

THEORY OF ACTION

HOW CAN THE USE OF ARTS EDUCATION MAKE AN IMPACT ON THE LGBT YOUTH
WHO ARE AT RISK?

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Executive Summary

Born with a desire to know *why*, my mother early on nicknamed me *question asker* because I always questioned authority and rules. I needed to understand why I had to study math, why a science project was going to make me a better person, how was having knowledge of the capital of a state, that I never planned to visit, was going to benefit me. In fact, I have, quite honestly, always felt different, unorthodox, and unconventional, but mostly very curious.

My first memory of school is playing the lead in the first grade production of "*Jimmie and the Sleep Fairies*" The line that stayed with me through the years was a quote from Benjamin Franklin; "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a young boy healthy, wealthy, and wise" I learned the line because of theater. In the fifth grade, I was dressed in colored sheets recreating the scene of Caesar's assassination. The line I remember is "The Ides of March have come, Ah Caesar but not gone." My greatest memories of early education were being on stage. My love of theater created an interest in the subjects I performed and the messages, as well as, the formats of delivery. I developed a love of writing, reading, poetry, history, geography, art, and sciences.

I drew pictures of the things I had seen through theater. I wrote stories and poems inspired by theater. I created costumes from the images I loved on stage. I studied maps searching for exotic places I discovered in theater. I picked up history books because the people, places, and things in the storylines of plays I performed fascinated me. I studied science to understand the elements of lighting, sound, props, and special effects that make a play magical.

I can trace all these interests to the theater. My teachers recognized my passion and ignited my interests in other subjects as well. I joined an educational theater company in the mid-80's that addressed teen pregnancy prevention by using theater to start open discussions on peer pressure choices. In 1991 was recruited because of a program through Johns Hopkins

School of Health and Hygiene and trained as an ethnographer. I interviewed teens on their sexual choices and behaviors. There I was again “asking questions.” Almost twenty years later, I find the need to ask questions as a documentarian, an artist, a student, a leader, and observer. I knew how important theater had been in my life and how I was shaped. Would I be able to prove it will help change, support, and affect lives?

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Introduction

The Overarching Topic

I believe that lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender (LGBT) students have special needs that can be addressed through use of the arts outside a regular school curriculum. I would like to explore the benefits of an arts-based education as a tool for healing and self-esteem building.

The Target Population

My proposed project is to create an afterschool arts program as a supplement for participants at LifeWorks Mentoring Program at the Gay & Lesbian Center. This program, originated by Antioch graduate, Michael Ferrera, offers one-on-one, peer, and group mentoring opportunities for LGBT youth ages 12–24. Their goal is to help LGBT youth to realize their goals and dreams with a safe space, positive and affirming role models, and workshops and activities that are fun and educational.

What will be done

The students will participate in an original theatrical production using their experiences and turn those moments into live theater based on:

- Coming out the closet
- Drugs (recreational and addictive)
- Self esteem (pride or lack of)
- Suicidal feelings
- Name calling (sissy, faggot, dyke)

- Masculine vs. Feminine behaviors
- Attitudes about HIV/AIDS

After each production, the students will facilitate discussions with audiences and create an open dialogue with the community.

The Need for Change

LGBT students face a unique challenge of not only intra-discrimination within their own community, but lack of understanding from a society that seeks to make them fit into a defined category. Each year LGBT students are bullied, battered, and bashed. LGBT students are at a high risk of suicide and homelessness. The pressure it takes to deal with a traditionally non-accepted sexual identity, combined with the academic demands of achieving in the current educational climate forces, can have dangerous repercussions. This not only robs the student of a valuable learning experience, but breeds secrecy and self-hatred that leads to likelihood of self-destruction.

The Expected Change

Using art to educate on LGBT issues does two important things.

1. The ARTIST: The expression of oneself through the arts is a healing, therapeutic process that brings about acceptance of gender identity.

2. The AUDIENCE: The experience of connecting with the arts provides empathy, understanding, and a safe place to dispel fears.

The Overarching Impact

LGBTQ youth will gain knowledge of their unique history and develop a sense of pride, develop marketable skills, identify themselves in a positive manner and, therefore, reduce the impulse of suicidal thoughts.

