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Bound to Continue: Using Applied Theatre Techniques to Bolster Retention Rates of First-Generation College Students, a Case Study Supporting the Mission and Continuation of the Trio Educational Opport

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BOUND TO CONTINUE:
USING APPLIED THEATRE TECHNIQUES TO BOLSTER RETENTION RATES
OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS,
A CASE STUDY SUPPORTING THE MISSION AND CONTINUATION
OF THE TRIO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM, UPWARD BOUND
by
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A dissertation submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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2017
This dissertation entitled:

Bound to Continue: Using Applied Theatre Techniques to Bolster Retention Rates of First-Generation College Students, A Case Study Supporting the Mission and Continuation of the TRIO Educational Opportunity Program, Upward Bound

written by Lindsay Weitkamp

has been approved for the Department of Theatre and Dance

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The final copy of this dissertation has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above-mentioned discipline.

IRB protocol # 13-0281
ABSTRACT

Weitkamp, Lindsay (Ph.D., Department of Theatre and Dance)

Bound to Continue: Using Applied Theatre Techniques to Bolster Retention Rates of First-Generation College Students, A Case Study Supporting the Mission and Continuation of the TRIO Educational Opportunity Program, Upward Bound

Dissertation directed by Dr. Beth Osnes

Upward Bound (UB) is a federally-funded TRIO educational opportunity program that assists low-income, potential first-generation college students in achieving a postsecondary education. UB offers many valuable services such as academic instruction and tutoring, cultural enrichment opportunities, work-study opportunities, assistance with college applications and financial aid navigation, counseling, and mentorship. However, in order for UB’s services to be fully effective, students need to remain in the program until completion. Therein lies a concern: students often drop out of UB prior to high school graduation.

The purpose of this study is to examine how applied theatre and arts-based techniques serve to build community and bolster retention rates in an individual UB program. The methodology used in this qualitative case study utilized a series of applied theatre and arts-based workshops, which centered on guiding program participants in developing a community of support, articulating their values and perspectives, and navigating their experiences as potential first-generation college students. This research is built upon an understanding of applied theatre, arts-based research, and sense of community theory. I integrate these concepts, as well as provide foundational information on the landscape of college access in the United States and the merit of this longstanding educational opportunity program.
This dissertation describes the collaboration with an individual UB program. During their 2013-2016 summer sessions on a residential college campus, 140 students participated in this research. Through the use of applied theatre and arts-based techniques, these workshops provided participants with a space to examine their college-bound journey and served to build community and bolster retention rates in this program. I include descriptions of the workshop experiences with participants and outline several of the activities utilized in this work. Perspectives from interviews with participants and current and former program personnel are included throughout, as well as a discussion on how this work could be utilized with students in other programs with similar goals and upon first-generation students’ arrival to a college campus.
To the Upward Bound students at Truman State University,
2004-2016
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Ch. 1—The Intersection: Educational Opportunity and Applied Theatre

...just be sincere, just be there, and just make a commitment.

—Lily Yeh

For four summers, I collaborated with participants and personnel of an Upward Bound (UB) program in northeast Missouri. UB is a federally-funded educational opportunity program that assists low-income, potential first-generation college students in achieving a postsecondary education. UB offers many valuable services such as academic instruction and tutoring, cultural enrichment opportunities, work-study opportunities, assistance with college applications and financial aid navigation, counseling, and mentorship. However, in order for UB’s services to be fully effective, students need to remain in the program until completion. Therein lies a concern: students often drop out of UB prior to high school graduation.

A bit of background: I began with a quote from artist and activist Lily Yeh because it connects to the heart of this research. I have been involved with this UB program in one capacity or another for over 12 years. My roles included: Performance Prep, Dance, Postsecondary Planning, ACT English, and Career Internship Instructor; Variety Show Director; Student Services Coordinator; Bridge Supervisor; Bridge Mentor; Community Council Lead; Office Assistant; Trip Supervisor; and, for three years, I served as Assistant Director. In witnessing several cohorts go through the program, I began noticing a trend: after losing participants due to homesickness or disconnection during the first week of the summer program, by the end-of-summer session banquet, the continuing students had formed a unique and close-knit community. They seemed
committed to one another and to the program at large. I began to wonder how we could work together to achieve this closeness and commitment sooner.

As a theatre practitioner, I have observed time and time again in both classrooms and rehearsal rooms as theatre games and activities helped to quickly form a tight ensemble. I cherish the experiences that valued this ensemble-building time and those colleagues are, to this day, close friends and collaborators. During my time as assistant director of UB, I began utilizing theatre activities with participants in academic-year meetings and with staff in orientations and trainings. After joyfully discovering the world of applied theatre, I began thinking of ways to connect the development of the UB “family” and the ensemble-building exercises already so widely used in the theatre world. I then set off on this exploration, with a commitment to UB and to addressing the retention concern.

This research seeks to answer the question: how can applied theatre and arts-based techniques serve to build community and bolster retention rates in an individual UB program? To answer this question, I conducted a qualitative case study with an individual program during their 2013-2016 summer sessions on a residential college campus. Together, we utilized applied theatre and arts-based techniques in a variety of small group workshops, which centered on guiding program participants in developing a community of support, articulating their values and college dreams, and navigating their experiences as potential first-generation college students. This research is built upon an understanding of applied theatre, arts-based research, and sense of community theory, and is constructed upon the premise that developing a sense of community will lead to an increase in student retention.
In this dissertation, I describe the collaboration with an individual UB program. I provide foundational information on the landscape of college access in the United States, as well as a description of the merit of this longstanding educational opportunity program. I guide the reader through the workshop experiences with participants and outline several of the activities utilized in this work. I include observations, responses, lessons learned, and recommendations for future work, as well as perspectives from interviews with participants and current and former program personnel throughout. My hope is that this work will serve educational opportunity program personnel as they navigate this retention concern, as well as serve applied theatre practitioners working with programs with similar populations and goals.

Educational Access and College Readiness in the United States

Upward Bound was born out of The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which was part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty. Unsatisfied with the inequities in the educational landscape of the United States, the U.S. Department of Education began what would be a series of eight TRIO programs. The umbrella term “TRIO” was chosen because this initiative began with only three programs and continued to expand under the Higher Education Act of 1965 and in subsequent amendments. TRIO programs include Upward Bound (1964), Talent Search (1965), Student Support Services (1968), Educational Opportunity Centers (1972), Veterans Upward Bound (1972), Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs Staff (1976), Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program (1986), and Upward Bound Math/Science (1990). These service programs were established to bridge social and cultural barriers in the educational system by fostering in those traditionally underrepresented in higher
education the skills and motivation necessary for postsecondary success. The TRIO programs were “the first national college access and retention programs to address the serious social and cultural barriers to education in America” (“COE: TRIO”). They are the largest group of discretionary grant-funded programs in the U.S. Department of Education (Cahalan and Curtin 3). The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) was established in 1981 and works with the colleges, universities, and agencies that host TRIO programs. “More than 2,800 TRIO programs currently serve close to 790,000 low-income students. Many programs serve students in grades 6 through 12” (“COE: Who We Are”).

UB was the first of the TRIO programs. In their report, The Upward Bound College Access Program 50 Years Later: Evidence from a National Randomized Trial, researchers Douglas N. Harris, Alan Nathan, and Ryne Marksteiner note, “Early in its history, UB was judged to be ‘an incredible success story’ as 70 percent of UB high school graduates enrolled in college compared with 50 percent nationally” (3). UB remains, to this day, “the single largest college access program in the country” (1). 813 UB programs across the nation were funded for fiscal year 2015 and approximately 61,361 students were served (“Funding Status--Upward Bound Program”). Two-thirds of the project participants must be low-income and potential first-generation college students, and the remaining one-third may be either low-income or potential first-generation college students. Students typically apply to UB during their freshman or sophomore year of high school, and, if accepted, have the opportunity to receive program services until high school graduation.

Pedro Noguera, author, sociologist, and education professor, researches the social and economic conditions that influence educational achievement. In “A Broader, Bolder Approach to
Education,” he writes of the need to enhance students’ time out of school through academic and enrichment opportunities. He states, “Low-income students learn rapidly in school, but often lose ground after school and during summers” (Noguera). UB addresses this concern by providing both an academic-year program and an intensive summer component, which could be a residential program designed to simulate living on a college campus. An individual program may also offer a summer “Bridge” program as a transitional step for participants who just graduated high school and plan to enter postsecondary education in the fall.

Educational opportunity programs, such as UB, address an important issue in the educational landscape of this country. In April of 2016, The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education and The University of Pennsylvania Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy (PennAHEAD) published *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States, 45 Year Trend Report* (2016). In an effort to broadly assess the state of educational opportunity in the U.S., the report utilizes several equity indicators such as who enrolls, the type of postsecondary institution students attend, financial aid and whether it eliminates financial barriers, how students pay for college, how attainment rates vary by family characteristics, and a comparison between U.S. attainment rates versus other nations. On many of these indicators, 2016 equity gaps were larger than in the past. The report concludes that the U.S. higher education system is “deeply unequal” (7).

