July 7, 2008. I traveled down to Sarasota for the very first Kaleidoscope creative team meeting on May 6, 2008. In addition to that first meeting, I was invited to visit CHAC that morning to travel with the Kaleidoscope touring group to see the current show Unwritten, and to go on an extensive tour of CHAC’s campus following the show.
The touring company consisted of actor’s who have graduated from the summer program. These are actor’s who have typically been involved in the summer program three times and are ready to mature into a yearlong program. In addition to touring the show throughout the community, the actors in the touring program take drama classes at CHAC.

Watching the touring show, I tried to go into it with no expectations, which was not too difficult since I had never seen an original, devised show created by individuals with disabilities. I thought the actors did a great job projecting, dancing, singing, and committing to the story while at the same time playing off of the audiences’ reactions. I found the theme of being unwritten, (as in Natasha Bedingfield’s song *Unwritten*) inspiring, but there were moments I felt confused by the storyline. At that point in my journey I had not sat down with anyone to discuss the process of *Unwritten* and how the play came to be. I only knew the touring show was a revised piece from the summer version of *Unwritten* performed at Asolo Rep. After seeing the show, I had many questions brewing: How much of the show truly came from the actors? How many years had these actors been involved in Kaleidoscope? Why was the show a mix of original music and well-known hits such as *Unwritten*? Was the show meant to be non-linear?

That same day, the creative and clinical team of Kaleidoscope 2008 met for the first time. While my questions about the show were not addressed at that meeting, I sensed that the productions came together in a way similar to the creation of a collage. Ideas about themes, music, and props were bounced around and it felt like we were beginning to piece together a hodgepodge of ideas to build our show. While the show is an original creation, the theme of the show was decided upon by the staff months before rehearsal began to provide structure. Anny Barker Schefler, Visual Art Instructor/Kaleidoscope Clinician, and Director Jessi Blue Gormezano shared their interest in exploring the concept of dreams. After an exciting discussion
about the different avenues we could explore with the concept of dreams, this topic was formally accepted as the focus for Kaleidoscope 2008’s theme. Specifically, the program would focus on the actors’ personal dreams—what they dream about and where their dreams take them. There was also discussion of scarves, fabric, bubbles, puppetry, projections, and a plethora of other ideas. I left that meeting feeling inspired by everyone’s ideas and truly felt like I was in the presence of innovative thinkers.

The entire creative team did not meet again until the volunteer training session on July 2, 2008. We discussed each actor’s disability and tactics for working with them. At this meeting, I learned about the program’s focus on consistency of working with the actors. The rules of Kaleidoscope state that in order to be in the show, the volunteers must commit full-time for five weeks. The actors benefit from the consistency of working with the volunteers full-time versus part-time. This training session was the last major meeting prior to the first day of Kaleidoscope.

Methods Of Data Collection

My methods of collecting data for this study included conducting interviews and recording observations. I interviewed eight actors at three different points throughout the program and my colleagues at two different points throughout the program. In order to participate in my study, the actors selected pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. The first round of interviews with my actors and colleagues took place during week two of the program. The second round of interviews with my actors took place during the fourth week of the program and the third round of interviews with the actors took place 2.5 months after the program during a three-week span over the telephone. My final interviews with my colleagues occurred in
person during the week after Kaleidoscope ended. I conducted an additional follow-up telephone interview with Gormezano in the fall.

My written methods of data collection included recording observational notes and keeping a personal journal. I wrote observational notes about the actors’ behaviors during classes, rehearsal, and free time. I also observed and took notes on the staff and volunteers’ interactions with the actors. While I did not conduct interviews with volunteers, I wrote down notes from conversations with them in regards to the actors. Additionally, I had access to notes from staff meetings and artistic/clinical goal reports. To provide myself with a personal outlet, I kept a journal. I wrote daily entries about anything and everything that I remembered from the events of the day and reflected on my research questions.

I used my interviews, observational notes, and journal entries as data to analyze shifts in the actors’ socialization, self-confidence, and self-expression (The Three Ss). These are the three through lines that I examined in this study. I entered this study with a wide scope of behaviors I sought to analyze and then narrowed my focus to The Three Ss based on early interactions with and observations of my actors. The Three Ss provided the lens through which I studied how participating in the process of drama and the product of theatre influenced the lives of the actors.

Deficiencies in my Study

Prior to the program beginning, I had every intention of interviewing all 18 actors. However, I quickly discovered on the first day of Kaleidoscope that not all of the actors were able to verbally articulate themselves at a level where interviewing them would be helpful to my study. Therefore my study shifted instantly as my actor interviewee pool shrunk to eight clients.
I decided that I would narrow my interview pool through personal observations and interactions with the actors and recommendations from the staff. I worked to create a pool that represented different disabilities in addition to including actors with the ability to articulate verbally in a one-on-one interview. While the eight actors I selected possessed various disabilities, as a whole they were pretty high functioning. They also represented the younger demographic in the program, as the youngest actor in the group was 16, and the oldest was 38. While I was pleased with the eight selected actors, I cannot ignore that their specific disabilities and ages influenced the outcomes of this study.

Another deficiency in my study was the time frame for my interviews. I aimed to conduct my first round of interviews during week one, however, I discovered how limited my interview windows were within our schedule. Since my interviews primarily took place during our lunch hour and free time in the morning before group warm-ups, I learned very quickly that those specific times were critical opportunities for the actors to socialize. I pushed back the first round of interviews to week two as I felt it was more important for the group to remain together to build an ensemble. Additionally, due to the intense rehearsal schedule, interviewing actors all on the same day proved impossible. Therefore my interviews were spread out further than I originally anticipated. My post-Kaleidoscope, actor interviews took place much further away from the program than I anticipated due to limited access to the actors after the closing night performance. While I initially wanted to conduct follow-up interviews as close to the programs’ end as possible, I ultimately found the prospect of interviewing my actors 2.5 months after the program intriguing based on the greater distance of time. I grew interested in how the actors expressed themselves and reflected on their experiences 2.5 months out of the program, offering further insight into the long-term impacts of Kaleidoscope on their lives.
Another deficiency in this study involved the amount of times I interviewed my colleagues. While I had every intention of interviewing my colleagues three times throughout the program, this shifted due to their limited free time during Kaleidoscope hours and at the end of the workday. I was unable to interview them three times, but I interviewed each of them twice.

Another deficiency in my study was the interview process. As I began to interview the actors, I realized that I was feeding them language to answer several questions. As I discovered that each actor required unique methods of engagement during interviews, I learned how to shift the way I asked questions so I was not feeding them answers. While I will detail specific methods throughout this study, the two most prevalent shifts were to keep my questions short and to allow the actors as much time as they needed to think about their response before I felt the need to fill the silence. As a result of changing my interview tactics, each interview ended up taking on a life of its own.

My own participation in Kaleidoscope while studying the process further complicated my research methods. As a participant/observer, I jumped from observing and taking notes to participating in activities, to interviewing, to facilitating drama games or dance class. While I would not trade my experience as a participant for anything in the world, my participation with the actors and the program itself directly impacted my observations as a researcher. Deficiencies resulting from being a participant/observer occurred from working with a group and then not having an opportunity to document what occurred while working with said group until the end of the day.
Ultimately Studying My Question

This thesis presents a mixture of interviews, excerpts from my daily journal, and observational notes from classes and rehearsal. Through analyzing all of my data, I attempt to document how Kaleidoscope affected the lives of its participants. The data presented three major through lines in how the program affected the actors this particular summer: socialization, confidence, and self-expression. Looking at my major guiding question, I seek to examine these through lines in relation to the Kaleidoscope actors. I went into this study expecting and hoping that the process of drama and the product of theatre would have a positive impact on how they relate to others socially, respect and own what they have to offer the world in terms of self-confidence, and grow in their abilities to express themselves both verbally and nonverbally.
CHAPTER TWO: SOCIALIZATION AND ROLES

When I sit back and allow myself to think about what stands out from the Kaleidoscope experience, I am flooded with a stunning visual of the bonds that were made. This visual reminds me of that old cinema gag where the moment before someone dies, their life flashes before their eyes in the form of a 30-second montage filled with a lifetime of memories. My 30-second montage is filled with hugs, laughter, tears, glitter, and bright lights. I see everyone holding hands, running through sheets, dancing, filling the rehearsal hall with shapes created entirely by bodies, playing, and singing. I also hear the Kaleidoscope soundtrack playing in my montage, which remains a powerful memory trigger of the entire summer because the music reminds me of the personal relationships that formed. So every time I hear Sweet Home Alabama, Groove Is in the Heart, or Walking in Memphis, I find myself back in the rehearsal hall and I see all of us developing relationships and creating together. The bonds formed during the five weeks of creating Dream Out Loud grew from opportunities to discover and cultivate individual roles and practice and strengthen interpersonal skills through socialization.

When I move through an artistic experience, whether as a student, teacher, actor, or stage manager, the most rewarding experiences occur when a community is built not only through the art, but through socialization as well. The different and colorful characters one comes across when working in the arts proves both a blessing and a curse. Simply because a group possesses a shared desire to create art together does not mean the path to get there will be smooth, but often times, the more exposure we have to working with strong personalities, the better equipped we become for dealing with conflict resolution in the arts and in life. With Kaleidoscope, I found
that the social aspect to the program proved integral to the actors’ experiences remaining positive.

In analyzing my data for changes in socialization, I relied on the following definitions of socialization. The first definition: “A continuing process whereby an individual acquires a personal identity and learns the norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to his or her social position” (“Socialization” Dictionary.com Unabridged). The second definition states: “Learning the customs, attitudes, and values of a social group, community, or culture. Socialization is essential for the development of individuals who can participate and function within their societies, as well as for ensuring that a society's cultural features will be carried on through new generations” (“Socialization” The American Heritage). While the first definition states that socialization is a process, which fits with the goals of Kaleidoscope, I struggled to accept the use of the word “norms.” What norms make up the process of drama and the product of theatre? What happens to markers of normativity when working with actors with a variety of developmental and physical disabilities? I ultimately interpreted “norms” as positive behavioral expectations within Kaleidoscope, which helped me accept this definition.

I then fused the two definitions of socialization to investigate shifts in the actors’ socialization through moments and processes where individuals discovered and took ownership over their personal identity, while demonstrating values, behaviors, and social skills specific to our social group, community, or culture. Specifically, I looked at actors’ friendships, actors becoming mentors, and challenges of socialization related to the spectrum of ages and disabilities on socializing. One of the potential benefits of Kaleidoscope is to empower the actors with life skills that will enable them to socialize on a higher functioning level with others in addition to
members within Kaleidoscope. As I solidified my definition of socialization for this study, I realized that the data I aimed to collect tied directly to the actors’ lives within Kaleidoscope.

My original question for this study was: How does the process of drama and the product of theatre affect the lives of the Kaleidoscope actors? Once the program began I realized that I only had access to my actors from 9:00am to 3:00pm, Monday through Friday for five weeks—with limited access to their lives beyond the walls of Asolo Rep. I only had admittance to their outside lives through our interviews, and those interviews primarily provided me with insight as to how participating in the process of drama and the product of theatre affected their lives within the program. While I did not originally set out to collect data from the actors parents, caregivers, siblings, friends, and significant others, any thoughts of trying to gain IRB approval to conduct interviews with them were also put to rest once reality set in over having access to the actors only during Kaleidoscope hours. Thus my question shifted to: how does participating in the process of drama and the product of theatre affect the lives of the actors within the Kaleidoscope community? The people that made up the Kaleidoscope community included the actors, volunteers, and creative staff.

For the first week of rehearsal, the entire group remained together and this time proved key to laying down a solid foundation for social interaction to occur and trust to build. In week two, we split up into smaller groups and the groups rotated from acting class to music class to dance class and art class. The groups were carefully selected by the staff to ensure balance of ages and disabilities, as well as personalities that would compliment each other.

We always began the day together warming up before the small groups went off to different classes, and we always came back together for group rehearsal after lunch, and then we split off into groups again for the last class of the day. I recall that very first day when the actors
still felt like strangers and I was not sure if they were going to like me. Looking around the rehearsal hall at our opening day party I observed looks of joy and nervousness on the faces of the actors and the family members by their sides that came to celebrate. That was the very first opportunity to socialize. The electricity in the room that day was palpable. Once the party was over and the actors kissed their family members goodbye, we cleaned up the spread of food and drinks and got right down to business. We stood in a circle, a circle that became a ritual for us. The circle came to be the place where we gathered to meet first thing in the morning, practice a variety of drama and dance games and exercises, re-group after lunch, and meet again at the end of the day before the actors’ transportation arrived to pick them up. Standing in our circle towards the end of week one, I witnessed smiles erupt on the faces of volunteers and actors as we discussed how, even though it was only week one, we already felt like family. Similar to my biological family in which everyone fulfills a different role, the actors in Kaleidoscope took on different roles as they explored how they fit in through socialization.

Friendship

The Kaleidoscope staff and I agreed that socializing with a variety of disabled and non-disabled people is one of the benefits of participating in Kaleidoscope, but I did not anticipate that the majority of the actors I interviewed signed up for Kaleidoscope to socialize. My hypothesis remained that through creating art, socializing would naturally occur, but I anticipated that the actors wanted to be there first and foremost to experience five weeks of rehearsal and to put on an original production on Asolo Rep’s main stage.

In an effort to discover and analyze why the actors initially came to Kaleidoscope, I asked if the actors entered the program with the desire to make friends, act, make friends and act,
or for entirely different reasons? Would their initial desires shift throughout the program as a result of participating in the art? How would such shifts impact their social behaviors and relationships? I also wondered if it really mattered if they were in the program to make friends more than to create an original production?

During my first round of interviews, I asked each actor why they decided to come to Kaleidoscope and what they looked forward to each day. Their answers were not black and white. While some actors initially cited “interacting and making friends” as why they decided to come to Kaleidoscope, they also discussed having fun and performing on the big stage. Since the actors discussed friendship above all else during our first round of interviews, I questioned how they perceived the idea of “friend.” What is a friend? How did the actors determine when someone becomes a friend? From the first week, I observed actors share crayons in the morning while they colored, wait for each other to walk down the hallway, and share music CDs with each other during free time. Do those actions make them friends? In Kaleidoscope, friendships appeared to form fast. The CHAC staff let me know during conversations prior to the program that for the most part actors gave unconditional love and were open to forming relationships. During our first interview, Liz DeVette, Kaleidoscope Vocal Instructor/Music Director said: “With this population they’re with us everyday, everyday their souls and everything are wide open, and that’s what it’s about” (DeVette Personal). Thinking about how the actors interacted with each other and the different types of friendships that formed, I examined the idea of friendship in Kaleidoscope.

The idea of making friends and equality of friendship brings to mind two actors from the program, Debbie and Sarah. During my first interviews with Debbie, a 19-year-old female who has Down syndrome (DS), and Sarah, a 35-year-old female who has DS, I observed their desires
to socialize. Debbie was new to the program, and she set a personal goal to work on projecting during singing. Characteristics of DS that Debbie possesses include an upward slant to her eyes, and a moderate Developmental Disability (DD). The staffs’ goals for Debbie were to gain confidence, take more risks, look at others’ mouths during singing to help her with words, and to initiate tasks on her own. The staff developed and set these goals for Debbie and goals for every other actor at a meeting during the first week of the program. Sarah was a third year Kaleidoscope veteran and set a personal goal to be more specific with writing poems and drawing pictures. Characteristics of DS that Sarah possesses include an upward slant to her eyes, a moderate DD, and sensitive ears. The staff set goals for Sarah to increase volume when she speaks and sings, gain confidence, and take risks. I asked both Debbie and Sarah during our first interviews why they enjoy coming to Kaleidoscope. Debbie articulated that she came to Kaleidoscope for friendship, while Sarah did not land on one particular reason as to why she came back to the program.

My first interview with Debbie proved challenging as she second-guessed her answers and typically provided me with very short answers. I could carry on a conversation with Debbie, but she did not consistently deliver complete ideas to express her thoughts. Our first interview took place during week two, and she did not list making good friends but “having good friends” as why she came to Kaleidoscope. I partly questioned if “having good friends” was simply a random choice of wording or if Debbie believed that she had created strong friendships by week two? By this point in the program, Debbie did not make huge efforts to socialize with others during free time and during classes, so I remained a bit skeptical as to whether or not she had formed close friendships by that point.
My first interview with Sarah also proved challenging as she struggled to find answers to most of my questions. This was one of the first interviews where I realized that I was feeding her language to answer my questions. I struggled to find methods of asking Sarah questions without spoon-feeding her language almost as much as she struggled to answer my questions. Sarah was able to speak to performing in the production *Unwritten* from the previous summer, but had a difficult time expressing her thoughts when they were not attached to a tangible experience such as working on *Unwritten*. While Sarah did not land on an answer as to why she came back to Kaleidoscope, she discussed the meaning of friendship in the program.

**K** (Karen): What makes it so special when we’re working together?

**S** (Sarah): Getting close better.

**K**: Can you talk about that a little bit more please? Getting close better. By getting close better, are you talking about friendship?

**S**: Yes.

**K**: What about friendships? Can you repeat what you just said? I just didn’t catch it.

**S**: Friendships. Close like being closer with friendship is to know them more.

(Sarah Personal)

While Sarah’s articulation of friendship intrigued me because she linked the idea of “getting close” to the group working together, I questioned if Sarah would have brought up friendship had I not fed her that vocabulary and idea? I believed that she was tiptoeing around the topic of friendship, but she looked confused by my questions, and I remained uncertain if she would have talked about friendship without my bringing it up. Sally Dorothy Bailey cautions practitioners to not assume that individuals with disabilities do not understand you simply because they have limited verbal skills. “Receptive and expressive language are two separate brain processes. She
could understand everything you say, but not have the ability to translate that understanding into words or to actually speak words back to you” (Bailey 80-81). I increased my efforts to remain patient while interviewing and to allow my actors to think about their responses. If actors such as Debbie and/or Sarah appeared as if they did not understand, I rephrased my questions until they were brief and specific versus my initial instincts to ramble. I tried to steer clear from asking yes and no questions, but found this method of interviewing necessary when open-ended questions appeared confusing to the actor. The interviews provided the actors with opportunities to strengthen interpersonal and linguistic skills, while teaching me similar skills.

Early on, Sarah and Debbie both appeared to open up to the group during activities such as creating and sharing nicknames. We each selected nicknames for ourselves, and created glittery nametags during art class. We shared our nicknames through a drama game by vocally sending out our nicknames to the group coupled with a motion that expressed how our nicknames made us feel. Then the group sent the nickname and motion back to the originator. Sarah’s nickname was “Princess Mia” and Debbie’s nickname was “Drama Queen.” In addition to revealing bits of their personalities through drama games, I observed them both engage in conversations with fellow actors throughout the program. However, they typically did not incite those conversations. They always appeared content and excited when peers such as Lauren, a 19-year-old female who has a DD included them in morning conversations before we warmed up as a group or made an effort to sit next to them at lunchtime.

By the middle of the first week, Sarah and Debbie both appeared more comfortable inciting conversations with staff than with fellow actors, as did several other actors. By the end of the first week, I noticed a shift in the formulation of friendships between actors, not solely through conversation, but through the mediums of drama, dance, and visual art. I noticed that
the further we dove into ensemble building activities during classes, the more social interaction increased between the actors, not just between actors and staff. As a result of the increase in comfort that came from bonding during activities such as Hot Potato, Captain on the Deck, and Baby if You Love Me Won’t You Please, Please Smile, the more inclusive the actors became during such activities. While the actors became social equals during drama activities, the same cannot be said of lunch and free time. While several actors displayed behaviors characteristic to being a good friend such as including others in conversation when they were all alone, others displayed behaviors that were not as welcoming.

An example of such behavior occurred mid-program. I observed Robyn, a 36-year-old female who has a DD and is deaf, push Frank’s lunch away from the spot next to her and guard the seat with her arm as she was saving it for Wayne. I saw her tell Frank, “NO!” Frank, a 54-year-old man who has a DD became upset and the situation required my intervention, and quite a bit of time, for Robyn to apologize to him for pushing his lunch away. Wayne, a 49-year-old man with a DD told Robyn, “that’s ok, I don’t have to sit there.” I found Robyn’s behavior in complete opposition to how she performed during drama activities. I noticed that she did not mind standing next to anyone in our circle and remained open to partnering with anyone while working in pairs. While actors such as Robyn did not consistently leave people out, I observed similar behaviors primarily during lunch and free time rather than in classes and rehearsal.

While I did not observe Debbie and Sarah make huge leaps in their attempts to reach out to fellow actors through socializing during lunch, free time, and rehearsal, I noticed that when they were included in conversations, they grew in their contributions to the discussion. Debbie did not have consistent patterns of growth, or remain consistent in her social behaviors. For instance, within one single day the staff and I observed Debbie arrive in the morning and freely
pass out hugs, then suddenly become withdrawn and avoid her peers, then throw herself into an activity and collaborate with peers, and then suddenly withdraw herself from the activity. Bailey discussed how individuals with developmental disabilities may instantly shift moods and no matter how hard one tries, sometimes they cannot be consoled and will snap out of their mood naturally. I found this to be true when Debbie displayed unpredictable behavior reflective of her mood. However, she appeared the happiest when she was provided individual attention, particularly from her peers. For instance, when Lauren saved her a seat at the lunch table or wanted to talk to her about boys or music in the morning, her body language instantly became open as opposed to closed off. I believe that Debbie had a difficult time taking ownership over her personal identity within the Kaleidoscope community, which directly fed into her erratic pattern of interacting with others. From my observations of Debbie standing close to her peers and looking at them as though she wanted to join in their conversations but remaining quiet, I gathered that she wanted to belong, but felt uncertain and lacked confidence in her ability to create friendships. She appeared more comfortable when others invited her to socialize rather than relying on herself to instigate friendships.

