

## **Overview**

During the course of my research, I have been able to engage directly through participation in the following ways:

Two Phone Interviews: Jonathan Mirin (Co-Artistic Director, *Piti Theater Company*, Shelbourne, MA), Linda Naiman (Director, *Linda Naiman & Associates*, Vancouver, BC)

Group Meeting: Theater for Change practice group (Florence, MA)

In-person Program Visit: Urban Improv program (Vine St. Community Center, Roxbury, MA), including a follow-up meeting with Kippy Dewey, director of Urban Improv.

### **Phone Interview, Jonathan Mirin**

General summary and relevance: Jonathan's Piti Theater Company is a group of theater professionals who have developed a theater-based model for addressing change management in organizational development. Jonathan was able to offer several leads for further exploration and suggested that in addition to my current directions, I might want to explore some of the university programs that directly address "applied theater". He also suggested the importance of remaining active in theater education by continuing to take classes so that I start to more naturally think about use of theater in education during my daily work.

Lessons learned: 1) using theater in learning environments necessarily means that everyone takes an active part in the process, particularly through physical movement and body awareness; 2) getting people to become engaged in theater-based activities and methodologies requires that a "warm-up" period is allowed, and although this seems like a way to activate the mind toward theater, it is mainly a way to let people find ways to let go of their inhibitions

Follow-up needs: 1) review the applied theater program at Stanford; 2) review the following local organizations: Dramaworks Theater Company (Northampton), the Ariel Group, The School for International Training, and the Sandglass Puppets Theater; 3) review the backgrounds and key works of the following people involved in developing theater-based education in social issues: Keith Johnstone and Michael Rohd

### **Phone Interview, Linda Naiman**

General summary and relevance: Linda is the Director of an arts-based consulting group that helps organizations experience change particularly through visual images and "print conversations".

Although her specific domain represents a different angle on the arts compared to my research, she was able to address the issue of what it means to engage people in use of the arts who decidedly do not

consider themselves to be artists. She was able to provide insight on presenting such material in a way to make it more accessible to those feeling some hesitation.

Lessons learned: 1) for non-artists, take a very direct approach in providing encouragement for people to welcome ambiguity and that artistic experiences can be shared independent of artistic skill; 2) it is critically important to establish arts-based change education in a “safe” environment - this means making it clear that a person will only engage in activities or discussion of personal information with their complete agreement, no discussion of such information will go beyond the immediate situation, and, it is actually the goal of the experience to allow someone to learn from “mistakes”, which are often just situations that we did not expect to encounter; and 3) creative learning experiences must involve a commitment to action, so establishing follow-up activities can be an important strategy for allowing people to take their experience beyond the arts-based learning situation

Follow-up needs: 1) review the following organizations: Interlog, Necessary Theater, and the art program at the Frick Art Museum; and 2) review the writings of artist Marchall McCluen

### **Group Meeting, Theater for Change practice group**

General summary and relevance: This is a group of independent practitioners involved in theater for social change who are looking to form a periodic meeting in which they can discuss models and activities for situations in which they work. I attended the very first meeting of the group, which provided important insight into the logistical needs and barriers that influence the success of such a group.

Lessons learned: 1) a key challenge in such a learning group is to connect theater-based activities to practical use and expected outcomes; it can be demonstrated through a physical exercise, for example, how body postures of two people can influence communication styles in their conversation. It is vitally important though to go beyond the exercise and define next steps or ways that a person can reflect upon and use this principle later, while actually in a related real-life situation.

Follow-up needs: 1) consider the practicality of my future participation in the group since it is far away from my home, 2) explore the activities of the True Story Theater group in the Boston area as another lead in social-change theater education

### **In-person Visit, Urban Improv**

General summary and relevance: Urban Improv is a program that seeks to reduce youth violence through a highly structured improv. education program. I attended one “class”, which was presented to the Tobin School’s 5<sup>th</sup> grade class as part of an 8-class series. This experience was highly important for

me because it presented a realistic view of a very well-established way to use theater as an engaging method of teaching about social change. Although this program focuses on children, I found numerous points of relevance to adult learning as well.