Research indicates a strong relationship between income and postsecondary enrollment and completion (Cahalan and Curtin 48). Harris, Nathan, and Marksteiner state that “students in the highest income quartile are six times as likely to complete college compared with the lowest income quartile” (2). This is not surprising given the differences in college preparation between
high- and low-income high school students. Though many high-income graduates have the grades and test scores to attend institutions of postsecondary education, only half of low-income students have those credentials (Myers et al. xv). The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) summarizes this trend: “Low-income students are being left behind. Only 38% of low-income high school seniors go straight to college as compared to 81% of their peers in the highest income quartile. Then, once enrolled in college, low-income students earn bachelor's degrees at a rate that is less than half of that of their high-income peers — 21% as compared with 45%” (“COE: TRIO”). This then affects individuals’ future careers and earning potential. Thomas G. Mortenson, Senior Scholar at the Pell Institute, states, “Since 1973 income has been redistributed according to educational attainment. Those with education have prospered, while those with the least education have suffered . . . This is Human Capital Economy. And in this environment higher education has become a key engine dividing Americans into those who have more and others who have less” (Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States, 45 Year Trend Report (2016) 81).

Consequently, there is still a pressing need for college access programs, especially since research shows them to be effective. COE reports:

The work of educational opportunity organizations has contributed significant accomplishments . . . an estimated 5 million students graduating from college; the integration of 2,800 TRIO programs into college campuses, serving 790,000 students (two-thirds of whom come from families with incomes under $36,450 — family of four); the establishment of performance standards that are subject to specific outcome measures. (“COE: Who We Are”)
In relation to strides from the UB program, in particular: “91.2% of Upward Bound students who participated in the program for three years or longer and 93% who participated through high school graduation enrolled in a postsecondary program immediately following high school” (“COE: TRIO”). Thus, UB has the potential to continue to serve as a vital tool in closing the gap in educational opportunity in this country.

Area of Concern

As previously mentioned, students often drop out of UB prior to program completion. To illustrate this information, key reports published by the U.S. Department of Education come into play. There have been two major national studies of UB. The first was conducted by Research Triangle Institute from 1973-1979. The second evaluation, sometimes referred to as the “Horizons study,” was conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) from 1992-2004. Both reports found the length of program participation to relate to student outcomes and suggest that “some attention should be paid in the performance report analyses to measures of program retention and risk factors among participants” (Cahalan and Curtin 6). In the MPR “impact study” of 67 UB programs nationwide, researchers found, “Less than 45 percent of participants continue with the program through the senior year of high school. . . over one-third of participants leave Upward Bound within the first year and nearly two-thirds leave within two years” (Myers and Schirm xx). Although not discredited entirely, this report has since been re-evaluated and deemed flawed for a “failure to detect positive impacts when they are present” (Cahalan and Goodwin 3). However, when Alan Nathan examined the MPR report in his 2013 dissertation, Does Upward Bound Have an Effect on Student Educational Outcomes? A Reanalysis
of the Horizons Randomized Controlled Trial Study, he agreed with the report’s assessment of student completion rates. He states that approximately 35% of the group studied completed the UB program, and, “[t]he grantees surveyed for the retrospective study of UB reported similar persistence figures for their students” (54). He therefore concluded that “the level of attrition the Horizons study researchers encountered was not unusual” (54).

In 2004, Margaret W. Cahalan and Thomas R. Curtin published the report, A Profile of the Upward Bound Program: 2000-2001. This study analyzed data based on annual performance reports, which are yearly reports designed to measure individual program outcomes and progress towards meeting goals. Due to limitations in their study, they were unable to provide complete data on UB participation; however, they stated that “one might estimate that about 42 percent of those served at least 12 months left prior to graduating from high school” (35).

Then, in 2008, Laura G. Knapp, Ruth E. Heuer, and Marcinda Mason published the report, Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math Science Program Outcomes for Participants Expected to Graduate High School in 2004-05, With Supporting Data from 2005-06. This report brought together data from 2000-2006 and focused on the progress of a complete cohort. They examined program retention by a student’s grade level at program entry and found that, overall, 40.9 percent of students left UB before their expected high school graduation date (5–6).

Program retention is related to several factors. Based on over 12 years of experience working with UB, I have seen students leave primarily at the beginning of the six-week summer session. Reasons included, but are not limited to: a lack of close friends in the new setting, feeling that they instead needed to help at home or get a job to earn money, homesickness,
feelings of trepidation about the changes in their summer plans, and the rigor of an academic summer program. These thoughts are echoed by UB personnel. Lana Brown, former UB Project Director who served the program for 35 years, stated, “We have an effect upon them [participants] from the time they’re age 15 forward, but they have 15 years of history and family life built and it doesn’t include us at all. And then we’re the new entry into it, and so we cannot go as deep as what family does... They walk away and the old pulls them back” (Brown).

Likewise, former UB Project Director Janet Blohm-Pultz stated:

I always felt like we were operating like a big rubber band. We were one side of the rubber band and the student’s home culture was the other side of the rubber band, and we were each pulling and the student was in between there. Sometimes it would just snap in our face and they’d pop right back, because I think there’s that continual pull. Because nobody likes change, really, at their heart, nobody likes change, and the status quo is the safest, best thing. And putting a student in Upward Bound changes that status quo, both for the student and the family, so there’s going to be resistance on all parts to that change.

(Blohm-Pultz)

In the new student/parent orientations, as well as during the parent summer session move-in day meeting, UB personnel talk with the families of UB participants about the merit of the summer programming and discuss ways that families can help participants combat potential feelings of homesickness. In my initial conversations about this dissertation topic, several participants shared with me that feeling more connected to others, developing a sense of “family” among students and staff, and a connection to larger program goals would help them
create initial ties in the summer session and propel them forward in the program. Sarah Hass, Project Director of the UB program at Truman State University, added:

They feel overwhelmed by the commitment they’ve made, being with a group of students, and the expected level of interaction with strangers or students that they don’t know very well. It makes them very uncomfortable, makes them very self-conscious. It causes kind of a “crisis of confidence” where they question if they really want to do this. It’s truly tragic that we’re a college access program and we expect students that we know have potential and are qualified, and . . . are we scaring them away? They’ve already demonstrated an interest and an ability to go to college and, so, then the last thing we want to do is to accept them into our group and then scare them. That they think, “Oh, maybe this isn’t something I can do,” or “Maybe this is not the track for me.” That’s personally very concerning for me, that we are intimidating them. That’s the last thing we want to do. We want to make them feel comfortable and confident and assure them that college is where they belong and doing a college-preparatory program is an obvious and logical step for them, and a good fit for them—not that they don’t belong. (Hass, emphasis added)

Students dropping out of UB also affects the program at large. Part of the assessment when awarding grant funding to an individual UB program is based upon the outcome of program participants. As stated in Title 34: Education, Part 645—Upward Bound Program in the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, the Secretary of Education utilizes secondary school retention and graduation, as well as postsecondary enrollment and completion, when deciding
which grants to award (e-CFR 645.32). Likewise, the U.S. Department of Education website states in its Upward Bound FAQs section: “The success of the UB Program is measured by the percentage of low-income, first-generation college students who successfully pursue and complete postsecondary education opportunities” (“Frequently Asked Questions—Upward Bound Program”). These same criteria are also utilized when evaluating prior experience points of an existing UB program (e-CFR 645.32). Therefore, students dropping out of UB before completion also affects the continued federal funding of UB programs across the United States. Hass stated, “Retention is an issue for all of us. This is a performance objective for us, whether students are retained in the program, and so it is a very widespread concern, especially as the other incentives for participation have waned” (Hass).

The correlation between retention and program funding is linked to an initial participant review process. When a student is accepted into a UB program, this individual is placed on a temporary roster for 60 days if admitted during an academic year (which is the typical recruitment time frame), or 10 days if admitted during a summer session. If a student attends the required initial program meetings and if the UB personnel conclude that the student will make a long-term commitment to the program, she or he likely “passes” the 60-day (or 10-day) review process and is placed on the program’s permanent roster. This 60-day or 10-day span serves both the program, as well as the student, and helps to ensure that the union between the two is a good fit before making what is meant to be a more permanent commitment to one another. Once a student is placed on the permanent roster, the individual UB program is then responsible for tracking this student for years following completion of high school (Cahalan and Curtin 7). Hass stated:
For students who are not successful—that we’re not able to retain, but have passed that 60-day window—the impact on the programs and their funding is long-term. You can be responsible for students that graduated or dropped out or were not retained 6-9 years ago, which is significant, and you’re unable to impact that as a director because it happened in the past. So, we feel tremendous pressure to implement good solid practices now because it’s one of those situations that you can’t look back or make adjustments to, or make a quick phone call and get someone enrolled. It’s the results of building relationships or having lost them . . . Even though we are not providing services or helping them in their college endeavors, we are still being held accountable for whether they went to college, whether they persisted in college, whether they graduated from college. (Hass)

Therefore, retaining a participant and providing continued program services is key. If a participant drops out of the UB program, or even high school, after being placed on a permanent roster, the individual UB program is still responsible for tracking this participant’s postsecondary success, yet without providing continued, and perhaps essential, services to assist in ensuring this success.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to examine the effect of utilizing applied theatre techniques and arts-based activities in a UB program. The key assertion of this study is that this work serves to build community, which I argue leads to bolstering retention rates in an individual
program. This will, in turn, promote both student success and aid in the continued funding of the program.

My research situates around the following central question: how can applied theatre and arts-based techniques serve to build community and bolster retention rates in an individual UB program? Additional questions include:

- What factors contribute to a participant persisting vs. dropping out of the program?
- How can the workshops contribute to developing a sense of community among participants? Between students and staff? Which activities are most successful?
- How can the workshops provide a fruitful space to discuss and navigate college success?
- How do these methods supplement and support the mission of the program?