The few instances I observed Debbie reach out to others occurred during activities that required her to do so. The first time happened early on in the program during our daily checkout. Checkout was a time for us to reflect on what occurred that day and how we were feeling. One particular day as we stood in our ritualistic circle, we were given the instructions from Stage Manager and Education Associate Leah Page to turn to the person to our right and tell them one thing they did that day that we liked, or one thing about them that we admired. Debbie turned to Monique, a volunteer who is the same age as her, and said, “You are a great friend.” Everyone in the room let out a collective “awwww!” I contributed to the sound effect, and wondered why
Debbie considered Monique a good friend. Was Monique extra kind to Debbie, did they engage in lots of conversation, could Debbie not think of anything else to say, or did Debbie relate to her because she is a female of the same age? Throughout the program I observed Debbie often use “you are a great friend” as her standard response during similar activities. I began to question if Debbie actually believed that whoever she was speaking to was a good friend and/or due to her expressive language skills this was the one response she could deliver?

While verbally engaging fellow actors to create friendships did not come easily for Debbie, she quickly bounced back from a sad mood or a withdrawn state on her own accord or with the help of others. Sarah, however, was not as flexible. Even though I saw slight shifts of growth in terms of Sarah participating in conversation with other actors, she remained soft-spoken and appeared shy throughout the entire program. In addition to her shy nature, Sarah often arrived in the morning visibly upset. Kaleidoscope provided a safe environment for the actors to express their emotions in an appropriate outlet. Thus, if an actor was feeling upset, it fit within the realm of socialization for the actor to request or desire support from others. The staff, volunteers, and I did not like to dwell on problems, but we provided positive verbal reinforcement to actors who lent a sympathetic ear and/or advice to help their peers. Sarah is an example of an actor who used her personal traumas to socialize with actors and staff. She was dealing with a new living situation at home as she just moved into a house with a roommate for the first time in her life. She was learning about independent living and sharing a home with a roommate, in addition to following rules set by a house mom. CHAC staff let me know that Sarah is sensitive and takes to heart everything people tell her. So if someone called Sarah out during an activity, for example, encouraging her to sing out her words during music class, she would burst into tears. Sarah’s emotional landscape did not shift throughout the program, and
every time she became upset, I observed other actors approach her with hugs and tell her everything would be alright. During our final interviews, the staff and I discussed how Sarah had little social growth in terms of how she reached out and related to others. While we all agreed that she did not experience tremendous social growth during the program, I believe that she remained completely vulnerable and open to receiving support from her peers partly because she naturally wore her heart on her sleeve and partly because she did not know how else to gain the attention of others.

Sarah’s need for her fellow actors, volunteers, and staff to listen to her when she was upset led me to examine support in the Kaleidoscope community. Actors giving and actors receiving support from each other became a marker of socialization in Kaleidoscope. Friendships endured throughout Kaleidoscope because the actors appeared to remain open to giving and receiving support. Support was a central component of friendship in Kaleidoscope. Some actors such as Sarah were prone to receiving support more than giving support, while others primarily gave support. If Sarah and Debbie’s closest friends in the program offered them support through positive reinforcement and/or lending an ear when one of them was upset, and Sarah and Debbie did not consistently reciprocate that support, did that make the friendship equal? Returning to my definition of socialization for this study, individuals continued to discover their identity and norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to their social role within Kaleidoscope. While the actors did not all change how they socially related to each other, the actors each carved out social niches for themselves including those who provided support, those who provided and received support, and those who did neither.

Thinking about how the actors interacted with each other and the different types of friendships that formed, I examined the equality of friendship. I realized mid-program that there
was no clear way to define equal friendships within Kaleidoscope because the actors all socialized with each other in a variety of ways. While Debbie and Sarah relied on Lauren to include them and/or cheer them up, Lauren appeared happy to do so, even though she was primarily the caretaker in those relationships. Debbie and Sarah demonstrated characteristics of friendship towards Lauren in other ways. For instance, I observed Lauren giggle hysterically when Debbie and Sarah danced with her during freeze dancing. In my opinion, in an ideal friendship efforts of support are reciprocal. However, Kaleidoscope consisted of a variety of individuals who were able to support each other in ways that were dependent on their specific ability. So while some actors such as Debbie and Sarah did not verbally reciprocate with others in friendships -- whether they were shy and/or did not possess strong language skills, they created friendships by enabling others to play the role of their caretaker. Although the friendships between actors in Kaleidoscope were not always evenly reciprocal, I observed relationships form regardless.

Earlier I mentioned how the actors all appeared as social equals during drama exercises and arts activities. Regardless of how actors socially interacted with each other during free time, I witnessed the greatest levels of socialization during structured activities. For example, Chip, a 50-year-old man with Autism and a DD, typically ate his lunch with lightning speed and then wandered around the rehearsal hall by himself while the rest of the actors ate their lunch. During free time Chip typically did not interact with fellow actors and kept himself at a distance from them, as he was uncomfortable with physical contact. While he did wander away from time to time during drama and dance activities, he often stood within close physical proximity to the other actors for long periods of time and occasionally allowed other actors to touch him. It appeared as though he did not mind interacting with others through an artistic medium.
Beginning week one to the end of the program, I observed social connections created between every single actor during movement exercises when they filled the space of the rehearsal hall by shaping their bodies in different ways and at different levels. While I observed Lauren appear slightly uncomfortable interacting with Robyn during free time -- as she did not know how to communicate with Robyn since she is deaf, they effortlessly appeared to create a series of three tableaus together about playing on the beach. While for instance some friendships outside of drama exercises consisted of a caretaker and a receiver of support, and some actors did not formulate friendships at all during free time and lunch, the nature of these relationships did not appear to impact the actors when participating in the artistic process.

The connections created during the art and free time cultivated an ensemble, a major crux of Kaleidoscope. My first interview with Lucy, a 38-year-old female who has Cerebral palsy (CP) intrigued me because she recognized that for her the medium of drama and art makes social interaction easier. Lucy is a second year veteran in the program whose personal goal was to work on her singing; the staffs’ goal was to provide Lucy with opportunities to mentor other cast members, stay focused on tasks, and increase her capacity to participate in movement exercises. Characteristics of CP that Lucy possesses include a mild speech impairment, muscle tightness, disturbance in mobility -- as she sometimes needed to sit in a wheelchair, and a mild DD. Early on, I asked Lucy if she enjoyed the rehearsal period:

L (Lucy): Oh yeah!

K (Karen): What do you like about it?

L: Getting to know the other actors.

K: Cool, what do you like about getting to know them in the five weeks?

L: But then, then I’ll never see them.
K: You mean when it’s all over?
L: And that’s hard. But that’s when I get their emails!

Lucy foregrounded “getting to know the other actors” as the reason for enjoying the rehearsal process, articulating an element of socializing as her motivation for participating in Kaleidoscope. I continued to question Lucy as I believed she could further detail why she enjoyed socializing in the program.

K: Can you try to name some of the reasons and things why it’s fun for you?
L: You know, interacting with people, getting to know different people, I love people.

K: Do you think that this is the type of program that makes it easier… you are talking a lot about making friends and socializing, does this program offer a new way for you to socialize?
L: Sure.

K: Do you have groups of friends outside of Kaleidoscope?
L: Suuuuuure.

K: Do you think the way this program is set up, between acting, dance, music, and art, getting to do all of these things in the art world, does that make it easier somehow to make friends or to bond with the group?
L: Art is not my thing.

K: Art is not your thing? Something in Kaleidoscope has to be your thing cause you came back. It can’t just be about socializing, or maybe it is, I don’t know?
L: The whole atmosphere, I mean it is so great. I love it.

K: Um…but you just said art is not your thing.
L: No.
K: Are you talking about the art class we have or the program as a whole?

L: No.

K: Ok, just the art. Do you think there’s anything special or specific about drama and acting that makes it easier to bond with people and form those friendships?

L: Yes.

K: Can you maybe talk about what that is. Whatever you think…

L: Mmmmmhmmmm…

K: Why do you think it’s easy for you to socialize and make strong connections with people in the rehearsal hall?

L: It’s always been easy for me.

K: It’s always been easy for you?

L: To connect with people.

K: Is there anything about what we’re doing in dance and movement and music and acting that makes it even easier, like not everyone in that group is um…makes friends as easily as you do. So what is it that you think acting does? The things we’re doing in the other room that makes it easy for people to come out of their shells and bond?

L: I don’t know why, it just is. (Lucy Personal) 

Lucy appeared out-going when she came into the program which ultimately impacted her ability to socialize with others. While she could not specifically articulate why participating in the art makes socializing easier, she did recognize that the medium of drama and art makes that interaction easier. This was one of my early interviews where I fed Lucy language, however, I believe she would have eventually tapped into the correlation between socializing and drama without my prompting. For Lucy, making friends went hand-in-hand with participating in the
art. It was one thing for the staff and I to recognize that socializing appeared easier through the art, but she was also able to see this from the inside perspective of a Kaleidoscope actor. She was the only actor who articulated a connection between bonding and the art during the first round of interviews. Throughout the program, the staff and I observed Lucy incite conversations with the staff, other actors, and volunteers. I observed her express her personal opinions to other actors regarding whatever topic of conversation was on the table, such as someone’s outfit or a picture someone drew, whether they wanted to hear her opinion or not. She addressed her ability to engage in conversation with others during our final interview, saying, “Well, if you noticed I love to talk. It’s like they can’t shut me up. But that’s a good thing and a bad thing. But that’s ok because that way I get out what I want and if you don’t understand me you can ask me until you do understand me. But yeah, I will get my point across” (Lucy Personal). I did not observe changes in Lucy’s social behaviors throughout the program. From day one she interacted with whomever she wanted to and came in with strong skills in socialization. I observed her treat fellow actors, volunteers, and staff with an attitude reflecting whatever mood she was in. When the staff and I were on the receiving end of Lucy’s attitude through unwelcome comments about how rehearsal was going, we felt very frustrated. Yet at the same time, we discussed in actor goal meetings how her ability to verbally express her opinion on a song that she did not think worked or another actor’s lack of participation in dance class was a trait to be celebrated. Lucy’s lack of filter made me think about the relationship between actors and the creative team in any production situation and how some actors will do their job without questioning the artistic vision of the show, and some will voice their opinions, and possibly overstep their boundaries.

Similar to Lucy, Richard an 18-year-old male with Williams syndrome (WS) appeared to be naturally outgoing as he entered the program. Characteristics of WS that Richard possesses
include puffiness around his eyes, a small chin, full lips, wide mouth with dental abnormalities, and a very thin figure. Individuals with WS are typically very friendly and show no fear of strangers, and Richard possesses these qualities as well. This was his third year in the program and his personal goal was to increase specificity in dance steps and the staff set a goal for him to increase focus and concentration and to remain focused on saying the words during voice class. Early on, I asked Richard why he liked coming to rehearsal everyday:

   R (Richard): Cause I enjoy the people. And I like interacting with them.
   K (Karen): Do you like interacting? Who do you like interacting with?
   R: You of course, Anny, everybody! (Richard Personal)

Both Richard and Lucy chose to articulate their experiences through the vocabulary of “interacting.” While they both possessed strong language skills, they both surprised me with their use of the word “interacting.” Out of my group of eight actors, Lucy and Richard remained the most consistent in how they interacted with the group. Similar to Lucy’s consistency with exercising freedom of speech, throughout the entire program the staff, volunteers, and I observed Richard offer endless hugs and attempt to make his fellow actors smile, laugh, and feel at ease. I did not see changes in Richard’s social behaviors throughout the program; rather his efforts to reach out to all remained consistent. Lucy and Richard were also the two veteran actors who specified interacting with others--and not the art--as reasons for returning to the program. Similar to my surprise with their use of the word “interacting,” I had anticipated different answers from the two of them based on stories shared/detailed by the CHAC staff detailing stories about the strong acting skills Lucy and Richard brought to the table.

Regardless of theatre experience or personality type, the actors all came into the program sharing a desire to make friends. They continued to discuss their love of having good friends as
one of their favorite parts of participating in Kaleidoscope during our mid-program and final interviews. Friendship positively impacted several actors overall performances in the program and provided opportunities to practice behaviors such as giving support and remaining open to letting others in. By no means did every actor excel at the aforementioned behaviors, but each of them practiced applying these behaviors within the environment of Kaleidoscope. While the actors’ reasons for entering the program surprised me at first, their desire to make friends created a basis for that the entire production. Their initial desire to socialize did not shift as a motivator to attend rehearsal everyday, but rather became one out of several motivators as the actors’ love of the art itself grew. As socialization became intertwined with increased engagement in the process of drama, I observed shifts in some of the actors’ behaviors and social roles.

Mentorship

In society, everyone has a niche to fill. In the society of Kaleidoscope the actors each created their own niche. Some actors carved out new and exciting roles for themselves as the weeks progressed, and some remained nestled in the same roles throughout the program. As the staff and I gathered initial impressions of the actors and set goals for them during the first week, we encouraged Lucy and Romeo to mentor other actors. I wondered how signs of mentorship would show up in Kaleidoscope and whether there might be clear shifts in actors’ social roles such as modeling positive behavior. While the staff and I wanted Lucy and Romeo to step up and serve as mentors, Lucy was the only actor who verbally articulated signs of wanting to mentor others in the beginning.
For this study, I defined mentorship as behavioral signs of leadership and guidance on a consistent basis in addition to providing advice and/or support. Signs of mentorship showed up in different ways in Kaleidoscope. Lucy verbally expressed an interest to teach people who are deaf and hard of hearing. During brainstorming sessions the first week of the program, the actors each shared their dreams. These dreams inspired dialogue, choreography, and music for the show. The staff hoped that Lucy would be an asset to help other actors in music class as we aspired to sing and sign the lyrics to the song *Good Friends*, one of the musical numbers from *Dream Out Loud*. While I did not observe Lucy help others learn to sign in music class, mid-program volunteers told me that she served as a positive model in music class for others to look to when learning how to sign. While I observed Lucy remind other actors of their blocking once we were deep into rehearsal, the staff and I did not observe major shifts in her behaviors when it came to mentoring others. With Lucy’s outgoing personality, I maintained that she freely provided advice regarding blocking to others because that was a natural part of her personality, and she wanted “the show to look right” (Lucy Personal). But was her providing advice a marker of mentorship or was that her simply being a good friend and an aware ensemble member? I think Lucy’s behaviors fell into the gray area between mentoring and how she related to others in the program. While I think Lucy tiptoed into the mentorship category more than most Kaleidoscope actors based on her providing advice, I wondered, if one actor helped another did that make them a mentor too? While support between actors proved vital to socialization, I documented that actors who became mentors in Kaleidoscope displayed consistent behavioral signs of leadership as well as provided advice and/or support.

I observed major behavioral shifts as Romeo and Lauren, two first-time actors, became what I considered mentors. Similar to how friendships increased as engagement in drama
increased, Romeo and Lauren’s roles as mentors increased the further they engaged in the artistic process. As they began to discover their strengths as artists and took ownership over their identities within the program, without prompting from staff they began to help fellow actors in need of assistance in multiple ways during classes, rehearsal, and free time. Romeo and Lauren’s behavioral shifts surprised me based on early observations. Specifically, at the start of the program Romeo could be found leaning against the wall during all activities, rolling his eyes at the creative staff when they tried to engage him, and making inappropriate comments during classes to make other actors laugh. Lauren came into the program so shy that she would freeze when called upon to speak or move in front of the group. I questioned if Romeo had the ability to behave appropriately and if Lauren would be able to perform through her shyness? They were the last two actors I expected to become mentors based on early impressions.

The first major shifts I noticed in Romeo’s journey to becoming a mentor began after he got in trouble at the end of the first week of the program. Romeo is a 19-year-old male who has a DD and a Speech and Language Disorder (SLD), specifically a stutter. Romeo’s personal goal was to improve specificity in dance steps. The staff set goals for Romeo to try not to plan everything ahead of time, take risks, and participate in the ensemble. I discovered early on that Romeo came to Kaleidoscope to make friends. The staff and I observed Romeo seek out friendships through securing his role as head of the teenage boys. Romeo did not tell us this was his goal, rather we observed him reel in friends such as Tom through interrupting his teachers with jokes and comments, and leaning against the wall when he should have been participating. Tom, a 16-year-old male with a DD began to mirror Romeo’s behaviors. Tom’s position in the program proved unique because his mom was a Kaleidoscope volunteer. They were the only parent/child duo in the program. Initially, the staff and I observed Tom remain very quiet during
most activities, which we attributed to his mom being around. The staff and I witnessed Tom come out of his shell, echoing Romeo when he would burst out with a comment, laugh out loud in an encouraging manner to Romeo when he was being disruptive during activities, and jump up and down as he became excited by interacting with Romeo at inappropriate times. Romeo’s disruptive behavior and influence on Tom prompted the staff to intervene, and as a result, Romeo completely altered his attitude and actions.

During music toward the end of the first week, DeVette asked Romeo to stop leaning against the wall and to sing with the group. In that moment, his face turned beet red and he crossed his arms around his slumped body. I literally thought I saw steam come out of his ears. Romeo ignored everyone for the rest of the day and CHAC staff told me that he almost did not return to the program the following week as he was so upset about being called out in music class. During our final interview, Rachael Cammarano, CHAC Transitions Specialist who works directly with the teenagers, addressed this moment:

He went from being excited, now this was before Kaleidoscope, then the first week he got very discouraged because he couldn’t pick everything up, and then Liz made that one comment to him. She was just saying please you can’t lean on the wall and he took that because she called him out. He didn’t like that individual criticism, and it was very difficult the next couple of days. (Cammarano Personal)

In an effort to diminish Romeo’s attitude, the staff encouraged him with compliments. As the staff curbed Romeo’s disruptive actions, they simultaneously redirected Tom’s behaviors during free time and classes. While I do not think that Romeo served as a mentor to Tom, I cannot ignore that as Romeo began to behave appropriately, Tom followed his lead. While
Romeo and Tom’s behavior was far from perfect throughout the remainder of the program, by week two of the program, I observed continual shifts in behavior. Both boys remained quiet and still at the appropriate times, and the previously quiet Tom began to participate in conversations during activities and free time. Cammarano discussed Romeo and Tom’s friendship during our last interview: “They revved each other up. You know as much as they loved/hated pushing each others buttons and got mad at each other they couldn’t be away from each other for anything. And I think there was a bond there that kind of grew” (Cammarano Personal). As the staff and I noticed how Romeo’s attitude adjustment influenced Tom’s behavior, we also noticed that he began to assist lower functioning actors who struggled to participate.

Romeo extended a helping hand to Alex, a 30-year-old male who has a DD, CP, and a Seizure Disorder (SD). Alex was a Kaleidoscope veteran; this was his third time in the program. He has limited verbal abilities and stomps hard on the ground in an effort to gain attention. Communicating with Alex proved challenging, even for the staff who had worked with him for years prior. For some reason, Alex took to Romeo and listened to him when he would not listen to the staff and/or volunteers. Romeo initially put up a tough front as he poked fun of the arts activities rather than participating. But signs of sensitivity burst through his tough exterior as the weeks progressed. I observed the boy who originally stood on the sidelines mocking the ensemble choose to partner up with actors who required a lot assistance such as Chip and Alex. I also witnessed Romeo spend extra time helping other actors with diction issues learn song lyrics. Romeo was able to motivate Alex to participate in activities and seemed to always be aware when Alex was not where he was supposed to be. As we began to rehearse for the show as a group, I observed Romeo re-direct Alex to his proper spot during musical numbers, especially during The Sand Man Dance. In our second interview, I talked to him about his role as mentor:
K (Karen): What makes you wanna help Alex?

R (Romeo): Cause he’s a cool kid.

K: What do you want to do by helping him?

R: Not have him run around and jump and make a lot of noise, and I also help with Tom too to get him calmed down.

K: How do you think it helps the group or them when you help?

R: It makes them feel nice when I help them, makes them feel confident.

K: What does it do for you?

R: Makes me feel smart when I’m helping him. Cause I know that he can talk a little bit, and he drools a lot and when he does it I have to tell him to wipe, and he listens to me perfectly when I tell him to do that. (Romeo Personal)

Romeo’s articulation of the effects mentoring had on both him and Alex made me realize that he valued himself and the person he was helping. During my final interview with Romeo, after Kaleidoscope ended, I asked him to look back and reflect on being a mentor:

Being a mentor...it was kinda like, a little bit rough, but with Alex, but he would do some of the moves and then ignore me for a little bit. And then he would listen to me and ignore me again. But he was trying his best and I was eggin’ him on and he had me to help him. When he came up to me and he asked me for help, I felt kind of excited that I could help someone who couldn’t really do anything, I felt really happy and excited that I could help him. (Romeo Telephone)

Romeo’s ability to tap into the struggles and rewards of mentoring Alex made me think about responsibility and self-awareness. Romeo realized that even though he wanted to help, at times
Alex ignored his help, forcing Romeo to work through his frustrations and re-evaluate how to continue mentoring Alex. During our final interview, Cammarano said, “Romeo was great and he was kind, and he was helping out the teachers and the staff. After the first week he was all about doing Kaleidoscope, and he was so proud of himself for following through with it” (Cammarano Personal).

Without jumping too far ahead into my next chapter on confidence, I cannot ignore that as Romeo’s confidence grew in his artistic talents, so did his role as a mentor. The pride Cammarano mentioned that Romeo felt was evident in Lauren as well. Specifically with Romeo, once he changed his attitude, I observed glimpses of his desires to dive into the process of creating a production. As the staff and I watched him discover that he possessed strong singing skills in music class, he realized that he could help others while continuing to strengthen his own skills. As I witnessed Romeo grow in his ability to technically support his voice while projecting, I noticed he helped other actors practice their breathing techniques. Similarly, towards the end of week two I began to notice signs of mentorship in Lauren’s social behaviors as her confidence increased. Lauren appeared incredibly shy at the beginning of the program. By the end of week one, I observed her engage others in conversation during free time and lunch, but she became a different person during classes. She froze when called upon to speak or move by herself in drama, dance, and music class. By the end of week two, the staff and I discovered that Lauren possessed strong singing, dancing, and acting skills. Everyday she appeared more comfortable putting herself out there while improvising scene work, singing out loud and clear, and using her body to create a variety of shapes. As Lauren’s confidence in her artistic abilities grew, I watched her rescue actors who were unsure of what to say or do during improvisational scene work, and review choreography with those who struggled to learn specific steps.
Socialization and confidence were interconnected in Kaleidoscope, and as Lauren and Romeo took ownership over their abilities to help other actors, their confidence regarding their own roles in the group appeared to increase.

