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Queer Pedagogy: Performing Outside the Lines

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Dedication

This is dedicated to the gay black boys growing up in fatherless, poverty-stricken slums across America with mothers hustling to make a living. I see you.

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Abstract

Queer Pedagogy: Performing Outside the Lines

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This qualitative study reflects on my experiences as a queer pedagogue developing a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered/Transsexual, Questioning/Queer, and Ally (LGBTQA) youth theatre ensemble, *Outside the Lines*. Through the analysis of my pedagogy and the pedagogy of three practitioners affiliated with the Pride Youth Theatre Alliance, I explore how my queer culture, language, expression and politics influence my Applied Drama & Theatre practice within educational and community spaces. It is hoped that by inviting other practitioners and allies into my process this document will generate constructive dialogue around queer pedagogy and its fluid performance. Furthermore, this document aims to serve as a reference for future practitioners that work with queer youth and in queer spaces.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	01
Chapter 1 The Starting Line.....	03
Applied Drama and Theatre.....	03
Gender and Sexual Education.....	09
Pride Youth Theatre Alliance.....	18
Queer Pedagogy.....	20
Chapter 2 Walking the Line.....	24
Outside the Lines: Project Structure.....	24
Outside the Lines: Project Narrative.....	28
Chapter 3 Crossing the Line.....	38
Sara Kerastas (About Face Youth Theatre).....	39
Susan Haugh (Dreams of Hope).....	42
Brain Guehring (Pride Players).....	44
Outreach vs. Performance.....	47
Queer Pedagogy 2.0.....	50
Chapter 4 The Finish Line.....	52
Bibliography.....	58

Introduction

My journey as a queer scholar, educator, and artist is one of many paths—an assortment of paths that have led to this moment. I now invite others into my process. I spent the past calendar year developing Outside the Lines (OTL), a theatre ensemble for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, Queer/Questioning, and Ally (LGBTQA)¹ youth, and it has left me with a traveler’s tale. Within this year, the understanding of my own queer identity, pedagogy, and artistic practice grew exponentially. I invite you along for a ride as I navigate strangely familiar but uncharted territory. Bear witness to my mistakes, assumptions, revisions, roadblocks, insights, triumphs, and queerness.

Your invitation into my process—I hope—will be a varied experience that runs the gamut of the emotional spectrum. If anger strikes you and you need to give a guttural cry, please by all means. I also invite you to take a creative and critical eye to my pedagogical process as an emerging theatre scholar. A central goal is to connect to other queer scholars, educators, and artists practitioners. Secondly, this document seeks to generate constructive dialogue around queer pedagogy and its fluid performance. I investigate how my queer culture, language, expression and politics influence my Applied Drama & Theatre (ADT) practice within educational and community spaces. I put my practice in conversation with other practitioners from the Pride Youth Theatre Alliance (PYTA) to deepen this exploration.

¹ Some people also use GLBT, LGBT, LGBTQI, or LGBTQAI. The “I” stands for Intersex, a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male (Plourde 183). For the purposes of this document I will be using LGBTQA, unless a resource dictates otherwise. My omission of Intersex (and/or terms like Twospirit) is not a rejection of the identities; rather, LGBTQA is the primary acronym I have come across in my research. Moreover, the way the queer identities choose to label is fluid; thus, there is a resistance towards heteronormativity that sees gender and sexual identity as static.

This chapter, which also functions as the literature review, contextualizes several keywords, scholarly and artistic discourses, as well as queer politics relative to this research document and process. Think of this as your travel kit. It begins with my pedagogical denotation of the term Applied Drama & Theatre. From here, I assess school environments and the necessity for gender and sexual curriculum. I also give you an introduction to PYTA that outlines their mission. I conclude the chapter by revealing my usage of the term queer pedagogy and how it functions in my own process. I will be the first to admit that the scholars and resources referenced in this chapter are just a small portion of a larger discussion(s). I concede that the thesis document in its entirety is a reflection of my experiences as a person and practitioner —welcome!

Chapter 1: The Starting Line

APPLIED DRAMA & THEATRE

ADT encapsulates multiple connotations. It is one of those academic titles that in certain circles (like this research paper), everyone nods or makes some affirming inaudible sound indicating they are in the ADT inner circle. In research journals and publications, the title is usually followed with a colon and a somewhat abstract, yet insightful phrase or tagline. I like to think of it as the academic hashtag. James Thompson's *Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and Beyond*, Helen Nicholson's *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*, and Philip Taylor's *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community* are examples of how practitioners codify, converse, and operate within this field. The emergence of the terms 'applied theatre' and 'applied drama' in the 1980's and 1990's marked the shift among academics to name work that exists outside of mainstream theatrical settings intended to benefit individuals, communities, and societies (Nicholson 2). Whereas some practitioner circles may take a more educational focus within their ADT practice (Theatre in Education, Process/Story Drama, or Creative Drama), other circles may focus on marginalized populations, unconventional communities (business and medical), and/or power systems (political and social injustices). Nicholson affirms, "What is evident here is not only the different values and aspirations of the institutions and practitioners involved in applied drama, but the wide range of dramatic practices with which they are accompanied" (3). More importantly, each of the previously mentioned authors (and other ADT practitioners) speaks to a particular context and methodology within the ADT field of study. All of this to say, this work is greatly influenced by its context, and, to bring some clarity to how it will function in my research, let me oblige you with my connotation.

Whenever someone asks me what I do, I usually say the title of my M.F.A. program, Drama and Theatre for Youth & Communities (DTYC). If I happen to be in one of those aforementioned circles, I might add a hashtag like an ADT practitioner that works with LGBTQA youth. More often than not, I am not within those circles, and the blank look on the inquirer's face is a clear indicator of their lack of familiarity. Not that the inquirer is totally void of all artistic acronym decoding capabilities either. It seems the combination of queer politics and arts engagement is not in the common vernacular of everyday speech for many. After fielding numerous inquiries that led to even more vague understandings of my work, I developed a one sentence explanation to help non-ADT aficionados to join the inner circle. ADT is theatre in non-theatre settings with a focus on civil engagement. The success rate using this sentence has been better, but I cannot be certain if nodding and inaudible sounds are the "new polite." This sentence is the foundation of how I use the term ADT. In deconstructing this sentence, I attempt to reveal my theoretical foundation and how it is aligned with the research methodology of this document.

ADT is theatre. This is to say 'applied drama' and 'applied theatre,' respectively, are interdisciplinary in nature, "They draw on research in different branches of philosophy and the social sciences, notably cultural studies, cultural geography, education, psychology, sociology and anthropology, as well as contributing to research in drama, theatre and performance studies" (Nicholson 2). In her book, *Drama and Diversity: A Pluralistic Perspective for Educational Drama*, Sharon Grady offers a definition of applied drama that coincides with my practice. Grady states,

A 'process' approach implies that the work is primarily done for the benefit of the participants, rather than for an audience, in order to more fully examine subject matter, strengthen drama skills, and enhance critical thinking. Drama work

embraces many techniques, including games to enhance cooperative strategies, traditional games, and theatre games; story dramatization, in which a piece of literature is enacted improvisationally; process drama, in which a group—including the teacher—collectively embarks on a dramatic adventure by taking on various roles; and Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, including image theatre, which focuses on creating still images of concepts or ideas with bodies, as well as forum theatre work, in which improvisational scenes are replayed with various students replacing the protagonist as a way to explore other solutions to the problem under investigation. (4)

From Grady’s viewpoint, applied drama establishes a space for critical inquiry and play that permits participants to make connections, rehearse skills, problematize content, and envision new alternatives. Moreover, the process is not geared towards a performance with an audience; rather the process evokes a shift in understanding for the participants. In my process, I tailor strategies, games, narratives, pop-culture, and other artistic disciplines to the participants and community space. Even though we are using dramatic skills we are also engaging interpersonally. What’s most significant about Grady’s usage of the term is that it represents the bonds that must be established for this type of engagement to be genuine and sincere. Participants must trust and share power with the facilitator, and the facilitator must actively check and balance expertise and privilege.

ADT is theatre in non-theatre settings. The ability to extract dramatic techniques and place them in non-conventional theatre spaces with participants that potentially have limited exposure to theatre can enhance critical engagement. Philip Taylor states, “The theatre is an applied art form because it is through, and in, the theatrical experience that these issues can be most immediately addressed” (xxx). Taylor draws attention to theatre’s ability to make the impossible possible through imagination and role play. The extraction of dramatic pedagogy and application in communities comes with its own set of ethical considerations. Historically, ethical considerations within the ADT field are

noted in the establishment of settlement houses towards the end of the nineteenth century. The development of settlement houses in the 1880's by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett represented a gaining socialist influence in western philosophy; Nicholson affirms, "They believed that social change would only be possible when the material conditions of the poor improved" (28). Thus, settlement houses became spaces for impoverished families and communities to come and receive services that included education, culture, and the arts. Within in a couple of decades, American pioneers such as Alice Minnie Herts (Children's Educational Theatre) and Jane Addams (Hull House) found themselves at the head of their own settlement house, however the function of settlement houses in America were more concerned with immigrant populations. "Whereas the English reformers were primarily concerned with overcoming class division," Nicholson argues, "settlers at Hull House and other US Settlement Houses thought of theatre and other performative events as part of a process of Americanization" (33). Settlement houses were a necessity for many immigrant populations, as they homogenized social and moral values for early twentieth century America. This coercive and yet subtle assimilation is an unfortunate truth of ADT's history, but it also reveals some of the power and privilege that is inherent within this practice. Who has the ability to educate others? When we speak of sharing values, culture, and morals, how do we align our practice with a more pluralistic perspective? What does it mean for disenfranchised communities to achieve liberation through their own methods? These questions and many more are at the core of ADT debates. Sharon Grady eloquently remarks,

By embodying the practice of diversity—which involves self-consciously interrogating our own identity locations (including race, social class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation) and heightening our context sensitivity as we attend to the complex identities of our students and our audiences—I believe we

will be able to more confidently respond to diversity in the young people we find ourselves working with. (17)

Here Grady suggests the only way towards a more pluralistic practice is to name and question our own power and privilege, while staying aware of the varying identities of our targeted populations. As an ADT practitioner, I have to remind myself that communities with limited theatre experience may initially be cautious of this work because of its historical and social context (Thompson 2006). Moreover, many ADT practitioners do not belong to the communities they work with and must form deeper interpersonal connections before participants feel comfort sharing their experiences and investing in the work. Taking theatre outside of the theatre comes with its challenges with regards to ethical practices, but I believe that Philip Taylor understands what motivates many ADT practitioners. Taylor declares, “Applied theatre workers are driven by a desire to provide insight, to interrogate understandings of community, and to contemplate notions of the better, the just” (3).