Logic Model

Introduction

Logic Model for Theater to Affect Social Change (LGBTheater) outlining an arts education program to build self-esteem and lower suicide rates. This model clearly depicts a map of my Theory of Action (Figure 1)

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Developed curriculum Infusing Virtues Training	Explore the history of LGBT Workshops on personal growth, character education and leadership	100% of participants demonstrate knowledge of LGBT history through performance assessment	Youth participants will identify with themselves positively	LGBT population embraces history with pride and reverence, not shame
Script creation	Public performance production	100% of participants demonstrate interpretation of script through performance assessment	Participants will learn how to apply the arts and literature to the process of building self-esteem creating marketable performance and production skills	Youth will be able to inspire others to take pride in LGBT life and share learned skills in a career building experience
Traveling Show	Multiple productions	100% of participants engage in audience dialogue of LGBT issues	Youth participants will gain a high sense of pride and reduce suicidal ideations	Decreased attempts at suicide

Figure 1. How can the use of arts education make an impact on the LGBT youth who are at risk?

Literature Review

Introduction

Each year the number of LGBT and queer (LGBTQ) youth, who are at-risk for suicide, and who experience discrimination and bullying, increase in schools. Of concern for LGBTQ youth, is their physical and emotional health, especially in the area of self-esteem. Arts education has been shown to raise self-esteem and, at the same time, raise awareness in audiences who lack sensitivity to the unique issues of LGBTQ youth. The first section of my literature review will cover the experience of LGBTQ students, and the concept of intra-discrimination from their sub groups. The second section of the review discusses the actual risk factors that put LGBTQ students' lives in danger and how this risk affects them whether they belong to the in- or out-groups, suicide rates, and the concepts of bullying. The final section of the literature review looks at the protective factors instituted in various arts programs that have shown to be successful in the development of LGBTQ students.

Experience of LGBTQ Youth

The night of Judy Garland's death, June 22, 1969, is the unofficial start of the Gay Rights Movement. That night a group of transvestites, gay men, and lesbians stood up to the police harassments at the Stonewall Bar in New York City. Same-sex attraction had been going on long before that night, but the political ramifications became apparent during that riot. That night LGBTQ became a group identified as one to society, but not to the members of that group.

Bunny Jones and Chris Spierer penned the lyrics to *I Was Born That Way* and Motown Records asked Carl Bean to record the vocals in 1977. The song reached No. 14 on the disco charts and is widely considered the first real gay anthem because it uses the (actual) word gay in

the lyrics (Rapp, 2004). Bean later left the music business when Motown asked him to record heterosexual love songs and founded Unity Fellowship Church Movement for gays and lesbians. He is currently archbishop of a movement with fifteen chapters across the country. The lyrics describe the LGBTQ quest for understanding.

You call me strange 'cause you don't understand

God's role for me in life's overall plan

I've learned to hold my head up high

Not in scorn nor disgrace

Doin' my thing individually

Entwined with this human race

Now I won't judge you - don't you judge me

We're all the way nature meant us to be

I'm happy, I'm carefree and I'm gay

I was born this way

(Jones & Spierer, 1977)

An art educator taught a three-week unit on diverse sexuality to a group of art students. In comparing the pre- and post-questionnaire, she learned that 43% of her students still believed that LGBTQ people could change their sexuality (Roebuck, 2008). While her lesson showed there had been some increase in sensitivity after watching a film like the Laramie Project, it had only been slight.

Society tends to organize in order to understand. The LGBTQ communities are placed in categories because it makes it easy for some people to understand. While within that community there are so many sub-levels that many inside are not exactly sure what it is.

Examine the L in LGBT. It stands for lesbians. In the lesbian community, there are Butch Lesbians, sometimes called tomboys, bull daggers, or dykes because of their masculine look. Stereotypically, they are further defined in dominant, assertive, very manly roles. This includes masculine clothing, haircuts, and little or no make-up. They generally play the masculine or dominant role in bed. Lipstick lesbians, nicknamed *fems* for their ultra feminized appearance, through use of make-up, sexy attire, generally play the passive role in bed.

Lesbians are even more unwelcoming of bisexual women, described as almost “chilly.” (Hartman, 2005) Julie Hartman further explains in her research that the resentments stems from opinions that bisexuals are more likely (than lesbians) to want to “pass” for heterosexual. 79% believe bisexuals experience less prejudice. Lesbians would rather date another lesbian (pg.64).