Lauren’s confidence grew throughout the program, but it was not until the week of the show that I realized how far she had progressed in mentoring her peers. During one of our ritual dance exercises called Hot Potato, Lauren was dancing in the middle of the circle with fellow actor Wayne. Wayne is a 49-year-old male who has a DD, and a third year Kaleidoscope veteran. One of the key goals of the partner interaction in the middle of the circle was eye contact. While Lauren was dancing with Wayne, he was physically engaged in the music but his eyes were unfocused. She looked him straight in the eye, pointed to her eyes and told him: “Wayne, eye contact,” and without missing a beat, Wayne looked right in her eyes and they continued to dance. As the circle of actors and volunteers continued to dance around Lauren and Wayne, the staff and I exchanged glances that were overflowing with pride. In that moment I realized that Lauren blossomed into a mentor on her own accord. At the end of the day, the staff and I discussed how at the beginning of the program Lauren could not even step into the circle to dance, and that her carefree dancing in the middle of the circle with an enormous smile plastered on her face demonstrated immense progression in her own confidence. This was also the first time I observed her provide directions to another actor with absolute confidence in her advice and with no reminders from the staff to make eye contact. Lauren made great progress from the start of the program, and I identified her as a mentor as she grew. While Lauren did not talk specifically about helping specific actors, during our final interview, she reflected on her experience of being a mentor throughout the entire program:
L (Lauren): Well I think I’m a really good role model for people like telling where they’re supposed to be and stuff. Stepping into that leadership role like being role models for Kaleidoscope. It was one of my first experiences.

K (Karen): When did you realize that you were a role model to other actors?

L: Probably talking about it! (Lauren Telephone)

She took complete ownership over becoming a role model, and she did not realize she was carrying out elements of mentorship until it was brought to her attention by staff and volunteers during the second half of the program. During our final interview, Cammarano talked about how Lauren assisted the staff in addition to the actors. “There were a couple of times Lauren was like, ‘you’re not supposed to be standing there.’ And I was like, ‘well you know what, you’re right. I’m not supposed to standing here!’ She’s caught me a couple times, you know, ‘Miss Rachel you need to be on the other side.’” (Cammarano Personal). Lauren’s behaviors not only surprised her and the staff, but she became an actor that the staff relied on to boost the spirit of others and maintain the artistic integrity of the production. In addition to Lauren discussing her experience of being a mentor, during our final interview she continued to speak about making friends, a topic she did not discuss in our first and second interviews.

L: I learned since Kaleidoscope is over how I really felt about making new friends.

K: How do you feel?

L: I feel like it’s like really nice to make new friends, I mean I think it’s like really awesome. (Lauren Personal)

Lauren’s response about making new friends came from my initial question about her role as a mentor in Kaleidoscope. I did not prompt her with any questions about friendship, and yet Lauren made a connection between being a role model and making friends. As Lauren cultivated
her role as mentor, she also tapped into artistic skills that utilized her voice and body, which empowered her to reach out and help others. As a result, the staff and I witnessed major shifts in her confidence as an actor and in her efforts to make friends.

Signs of mentorship showed up in the Kaleidoscope community in unexpected ways and from unexpected actors. The pool of actors who became mentors in Kaleidoscope remained quite small, making Romeo, Lauren, and even Lucy’s actions stand out as significant. Out of the 18 actors, it did not surprise me that Romeo, Lauren, and Lucy displayed behavioral signs of guidance because they were some of the highest functioning in the group. Within a group of 18 individuals who have a variety of DDs, the highest functioning actors in the group were more inclined to fulfill mentor-like roles. It was not a given that these three specific actors would become mentors as there were other actors in the program who were just as cognitively high functioning. Romeo and Lauren were new to the program, and therefore possessed the potential to grow artistically and socially based on the experience being brand new. Through their growth, they discovered that they were able to assist fellow actors and enjoyed doing so. Looking at the scope of socialization in Kaleidoscope, signs of mentorship were the clearest behavioral changes for me to document, as the pool of actors who became mentors was small, and their actions stood out as significant. Romeo and Lauren’s actions stood out specifically, as their positive influence ultimately enhanced some of the actors’ performances during classes, rehearsal, and the final production.

Spectrum of Generations and Disabilities

The wide spectrum of ages and disabilities in the program challenged the actors socially. From day one I was captivated by the generational differences among the actors. The youngest actor in the program was 16 and the oldest was 61. Could a 16-year-old find common ground
with a 61-year-old? The range of disabilities stretched from incredibly high functioning such as actors with mild DDs and PDs to much lower functioning such as actors with strong DDs and PDs. I questioned if it was possible to cater to each actors’ individual needs when the spectrum and types of difference remained so large. Could a high functioning actor make friends and artistically create with actors facing greater cognitive and physical challenges? When looking at my definition of socialization, I questioned what happens to markers of normativity when working with actors who have a variety of developmental and physical disabilities. I previously discussed qualities of friendship and mentorship in Kaleidoscope as well as shifts in behavior that marked normativity according to our community. Keeping in mind how the actors’ disabilities affected their social interaction, I examined how the teenagers impacted the social and artistic experiences of the older actors because the teenagers were a new addition to the Kaleidoscope program, how the spectrum of disabilities affected actors who were higher functioning, and how the spectrum of difference affected socialization as a whole.

This was the first year the program had a significant number of teenagers in it. CHAC received a grant from The Mertz Foundation which funded the five teenagers from the Transitions program. The Transitions program provides teenagers with tutoring services and opportunities to learn job and college placement skills. The staff, volunteers, and the eight actors highlighted in the study agreed that the five teenagers proved vital to the creation of Dream Out Loud. I observed the teenagers bring an abundance of energy to rehearsal, which pushed the veterans vocally and physically. For example, the staff and I agreed that Mike possessed strong dancing skills, but we observed him work up a sweat during movement activities and dance class in an effort to keep up with the younger actors. There were five actors above the age of 40, each of whom the staff believe were affected by the energy that came from the younger actors. In my
final interviews with Lucy, age 38, and the eldest actor from the group of eight, and Sarah, age 35, I asked them how they thought the teenagers impacted the program:

L (Lucy): They were awesome. They really made the show. I thought it really made a difference from last years.

K (Karen): How so?

L: The teenagers really stepped up to the plate and they really made everything different. Different in a good way. I think they made us older ones think that we could do more because they did more. I loved them. I think it went both ways really. I wouldn’t want to be a teenager again; anyway, they just made a difference.

K: How did they affect your performance?

L: Not so much in the performance, in the spirit of things. The games were faster, and I loved it. If they can do it so can we. (Lucy Telephone)

Lucy’s thoughts on how the teenagers positively affected the older actors made me question how the teenagers felt about working with the older actors. In response to my question, Sarah said, “One of the effects is that it made me feel wonderful to be with other ages and to be with them” (Sarah Telephone). While across the board the staff, volunteers, and older actors agreed that the addition of the teenagers proved vital to the social and artistic growth of the program, the teenagers were not all on the same page. During our final interviews, the teenagers each made positive statements about how they thought they helped the older actors. For instance, Lauren said: “I liked it. Like when I first walked in there I didn’t expect like what ages were like what kind of people were gonna be there. I mean I didn’t even expect older people, and then I was like OK with it” (Lauren Telephone). While Lauren enjoyed working with the “older people,” when I asked her if she would prefer to do Kaleidoscope with all teenagers or
with the mixed ages, she said, “Probably like teenagers. Probably being with people the same age as me” (Lauren Telephone). In response to my questions, Romeo said, “All teenagers, well maybe all teenagers and some disabilities and it would probably be easy that way to have all teenagers and some people with disabilities and some teens can help. Yeah we did push them really hard, we pushed them a lot harder. I pushed Wayne a lot and Chip” (Romeo Telephone).

In terms of levels of functioning, I understand why Lauren and Romeo desired to create a show with all teenagers because as a group the teens were higher functioning than several of the older actors. I also understand the appeal of socializing with peers rather than with adults in their 50s and 60s. During week two, after a morning group warm-up, I observed Mike walk up to Lauren and hug her. Lauren completely tensed up and tried to remove herself from the hug but appeared unsure of how to do so. So I looked at Lauren and told her “If you don’t want a hug from him, it’s OK to tell him so.” So Lauren told Mike, “I don’t want a hug right now,” so he released her from his embrace, and she immediately looked relieved. I then told Mike that he needed to ask people for a hug before he hugged them. He nodded and smiled, and then asked me for a hug. Unable to resist, I accepted a hug from him. The teenagers elevated the energy of the older actors, and they appeared happy to assist them during and in between rehearsal, but the teenagers were not always comfortable socializing with them.

The older actors never appeared uncomfortable socializing with the teens, and as the program progressed, I observed the teenagers increase in their comfort levels of socializing with the older actors when doing acting exercises. While the group became an ensemble, I documented that the teens as a whole appeared more comfortable socializing during free time and lunch with their peers and actors in their 20s and 30s. Empowering actors to develop and
practice interpersonal skills is one of the benefits of Kaleidoscope, and the staff and I witnessed an increase in such skills as a result of the variety of ages and abilities.

The majority of the actors I interviewed did not look at themselves as individuals with disabilities, but assigned others in the program as having disabilities. While some articulated how they felt about working with those who have disabilities, the only actor from my group of eight who talked openly about her disability was Lucy. She was hesitant at first to allow me to discuss her CP in this study, but then she changed her mind. During our first interview, Lucy said, “I don’t want to use my disability as an excuse” (Lucy Personal). Lucy walked up to me at the end of that day, gave me a big hug and said, “OK, you can use it!” Lucy is very high functioning, and at the time I questioned if her cognitive aptitude was the reason that she was not only aware of her disability, but also willing and able to discuss it with me? I was struck with how openly she discussed her disability as well as her recognition of other actor’s disabilities.

Prior to this study, it did not even occur to me that the actors would take issue working with other actors who have disabilities because I assumed they knew what they were getting into when they signed up for the program. I became aware of this notion during my first interview with Billy, a 25-year-old male who has a mild DD, and a second-time Kaleidoscope actor. Billy set a personal goal to work on acting a song, and the staff set goals for him to participate in everything and provide him with a mentoring role. Billy was the only actor in the program with previous theatre experience in addition to Kaleidoscope; he performed in several school and community theatre productions. I believe his theatre experience uniquely positioned him among the actors, and his view on the spectrum of difference opened my eyes up to the notion that socializing and performing with individuals with disabilities proved challenging for the actors
and not just the staff. While discussing socializing, Billy brought up his feelings on the other actors and their disabilities.

B (Billy): Well the first day when we came to orientation I kind of felt out of place.

K (Karen): Why did you feel out of place?

B: Well because a lot of the disabilities kind of like….um, for example Alex, I kind of feel sorry for him.

K: So do you feel like cause it’s such a huge range of disabilities at first it made you feel like, what did I get myself into?

B: YEAH YEAH EXACTLY!

K: Even though you’ve done Kaleidoscope before, you knew going into it was a range of disabilities, but maybe you weren’t expecting someone like Alex, ok so what conclusion did you come to? How do you feel about the range of disabilities? So you were hesitant at first, now how do you feel?

B: I think that everybody has their own contribution to the show. For instance I’ll give you an example, when we sing Good Friends and we’re not only singing but we’re signing. Robyn can relate to that because she’s deaf. And um, so I think she feels very proud that she can contribute that. (Billy Personal)

Billy’s articulation of feeling “out of place” helped me understand his social behaviors based on this part of our conversation. While I observed Billy dispense theatre terms and vocabulary to the group during classes and rehearsal and consistently engage in conversations with fellow actors during free time and lunch, I did not observe him step into a mentorship role like the staff hoped he would. The staff and I observed him display behaviors that made us think that Billy related to the staff and volunteers more than to his fellow actors. For instance, if the
staff was ever sitting around stage managements’ table in the rehearsal hall having an impromptu meeting, the majority of the actors gave us space to have conversations that did not include them. But Billy consistently attempted to stand by us when we were having private conversations, and he would interrupt us to the point where we had to say: “Billy, can you please go join your friends, this conversation only involves staff.” Billy would walk away visibly upset, as he not only wanted to be around the staff, he wanted to know how decisions were being made for the show. We believed he had every right to question how decisions were being made, but we shared new ideas and decisions regarding the show with the entire group as soon as we were ready. While Billy continued to display behaviors of wanting to be a staff member more so than channel his theatre experience towards mentoring, he expressed to me during our final interview how he felt about socializing in the program. Billy said, “Um…it did a great deal for me because it got me to socialize with all types of different people. Not just high functioning, but everybody, and that’s the part that I really enjoy about that” (Billy Telephone).

With the exception of Lucy, Billy and the other actors spoke about others having disabilities as though they were an entirely separate group. While Billy ultimately realized that he enjoyed socializing with “all types of people,” his initial remarks made me examine how even though high functioning actors and lower functioning actors benefited from working together, the higher functioning actors were not always comfortable working with lower functioning actors. Perhaps the lower functioning actors had moments of frustration when working with higher functioning actors as well, but were not able to articulate their opinions. In a group where the ages and disabilities were so varied, actors were bound to express different emotions, opinions, and behaviors towards each other, thus layering in complications as we worked to build an ensemble.
Thinking about the 18 actors, I questioned if they all formed strong connections with each other. Within the definition of socialization in Kaleidoscope, I think that it was important that the actors connected with each other, as ensemble building was a key goal of the program. However, I do not think it necessarily mattered that all 18 actors shared strong connections because that was not realistic. While the staff hoped that the actors would all treat each other with respect and strengthen interpersonal skills through socialization, such behaviors did not consistently happen. There were days when actors fought with each other, verbally and even physically. Examining the scope of socialization in the program, I realized that actors did not always interact together and/or behave appropriately during free time and lunch. However, the actors became more of social equals during drama, movement, dance, and music activities.

The variety of friendships in Kaleidoscope looked no different to me than any other group of drama students I have worked with during free time and lunch, except for the fact that they are all persons with disabilities. I learned that teenagers wanted to socialize primarily with other teenagers and that leaders will inevitably rise within a group. What stood out to me as significant and different from all previous drama students I have worked with was the increased equality between the actors during classes and rehearsal. The actors for the most part displayed respect for each other and themselves during classes and rehearsal, but the spectrum of difference played a major part in the social roles each actor fulfilled.

While the majority of friendships between high functioning actors, and mentors and mentees were very apparent, I observed some of the lower functioning actors such as Chip, a 50-
year-old male who has a DD and Autism, exist on the sidelines. Throughout the program, I observed Chip interact with staff through hugs, kisses, and vocally articulate within his limited vocabulary during activities and free time, but not make any efforts to interact or accept interaction with fellow actors. While Chip’s social interaction with fellow actors was minimal, according to CHAC staff, Chip grew tremendously in his abilities to relate to others, specifically through physical contact as a result of his previous experience in the program. Chip’s social role reiterated that there was not one clear picture of how relationships looked in Kaleidoscope as the actors connected and supported each other according to their abilities.

Socialization influenced the lives of the actors within Kaleidoscope through providing opportunities to interact with a variety of individuals with and without disabilities in an artistic environment. My research revealed that acting, singing, and dancing became the foundation upon which the actors stood as social equals. Every actor did not experience shifts in how they socially related to others, thus complicating this study’s results regarding how socialization affected the actors’ lives. While there was not one clear picture of how socialization looked in Kaleidoscope due to the mix of personality types and disabilities, the actors’ social behaviors influenced their social positions within the ensemble and ultimately in the final production.
CHAPTER THREE: SELF-CONFIDENCE

Reflecting upon shifts in the actors’ self-confidence throughout the five weeks matches my level of excitement on opening night. I do not think it is a secret that participating in the process of drama and the product of theatre holds the potential to enhance self-confidence. In the study *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts On Learning*, seven different research teams examined arts education programs in a variety of settings utilizing different teaching methodologies. Researchers found that “Engagement in the arts — whether the visual arts, dance, music, theatre or other disciplines—nurtures the development of cognitive, social, and personal competencies” (Executive Summary 11). The research teams worked separately from one another, but their findings each stated, “the arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached” (Executive Summary 11). While these studies took place with youth, I cannot ignore the correlation between the findings of the studies and my own research. Kaleidoscope reaches out to a marginalized population through providing the participants an opportunity to create an original production. The staff, volunteers, and I observed a variety of shifts in the actors’ confidence levels throughout the entire program. There were actors who experienced increases, decreases, and, for some, no changes at all in self-confidence. During my interviews the actors tapped into changes regarding their own confidence. In an effort to analyze confidence in Kaleidoscope, I examined how participating in movement and voice, and experiencing stage fright, affected the actors’ performances in classes, rehearsal, and during the final production.
In analyzing my data for changes in self-confidence, I relied on the following definition:

Self-confidence is a belief in yourself and your abilities, a mental attitude of trusting or relying on yourself. Confidence is sometimes equated with freedom from doubt, however when confidence is needed is usually when the outcome is uncertain, so that true confidence is actually about feeling comfortable with uncertainty and not knowing what the outcome will be. (“Self-Confidence”)

The actors’ most noticeable changes in self-confidence related to how they believed in themselves and their abilities, particularly while participating in classes, rehearsal, and during the final performance. Tracking shifts in the actors self-confidence according to this definition aligned with the core of creating an original production because the outcome of devised work remains uncertain. While I recognize there are endless avenues to explore when working from a published script, the outcome of *Dream Out Loud* remained more uncertain to me than any previous production experience because this was my first time collaborating on an originally devised show. For instance, I wondered if the audience would understand the story. Would the actors recognize and accept the play as their creation and/or would the actors remember their lines, blocking, music, and choreography? And would their performances remain the same or change in front of an audience? I hypothesized that confidence would increase as the actors’ willingness and efforts to take risks during drama, movement, and vocal exercises increased. The actors demonstrated growth, setbacks, and, for some, little to no change in their ability to work through personal fears and to trust themselves as artists in both the rehearsal process and the final production.
Drama, movement, and dance exercises were interconnected in Kaleidoscope. During individual classes, there were clear distinctions between acting and dancing, however, the Director of Kaleidoscope, Gormezano, infused a great deal of movement work into her teaching and directing practice, and bridged the gap between drama and dance. Gormezano and Dance Instructor/Choreographer Leymis Bolaños Wimott also worked closely together during all group warm-ups and rehearsal, thus creating an environment where drama, movement, and acting were of equal and complimentary value. Gormezano and Bolaños Wimott created a world where we filled the space - moving like sea creatures and robots, creating imaginary machines, morphing someone’s imaginary object or idea into another imaginary object or idea, and discovering alternative uses for fabric and sheets through drama, movement, and dance.

While I aim to tap into multiple intelligences when I teach, I frequently incorporate dance and movement into my work as a teaching artist, as I am a kinesthetic learner. Throughout the program, drama activities that incorporated or focused on movement and dance exercises seemed to cultivate visible changes in actors’ confidence levels. Changes of confidence during movement and dance exercises included length of time while dancing individually or in pairs in front of the ensemble; effort; attitude; engagement during all group rehearsal and dance class; and pushing through physical disabilities.

I observed shifts in many of the actors’ confidence as a result of movement and dance, but Lucy remains the only actor whose confidence I observed increase as she pushed beyond what she thought she was capable of due to her CP. Lucy was the only actor in the program who used a wheel chair to assist with her disability. CHAC staff informed the rest of the creative
team that despite Lucy’s mobility issues, she could walk with or without a cane. However, during the first few days of the program, Lucy could be found at times sitting in a wheelchair during drama activities that required standing or movement. By the end of the first week, Lucy stopped sitting in her wheelchair as we continued to do ensemble building activities that required standing or movement. I observed her make an effort to stand and move, and when she needed help balancing, a staff member or volunteer remained by her side.

Lucy’s confidence was complex, as she appeared incredibly self-assured as an actor and singer, but incredibly uncertain of her ability as a mover and dancer. As I discovered during our first interview and through other conversations early on in the program, Lucy did not like using CP as an excuse for anything, and I believe this remains one of the reasons she pushed herself physically. She also voiced concerns about “wanting to look right” throughout the entire program (Lucy personal). Lucy’s shifts in self-confidence did not elevate in a consistent upward trajectory as she had a tendency to question staff during rehearsal when she felt she did not “look right,” specifically during dance numbers. For example, during two dances, *The Magic Shoe Dance* and *The Safari Dance* there were moments when Lucy had to move in different ways from everyone else to get from point A to point B. During *The Magic Shoe Dance* she had to hold one position longer than anyone else before I came to take her chair from her and move it upstage due to her inability to physically push the chair upstage by herself. So as everyone else transitioned from *The Magic Shoe Dance* into *The Restaurant Scene*, she had to wait for me to help her transition until I finished moving her chair. In reality Lucy was only waiting about five to ten seconds before I came to help her, but she expressed concerns to me about that moment. Once again she told me that she did not “look right” waiting for me to help her move, which I believe decreased her self-confidence during that moment because she worried about looking
different from the rest of the ensemble. Also, during *The Safari Dance* there was a moment where everyone took a few steps backward to form different lines. Stepping backward proved challenging for her, so the staff encouraged her to turn around and walk forward to her spot. I observed Lucy initially argue with staff about having to turn around to walk to her spot, but she eventually gave in because she wanted to remain in the dance number. Lucy’s self-confidence would have suffered further had she been removed from the dance number rather than walk to her spot differently than everyone else. While Lucy was worried about moving differently than the group due to her CP, she knew that at times she had to find alternative ways to move her body. Lucy’s confidence appeared shaken while rehearsing this moment, but if she did not turn around and walk forward to her spot, she would have fallen down trying to walk backwards.