Taylor’s quote speaks to the latter part of my ADT connotation. ADT is theatre in non-theatre settings with a focus on civil engagement. Civil engagement is synonymous with social justice, and, primarily, my ADT practice is centered on social justice discussions, performances, and/or workshops. I use civil engagement to distinguish the impact of the experience for the stakeholders. Either way, civil engagement allows for more discussion around the impact an ADT project has within a community. Helen Nicholson’s word preference is ‘transformation’ and ‘transportation’ (Nicholson 2005). Nicholson suggests that ‘transformation’ is more connected to ritualistic practices (as in a wedding) that are performed by social actors with ceremonial authority). In addition, the effects of the transformation are immediate and intended to last (Nicholson 12). This is what I think of when I hear the words social justice. Social justice evokes the imagery of

a significant shift in a societal value that generates lasting justice for disenfranchised communities. Nicholson posits, “‘Transportation’, however, is less fixed—performers are ‘taken somewhere’, actors are even temporarily transformed, but they are returned more or less to their starting places at the end of the drama or performance” (12). When I use the term civil engagement, I am referencing Nicholson’s definition of ‘transportation’ because it is a more accurate account of how my practice functions. James Thompson’s word choice is ‘bewilderment,’ he defends,

Bewilderment is a perplexed state created by transitions where that movement can include the shift to practicing a new form of theatre, the practice of that theatre in a different setting and the dislocation of communities caused by exclusion, violence, poverty or imprisonment. (25)

From Thompson’s perspective, it is the space in between the transportation and transformation where the forming of new behavior can develop. Thompson’s connotation of ‘bewilderment’ is influenced by his ADT work within prison and forefronts solidarity as a defining characteristic of ‘bewilderment,’ Thompson adds, “Bewilderment is also used to define an experience central to the lives of the many different communities in which applied theatre is practised ” (23). Again, this spectrum of difference in how practitioners measure ‘impact’ speaks to the variety of practice found in the ADT field, and it reveals some of the ethical concerns. In research with OTL, I confronted these questions of ideology, spaces and community, and impact.

ADT is theatre in non-theatre settings with a focus on civil engagement; and, it morphs with each community of participants. The latter statement is a central component of ADT work. ADT’s fluid and mobile shape reoccurred in my work and as I conversed with other practitioners. We were all negotiating our personal identity politics with respects to our participant populations. To give this some context, Bryant Keith

Alexander writes about this negotiation in his article, “Embracing the Teachable Moment: The Black Gay Body in the Classroom as Embodied Text.” Alexander notes, “I am interested in a situation in which the course content serves as the primary text and the gay identity of the teacher is the subtext through which the material, teaching, and classroom experiences are filtered” (250). Thus, as a self-identified gay black male, my queer experiences will potentially overlap and diverge from another LGBTQA body. Yes, both of us could be teaching the same content or working with the same population of participants, but our queer identities will inevitably shape what happens in the classroom. These constant negotiations serve as a way for me to acknowledge and challenge my power and privilege within the spaces I work.

GENDER AND SEXUAL EDUCATION

From a research stance, what might an ADT project look like with a group of LGBTQA teenagers? In the developmental and planning stages of a queer youth theatre ensemble, this question seemed to generate a host of other questions such as: What is the make-up of this LGBTQA community? Where are the spaces for such youth to build community? What resources are available to them? How do we build excitement and interest in the program? Who is already doing this work? Research started with schools. Since most adolescents spend a good amount of their day at school where there are a host of programs, electives, and/or clubs that are available to them. It was not until I refined my search to LGBTQA youth organizations, gay-straight alliances (GSA), and queer spaces within Austin, Texas that I began to wonder where were all the queer kids? A closer examination of the relationship between the Texas educational systems and LGBTQA youth began to illuminate the pejorative school climate these youth face each day.

The education system is where North American youth rehearse skills, behavior and knowledge influenced by their surrounding environments. Moreover, these settings are impacted by race, class and gender respectively. Reports from scholars and practitioners within these environments denote the ever changing climate of our educational system. Susan Birden's book, *Rethinking Sexual Identity in Education*, posits that an astounding ninety seven percent of youth surveyed report regularly hearing homophobic remarks by their peers (1). The usage of homophobic remarks is so common that the American Association of University Women reported that being called 'lesbian' or 'gay' is the most upsetting form of sexual harassment experienced by youth (Birden 1). This is further substantiated by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network's² (GLSEN) school climate report for the state of Texas.

Findings from the GLSEN 2011 *National School Climate Survey* demonstrate that Texas schools were not safe for most lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) secondary school students. In addition, many LGBT students in Texas did not have access to important school resources, such as having a curriculum that is inclusive of LGBT people, history, and events, and were not protected by comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment school policies. (GLSEN website)

David Campos' book, *Understanding Gay and Lesbian Youth: Lessons for Straight School Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators*, was inspired by the stories he encountered from students that were subject to bullying and discrimination not only by their peers, but also from teachers, administrators, and other academic personnel. In his book, Campos illustrates the importance of gender and sexual education for the entire

² Almost all [students] heard "gay" used in a negative way (e.g., "that's so gay") and nearly 9 in 10 heard other homophobic remarks (e.g., "fag or "dyke") regularly at school. Nearly 9 in 10 regularly heard other students in their school make negative remarks about how someone expressed their gender, such as comments about someone not acting "feminine" or "masculine" enough. Students also heard biased language from school staff. 32% regularly heard school staff make negative remarks about someone's gender expression and 26% regularly heard staff make homophobic remarks. (GLSEN website)

school community. Campos connects a lack of gender and sexual education within schools to court cases such as *Jamie Nabozny v. Podlesney*, *Derek Henkle v. The Washoe County School District*, and *Timothy Dahle v. The Titusville Area School District* (44). The usage of the term gender and sexual education encompasses topics of women's and LGBTQA equality. Paul V. Poteat emphasizes how homophobic attitudes, language, and behavior can be greatly influenced by peers. In Poteat's article, "Peer Group Socialization of Homophobic Attitudes and Behavior During Adolescence," his study concludes that young adult males have a higher tendency to engage in homophobic acts to exercise or reinforce masculinity. Robert Heasley and Betsy Crane add to Poteat's analysis of adolescent masculinity in their article, "Queering Classes: Disrupting Hegemonic Masculinity and the Effects of Compulsory Heterosexuality in the Classroom". Heasley and Crane argue,

These boys (the sissies, the fems, the artists, the dancers) queer the meaning of masculinity. This queering could be considered a gift, as it expands the definition of what is and can be "masculine." Yet this queer type of masculinity does not find a place in the center of schools culture. Behaviors, interests, and ways of expression of such boys are not integrated into the curriculum. (101)

Whereas some school communities are timid to include queer identities into the learning process, Heasley and Crane name it as a gift that further expands the way students understand their identity. These examples are a minuscule representation of LGBTQA youths' experiences within the education system; however, they highlight that a lack of gender and sexual education can leave LGBTQA youth marginalized and without support educators and administration³.

³ LGBT students in Texas most often do not have access to in-school resources and supports. Only 5% attended a school with a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy that included specific protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Nearly all could identify one school staff

Some school communities have become more responsive as the rise of violent behavior and language impacts school culture. Currently, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) is a site designation for the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) No Place for Hate diversity campaign. Launched in Austin schools in the Fall of 2004, the popular initiative has been embraced by hundreds of campuses throughout the Central Texas region. The need for programs like No Place for Hate that include gender and sexual education⁴ are necessary for the social and emotional development of adolescents. This is not just about students that identify as LGBTQA. It also encapsulates those students that are perceived outside the normative of school culture—a school culture infused with heterosexism (O'Connor 1995). Moreover, teachers and school staff lack professional development addressing gender issues. Not because they do not want to incorporate gender education into their classroom, but gender inequality in schools can be a controversial subject in itself. The first of two major goals of the No Place for Hate campaign is to provide teachers and students with resources that merge diversity education into classroom curriculum. Secondly, No Place for Hate strives to create and sustain an environment where students feel valued and empowered to challenge bigotry and bullying. The ADL's curriculum is structured around subjects of civil rights, immigration, extremism/terrorism, hate crimes, and bullying.

The immediate object of the League is to stop, by appeals to reason and conscience and, if necessary, by appeals to law, the defamation of the Jewish people. Its ultimate purpose is to secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens

member of LGBT students, but only 48% could identify many (6 or more) supportive school staff. Many did not have LGBT-inclusive curricular resources: only 11% were taught positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events, and only 32% could access information about LGBT communities on school internet. (GLSEN website)

⁴ The Performing Justice Project – a program created by the Center for Women's and Gender Studies Department at The University of University of Texas at Austin and partners with locale high schools to engage students in gender and racial justice.

alike and to put an end forever to unjust and unfair discrimination against and ridicule of any sect or body of citizens. (ADL website)

The curriculum does not include gender and sexual education which raises awareness about injustices that are suffered due to gender and gender identity. Because gender and sexual education is not outlined in the curriculum, there is no certainty that school communities will address this impactful component of justice. If the ADL is to live up to its mission statement, then gender and sexual equality should be added to the campaign's curriculum.