Many lesbians prefer not to be grouped with gay men because they feel their issues are not the same. Politically they have had to join forces, under the umbrella of same sex causes, but their culture is not the same, generally speaking.

The G in LGBTQ refers to gay men. The subculture of gay men is as diverse as the shades of African-American skin. The descriptions run from top to bottom, versatile, bear, leather, butch- queen or just plain queen. This is where subculture runs deep. There are masculine men who look disdainfully upon feminine men. There are still, other gay men who frown upon the bear culture because it glorifies overweight hairy men. There are some gay men who are uncomfortable with the dominant-submissive images found in the leather culture. There

are gay men who prefer clear definitions defined by sexual roles as a top or bottom. If a gay man chooses to be versatile, this too can push them into another category.

The B in LGBTQ stands for bi-sexual. This covers either gender that shares an attraction to both sexes. Bi-sexuals make heterosexuals and homosexuals uncomfortable for numerous reasons. One of which is the sexual honesty shared with both partners. Another is where does your monogamy lie with the same sex or the opposite sex. Finally, is the attraction a true 50%, equally divided between males and females and, one day will the person have a change of heart and leave one sex for the other completely.

The T in LGBTQ is for Transgender. A transgender person wants to change their sex from male to female or female to male and have a relationship with a person of the opposite sex. A transgender person is thrown in the mix of a gay culture actually seeking to leave the gay life once the sex change is complete and live a heterosexual life. This has many grey areas because then the question arises, is your lifestyle defined by your relationship or your friends? It can take many years and a lot of money to transition into the opposite sex. How do you drop out of a same-sex lifestyle and magically appear in a heterosexual lifestyle seamlessly? Some transgender do and others maintain visibility in both cultures.

The recently added Q in LGBTQ is supposed to cover anything else that does not fit into the other categories. It is called it queer. There are individuals who do not want to identify as either gay or lesbian. Some people prefer the option of crossing gender lines as they see fit. It could be a combination of male and female dressing, make-up and non-traditional attire that can change simply based on the mood.

Like a separate world to itself, even the LGBTQ community carries levels of racism within. While interracial relationships exist, there have been many long-standing policies over the years of not allowing black gays into white clubs, using a policy called double identity cards. After this was challenged and changed, a more subtle policy was instituted. Segregated nights were introduced under the banner of creating a theme. While not banning any one group, various nights are promoted as Latin night, urban hip-hop night or Asian night. Many major cities, such as Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago, New York, and Washington DC, hold a regular gay pride celebration and a separate Black or even a Latino gay pride celebration. African- Americans established the nation's first Black Lesbian and Gay Pride Weekend in 1991. (Beemyn, Encyclopedia Copyright © 2004, glbtq, Inc.)

It has proven difficult to meet the needs of such a diverse group who happen to share some same-sex attractions. Now place a LGBTQ kid in school that, like a heterosexual kid, has raging hormones. Now ask a teacher who has to deal with learning challenges, socio-economic problems, race, religion, ethnic cultures, budget restrictions, less support in growing classrooms, more emphasis on scores, and elimination of the arts, to figure out how to champion for their needs.

Risk Factors

There are risk factors present for both LGBTQ youth who identify and who do not identify in the school system. One of the most obvious is homophobic bullying. Besides being used as an abbreviated slang for homosexual, the American Heritage Medical Dictionary (2007) defines homo as “same.” It also defines phobia as an intense, irrational fear.” Minton, Dahl, O'Moore, & Tuck (2008) define bullying as repeated aggression, which included verbal assaults,

psychological intimidation and physical attacks by one or more persons against others. When you combine homophobia with bullying, *homophobic bullying* is repeated aggression that is directed by a fear of homosexuals. Some of acts of bullying include harassment in the form of name-calling, spreading gossip, and exclusion from social groups, but can progress to acts of physical violence.