As I focused in on the heart of this research, I kept returning to three key words: support, build, and bolster. Throughout the course of this work, my goals were to support the UB program mission, work with participants and staff members to build community within an existing program, and to bolster retention rates. Our work together from 2013-2016 is documented in this qualitative case study. I facilitated a variety of theatre workshops—the community-building “Theatre Games” involved all of the UB participants, and the applied theatre-based “Theatre Workshops” involved a small group of students who participated in four consecutive workshops. I am interested in the ways in which this work served to build a sense of community among participants and affected their connection to one another and to the program at large. I aim to ground the reader in an understanding of the workshop experiences,
and will provide participants’ contributions and responses, as well as perspectives from program personnel regarding this work.

**Merit of the Study**

Research shows that there is a link between receiving program services and students’ postsecondary success. When examining the effect of program retention, both the MPR researchers and Nathan note significant results. MPR researchers state:

> Our findings suggest that Upward Bound participants would reap larger benefits from additional participation. Among students who applied for Upward Bound in ninth or tenth grade and left the program before the end of twelfth grade, program completion may increase the rate at which they attend postsecondary institutions by as many as 17 percentage points. For each of the same students, program completion may result in 16 additional postsecondary credits. Furthermore, for students who participated for two years or less, each additional year of Upward Bound may increase the rate at which participants attended postsecondary institutions by about 9 percentage points. (Myers et al. xviii)

After examining this trend, the MPR study concluded that “the longer students remain in the program, the more they appear to benefit in terms of both high school and college outcomes. Therefore, one obvious way to increase overall program effectiveness is to improve student retention” (Myers and Schirm xxii).
The 2008 report found two predictors of postsecondary enrollment: duration in the program and persistence in the program through high school graduation (Knapp et al. 1). COE summarizes the results:

In 2005, 77.3% of all students who participated in Upward Bound programs immediately went to college in the fall following their high school graduations. This rate is even higher by persistence in the program: 91.2% of Upward Bound students who participated in the program for three years or longer and 93% who participated through high school graduation enrolled in a postsecondary program immediately following high school. ("COE: TRIO")

This information points directly to a need for study in order to ensure the continued retention of these students and the success of the program at large. In their report, The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies, authors James S. Catterall, Susan A. Dumais, and Gillian Hampden-Thompson concluded, “Socially and economically disadvantaged children and teenagers who have high levels of arts engagement or arts learning show more positive outcomes in a variety of areas than their peers.” They continue, “To varying degrees those outcomes extend to school grades, test scores, honors society membership, high school graduation, college enrollment and achievement, volunteering, and engagement in school or local politics” (24). Similarly, in their article “Creative Arts: Strengthening Academics and Building Community with Students At-Risk,” authors Randal W. Boldt and Catherine Brooks state, “The creative arts have proven to be especially helpful by fostering positive relationships, academic motivation, responsibility, and a climate of respect” (223). My hope is that this dissertation—the activities implemented in this case study, as well as the perspectives of
Definition of Terms

I will utilize a few terms repeatedly throughout this research. The term *educational opportunity* refers to the vision of the Council for Opportunity in Education, which states, “Every young person and adult has an equal opportunity to prepare for, attend, and graduate from college. Graduation from any category of postsecondary institution is achievable and not limited by economic status, family background, or disability” (“COE: Who We Are”). A *first-generation college student* is a high school student from a family in which neither parent has attained a bachelor’s degree (“Upward Bound Program”).

I will also utilize terms in relation to the UB program. I refer to the *mission* of the UB program as a combination of the U.S. Department of Education’s “purpose” and the “goal” of this program. The department states that the purpose of UB is to “generate in program participants the skills and motivation necessary to complete a program of secondary education and to enter and succeed in a program of postsecondary education” (“Frequently Asked Questions—Upward Bound Program”), and, likewise, the goal is “to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education” (“Upward Bound Program”). A UB *program participant*, also sometimes referred to as a “student,” is typically 14-18 years old and is enrolled in an individual UB program. *Program personnel* refers to UB administration (in this case study: the current and...
former project directors, assistant directors, and office manager). Retention refers to a program participant remaining in the program until completion.

**Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions**

There were some delimitations in this study. Despite my initial hope to facilitate workshops during both the 60-day review process that occurs in January and February of each academic year, as well as during the summer sessions, I found this was not feasible. As a graduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder, I needed to spend the fall and spring semesters in Boulder taking coursework, completing comprehensive exams, and fulfilling teaching responsibilities. I therefore conducted this research in four consecutive summer sessions, 2013-2016. My hope is that the activities used in these workshops are easily transferable to the academic-year meetings and can be utilized in existing programs within other critical time frames, as well as in future summer sessions. I discuss this in greater detail in the conclusion of this dissertation.

It is important to note that there are many variables at play when it comes to retention, not simply a sense of community. In surveys with program participants, the most common reasons for potentially dropping out of UB included: family issues (ties to or problems at home), moving, personal issues, involvement in other extracurricular activities, issues related to other people in the program, or homesickness. In addition, the MPR study showed that factors such as ethnicity, lower educational expectations, and when students joined the program also played a part in student retention (Myers et al. 16). For instance, “Hispanic participants remained in Upward Bound less time than African American participants (15 versus 20 months, on average),”
and, “typically, students with lower educational expectations stayed in Upward Bound 15 months and those with higher expectations stayed 22 months” (16). Because the scope of this dissertation is limited to one case study, further examination of these multiple factors would be included in future manifestations of this research involving multiple programs. This dissertation focuses on the potential retention variable of a sense of community, which I believe relates to the previously mentioned “issues related to other people in the program,” “personal issues,” “homesickness,” and the general development of close ties to other UB participants and staff members and to the program at large.

Also important to note is my role in this research. Philip Taylor, educational theatre professor and author of *Applied Theatre, Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community*, writes, “There are huge risks involved for applied theatre facilitators when they enter communities believing they can effect change. The most one can hope for is to engage the community in a dialogue and with a presentation so that all participants can interact with the focused area” (68). As a guest of this community, I was careful not to disrupt the very full and structured program model too much at this stage of exploration. As UB participants, staff members, and I worked together to investigate ways to build community, I was cautious to not assume that program participants would want to contribute to this research. Therefore, although all of the program participants joined in initial community-building workshops, participation in the more intensive applied theatre workshop series and/or the interview component was conducted on a volunteer basis.

Likewise, I acknowledge my own reflexivity in this research. As mentioned previously, I came to this research after several years of working with the UB program. This prior experience
sparked initial observations of the UB community and retention, and then eventually led to my pursuit of this research. Consequently, my history with the UB program has undoubtedly shaped and informed this work. Also, the participant-observations are my own accounts of the workshops, and therefore may not represent the only version of the truth of a particular moment. With the lens of social constructionism, I note that I, too, have been shaped by my experiences and social interactions. I have therefore triangulated my research methodology to ensure multiple perspectives. I included participants in multiple parts of this design and analysis, utilize quotes from surveys and interviews with participants and program personnel throughout this analysis, and I include quantitative results and photo documentation. In Membership Roles in Field Research, sociologists Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler state, “We have become consciously aware that in order to appreciate the value or evaluate the perspective of each other’s work we must know where they stood in the picture and the impact it had on them as well as they on it. We are thus offering profound self-disclosures about very personal aspects of our selves and lives” (86). I have therefore presented an honest disclosure of my own perspective and journey with UB throughout this research.

Chapter Organization

In Chapter 2, I share an overview of the literature and the theoretical foundations of this work. I ground the reader in understandings of applied theatre, arts-based research, Freirean notions of education, and sense of community theory.
Chapter 3 focuses on methodology and discusses the setting and participants, the factors that led me to work with this specific UB program, and this program’s existing model of services. This develops into a discussion of my research design and methods.

Chapter 4 focuses on the workshop experiences titled, “Theatre Games,” which were facilitated at the beginning of UB’s summer sessions, 2013-2016. I discuss several of the arts-based activities utilized for community-building in these workshops, and the chapter includes student survey data and perspectives from interviews.

Chapter 5 focuses specifically on the “Theatre Workshops” conducted in 2015, which utilized applied theatre in multiple sessions with the same group of students. I discuss several of the activities employed in the workshops, as well as student survey data, perspectives from a focus group, and examples from another small group workshop facilitated in 2016.

Chapter 6 discusses the effects of this community-building work on this case study’s participants. I include an examination of retention data from these cohorts and discuss the overall results of this case study. I also include recommendations for future research. At the end of the chapter, I discuss how these techniques could be utilized in other programs with similar goals and how they could be utilized with first-generation students on a college campus.

A final introductory note . . .

When asked why participants stay in the UB program, Erika Sterup, Assistant Director of the UB program at Truman State University stated, “They stay in the program because they make a relationship with somebody. People don’t join organizations, they join other people” (Sterup). Building community seems key to ensuring that students stay in the program and do not quit
before completion. This dissertation explores the efficacy of applied theatre and arts-based techniques as tools to develop a sense of community and, in turn, bolster retention rates. The intensive UB programs have the potential to continue to serve as a vital tool in closing the gap in educational opportunity in this country. In the foreword to the book, *Bringing Out the Best in Human Effectiveness, Lessons for Educators from an Upward Bound Project*, UB alum Craig Crenshaw shares:

Success is more than a want. One must have a mechanism that will permit the want to mature into a reality. Upward Bound is the educational road map that allowed this evolution to occur. It was more than an organization made up of young people who had a desire to succeed. It was more than a group of people who were classified by a social label. Upward Bound . . . is a state of mind, and a belief that one can make a difference through education and awareness. It is an experience that one lives and where one is introduced to the skill sets that allow one to open the closed doors and opportunities" (Dottin et al. ix).