I noticed that Lucy began to take physical risks as a mover and dancer as she began to explore alternative ways of moving during dance numbers. Specifically during all group rehearsal weeks three and four, the staff and I noticed Lucy extend her arms and torso further while we stretched, explore new shapes during tableau work increasing her effort to reach high and middle levels, and sometimes travel around the room during movement and dance exercises with a smile on her face, a shift from her worried expression during week one. During our final interview, Bolaños Wilmott addressed Lucy’s growth: “I think Lucy grew tremendously as far as her self esteem and trying things that she would never do movement wise” (Bolaños Wilmott Personal). Her comment made me realize that Lucy’s confidence grew in Kaleidoscope largely in part to her efforts to push physically beyond that which she thought she was capable. Not only did Lucy begin to trust in her abilities to physically move in ways that her body was unfamiliar with, but Lucy’s confidence regarding her CP and movement was put to the test during the final performance.
During *The Art Gallery Scene*, right after *The Safari Dance*, we all used our bodies to become art sculptures. As Pavel, an 18-year-old male with Depression-Schizophrenia (DS) waved a magic paintbrush over the ensemble, we shifted our sculptures. For instance, when Pavel waved his brush and said “love,” we created sculptures with our bodies based on love. This scene came from physical exploration with tableau work in rehearsal. I partnered with Lucy and Billy for this scene. The three of us faced challenges in rehearsal discovering how to balance our sculptures as Billy is very tall and large in stature and Lucy is fairly small. During the final performance on Saturday night, right as we transitioned into *The Art Gallery Scene*, Lucy’s legs locked and she almost lost her balance. I held her so she would not fall and then we moved into the scene as though nothing happened. Billy, Lucy, and I adjusted our three additional tableaus to help her balance because she remained shaky throughout the scene. During our final interview, Lucy shared with me what that moment was like for her:

L (Lucy): The last show my legs locked up and I couldn’t move and that was scary.

K (Karen): How did you work through it?

L: I just kept telling my legs to move! Fortunately they listened. When I get that tired, that’s what happens. (Lucy Telephone)

Lucy faced her fear on stage as her legs locked due to her CP, causing her to look different as her fear of her PD could have potentially stopped the show if she had fallen and injured herself. After that scene, she continued to perform with the same light in her eyes, the same energy that pulsed from her voice while reciting her lines, and the same expressive looks on her face that she possessed prior to her legs locking. In my journal entry from that performance, I reflected on that moment: “Lucy showed everyone tonight what a true professional she is. I was terrified that I wasn’t going to be able to support her when she almost fell, but she seemed so determined to
stay standing. She was shaking as we tried to hold her up. I don’t know that I could have gone on to perform with the energy that she did. It was like nothing had happened at all. Almost like she used her near fall as fuel to light the fire for the rest of the show.” Lucy told me during our final interview that she originally planned to be in a wheelchair on stage, but due to encouragement from staff, she made an effort to increase her ability to stay up on her feet. Lucy also told me that she decided, “I will get up and I’ll make myself move” (Lucy Telephone). Encouragement from staff to not let Lucy rest in her physical comfort zone planted seeds for her to trust her body while she moved. The support provided from staff, volunteers, and fellow actors stayed with Lucy on stage when she almost fell down. She did not allow that moment to shake her performance for one minute. Lucy’s self-confidence increased as she traveled on a complex and difficult journey through crossing physical barriers.

Movement and Dance: Permission to Enjoy Moving

While Lauren, Debbie, and Billy did not enter the program facing a physical disability (PD) like Lucy, their confidence also appeared to shift as they gave themselves permission to enjoy moving and dancing. Specifically with Lauren and Debbie, I observed increasing confidence during activities that required them to move or dance individually, or with a partner in front of the entire group. I discussed the activity Hot Potato in Chapter One in regards to Lauren telling Wayne that he needed to give her eye contact while they were dancing together. Hot Potato also required actors to dance on their own or with a partner. Standing in our circle, we would dance in place while a hat was passed from one person to the next. When the music stopped, the person holding the hat at that moment was supposed to step into the middle of the
circle and dance. The first few weeks of the program, Debbie and Lauren would literally freeze with looks of terror on their faces, step one or two feet away from their place in the circle, dance for about 10 seconds, and then return to their place in the circle. The staff, volunteers, actors and I clapped and cheered for whoever was in the middle of the circle. Visual Art Instructor and Clinician Barker Schefler often volunteered to dance with Debbie and Lauren when it was their turn so they would not feel so frightened, but even with her help, they lasted only about 10 seconds before returning to their spots. It appeared as though their self-confidence disappeared when they entered the middle of the circle. Smiles immediately returned to Debbie and Lauren’s faces, the flushed red color disappeared from their cheeks, and they began to dance up a storm the moment they stepped back into their spots and passed the hat onto someone else.

We played Hot Potato almost every morning, and during week two, Gormezano began to layer on new rules to the activity. She started to pass around two objects so that when the music stopped, there were two people dancing in the center of the circle. By that point in the program we explored the use of levels and alternative uses for props while doing tableau work, mirroring, and dance exercises. As we began to infuse partner work and apply acting techniques to Hot Potato, the staff and I observed an increased length of time that actors remained in the center of the circle, as well as little to no hesitation about dancing in front of everyone when they were caught holding the object. The application of props, acting techniques, and partner work provided the actors with a specific focus, thus making the actors more comfortable dancing in the circle because they no longer felt pressure to make up a dance without any guidance.

While I further discuss Lauren’s growth in self-expression as an actor in my next chapter, I cannot ignore that as she discovered and took ownership of her strengths and desires in acting
class and her role in the production, her confidence while dancing also increased. During our final interview, Lauren addressed her own growth during Hot Potato:

L (Lauren): When we passed around the hats and they had to freeze the music, that was like really comfortable. Well like after a couple of weeks, I was like, at first I was a little afraid to dance in front of everybody, cause I was a little shy.

K (Karen): But then what happened?

L: But then a couple of weeks it just made me happy to do it. (Lauren Telephone)

The happiness that Lauren mentioned did not go un-noticed by the staff, the volunteers, or me. She appeared joyful about her role as a mentor, and happy during acting class. Lauren’s ability to tap into shifts in her own confidence - such as starting out shy - and then connecting her comfort level to happiness while doing Hot Potato demonstrated significant intrapersonal growth. During our second interview, Lauren also showed signs of increased self-confidence as she expressed feelings of happiness in regards to her role in the production. Lauren had a moment alone on stage at the very top of the show and at the very end of the show. In an effort to learn about this moment, I asked Lauren how opening and closing the show made her feel.

K: How are you feeling about your part of the show? Jessi chose you for a reason.

L: Because she thinks that I’m really good!

K: She does think you’re really good. How does it make you feel that you get to close and open the show?

L: I mean it’s like really fun cause you know you get to like open it and then close the show.
K: What do you like about getting to be that person that starts and finishes it? How does that make you feel?

L: Makes me feel like…happy.

K: Yeah? Awesome Lauren! And how do you feel that you’ve grown so far from the last time we’ve talked? Anything specific you feel like you’ve gotten better at?

L: Probably the singing and dancing. (Lauren Personal)

Lauren’s articulation of her growth in singing and acting coupled with her recognition of why Gormezano gave her the role of opening and closing the show demonstrated that she believed in her artistic talent. In addition, this specific part of our interview marked the first time Lauren did not respond to my questions with a hint of a question or self-doubt in her voice. She made statements and exclamations filled with pride, demonstrating that she believed in herself.

Prior to Debbie’s increased comfort with dancing in the middle of the circle, when she danced on the perimeter of the circle, she had joy on her face and energy radiated from her body. The staff and I observed Debbie pop her hips and slink her body like a pop star during movement and dance activities throughout the entire program. Debbie appeared most comfortable when provided opportunities to infuse her signature style of dancing into exercises and even during choreographed routines. While I discuss self-expression in detail in the next chapter, Debbie’s dancing style inspired a red carpet/paparazzi themed finale for the show. The staff and I wanted to provide her with an avenue to show off her supermodel runway walk. Reflecting on the red carpet finale during our final interview, Debbie told me, “I feel like a rock star, like Hannah Montana!” (Debbie Personal). While Debbie addressed her love of dancing and her desire to improve on her balance in our first two interviews, this was the first time she expressed to me how dancing made her feel. I related her articulation of feeling like Hannah Montana to self-
confidence more than when she talked about how she loved to dance. During our final interview, Cammarano discussed Debbie’s Hannah Montana moment as well: “This is gonna sound really cheesy, but I think the whole Kaleidoscope show was her moment to shine in front of everyone. At that moment when she was walking down the stage at the very end - that was it. That was her shining moment. And at that point was on a cloud” (Cammarano Personal). While I do think that the entire show provided Debbie with an opportunity to be in the spotlight, I believe that moment at the end belonged to her more than any other moment in the show. Debbie began the program timid about performing alone in front of the ensemble. Through rehearsal I noticed an increased comfort in her self-confidence as she began to focus more on being in the moment while dancing rather than on being the center of attention. As a result of participating in the classes and rehearsal, I believe Debbie felt confident while performing but she relished being the center of attention as well.

Debbie’s shifts in confidence that grew specifically from dance made me think about the power of nonverbal communication. While I do not believe that nonverbal drama activities are the best methods of tapping into self-confidence with actors who have disabilities, nonverbal work was the most successful with this specific pool of actors. There were some actors with strong verbal skills, but the majority of the actors possessed limited verbal skills. Debbie is an example of an actor whose confidence primarily increased through opportunities to practice and highlight her dancing abilities rather than her verbal abilities. Early on I noticed Debbie hide in a corner during improvisation exercises requiring dialogue and/or movement such as pretending to work in a restaurant. She would hide in the corner and when a fellow actor or volunteer tried to include her, she would remain standing still looking very scared. By mid-program, I noticed that she did not increase her participation through speaking during such activities, but she began to
participate physically. For instance, during activities such as Machine, I observed her become a part of a “dream factory” assembly line without any hesitance or prompting from others to join. Debbie did not consistently jump into activities without prompting from others, but the moments when she did demonstrated changes in her self-confidence. I asked Gormezano to discuss changes in Debbie’s confidence from participating in verbal and nonverbal activities during our final interview.

I think she would occasionally get bit by that fearful bug, sometimes it would just be in the circle, and she would get caught with the hat and she would get paralyzed like she was gonna die. I don’t think there was a clear progression for her, I think when other people were like WOO and others would give her support, but she would really physically go for it more then anyone else. So when it came to speaking I think she was more comfortable making exclamations than speaking, like, ‘yeah I love this!’ I think if it was deeper communication she would watch from the outside. But I would say dancing wise and movement wise, she would REALLY put her Debbie sort of attitude on it. (Gormezano Telephone)

Debbie’s self-confidence wavered throughout the program when she was asked to speak during drama activities. While I did not observe changes in her self-confidence through verbal expression, she demonstrated signs of believing in herself through becoming comfortable and happy when moving and dancing in front of others.

Actors with limited verbal abilities were not the only ones whose self-confidence grew from movement and dance. Billy and Richard appeared to enter the program with confidence. They are both verbally articulate and have previous theatre experience. During each interview they both expressed a love of performing in the spotlight. The staff and I observed their minds
and bodies actively engage in drama activities throughout the program, and we observed the same behaviors in Richard during movement and dance. However, when it came time for Billy to move and dance, looks of boredom plastered his face, and he appeared to move his body with minimal effort. While Billy and Richard both demonstrated different levels of engagement through movement and dance, the common trait they shared was exceptional verbal skills. These two verbally expressive actors’ self-confidence both shifted as a result of their personal journeys through movement and dance.

At an artistic/clinical goal meeting during the first week, the staff collectively agreed that Billy’s tall height, large size, and lack of spatial awareness contributed to his lack of participation during movement and dance. According to CHAC staff, Billy had boundary issues in terms of invading others’ personal spaces, which directly connected to his size. I often observed Billy attempt to connect with staff, volunteers, and actors through hugs, leaning on others, and standing close while talking without realizing that he was invading others’ personal spaces. While Billy was not clinically diagnosed with mobility issues, CHAC staff determined that his size appeared to make him uncomfortable making large physical movements.

In addition to Billy’s size affecting his movement, I initially wondered if Billy’s lack of effort to move coincided with his desire to be a staff member, and perhaps he thought he was “above” participating in movement and dance with those who were lower functioning than him. During classes and rehearsal the staff and volunteers consistently encouraged Billy to extend his arms further, bend his knees deeper, and swing his hips in larger circles. The staff aimed to push Billy not only in his ability to move and dance, but in his attitude as well. The first half of the program, I observed Billy fully engage his mind, body, and voice during acting class, to looking bored and not fully participating during movement and dance. I believe Billy’s visible shifts
such as looking bored and even like he was above fully participating in certain activities stemmed from a lack of confidence in his ability to move and dance. I observed such behavior until we began to rehearse on stage the week of the show. He appeared far more comfortable with movement and dance as we solidified *Dream Out Loud* than during exploration within the first half of the program.

I observed shifts in Billy’s attitude while participating in movement and dance during the second half of the program as we moved away from breaking off into small groups, and began to rehearse the show. I wondered if this was due to Billy’s love of performing? Perhaps he enjoyed the product more than the process? Or, perhaps he required more time to become comfortable with movement and dance than with dialogue? During our final interview, I asked Billy to reflect on his efforts in movement and dance: “I definitely pushed myself, I don’t wanna push myself too far. I definitely grew as far as doing the warm-ups and pushing myself yes I did. Leymis wasn’t pushing us too far but I could definitely feel it. I could feel myself getting stronger as an actor with doing the movement exercises” (Billy Telephone). Billy stated that he grew stronger and pushed himself, but that Bolaños Wilmott did not push the actors too far. From my perspective and the staff’s, Bolaños Wilmott did push the actors, not to a level where people were injuring themselves, but in a supportive manner that encouraged everyone to safely push themselves to new places physically. Billy’s statement led me to question what is “too far?” Who determines what someone is capable of doing physically? For instance, Lucy has CP and she pushed herself physically beyond that which she thought she was capable. While Billy did not want to push himself too far, from his perspective, participating in movement and dance increased his strength as an actor. While I cannot conclude as to whether or not his confidence
increased from participating in movement and dance based on observations, I noticed an increase in his attitude and commitment to choreography while moving and dancing on stage.

While Richard entered the program appearing confident in his abilities as a dancer, his confidence rested heavily in his ability to dance like a robot. I discuss further Richard’s *Robot Dance* that we highlighted in *Dream Out Loud* in the next chapter, but it remains important to note that one musical number in the show grew from Richard’s strong robot dancing skills. From day one to the end of the program, the staff and I observed Richard continue to do the robot during other dances. Not in the same way that Debbie would find a way to pop her hip to punctuate a move during a dance, but he would continue to move like a robot throughout other scenes. Gormezano, attempting to help Richard focus on the task at hand, would say: “robot off,” and most of the time Richard would adjust himself physically. I questioned if Richard relied on his robot dancing skills because he was comfortable moving in that specific style. I also watched people compliment him about his robot dancing skills throughout the program, and I wondered if he did not think it was necessary to explore other styles of dance because of the constant stream of praise? I came to realize that similar to all actors, he excelled in one specific area of dance and therefore found other styles of movement and dance challenging.

During our second interview, Richard addressed how other dances in the show proved challenging for him.

K (Karen): How’ve you been feeling about these past two weeks of rehearsal, is there anything you’ve particularly enjoyed?

R (Richard): The dancing.

K: The dancing? What have you enjoyed about that?

R: Lots of fun!
K: Lots of fun. Is there anything that’s been particularly challenging for you?

R: Yeah the water one. Yeah, the River of Dreams.

K: River of Dreams, what about that one has been challenging?

R: Well, I try to step over what Romeo’s trying to do.

K: Oh, cause you guys are doing the sheet thing?

R: Yeah.

K: So is it because of his height? Or is it because the movement is a little bit tricky.

R: A little bit tricky.

K: What are you doing to work through that or make it a little easier to do?

R: Moving my feet fast. (Richard Personal)

While Richard did not directly say that robot dancing came easily for him and the other dance numbers in the show were difficult, his articulation of finding the River Of Dreams dance tricky made me think about self-confidence in relation to his dancing. The staff and I often discussed how Richard’s movement and dance abilities were so specific to the robot that he found the other dances challenging. But did his articulation of a dance being “tricky” equal a lack of self-confidence? Did he revert back to his robot dance at inappropriate times during rehearsal because he felt unsure of his ability to carry out different styles of choreography? Or did he revert back to his Robot Dance because of his tendency to drop focus and get lost in his own world? During our final interview I asked Richard what stood out to him from the show, and he said, “My dance performance. Cause everybody liked it. It made me feel great” (Richard Telephone). Richard’s reflection on his Robot Dance during the final performance emphasized for me how aware he was of his strengths. Participating in all dances throughout the program did not appear to elevate Richard’s self-confidence, but rather pushed him to latch onto skills that he
felt confident about prior to Kaleidoscope, thus making me believe that he only possessed self-confidence in one area of dancing.

While signs of self-confidence within movement and dance showed up in a variety of ways such as actors who pushed through physical boundaries, for actors who gave themselves permission to enjoy moving, and actors who became engaged while dancing on stage, movement and dance became the glue that held the ensemble together. The staff and I held high expectations for the actors in terms of exploring and expanding their physical capabilities during the program. In my first interview with Dance Instructor/Choreographer Bolaños Wilmott, she addressed how the staffs’ expectations impact the actors’ growth in movement. “I know what it is to move and the gift of moving. You know, so I feel like everyone’s capable you know, somewhat. It’s just what our expectations are for that individual is really what I think limits the process or limits the experience” (Bolaños Wilmott Personal). Whether or not the actors burst through limitations they put upon themselves such as fear of dancing in front of the ensemble, or fear of pushing beyond what they thought their body was physically capable of, movement became an artistic and social equalizer. For the duration of the program, I observed the actors as a collective whole exude energy, respect for others, and remain engaged during drama exercises requiring movement and choreographed dances. In a group of 18 actors with a variety of DDs and PDs, self-confidence increasingly radiated from the ensemble. Signs of confidence radiating from the ensemble during activities requiring their voices were not as prevalent.
Sending Out Their Voices

Due to the actors’ varying abilities to communicate verbally, including Speech and Language Disorders (SLDs), and intelligibility issues, vocal work proved far more challenging than movement and dance. Vocal challenges were less obvious to see than watching actors struggle physically. Vocal work refers to warm-ups and exercises in both music and drama class focusing on articulation, diction, rhythm, and projection. Signs of confidence through vocal work appeared as actors practiced articulation of consonants and vowels, and projection and breathing techniques during classes, rehearsal, and the final two performances. The mix of actors with and without SLDs created a blend of sounds that initially challenged my ears because some of the actors possessed natural singing abilities, while some struggled to release one single word from their lips. The first week of the program, I wondered how polished the songs and dialogue in the final production would sound with the vocal blend of actors who could sing, actors who could not carry a tune, actors who were rhythmically challenged, and actors who could not vocalize specific consonants, vowels, or even complete words.

Thinking about the variety of sounds the actors produced led me to question what matters in terms of vocal work in the program, the process or the product? During our first interview, Music Director/Instructor Liz DeVette discussed the importance of the actor’s processes in her music classes:

If I get one of them to speak a word clearly that they never spoke before - because that’s where they feel the accomplishment. Because after a day of you know, doing this whole show that they’ve been working on for five weeks, what they will remember is that they can speak that word now. That’s what stays with
them. Riding them on learning to use their tongues. And of course there is an automatic joy that just comes out of singing, so I know that’s just there!

(DeVette Personal)

DeVette’s comment made me think about the variety of accomplishments the actors experienced specifically using their voices. Growth in vocal abilities in Kaleidoscope was not limited to singing on key. In fact, I discovered early on in the program that the majority of the actors could not sing on key, despite the fact that Kaleidoscope is a musical theatre program. For several of the actors, producing consonants and vowels, single words, reciting a short line of dialogue, and striving to keep up with the timing of lyrics proved challenging enough. I wondered how we would create an original piece of musical theatre with a group of actors who struggled with the aforementioned components of vocal work.

Glimpses of change in confidence among actors with major speech impairments sporadically occurred throughout the program. I observed some of the older actors who had diction and rhythm issues occasionally speak words that were difficult for them to say, and find the beat within songs. For instance, Mike, a 61-year-old male with a DD and Josh, a 56-year-old male with a DD consistently remained a few beats behind the rest of the group during vocal exercises and singing. They could not articulate specific vowels and consonants and their mouths could not consistently keep up with the timing of songs and vocal warm-ups. The staff set goals for both actors to improve their diction and rhythm to enhance their vocal skills, and hopefully increase their self-confidence through using their voices in ways their mouths were not accustomed.

In an effort to help the actors experience vocal breakthroughs the staff and I used methods of helping actors with profound diction and timing issues during music. By holding
their hands while clapping out the beat to every syllable, guiding their eyes to focus on the mouth of the person helping, and reinforcement of consonant and vowel placement, actors periodically kept up with timing of music and enunciated letters clearly. Looking into Mike’s eyes as they widened with surprise while I held my hands over his, clapping to the beat while we sang scales to the words “spaghetti and meatballs,” I knew that he realized that he was singing with the group and not a few beats behind. In that moment, I asked him if he could feel the difference, and he nodded, smiled, and said, “yes maam!” This moment of clarity in terms of timing and diction did not last long, as the staff and I observed him continue to remain behind the group rhythmically for the bulk of the program.

The majority of actors with profound SLDs such as Mike were open to accepting help from staff and volunteers, but others were more resistant to help. Before Josh experienced a breakthrough by saying the letter “b,” he rolled his eyes at me, and physically turned his body away to avoid my help. A volunteer and I worked with Josh in acting class while Gormezano floated from actor to actor to provide one-on-one attention as they practiced their “b” sounds. The more I worked with Josh, the further his frustration grew, eventually to the point that his eyes began to water with tears and he would not look me in the eye. I had to physically stand up and adjust my body according to his movements as he kept turning his full body away and refused to look me in the eye. However, the volunteer and I continued to work on this sound with him while encouraging him with compliments to cheer him up, and suddenly he said “b.” Not only did he say “b” but he also said “boat.” Josh instantly sat up, smiled, and shared his new sound with the entire room. While this victory felt enormous, similar to Mike’s success with rhythm, Josh’s ability to produce “b” sounds remained inconsistent throughout the rest of the program. Reflecting on DeVette’s attitude toward success, I wondered if these short brushes of
success with diction and rhythm stayed with Mike and Josh beyond the summer? Did those few moments make a lasting impact on their confidence? The optimist in me would like to think that these moments had a long-term impact on their confidence, but Mike and Josh’s inconsistency with growth of vocal skills led me to decide that the confidence they felt in those moments most likely did not extend beyond the program.

