



TBA: Harnessing the Transformational Power of Theatre

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*Special thanks to Frank Delaney, MFA candidate at Western Illinois University and Stage
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TBA Harnessing the Transformational Power of Theatre

Augusto Boal introduced the concept of Forum Theatre in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Forum Theatre is a type of play which encourages audiences to participate in the resolution of some social issue. The core of the story is scripted and presents a protagonist with a conflict. However, the protagonist is unable to overcome the conflict, and the audience is brought in to suggest possible solutions to the conflict, turning the audience into what Boal referred to as spect-actors. Those solutions are then played out by the actors. (Forum Theatre, n.d.)

This type of theatre was originally created to deal with sources of external oppression (in Boal's case the Brazilian government), however, it has since evolved for use in things such as employment training and problem solving. Boal extended his theories in his book *The Rainbow of Desire*, which focused on the individual and dealing with internal oppressions. The techniques and theories in this book are the basis for drama therapy.

An example of how Forum Theatre has effected positive change in global communities may be seen in the [Youth Theatre for Peace](#) (YTP) (2011) project. This IREX supported project was created to train educators, implement student participation in Drama for Conflict Transformation (DCT), and facilitate the presentation of these forum theatre performances throughout communities in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The stated goal of the YTP is to successfully affect a sustainable community change in the prevention of conflicts via forum theatre. Additional examples of how forum theatre has affected change include conflict resolution in [Philadelphia](#), [Kosovo](#), and [Amani](#). These examples, along with innumerable others, only begin to scratch the surface of our understanding as to how, and why, theatre has the ability to affect global, community, and personal change.

Transformational Powers of Theatre

Theatre affects the lives of those who experience it not only via patronage, but also as a result of the creation of the art. Though this may be easily illustrated by performing an internet search, hearing stories directly from the individuals who have experienced them, allows for the emotion which accompanied the experience to become palpable.

Becky Sheridan (personal communication, 2012), a local actress specializing in comedy, recalled a play she performed in while attending college. [*When Scott Comes Home*](#), based on a true story, is a show about a kid who goes to college in the 80's for a few years. Upon returning home, he comes out as a homosexual to his parents; this doesn't go well for him. Eventually, he dies of AIDS. This play was written by Becky's college professor; the adaptation of a book Scott's mother wrote. Becky recalls performing the play and being protested by other Christian groups. She remembers feeling very profoundly influenced by the message of the show, as well as the reaction of the others around her. She says it was this show that exemplified the acceptance of others as a part of the Christian life that she strives daily to live. (B. Sheridan, personal communication, 2012)

Justin Oller (personal communication, 2012), another actor in Anchorage, has been involved in theatre since elementary school. Justin fondly remembers an experience in which he travelled to Scotland with an unusually varied group of actors: different theatre backgrounds, incomes, experiences levels, etc. Justin notes how the coming together of artists who varied this intensely, simply for the love of the art, solidified theatre as his career objective. Justin also mentions that every show he is in opens his eyes to some aspect of life or himself. For example, having grown up with a single mother, his work with [TBA](#) and, specifically the artistic director, Shane Mitchell, helped guide him towards becoming a gentleman. Shane also affected his

perception of what theatre was for: art as a means to communicate, problem solve, and better a community rather than just to entertain from on stage.

Rhiannon Johnson (personal communication, 2012) agrees with Justin. She reflected on her perception of theatre before starting classes with TBA and how they compare to her perception now. She describes Shane's philosophy on theatre as she has come to understand it: one shouldn't do theatre to show off, but instead should do it to affect positive change. She says she has learned that the more you learn and embrace art, the more good you do for your community and for others; you facilitate less conflict. Being in theatre has made Rhiannon think more about the effect theatre has on people, and its long term effects as well.

Anthony Cruz (personal communication, 2012), who specializes in dance, remembers a yearly HIV/AIDS play that was performed in order to help the students understand the severity of the disease, and what it might be like to live with it. His recollection of this show, exemplifies how theatre that takes on a social cause may affect those who are exposed to it. Anthony also recalls the first time he saw [*To Kill A Mockingbird*](#). He says he was very taken aback by the transportive feeling that came with the set and the attention to detail. He notes that reading the book didn't convey the feel or perspective of the time like experiencing the play did. He said it was like history right in front of him.

A Community Based Approach

TBA Theatre's mission statement is, "To enrich our community by providing innovative and comprehensive theatre arts experiences through which artists of all ages can develop their creativity and self-expression; and in so doing stimulate human potential." (TBA Theatre, 2012) It is clear, through numerous interviews with individuals involved in TBA that artists of all ages are, in fact, developing creativity and self-expression. Additionally, they are clearly stimulating

human potential. Justin, Becky, Anthony, and Rhiannon are only a few examples of individuals associated with TBA who have uncovered what may have otherwise been a very abstract truth about life, who they are, who they want to be, and how to become that self.