Lessons learned: 1) it may not be necessary to promote the concept of “theater” in a education for social change situation - it can be sufficient describe activities more generically to make sure that the “audience” feels that it can participate without prior knowledge; 2) all activities in the program were preceded by a description of the activity and followed by a whole-group dialogue and “conclusion”; activities included a role-play of a new student’s first day of school and a student-developed skit that addressed bullying and allowed students to take on the role of both the bully and the “oppressed” student; 3) the improv. group started the program by taking on roles as young students and interacting with the audience, which allowed the students to become engaged as “themselves” first, before the students were asked to take on other roles; and 4) the class’s teacher very naturally felt comfortable as a performer and found it refreshing to be able to related to the students in a way other than their teacher; 5) emphasis was placed on “trying something”, but never “right and wrong”; 6) the class’s teacher reviewed the importance of discussing the program with the students in their own school and also suggested that the students attending the program would be encouraged to discuss the experience with those who did not attend; and 7) even though I am focusing on areas of adult learning, it may be worthwhile to consider involvement or development of a theater-for-change group that serves a school-aged afterschool/summer vacation need - this kind of activity is well-received, much needed, and usually finds funding relatively easily when many other non-profit ventures struggle financially

Follow-up needs: 1) consider how to facilitate theater-based activities in teacher groups; 2) review the activities of “partner” programs “Creative Arts in the Park” and “The Freelance Players”.

### **General Needs for Future Exploration:**

- 1) because all of my informants originally started with theater experience and found applications in education, it would be helpful to continue to seek those primarily experienced in adult learning who might be open to theater-based education
- 2) participation is a key; in future exploration, it will become increasingly important to explore possibilities that involve direct participation of adult learners/educators; and also, it will help to expand my understanding to longer-term prospects, so that I am thinking not only of theater activities/applications for teachers and discussions of social change but also of the extended process of transforming the notion of adult education to consider social change as a primary goal

## Interview Report

I met twice with J--, a cellist who, as he put it, was in need of relearning how to move his body. He did not like the term "injured." He felt that "injured" did not actually apply as he was really trying to restructure his approach to how his body works. This remark occurred at the onset of the interview and helped to set the tone. I quickly learned to prompt him with terms that (hopefully) would not be labeling or confining to him. He was very engaged in the discussion and had a lot to say about his experiences.

He looked over the questions and pushed them aside saying that he would just let me lead and asked if it mattered if we went in order. I explained that the questions were a guide, rather than a set agenda, with which he seemed contented. As he was very comfortable with sharing his story, I did not need to prompt him very much. He actually went in a similar order as my questions. He was extremely concise and well spoken with his responses, which will help me to apply his information to the project. The difficulty I had was trying to hear and retain his story so I could digest the information quickly enough to then assess whether or not I had the particular information I felt I needed. J-- covered a lot of ground and it was challenging to take it all in. On a personal level, it was challenging to not let myself get pulled into his story too much. I found that it stirred up my own feelings... [section omitted]

Our second conversation had some highlights, but I think the fire was more present in the first. J-- is training to be Feldenkreis practitioner and he invited me to observe one of the sessions, which I did attend. It was fascinating to see the similarities between the Internal Martial Arts and Feldenkreis, as well as the differences.

My talk with J-- gave me the unique information I wanted for the project. It also caused me to take a closer look at my own engagement in my project and my relationship to the topic, which I believe will help to make my project a stronger one.

I have interviewed 2 out of 5 injured musicians. Of the remaining 3, I believe 2 are a lost cause, and 1 may still work out. I have one other person I will try to contact for this interview. I am toying with the idea of contacting my neurologist to try to get similar information from him, since he primarily works with injured musicians.