Taking into account Mike and Josh’s disabilities, ages, and inconsistent delivery while singing and speaking, I wondered what was the point of setting and trying to achieve goals if the impact was not long-term? During our final interview, I asked DeVette how she felt about actors such as Josh and Mike as far as their growth when the program ended. “I do feel a lot of times unsatisfied without closure at the end of the summer cause you are just starting to see someone growing and getting it. And then boom, it’s done you know. And then I’ll see them at the Haven and they’re back in their old habits. I don’t know what to do about it, I’m only one person. But I am one of those people who wants to save the world” (DeVette Personal). I bumped up against this notion of making a long-term impact on the actors throughout the entire program and wondered where I would land on this topic when Kaleidoscope ended? Vocal work in particular made me question the long-term impact on the actors because as a whole I documented greater shifts in their social behaviors, confidence, and self-expression through movement and dance rather than vocal work.

While I observed momentary shifts of confidence among actors with severe speech impairments such as Mike and Josh, I observed the most noticeable shifts in confidence through vocal work among actors who all possessed the ability to carry a tune. I believed confidence tied to singing ability because I observed the greatest shifts in confidence in Tom, Lauren, and Romeo, three actors who entered the program with natural singing talent. Billy and Sarah also
possessed natural singing talent, however, I observed greater shifts in Tom, Lauren, and Romeo’s confidence through vowel, consonant, projection, and breathing exercises.

As voice training proved a central component to Gormezano’s graduate school actor training, it remained vital to her that the actors practiced proper voice techniques. The further we dove into the mechanics of vocal work, signs of confidence began to appear in Tom. He entered Kaleidoscope speaking with a soft voice, but by mid-program, the staff and I began to pick his voice out as one of the strongest during music class. As Tom began to apply techniques to support his voice while singing and speaking, I witnessed his entire body relax and looks of joy and focus stretch across his face. I believed Tom is a musical learner as he is a self-taught pianist. Whenever he would play the piano for the group during free time, similar signs of joy and confidence exuded from his being. During our final interview, I asked Tom to reflect on his vocal growth. Tom said, “Singing. Um….I’m a good singer, I speak my voice out to the audience. When I was singing the song Good Friends. Pronounce the words, know the words, remember them. I do good sign language” (Tom Telephone). Tom took complete ownership over his singing talent and his ability to send his voice out to the audience. During the song Good Friends, the one he referred to, we signed the words while we sang. Tom is a very physical person and struggled with his desire to jump up and down all the time. Singing Good Friends while signing helped him stay grounded because he had a physical task to carry out while he sang. In addition to feeling confident about singing Good Friends, he too expressed confidence during a piano solo of When You Wish Upon a Star during the restaurant scene in the show. While I will further explore self-expression in the next chapter, providing Tom an opportunity to express himself through playing piano brought about changes in his confidence. He told me several times that he felt “good inside” when he played piano during the show. Tom’s feeling
“good inside” did not go unnoticed by the staff and me. During our final interview, Gormezano reflected on Tom’s growth through vocal work:

I think about Tom, about the way he was able to send out his T’s, a boat ride, before he was always like a BOA ride. I would say that he is a really hard fast example of somebody who took really well to the vocal warm-ups and the consonant work and really moving your tongue around. He got a lot more confidence and found it really fun. I think in the beginning he was like, is this gonna be fun? Am I gonna wanna do this? And I think about his singing, he had a beautiful singing voice, maybe he didn’t think singing class was fun, he started to think it was cool to sing out and it was fun to get to be a part of that group. At the end he was one of the voices that I really could pick out. I think for him it was just giving himself permission to enjoy it. (Gormezano Telephone)

Similar to DeVette, Gormezano made me think about the natural joy that comes from singing. Tom not only gave himself permission to enjoy singing, but his confidence grew as a result of learning how to use his vocal instrument in a healthy way. I believe Tom’s confidence grew because he began the program incredibly quiet in all classes, and by the end possessed one of the strongest and loudest voices.

Similar to Tom, the staff and I noticed Lauren’s confidence grew through vocal work. Specifically, the staff and I noticed her confidence change during improvisation activities requiring her to speak. While Lauren initially held herself back in movement and dance, I noticed that she did not hold herself back in music class. Throughout the program, I heard her voice sing out as one of the strongest in the bunch. However, it took her a little bit more time to become comfortable sending her voice out through speaking. Mid-program I observed her
volunteer ideas without being prompted by Gormezano, while projecting her voice in a healthy and supported manner. Gormezano further reflected upon Lauren’s vocal growth during our final interview: “I would say Lauren, she was really able to have energy through her voice which I think in the beginning not as much probably cause she was shy, but she was really able to send her voice out in a fun and excited way, supported and technically wise, but you also wanted to listen to her” (Gormezano Telephone)! As I let Gormezano’s comment marinate, I realized that as Lauren let go of previous insecurity and/or fear regarding sending her voice out through speaking, the same natural vocal talent that made one want to listen to her when she sang showed up when she spoke. During our final interview, I asked Lauren what made her feel comfortable speaking up during drama activities and sending her voice out during rehearsal for the show, and the final performances. Lauren said, “Like doing all kinds of fun stuff, like…doing the like, those things that Jessi taught us, like D’s, and the like, like the breathing exercises” (Lauren Telephone). While I do not believe Lauren tapped into self-confidence through her response, she pinpointed specific exercises that I observed enhance her confidence. I did not anticipate her strong level of connection to vocal work, and also did not expect this initially shy girl’s confidence to elevate her to a place where she felt comfortable enough to stand alone on stage, and to send her voice out into the theatre as the actor who opened and closed the show.

The staff and I remained uncertain as to whether Billy applied vocal techniques taught by Gormezano and DeVette because he sang and spoke with a stressed voice. Billy appeared confident in his singing skills upon entering the program. During all three interviews, he discussed his ability to sing beautifully. The staff and I questioned if Billy responded to projection and breathing exercises led by Gormezano as he often sent his voice out in a strained
and unsupported manner during drama and music class. During our final interview, Gormezano reflected upon Billy’s performance during vocal work and movement:

Billy, I think he wasn’t afraid of articulating his ideas, for being such a large man you really had to encourage him to send it out and keep it small. No send it out I just can’t hear you! I think maybe he was stressing the back of his throat a little bit, maybe he had nodes, a little exhausted voice, it would worry me. I thought maybe he was hurting his throat a little bit. But I would say that I think he sort of thought he knew what was up and didn’t try to maybe invest his time with specific exercises I was giving him, so maybe it wasn’t as helpful for him as Tom, who was using his instrument properly. I saw improvement with Billy’s ability to work with the group. That’s pretty hard, with the octopus he totally pulled it off, he moved with the group well. I would say that when it was a personal challenge, ok try to touch your toes; I would say it wasn’t very interesting to him. But when it was a new thing with a group and the group relied on him and he really shined. And maybe it does tie into him feeling like he was a volunteer. (Gormezano Telephone)

While I also observed Billy display a disinterested attitude at times during movement and vocal work, Gormezano’s comment made me realize that he appeared completely engaged, energized, and content when the group specifically needed him, similar to how they relied on volunteers. Billy struggled with movement, and he relished his role as the center of the octopus during the musical number Octopuses Garden because the nine other actors creating the legs of the octopus relied on him. Perhaps Billy did not feel the need to apply DeVette and Gormezano’s vocal techniques because others did not specifically rely on him to carry out a
song? While the staff and I did not see tremendous growth in terms of Billy applying vocal techniques, Billy had a different take on his vocal growth. During our final interview, Billy reflected on his vocal abilities during the program and said, “I always worked on my voice because I love to sing, I’m a natural born singer” (Billy Telephone). Listening to Billy sing there is no denying that he can carry a tune. However, I believe Billy’s confidence probably did not change based on his lack of effort, not his ability to support his voice in a healthy way.

Billy’s confidence as a singer shined as DeVette included the song *The Impossible Dream* from *Man of La Mancha* in the production, a song he proposed to DeVette as it was one of his dreams to sing this song on stage. He engaged in rehearsal for *The Impossible Dream* far more than he did for any other song in the show. *The Impossible Dream* turned into a quartet called *The Four Knights*, which included Billy, Romeo, and two volunteers, Joseph and Steve. Initially, Billy, Joseph, and Steve’s voices could be heard above Romeo’s. As Billy inspired *The Four Knights*, I expected him to become the standout singer of the group. However, Romeo shined equally to Billy by mid-program.

As Romeo appeared more comfortable participating in voice centered exercises, I noticed shifts in his confidence. Romeo has a minor stutter, which I imagine contributed to him initially acting out during music class. Cammarano discussed how Romeo acted out partly because there were exercises he found challenging, particularly in music class. I noticed that the further we explored diction, projection, and breathing exercises, Romeo not only increased his engagement in such exercises, but his vocal and physical tolerance increased as well. I partnered with Romeo on several occasions where we practiced strengthening our breath support through taking a deep breath from our diaphragm, and then blowing out our breath through a “shhhhhhhhh” sound. We partnered up for this exercise to provide a point of focus, to hold each other accountable for
inhaling and exhaling properly, and to add a competitive element to see whose breath could last the longest. Romeo and I looked into each other’s eyes, and every single time we shhh’d out air, his breath lasted longer than mine did. He got so excited every time he beat me that he did a little dance, smiled, and even said: “Come on Karen!”

While Romeo’s vocal technique improved, so did his attitude and willingness to project his voice during music class, and actively speak during improvisation activities requiring speech. When DeVette placed Romeo in *The Four Knights* based on his vocal growth and overall attitude adjustment, he appeared excited to participate in the quartet, but it took him about one full week of rehearsal to fully sing out with the group. Romeo and I discussed his increased confidence through singing during our second interview:

K (Karen): What things have you improved on since we last talked?

R (Romeo): I improved on the song that I sang. Cause my voice is getting better and better.

K: Why do you think you’re improving in singing? Cause I agree with that, I’m just curious what makes you think that?

R: Cause I get to sing with three guys that I know.

K: Cause of its familiarity of working with them?

R: Yeah.

K: Anything else? What else have you been doing?

R: Well, I know how to bust a move a lot.

K: Well that too, but I wanna see if you can tap into something and I think you can.

R: I’ve been doing good on my curtain call.
K: You have been doing good, but well - we’re still talking about singing, something that you’ve been doing…

R: Not being shy on singing?

K: YES! Your confidence has exploded! All of a sudden you’re not letting Steve and Joseph and Billy do all the singing? You’re just as loud as the rest of them and it’s so exciting to see.

R: It’s from practice! (Romeo Personal)

After this interview, I realized that I told Romeo that his confidence as a singer exploded before giving him a chance to talk about it further. While I thought that I improved on not giving the actors language to answer my questions, I became so excited to talk about his confidence that I forgot to hold myself back. I recognized that his confidence grew through rehearsal, thus increasing his comfort level of sending his voice out during The Impossible Dream. During our final interview Romeo reflected on his performance in The Restaurant Scene during the two shows. He said, “The Four Knights with Steve and Jo Jo and Billy and me. That felt kind of energizing to me, it felt kind of like amazing that we did that. Cause our voices shouted out, even in the booth they could hear us” (Romeo Telephone)! Romeo tapped into a feeling that radiated from him not only while he sang on stage, but through spoken dialogue as well. In The Restaurant Scene, the scene in which The Four Knights perform, Romeo also played the role of The Maitre’D and had several lines to memorize. The varied vocal coloring, distinctive facial expressions, and high energy that visibly sparked off of Romeo in rehearsal and the final performances during his major scene demonstrated signs of ownership and evident pride in his abilities as a performer. Romeo’s belief in himself became an example of the significance of how learning to trust in his abilities as an actor induced self-confidence.
While actors with natural singing abilities displayed flashes of confidence through vocal work, Sarah’s confidence decreased. Flashes of confidence from actors who entered the program with singing talent stemmed from increased efforts in projection, diction, rhythm, pitch, and showmanship. Just about everyday, Sarah arrived to Kaleidoscope with an excuse as to why she could not speak. The staff, volunteers, and I would stand less than one foot away from her and typically could not hear her speak. Barker Schefler, Doss, and DeVette advised the staff and volunteers to speak to her at the same volume we used with everyone. We were encouraged to let Sarah know that we could not hear her and would like for her to speak up. We reminded Sarah of her importance to the show, and the importance for her to speak up, particularly on stage. Gormezano told me that she understood Sarah’s fear of putting her voice out there, and discussed how scary it can be for actors to send their voices out for the world to hear. In an effort to boost Sarah’s confidence, DeVette selected her as one of the featured actors during the song Lovelight. There were five pairs that came together for this song. I was partnered with Sarah; I was in role as a robot and she was in role as a human. Throughout the bulk of rehearsal while singing the song Lovelight she typically whispered until the last line of the song. She would whisper and then towards the end of the song she would belt out the lyrics loud and clear. I was so proud of her every time she belted out the last few phrases of the song, and her eyes lit up and her face produced a huge smile. It was as though she needed to move through the song, build up her confidence, and then let the words rip from her vocal chords. She sang like this during the performances as well, which prompted me to ask Gormezano what she thought about Sarah’s performance in Lovelight during our final interview:

I think she would have breakthroughs every now and then. But then by the end I wasn’t sure if she was able to take it and run with it. I don’t know if it was
shyness or kind of not really wanting to be in the spotlight. But I think maybe her dancing moment was hers, so maybe the voice stuff because that doesn’t come as naturally to her, it wasn’t as exciting to see that and go. (Gormezano Telephone)

The dancing Gormezano referred to took place during *The Four Knights*. Sarah is a rhythmic gymnast who competed in The Special Olympics, and she applied her talents by dancing with a scarf in the background while the men sang *The Impossible Dream*. The staff and I agreed that this was her moment to shine. While Sarah appeared timid as she sang or spoke, she expressed to me in all three interviews that singing, “makes me feel good inside” (Sarah Personal). This made me question the notion of confidence, because self-reporting does not always provide reliable data. Sarah said she felt good inside which I believe directly relates to confidence, but if fear radiated off her most of the time instead of confidence, was she really feeling confident?

The actors’ shifts in confidence that arose through vocal work affected their daily performances in the program in a variety of ways. Some did not attempt to change their methods of using their voice, some focused on applying proper breath and projection techniques, and some decreased using their voice period. Participating in vocal work proved more challenging for this group of actors than participating in physical work because they possessed several SLDs. While shifts in confidence were more difficult to track because SLDs are less obvious than PDs, I hypothesized that the actors who believed in their ability to share their voices with others, through speaking or singing would continue to carry that confidence into their lives after Kaleidoscope. I do not think the experiences of the actors who had small brushes of success while participating in vocal work were not significant because the confidence that grew from those moments did not last.

However, I find the notion of long-term affects of possessing self-confidence through vocal work
important, because the ability to speak loud and clear will benefit the actors socially, artistically, professionally, and academically throughout their lives.

Stage Fright

There were times during Kaleidoscope when I felt nervous for myself, the staff, the volunteers, the actors, and the production as a whole. As an actor, I identify with having stage fright. Prior to graduate school, my body would literally tremble with fear before performing. My fears usually subsided the moment I stepped on stage, but I did not experience feeling comfortable performing in front of small and large audiences until I explored process-centered drama in my graduate classes. I accessed skills such as maintaining a steady breath, using my voice to invite and engage others, and remaining present and open to myself and to those around me through creative drama, devising, and facilitating classes, lectures and presentations.

Through my graduate studies, I tapped into methods of speaking and performing which enabled me to push through stage fright. While I still feel nervous before I present, teach, or perform, those nerves shifted to a place where I no longer tremble with fear due to a lack of confidence in my abilities to share myself with others as a facilitator or an actor. Now I attempt to channel my nerves into positive energy to elevate my performance rather than cripple myself with fear. As we moved into the second half of the program with the show looming, the actors expressed feelings of stage fright.

While most of the actors experienced changes of confidence towards the end of the third week of the program, during this week, they all suddenly realized the realities of performing on stage in front of an audience. Specifically, I encountered their feelings of stage fright during my
second round of interviews and through conversations during free time and in classes. I was surprised with the actors’ articulations of stage fright because so many of them cited performing on “the big stage” as one of the main reasons they came to Kaleidoscope. The actors expressed concerns about line memorization and feeling physically ill thinking about performing. I noticed that there was no rhyme or reason to who expressed nervousness. Out of my group of eight, every single one of them except Billy expressed feelings of performance anxiety during our second interview.

Lauren and Romeo discussed general exercises that would help them relax if they felt nervous. Lauren told me she was feeling nervous about “Being on stage, like in front of a lot of people” (Lauren Personal). Romeo told me that he was feeling nervous about, “Just me being on stage and everything and singing for the whole audience” (Romeo Personal). I found the timing of their responses interesting because these two interviews took place before an all group discussion ensued about stage fright. During my second interview with Debbie, she began speaking about stage fright on her own accord:

D (Debbie):  I want my heart to relax on stage.

K (Karen):  Your heart to relax on stage?

D: My heart.

K: Your heart?

D: Relax.

K: You want your heart to relax on stage?

D: Yeah.

K: So that’s a goal for yourself. So nerves, ok….

D: I got that, I’m not gonna die!
K: I KNOW YOU’RE NOT GONNA DIE! You want your heart to relax on stage?

D: Yeah. (Debbie Personal)

This interview took place on the same day that upon receiving my morning hug from Debbie, she told me that she thought she was going to have a heart attack. She appeared completely serious when she uttered those words to me. This was one of those mornings where her mood shifted from happy to depressed and then happy again. While Debbie did not voice what she was specifically nervous about, she tapped into a real fear of getting up on stage. I worried about feeding Debbie language during this interview as she often struggled to answer my questions. I was surprised by her articulation about her heart relaxing on stage because I had not heard her speak before with such strong descriptive language. I questioned if her fear of performing on stage felt so real, that her emotions automatically triggered her speech? After this interview, she continued to rehearse with no difference in her performance. This behavior continued during our dress rehearsal and the final two performances, as she did not portray one single shred of self-doubt. During our final interview, I asked her how she worked through nerves on stage.

D: I had butterflies in my stomach. The dark.

K: The audience was dark?

D: Yeah.

K: What else helped you relax?

D: My friends supported me. (Debbie Telephone)

The support Debbie relished and referred to came from her fellow actors and her family. Lauren in particular stood by her side and could often be found telling her that everything would be alright, and that she would do great. Based on Debbie’s displays of self-doubt throughout the first half of the program, I was not entirely surprised by her stage fright. I was, however, caught
off-guard by some of the other actors who expressed feelings of stage fright, namely Richard and Lucy.

I was more surprised by Richard’s fears as he was typically brimming with confidence while socializing and rehearsing. He also constantly talked about his love of being on stage, whereas Lucy struggled with her personal insecurity of wanting to “look right” on stage. During our second interviews, which took place the week before the show, both actors shared worries over not knowing their lines. Richard became visibly upset as he shared that he did not work on his lines when he went home at night, and that he only looked at them at rehearsal. He was frustrated based on rehearsal earlier that day because he adlibbed during *The Mr. Sandman Scene* in which he had several lines. We discussed how simply talking about memorizing lines made him nervous. Later, the staff and I discussed that his nerves possibly stemmed from a lack of confidence in his reading abilities, even though he was surrounded by people who could help him memorize, including his dad who could help him in the evenings. While I did not have access to Richard’s home life to see if he worked on his lines in the evening, as the show crept closer he told me that he was working on his lines with his dad. He learned his lines quickly after our second interview, however, he continued to improvise his lines slightly on stage. Richard may not have felt confident about lines, and one would never know once we moved on stage as he delivered all lines, improvised and scripted with determination and energy.

Unlike Richard, Lucy shared that she worked on her lines at home in the evenings, but that she did not feel as though she had an ample amount of time to memorize her lines. Lucy also expressed a distaste for memorizing her lines, saying, “I wish I could just know them!” during our second interview. I understood Lucy’s fear of not having enough time to memorize lines based on the short window of time before the final performances. We did not have a finished
draft in our hands until the fourth week of the program and the performances were scheduled for week five. The actors’ were given scripts during week three, but there were changes made to the scripts during rehearsal. Lucy was not the only actor feeling stressed out about learning her lines. The volunteers, and artistic and clinical staff were worried about the actors learning their lines as well as about learning their own.

We did our very first line-through with no scripts in hand during week four. Everyone sat in a circle and delivered a flawless line-through. As I sat on the outside of the circle listening and watching, I would not have known that actors felt nervous about knowing their lines. This line-through seemed to elevate the confidence levels of the actors as a whole because they understood how well they actually knew their lines. I was the most surprised by Sarah’s performance during the line-through because she projected her voice loud and clear every time she spoke. While the actors’ confidence levels continued to waver right up until the performances, this line-through demonstrated their ability to rise to the occasion.

As we began to rehearse further on the stage during the fourth and fifth week, I noticed that the actors relished their time on stage. The Mertz Theatre holds the capacity to seat 500 people. The space has first floor orchestra seating, a second floor mezzanine, and a third floor balcony thus providing the actors with the task of filling the enormous space with their voices and bodies. The staff and I observed the actors perform with complete freedom from self-doubt as we rehearsed on the stage, explored projection exercises, and moved through cue to cue. The actors adjusted their blocking to the stage and it was as though they forgot about feeling nervous and just enjoyed being in the theatre.