Standing up to bullies and against bigotry is never easy – particularly for young people. This is why ADL's No Place for Hate initiative empowers the whole school community – teachers and students, administrators and parents – to confront prejudice, bullying and intergroup conflict. (ADL website)

Whereas the addition of gender and sexual education to the ADL's curriculum is a closer step towards equality for LGBTQA youth within our schools, I also recognize that increased awareness of gender and sexual injustices is a systemic issue. Despite the systemic challenges of instituting gender and sexual education and equality, GLSEN recommends that failure to do so will further marginalize LGBTQA young people,

Given the high percentages of LGBT students in Texas who experience harassment at school and the limited access to key resources and supports that can have a positive effect on their school experiences, it is critical that Texas school leaders, education policymakers and other individuals who are obligated to provide safe learning environments for all students take the following steps: implement comprehensive school anti-bullying/harassment policies; support Gay-Straight Alliances; provide professional development for school staff on LGBT student issues; and, increase student access to LGBT-inclusive curricular resources. (GLSEN website)

ADT has many forms and is not confined by my previous definition. Two examples are theatre for young audiences (TYA)⁵ and educational theatre, which represent the more common interactions most youth in North American have with the theatrical arts. When we survey the relationship between TYA and educational theatre, again, gender marginalization and heterosexism is prominent. The history of North American TYA has a rich and varied past of plays that both delight and educate young audiences about cultures, identities, morals, and a connection to the world at large. However, a closer look at this vibrant past it is also vital to interrogate some of the norms and themes presented in these plays in order to continue to better serve our youth. Professor Annie Giannini in her article, “Young, Troubled, and Queer: Gay and Lesbian Representation in Theatre for Young Audiences,” challenges TYA practitioners to produce plays including queer representations of homosexuality that challenge the prevailing notion that being gay can only ever mean trouble for young people (2). Giannini not only acknowledges that very little work speaks to the LGBTQA youth experience, but she also claims that what is available portrays queer youth identity in a somber light. Giannini’s article is mainly a literary analysis on where the TYA field is currently with the representation of queer youth. *The Children’s Hour* by Lillian Hellman, *Tea and Sympathy* by Robert Anderson and *The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufman is where Giannini begins her critical look at how queer youth and themes are portrayed in theatre. These selections were chosen based on their popularity and the possible likelihood to be shown to a youth audience at the secondary level. It should also be noted that the aforementioned plays were not originally written for youth audiences,

⁵ “In most of the world TYA means professional performance to children and young people by adults or children under adult direction, drawing on the professional theatre traditions of each culture” (Harman).

however they included queer youth identities and themes. However, Giannini argues that these models, as ground breaking as they are, perpetuate heteronormativity. For example, “Plays that reinforce heteronormativity support the idea that homosexuality is never desirable but that it is always an affliction that leads to punishment, psychically and/or psychologically” (Giannini 4). The protagonists in each of these plays suffer severe bullying, physical abuse, and psychological distress. Giannini argues this does not resonate well with young audiences as an accepted identity; rather, it cautions them to never end up like the unfortunate characters in these plays. Giannini’s methodology to counter heteronormativity is,

A queer play for young audiences breaks away from the restrictions of the anti-gay-bashing genre by including: (1) the articulation and representation of same sex desire; (2) manifestations of homosexuality both within and beyond sexual identity categories; (3) fun in homosexuality; (4) communities that embrace homosexuality; and (5) the extension of queerness beyond able-bodied, white, middle-class males. (6)

What Giannini provides with this framework is a way to shift the melancholy and tragic narratives of TYA plays of queer youth from victim-hood to resilience and empowerment. Additionally, she recognizes the need to expand queer themes to queer communities of color. Not only does this connect to Grady’s usage of pluralistic practice, but it also highlights ADT’s potential to support and empower marginalized identities.

Giannini applauds the TYA field for the growth that has occurred but still encourages more. *Vin* by Stephen House, *Yellow on Thursday* by Sara Graefe, and *The Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger are three plays that Giannini offers as a step in the right direction, and these plays are intended for youth audiences. These TYA plays feature LGBTQA youth finding humor in their personal queerness and heterosexual

environments such as high school; dealing with socio-economic issues as the nucleus of the play and not sexual identity; and challenging the prescribed, generic norms for LGBTQA identities shaped by contemporary popular culture and mass media. Giannini's article presents a larger issue because it brings into question whether TYA can include same sex attraction without making sexual identity its central problem. Giannini's call-to-action challenges the TYA field to incorporate socially conscious gender representation and education into new works. Clearly, I agree with Giannini; however, I think that Giannini's call-to-action can go a step further and include themes about transsexual and transgendered identities. Even within the LGBTQA community trans identities oftentimes receive a back seat to the Lesbian and Gay agendas for fear of pushing allies and heterosexual counterparts away⁶. Giannini's most thought-provoking claim speaks to queer communities of color. Out of all of the plays she reviewed, most of them speak from a white queer perspective. Where are the plays that speak to the experiences of queer youth of color? Why is queerness primarily represented through progressive white normativity? Some practitioners, like Giannini, advocate for more TYA literature that represents LGBTQA young people as resilient and empowered. Other practitioners place more emphasis on the inclusion of these plays within TYA companies' production seasons. I believe that through the development of plays that portray the LGBTQA youth experience as inclusive of community, positivity, and social equality this will transfer to TYA stages, which include educational theatre programs in schools across North America.

⁶ "Transgender students have the highest average levels of victimization when compared to non-transgendered LGB students" (Greytak 18).

Jennifer Chapman's dissertation study, "The Theatre Kids: Heteronormativity and High School Theatre," investigates how high school theatre might serve to challenge assumptions about gender practices as they relate to sexual orientation. The three main guiding questions in Chapman's research are:

What are the ideological boundaries that contain high school theatre historically and in contemporary practice? How does the "best practice" of the field of theatre/drama education respond to these boundaries? How is the normalization of heterosexuality—a significant ideological boundary—challenged or reified by high school theatre pedagogy and play production? (32)

Chapman explores these questions through interviews with theatre educators who exemplify the "best practice" of the field. Chapman defines, "those with formal training in theatre, with completed graduate study, and with teaching assignments that included classroom instruction and play direction" (34). Chapman's most significant insight is her exploration of the common assumptions of the function of high school theatre,

Theatre has the potential to teach 'life skills' and is thus important beyond its ability to teach within its discipline; play productions will be something that students, parents, and younger siblings can attend; students actors should not engage in on-stage behavior that is not allowed in the school at large; plays should not be overtly sexual or have non-heterosexual characters (unless for the purpose of a joke); and theatre class or drama club is an alternative to playing sports and thus occupies an 'unmasculine' space in high school society. (32)

The conclusions of Chapman's research notes that "best practice" theatre educators are addressing these issues subtly, but not without support from parents, administration, faculty, and constant attention to the significance of the theatrical work to the community at large. Hence, this is a very slow process that involves a high level of risk taking and relationship building. The major concern here is that not all theatre educators fall under

the ‘best practice’ umbrella. Furthermore, some theatre educators work in school communities where they are not at liberty to address homophobia and heterosexism for fear of losing their jobs. In these situations, theatre educators can, figuratively, have their hands tied. Chapman asserts,

High school theatre, much like the students it serves, lives in an awkward, in-between space that is not for children and not quite for adults; it is taken more seriously than the annual fifth-grade pageant, but less so than adults playing adult roles. (37)

On the one hand, without the guidance of attentive and thoughtful theatre educators, the efficacy of theatre education will further negate discussions around socially conscious gender and sexual education; on the other, the work is happening, but its form is still somewhat elusive. This is why I believe a queer youth theatre ensembles are one space where LGBTQA educators and youth can openly dialogue, create, and perform content that speaks to the LGBTQA youth experience.

PRIDE YOUTH THEATRE ALLIANCE

The PYTA is a national network of arts organizations from across the U.S. and Canada with programs focused on LGBTQA youth theatre. Supported by the Mukti Fund, PYTA has received upwards of \$800,000 in grants since 2009 to promote successful models for LGBTQA youth theatre programming. If you add the LGBTQA youth initiatives that the Mukti Fund has supported since 2005, this philanthropic organization has invested about \$1,400,000 in gender and sexual education (Mukti Fund website). Currently, the PYTA consists of twenty two national and international ensembles for LGBTQA youth. The structure and goals of each program varies, but all members adhere to PYTA’s mission.

The Pride Youth Theater Alliance connects and supports queer youth theater organizations, programs, and professionals committed to empowering lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and allied (LGBTQA) youth in North America. (PYTA website)

As theatre scholars Chapman and Giannini have articulated, many educational theatre programs, and TYA plays, respectively, represent LGBTQA youth as marginalized and/or reinforces heteronormative practices. PYTA's mission, however, works to counter these challenges, "Most importantly, PYTA is an opportunity to support the insight and resilience of LGBTQA youth and provide them with safe spaces for creative expression to tell their own stories" (PYTA website). When Creative Action, an arts organization in Austin, received a Mukti Fund grant in 2012 to develop a queer youth theatre ensemble this presented a unique opportunity to build community and space for LGBTQA young people. As part of my graduate research, I partnered with Creative Action as a co-director of the ensemble. Through this partnership, I arrived at the second major goal of this research document, which is to investigate how my queer culture, language, expression and politics influence my ADT practice within educational and community spaces. To refer back to Alexander, how does my gay, black male identity shape my usage of ADT methodologies within in educational and community spaces? Whereas many ADT practitioners work in communities outside of their own, this experience closely related to my personal, professional, and artistic identities. To deepen this exploration, I interviewed three artistic directors of queer youth theatre ensembles from the PYTA—Sara Kerastas (About Face Theatre—Chicago, Illinois), Brian Guehring (Pride Players—Omaha, Nebraska), and Susan Haugh (Dreams of Hope—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)—about their programs. This engagement with these artistic directors led me to interrogate what influences were at play in the development of the ensemble in

Austin, Texas. Moreover, it compelled me to write about this process as a reflective practitioner with the hope of gaining insight into what practices and strategies most adequately serve LGBTQA youth populations. The inclusion of this network into my research process provided a collection of resources and support as I help establish a new youth theatre in Austin.