In performing shows during the daytime, and charging minimal rates, TBA also allows for students of all ages to attend shows, as well as providing educational resources for teachers, parents, and students alike. TBA also provides course through the Theatre Store during the winter months, as well as a Summer Academy, and Spring Break Academy, which not only allow students to enrich their understanding of theatre, art, and creativity, but provide a safe place to do so. Parents can rest assured that there is a safe place for their child to play, think, and grow during the long Summer days in Anchorage. These are certainly ways in which TBA enriches the Anchorage community.

Imagine, however, combining the enriching and educating power of TBA with the community based and conflict resolving power of forum theatre. Using TBA's existing educational structure as the foundation for a week-long intensive, forum theatre could be used to exemplify the mission of one or more of Anchorage's local community based organizations (CBOs) (see Appendix A). Not only does this afford TBA cross-promotional opportunities in which they gain additional exposure in the community, but they are furthering the enrichment of their community by supporting family based causes similar to their own.

Furthering Theatre's Reach in Anchorage

Strategy

This plan suggests that TBA include a one week intensive in their existing curriculum structure. This intensive would teach students to write short scripts, based on the mission of a local CBO, in which the protagonist becomes unable to resolve the driving conflict. The students

would then sell tickets to the show at the end of the week, in which they act out the scripted parts of the shows and encourage audience members to suggest resolutions for the protagonist. Those resolutions would then be acted out. CBOs would be encouraged to supply TBA with information to be disseminated to audience members who are interested in more information, or volunteering.

Perceived Barriers

As is often the case with CBOs, monetary cost of any marketing strategy is a concern. Costs for this plan may include space rental for the performance and for the class itself, script printing, and light design.

Time may also be a concern, as volunteers are needed to run light and sound, stage management, direction, and, of course, teachers. Though students would be selling tickets, volunteers would be needed to organize tickets, man the box office, and process any monies involved. Additionally, a volunteer to be the liaison between TBA and involved CBOs would be necessary in order to ensure the promotion of TBAs production by the CBO(s) being represented.

Resources Maximized

Several of these barriers may be overcome easily by taking advantage of the existing structure. If students are charged tuition for admittance into the intensive, several costs may already be covered. Also, as this would be presented as a performance, admittance fees may help cover the costs of things such as space rental. Scripts would be minimal, as they are meant to be unresolved in script. This will save on the costs of reproduction, but also environmental costs associated with extensive copying.

By grouping the intensive in with an already volunteer rich educational structure, volunteers may be asked to include paperwork, money transactions, and data entry in with efforts for pre-existing classes at a minimal time/effort increase. Because social marketing is a function of both media studies and psychological studies, volunteers from those fields may be sought after to act as liaisons between TBA and any involved CBOs.

Benefitting Us All

Possible benefits to incorporating the missions of local CBOs into the TBA curriculum may be the desirability that TBA be involved in future social marketing campaigns. Not only does working with local charities and social betterment efforts make TBA an example to the community, but it also makes TBA a commodity which parents, adults, teachers, professionals, and corporations alike, would be desirous to be aligned with. Ensuring that funders may feel secure in their donations bettering not only the arts community in Anchorage, but by association other family based charities and organizations, sponsors and donors are given more incentive to support TBA.

Financial benefits may be reaped as well. By reaching out to a CBO, you are also reaching out to their existing supporters, funders, volunteers, and the families involved or affected by the charity. In the vein of “you scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours,” assisting CBOs in achieving their goals, creates a bond through which they are likely to help TBA achieve theirs. The financial benefit may come in the form of additional donations, corporate sponsors, or patronage in the form of students or attendees.

Measuring Success

Because the measure of success, regardless of the level of integrity the group, is necessary for the evaluation of any plan, a measure for the success of this plan must be put into

effect. Where the goal is to cross-promote with another CBO for the furthering of both groups' agendas, the attendance for all classes, and shows performed using the forum theatre format should be recorded and compared. If the desirability of the courses and performances climb, or remain at a level which produces a profit, rather than a deficit, it should be considered a success. The initial goal, however, should be to implement the plan, and begin immediately measuring attendance and profit above the costs induced. A record should then be kept comparing subsequent years' attendance and profit.