. . . So, the stakes are high. I invite you to join me in exploring this idea in student retention.
Hope is founded on critical imagination. It is therefore not enough for research to tell us what the world is. Instead it must provide opportunities for communities to imagine what it might be.

—Peter O’Connor and Michael Anderson, authors of *Applied Theatre: Research, Radical Departures*

In this chapter, I first note any previous research involving ties between theatre and Upward Bound (UB). I then examine the four central areas of study that provide a foundation for this work: applied theatre, arts-based research, Freirean notions of education, and sense of community theory. Connections are made between these areas of study and they are also linked to this research with UB.

Although much has been written about the UB program, and, likewise, much has been written about applied theatre, no literature to date has discussed the use of applied theatre in UB programs. In terms of theatre and UB, Denise Hughes-Tafen’s dissertation, *Throwing Black Women’s Voices from the Global South into an Appalachian Classroom*, utilized performative inquiry to examine issues of race in urban and rural Ohio. She utilized 25 UB students in this study, and, although her work was not directly related to her participants’ involvement in the UB program, this connection between UB and a theatrical endeavor is worth noting. Also, in Benjamin Bates’ dissertation, *Whole Language Theatre: Literature as Performance*, he used theatre techniques to promote literacy. He facilitated his work in a UB Language Arts Workshop. Again, although he was not expressly studying the connections between theatre and the success of UB programs and participants, like Hughes-Tafen, he utilized theatre techniques with a group of UB students. In 1967, the UB program at Indiana State University cast students in four plays in
hopes that the role-playing scenario before an audience would lead to students’ gains in their adjustment scores. Although not explained in the source, my guess is that “adjustment scores” refers to the change in students’ academic scores from pre-program to during the program. The researcher notes that for a variety of reasons, the hypothesis was not supported (Carpenter 179–181). Also, although many programs choose to take the participants to theatre productions as a part of the students’ cultural enrichment, to my knowledge, the three examples outlined above are the only instances of any sort of studied connection between theatre and UB.

**Overview of the Literature**

Thoughts of theatre typically conjure up notions of sitting in a dark space with a community of strangers, watching an artistic piece unfold in a lit performance area. This viewing is often the result of numerous rehearsals by trained performers, all of which were constructed to perfect a final product. However, there are models of theatrical practice that push against this widely accepted theatrical design and instead focus on the improvisational participation of all involved.

In the 1960s, theatre artists and practitioners were working to redefine traditional conceptions of theatre. They wanted more; they thought theatre could do more. Applied theatre then emerged in order to depart from the traditional definitions and conceptions of theatre and to instead define a wide array of community-based work. The term “applied theatre” was coined in the late 1980s as an “umbrella term” for many approaches to theatre-making. Helen Nicholson, theatre and performance professor and author of *Applied Drama: the gift of theatre*, reminds us, “Despite differences of inflection, the terms ‘applied drama’, ‘applied theatre’, and
‘applied performance’ are often used quite flexibly and interchangeably, with ‘applied theatre’ emerging as the term most regularly used” (5).

The concept of applied theatre encompasses many different practices and approaches to the ways in which theatre can be used as a tool of engagement, and multiple scholars provide overarching understandings of this canon. Nicholson states that “applied theatre is academically interdisciplinary” (6). James Thompson, applied theatre professor and author of Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and Beyond, adds that applied theatre “joins different categories of a socially engaged theatre without denying their separate histories or dictating what can be placed within their own boundaries” (14). Similarly, Philip Taylor explains, “theatre is applied because it is taken out from the conventional mainstream theatre house into various settings in communities where many members have no real experience in theatre form” (xxx). In this sense, “theatre is pressed onto something other than itself” (33). The applied theatre canon includes, but is not limited to, Theatre in Education, Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre for Development, Community-based Theatre, Prison Theatre, and Reminiscence Theatre. This work centers on issues identified by the community itself, and these various movements share the central idea of practice in non-traditional theatre spaces with participants with little or no theatre experience.

The purpose of this work rests in the community. Taylor states, “The applied theatre operates from a central transformative principle: to raise awareness on a particular issue . . . to teach a particular concept . . . to interrogate human actions . . . to prevent life-threatening behaviors . . . to heal fractured identities . . . to change states of oppression” (1). Applied theatre practices shift the idea of the audience from passive to dynamic and engaged through the use of active participation. In traditional mainstream theatre, the work is situated around a pre-written
script and the product is often privileged, whereas in applied theatre, traditional rules of the theatre are largely abandoned. It is process-oriented, and the process is shared and experiential for all involved. And, sometimes, it is simply that—“a process,” without any type of final performance. Augusto Boal, the creator of Theatre of the Oppressed, further explains this concept: “Theatre is a language through which human beings can engage in active dialogue on what is important to them. It allows individuals to create a safe space that they may inhabit in groups and use to explore the interactions that make up their lives. It is a lab for problem solving, for seeking options, and for practicing solutions” (qtd. in Rohd xix). It seeks to devise roles and situations that shift understandings of the world, and, “[a]t the very least, applied theatre should leave participants with good questions they can take away with them” (Taylor 72). Because of this connection between performing and participating, audience/community members are often referred to as either performer-participants, or by Boal’s term: spect-actors.

Grassroots theatre’s emphasis on local and/or personal stories made a significant impact on the development of applied theatre techniques. Nicholson notes that “the construction and shaping of local communities . . . is not so much a matter of recovering or rediscovering the lost narratives of a homogeneous past, but of making a contribution to redefining their actual and symbolic boundaries in the present and for the future” (85-86). A sense of belonging emanates from shared understandings of experiences and thus “communities of identity are constructed when people recognise their own experiences in others, and share an understanding of each other’s values or stories” (97). In their book Applied Theatre, International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice, theatre educators and authors Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton share that the intent of applied theatre “is to reveal more clearly the way the world is working”
and it provides “ways by which we can re-examine the world to discover how it works and our place in it” (8). The work holds “the potential to be educational, reflective and/or rehabilitative” (8). In all contexts, applied theatre work focuses on multiple perspectives, remains open-ended in construction, often relies more on movement and image than language, highlights issues of importance to a particular community, and uses a collaborative, connective approach to theatre-making and storytelling (11).

Since applied theatre techniques are non-limiting and molded to serve in the context of a particular community, I drew upon multiple sources when developing this work in relation to UB. The activities utilized came from a wide range of practitioners and sourcebooks. The Geese Theatre Handbook, Augusto Boal’s Games for Actors and Non-actors, Julie McCarthy’s Enacting Participatory Development, and Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton’s Applied Drama: A Facilitator’s Handbook for Working in Community serve as texts with ample sample activities. Michael Rohd’s Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual serves as a sourcebook for mindfully using applied theatre techniques within a community.

In the Theatre in Education canon, texts on developing a process drama informed a workshop discussed further in Chapter 5. Process drama was developed in England in the 1950s-70s, namely through the work of drama educators Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton, and Cecily O’Neill popularized the term in her continuation of the work in the 1990s (Weltsek-Medina 91). It begins with an impulse for the drama and knowledge of what the drama is for (Wagner 127). This impulse may come out of theme or issue, a historical or creative text, or even a response to a work of art. The facilitator then creates a framework for the experience by composing a series of episodes, or units, that are separate, yet linked through this initial impulse.
Units are often non-linear and can include, but are not limited to: role-play, tableaux, speaking inner monologues, exploring dreams or a character’s conscience or soul, and prompts for movement pieces. Improvisational techniques are then utilized, and, since this form does not use a script, the life experiences of each individual are integral to the choices made throughout the piece. The work “creates moments of tension, conflict and realization where issues of ethics, morals and meanings of existence come into play while individuals act and react to the situations they have created” (Weltsek-Medina 96).

The facilitator works both inside and outside of the drama. When in role, they often answer questions from a character’s perspective, propel the drama forward, or provide necessary background information. When out of role, the facilitator guides the movement between units through reflection and dialogue. The facilitator “is not merely implementing a predetermined sequence of activities but is constantly rethinking ideas as participants experience the structure” (Taylor and Warner 1). Based on what occurs within a particular unit, the facilitator decides how to develop discussion and reflection, as well as where to travel within the next dramatic unit. The learning that occurs and the decisions made in the intensified moments of the drama are key to this work.

Participants, too, work both in and out of role in the different units. In role, they make choices as their characters. Heathcote states, “Drama is not stories retold in action. Drama is human beings confronted by situations which change them because of what they must face in dealing with those challenges” (48). Students usually “face” these challenges within the context of a character. Students take on what Heathcote calls “mantle of the expert,” where they become the experts in the subject being explored (Heathcote and Bolton 4). This both deepens
their understandings and heightens their experiences. Students do not normally stay in role as the same character throughout the drama, but rather, they step into multiple characters in order to see the issue or theme from new perspectives. Process drama is interested in having participants “project into the situation in its entirety” and “[t]his projection requires participants having access to multiple roles and viewpoints” (Taylor and Warner 17).

In Drama Worlds: A Framework for Process Drama, O’Neill writes, “[I]nfluences from postmodern theatre practices are reflected in process drama. These include fragmentation and distribution of roles among the group, a nonlinear and discontinuous approach to plot, the reworking of classic themes or texts, a blurring of the distinction between actors and audience, a double self-consciousness, and a constant shift in perspectives” (xvii). Through dramatic improvisation, the facilitator and participants journey together in an effort to deeply explore the initial dramatic impulse and the attitudes that develop along the way. O’Neill states, “The audience in a theatre waits for something to happen, but the participants in a process drama make this ‘something’ happen” (119). This dialogic component, where all involved are meaning-makers, is central to this form.