QUEER PEDAGOGY

My experiences developing a queer youth theatre ensemble made me question what queer pedagogy is; and, more precisely, how do my queer identity and politics appear in my ADT pedagogy? In this document, queer pedagogy uses queer culture, language, expression and politics in educational and community spaces with the purpose of sustaining critical dialogue, interpersonal depth, creative play and agency. I am still heavily situated in ADT pedagogical frames within my personal pedagogy. Paulo Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is a major voice in the North American ADT field. Many scholars and practitioners still reference his theories of anti-oppression and social activism as a foundation for ADT pedagogy. Freire warns,

Unfortunately, in the United States, many educators who claim to be Freirean in their pedagogical orientation mistakenly transform Freire's notion of dialogue into a method, thus losing sight of the fact that the fundamental goal of dialogical teaching is to create a process of learning and knowing that invariably involves theorizing about the experiences shared in the dialogue process. (17)

This returns us to the somewhat elusive form ADT can become. Freire argues that his pedagogy cannot be reduced to a standardized method for actuating transformation, rather his pedagogical form uses dialogue to invite participants to reflect on their experiences throughout the ADT experience. If anything, this seems to be the one staple of Freire's pedagogical process. When participants—in this case, youth—are engaged in these

dialogical processes they are co-constructing meaning from their lived experiences and of those also in the room. Freire trusts, “Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence” (91). It is this exchange that makes Freire’s pedagogy so relative to ADT research and pedagogy. Based on the issues that LGBTQA youth face, Freire’s approach offers an opportunity for youth to converse and raise awareness around oppressive behavior, language, and systems of power. Thompson sustains, “A lack of developed perception is widely understood as central to the problems faced by certain groups of adolescents” (71). I argue that an ADT project for LGBTQA youth is one method to build resilient and constructive skills to address heterosexism and a lack of gender and sexual education. Freire poignantly comments,

Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (34)

Not only do I believe that gender and sexual education has the potential to reduce and counter homophobic and heterosexist norms, but it grants LGBTQA young people an integral part in reshaping school environments. As it currently stands, the Texas education system is an oppressive instrument stifling the success, safety, and development of LGBTQA youth; however, this instrument has the potential to reeducate school communities to be more inclusive of LGBTQA identities.

The purpose of my queer pedagogy is to sustain critical dialogue, interpersonal depth, creative play and agency. What makes my pedagogy particularly queer? The short answer is that I am a queer body. Queer pedagogy uses queer culture, language,

expression and politics in educational and community spaces. As a self-identified queer person, I live the queer experience and culture. I socialize with other queer artists and LGBTQA identities to gain a more inclusive understanding of the queer community. From this standpoint, queer politics and social discourses reveal facets of queer identity. Furthermore, queer forms of language and expression are used to embody the queer experience. I am not suggesting that non-queer identities are forced to comply with my queer politics, but in an ADT project both non-queer and queer identities are invited to engaged in a process of sharing perspectives. Sharon Grady's usage of the term 'pluralistic perspective' is applicable in this context. Grady comments,

I've witnessed far too many drama lessons that had no connection with (or recognition of) culturally diverse groups of students—where White middle-class views of the world were assumed to be the 'universal' experience for contexts in which they simply were not. (17)

As it stands, numerous practitioners and educators lack a pluralistic perspective in regards to LGBTQA youth and gender and sexual education. Even as a queer educator, I continue to exercise a pluralistic approach when working within queer spaces because queer identity alone does not equate solidarity. I must also be conscious of my male, scholastic, and artistic privileges and assumptions in relation to the educational and communities I inhabit. Throughout the remainder of thesis document, I will return to this denotation of queer pedagogy and how it shifted my perspective and practice throughout my research process. Not only was I surprised by how queer pedagogy varied with each practitioner that I interviewed, but I was excited to see how these innovative processes interacted with youth populations.

In my examination of the ADT field, I highlighted distinctions between drama and theatre, the spatial dynamic of communities in which these projects occur and the

influence of social justice pedagogies. I also noted that many intentional and socially conscious practitioners work in communities outside of their own. The relevance of this section lays the foundation for how I constructed my research process and design. Thus, I reference ADT scholars and practitioners that influence and inform my work. Of course, I cannot represent the full spectrum of the field within this document, but I have provided an established theoretical frame to situate future analysis. From here, I assessed school environments and the necessity for gender and sexual curriculum. North America's student population is diversifying not only in the categories of race and class, but gender injustice has reached a systemic level. More than ever, schools are a place where LGBTQA youth are subjected to heterosexism and oppressive behavior, language and assault. The publications of national research studies and scholars further supports that the lack of gender education in our school communities promotes this pejorative for LGBTQA youth. The good news is that there are people taking action. The ADL's No Place for Hate campaign has gained considerable popularity across North America, but the omission of gender and sexual education in the curriculum adds to the lack of agency and resources for LGBTQA identities. The situation becomes almost too bleak to bear when we survey the troubled and victimized representations of LGBTQA youth in theatre for young audiences. Moreover, educational theatre programs can be a place to challenge heterosexism and gender normativity, but resources, school community, and subject content regulate the impact of the program. This leads us back to a question I asked earlier: from a research stance, what might an ADT project look like with a group of LGBTQA teenagers?

Chapter 2: Walking the Line

Chapter two focuses on the development and structure of OTL. I will take a closer look at several pivotal administrative decisions and community factors that shaped the narrative of OTL. In the midst of those decisions is where the structure and function of this ensemble became most relevant. The chapter begins with an articulation of the initial project structure which includes stakeholders, space, and goals. Conceived in conversations with my co-director, Patrick Torres, this section highlights the early developmental stages of the ensemble. I return to questions posed in chapter one such as; from a research stance, what does an ADT project look like with a group of LGBTQA teenagers? What is the make-up of this LGBTQA community in Austin, Texas? Where are the spaces for them to build community? What resources are available to them? How do we build excitement and interests in this program? Who is already doing this work? Throughout the developmental year of OTL, 2013, the ensemble produced and presented two shareformances⁷; however, I spend the latter part of this chapter discussing some of the successes and challenges of the first shareformance. My intention is not to give a daily account of how the ensemble progressed over the course of a full calendar year, rather I hone in on the moments that noticeably impacted the trajectory of the ensemble in its initial four months.

OUTSIDE THE LINES: PROJECT STRUCTURE

The Mukti Fund, an organization that funds gender and sexual education, has supported twenty one LGBTQA youth ensembles since 2008, and OTL would become

⁷ A shareformance is a combination of an informal sharing and theatrical performance. Thus, the focus is more on sharing content and themes that feed critical discussion, and less on presenting a finalized theatrical production.

the twenty-second. Creative Action is a local arts organization in Austin whose mission is “to spark and support the academic, social and emotional development of young people” (Creative Action website). A partnership between Out Youth, Austin’s only LGBTQA youth organization outside of educational settings, and Creative Action laid the foundation for OTL’s creation. In application, this partnership would draw participants and rehearsal space from Out Youth, a co-director, Patrick Torres, from Creative Action, and fiscal support from the Mukti Fund. My involvement with OTL resulted from the need for a queer identified co-director. This returns to a point I made in chapter one about ADT practitioners who work outside of communities with which they identify. This scenario exemplifies why some ADT scholars argue that work with marginalized populations requires practitioners that identify with said population. Torres identifies as a heterosexual, Latino male. And, as a self-identified gay, black male this meant that OTL was co-directed by two men of color, one being a member of the queer community, and both outside the lines. Hence, there were varying layers where our gender, sexual, and racial identities converged and diverged with potential participants of the ensemble.

With the team together and excitement high, Torres and I began meeting in December of 2012 to plan for the imminent sessions. In considering, what a LGBTQA youth theatre ensemble might look like, we went directly to PYTA for a framework(s) to follow. We found that each ensemble was different in numerous ways. In our initial research we noticed the ensembles, primarily, diverged along the lines of participants’ needs, rehearsal space, varying connotations of theatre, and overall mission. Beneath these distinctions, we knew that race, class, and gender identity/expression were also specific to each ensemble. In chapter three, I give more details about the ensembles we drew from the most through the PYTA artistic directors I interviewed. Our survey of

PYTA led us to ask more questions about Austin, Texas to better understand the setting of the ensemble.

Austin is a rapidly growing city. In fact, if you visit the World Population Statistics website, you will find that since 1990 Austin's population has grown from 497,154 to 820,611 (World Population Statistic website). A closer look at the racial demographics of Austin reveals,

The largest racial demographic in the city is the white demographic, which makes up about 49% of the population. The next largest demographic is the Hispanic or Latino group, which makes up about 35% of the population. The Black or African American population makes up only 8% of the population. Also, the Asian population of the city is about 6% of the overall population. (World Population Statistic website)

Further investigation discloses that Austin does not have a designated neighborhood or commercial district for its LGBTQA community; instead, many queer periodicals confidently promote Austin's gay friendly attitude as a result of queer identities, businesses, and families city wide distribution. Christopher Carbone, former editor of *L Style G Style*, claims that Austin's LGBTQA scene has it all, "Unlike many places, which have only one or two areas known as 'gay districts,' Austin's LGBT residents are truly everywhere. And proud of it" (Carbone). The Austin Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (AGLCC) lists over thirty organizations that provide various services to the LGBTQA community. The AGLCC also hosts their annual Pride Festival, which is the largest in Central Texas. From an outsider's perspective, Austin, unlike other areas of Texas, is what some would describe as a liberal haven for LGBTQA identities. Before I discuss those services and organizations specifically for LGBTQA youth, it is important to note that despite Austin's good reviews there are still tensions within the LGBTQA

community around representation of queer people of color and transsexual/transgendered identities. Austin's largest racial demographic is Caucasian, which transfers into the LGBTQA community. I agree with Carbone that Austin's LGBTQA community has much to offer with respect to tolerant perspectives; however, the primary benefactors of this 'diverse' scene are white, homosexual men. This challenged Torres and I to brainstorm ways to invite other queer youth identities into the ensemble.

The aforementioned stats primarily referenced adult LGBTQA populations, but resources for LGBTQA youth are even harder to come by. Out Youth is the only LGBTQA youth organization in Austin outside of education settings. Their mission reads,

Out Youth promotes the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social well being of sexual and gender minority youth so that they can openly and safely explore and affirm their identities. Out Youth envisions a world where sexual and gender minority youth receive the support needed to develop positive self-images, empower themselves and become active citizens in their communities. (Out Youth website)

In addition, Out Youth is the headquarters for all of Texas' Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA). As Torres and I continued to develop OTL, our partnership with Out Youth seemed more important than ever. Out Youth's access to counselors, weekly youth programming activities, and space allocation just for LGBTQA youth were incentives for our partnership. Moreover, Out Youth's connection to Texas' GSA network was a starting point to locate youth that would be interested in this project. The project narrative of OTL, conversely, revealed the constraints of our partnership due to Out Youth's lack of student participation, poor administrative infrastructure, and mission.