The one struggle that the actors experienced across the board was projecting their voices during songs. During most of the musical numbers, the staff and I heard the voices of the
volunteers above the actors. The volunteers and staff are integrated into the show, as several of the actors require assistance on stage. However, it remains a priority of the program to highlight the actors versus the staff and volunteers. There’s a saying in the theatre that goes, “bad dress rehearsal, great opening.” I would not go so far to say that we had a bad dress rehearsal, but to the staff and me, the actors appeared to hold themselves back slightly, both vocally and physically for the first full run through with costumes, makeup, and all of the technical elements. We actually had a great audience that day as all of their friends from CHAC came to support them. Our dress rehearsal took place in the morning of the same day as opening night. The vibe from the actors, staff, volunteers, and I felt excited, but jittery. The staff and I wanted the actors to relax during the afternoon so they would return to the theatre with renewed energy, and be prepared to fill the theatre with their voices and bodies to tell the story of Dream Out Loud.

The energy that filled the rehearsal hall the evening of opening night felt electric. In fact, as we warmed up every single actor appeared to radiate with confidence as they moved through warm-ups bursting with excess energy. Every actor behaved as though they were going to bounce off the walls with excitement, except for Sarah. As we finished warming up and everyone moved back into the dressing rooms to put the final touches on their hair and makeup, Lauren approached me to let me know that Sarah was crying in the bathroom. So the two of us went into the bathroom and discovered a sobbing Sarah. She told us that she was not feeling well and said she did not think she could perform. Lauren and I tried to help Sarah work through her performance anxiety, but remained only moderately successful at calming her fears. We were able to walk her out of the bathroom and convince her to perform, but she remained visibly upset until about 10 minutes before the start of the show. Once we were on stage, Sarah appeared to ease into her role. She even surprised me during Lovelight as she adlibbed a line
loud and clear. Right before we sang the song *Lovelight*, the humans entered the stage and tried to befriend the robots. There were five of us playing robots on stage, Richard, Robyn, volunteers Joseph and Hannah, and me. Suddenly during the show, right as the humans decided to sing to the robots, Sarah adlibbed the following line: “Maybe we should try singing to them?” While she continued to sing softly until the end of the song just like she did in all previous rehearsals, something inside of her gave her the confidence to speak out as she never had before. I tried my best not to overreact to “Maybe we should try singing to them” as there was an audience, but on the inside I was jumping up and down with joy at her adlibbing. I noticed that all of the actors appeared fearless as they committed to their roles and the story as they overflowed with an abundance of energy during our two performances. Gormezano discussed the group’s performance as a whole during our final interview.

I saw a bump up of energy during the show, which I think, with an actor happens with a real piece of theatre. In every instance having the audience there amped them up. Just sort of gave them that extra oomph, and I would say that I didn’t expect that, that they would focus on each other and fight their nerves, that they totally had that outer awareness of an audience and totally played into it, you can’t teach it, you can try. I think ultimately you either acknowledge it, or you can’t. I was surprised by them. (Gormezano Telephone)

I also did not expect the actors to feed off the audience as much as they did. My expectations for the actors’ performances during the two runs were very high based on their social and artistic progression during the five weeks. However, as this was my first experience working with this pool of actors, and the first time several of them ever performed on stage in front of an audience, I anticipated that anything could happen. I discovered that similar to every show I have ever
worked on, the actors needed an audience to elevate their confidence and ultimately boost their performance. I could provide a play by play of the entire show, but some moments that stand out to me include Lucy, Billy, and Romeo improvising their dialogue during *The Restaurant Scene* to play off the audiences roaring laughter. I saw a huge smile on Pavel’s face when the audience gasped and then laughed at one his lines during *The Art Gallery Scene*. I observed Lauren jump up and down and squeal when she exited the stage after she closed the show. Lucy pushed through *The Dream Dr. and Dream Nurse Scene* as she forgot her line and began to adlib. The creative staff, volunteers, and I laughed with Josh when he ran across the stage as he realized that he exited off the wrong side. Anything could have happened during the two performances, and the actors demonstrated signs of confidence and feeling successful as they dealt with unexpected reactions from audiences and mistakes that they made while performing.

During my follow-up interviews with the actors, they each said that they were more confident after participating in the program. Richard, Romeo, Lauren, Billy, and Lucy articulated how the program enhanced their confidence. Richard said, “Made me a stronger, smarter, and better person. Like my acting and my dancing got better” (Richard Telephone). Since Richard entered the program as a friendly person and talented actor, I questioned how much he really did change. I was excited by Romeo’s response because he discussed how much he loved performing and his love of performing did not go unnoticed. “It helped my confidence cause I’m like really strong and helpful to people and kind to people, I just love being on stage. I wanna be on a stage show one day. I wanna be in *Hairspray*” (Romeo Telephone). Romeo also tapped into his role as a mentor as did Lauren in her response. Lauren said, “After the program. I think I was outgoing. Yes! Well, it was like other people looking up to me and having friends at my school” (Lauren Telephone). I did not have access to speaking with staff and/or students
at Lauren’s school to clarify if people were looking up to her. However, Lauren is a very honest individual and I believed her when she said that she was outgoing and others looked up to her. As one of the new actors in the program, Lauren’s confidence appeared to increase immensely.

I did not notice great shifts in Billy’s self-confidence, but during our interview, he said: “My confidence has definitely doubled since doing Kaleidoscope, I’m more confident in myself. I mean, I love to act and I love to sing, and I love to dance, and I think that if I continue doing what I love there’s no stopping me” (Billy Telephone). Billy’s confidence overwhelmed me because I did not observe shifts that were so large, although his confidence seemed to have doubled. Perhaps Billy’s self-confidence came directly from performing in the finished productions? Lucy’s response demonstrated a shift in her outlook on life, she said: “My attitude has changed a lot. I mean I used to just say whatever happens happens. And now I’m like, you make it happen” (Lucy Telephone).

Debbie, Sarah, and Tom’s responses about how the program affected their confidence were more general. Debbie said, “More confident since Kaleidoscope, I feel confident” (Debbie Telephone). Debbie’s short answer made me question, how she was more confident. I tried to question Debbie further but she replied with the same answer. I am not quite sure that I believed Sarah as she said, “More confident now than at the beginning of the summer” (Sarah Telephone). Besides Sarah’s surprising adlib during Lovelight, I did not see Sarah exhibit behavior with increased self-confidence towards the end of the program, and to me, her self-reporting did not mean that she was more confident. Tom’s response made me realize that he believed in his ability as a performer, saying, “The people liked it cause I did a good job. It made me feel happy” (Tom Telephone). Whether I agreed or not with their responses, the actors articulated their growth in confidence as these interviews took place almost two months after Kaleidoscope.
ended. They were all able to recall and discuss feelings of confidence brought about by the program which made me question if the actors were feeling more confident in their daily lives as a result of an increase in confidence from participating in the program. Reflecting on how the final interviews offered me a small view of the programs’ long-term affects on self-confidence, I realized that participating in the art during the five weeks brought about changes in self-confidence that the actors attributed to the product of theatre. Whereas I believed that the process and product contributed to long-term affects on self-confidence.

Through all the nerves, tears, and frustration, I witnessed a variety of changes in confidence among the actors. My research revealed that movement appeared to be the greatest equalizer as far as cultivating confidence among all 18 actors, even physically lower functioning actors because this specific group of actors possessed a variety of SLDs. As I said earlier in this study, movement is not necessarily the best artistic method to use when working with persons with disabilities. Movement and dance just happened to work better with this specific group. In terms of vocal work, shifts in confidence among the actors who were lower functioning appeared brief and inconsistent. Even among actors with natural singing talent, vocal work did not always seem to stimulate positive shifts in confidence. Several actors took a few steps backwards, then forwards, and some backwards again in terms of confidence within their vocal work. However, across the board, the actors demonstrated growth in confidence during the two final performances. The actors trained for five weeks to get to the point that they were able to move beyond self-doubt, and the unknown, in order to perform in front of an audience. Similar to the scope of socialization, there was not one clear picture of how self-confidence looked in Kaleidoscope because the actors all possessed such varied disabilities. Reflecting on self-confidence in the program, I wondered if there was potential for all 18 actors to feel self-
confident while participating in the art? While Chip, Alex, Mike, and Josh experienced success from time to time, did they actually feel confident in their abilities? I believe that the actors all had moments where they felt confident, and even if an actor only felt confident sporadically, such moments inspired me to research methods of helping actors feel confident more consistently.
CHAPTER FOUR: SELF-EXPRESSION

Participating in the creation of Dream Out Loud provided the actors with countless opportunities to express themselves. From the moment I discovered Kaleidoscope, I was fascinated with the vision of the program as it centers on constructing an original show from the perspective of its participants. Through drama, movement, voice, dance, and visual art the actors explored artistic outlets of self-expression. Similar to how the actors experienced different changes - and for some no changes at all - within the areas of socialization and self-confidence, they also demonstrated various markers of change related to self-expression. The key factors of self-expression I examined in Kaleidoscope centered on communication. I studied how directly participating in the art impacted the actors’ ability to express themselves through the process of creating an original production.

Looking at self-expression as a whole in Kaleidoscope, I examined the major through-lines of verbal and nonverbal communication in Dream Out Loud. My research revealed a mix of theatre companies that are currently creating original work or putting on well-known plays and musicals with individuals who have disabilities. Sally Dorothy Bailey discusses the validity of constructing original plays with special needs populations as this method of work focuses on the strengths of the actors who are driving the project:

Performers who have special needs may need additional support or adaptations in dramatic material in order to achieve success. Most scripts focus on verbal abilities and this may create obstacles for actors who have certain kinds of disabilities. They may be unable to memorize large sections of dialogue from a
conventional play. They may not be able to communicate well through words, but can express themselves exceptionally well through movement. (Bailey 223)

Bailey tapped into the core of creating original work with special needs populations as the process and product focuses on the actors’ abilities. Bailey also emphasizes that creating original work proves just as valid, challenging, and rewarding as performing a published play or musical.

If your actor’s abilities do not “fit” the needs of a previously written script, it is not cheating to create a play that “fits them. In fact, molding a play to fit a specific group of actors, as opposed to molding a group of actors to fit a play, is a time-honored theatre tradition! Many playwrights originally wrote their plays to enhance the talents of a specific group of actors. (Bailey 225)

What fascinated me about Bailey’s foray into validating original scripts with special needs populations is that prior to this study, it did not occur to me that others might think that this method of work equals “cheating.” In fact, my mind went in the opposite direction as I approached this study feeling inspired and excited that Kaleidoscope centers on original work rather than a pre-written script.

Participating in a process focused on original work empowered the Kaleidoscope actors to practice numerous methods of verbal and nonverbal communication. The actors communicated through drama, movement, voice, dance, and visual art, with the intent to explore personal identity within the concept of dreams. In an effort to study how participating in the art influenced the actors self-expression, I relied of the following definition: “Expression of one's own personality, feelings, or ideas, as through speech or art” (“Self-expression”). I believe this definition fits with the core of the program, as our play grew out of the actors’ words, ideas,
feelings, and personalities expressed through both speech and art. Upon entering Kaleidoscope, I understood that the play grew from the actors, but I wondered how much of the play actually came from the actors versus the creative staff? What methods would the creative staff use to draw stories from the actors? Would the actors’ ideas show up equally in the show? Would the actors feel as though their voices were being heard and accepted? How would their abilities to articulate their experiences in the program increase as a result of participating in both the dramatic process and product? I walked into this program overflowing with anticipation, as I had no idea what the actors would offer in terms of material for the show. I hypothesized that they would feel empowered to express themselves, and hoped that their abilities to verbally articulate their experiences would improve by the program’s end.

Verbal Expression

Keeping in mind the actors’ strengths and weaknesses within vocal work, verbal expression proved far more challenging than nonverbal expression for the Kaleidoscope actors. Throughout the program, the actors were provided opportunities and encouraged to express themselves through a variety of ways, including verbal sharing of personal stories and improvised dialogue. As the creative team and I observed the actors discover their social roles and tap into confidence through movement, dance, and voice, we also discovered which methods of expression worked best for each actor.

While the actors were all on different levels in terms of speech and language abilities, they were all expected to verbally share their personal dreams during the very first week of the program. Verbal brainstorming sessions proved crucial to developing the storyline of Dream Out
During our brainstorming, the actors’ answers provided a starting place to examine their abilities within verbal self-expression, as well as immediate insight into their personal dreams. The answers that proved the most influential in terms of source material for drama, movement, dance, and music primarily came from the actors’ dream jobs, dream travel destinations, and dream shoes. As I began to document the actors’ dreams from our brainstorming sessions, I hungered to know how our Director, Gormezano was going to use their words, ideas, and artistry as inspiration to create the show. During our first interview, I asked her how true to the actors’ words the show would be:

I’m learning as I go. I think I’m trying to write down a fan of details, today we were hearing stories that I loved - that Billy’s waitress had a British accent. And I love that Tom told a story about a plate breaking. So kind of maybe not taking your explicit words, but taking the idea of it. A plate dropping, a waiter having an accent, taking those details and applying them to the scene. So I wanna keep their original words as much as possible. But I think it’s more important that you keep the elements of the story that they’re sharing and they try to plug it in. And what
I’m realizing I wanna keep doing more of is creating experiences that are fun for them to do. (Gormezano Personal)

Her comment made me examine every activity the actors participated in. I recognized a through-line of finding ways to use the actors’ stories to create fun experiences in dance and music class in addition to drama. I noticed that as the actors’ personal interests and/or stories were used as material for activities, the further engaged they became while participating in such activities.

In terms of growth within actors’ self-expression as a whole, I observed strong visible shifts in Romeo and Lauren. What stands out to me above all else with Romeo and Lauren was growth in their abilities to articulate their experiences by the final interview, and their ability to take direction from Gormezano. While Lucy, Billy, and Richard were able to tap into specific ways they grew throughout all three interviews, they were all veterans of Kaleidoscope whereas Lauren and Romeo were brand new to theatre. I connected Romeo and Lauren’s increased confidence to growth in their verbal expression. While veteran actors continually demonstrated strong abilities to verbally respond to my questions, Lauren and Romeo grew in how they responded. During my first interview with Romeo, he kept interrupting me and tried to ask me questions about the volunteers, staff, and myself. His answers to my questions were also very short, and he appeared impatient with the whole interview process. During my first interview with Lauren, we focused quite a bit on how she felt shy around new people and her excitement about learning the dances. Her answers at that point were a lot more general, she did not share anything too specific about the program. I believe the way they responded to my questions was rooted in the fact that they were new to Kaleidoscope. Perhaps they were not completely comfortable with me either, as we hardly knew each and I was pushing them to answer my questions. During my second interviews with both Lauren and Romeo, they tapped into a variety
of ways that participating in the program made them feel. They both expressed feeling nervous, but discussed methods of relaxation to combat stage fright when I asked them how they would work through feeling nervous. They also discussed how they enjoyed stepping into role as mentors, as well as how their confidence as performers improved. Romeo also no longer interrupted me and allowed me to interview him rather than him trying to interview me. I was surprised by the large jump with how freely they shared their emotions than during the first round of interviews. I believe that as their confidence regarding their social roles and ability to sing, act, and dance grew, so did their desire to discuss how the program affected them. During our final interviews, they both detailed their favorite parts from the production, the experience of mentoring others, how much they missed the friends they made, and activities that helped them grow. When I asked them how the program affected their lives, they both surprised me with their responses. Addressing the programs’ influence on his life, Romeo said:

It affected me a little bit in my life to make more sense like when I talk a lot I stutter a little bit when I was talking and that affected me to take a breath before I said anything and I would count to five before I said a word and I would start again. I learned everything, I learned how to do singing, dancing, acting, stretching warming up my voice working as a team and working with friends and making friends. (Romeo Telephone)

I knew Romeo was incredibly sensitive about his stutter, and I was surprised that he felt comfortable enough to talk about it. Therefore when he said “It affected me a little bit in my life…,” I found Romeo discussing how Kaleidoscope helped his stutter to be anything but little because he never talked about his stutter. Lauren also addressed friendship in her response, saying: “After Kaleidoscope, I went to a vo-tech school, and then I was really different. I think I
was more outgoing. It was like other people were looking to me and having friends at my school. I think like coaching other people” (Lauren Telephone). Lauren’s articulation of her newfound confidence and desire to continue mentoring others coupled with Romeo’s articulation of how the program helped him work through his stutter made me realize how far they grew in their ability to verbally discuss their experiences in the program during one-on-one interviews.

Lauren and Romeo also grew in their abilities to take direction from Gormezano. Taking direction was directly linked to their abilities to express themselves because they had to adjust or choose new ways to express themselves based on Gormezano’s guidance. While the following quote discusses growth in nonverbal expression rather than verbal, the sentiment behind Gormezano’s reflection of Lauren and Romeo’s ability to take direction was the same.

During our final interview, Gomezano said:

Those three are the ones that I could give the most specific notes on. Like when Romeo was the Maitre D, I could tell him to be so confident, instead of point your nose up in the air and walk with stiff legs. You could give it to them specifically. With Lauren, Billy, Romeo, and maybe Wayne I was able to give them notes and point of view shifts with everyone else they found in the room, it’s almost just a different way to approach the same task. (Gormezano telephone)

Initially, Romeo displayed a poor attitude when Gormezano tried to give him direction, and Lauren appeared timid and unsure of what to do when given direction. Around the middle of week two, I observed them begin to accept direction from instructors without any attitude or hesitancy. Thus demonstrating that the further they participated in arts activities, the more comfortable they became with making in the moment decisions based on the directions of others in how they expressed themselves.
In addition to Romeo growing in his ability to verbally express his experiences in Kaleidoscope, he also demonstrated an increased interest in the artistic process as a whole. Lucy stood out as another actor who displayed strong signs of self-expression as she also showed a strong interest in how we created *Dream Out Loud*. I often observed Romeo and Lucy question Gormezano about directorial choices about blocking and technical elements, and offer their opinion when they did not think a moment during the show was working. During our final interview Gormezano addressed Romeo and Lucy’s curiosity with the process:

Romeo always had really good questions and was able to really send his voice out in a good way, intelligent questions about his character too. Lucy, oh I loved that she was so inquisitive with how is this gonna work. She was not only very verbal as a person in the world, but she would ask very specific questions about her storytelling. “Jessi wouldn’t it make more sense if I kind of flirty waved at him instead of a thumbs up?” So she was able to articulate what she needed to happen. We had a true actor to director conversation about acting work. She was able to take her very outgoing personality and sort of channel it into a conversation, which was cool. (Gormezano Telephone)

As I observed Romeo and Lucy ask specific questions throughout the process, their ability to have conversations with Gormezano about actor work made me think about all of the actors who did not share such verbal skills. I wondered if such actors ever felt left out of such conversations or if they were not interested in learning more about the process as a whole.

Tom falls into a category all unto himself within shifts of his ability to verbally articulate his experiences during interviews. While Tom benefited from vocal work, he possessed a quiet nature during outside conversations and our first two interviews. Tom’s responses during all
three interviews remained brief and consistent. During our final interview, he was much more talkative. Perhaps he was excited to talk to me on the phone because it was easier to self-express on the phone, and/or his comfort level with me personally grew, but during our last interview he spoke at length about school and his life, which he had not done with me during the five weeks of Kaleidoscope. I also spoke with Tom’s Mom, a Kaleidoscope volunteer, during that same phone conversation. I asked her to reflect on how the program affected Tom’s ability to express himself. She said, “I think about when he was singing and what he learned. I remembered with the boat he said ‘boa T’ and he really pronounced it. Dancing, he loves to dance, I think he can move pretty good. I think he did pretty good. Next summer he wants more parts, more acting parts” (Tom’s Mom telephone). While Tom’s talkative nature on the phone might not have been a direct result from participating in Kaleidoscope, he demonstrated growth in his abilities to articulate his experiences in the program as he increased the length of his responses to my questions from our first two interviews.

I did not see any major changes in most of the actors’ abilities to verbally articulate their experiences through our interviews. From my group of eight actors, I observed only slight shifts in Debbie’s verbal skills as brought up the topic of stage fright on her own accord, and without me providing her any language, she discussed how support from her friends helped her work through her stage fright during our final interview. These two specific conversations stood out to me because Debbie brought up these two points related to the program on her own. Debbie typically brought up music and boys in conversation, and I had to prompt her with questions to speak about anything program related. But these two moments demonstrated small shifts in her ability to articulate her experiences during interviews. With Sarah, I did not observe any changes in her verbal articulation skills. While she surprised me during our final interview by
telling me that she wanted “more lines” next summer, she was not able to offer specifics as to why she wanted more lines. Similar to Sarah’s soft-spoken voice during classes and the final productions, she continued to speak softly and with very short sentences during our interviews. While Sarah stated she wanted “more lines” for future productions, she did not exhibit any verbal strength that would place her in a position to accept a larger role. While Sarah and Debbie possessed stronger movement skills than voice skills, I did not find a through line between growth in their ability to verbally articulate their experiences in the program.