Applied theatre work, in its varied forms, can serve a community in multiple ways. In their article “Drama for change? Prove it! Impact assessment in applied theatre,” Michael Etherton and Tim Prentki point out, “One of the commonest aims and stated outcomes of using a drama process is to increase the confidence of participants who frequently assert that their confidence was indeed boosted by being engaged in a process which enabled them to explore aspects of themselves through the mask of the other” (145). They continue, “Even those processes which are not explicitly therapeutic often embed into their practice the assumption
that all those involved will enjoy themselves and have higher self-esteem as a result” (145). This was certainly a foundational goal in this work with UB. When I facilitated theatre activities during my time as assistant director or as a classroom instructor with this program, I witnessed firsthand shy, detached students come out of their shells and begin to connect with their peers. My observations of their increases in self-confidence are, in fact, the initial discoveries that began the path to this research several years ago. Additionally, theatre work creates empathy and understanding. It gives students a chance to walk in someone else’s shoes and/or express themselves beyond the confines of language. Applied theatre work, in particular, without the confines of a pre-written text, allows students to create artistic and meaningful responses to the world around them. As noted by Etherton and Prentki, “Through imagination and creativity, thoroughness of analysis, and participatory methodologies, applied theatre practitioners can contribute significantly to making lasting social change” (154).

Much like applied theatre, arts-based research also casts a wide net. Its beginnings were found in the qualitative research process, yet this type of research opens space for alternative ways of knowing to manifest within academia. In her chapter in the Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research, Susan Finley states, “Arts-based research describes an epistemological foundation for human inquiry that utilizes artful ways of understanding and representing worlds in which research is constructed” (79). This type of research encompasses multiple methodologies and provides further means of communication and self-expression. Finley explains:

Arts-based research is difficult to characterize because its forms and methods vary according to location, diversity of participants, and the range of ways
through which researchers, artists, and participants describe, interpret, and make meanings from experiences, as well as by multiple forms of representation available to the artist-as-researcher—e.g., novel, poetry, film, dance, photographic portfolios, visual art installations, or dramatic performance. Arts-based research makes use of diverse ways of knowing and experiencing the world. As such, the term *arts-based research* cannot be reduced to a prescriptive set of methods for generating and representing empirical materials. It is more of an “umbrella term” for many methodologies that follow from a constructivist, emotive, empiricist research aesthetic. (79)

Finley uses the same phrase employed in my earlier discussion of applied theatre; arts-based research is an “umbrella term” that encompasses multiple approaches. In their book *Arts Based Research*, art and education specialists Tom Barone and Elliot W. Eisner further describe this notion: “The primary aim of arts based research is to expand the variety of resources that researchers can use to understand the social world” (170). They add, “Its aim is *not* to replace old methods with new ones; its aim is to supplement, to enlarge, to expand, and to diversify the tools researchers can use and through such diversification to both see what might not otherwise have been seen and to be able to say what otherwise might not have been able to be said” (170).

Additionally, arts-based research seems like an ideal fit as an inquiry umbrella for this work with UB because it goes outside the walls of a typical theatrical space and brings the work into a community setting. Finley states, "Socially responsible research for and by the people cannot reside inside the lonely walls of academic institutions" (74). Thus, this research was facilitated at the site of a UB program, in a room located within the participants’ residence hall.
(which was a comfortable and known space for the participants), and it occurred within the program schedule. Also, arts-based research expands the typical notions of inquiry. It "champions the idea that knowledge of the world cannot and should not be reduced into words and numbers alone. That representation through image, sound, movement and colour are equally valid ways of expressing knowledge" (O’Connor and Anderson 24). Although both qualitative and quantitative analysis are utilized in this research, of equal importance are the images created by the participants during the workshops, their body language, the visual art they created, their written poetic responses, and their movement within the activities. Since this work highlights building a sense of community, sound is also of great importance. When did the soundscape of the room change? When were the students uncomfortably silent and when did they easily talk to one another and laugh together? This work "recognizes that we know the world through all our senses, through our bodies, and that we can sometimes better represent that knowledge through our bodies rather than through what comes from our mind alone" (26). Furthermore, this type of research is ideal for community-building efforts because it relates to emotional connections. Arts-based research scholars Gioia Chilton and Patricia Leavy acknowledge, “The immediacy of art provides viscerally felt sensorial experiences, an embodied knowledge that is effective at communicating emotional aspects of social life (Leavy, 2009). This empathetic understanding can provide deep insight that is empirically different from cognitively acquired knowledge” (407). This, too, relates to my own role in this work. In her book Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice, Leavy writes, “As researchers, we are often trained to hide our relationship to our work”; however, arts-based research practices “allow researchers to share this relationship with the audiences who consume their works” (2).
Arts-based research and applied theatre also work hand-in-hand because of their shared focus on social justice. Finley summarizes:

At the heart of arts-based inquiry is a radical, politically grounded statement about social justice and control over the production and dissemination of knowledge. By calling upon artful ways of knowing and being in the world, arts-based researchers make a rather audacious challenge to the dominant, entrenched academic community and its claims to scientific ways of knowing. In addition, arts-based methodologies bring both arts and social inquiry out of the elitist institutions of academe and art museums, and relocate inquiry within the realm of local, personal, everyday places and events. (72)

Arts-based research provides an ideal umbrella for unpacking educational opportunity because "[w]hen arts-based research is grounded in a critical performance pedagogy, it can be used to advance a progressive political agenda that addresses issues of social inequity" (79). This belief was of particular importance during the development of the UB “Theatre Workshops” outlined in Chapter 5. Utilizing the arts expands students’ ways of both understanding and responding to their paths as potential first-generation college students.

Progressive models of European education, as well as the work of Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire, guide the contextual and practical components of this study. Freire believed in problem-posing education, which “affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (84). This process of becoming is achieved through continued discourse. He placed the learner, rather than the teacher, at the center of the educational process, and states that students should play a
dynamic role in their education. His ideals serve to support my research by enforcing that participants should examine their own role in the politics of the educational landscape in order to become agents of change, not only for themselves but also for future generations. This critical consciousness, or “praxis,” can be developed through participatory work in which students and teachers work collaboratively. Taylor explains:

*Praxis* . . . claims that an ability to help one another reflect and act on their world is at the heart of a sound education, and through that process transforms it into something more equitable and worthwhile. Praxis is powered by an agenda, a desire to push us to reflect on our practices and refine our theoretical leanings as a step toward acting on and changing our life circumstances. Put simply, praxis denotes the action, reflections, and transformation of people as they engage with one another. Those involved in praxis can anticipate that such action, reflection, and transformation should help people create a just and better world. And, this is where applied theatre can play a major role. (35)

Likewise, in progressive models of European education (which is where process drama was born), students are active learners and role-playing and improvisation serve as avenues of knowledge. In understanding the didactic notions of applied theatre, “these two pedagogical strands are often interwoven, and have led to questions about where knowledge is situated and whose cultural experiences are reproduced in theatre-making” (Nicholson 12).

In this research, I explore the intersections of applied theatre, arts-based techniques, and educational opportunity by asking UB students to become dynamic participants in their academic present and future. Freire believed that we learn by doing and that educators should
“empower learners as active agents in their own education” (Prendergast and Saxton 10). In the UB “Theatre Workshops,” we developed a safe space to examine overarching obstacles facing participants. However, this work did not seek to point out possible hurdles, but to instead examine potential scenarios and build a support system to assist, should difficulties arise in the future. As the authors of Bringing Out the Best in Human Effectiveness, Lessons for Educators from an Upward Bound Project remind us:

To define other people negatively by defining their impossibilities for them under the guise of disclosing their genuine possibilities is oppression. To lay the ground for the possibility of the pedagogic encounter and meaningful learning, the teacher has to lead the pupil back to him/herself. In so doing, he/she can recover his/her being and find the world safe enough to explore without having to pretend to be other than he/she is. (Dottin et al. 63)

I propose that Freire’s sentiments can also be applied to community-building. The “Theatre Games” provided tools for the participants to become “active agents” in building a community of support and in developing communication methods that may assist them in UB, their postsecondary career, and beyond. Janet Blohm-Pultz shared, “It’s so, so, so important to have some toolkit of techniques to build community with a group quickly, because I don’t think kids have any ability to do it on their own. They’re so tied to their electronics and communicating in that world. They have developed this whole language of texting—so, much of their life happens that way. But it’s not totally fulfilling” (Blohm-Pultz). In addition, research shows, “First-generation college students benefited more from extracurricular activities and engagement with peers, but were less likely to participate in these beneficial activities than were those students
who were not first-generation” (Inkelas et al. 407). Therefore, developing this toolkit of community-building methods has the potential to serve participants far beyond their UB program tenure.