OUTSIDE THE LINES: PROJECT NARRATIVE

The first iteration of OTL did not come with many expectations. Essentially, the program would consist of six two hour weekly sessions with a concluding shareformance. The content, design, and focus of the sharing would be constructed between the participants and facilitators. Torres and I agreed to manage the ensemble from a co-facilitator/director stance, which meant we shared the administrative and creative responsibilities. Because the development of the ensemble was so new, we spent a lot of time discussing the project workload. Torres agreed to oversee the administrative duties: communication with Out Youth, Pride Youth Theatre Alliance funding, Creative Action policies, and participant recruitment. My responsibilities would include writing session plans, communication with youth participants, and production elements (i.e. sound, lights, properties, etc.). Over the course of the six sessions, Torres and I would co-facilitate activities at Out Youth that would explore themes relative to LGBTQA youth through creative and dialogic strategies. Based on these strategies and group conversations, the participants would move into a play building process to construct the shareformance. Though we experienced many successes, we also encountered several hurdles throughout our tenure at Out Youth.

Prior to the actual start of OTL, Torres and I spent four weeks visiting Out Youth during their regular programming to observe and build interest in the theatre ensemble. The environment was cozy due to the home like environment of the residential location. The youth that attended seemed familiar with each other as well as the counselors, volunteers, and employees. With several casual sitting areas located throughout the house and a well-stocked kitchen, youth roamed and conversed leisurely. This is what Out Youth calls ‘drop-in,’ where you can stop by, grab a snack, and hang out with peers.

After 30 minutes or so, the programming director would call everyone together for the evening's programming, which could range from group conversation, video/board games, music videos/movies, and/or arts and crafts. The evening concluded the same way it began after the youth completed said activity.

We had hoped that our participation in Out Youth's events and programming over the course of a month would aid Torres and me with the preparation for our program. First, we wanted the youth to see us in the space before we actually started our program. Secondly, we wanted to recruit new and acquainted youth to join OTL through more casual interactions, instead of just dolling out fliers and making official announcements. Whereas the young people that talked and interacted with us during our visits were amicable and genuinely seemed interested in the program, they also had other reasons for attending Out Youth. For some young people Out Youth provided food and shelter after school, and a place to meet up with friends. For others, it was a time for them to get away from home or other hostile environments and be surrounded by peers. Even though there had been previous attempts to add drama and theatre initiatives to the drop-in programming, it was inconsistently offered and not prioritized by Out Youth staff or administration. Thus, the start of OTL seemed ominous despite our enthusiasm and investment.

OTL went through three major developmental stages over the course of four months. After the first two sessions, which were attended by two to three participants, attendance diminished and youth stopped showing up. I have briefly outlined these phases to provide more of a context of how Torres and I problem solved our way through the ups and downs of establishing a LGBTQA youth theatre ensemble. Each phase taught us something new, and challenged us to make this ensemble a reality.

In the initial phase of the ensemble, from January – February 2014, Torres and I left the details of the ensemble loose ended. We were anxious about using too much vocabulary or parameters to define what the ensemble was before Torres and I even knew what it was. We also wanted the youth to know the focus of this ensemble was not strictly theatre. During the observation period, some youth expressed concerns about their lack of theatre training. In response to their concerns, we designed the first couple of session plans as entry points for ensemble members to inform us of the focus and potential name of the ensemble. Whereas the six sessions would culminate with a shareformance that could draw from theatrical performance techniques, we also expressed our candor to take the ensemble in another artistic or thematic direction if the participants wanted. Attendance at our initial sessions was inconsistent, and we never received assured commitment from the youth. Torres and I tried to connect with Texas GSA directors during the construction of OTL but never received confirmation or interest in the program. After several email and phone call attempts to connect with GSA directors, Torres and I relinquished our pursuit to avoid harassment. So we went back to the drawing board and tried to find another way to build youth participation.

The second phase of OTL, which began March 1st, 2013, had a bit more clarity. We decided one reason youth participation was low was because we left the description of the ensemble too open ended. Perhaps the youth would be more likely to participate if they knew more of what they were signing up for. The focus of the ensemble shifted to re-authoring fairytale narratives to include queer identities. We were only able to try this session with one participant, unfortunately, it was not received well. The re-authoring of fairytale narratives seemed like a good idea, but with attendance low it was hard to get a clear sense of how youth would respond. At this point, Torres and I

encountered some administrative infrastructure problems at Out Youth and participation pretty much ended. We made a risky choice and decided to cancel the next three weeks of sessions and work on recruitment and the re-launching of the project. After three months of trying to establish OTL at Out Youth, Torres and I decided that it would be best to try a new space that could better accommodate the intentions of the ensemble.

As participation for the ensemble waned throughout the development of the ensemble, Torres became concerned about his identity as a straight male in a queer space with queer youth. Torres' fears mainly stemmed from a sense of not belonging and lack of expertise in gender education to lead the ensemble. From a researcher's standpoint, I was fascinated by Torres' concerns around ethical practice because it was something that I had not thought of. As a queer person in a queer space, I directly identified with this community and my solidarity granted me access and expertise to do this work. However, in the context of creating a youth theatre ensemble that focuses on LGBTQA themes, what is the role of straight allies? How can allies have expertise or a sense of belonging in predominantly queer spaces? Furthermore, in a city where the largest racial demographic is Caucasian, what does it mean to have two men of color co-directing a youth ensemble? Nelson Rodriguez in his article "Queer Theory and the Discourse on Queer(ing) Heterosexuality: Pedagogical Considerations" coins the term, 'Queer critical care,' which speaks to Torres' concerns.

"Queer critical care," then, is the practice by which the straight self begins to understand and respond to the complex processes of heterosexual subjection and the ontological and epistemological limitations such subjection creates for living an ethical and more free life, both in relation to itself and in its relations with the GLBTQ "Other." (282)

Torres' extreme awareness of his identity and the power associated with that identity parallels what queer identities experience in predominately heterosexual spaces. Torres' fear of being a potentially oppressive presence in the room led to my facilitating the majority of the sessions. There were three reasons for this: (1) Torres and I both felt that having a queer person as the primary facilitator would encourage like identities to feel less at risk in the space. (2) As the researcher for this study, this would give me more opportunities to dialogue about the research study and how participants could contribute. (3) As a new practitioner of this work, we felt that I should log as many facilitation hours as possible to strengthen my pedagogy skills. Torres' exercise of 'Queer critical care' was a way for him to still engage in the ensemble process, but it was also a gesture and understanding that did not place heteronormativity at the forefront of the experience. This example of awareness speaks to the need for gender and sexual education not only for students, but for teachers and administration as well.

While organizations like Out Youth and the resources it provides are rare in Texas, and nationwide, the administration was not prepared to partner with Creative Action and PYTA. The factors that mainly contributed to our departure from OUT Youth were community access, administrative infrastructure, and student participation. For the young people that attend Out Youth, their presence in the space is a form of 'outing.' To be in that space means the youth, on some level, share connections with LGBTQA identities. Such a program lets youth know that there are spaces and resources—even if limited—for them. It is also an example of making the invisible visible. This organization is a queer space that takes pride, rightfully so, in that presence. On the other hand, the threat that organizations like Out Youth pose to some guardians of youth is the affirmation of queerness. This affirmation is what some parents of queer

youth and queer youth themselves struggle with even in ‘liberal’ cities such as Austin. In the context of starting a youth theatre ensemble, Out Youth carried different perceptions in the Austin community. Would parents let their children attend a known queer space? What if youth were not ‘out’ to their parents? How could they participate in the ensemble? As we departed from Out Youth, these questions became more relevant as we thought about how and from where to recruit young people—particularly, young people that identified as LGBTQA.

The partnership was further complicated by Out Youth’s staff, which seemed stretched thin. Email was the main form of communication, but proved to not be effective in keeping all parties up to date. Several times Torres and I arrived at the space to find the Out Youth staff member unavailable or running late. Moreover, we were assigned four different contact personnel as organizational responsibilities kept shifting. Hence, it was very difficult to establish a partnership with the organization without a stable administrative infrastructure. Our biggest challenge, however, within this space was student participation. We spent numerous outside hours trying to recruit youth from Out Youth to attend the ensemble, but with little success. The majority of the youth we attempted to recruit were hesitant because of lack of experience, lack of overall interest, or the ensemble did not serve their large needs or issues. The latter factor made us question what are the needs of the youth that attend Out Youth? How might this ensemble address those needs? How does this ensemble not address those needs? How did the ensemble addressed or not address the needs of the participants, resulting in OTL’s departure from Out Youth? Simply put, the ensemble did not carry enough value for the youth to attend. Or in some cases, youths’ association with OTL could intensify anxiety, fears or bullying within their personal lives—thus, participation was not worth

the risk. My reflection of my experiences at Out Youth is not to devalue the mission and value of the organization. However, OTL's development needed a community partner that could provide the administrative infrastructure and staff to sustain the ensemble. Unfortunately, the development of the ensemble in phase one required more support from Out Youth than it could provide.

After departing from Out Youth, we moved to The University of Texas at Austin Department of Theatre & Dance. The last phase of the ensemble consisted of a weekend workshop series of three sessions that culminated in a shareformance. Essentially, it was the format that we initially started with but on a tighter time frame. The choice to move to The Department of Theatre and Dance was first due to my affiliation as a graduate student, which afforded us a rehearsal space without charge. Also, The University's location was more centrally located and could be accessed by public transportation. Out Youth participants were still invited to participate. In addition, we called and emailed all Travis County GSA's to interest potential participants. The most noticeable change about phase three is the response that we received after we moved the ensemble to UT Austin. It was not until Torres sent out a second call for participation (articulating our shift) that we started to receive responses from GSA directors. Moreover, it seemed as if parents were more likely to bring their youth to campus rather than Out Youth. All of a sudden it seemed like a heavy curtain had been lifted off the progression of the ensemble. In the end, this third phase rendered some success. We had a total of five youth participate in three four hour weekend workshops that culminated in a brief shareformance with invited community members and friends.

The shareformance at the end of this process was a major relief for a couple of reasons: (1) it brought closure to project that seemed as if it would never get started.