Chang and Kleiner (2001) conducted a survey demonstrating that 69% of LGBT experienced harassment and 14% reported the harassment became violent. Some instances indicate that teachers are aware of the harassment. Because you can break homophobic bullying into indirect and direct categories, (heteronormative and sexual orientation-based) teachers are not equipped to address it. Let's look at heteronormative. The use of homophobic banter in general discussion, although not directly attacking anyone person, sends out a heterosexual standard to pupils who are not heterosexual. Minton, Dahl, O'Moore, & Tuck (2008) further opens the floor of discussion on this subtype of bullying because teachers are far more likely not do anything about it, therefore making their silence condone the abuse as normal. The use of an expression like "That's so gay" is a perfect example. When a teacher does not stop and address why the use of the statement is wrong, students will feel it is okay to continue to use it, therefore making an LGBT student feel silent shame.

If we look at the more obvious sexual orientation-based bullying, where LGBTQ students, who receive direct persecution, we can observe shocking statistics. Stonewell's 1999 study conducted in Great Britain showed 93% of youth, who identify as LGBT suffer, verbal abuse. Unfortunately this kind of pressure results in suicide attempts. The impact of bullying cannot be taken lightly. Let's take a look at how the safety of LGBTQ students are at-risk because of bullying. Minton, Dahl, O'Moore, & Tuck (2008) conducted a study that detailed various acts

of bullying: One statistic showed, out of 105 participants, LGBT students experienced the highest percentage (24.8%) of being called nasty names because of their sexuality over the course of a day. The highest rate of teasing comes from sexuality on a daily basis. This is higher than race or religion. Further studies explore violent risks for LGBTQ youth in schools.

Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, & Howell (2009) explore how these risks make more students leave school early:

LGBT students were three times as likely as non-LGBT students (22% vs. 7%) to report not feeling safe at school, and nine out of ten LGBT youth (vs. 62% of non-LGBT youth) reported verbal and physical harassment or assault during the past year because of their perceived or actual appearance, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability, or religion. The study also found a link between experiences of bullying and unsafe learning environments with poor academic performance, as students who experienced harassment were more likely to miss classes and skip school days.(p.25)

Because the greater part of an adolescent's day is spent in the educational environment, it comes as no surprise that the first occurrence of verbal and physical victimization happens at school. Bontempo and D'Augelli(2002) concluded LGBTQ youth who are victimized at school experience a greater level of substance abuse, sexual-risk behaviors, and suicidality than heterosexual peers who experienced victimization. With this kind of pressure, it is a natural assumption that an LGBTQ student will also be at risk for poorer grades, school absenteeism and higher drop-out rates. The Human Rights Watch (2001) did an important study that not only included students; but adults, teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents. The research concluded the daily forms of harassment created such a antagonistic environment that it was mentally unhealthy to concentrate in school. Students reported obscene notes, suggestive

cartoons, and graffiti on lockers as part of their normal existence in that hostile situation.

Sometimes it is not just students who inflict victimization. One student from a focus group in the study told a story about a security guard on the first day of school calling her a dyke and refusing to check her at the metal detector. The experience made her so uncomfortable, she refused to attend school.

Students described their vulnerability in areas, such as bathrooms, that they completely avoided them during the school day. One student, from the focus group, describes a stabbing that kept him out of school for three months. A transgender student who, after being thrown into a garbage can, refused to go to school for a year and attempted suicide. Finally, she was transferred to another school. Kosciw & Cullen (2001) reported 80 percent of LGBTQ received verbal harassment over a period of twelve months and 50 percent of the time the harassment happens frequently. Physical assaults, perpetrated because of sexual orientation, accounted for 20% of all assaults. Similarly almost ¾ of all students felt unsafe in school.

One-in-five reported physical assaults over the past year because of their sexual orientation, while one-in-ten reported being assaulted because of their gender identity or gender nonconformity. Overall, nearly 70 percent of the students reported feeling unsafe in school. As indicated by the students in all five focus groups in this study, many youth spent long periods of time not enrolled in school. Those who stayed in school, where they had been harassed or assaulted, indicated that they had a difficult time paying attention in class.(p37)

The study also addressed that LGBTQ youth not only experienced physical attacks at school, but also at home from their parents who banished them from their homes. The dangers

that face a LGBTQ youth who is homeless becomes another risk factor for them and the community at large.