Billy, Lucy, and Richard all entered the program with strong verbal skills. While Billy took direction well and Lucy asked Gormezano specific acting questions, they remained consistent with their answers during all three interviews. These two actors were the only actors who broached the topic of disabilities with me. Billy was not afraid to share his concerns about working with lower functioning actors, and Lucy openly discussed how CP affected her performance in the program. While I did not see shifts in their abilities to verbally articulate their experiences, Billy did begin to demonstrate more acceptance of working with those who are lower functioning. During our second interview, I wanted to know how he was feeling about working with lower functioning actors. He told me, “I think I’ve grown. It’s not easy, but I’m working through it.” While Lucy told people often that she does not like to rely on her disability as an excuse, I observed her began to accept being a physically able bodied actor who also has CP through increased efforts to carry out choreography, even when she had to move differently than everyone else. Lucy did not always wear a smile on her face while dancing, but watching her trajectory of originally wanting to perform in a wheelchair, to dancing alongside her fellow actors showed me that whether she liked it not, she accepted that she has CP, but she could still move.
Richard’s verbal articulations remained consistent throughout our three interviews. He particularly expressed his desire to be famous and described how Kaleidoscope put him in the spotlight. During our final interview, I asked Richard how participating in Kaleidoscope affected his life. Richard said:

It made a star, I can tell you that. TV and Stage. Made me a better actor like with the miming the food, the part when I did the food the miming part. We acted like mimes eating food and stuff. And the statues, that’s all I can remember – it made me more active. Like being more social and stuff. (Richard Telephone)

Whenever a news station or local public television show featured a story on Kaleidoscope, he was always selected by CHAC and creative staff for an interview. In an interview setting, he expressed himself through speech with humor and represented the program quite well. Richard’s mention of miming eating and statue work were both nonverbal activities and he was one of our strongest actors during verbal improvisations. I found this interesting because Richard always talked about his success with movement and dance, and not anything speech related during all three interviews. However, Richard possessed strong dancing skills, and while the staff and I relied on him to speak during improvisation-based work, he felt more comfortable with movement-based work as a whole. During our final interview, Gormezano said, “We improvised wildly, but I think Richard did such great, great work in just being creative and always having ideas and always offering up fun stuff. His creative bone was never dry, I thank him for that” (Gormezano Telephone). Discussing Richard’s creativity made me think about creativity and ideas that the actors offered as a whole. While the staff, volunteers, and I observed shifts in some of the actors’ abilities to verbally express themselves, across the board, the actors’ best shared their personalities, feelings, and ideas through nonverbal communication.
Nonverbal Expression

Drama activities that required the actors to silently observe each other and react off each other’s movement and/or facial expressions exemplified strengths in nonverbal expression. What inspired me about nonverbal expression is that the entire group grew as an ensemble during such activities. I noticed visible shifts in every single actor such as taking time to observe a situation before joining, such as in the game Machine, and increased length of time maintaining eye contact with a partner. Josh could partner with Romeo during a Mirroring exercise and suddenly the differences between them appeared minimal as they slowly moved their bodies to the point where I could not tell who was leading, and who was following. For this study, I defined self-expression as expression of one's own personality, feelings, or ideas, as through speech or art. The actors participated in drama and movement activities where they had to rely on using their bodies, faces, and sometimes objects to communicate with a partner or a group. During these kinds of exercises I observed the actors engagement and focus increase, as they discovered how to use their faces and bodies to communicate and respond to another actor or the entire group without speaking. This particular group of actors had an easier time expressing themselves nonverbally due to the high number of actors with SLDs, and as a result, a great deal of Dream Out Loud came from the stories they created during the creative process.

The actors found endless ways to express themselves when given an object to work with. With actors who had limited verbal abilities such as Chip and Josh, I noticed that when we did activities such as Story Circle where everyone was expected to contribute one sentence at a time to build a story, they struggled to contribute one single word. However, when we used objects to communicate a story such as sheets, I observed Chip and Josh use the sheets for an extended
length of time to tell the story of a bird taking off and crashing, or a mummy rising from the dead. Finding different ways for actors to move and use sheets became the core of nonverbal work using objects in Kaleidoscope. While Gormezano had an idea to use sheets creatively in *Dream Out Loud*, she did not realize how integral the sheets would become to the story until the actors’ explored movement with them during week one. During our first interview, Gormezano said, “I definitely envisioned a different beginning. But because of the work they did with the sheets. Oh my goodness it’s so much more beautiful than anything I could have ever thought of” (Gormezano Telephone). The beauty she referred to occurred when the actors stood in a circle, while a few people in the middle of the circle used sheets to represent different objects. As they moved to instrumental music, the actors found ways of using the sheets with each other to create wings, go on a magic carpet ride, play tug of war, wear a bridal veil, etc. One day during week two, we became so inspired through our sheet work, that we collectively decided to extend all group rehearsal shifting the schedule for the rest of the day. At its very core, drama stems from play and whenever we played with the sheets, I observed a room full of adults abandon their cares with shining eyes, light feet, and smiles on their faces we played like children. Through child-like play, the ways the actors used the sheets became the through line in *Dream Out Loud*, representing scenic and props elements, as additional set and props for the show were minimal. We used the sheets for creating a windy atmosphere to play in, sliding mall doors to enter through, swelling ocean waves for a boat to float on, and the boat that floated on the waves, toga’s for actor’s to wear, table tops for people to eat off of, red carpet ropes for the paparazzi finale, a tunnel for actors to run through, a drop backlit for Richard to dance behind during his robot solo, octopus legs that danced in the ocean, and shelter from the rain. I originally wanted to know how much of the actors’ words showed up in the final production. While their work
with the sheets was nonverbal, how they used the sheets inspired largest through line in the production, a through line that Gormezano had not originally pictured for the show.

In addition to the actors’ discovering endless ways to communicate using the sheets, I observed shifts in how they responded to others while using the sheets. In the beginning of the program, the actors had a tendency to interrupt each other during drama activities. They would get so excited to share what they had to say, that they would interrupt whoever was speaking or silently communicating a story through movement. So when I observed Josh interrupt Richard telling a story to tell the ensemble why he wants a robot friend, or Chip grab a sheet right out of Sarah’s hands while she was exploring movement as a butterfly, Josh’s and Chip’s behavior told me that they were not focused on what Richard and Sarah were communicating. I questioned if actors who remained focused on themselves rather than the group during moments such as these did so due to cognitive levels, or possibly lack of caring about what others were doing, or simply were too excited to share with the group that they could not resist interrupting? Regardless of the reason actors often focused on what they had to offer in terms of storytelling or inserting themselves in a group physical activity such as Machine rather than taking in what others had to offer, I noticed that the further we dove into nonverbal activities such as exploring with sheets and Machine, the actors increased their level of focus on others before inserting themselves in the story or situation.

In addition to the actors finding endless ways to nonverbally express themselves using real objects such as the sheets, they connected to activities that allowed them to express themselves while using imaginary objects. Similar to how the actors began to excel doing Hot Potato once we layered in props, as we began to layer in imaginary objects during nonverbal improvisation work, I noticed the actors became increasingly comfortable just participating in
the activity rather than looking unsure how to participate. For instance, the actors appeared unsure of how to silently explore the process of waking up in the morning. I observed several actors look confused as Gormezano led the actors through a guided improvisation of going through a morning routine. When given the instructions to brush their teeth, they appeared more sure of how to carry out their physical actions, but the exercise as a whole was not focused on one specific object, which initially proved challenging for the actors. As we began to explore silent improvisations centered on imaginary objects, the actors’ engagement in the activity as a whole increased.

In addition to the actors connecting to communicating stories where they used imaginary objects, I noticed that the actors focused best when there was a follower and a leader. Similar to how the actors became so focused in their partner during mirroring exercises that one could not tell who was leading and who was following, I observed similar increases in focus during group activities similar to mirroring. The combination of nonverbal storytelling while focusing on imaginary objects coupled with group mirroring exercises became a breeding ground for actors to increase their focus on the entire group. The actors also connected to nonverbal improvisation activities that placed them in familiar settings such as a restaurant. The actors’ thrived when placed in a situation such as eating in a restaurant and the entire group would mirror their motions. During our final interview, I asked Gormezano to address why these types of activities were successful with the actors. She shared a story from one day when Josh led this exercise to answer my question:

We were all in the restaurant. I had the table set up horseshoe-shaped so everyone could see each other. Robyn was on the end, and then Lauren, and Josh was in the center, and I asked them to move slower. Josh starts eating, takes
a drink of water, and he starts to put on makeup and then everybody starts to join him, and then he begins to pluck his eyebrows and put on lipstick and everybody is trying to muffle their laugh, and then he put on a bra, and I mean he went all out! I would say the nonverbal stuff that was a little more structured in the sense that everyone had to do that with that person did, I would say that’s an example of something that really worked. (Gormezano Telephone)

I was not fortunate enough to witness Josh’s antics, but this story confirmed for me the power of nonverbal communication among a group of actors with limited verbal abilities. At times when Josh would speak to the group, some of his fellow actors and even I had a difficult time understanding what he tried to say. But his nonverbal actions read loud and clear. I cannot make claims that every actor with limited verbal ability consistently communicated clearly through nonverbal actions. For instance, Chip often moved his body in ways that were difficult to interpret, and typically required intervention from the staff to help him adjust his movement so we understood what he was trying to tell us. Sometimes even with staff intervention, we could not make sense of his actions. However, nonverbal activities requiring a leader and a follower ultimately empowered the actors to guide the actions of others, and increased ability to focus on others rather than focus only on themselves.

While verbal expression allowed the actors to creatively express themselves, I noticed increased displays of confidence across the board through nonverbal expression. While actors such as Billy, Lucy, and Richard radiated with confidence as they entertained the ensemble during improvisation activities requiring speech, I witnessed confidence increasingly radiate from the entire ensemble when they were given opportunities to express themselves nonverbally. For the most part, I learned that actors with limited verbal ability and actors who were incredibly
articulate became less hesitant to carry out a silent physical task than offer an idea verbally. I asked Gormezano why nonverbal expression seemed to resonate with the actors during our final interview. She said, “I think in the end it encouraged a deeper focus and I would say that that one in particular really build up to something fun, cause you had to watch and see what happened before to be able to tie it in” (Gormezano Telephone). Thinking about the deep focus Gormezano mentioned, I conclude that the actors’ focus appeared “deep” during nonverbal activities because their reactions were visibly obvious. While opportunities to practice verbal and nonverbal self-expression in Kaleidoscope fostered various levels of self-confidence in actors with limited or strong verbal skills, across the board the actors appeared less hesitant to share their personalities, ideas, and thoughts through nonverbal expression.

Scope of Self-Expression

Out of The Three Ss, I noticed the strongest through line of actor growth through self-expression. I believe the actors grew in their ability to express their thoughts, opinions, and ideas through verbal and nonverbal expression because the goal of the entire program is to create an original production based upon the actors viewpoint of the world. While the actors had varying degrees of changes in the areas of verbal expression such as improving on clarity of diction, keeping up with the timing of songs, speaking up further during improvisation activities, and nonverbal expression such as observing and focusing on the situation before joining, the actors each contributed to the material for Dream Out Loud. The staff created activities designed to gather personal dreams from the actors to create the show. Through brainstorming, the actors each verbally shared personal dreams to inform the show. While at least one personal dream
from each actor showed up in the final production, some of the actors’ dreams and ideas from our brainstorming sessions were more prevalent in the play.

I initially questioned if the actors’ ideas would show up equally in the show, and I conclude that they did not show up equally. Actors with strong verbal expressive skills such as Lucy shared very detailed stories during brainstorming sessions. Lucy’s long and detailed story about wanting to move to France and marry a rich Dr. showed up in the script word for word. Actors with limited verbal skills such as Chip who only talked about eating during brainstorming sessions did not inspire any dialogue for the show. His love of eating fit in with the theme of *The Restaurant Scene*, but several other actors also talked about their love of dining as well and with further detail than Chip. So while an entire scene formed based upon several actors who expressed their love of eating at restaurants, I do not think all the actors dreams that came from brainstorming showed up equally in the final production. I do not think it is good or bad that the actors’ words were not equally represented in the final production, but I think this point deserved acknowledgement. During my final interviews with the actors, I asked each of them if they thought their words and ideas showed up equally in the final production. All eight of them told me that they not only thought their words and ideas showed up equally in the show, but they also viewed the sizes of their roles in *Dream Out Loud* equally. I found their responses surprising because I did not think they all had equal sized roles. I was also surprised by their responses, because I tried very hard to not use the word “equals” when asking them questions to not feed them language, and they all used the word “equals” in their responses. In my final interviews with the staff, they across the board said that we were able to highlight each actor, but that just like in most theatrical productions, not every actor could have an equally sized part. I did not think the size of their roles in the show was equal, and their words, thoughts, and ideas did not
show up equally in the show. Equality aside, I initially hypothesized the actors would feel empowered to express themselves, and I hoped that their ability to verbally articulate their experiences would improve by the programs end. I conclude that the actors felt empowered to express themselves based on their overall increased engagement and excitement to perform during classes, rehearsal, and the final production. Not all of the actors grew in their ability to verbally articulate their experiences by the programs end, however, they all believed that their thoughts, ideas, and words were represented well on stage. Participating in the art affected the actors’ ability to express themselves through creative outlets. While words, ideas, thoughts, and actions from each actor did not heavily influence the finished production, they each contributed to the creative process of the making Dream Out Loud through self-expression.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

As I reflect on Kaleidoscope as whole, I remain surprised, overjoyed, and overwhelmed by both the actors’ and my personal journey with this project. While the actors tapped into their strengths and discovered new ways they could project their voices, move their bodies, and develop relationships, I also made personal discoveries about myself as an artist and educator. Looking at how the process of drama and the product of theatre affected the lives of the actors within the Kaleidoscope community, I both drew conclusions, and developed further questions for this study.

Kaleidoscope’s mission is to “unlock and celebrate the unique voice, intelligence and creative expression with our disabled community through music and theatre arts.” I conclude that the goals of “to unlock and celebrate” were met in the program and shaped The Three Ss, socialization, self-confidence, and self-expression. Within The Three Ss, some of the actors grew in their ability to relate to each other, display signs of believing in their talents as actors, and verbally and nonverbally express their personal words, thoughts, and ideas. However, some of the actors experienced little to no growth in the aforementioned ways. While there were specific through lines of changes in some of the actor’s behaviors within The Three Ss, I conclude that there was not one clear picture of how socialization, self-confidence, and self-expression looked in Kaleidoscope because the actors had such varied disabilities. While I think that only some of the actors demonstrated shifts within The Three Ss, thus “unlocking” specific behaviors and skills such as making friends, verbalizing a personal story, or leading a mirroring
exercise, I think that every actor was celebrated as they contributed to the artistic material of Dream Out Loud.

In this closing chapter, I examine categories that I was interested in studying prior to the first day of Kaleidoscope, but became increasingly interested in process versus product, actor assessment and long-term responsibility, actor accountability, professional versus community based work, and personal discoveries the further I conducted my research.

Process versus Product

I walked away from this project placing equal value on process and product. While this was a personal surprise, as I tend to be a process-centered artist, I also discovered that the actors thrived on the product. I learned very early on in the program that the actors came to Kaleidoscope to perform on what so many referred to as, “the big stage.” Prior to graduate school I placed an equal emphasis on both process and product, and then I came to UCF and began teaching creative drama to underserved youth and fell in love with the freedom that came without the pressure to perform in front of an audience. This study made me realize that there is a time and a place to carry out process-centered work free from a product, and that facilitating drama with and for persons with disabilities is not the time for such work. That is not to say that the process is not important with this population, because the process proves incredibly important. Rather, these actors taught me that they thrive on goals, and while there were goals set for the actors within the process, I think the actors needed to see the fruits of their labor. The goals of performing in a play are different than exploring drama through a process, and this
experience has taught me that process and product with this population are of equal and complimentary value.

During my first and last round of interviews with the actors, I asked them all if they would come to Kaleidoscope if there were no show and it was a five week drama camp. Across the board the actors said no. When I asked, they all said that they valued the process and product equally (which they referred to as rehearsal and play), however, they only wanted to participate in Kaleidoscope if they were performing in a production. The actors were not only able to understand the concept of process and product, they also articulated that they were uninterested in the process without the product. While the actors all blossomed on stage in front of an audience, and perhaps valued the product more than the process, they arrived at the point of feeling confident enough to perform in front of an audience as a result of the five weeks of process. I walked into this project placing a much higher value on process, and now I do not think I could carry out future work with this population without a finished product. The actors grew as artists throughout the creative process, but they radiated with such self-confidence and excitement while performing in front of an audience, that I ultimately decided that sharing the finished product Dream Out Loud with others was the greatest reward for the actors.

Actor Assessment and Long-term Responsibility

One of my initial sub-questions was, “why is it important to track both clinical and artistic goals?” I learned early on that the answer to this question remains two-fold. First, it is important to track clinical goals for funding. Barker Schefler typed up daily clinical notes to share with the services that funded the actors so there was documentation of how the actors grew clinically. Second, combining the clinical goals with the artistic goals helped the entire team
work together to elevate the productivity of the actors. For this study, I also had the actors set personal artistic goals during the first week to give them a sense of ownership over their work, as well as provide the staff with insight into how the actors desired to grow. Overall, I observed most of the actors work towards and/or achieve their personal goals. The actors’ personal goals primarily fell into two categories: wanting to improve as singers or wanting to improve as dancers. The three actors with different goals were Alex, Sarah, and Billy. Alex wanted to improve on throwing and catching a ball with another person, Sarah wanted to become more specific with poems and pictures, and Billy wanted to learn how to act a song really well. I did not track Alex’s growth in playing catch or Sarah’s specificity with poems and pictures, but I did observe growth in Billy’s abilities to act a song. While not every actor was able to set and achieve their personal goal, it was encouraging to watch them try because their efforts displayed an interest in growing as artists and as individuals.

As far as actor assessment is concerned, I observed the most visible changes within The Three Ss among actors who were younger, and/or brand new to Kaleidoscope. I wondered if several of the older, repeat actors “maxed out” in terms of what they were capable of achieving? Maxed out is a term that CHAC staff used often when talking about some of the oldest actors in the program who were at a point in their lives where they were not capable of changing their behaviors due to the natural onset of aging coupled with their disability. I found the spectrum of ages and disabilities among the actors as one of the benefits of the program because it offered the actors an opportunity to socialize with such varied individuals in an artistic setting. However, the older actors were the lowest functioning of the group in terms of their disabilities. Therefore I was not surprised that I observed little to no changes in the older actors behaviors throughout the program. While the younger actors displayed an interest in nurturing their social and artistic
roles that I did not observe in the older actors, I cannot ignore that the younger actors ages and higher functioning disabilities influenced how participating in the program affected their growth within The Three Ss.

Throughout the Kaleidoscope program, the creative staff, volunteers, and I met to discuss the actors’ growth. With most of our actors, crossover existed between their clinical and artistic goals. (For example, we set goals for several of the actors’ to improve their eye contact, which often fell under the categories of clinical and artistic.) While the focus remained on the artistic process, Gormezano, Hersh, Page and I discussed how addressing the clinical needs of the actors helps keep programs like this alive. From a financial view, I think funding is much more accessible when grant sponsors see that the program is not art for art sake. I also think we would be doing the actors a disservice to not track and assess clinical goals in Kaleidoscope. While I primarily discussed shifts that came about through the artistic process in this study, I discovered there was a natural bridge between how the art affected the actors’ different abilities, ultimately addressing several clinical needs. For instance, Romeo’s stutter improved from his artistic vocal work and Chip’s tolerance to be physically near other people increased from working with the ensemble as a whole. Documenting how the artistic and clinical needs compliment each other can only help open doors for other artists, educators, and clinicians to carry out this kind of work.

As I continue to research using drama and theatre with and for special needs populations, I would like to conduct a study looking specifically at assessment of actor growth from both a clinical and artistic perspective. I am particularly interested in researching the long-term affects of a program like Kaleidoscope. Once the program ended, the actors, staff, volunteers, and I all returned to our “normal” lives. While I was able to assess some the programs’ affects up to two months after the program ended, based on the answers of the eight actors I interviewed, I realized
that I longed to gain a deeper understanding of how the program influenced them. While I thoroughly enjoyed reconnecting with the actors over the phone, I remained curious as to whether the ways the actors told me Kaleidoscope changed their lives was actually true. Was Lauren really more outgoing at school? Did Billy practice warm-ups we did to continue improving himself as an actor? I constantly thought about assessment of the actors’ growth beyond the program all last summer. I engaged in several conversations about this topic with creative staff before, during, and after Kaleidoscope. Everyone wished there was a way to continue assessing the actors but no one had a feasible solution. Assessment requires time and money, as well as access to the actors throughout the year. On one hand Kaleidoscope is a five-week summer program, and I questioned if one can measure long-term affects from such a short program. On the other hand, as an artist and educator I felt unsatisfied that the program ended and then I had no way of knowing if the actors continued to practice and strengthen the skills acquired from the program. If the touring program was happening this year, I could see that as a potential opportunity for measuring long-term affects on actors who transitioned from the summer program to the year round touring company. In continuing this line of work, I would like to formalize a system that includes measuring clinical and artistic growth that includes long-term assessment. While I do not think the results of my study are inconclusive because my follow-up interviews occurred 2.5 months after the program, and took place over the phone, I conclude that my findings could have been more extensive had I shifted my study to include further post-program assessment of the actors. Working on this project made me realize that in designing my own program, I not only want to measure, assess, and document through writing and filming the clinical and artistic growth of the actors, but I want to find methods of measuring the long-term affects of the process of drama and movement, and the product of theatre as well.
Reflecting on the lack of assessment beyond the five weeks makes me think about the responsibility of the creative and clinical staff. Did the program actually make an impact on the actors if they later digressed back to their old behaviors once Kaleidoscope was over? If specific skills are strengthened but once out of the world of Kaleidoscope the skills are not sustained, how does that benefit the actors? I think that the growth the actors experience while in the program is incredibly beneficial to their lives, but the thought of them losing those skills as time passes fills me with the desire to carry out a study specifically measuring long-term affects.

Designing my own program, I would ideally offer drama classes and production opportunities throughout the year, as I think CHAC and Asolo Rep would like to offer as well if budgets allowed. I believe that summer proves an ideal time for an intense program to occur. But keeping the dramatic arts alive in the lives of the actors, or at least offering further opportunities throughout the year would bridge the gap between the summer program and then nothing. Researching theatre companies in The United States, I discovered a mix of theatre companies who carry out programs for persons with disabilities sporadically throughout the year. I understand carrying out this type of work in a year-round program might not be possible for some theatres as area demographics, funding, and organization goals vary. However, I am interested in creating year-round programming to help the actors grow and sustain what they learn. Barker Schefler, DeVette, and Doss told me on several occasions that the actors talk about Kaleidoscope all year as they place such a high value on the experience. I questioned, why should they have to wait all year long to have that experience? During my final interviews, each actor said that there are no drama and theatre opportunities available to them throughout the year besides Kaleidoscope. While I realize that there are many organizations that offer such opportunities across the country, there are little to no opportunities in the communities the
Kaleidoscope actors live in. While actors such as Billy audition and are cast in community theatre productions, where are the opportunities for those who are not as high functioning? I do not have all the answers in terms of providing further opportunities for persons with developmental and physical disabilities opportunities to take drama class and perform in fully realized productions, and assess the long-term affects from participating in such experiences. But, I continue to ask questions as this particular topic sparked a potential new study that I would like to implement.