What started as a six week project, turned into a four month uphill battle. (2) We were finally able to get into a room with invested participants and create a work of art. During the first couple of months of the ensemble, it was discouraging to arrive week after week, only to have no participants. This resulted in my questioning the validity and necessity of this work. Maybe I was forcing something that others did not value? This perception changed the moment we were in the rehearsal room with participants that were excited to creatively discuss these themes⁸. (3) The audience and participant responses sparked engaging conversations about what this work might look like in the future. I was most struck by the honesty and confidence with which the youthful participants spoke as they recounted their experiences with OTL to the audience. This testimony was especially helpful as I got to hear what the participants enjoyed about this experience and how they wanted further develop the ensemble. Most notably, towards the end of the talkback, an audience member asked the youth participants what they would want with regards to performing in community and social spaces. The young people responded,

- In my opinion, I guess that for me joining this [program] or programs like these, I'm making a statement with my life. Saying, "This is who I am. This is what I believe in." So I'm going to take the risk of expressing myself. And, so, I'll do whatever I need to do to get this message out there. (OTL Talkback)
- Well, I guess the reason I'm here is because I've always wanted to do something like this. Like I've been in theatre before, but I'm more like a tech theatre kind of person. But something like this [program] where it's really organic and like self-created, it feels better to perform it than it does to perform some play I don't have any personal connection to. But another thing is like, I really don't care what people think of me. So like doing something like this is really good for me because I can express myself. And if people don't like, I can see that. And, also, the people that come to see these things [shareformances] think similarly, so it's much better. (OTL Talkback)
- If we do go out and perform where anyone can watch it [shareformances], I think it would take a lot more of the performer to perform. But I think a lot of

⁸ In chapter four, I explain how we moved through dramatic activities and discussion.

students...like a lot of teenagers really need that...need to like accept themselves. And like sometimes people just need that part pushed. And sometimes maybe somebody will walk by and see this performance and it will maybe change their lives forever. It's like a small possibility, but it's still a possibility. So why not take it? (OTL Talkback)

The difficult start of the ensemble was a blessing in many ways. One, the amount of time Torres and I had to develop our co-facilitator/director relationship. As we met weekly to plan, problem-solve, and vent about the progress (or lack thereof) of the ensemble. During these meaningful discussions, I not only learned about what I had to offer as a director/facilitator, but also about the intricacies of Torres' director/facilitator identities. This connection became apparent as we prepared for the public sharing. There was a sense of fluid power in the room and this shifted depending on the needs of the ensemble. By the end of our shareformance, I was left with several thoughts about my four month journey.

There were numerous systemic and social challenges from the start, but even before those challenges asking youth to participate in an ensemble of this nature required acknowledgement of one's queerness. For some of the adolescent youth, this ensemble shifted them from just verbalizing their queerness to moving into a space where they were living their queerness, resulting in major steps. I was saddened by our departure from Out Youth because it seemed like an ideal relationship. Here was this organization, the only one of its kind in a non-educational setting in Austin, and we could not establish enough interest to begin the ensemble. Even the most well intentioned programs will stall unless they meet the needs of their targeted population. This is not to say that OTL did not meet some of the needs of Out Youth's attendees; rather, it helped me realize that ADT programs will not address all of the needs of LGBTQA youth. More importantly,

they do not have to. It is, however, important to acknowledge how the purpose of the project addresses or not the needs the targeted population in the developmental stages.

Community partnerships that support artistic/educational programming and resources for LGBTQA youth are just as complicated. Community perceptions of LGBTQA youth organizations carry both positive and negative connotations. This is the double edged sword of this type of work. Whereas being a LGBTQA youth organization that creates opportunities where there was not such. It also has the potential to drive others away. This was and will be the most challenging part of the work I do. How can queer identities, especially youth, build community, explore their queer identity, and challenge their own communities, when the notion of association with queer spaces threatens their livelihood? Of course, there are numerous approaches to this question. In chapter three, I explore this question and many more through interviews with three PYTA members.

Chapter 3: Crossing the Line

Chapter three consists of interviews I conducted with three PTYA directors in the Fall of 2013. My interest in speaking with PYTA leaders derived from an inquiry to see how OTL compared and differed from other affiliates. I wanted to see, in addition, how other directors pedagogically constructed their programs. Initially, I contacted all of the PYTA ensemble directors and asked for their participation in my research study. Out of the twenty one ensembles, Sara Kerastas (About Face Youth Theatre—Chicago, Illinois), Susan Haugh (Dreams of Hope—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), and Brian Guehring (Pride Players—Omaha, Nebraska) volunteered to participate in the interview process. Each of these directors works in various capacities and spaces to ensure the success of their programs. Whereas each of these youth ensembles are housed under the PYTA mission, the youth demographic, community engagement practices and partnerships, and overall function of each ensemble are tailored to their specific communities.

Chapter three is formatted to give a brief profile of each of the interviewees and their programs' infrastructure and mission. In addition, I look more specifically at the areas of youth demographic, community engagement and outreach (CEO), and as advice to future practitioners. I use the practitioner advice to conclude the chapter with a differentiation between ensembles that are more focused on outreach versus theatrical performance; how participant commitment may vary based on an outreach focus versus theatrical performance; and the challenges of spaces and resources. Due to the experience and advice shared during these interviews, I return to my denotation of queer pedagogy to distill the components that helped progress OTL's development. Of course, there were numerous other topics that are not included in this research paper, but definitely influenced the way I approach my practice—and hopefully that of others.

ABOUT FACE YOUTH THEATRE

Sara Kerastas served as the Educational Director of About Face Youth Theatre (AFYT) for four and half years until her departure in the fall of 2013. AFYT is an identity-affirming theatre activism program located in Chicago, Illinois—“LGBTQAI⁹ youth and their allies ages fourteen to twenty-three explore and expand the boxes we use to define our intricate intersections of race, nationality, gender, and sexuality” (AFYT website). The youth theatre operates on a two-year devising cycle. The first year is composed of two ten week sessions (fall & spring), which are focused on theatre and social justice training. Throughout these sessions participants creatively generate themes relative to race, nationality, gender, and sexuality. As the first year concludes, the participants decide on themes to further develop and research. The end of the first year is followed by a summer intensive where community artists and activists are brought in to address the themes chosen by the ensemble. The summer opportunity functions as a time for participants to expand their understanding of the chosen themes. The second year is structured similarly to the first; however, the focus shifts more into a devising process. This means the creation and development of a performance text as the goal of the second year. To aid in this process, AFYT hires a writer and/or a director to help the participants shape their ideas into a performance text during the fall and spring of the second year. The summer of the second year is focused on the staging of the performance text. Participants are asked to audition for a four week rehearsal schedule and three week performance schedule. Participants involved with the summer production are compensated for their time with a financial stipend.

⁹ AFYT denotes “I” (Intersex) in their inclusion of queer identities.

About Face Youth Theatre also houses an outreach program that engages with school and ally communities.

The Education Outreach Program at About Face Theatre provides touring plays and workshops to schools as an entertaining, compelling, and necessary approach to starting dialogue about bullying, diversity, and intersecting identities. Our standard format is performance + talk-back, however we do offer break-out sessions with the audience and workshops following the performance. (AFYT website)

The outreach program structure differs from the two-year youth theatre program on a several levels. First, the outreach program edits the performance text from the youth theatre to make it applicable to the aforementioned format. Kerastas instituted this change to find a balance between dramatic literature (i.e. the performance text) and a theatre for dialogue model (i.e. Augusto Boal's forum theatre). Another noticeable change in the outreach program is the employment of young adult actors for the touring ensemble. This allows for the touring schedule to not be hindered by school conflicts of younger actors. Moreover, the performance text generated by the youth theatre is often derived from personal narratives. The actors of the outreach program adapt these stories for the tour. It also provides the youth actors some separation from having to perform their personal narratives in potentially hostile communities.

Kerastas described the youth demographic at AFYT as predominately youth of color. However, the program has participants that come from various socio-economic levels and neighborhoods across the city. Most participants are between the ages of sixteen and twenty one—what Kerastas calls the 'sweet spot' because the youths' experiences tend to overlap. The only requirement for participants to join the ensemble is that they identify as an ally. Other than that, Kerastas commented that she is not

concerned about making youth self-identify. When asked about participant commitment, Kerastas said that it varies. Similarly to OTL, the ten week fall & spring sessions are not mandatory. Kerastas did note that when the youth theatre production enters the rehearsal process that having stipends for actors and crew is an important way to ensure commitment to the production. On top of offering participants rigorous artistic and social justice training and access to professional mentorship from LGBTQA artists and activist, AFYT provides Chicago Transit Authority cards (public transportation fare) and food to accommodate the varying needs of the ensemble.

The Youth Task Force (YTF) is one of the youth theatre's strongest attributes. Comprised of five youth leaders selected through an interview process and accompanied by a stipend, the YTF is responsible for representing the various voices of the youth theatre, identifying specific goals and focuses for ensemble, and facilitating a project or event of their choosing. The YTF meets twice a month for nine months out of the year and are given a \$700 budget. In addition, the youth are provided with basic leadership training and are supported by a part-time staff member. In April of 2013, the Youth Task Force hosted "The Drop: Queer Dance Part (all ages)" in conjunction with Chances Dances, a queer DJ collective located in Chicago, IL (AFYT tumblr). The YTF used this opportunity to build awareness around queer spaces for LGBTQA identities under the age of eighteen and to raise money for the upcoming summer production. Kerastas gleefully commented on the three hundred plus people that attended for the dance party and the community support from other LGBTQA youth services.

In asking Kerastas about what the community engagement structure of AFYT, she commented, "there's no official language about community engagement." Upon further thought, Kerastas remarked, "It basically boils down to community partnerships."

Columbia College is a vital partnership for AFYT as they offer the ensemble free meeting space in exchange for an internship position. Kerastas values this partnership because Columbia College is a central location within Chicago and allows better access for participants dependent on public transportation. Kerastas further explained that Chicago “is a theatre resource sharing community” with regards to community engagement and networking. There are numerous theatres and arts organizations located in Chicago, so there is a culture of sharing resources and/or developing partnerships that reciprocate support. Kerastas also builds partnerships with social and activist organizations to provide mentorship on specific topics. These partnerships are nurtured not only through mentorship, but also through panel discussion led by social and activist organizations after performances.