In Conclusion

It is true that maintaining an already established habit is easier than affecting change. However, transitioning ways of thinking, learning, and creating, allow for the introduction of forward thinking and problem solving techniques. In a post-modern world, where education means self-directed research, stories are told by thousands of people who have never met, and the advancement of technology creates new venues for storytelling, theatre remains an emotionally charged medium for the stories, myths, and journeys which define us as individuals, families, communities, and nations. Continuing to use the transformational power of theatre to focus on positively affecting those who are exposed to it, ensures its survival and secures its foothold in the future of storytelling.

TBA Theatre, already the gold standard in entertainment in Anchorage, also maintains the unique ability to spread its influence to those in need by using the emotional connection inherent in theatre, to connect supporters with causes worthy of their support.



Appendix A

Community Based Organizations in Anchorage, AK

[Friends of Alaska CASA](#)

Target: Children, Youth, & Adults

Mission: More than 2,000 of Alaska's children are victims of abuse and neglect and are living in foster care. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) speak out to help abused and neglected children. Our Goal: Help CASA programs achieve the goal of providing a CASA volunteer for every child who needs one by 2016.

[Anchorage CASA](#)

Target Audience: Youth, Children, & Adults

Mission: The mission of CASA is to speak for the best interests of abused and neglected children in the courts. We promote and support quality volunteer representation for children to provide each child a safe, permanent, nurturing home.

[Challenge Alaska](#)

Target Audience: Youth, Adults, & Disabled

Mission: Improving the lives of people with disabilities and the whole community through recreation, sports and education. Through the programs offered by Challenge Alaska, participants can develop skills, expand their social horizons, become physically healthier, and increase their self-esteem.

[Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#)

Target Audience: Youth, Adult, & Blind

Mission: Equipping Alaskans who are Blind and Visually Impaired for Success in Life and Work. The Center helps youth grow in independence and capability through a summer training,

career development, and enrichment program. The Center also supports blind and visually impaired students in Alaska school districts thanks to a grant program providing up-to-date technology and staff training to ensure accessible learning materials.

[RurAL Cap](#)

Target Audience: Low income, & Families

Mission: RurAL CAP encourages the efforts of low-income people attempting to break the cycle of dependency and gain control of the changes affecting their lives. Its mission is to protect and improve the quality of life for low-income Alaskans through education, training, direct services, decent and affordable housing, advocacy, and strengthen the ability of low-income people to advocate for themselves.

[Standing together Against Rape](#)

Target Audience: Youth & Women

Mission: The Mission of STAR is: To provide the best quality of crisis intervention and advocacy services to victims of sexual assault and sexual abuse, and to provide education on these issues to the community.

[Access Alaska](#)

Target Audience: Youth, Families, & Disabled

Mission: Access Alaska is a private, non-profit, consumer-controlled organization that provides independent living services to people who experience a disability. As an Independent Living Center, our mission is to encourage and promote the total integration of people who experience a disability to live independently in the community of their choice. Through our assistance and support individuals with disabilities can identify and obtain needed services in an effort to maintain their independence as opposed to living in an institution.

[Stone Soup Group](#)

Target Audience: Youth, Families, & Disabled

Mission: Stone Soup Group exists to sustain the health and well-being of Alaskan children with special needs and their families. Through listening to the stories of families, we identify areas of need and work with communities to find solutions.

[Friends of Pets](#)

Target Audience: Families

Mission: Friends of Pets provides vital animal welfare and protective services for abandoned animals, with respect, compassion and integrity. We intervene to reduce the euthanasia rates at the Anchorage Animal Care & Control Center, to promote responsible pet ownership and to improve the quality of life for companion animals. FOP is a non-profit organization staffed entirely by volunteers and supported by donations.

[Intervention Helpline](#)

Target Audience: Families

Mission: Intervention Helpline is a non-profit organization based in Anchorage, whose sole focus is to bring hope, help and solutions to those battling addiction and provide support to those in recovery. We actively work to find a solution for every person who calls us asking for help—whether they are looking for a place to detox and receive treatment, a safe place to stay, some words of encouragement, or calling about a family member they are desperate to save and want to know what they should do.

[Alaska Cares](#)

Target Audience: Children, Youth, & Families

Mission: Alaska CARES is an outpatient clinic located near Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage. The clinic provides sexual and physical abuse evaluations for children, newborn to age 18 years, and 24-hour on-call services for cases that are considered emergent. These cases usually come to the attention of law enforcement or the emergency departments of local hospitals.

[The Alaska Zoo](#)

Target Audience: Families

Mission: The Alaska Zoo is a 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to providing homes for orphaned and injured wildlife. We pride ourselves on providing educational opportunities for visitors, both Alaskans and tourists.

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