If we explore name calling injuries from the homophobic perspective, we can also see the risks involved in injurious speech patterns. Athanases & Comar (2008) did a study investigating seventh grade students' perspectives on the frequency of hearing and using homophobic name-calling, reasons such language gets used, and reactions to hearing others use it. They labeled schools where seventh grade LGBTQ youth are expected to remain as "risk environments." They argue that because a LGBTQ student is actually sexually diverse from heterosexual norms in contrast, that the student is now seen as deviant. Lasser & Tharinger (2003) added that for a confused youth coming out the closet in such a risk environment will only foster a loss of self-esteem and fractured identity development. The environment is fraught with name calling, hostile remarks and homophobic language, much of which is heard outside of the teacher's view, but some do occur in public view with little or no reprimand. The age range at which this is happening is growing broader. O'Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub (2004) report that the high prevalence of bullying against LGBT youth shows a slight decline towards the high school years.

Everyone can admit the problem exists, yet teachers are unclear how to address the issue without some clear directive. Many schools in Canada and even South Africa have instituted large scale protection of LGBTQ rights. You can punish someone for name-calling, but how do you change the attitude that put the words in their mouths? Thurlow (2001) reports on the dangers of homophobic name calling. Even if not directly targeting LGBT youth, such language "pollutes the social-psychological environment" where these youth must live (p 26).

The vary nature of bullying is tied to name-calling. Name calling puts the bully in a position of power. Often you will hear the expression, “It is not what they said, it is how and most often who says the offending word.” Among a group of African-Americans, it may be perfectly acceptable to call each other the “N” word, or among a group of LGBTQ peers to jokingly refer to each other as “queens.” Graham & Juvonen (2002) discuss that an “in” group affiliation is established through name-calling that is intended to create a public identity for themselves (the bullies) over the victims. Athanases & Comar (2008) further report that male students hear the expression “that’s so gay” and “fag” more than 50% daily They also hear both expressions more frequently than female students.

Social acceptance among peers is intergal during the adolescent years. D’Augelli, Hershberger, and Pilkington (2001) did a study relating suicide attempts to sexual identity. The stress factors that add to suicide attempts include; disclosing sexual orientation to others, family conflict about same sex-orientation and romantic rejections. Out of the three hundred and fifty participants, aged between 14 and 21, about one-third had attempted suicide at least once. A later study showed increased rates when examining more specific predictors. D’Augelli, Grossman, Salter, Vasey, Starks, & Sinclair (2005) discovered that overall suicide rates for females were nationally higher than males, suicide rates for gay males were higher than lesbian females because males realize same sex attraction earlier than females and receive a greater lifetime of victimization (p. 647).An additional stress factor was the pressure from parents to behave in a gender “typical” manner befitting the dominant culture. They also addressed the earlier the child is victimized the greater the suicide rate appeared to be. This victimization included verbal abuse from parents.

D'Augelli, Grossman, Salter, Vasey, Starks, & Sinclair (2005) conclude the risks to LGBTQ youth during their adolescent years are greater than heterosexual youth because of the need to please parents can also involve suppressing same-sex desires and behaviors triggering negative emotional responses. This triggers isolation when combined with peer pressure, suicide seems like the easy way out.

In one of the most recent reports, Zhao, Montoro, Igartua, & Thombs(2010) suggest overall LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk for mental health problems than their heterosexual peers. The LGBTQ youth has a suicide rate of two to six times more than non-LGBTQ adolescents. Their risk factors include suicidal behavior, including depression, anxiety, alcohol and substance abuse, eating disorders, early sexual activity and more sexual partners, being victims of violence, family history of criminal offending, and family disruption.

Protective Factors

Incorporation of arts in a curriculum has shown benefits that not only build self-esteem and combat homophobia, but also increase competency in test scores and increase the success of the students in other areas of education Ebner (2006). Theater arts has shown to be effective in delivering messages about teen pregnancy, substance abuse, HIV awareness, peer pressure and domestic violence. Why not homophobia ? According to Halverson (2005), self-esteem was fostered in LGBTQ youth through story-telling. Halverson's study consisted of following twenty five LGBTQ youth that belonged to a theater company called About Face Youth Theater. Through written stories, both anonymously via internet website and workshop sessions, as well as one on one interview, the youth were able to work through their own issues of identity and stigma by seeing it performed by their fellow actors. For example, one story was where a self identified lesbian had a relationship with a transgendered biological female to male. The youth

described the situation as painful because it made her question her sexuality, yet the theatrical depiction allowed her to see the humor in the situation.