DREAMS OF HOPE

Dreams of Hope (DOH) was created in 2003, and is a testament to the dedication, work ethic, and passion of Susan Haugh. I admit my first impression of Haugh and the work she has accomplished in the past decade was one of admiration (and maybe just a little trepidation). A model ‘Do it yourself’ practitioner, Haugh’s approach to working with LGBTQA identities is one of multidisciplinary arts. DOH’s mission reads,

Through the power of the arts, Dreams of Hope provides the region’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and allied (LGBTQA) youth a welcoming environment to grow in confidence, express themselves, and develop as leaders. Their creative contributions educate audiences, build awareness, and increase acceptance. (DOH website)

DOH’s mission is reinforced by five core values: (1) all youth deserve respect, (2) all people are creative, (3) creative expression connects people, (4) open dialogue is a foundation for empathy and peace, and (5) multidisciplinary arts develop the entire

person (DOH website). Upon first glance, the most striking quality about this PYTA member is the infusion of other artistic mediums. Haugh's training as a musician and composer is a major contributor to this multidisciplinary pedagogy. When asked about why she chose multidisciplinary arts, Haugh remarked, 'I don't want to just do theatre. That's boring.' Now, I do not presume that Haugh devalues the efficacy of theatre; rather, I think Haugh finds value in many art forms as a way to uncover the many facets of the youth with whom she works.

DOH houses three programs that engage communities surrounding Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—theatriQ, speaQ and Qamp. theatriQ is DOH's first and primary performance program, which tours throughout the year with an ensemble of ten to fifteen youth. Through the creation and performance of new works of drama, song, dance, and poetry derived from personal narratives, the ensemble performs outreach shows in non-traditional spaces (i.e. high schools, houses of worship) and to audiences that serve LGBTQA identities. The commitment required for theatriQ limits the number of ensemble members, which led Haugh to develop speaQ, a youth-led open mic event, held monthly, "speaQ provides a forum for young LGBTQ people in the Pittsburgh area to creatively express themselves and see professional artists in a safe environment" (DOH website). Haugh describes speaQ as having more of drop-in feel, which allows participants to negotiate their involvement. Lastly, Qamp is a week long summer camp held at the Emma Kaufmann Camp near Morgantown, West Virginia, for LGBTQA youth ages thirteen to nineteen. Qamp includes arts, games, educational workshops, and traditional camp activities facilitated by local artists and poets.

When asked about what community engagement looks like for DOH, Haugh referenced the theatriQ ensemble, sharing that in 2003, the pilot year, theatriQ performed

six times around the Pittsburgh area. Over the past decade that number increased to twenty plus performances in 2013. The US Department of Education, Pittsburgh Black Pride, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, Persad Center Incorporated, and Bethany College are just a few examples of the communities DOH works within. What is even more striking is the literal reach of DOH to areas such as Ohio and West Virginia. Haugh believes this expanding reach is necessary because of DOH's geographical location. A part of the country Haugh believes still harbors strong and impactful homophobic ideologies. This is not only reflected in funding for organizations that serve LGBTQA individuals, but also within the Pittsburgh LGBTQA community itself. Haugh went on to explain that the majority of LGBTQA organizations within Pittsburgh are maintained on a volunteer basis, which leads to inconsistency in services and impedes growth due to high turnover. In the face of such constraints, Haugh has managed to build DOH from the efforts of one person to establishing it as a fiscally stable and community supported organization with dedicated staff to carry out its mission.

PRIDE PLAYERS

Brian Guehring is the educational director for the Omaha Theatre Company for Young People and co-founder of the Pride Players. Tracy Iwersen and Guehring started the ensemble in 1999.

Pride Players is an ensemble of open minded high school aged teenagers in Omaha, Nebraska that spends twelve weeks each year improvising, creating, rehearsing and performing a collection of skits, scenes, parodies, poetry and monologues exploring the issues facing gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight allied teens. (Brian G website)

Pride Players was Guehring's second attempt at starting a queer youth theatre ensemble in Omaha. When he first arrived in Nebraska he partnered with a local youth

organization that provided support and services for LGBTQA identities. Unfortunately, the program did not materialize because the organization needed to focus on support. This is essentially what happened between Outside the Lines and Out Youth. I will return to this point in my conclusion. It was not until Guehring was required to direct a youth show for The Rose that he was able to fuse his passion to work with LGBTQA youth identities.

Unlike AFYT that spends two years devising a production, Pride Players utilizes an improvisation foundation to generate their performance text over the course of a three month time period. This time period concludes with a weekend of performances. It is important to note the Pride Players show is one teen theater performance out of seven in the Omaha Theatre Company's Teens-N-Theater season. Again this differs from AFYT, where the youth theatre program is a bi-yearly event. There is the opportunity for touring performances at the end of the production, but these are usually limited due to participants' schedules. Thus, Pride Players function more as an annual stage production than a touring company.

During our interview, Guehring divided the youth demographic of the ensemble into four factions: (1) theatre geeks who just want to get as much experience as they can; (2) theatre geeks who are interested in the devising process; (3) queer kids who want to develop an open and accepting social group; and (4) teen activist who want to change the world. Due to The Rose's reputation as a safe and creative space for young people, there is an established culture of young thespians to sustain the ensemble. Moreover, there is a higher level of dramatic experience and skills within this demographic because by default The Rose is a theatre geared towards young performers. Again, important to highlight is that participant commitment is different in an outreach focused program versus a theatre

focused program. For example, getting participants to commit to a rehearsal and production schedule in a theatrical program is embedded in the experience. This is not the same for participants that attend an outreach program who may be looking for social activist training, but not looking to commit several weeks to devising and performing an original work. Essentially, the program has to serve the needs of the participants.

Similarly to AFYT's YTF, Pride Player's Youth Leadership Council (YLC) is comprised of high school seniors who serve as leaders for the ensemble. One of the YCL's responsibilities is to recruit new members for the ensemble. Guehring remarked how most of the youth in the ensemble either participated the year before or knew someone previously in the ensemble. If there are opportunities to tour the production, the YCL serves as the touring ensemble. With regards to community engagement, the YCL also aids Guehring in selecting three community guests to speak and/or conduct workshops with the ensemble annually. The Pride Players sustain community partnerships through benefit shows where the proceeds go towards local LGBTQA organizations such as GLSEN and Parents, Friends and Family of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). The passing of Tracy Iwersen in August of 2009 instituted the Tracy Iwersen Memorial Pride Player College Scholarship, which awards a total of three thousand dollars to graduating or alumni Pride Players to assist with college tuition. The Pride Players' most significant partnership is the Omaha Theatre Company. Because the Pride Players are a part of Omaha Theatre Company's Teens-N-Theatre season, they are provided with free performance and rehearsal space, three teaching artists, a theatre van, costumes, props, lighting, sound, and other production assets. In addition, fiscal support from the Mukti Fund and private donors ensure the stability of the ensemble. Of course,

these are not the qualities that define each PYTA ensemble, but it is a level of consistency and support that many hope to achieve.

OUTREACH VS. PERFORMANCE

I conclude this chapter with a differentiation between ensembles that are more outreach focused versus theatrical performance; how participant commitment may vary based on an outreach focus versus theatrical performance; and the challenges of spaces and resources. My focus on these three areas relate significantly to the development of OTL. The partnership between Out Youth and OTL was geared towards an outreach focus. Even though Torres and I intended to end the six week session with a shareforamnce, it did not carry the same performative qualities as AFYT or Pride Players. The outreach focus becomes more apparent with a closer look at Out Youth's mission, which is focused on providing support services for LGBTQA youth. Similarly to Guehring's first attempt to start an ensemble in Omaha, Out Youth needed to be focused on providing support for their attendees. Not to say that OTL could not serve as a form of support, but it was not the type of support that Out Youth could sustain. There are two factors that contributed to this lack of support: (1) the youth that attended Out Youth were not looking to partake in a theatrical process. (2) OTL's pedagogical structure required not only social activist, which was not specifically embedded in the workshop process, but also theatrical training. As a result, youth that were attending Out Youth were hesitant of this new program that was one part activist and another part artistic, and there was not an option for participants to select one or the other.

My second point—participant commitment. Some important things I learned from the aforesaid practitioners is (1) develop a core of youth that serve as leaders in the ensemble; (2) provide food, public transportation fare, an accessible location, and

compensation or other incentive for participants' time; (3) utilize relevant community artists and activist to engage with the youth; and (4) call upon other youth services and organizations to build stronger partnerships. Establishing youth leaders is one of the most transparent ways to share the focus and direction of the ensemble. Not only does it hand over responsibility to the participants, but it establishes them as stakeholders in the livelihood of the ensemble. The youth leaders, additionally, become the best spokes models for the ensemble. A deeper investment is built in the ensemble when participants are invited by their peers or when someone they identify with is active in the ensemble.

Youth are usually hungry, and their mood is closely linked to that hunger. If you feed them, they will come. If you feed them really awesome snacks, they will stay. On a more serious note, there has to be an incentive for youth participants to devote their time. Better social activist skills and theatrical training is not enough. Offering a stipend (no matter how small) is one gesture that demonstrates that you fiscally and artistically value their presence and input. Offering youth participants stipends exemplifies a culture where artists and activist are paid for their contributions versus volunteerism. Ideologically, I think offering artists compensation for their work is important because, more often than not, many people, especially in the United States, do not see the fiscal value of art. Yes, I think most people can see and understand the social and cultural value of art, but, particularly in the theatre arts field, practitioners are paid low wage salaries and/or expected to work for free. By providing a stipend for youth participants' time and effort, programs like OTL can build investment and incentive, while providing an enriched experience.

“Reach out and touch somebody's hand”—that was the name of one song my church congregation would sing for benediction when I was a young person. I am using

it now to promote the usage of community artists and activist as source material for ensemble engagement. In addition, these artists and activists offer another level of expertise outside of the ensemble or practitioner. Moreover, it invites other identities and voices into the group to help expand the discussion(s) at hand. This can happen through various mediums. Take a cue from AFYT. Grab some DJ's and have a dance party and invite all of your friends. Skype other LGBTQA youth ensembles and share ideas. The possibilities are limitless. The most important thing to remember is the conversation does not have to remain in one room between one collective of ensemble members. Through this process of engagement, partnerships are formed and nourished through reciprocity.