In this mediated age, where heads are often turned down to phones and computers, and amid the current U.S. educational model, where students are often focused on STEM study and familiar with the isolation of standardized testing, to some, it may seem absurd to look to the arts as a way of knowing. However, I propose that learning how to connect with others and build community is all the more important. And theatre work can assist in this. Perhaps Barone and Eisner state it best:

We would argue that it is precisely during a period in which precision, quantification, prescription, and formulaic practices are salient that we need approaches to research, and we add, to teaching, which exploit the power of “vagueness” to “get at” what otherwise would seem unrecoverable. It makes no sense to embrace plans that win the battle but lose the war. We need to touch the souls of students as well as to measure their sleeve length or hat size. (3–4)

In the end, this work seeks to open up space rather than add limitations. Although terms such as applied theatre and arts-based research are useful categories in unpacking important understandings surrounding this type of work, I have embraced a wide array of activities in this study design. Some are from known applied theatre practitioners, others are often used in the Theatre in Education or Theatre of the Oppressed canons, still others come out of acting classrooms and rehearsal rooms. All use participatory and theatrical modes of expression. They ask the community to be, to do, to share, and to reflect. As scholar, artist, and activist Jan Cohen-
Cruz reminds us:

The engaged scholar cannot learn all she needs to know from books, but must also rub up against the situations in which knowledge is tested, in lived experience. Responding to actual situations rather than furthering their work strictly theoretically, engaged scholars seek out expertise not all to be found in one discipline. And they, in turn, bring a range of approaches to such situations.

(4)

**Theoretical Foundation**

This dissertation is an exploration of praxis, focusing on the doings (the workshops) and the responses and reflections (Cohen-Cruz 12). It is rooted in sense of community theory and social constructionism epistemology, and I wear these theoretical lenses as I interpret the workshop experiences, as well as the supplemental data collected in this study.

While UB programs were redefining the educational landscape and theatre artists and practitioners were working to redefine traditional conceptions of theatre, a shift was also happening in psychology. In her dissertation, *Community Connections: Psychological Sense of Community and Identification in Geographical and Relational Settings*, community psychology scholar Patricia Obst states, “Community psychology emerged as part of a paradigm shift during the 1960s away from an individually oriented psychology that was unresponsive to social needs” (266). With this new trend came the need to define “community.” Therefore, in 1974, Seymour Sarason first presented the concept of psychological sense of community (PSOC) and “noted the basic characteristics of sense of community as ‘the perception of similarity with others, an
acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, the feelings that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure” (267).

The Theory of Psychological “Sense of Community” was then developed by David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis in 1986. Obst states, “To date, this theory is the most widely used theory of PSOC in the community psychology literature” (274). The original categories key to developing a sense of community include membership, influence, fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillan and Chavis 9). “McMillan and Chavis (1986) argue that all these sub-elements work together to create each dimension which, in turn all work dynamically together to create and maintain an overall sense of community” (Obst 274). In 1996, McMillan revisited the original theory, and, after more years of experience, renamed and reconsidered the four initial key components to the following categories: spirit, trust, trade, and art. He writes, “Presently, I view Sense of Community as a spirit of belonging together, a feeling that there is an authority structure that can be trusted, an awareness of that trade, and mutual benefit come from being together, and a spirit that comes from shared experiences that are preserved as art” (315). I chose to utilize McMillan’s renamed categories in this research. These four threads provide a foundation for my interpretation of how applied theatre and arts-based activities served to build a sense of community in this individual UB program.

Creating a spirit of belonging is the first step in developing a sense of community. McMillan explains, “In essence, people bond with those whom they believe want and welcome them . . . In effect, when we believe that we will be welcome, that we fit or belong in a community, we have a stronger attraction to that community” (317). This feeling of belonging is
important to establish with the UB participants as soon as possible. Do they know one another’s names? Do they feel comfortable in the space? Do they feel like they are a member of this group? Is there a “spark”?

Next, a feeling of trust must be established. This is key to moving beyond the initial “spirit” and relates to power dynamics within the group. McMillan writes, “The first requirement for such resolution is that people must know what they can expect from each other in the community. In effect, some sort of order must be established. This would include the development of community norms, rules, or laws” (319). In UB, this relates to multiple factors including, but not limited to: an understanding of the program, an awareness of the different ages and experience levels of the participants, and developing trust in the authority structure. How can applied theatre and arts-based workshops assist in developing an understanding of UB? Will leaders emerge? How will the activities facilitate interactions among smaller subsets of the larger group (roommates, residential living groups, rising juniors vs. rising seniors, etc.)? How will the program staff function within these workshops?

Trade is the next step in forming a community. Members begin bonding with those with whom they share similar traits. After they secure their bond, they then begin to search for ways in which they are different. McMillan states, “The search for and appreciation of differences represents a beginning step toward the development of a community economy” (321). He explains, “A community economy based on shared intimacy, which is implied by the term ‘sense of community,’ represents a social economy. The medium of exchange in a community social economy is self-disclosure . . . In a social economy, the most risky and valuable self-disclosures involve the sharing of feelings” (321). The participants in a UB summer session live together,
work together, play together, eat together, breathe together. This goes on for six weeks. However, "a community is not merely a locality where people reside. Rather, community implies commonality, gregariousness, and shared enjoyment which facilitate the exchange of experiences (physical, psychological, and social)" (Dottin et al. 66). It is therefore important to develop a space where participants feel comfortable being fully themselves, as six weeks is a long time to live in close quarters with strangers. Therefore, bonding over similarities, as well as celebrating and respecting differences are of equal importance. How does this work allow them to discover these commonalities and differences? What tools does it give them to continue to explore these bonds outside of the workshops? What are the benefits of being together?

Finally, the shared experience is preserved as art. This refers to the value of a collective experience. In Chavis and McMillan’s original theory, they utilized the term “shared valent event”; however, in McMillan’s reevaluation, he changed the term to “shared dramatic moment.” (This seems like a change worth noting in a theatre-based research project.) The term refers to the weight or value of the shared experience. Yes, there was an interaction, but was the contact an important dramatic moment? Obst explains:

They quote the central tenet of the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) to suggest that, the more people interact, the more likely they are to form close relationships. The more positive this interaction is, the stronger the bonds developed from this interaction (Cook, 1970). Further, the more important a shared event is to those involved, the greater the community bond (Myers, 1962).
When McMillan renamed the event/moment, he noted, “The primary question at this point is: What collective experiences become art? I would suggest that a community chooses the events that become a part of its collective heritage” (322–323). This collective heritage is made up of stories. McMillan writes, “They are stories of community contact. But contact is not enough. The contact must have a certain quality for it to become a collected memory that is art; the community must share in the fate of their common experience in the same way . . . If it was a success for one, it was, in some way, a success for all members” (323). In relation to UB, these workshops were a new addition to an already packed summer program schedule. Would UB participants and staff want to continue this work? Is there a lasting impact? Did it become a part of the participants’ collective heritage? Was it worth it?

Alongside sense of community theory, I will apply a social constructionism epistemology to this research. This approach argues that understandings are formed by what happens between people as they join together to create their perceived realities, which social constructionism scholar Vivien Burr argues are “dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time” (Social Constructionism 4). Brenda J. Allen, diversity and inclusion scholar and educator, states that the “four primary propositions of social constructionism are that a critical stance should be assumed toward taken-for-granted knowledge, knowledge is historically and culturally specific, social processes sustain knowledge, and knowledge and social action are interconnected (Burr, 1995)” (38).

In connection to Freire’s notions on education, social constructionism takes a critical stance against how knowledge is created and sustained. It speaks to inheriting a system of symbols and questions what is “fact” (“Overview: Realism, Relativism, Social Constructionism and
Discourse” 14). This lens asserts that meaning arises from social systems and often reinforces a dominant belief system (Allen 35). Consequently, as Burr reminds us, “Our constructions of the world are therefore also bound up with power relations because they have implications for what is permissible for different people to do, and how they may legitimately treat others” (Social Constructionism 5). In addition, this lens provides a nice parallel to arts-based research, which “rejects the notion of singular truths or clear answers, instead searching for contrasting nuances, revealing ambiguities and complex multiple truths” (O’Connor and Anderson 24).

I also utilize this lens because, as perhaps best stated by Allen: “Social constructionism helps me identify and illuminate ways that organizational actors make, modify, and maintain meaning about social identity” (35). This lens recognizes the social process that sustains understandings, both in our community and in the larger systemic way. Who influences whom? And how? In relation to first-generation college students, “Retention theorists, such as Tinto (1993) . . . found that a peer culture that emphasizes academic pursuits and peers as study partners can assist in a successful academic transition” (Inkelas et al. 406-407). How, then, can the UB community serve to illuminate new understandings and serve as a support system in academic pursuits and transitions?

In the larger context, this framework recognizes that knowledge and social action go together, that they are interconnected. This relates to developing an understanding of educational opportunity at large. In Raising Curtains on Education, Drama as a Site for Critical Pedagogy, author Clar Doyle states, “Students should be allowed to explore the contradictions between their schools and the larger society with a view to changing what needs to be changed.
as well as affirming what needs to be affirmed” (10). Laura W. Perna, Executive Director of Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy, states:

The benefits of a college degree are well documented and numerous. People with college degrees tend to experience higher earnings, lower unemployment and poverty, better working conditions, longer lives, better health, and many other benefits. Society as a whole benefits when more individuals complete higher levels of education. When college attainment improves, the tax base increases, reliance on social welfare programs declines, and civic and political engagement increases. (Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States, 45 Year Trend Report (2015) 39)

This research with UB recognizes that students bring with them a rich history that has been shaped by their cultural and social experiences. Therefore, “How can students appreciate the best dimensions of their own histories, experiences, and culture? Students are often put in a position where their own histories are treated as incidental and their own experiences as unimportant” (Doyle 10). Yet, applied theatre and arts-based work privileges the lived experiences of participants and provides a rich ground to examine their history. It also provides a forum in which participants themselves can negotiate the costs and benefits of new behaviors in a supportive community. Since the participants dictate much of the content of applied theatre, the use of this medium has the potential to aid in the avoidance of erasure of one’s own culture and family, which may include a culture and/or family that perhaps does not hold experience or value around higher education. Rather than embody a prescribed theatrical character completely outside of oneself, applied theatre asks participants to utilize their own stories,
values, and perceptions. Opening up the theatrical process in this way allows for new, and sometimes even shared, understandings to emerge. As Doyle reminds us, drama can then be a “fertile site for critical pedagogy” (44). It “can be an improvisational, non-inhibiting process based on human impulse and ability to act out perceptions of the world to understand it” (50).