Similarly, the process proved to be useful from the opposite perspective as well. The story of a gay male who had to portray a transgendered biological male describes how that made him feel being able to empathize with somebody else's feelings. Lampert (2005) provides the following definition of empathy:

Empathy is what happens to us when we leave our own bodies...and find ourselves either momentarily or for a longer period of time in the mind of the other. We observe reality through her eyes, feel her emotions, and share in her pain (p. 157).

This feeling of empathy can be a tool used in theater. Bandura (1989) did research that supports the idea that theater can be an important tool for enhancing understanding regarding a variety of social issues. He explains the *enter-educate* approach relies heavily on social learning. This theory states that most behavior is learned through modeling. A person observes other people and uses their behavior as a model for future behavior. Educational theater in itself is a teaching tool for the changing of behavior. It is like the expression "walking in somebody else's shoes" (p. 76).

The use of arts is not only limited to theatrical arts. Visual arts contribute an important protective factor. For example, Ebner (2006) argues that therapists use art to get kids to express themselves even before they begin to write words, but after developing that skill by adolescence, adults disregard art as irrelevant to traditional curriculum studies. She feels that art in general triggers the part of the brain that inspires creativity and art should be incorporated into the curriculum as often as possible.

Pelton-Sweet and Sherry (2008) demonstrate that how using art therapy to examine sexual identity is very helpful in the coming out process for LGBTQ clients. One such example is the “Inside Me, Outside Me” activity. The client creates two self-portraits, a picture of how the public see them and a picture of how they see themselves. Her work demonstrated that LGBTQ clients draw two very different pictures. This opening exercise allows a straightforward forum for discussion.

Pelton-Sweet and Sherry (2008) also imply through their research that the ability to “come out” is a form of self-expression. To the contrary, not coming out has also been associated with HIV positive men advancing to AIDS at a rate of 40% above those who did come out (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, & Visscher, 1996). It is inferred that coming out is healthy in the sense that any kind of self-expression such as visual arts or performing arts adds a healing element to our lives. Examples like leisure activities, self-expressive hobbies, books, magazines, movies, internet chat rooms allow opportunities to find like-minded individuals to form social networks, which are a challenge to the LGBTQ youth seeking social acceptance. (Laura M. Pelton-Sweet, 2008)

Capacity for Funding

Background information and organizational capacity

The project comes out of the passion of Dale Madison, openly gay author of *Dreamboy: My Life as a QVC Host & Other Greatest Hits*. Madison is an actor, artist, and activist. As the co-founder of two non-profit theater companies, Actors Against Drugs (AAD) and Umoja SaSa! Storytellers, Madison is familiar with the use of theater as a learning tool. Through these and other companies, he has used the arts to educate.

- The risks of teenage sexuality

Family Circle Theater

- Reproductive health

Baltimore Council on Adolescent Parenting and Pregnancy Prevention

- Substance abuse and HIV/AIDS awareness

Actors Against Drugs

- The value of African and African-American oral history

Umoja Sasa! Storytellers

- Domestic Violence

East Baltimore Violence Prevention Project

In July of 1995, Dale Madison collaborated with Darryl LeMont Wharton, to create *FREEda SLAVE: MASK of A DIVA*. The 1995, the Artscape Festival in Baltimore selected their 45-minute work-in-progress and staged it in the Performance Art Division. The critically acclaimed one-man show, *FREEda Slave: Mask of a DIVA*, focuses on the life of a gay cross-

dresser. The Maryland State Arts Council awarded Madison the 1999 Individual Artist Award in Playwriting. In the summer of 1999, Madison moved the production to Los Angeles for a critically acclaimed run at the Hudson Backstage Theatre. Free access to performances was extended to homeless gay youth of Santa Monica Blvd.

Besides introducing taboos that are rarely spoken of in the African-American community, the production offered a rare forum on discrimination within the African-American gay community (e.g., cross-dressers versus gay men) *FREEda SLAVE: Mask of a DIVA* showed the triumph of the human spirit, as the character builds self-esteem throughout the course of the play. The play used masks as the overarching theme of the play to demonstrate people hid behind masks to survive in life. The universality of the theater piece resulted from its ability to illustrate the kinds of social masks people wear (i.e. mask of a masculine-acting son, mask of a bully, mask of a drag queen). *FREEda SLAVE* showed how those masks often inhibit personal growth, development, self-acceptance, and acceptance by others.