“It's really hard to quantify art—especially to funders,” Kerastas noted in our discussion. I certainly agree with her. How do you measure the impact of a LGBTQA youth ensemble? What is the fiscal return of queer youth developing social activist skills? Where is the value in such an investment? This research study does not answer these questions but perhaps offers a case for the need for more research. Transferring this work into figures that funders will support requires communication and invitations. Space and resources for organizations that serve LGBTQA populations can be difficult to acquire. Moreover, socio-political and cultural debates continue about whether services and resources for LGBTQA youth are a necessity. Through communication and invitations, funders are also asked to join in the process. What better way for them to ‘see’ the value than up close and personal. Of course, there is a fine line between invitations and exploitations, but there is a way to provide funders with mitigated entry points to see the value of their investment, all in action. Failure to have these conversations will stagnate the growth of these programs and resources which are a vital necessity for LGBTQA youth identities.

QUEER PEDAGOGY 2.0

In this document, queer pedagogy uses queer culture, language, expression and politics in educational and community spaces with the purpose of sustaining critical dialogue, interpersonal depth, creative play and agency. To this end, I asked each of the aforementioned PYTA leaders to conclude our conversations with advice for future practitioners. In returning to this definition, I find the words each practitioner imparted to be somewhat connected. Kerastas declared, “Take an anti-oppression workshop so you know how to check your privilege. So much of this work is about relationship building, so you need to be able to connect to people.” Not that Kerastas’ words need decoding as they are obvious; however, Kerastas’ words speak to the oppressive history embedded within queer identities. Most notably, this brings to mind a quote from Freire who reveals, “Thematic investigation thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes this investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action and liberating character” (170). Both Freire and Kerastas acknowledge that in order for queer/non-queer identities to move towards a more socially conscious state there must be a ‘checking of privilege’ and oppressive structures. It is through this process that we reach the second part of Kerastas’ quote, which focuses on connecting to people—in a way that leads us towards liberation and action. Haugh reminds us, “Be open and patient. Be versatile and adjustable.” Haugh’s words ring true with respect to social change, which is versed in numerous methodologies. Applied theatre techniques, in reality, do not always ensure equality for all stakeholders. Tim Prentki, editor of *The Applied Theatre Reader*, substantiates the applied theatre form with respect to its application and reception, “There is, however, no static, achieved formula for creating theatre for change but only a constant process of

refining and reforming poetics in answer to changing social realities” (21). In these moments, being patient and versatile can allow a practitioner to return to the drawing board to start the arduous work again. Guehring’s quote is a life long challenge for all practitioners, “Find your own voice. Make your program unique to your community, and do the work that needs to be done.” While the search for one’s voice can be muffled by doubts, anxieties and resistance, there is still a persistence that leads us to re-envision the communities and identities we inhabit.

Chapter 4: The Finish Line

Below are my final thoughts and reflections with regards to OTL and conclusions in regards to LGBTQA youth theatre. I spoke of the program structure and narrative of OTL in chapter two, but I would like to share the details of the shareformance and some of the insights gained. Throughout much of the development of OTL, participant commitment was almost nonexistent. Torres and I moved the ensemble from Out Youth to The Department of Theatre & Dance whereupon we recruited more participants. The last phase of the ensemble consisted of a weekend workshop series of three sessions that culminated in a shareformance. Essentially, it was the format that we initially started with but on a limited time frame. The shareformance produced several developments: (1) it brought temporary closure to a project that seemed like it would never happen. (2) We were finally able to work in a room with invested participants in creating a work of art. (3) The audience and participant responses sparked constructive dialogue about what this work might look like in the future.

The shareformance was not intended to be a formal performance. In fact, upon the recruitment of the four ensemble members, Torres and I expressed the purpose of the shareformance was to envision the possibilities for the ensemble in the next iteration. With that in mind, we constructed the shareformance from three devising techniques. The first technique was used to generate some original text for the shareformance. On day one of the workshop series, we gave the participants four incomplete prompts to complete with their words and experiences. The participants were cautioned their words would be shared and to only complete the prompts with information they wanted to share with others.

- Something I want to see changed in my community is...

- Just because I'm _____ doesn't mean _____.
- The truth about me is...
- Being outside the lines means...

Once the participants completed the prompts, the ensemble discussed about the significance their prompts carried. This dialogue was used to gain deeper understanding about the youth and their backgrounds. Moreover, we used this technique to generate the themes of the shareformance instead of prescribing a focus.

The second technique invited the participants to generate pedestrian movement. We asked the participants to individually create eight seconds or an eight count of movement that represented what it meant to be outside the lines. The participants were invited to use their responses from the first activity or to generate something completely new. Once each participant had generated and rehearsed their eight count of movement, We paired the participants together and asked the partners to teach each other their respective eight counts. Thus, each partnership would be responsible for two eight counts of movement. It is important to note that this exercise was not about dance technique. The participants were encouraged to use pantomime, everyday activities and/or gestures. The partnerships, without verbally sharing the context of their movement, performed for one another. Afterwards, as an ensemble, we discussed the experience of creating, learning and sharing an eight count of movement. Furthermore, we discussed the multiple possible meanings embedded in the movement. We also used this activity to have the participants generate possible stage movement that related to the themes generated in the first activity.

The final technique merged two of my favorite activities, drama and cooking. In some educational drama circles this activity is called "Recipe for Me." This activity invites participants to create a recipe based on their personality. The creation of this

recipe asks participants to list the ingredients, measurements, utensils, and cooking/serving instructions relative to their personality cuisine. During the workshop series, each participant created and shared their recipe. Afterwards, we asked the participants to collectively create a recipe about what it meant to be outside the lines. Again, the completion of the collective activity led to a group dialogue about the significance of the ingredients, measurements, and instructions chosen. Ultimately, we wanted the participants to keep creatively exploring the multiple significances and interpretations of outside the lines. The remaining two workshop days were used to stage and rehearse the aforementioned material. Essentially, the participants collaborated with us about how they would like to stage the material they had created. Of course, the shareformance was more than just the exercises articulated in this chapter, but I am afraid my words cannot capture the full essence of the ephemeral experience the participants created that weekend.

Torres and I constructed this pedagogical approach for the weekend workshop series from our previous three month trials with Out Youth. First, we wanted to be honest with the participants and inform them that OTL was a youth ensemble that used theatrical techniques to explore identities that fall outside the lines. However, the ensemble was not beholden to theatrical techniques or explicitly queer identities. This element was communicated to Out Youth, but participants in that space prioritized other programming and resources. Secondly, we articulated that we needed participant input about how to increase awareness about OTL. Thus, we relinquished our administrative control and anxieties over how we communicated with the public. As I learned from the PYTA interviews, youth participants were the best spokes models for recruitment. For our final pedagogical shift, we stopped trying to prescribe a thematic focus for the

ensemble. Yes, Torres and I titled the program, but the actual meaning behind the title and how it functioned was up to the participants. With this in mind, we crafted three devising techniques that would allow the participants to co-construct the meaning behind OTL. The shareformance would be the culmination of this investigation with invited guests to respond to the content the participants created. Moreover, the participants could reflect on their experiences after moving through this process.

Being outside the lines can be lonely. When I look back on my field notes from this experience, I was disheartened by the lack of youth in the room each week. Not that I expected every queer/ally teen in the city to flock to this ensemble, but I guess in my practitioner brain more youth would find some value in the ensemble. Nicholson, in *Theatre, Education and Performance*, reveals the nuances behind the culture of participation. Nicholson highlights how theatre education and applied theatre programs must strive to develop art that incorporates multiple meanings, multi-sensory performances, and site specific locations (Nicholson 2011). Nicholson's most poignant contribution towards the culture of participation is allowing participants to make memories with the space where the arts happens, "Making space for learning in theatre not only requires new ways of thinking about participation and new aesthetic forms, therefore, it also depends on young people's ability to generate their own spatial meaning within the building" (209). As mentioned in previous chapters, space was a large concern for OTL's development. Participants that attended Out Youth had already created memories around that space and how it functioned for them. Perhaps OTL challenged those memories and/or impeded participants from making new memories in connection to Out Youth. It took some time to overcome this anxiety. What helped was the completion of the shareformance. Completing the simplest performance made the impossible seem

possible. The shareformance also demonstrated that even with only four participants important work can take place. It is easy to say that a program does not have value or is not well tailored to the needs of a community when the attendance numbers are consistently only four people. Whereas the majority of this experience was spent alone, except problem-solving with my amazing co-facilitator, the conclusion demonstrated that there is a need for such an ensemble in Austin, Texas.

Being outside the lines means redrawing the lines—this vantage point reveals a perspective of where the lines are and are not. When is it safe to be inside the lines? When is it not safe to be outside the lines? Who draws the lines? What happens when your resources are inside the lines and you are on the outside? Who polices the lines? How do new lines get defined around old lines? Why do we even need lines? How can you learn to draw your own lines to your own needs? The latter question was tough for me to answer throughout this research experience. I invested countless hours in fieldwork trying to find the starting line. Sometimes it seemed as I located where the lines were they leaped a few miles away in another direction. In addition to these numerous questions, developing my queer pedagogy within this context took further examination. I am not arguing that I regret the process and/or the results of its labor, rather the intersectionality of ADT techniques and queer pedagogy is still formative. Thus, I forged my own industrial strength lines to map out new terrain.

Being outside the lines means building community. Kerastas, Haugh, and Guehring are angels disguised as humans. Their support and advice contributed significantly to continued progress of OTL. Our discussions rejuvenate my drive and passion for this work because the practitioner woes I experienced were not unique to OTL. Similar challenges and triumphs were shared across the United States in

metropolitan and rural cities. Being able to problem-solve with other practitioners that confronted similar challenges ameliorated potential hurdles, and I hope inviting you into the process will do the same. My engagement with Out Youth helped me realize the importance of community partnerships and organizations that serve LGBTQA youth identities. Not all LGBTQA youth organizations have to serve the same purpose or support each queer youth identity. In fact, it is important that we continue to diversify our approaches to meet the expanding needs of this population, whilst reciprocating support and resources for one another.

I started this project with lofty intentions to change the world through art and theatre. The slow build of OTL taught me that change does not happen overnight. It happens through open communication. It happens through investing hours upon hours of time to build trust with community organizations and participants. It happens through sharing experiences and wisdom from those that have come before you. It happens when you least expect it and in ways you never envisioned it. It happens when you relinquish control and allow others to help contribute to its meaning. It happens in spaces and communities you glossed over initially. It happens when you trust the process. And, yes, the process is still in development. Since the first shareformance in April of 2013, OTL has continued to explore LGBTQA youth experiences in Austin as a growing ensemble that performs outside the lines.

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