Applied theatre, arts-based research, Freirean notions of education, and sense of community theory all work hand-in-hand in this experience with UB. This qualitative research was “a process, as opposed to the clearly graded stages that comprise quantitative inquiry,” and it will be discussed as such in Chapters 4 and 5 (Leavy 11). In the next chapter, I discuss the site involved in this case study, as well as the research design and methodology.
Ch. 3—A Site That’s Right: Planned Praxis in an Upward Bound Program

The most salient of all the lessons learned from this project is that education is not merely the imparting of knowledge/information, but the cultivation of certain aptitudes and attitudes in the mind of the young. Someone once offered the following poignant observation: “It is not what is poured into a student, but what's planted that counts.”

—Erskine S. Dottin, Daris L. Steen, and Denise Samuel, authors of Bringing Out the Best in Human Effectiveness: Lessons for Educators from an Upward Bound Project

The purpose of this study is to explore the benefits of community-building efforts in an Upward Bound program. This serves to develop a sense of community in an individual program, as well as serves UB program personnel in combating issues of student retention. A number of research questions guide this work. In the planning of the workshops, I asked: *What factors contribute to a participant persisting vs. dropping out of the program? How do these methods supplement and support the mission of the program?* During the workshops themselves, I was guided by the following questions: *How can the workshops contribute to developing a sense of community among participants? Among students and staff? Which activities are most successful?* In the small group “Theatre Workshops,” I asked: *How can the workshops provide a fruitful space to discuss and navigate college success?* In the conclusion, this research seeks to answer the following: *Did the workshops build a sense of community? Did they serve to prolong students’ tenure in the program?*

This chapter describes my research methodology and includes an overview of this qualitative case study, a discussion of the setting and participants, the research design, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. The chapter ends with a discussion of facilitation.
A Qualitative Case Study

This research is designed as a qualitative case study and was conducted on-site with a UB program during four summer sessions, 2013-2016. The case study model provided the opportunity for a prolonged engagement with an individual program, which allowed for an in-depth examination and exploration with participants and personnel. This qualitative work is process-based and relies primarily on descriptive data, such as observations, field note accounts, open-ended surveys, and semi-structured interviews. Because this was a long-term investment, I was able to evaluate and revise this work from summer to summer. After each session, I analyzed the data and built upon new understandings in the following year.

Setting and Participants

The UB program housed at Truman State University (Truman) served as the site for this case study. Truman is located in Kirksville, Missouri, a town with an estimated population of 17,520 in the rural, northeast corner of the state (“Kirksville, Missouri”). A Kirksville tourism website boasts activities such as hunting, fishing, the historic downtown square, small town festivals, and the 3,000 acre state park (“Visit Kirksville”). It is the home of Truman, which is a highly selective liberal arts university, as well as A.T. Still University and Moberly Area Community College.

The UB program at Truman serves ten target schools in the surrounding area. Their grant serves up to 90 participants, who typically range in age from 14-18 years old. There are usually a few more females than males in the program. For instance, in April of 2016, the gender breakdown was 67.9% female, 30.2% male, and 1.9% other (Garth et al. 2). The UB participant
population is ethnically diverse, yet some of the hometowns of these students are not. The following is a sample of demographics from five of the towns served by this program:

- Edina, MO—Population: 1,134 in 2014 (98.0% White alone, 0.6% Hispanic, 0.4% Black alone, 0.4% American Indian alone, 0.4% Two or more races, 0.09% Asian alone) ("Edina, Missouri").
- Lancaster, MO—Population: 714 in 2014 (98.1% White alone, 0.7% Two or more race, 0.7% Hispanic, 0.5% Asian alone) ("Lancaster, Missouri").
- Milan, MO—Population: 1,870 in 2014 (53.1% White alone, 45.3% Hispanic, 0.4% Black alone, 0.4% American Indian alone, 0.4% Two or more races, 0.3% Asian alone, 0.2% Other race alone) ("Milan, Missouri").
- Moberly, MO—Population: 13,890 in 2014 (84.6% White alone, 10.2% Black alone, 2.1% Hispanic, 1.6% Two or more races, 0.7% Asian alone, 0.6% American Indian alone, 0.08% Other race alone) ("Moberly, Missouri").
- Winigan, MO—Population: 44 in 2010 (95.5% White alone, 4.5% American Indian alone) ("Winigan, Missouri").

For participants that live in Winigan and in towns of a similar size, when they come to summer session they are suddenly living with more people than in the population of their hometown.

Students apply for this particular UB program during their sophomore year of high school and, if accepted, enter the academic-year component of the program during the spring semester of their sophomore year. They then attend their first summer session as a “rising junior.” They continue in both academic-year and summer sessions until their high school graduation, at which point they have the opportunity to apply to participate in a summer Bridge program. The Bridge
program awards a small number of scholarships to newly graduated high school seniors and these “Bridgers” then return to campus for a third residential summer session to take Truman’s summer classes. The college credits then transfer to the institution they will attend in the fall.

During the academic year, participants meet with UB staff and other UB students on a weekly basis at either their own high school or at a nearby school, therefore making up a “center.” During the summer session, however, students from all ten target schools come together to live on Truman’s campus and experience the residential component of the program. Some UB participants live just a few miles away from Truman, while others commute an hour to get to Kirksville for the summer session. They sleep in a residence hall Sunday-Thursday nights and go home Friday evening-Sunday afternoon. For most, their arrival on campus for the summer means an entrance into a large group of strangers, as many of the participants only know their peers from their UB center.

After deeply considering reaching out to a program near my current home in Colorado, I realized that the UB program at Truman was the best fit for this case study. Since I worked with this particular program for several years, I held prior knowledge about their program model, the various components and structures, Truman’s campus, and the program’s target areas (the geography as well as the communities that this program serves). I have spent time in the participants’ high schools and know some of the school personnel. I have visited their town squares, libraries, grocery stores, and theaters. In short, I lived as a community member in this area of Missouri for around eight years. That held knowledge was invaluable to this research.

I also found it beneficial that I knew some of the parents and/or guardians of current program participants, since their siblings had been in the UB program during my tenure.
Especially in the first couple of summer sessions, 2013 and 2014, I found these ties particularly helpful during the parent orientation meeting that occurred on move-in day. This was when I first introduced myself and this research. Familiar parents and UB alums in attendance were willing to hop up and join in a demonstration of a theatre game. They showed their trust in me and my work through their willingness to participate and interact with me during my brief overview of this research, and this was an unexpected benefit.

Perhaps most important to the decision to work with Truman’s program was the fact that I already had strong relationships with program personnel. I had developed a support system and trust. At the time of the research’s inception, Janet Blohm-Pultz served as Project Director and she offered genuine excitement for this research. When asked why she initially agreed to support this work, she shared that she had “[seen] what theatre games did for people . . . how it opened them up in a way that made them capable of really communicating with each other in a different way. I had just seen it change the tenor of the group and bring so many people out and enable them to actually be part of this group” (Blohm-Pultz). She continued:

Theatre games are so effective with teenagers because they’re kind of sophisticated, they’re incredibly fun, and you connect with people in a different way. There’s just something magical that happens, something that happens in the act of doing it that opens people up and brings them all up on the same level. Because you don’t have to be skilled, everybody is kind of at the same level. So that builds confidence. It makes everybody be involved. You can’t sit out and be a spectator and that’s, I think, really, really important. (Blohm-Pultz)
When asked to share her thoughts on this work, former UB Associate Director Jeanie Casady stated, “I think the thing that excites me about it is that it provides an opportunity. I think it is a fertile ground for allowing students to be heard, and to learn that someone’s interested in what I have to say or what I feel” (Casady). Looking back, I recognize that the support from program personnel from day one was instrumental to this work.

This program also seemed ideal for this research because this particular program has existed since the beginning of the UB program at large; therefore, it is not a site still searching for its footing, but instead one that has built strong roots within the community it serves. When I entered the community as an instructor in 2004, the three administrators at the time had been serving the program for 30, 24, and 18 years and had built strong campus and community relationships. In the last few years, however, this program has experienced several changes, as members of the program personnel either retired, accepted another position, and/or moved to another state. During the course of this research, I worked with three project directors—one during the initial proposal and summer session 2013, an interim project director in late 2013 through early 2014, and then a new project director from 2014-2016. I also worked with three different assistant directors—one during my initial proposal and planning of this work, a new assistant director in 2013, and then another assistant director from 2014-2016. UB Office Manager Donna Fude shared, “Whenever there’s a turnover in administrative staff, you’re going to see a big turnover in students as well because they’re probably bonded to that person that’s leaving and then they give up because that bond is gone . . . and, so, now you have to either build a new bond or leave. I see there’s a big exit whenever there’s a turnover in administrative
staff” (Fude). My observations of these transitional times served to strengthen my desire to assist in community-building efforts in the UB program.