Actor Accountability

I observed the most positive behavioral shifts when actors were held accountable for their actions. The creative staff, volunteers, and I called attention to actors when they displayed negative attitudes or disruptive behaviors. For instance, when DeVette singled out Romeo during week one, he clearly did not enjoy receiving attention for poor behavior, and as a result, he completely shifted his behaviors. Initially, Barker Scheffler, DeVette, and Doss’s approach to redirecting the actors when they were misbehaving surprised me because they were tough on the actors. When Chip isolated himself from the group during activities, I observed them immediately reel him back in. When Alex stomped his foot hard on the ground repeatedly to gain attention, they were harsh wish him until he stopped stomping. They encouraged him to remain silent and when he needed to communicate to use his words, but they did so with a very firm tone and look of strong disappointment on their faces. They handled each actor differently, as Sarah would have burst into tears had she been spoken to in that manner, but when several
actors did not act appropriately, CHAC staff responded fast and did not treat the actors like infants.

When an actor became truly disruptive during class or all-group rehearsal, they were told: “You acting this way lets me know that you don’t want to be here. There are plenty of others who would love to be here.” One day during acting, I spent almost the entire class period sitting out with Josh because he took some used toothpicks that belonged to someone else, placed them in his wallet, and then lied and told us that he did not take the toothpicks. While taking used toothpicks might not sound like the most disruptive thing in the world, all I wanted was for Josh to throw them away. He would not throw them away and as a result, Gormezano told him, “By you not listening to Karen, you’re showing me that you don’t want to be in this scene.” The scene Gormezano referred to was The Restaurant Scene. Josh and I sat in the corner of the room together for almost the entire class until he decided that he wanted to be in the scene more than he wanted to hang on to the toothpicks and he threw them away. He displayed such anger towards me for the rest of the day. But he needed to be aware that his actions had consequences, and that if the staff asked him to do something, he needed to listen. Josh deserved to be held accountable for his actions and realize that he could not behave inappropriately and get away with it.

I often wondered how the actors would have reacted had they actually been removed from scenes as punishment. While that never happened, I thought about what was more important: teaching the actors accountability or letting them perform? The actors showed up to the rehearsal hall everyday with the intent to perform. While the creative staff, volunteers, and I wanted the actors to fully participate, the actors at times needed reminders that performing in Kaleidoscope was a privilege. I think that as the actors were held accountable for their actions,
they began to hold other actors accountable for their actions as well. Based on the actors’ overall increased engagement in the program, I noticed that they began to redirect each other similar to how staff redirected the actors. The actors all wanted to attend Kaleidoscope and none of them wanted to be removed from a scene and/or the program. I conclude that the actors became increasingly accountable for their social and artistic roles in the group because by the programs end, they took ownership over their individual parts in *Dream Out Loud*, and if a fellow actor got off track, they helped reel them back in.

**Professional versus Community-based Work**

Just as I think there is room for both professional and community-based programs that use drama and theatre specifically with and for special needs populations, I think there is room for programs that focus and do not focus on the clinical growth of the actors. Tracking actor growth might not fit the mission of a theatre focused on creating professional productions. Working on a production where the goals are purely professional would be an interesting change. At this point in my career and life, my interest lies in exploring the dramatic process and creation of original theatre with individuals who have DDs and PDs. I desire to work with persons with disabilities who have not necessarily been exposed to drama and theatre; perhaps they have natural talent but no experience. The marriage between community-based work and professional work within Kaleidoscope intrigues me. During our final interview, I asked Gormezano where she thought the program landed in terms of professional and community-based work:

I think the goal is to give the actors a theatrical experience that’s as professional as possible; I think they both can happen. I think the goal shouldn’t be to entertain these guys and let them have playtime for five weeks. So I think the
only way to give them a really viable experience is to constantly raise the bar, and say we’re gonna make some theatre together, and say this is gonna be fun and we’re gonna do some work. I think that by having standards that are high, I feel like they couldn’t have an experience like this at a community theatre with the nature of the union between CHAC and Asolo. It’s not gonna be broadway singing and dancing, but I think a professional experience fully produced well performed piece of theatre. I think we can keep growing in our professionalism, but I think we gave a good blow at both. (Gormezano Telephone)

Gormezano tapped into the fine line that Kaleidoscope walked between professional and community-based work, not community theatre. In terms of theatre, I define “professional work” as a rehearsal process that takes place in a professional theatre, in which the actors and production team are paid, and the outcome from the rehearsal period is a high quality production where audience members pay to watch. I define community-based work as an extension of professional programming to involve organizations and/or specific demographics of people such as Asolo Rep’s partnership with CHAC. I define “community theatre” as a rehearsal period and production carried out entirely by community volunteers. In community theatre the actors and production team are not paid for their efforts, but audience members pay for tickets.

During my final interview with Bolaños Wilmott, she reflected on how she felt the professional outcome of the show grew from the organic nature of the rehearsal process:

I feel like with my company and working with professionals there was this whole kind of, you know this other voice, it has to be a certain type of caliber. So maybe if I even approach my daily work with my company, maybe with a little bit more of an honest kind of open you know, I would have this kind of outcome,
because I don’t feel like, I feel like this performance was very professionally done. From the lighting, to the storytelling, to the movement, to everything. I don’t think we compromised anything to give it not a professional look. I think it was as professional as any other show in town honestly, I mean truthfully. (Bolaños Wilmott Personal)

I also shared in her opinion that the production was very professional, from the technical elements to the actors to the story itself. However, I think there was room to go even further in terms of elevating the professional elements to the program. The actors in Kaleidoscope are paid to be there through arrangements with CHAC, as Kaleidoscope is a work program. While logically I know that most of the actors in Kaleidoscope are new to theatre and have DDs and PDs, and therefore the performances will most likely not be similar to Broadway, I would have liked to see the process tightened up as a whole so the actors’ experience was more professional. I do not have all the answers as to how to make their experience more professional, and I question if it is possible to create that perfect marriage between professional and community-based work when working with this population because I found that everyone involved has a different idea of what “professional work” looks like. Participating in the collaborative process of creating a show made me realize that taking into account everyone’s opinion remains vital, however, at the end of the day, decisions must be made. While communication and collaboration between the clinicians and the artists proved critical to the actors’ growth, the production ultimately lied in the hands of the artistic staff. The clinical and artistic staff worked hand-in-hand to create Dream Out Loud, and while part of the beauty of creating Kaleidoscope was the crossover of roles, I believe if everyone’s roles had been further identified, the experience as a whole would have been more professional for the actors. Some of the staff thought Dream Out
Loud was by far the most professional Kaleidoscope production yet, while some thought we could have gone even further with exhibiting professional-like behavior during the process and in formalizing the finished production. I landed somewhere in the middle, as I thought the process and product were very professional, but I think we could have gone further. I believe that the program will continue to grow in terms of how professional the experience is for the actors. I think that by continuing to find the balance of power while collaborating, clarifying specific roles, and striving to provide the actors with artistic work that cultivates The Three Ss will ultimately make the experience more professional. I hope to continue my practical and theoretical research in the field of Disabilities and the Arts through a new endeavor--working on a professional production cast with persons with DDs and PDs, and the goal is purely product centered. I also want to be a part of a production process cast with persons with disabilities where there is no clinical component to the program. Until I fulfill such experiences to further understand and complicate where I stand as an artist and educator, I currently want to work with persons who have disabilities, and assess both their artistic and clinical growth, in programs quite similar to Kaleidoscope. Ultimately, I strive to continue in this line of work, as this specific program aims to serve the actors by helping them achieve their highest levels of functioning as human beings and as artists.

Personal Discoveries

While I went into this study incredibly excited to work with 18 teenagers and adults, there was a small part of me that wished there were children in Kaleidoscope. Then I met the actors, and throughout the entire the program I did not feel the least bit unfulfilled. While I think
a Kaleidoscope-like program could take place with children, and perhaps one day I will explore such a project, I relished working with the teenagers and adults. They were fun, and we had things in common such as favorite movies and music, and they did not censor their vocabulary, which at times was inappropriate and at others completely hilarious. While several of them functioned on cognitive levels that clinically categorized them at much younger ages, at the end of the day, they were all adults. I cherish how they shared themselves artistically, and the relationships I formed with them because I felt like I made real friends. In classes, rehearsal, and free time I bonded with several of the actors. Just as some of the actors formed strong relationships with each other, I formed strong relationships as well.

While I had stronger natural connections with some actors more than others, I grew in my ability to communicate with the actors, specifically through interviews. While interviewing, I felt confident in my ability to make the actors feel comfortable, really listen to their answers, as well as ask questions in a clear manner. When I started to transcribe my interviews, I literally cringed when I heard myself ask questions that were too long and too detailed, and often leading. However, as I conducted more interviews, I became more confident and the questions became clearer, and the less I fed the actors specific vocabulary that informed their responses. I was excited to recognize that I grew in my ability to interview as the actors grew in their ability to answer my questions.

While I entered the program patient and tolerant of others, my ability to remain patient and tolerant was tested and grew throughout the process. There were moments when I wanted to yell at the actors when they were unfocused and/or being mean to each other, and there were moments when I became frustrated when actors did not cognitively comprehend what I was trying to communicate to them. There was one particularly day mid-program when we had to
stop rehearsal for the day and let everyone have down time to listen to music, color, and relax because there was so much disruptive behavior going on. While during those moments I wanted to cry and/or scream, I reminded myself that the program was not about me, but about the actors. So rather than get frustrated or upset in any of the aforementioned situations, I tried to move the situation forward keeping in mind how my reaction would impact the actors. I also strengthened my ability to hold others accountable for their actions. In the beginning of the program I typically let DeVette, Barker Scheffler, or Doss swoop in when an actor displayed poor behavior. But eventually I became comfortable enough to call actors out when their behavior warranted action. This shift in my behavior occurred the day Robyn wanted to sit next to Wayne at lunch and pushed a fellow actors lunch away. There was not another staff person around and I had to take control of the situation. My confidence regarding my own ability to redirect an actor when they exhibited poor behavior grew partly from observing CHAC staff and learning from their interactions with the actors, partly from my own natural instincts from past teaching experience, and partly from the relationships I built with the Kaleidoscope actors.

My research taught me quite a bit about the use of language in relation to the topics in this study, including the use of the “people first” motto when referring to individuals with disabilities. “People first” promotes the individual rather than the disability. Therefore one would not say: He is autistic, but rather he has autism, or she is developmentally delayed, but rather she has a developmental delay. Prior to this study, I often used the term “special needs.” While conducting my research, I discovered that currently there are people who find the term “special needs” offensive. CHAC staff agreed that the current politically correct term is “persons with disabilities” and that “special needs” can be offensive. My research proved that most organizations that promote awareness of or provide services to persons with disabilities
prefer the term “disabilities” over “special needs.” Further research confused me as I discovered some individuals find the term “disability” offensive. I am not a fan of buzzwords, but with the overwhelming amount of research pointing to the term “disability,” I had to adjust my thinking and writing to erase the term “special needs” from the majority of this document. Once I learned about “people first,” I applied through IRB and was approved to change the title of my study, which originally was: “Dramatic Impact: Exploring the Affects of Drama and Theatre With Special Needs Actors.” I changed the title of my study to: “Dramatic Impact: Exploring the Affects of Drama and Theatre with Actors Who Have Special Needs.” I held onto the “special needs” in the title to remind me of where I started with this process and what I have learned.

I really enjoyed working with such a wide range of ages and abilities, but I would be interested to explore doing Kaleidoscope with all teenagers or individuals with similar disabilities. I understood Billy’s point about wanting to work with actors that possessed a similar intellect, and how Lauren initially wanted to do Kaleidoscope with all teenagers. However, I observed the actors from all ages and with different disabilities support each other in ways that elevated the spirits of individuals as well as the entire group. I think there is something to be said for trying Kaleidoscope with all teenagers or with persons who all have DS, but currently, I am inspired with how the actors reached across the spectrum of difference to create an ensemble. I believe the actors formed such a supportive ensemble primarily from Kaleidoscope’s focus on devising an original production.

I learned from this study how inspired I am to devise original work with this specific population. I think devising works well with this population because it empowers them to share their personalities, ideas, thoughts, and stories with others. Ultimately, they possess strong comprehension of the material as the creators. I also think that when working with this
population, it is crucial to not let the finished production become a dog and pony show. Devising work focuses on the actors’ strengths, and the show can bend to suit their specific needs, thus creating a product that the actors can take complete ownership of.

As I originally began this study with the intent to model my own program after Kaleidoscope, I learned how complicated carrying out a program like this is. There are so many logistics to think about such as transportation for the actors and methods of payment through insurance and grants that I did not even think about until I worked on Kaleidoscope. While I am still researching and learning, based on this experience I learned that I would not carry out a program of my own without clinicians and artists working side by side. In designing my own program, I desire to bring on board more medically trained experts such as a speech pathologist to help with vocal work or an occupational therapist to help with movement. I also want to create hands on opportunities for persons with disabilities to learn about technical theatre, as the majority of the Kaleidoscope actors were fascinated with the props, costumes, scenic, lighting, and sound elements for *Dream Out Loud*. I stated this earlier, but I want to create year-round programming rather than one summer production opportunity. I think the “dream team” of Hersh, Page, Gormezano, Bolaños Wilmott, and myself was pretty amazing, and the most important factor for me in designing my own program is working with open minded and innovative artists who want to collaborate and elevate the lives of the actors through the best possible practices.

Ultimately, I discovered that collaborating on the creation of *Dream Out Loud* proved one of the most, if not the most defining artistic endeavor of my life thus far. Participating in the process of drama and product of theatre with the Kaleidoscope actors made me realize why I want to carry out this particular kind of work. I want to work with persons with disabilities
because I want them to feel valued. Participating in the arts since childhood not only helped shape my identity, but also made me recognize and celebrate my own personal value. I want to help others discover and own what makes them unique, and share their personal stories through artistic expression. My data suggests that participating in the process of drama and the product of theatre shifted actors’ verbal articulation and expression, diction, breath support, physical expression, physical strength, tolerance, patience, empathy, artistic risks, vulnerability, spatial awareness, focus, eye contact, language intelligibility, accountability, attitude, and respect, social and artistic roles, and friendship. I initially went into this study expecting each actor to experience life altering changes, and when that did not happen, I was disappointed. However, I ultimately realized that it was simply not realistic for each actor to experience huge changes. Within socialization, some actors emerged as social leaders while some actors only participated with the ensemble during drama and dance. Within self-confidence, some actors pushed themselves physically and vocally beyond what they thought they were capable of during rehearsal and on stage, while some actors appeared to make no shifts, or at times declining shifts of self-confidence in terms of their social and/or artistic roles. Within self-expression, not all of the actors grew in their ability to communicate verbally and as a result, their words were not represented equally in the final product. However, every actor contributed to the design of Dream Out Loud through varying degrees of verbal and nonverbal creative expression. I plan to use my research and apply methods of teaching drama, dance, and music used by Kaleidoscope instructors into my teaching practice. I also desire to help advance the field of Disabilities and the Arts by creating new programs with and for individuals who have disabilities. Regardless of disability, age, or talent, the actors created a world where everyone’s dreams were celebrated, and through the lens of a kaleidoscope evolved on stage into a dazzling mixture of colors, personality, and heart.
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER
Notice of Expedited Initial Review and Approval

From: UCF Institutional Review Board  
FWA0000351, Exp. 6/24/11, IRB00001138  

To: Karen E. Scherman  

Date: July 02, 2008  
IRB Number: SBE-88-05706  

Study Title: Dramatic Impact: Exploring the Affects of Drama and Theatre With Special Needs Actors  

Dear Researcher:

Your research protocol noted above was approved by expedited review by the UCF IRB Chair on 7/2/2008. The expiration date is 7/1/2009. Your study was determined to be minimal risk for human subjects and expeditable per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.110. The categories for which this study qualifies as expeditable research are as follows:

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

The IRB has approved a consent procedure which requires participants to sign consent forms. Use of the approved stamped consent document(s) is required. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Subjects or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

All data, which may include signed consent form documents, must be retained in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of three years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained on a password-protected computer if electronic information is used. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

To continue this research beyond the expiration date, a Continuing Review Form must be submitted 2 – 4 weeks prior to the expiration date. Advise the IRB if you receive a subpoena for the release of this information, or if a breach of confidentiality occurs. Also report any unanticipated problems or serious adverse events (within 5 working days). Do not make changes to the protocol methodology or consent form before obtaining IRB approval. Changes can be submitted for IRB review using the Addendum/Modification Request Form. An Addendum/Modification Request Form cannot be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at http://src.ufr.edu.

Failure to provide a containing review report could lead to study suspension, a loss of funding and/or publication possibilities, or reporting of noncompliance to sponsors or funding agencies. The IRB maintains the authority under 45 CFR 46.110(e) to observe or have a third party observe the consent process and the research.

On behalf of Tracy Dietz, Ph.D., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Joanne Muratori  
Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 07/02/2008 08:34:16 AM EDT

IRB Coordinator
APPENDIX B: DEFINING SPECIFIC DISABILITIES
DEFINING SPECIFIC DISABILITIES

Cerebral palsy – “Also referred to as CP, is a term used to describe a group of chronic conditions affecting body movement and muscle coordination. It is caused by damage to one or more specific areas of the brain, usually occurring during fetal development; before, during, or shortly after birth; or during infancy. Thus, these disorders are not caused by problems in the muscles or nerves. Instead, faulty development or damage to motor areas in the brain disrupt the brain's ability to adequately control movement and posture” (“Cerebral palsy” ucp.org).

Developmental Disabilities – “Developmental disabilities are a diverse group of severe chronic conditions that are due to mental and/or physical impairments. People with developmental disabilities have problems with major life activities such as language, mobility, learning, self-help, and independent living” (“Developmental Disabilities” cdc.gov).

Down Syndrome – “Down syndrome is a genetic disorder that causes lifelong mental retardation, developmental delays and other problems. Down syndrome varies in severity, so developmental problems range from moderate to serious” (“Down syndrome” mayoclinic.com).

Williams Syndrome – “Williams syndrome is a rare genetic condition (estimated to occur in 1/7,500 births) which causes medical and developmental problems” (“Williams syndrome” williams-syndrome.org).
APPENDIX C: DREAM OUT LOUD SCENE BREAKDOWN
Scene One: Camp Scene

- Lauren enters setting the scene inviting everyone to come out and play because it’s the last night of the camping trip.
- Everyone emerges from a tent and plays in different groups. *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* begins to play, and everyone falls asleep.

Scene Two: Dream Dr. and Dream Nurse

- The Dream Dr. and Dream Nurse (Anny and Lucy) teach the audience the call and response. Anny and Lucy say: “What time is it?” The audience responds with: “Dream time!”
- The Dream Assistants enter and place sheets on the sleeping campers.
- Everyone wakes up in the dream world and does *The Sheet Dance* set to the *Forrest Gump Suite*.

Scene Three: Dream Train

- The Red Hot Show Stoppers dialogue and have everyone hop aboard the dream train to talk to Mr. Sandman.
- Everyone dances on the dream train to move into *The Sandman Dance* positions.

Scene Four: Mr. Sandman

- Everyone does *The Sandman Dance* for Mr. Sandman himself, and he shares wisdom with the group to help guide their journey through their dreams.
Scene Five: The Mall

- The Spiderpeeps dialogue and decide that they want to go the mall for their next dream.
- The Magic Shoe Dancers enter the mall and do *The Magic Shoe Dance* to Marc Cohen’s *Walking in Memphis*.

Scene Six: The Restaurant

- The Wild Cool Magician’s dialogue and decide that they want to eat at a restaurant in their next dream.
- The Red Hot Magician’s and Showstoppers enter take their places in a romantic French restaurant. In addition to a great deal of dialogue, within this scene Frank and Wayne have harmonica solos, Tom has a keyboard solo of *When You Wish Upon a Star*, *The Four Knights* sing *The Impossible Dream*, and Sarah has a dance solo while *The Four Knights* sing.

Scene Seven: Art Studio

- At the end of *The Restaurant Scene*, the group decides that they want to travel to Italy to see some art for their next dream.
- So the entire group travels to Italy where Pavel stars as a famous magic painter. The actors are the art, and every time Pavel waves his magic paintbrush and calls out an emotion, the actors create new frozen group sculptures.

Scene Eight: Safari

- The Wild Cool Magicians dialogue and decide that they want to go on a safari in their next dream.
- Everyone enters and does *The Safari Dance* in the jungle.
Scene Ten: Robot Dance and Lovelight

- The Spiderpeeps decide that they want to meet new people from a faraway land.
- Billy and Romeo enter carrying the big sheet hiding Richard behind it while he is backlit doing his *Robot Dance*. The other robots enter and do their *Robot Dance*. Humans enter and decide to sing to the robots to befriend them.
- Everyone sings *Lovelight*.

Scene Eleven: Cruise, Beach, and Good Friends

- The Redhot Showstoppers dialogue and decide that they want to travel and take their new friends on a boat ride.
- Showstoppers and Magician’s do the *River of Dreams Dance* to Billy Joel’s *River of Dreams*. Showstoppers exit and re-enter in Octopus formation as everyone sings The Beatle’s *Octopuses Garden*. Both dances require sheets to create water, boats, and an octopus.
- Everyone exits while the Spiderpeeps enter and surf upstage to The Beach Boys *Surfin Safari*. Everyone enters and has a beach party.
- Everyone gets together and sings and signs *Good Friends*.
- It begins to rain, *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* begins to play again, and everyone falls back asleep.
- Anny wakes everyone up in role as a camp counselor. Everyone sleepily walks back into the tent.
- Lauren is the last camper on stage, she finds a magic shoe center stage, turns to the audience, and winks and whispers: Shhhhhh.” She exits.
- Red Carpet Paparazzi Finale!
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