Theater, in general, allows people to vicariously experience the beliefs, attitudes, values, and general lifestyles of people they may have very little, if any, familiarity with. Theater allows the viewer to see into someone else's lifestyle from a distance. The audiences are allowed to "walk in someone else's shoes" for an hour and safely return the shoes when it is over. This well-known process of "walking in someone else's shoes" has been emphasized by social psychologist, Dr. Albert Bandura, in his social learning theory. Dr. Bandura proposes that much of how we experience the world is not direct, but indirect. This indirect experience is referred to as vicarious learning or modeling. Dr. Bandura's research supports the idea that theater can be an important tool for enhancing understanding regarding a variety of social issues (Bandura 1989).

Overall mission and goals

To use educational theater to lower risk factors of suicide and increase self-esteem in addressing LGBT self-esteem issues.

Services provided

- Produce original productions suitable for general audiences, but written specifically to cover issues of self-esteem, homophobia, intra-discrimination, cross dressing, and sexual identity.
- Provide a forum for the discussion of issues related to gender identity in the LGBT adolescent community.
- To distribute self-esteem building messages (concrete and abstract) that combat negative attitudes within and outside the LGBT community.
- To lower high school dropout rates and increase the visibility of LGBT students in high school and in college enrollment.

Development and Overall Mission

I observed the needs of the LGBT youth community through self-experience in the LGBT lifestyle. The use of theater as a healing tool proved successful in my own personal development and it seemed logical to theorize if could be successful if attempted on a larger scale. Milton Smith of Lifeworks approached me to be a mentor in a youth development and mentoring program at the LA Gay & Lesbian Center. I went through three-week training and a background check. Finally, I was matched with a youth who had a passion for the dance arts. My involvement also included volunteering as a chaperone for various events and doing a career

presentation. I also spoke on the creative process of writing my life story and coming-out experience. Upon informal inquiry, several youth were anxious to have a creative outlet for expression. Further inquiry resulted in discovering that Lifeworks is located next door to a theater space housed in the LA Gay and Lesbian Center. Logistically this could be a good fit to provide a performing arts program for their youth. The community benefits from positive relationships bringing positive things to society. LGBT people in socially accepted relationships with legal equality enrich the lives of everyone. A society that values the differences of its members and appreciates that everyone is the sum of their experiences from inception to the present moment, is one that seeks growth, including equality for all.

Services

Theater to Affect Social Change (LGBTheater) is an after school program dedicated to LGBT youth of Los Angeles. This program will target LGBT youth at risk and their allies using live performances as a theatrical, therapeutic and educational experience. LGBTheater empowers youth to educate and entertain audiences at the same time. Youth are volunteer participants. There will be no audition process to be included. Every participant will be encouraged to become involved in whatever capacity they are comfortable.

- Youth will use their life experiences to create theater that expresses the LGBT experience.
- Mentors in art, theater, film and movement will provide training in their respective fields.
- Research gay icons and incorporate LGBT history with life experiences

- Participants will create written literature, buttons, t-shirts, and posters with positive messages.
- Participants will participate in LGBT and non-LGBT events to spread positive messages
- Training in the Virtues Project(VP) will be an important portion of their development

The Virtues Project (VP) *virtues project (tm) international* founded in 1991 by Linda Kavelin Popov, Dr. Dan Popov, and John Kavelin, is a global grassroots initiative that uses the strategies of practicing virtues in everyday life. Families, educators, and leaders have used the Virtues Project as a process to heal violence with virtues, and to create safe and caring communities. Honored by the United Nations, one of the strategies focuses on language. It explains how language shapes character. The way we speak, and the words we use, have great power to discourage or to inspire. There are over eighty certified trainers in The Virtues Project in at least nineteen countries. (Popov, 2000) Training in the VP will provide an excellent way to enter into skills to handle a pre and post discussion of the performances.

We will need a staff of seven (although some duties can be absorbed into multiple positions): Director; Administration Assistant; music mentor; movement mentor; acting mentor; production coordinator and a Virtues Project facilitator. The staff should have an entertainment background and be an ally of the LGBT experience. Their knowledge of the LGBT community is integral to the success of the project. They need to understand the uniqueness of what LGBT youth deal with in their everyday lives and how to apply it into a performance piece that reflects that struggle. A VP facilitator will monitor and manage the variety of responses that come from the community (audiences) as well as the issues the individual performers bring when re-living their own experiences.

Demographics, Risk Factors and Participation

A group that ranges from 10 to 20 LGBT participants including all races between the ages 16 to 24 students will participate per cycle. A cycle can be a year round project. This is an after school program that uses three hours a day Monday through Friday.

Demographic samplings that support such a program list some of the risk factors. The Safe Schools Anti-Violence Project issued their third annual report in late 1996. It included the results of a survey of over 8,400 students in the state of Washington:

- 95% of the students described themselves as heterosexual; 5% as homosexual or bisexual, and 4% as uncertain.

Among the gay/lesbian/bisexual students:

- 34% had been harassed because of their sexual orientation.
- They were 3 times as likely to have been injured in a fight requiring medical attention than their heterosexual contemporaries.
- They were twice as likely to have seriously considered suicide.
- They were 75% more likely to report feeling unsafe at school.
- 6% of heterosexual youth reported being the victim of homophobic harassment.
- It is somewhat ironic that among students harassed because of their perceived sexual orientation, about 75% were actually heterosexual. Thus, heterosexuals are the main victims of homophobic harassment.

A 1999 survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual (LGBT) friendly youth organizations by the Gay Lesbian & Straight Educational Network (GLSEN) found that:

- 91% sometimes or frequently hear anti-gay comments such as *'faggot'* and *'dyke'* in school.
- 61% report verbal harassment
- Of those who reported verbal harassment, 46% reported that they experienced it daily.
- 47% report sexual harassment
- 28% report physical attacked.
- 38% did not feel comfortable speaking to school staff about LGBT issues.
- 58% say that they do not feel safe in school.

Outcome Objectives

- Youth will develop a deeper sense of belonging.
- Youth will increase their level of participation in the community.
- Participants will leave program as up-standers and independent performers of social justice themes.
- Participants will become self-sustaining artists of social change
- Youth will develop a deeper sense of identity
- Youth will develop leadership skills.
- Create the template for interactive educational theater productions that can be used to address a variety of social issues in the LGBT community.

Improvement

- Participants will develop empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills as the problem is addressed.
- Participants will place high value on equality and social justice which in turn will allow participants to identify their work as representing and serving larger LGBT youth community. Participants will act as mentors to new performers entering the program
- Youth's sense of themselves as individuals and as leaders will be informed by a strong sense of equality and social justice.

Sustainability

As director, I will commit for five years and seek the collaboration of LifeWorks for a five year commitment to grow the program into a network of LGBT theater companies that would produce an annual festival.

These improvements will result in an increase in program costs because we feel the project will inspire other students to want to be a part of it. As youth develop skills in scriptwriting, theatre performance and theatre production, more productions can be produced and wider locations can be added. To sustain the company, we propose to launch a traveling theater component to take educational messages to other locations with the goal of creating a national youth LGBT theater festival.

We will create a board of directors to oversee development. We will develop a PR campaign in collaboration with a major celebrity from the arts community to raise awareness of the presence of the performances and its importance to the community at large.

Summary of Theory of Action

This theory of action demonstrates the positive use of theater to address self-esteem issues. The social learning theory described by Dr. Albert Bandura has proven a successful model to use in health related problems. Bullying and suicide are very real social health problems. This TOA project can affect change in self-esteem for the actor by providing therapeutic expression and change attitudes vicariously for the audience (and bullies) by allowing them to see into someone else's lifestyle from a distance. The audiences are allowed to "walk in someone else's shoes" for an hour and safely return the shoes when it is over. The experience allows everyone to share beliefs, attitudes, values, and general lifestyles of people they may have very little, if any, familiarity with.

You have read the elements. A logic model maps out a clear plan with realistic outcomes. The need is evident as the climate of the country witnesses an epidemic of teen suicides related to lack of understanding of LGBT issues. Educational theater has produced positive outcomes in other socially relevant issues. The research from respected peers in the field of suicidology, LGBT experts, professors and educators provided in the literature review supports it can affect change in LGBT risk factors. A funding capacity is evident along with collaborations in place from LifeWorks and training in the Virtues Project.

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