In short, this site provided an ideal mixture of the known and unknown. I knew the program personnel, the campus, the environment at the students’ high schools and in their communities, and the UB program model at this specific site. However, before beginning work in 2013, I had been away from this program for two years, which provided a complete turnover of program participants, as well as many of the staff members. I was therefore re-entering, re-building connections, and re-establishing familiarity, as well as adapting to some changes in structure that occur with personnel transitions and the adoption of new and creative ideas. This negotiation between being an insider and an outsider seemed to serve this research well.

From 2013-2016, the Center for Applied Statistics and Evaluation at Truman provided evaluations and analysis of this particular UB program. This is the first time they have evaluated the program. Researchers facilitated student and counselor surveys, as well as student and parent focus groups. In their most recent analysis, provided April 2016, 83% of the 53 students surveyed reported that “making friends with other motivated students was the most beneficial aspect” of UB (Garth et al. 7). The second most beneficial aspect was summer session, which was noted by 81% of the students surveyed, therefore highlighting the importance of both community and the summer component (7). When asked about limitations related to the summer session, the largest concerns included “I cannot help out with family responsibilities/chores” and transportation to and from campus (10). Also, 38.1% of the 42 students who responded to that question noted that they “will be away from family and friends and fear becoming homesick” (10).
Despite this program’s longevity and ties to the community it serves, retention is still an issue. The following is an overview of the retention numbers surrounding summer sessions in the few years leading up to this research: In 2008, 6 students out of 61 left either right before or during the summer session. In 2009, 4 out of 56 students left. In 2010, 14 out of 53 students left. In 2011, 4 students out of 56 left, and, in 2012, 5 students out of 52 chose to leave the program. This does not include the participants who chose to leave during the academic-year component of the program. According to the program’s annual performance reports, these participants chose to leave right before or during summer session for a variety of reasons, including: no longer interested in or use the program, family responsibilities, other extra-curricular activities, or the need or desire for employment. Also, one student dropped out of high school. I will provide retention numbers from summer sessions 2013-2016 in the conclusion of this research in Chapter 6.

Research Design

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I was not able to work with this program during their academic-year components, but instead during the summer sessions. However, because of the stakes of a residential program, which asks students to leave home for an extended period and live with others in a simulated college experience, this time frame worked well in relation to program retention. When asked when participants are most likely to drop out of the program, several current and former program personnel shared that summer was a critical time frame. Blohm-Pultz stated, “The first two or three days of summer session are probably the most critical. That’s when you’re going to have drops most of the time . . . It’s that shock of being away
from home” (Blohm-Pultz). Likewise, Casady stated, “I think [summer] move-in day and that first week is critical . . . the first 48 hours are critical” (Casady). Lana Brown stated:

In that first 24 hours, an awfully lot happens in terms of retention. Students begin to think, “Yes, this is going to be good,” or the doubts just soar . . . First night. Crucial. If you can get them to the second Monday of the program, get them to come back on that weekend between week one and week two and effectively engage them in that first 24 hours of the second week, you’re a long way down the road. (Brown)

When asked why the first few days are critical, Casady responded with an analogy:

When you plant a tree in the ground, you dig a hole, put it in there and put water around it, put in the dirt—Why are the first days critical? Because roots aren’t attached yet. They’re more than they were the first day; they’re calming down a little bit. That new little tree is getting used to its environment. It’s saying “Okay, I can grow here.”—Same thing. They’re just not rooted yet. (Casady)

With this in mind, for four summers I left my home near Boulder, Colorado to live on site with this UB program from May-July. It was important for me to not simply “drop in” and facilitate a few workshops each summer, but rather to integrate within the program as much as possible in an effort to fully examine the effects of the work. I lived in an apartment near the participants’ on-campus residential building and facilitated the theatre workshops within their residence hall, a known environment for the participants. This takes into account that “in critical arts-based inquiry, the location of research changes from the isolated sanctuaries of the laboratory and constructed and bounded environments to places where people meet, including
schools, homeless shelters, and working-class and minority neighborhoods” (Finley 74). All of the workshops took place in the same space in the students’ residence hall.

The research design includes multiple data sources to provide as complete a picture of the work as possible. It relies on an ethnographic account of the process and participant-observations, photographs and video recordings of the workshops, one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and surveys. The practical and experiential component of this research involves two main categories: “Theatre Games” (which are discussed in Chapter 4), and “Theatre Workshops” (which are discussed in Chapter 5). Since this research continued for four summer sessions, I was able to mine through data from a total of eleven “Theatre Games” workshops (2013-2016), four small group “Theatre Workshops” (2015), and one small group “Theatre Workshop” (2016). I worked with 140 participants during these four summers.

The “Theatre Games” were named as such to seem fun and not intimidating. All of the UB participants joined in this workshop opportunity. In 2013, participants were split into two groups, and, due to the late consent form distribution and scheduling concerns, the workshops did not occur until week three of the summer program. In 2014-2016, however, the workshops took place on either Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday night of the first week of summer session. Two “Mentor Groups” participated in “Theatre Games” from 8:00-9:30 p.m. Mentor Groups are the smaller clusters of students, typically 8-10 in a group, that are assigned to a UB Mentor, who is typically a current college student at Truman (this is similar to the residential advisor/advisee design in a college residence hall). The purpose of “Theatre Games” was to build a sense of community early in the summer session by providing an opportunity for participants to learn one another’s names, play and laugh together, and ideally begin to drop their guard and feel more
comfortable around one another. Rather than work with 50-60 students at a time, I chose to divide them into these smaller groups with the hope that the experience would then be less overwhelming. Since students spend a lot of time with their Mentor Groups throughout the summer, this seemed like an ideal place to start developing bonds. The design included: a pre-survey, a participatory baseline exercise, introductions, name games, a series of “get to know you” and communication-centered games, a final name game to check-in on progress, a closing exercise to visually show any changes in group comfort, and a post-survey.

During summers 2013 and 2014, I reintegrated with this UB program, facilitated “Theatre Games,” watched, and listened. This prepared me for facilitating “Theatre Workshops” in summer 2015, which was a series of four workshops with a small group of volunteers. We met for three consecutive Sunday nights from 7:00-9:00 p.m., and then one afternoon during the last week of the program from 1:30-3:00 p.m. To gather the group, I posted a volunteer sign-up sheet on the door in their residence hall lobby during the first week of the program. This was a typical place to post announcements. I also announced the opportunity during a full group UB meeting and invited questions from participants. I was hoping for 10-15 participants, so I was thrilled when 13 students volunteered for and participated in this series of workshops. Since we had more time to work together, the purpose went beyond community-building, although this was still a goal. Techniques such as theatre games, role-play, playmaking, tableaux, and improvisations assisted in problem solving, communication, and decision-making. Participants were given opportunities to critically reflect on their experiences as potential first-generation college students within a community of support and engaged dialogue. Together, we worked to strengthen their ties to one another and to their postsecondary goals. Given the students’ busy
schedules, I had initially planned for two workshops, but the students requested more. We therefore came together for a third workshop, and they then requested a fourth. We worked to find time for the fourth workshop during the last week of the summer program.

To supplement the data in workshop experiences, the research design also included interviews and surveys. Due to time constraints in scheduling, interviewing students one-on-one proved difficult. I was able to conduct a few, but not as many as I had initially hoped. I therefore provided individual surveys at the beginning and end of each workshop. These were designed to chart the participants’ comfort level with others at the beginning versus the end of each workshop, as well as provide short answer questions and space for the students to write additional comments. Surveys were utilized in both the “Theatre Games” and the “Theatre Workshops.”

Information was also obtained through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with UB program personnel. I interviewed six current or former administrators of this particular UB program. Their name, position(s), and years of UB involvement are as follows:

- Sarah Hass, Project Director (2014-present)
- Erika Sterup, Assistant Director (2013-present)
- Donna Fude, Office Manager (1990-present), Program Secretary (1986-1990)
- Janet Blohm-Pultz, Project Director (2009-2013)
To personally prepare for this research every summer, I perused multiple applied theatre textbooks and articles and made a list of potential activities. Other games and exercises used in this work were borrowed from my own classroom and rehearsal room experiences over the years. Where I can remember the origins, I credit the teacher or director who first introduced me to the exercise and I note if any modifications were made to the original activity. I often practiced facilitating some of these activities with a group of colleagues or students at the University of Colorado Boulder before traveling to Kirksville for the UB summer session.

In terms of preparatory work with the UB program, I was given the opportunity to facilitate a workshop with the residence hall staff members, the Mentors, prior to student move-in. This provided an opportunity to introduce myself and this research, answer any questions, and facilitate some of the exercises with the staff so that they would know what to expect when they attended the workshop with their Mentor Group. This also better prepared the staff to answer any questions from the students about what the “games” or “workshops” would be like. I also worked with program personnel to design the scheduling of the Mentor Groups on either Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday. If there was concern about the retention and/or connectedness of certain students, I did my best to arrange for their “Theatre Games” workshop to happen on the first night, as opposed to the second or third night.

Data Collection and Analysis

In terms of data collection, I first utilize an ethnographic account of the workshops themselves, which I created by journaling post-workshops, watching video recordings and looking at photographs captured by a photographer attending the workshops, and recording
participant-observations. Although I was always in the role of facilitator during the workshops, my role ranged from mostly observing to mostly participating. For some activities, I was able to step away and observe more closely in the moment, yet for others, I was playing/actively participating alongside the students. I later watched the videos of the workshops several times so that I could fully step out of the process and notice the effects on the group at large, as well as look for interactions that I missed when facilitating. This allowed me to draw upon both my participant perspective and the observational perspective of these workshops. I include several of the photographs throughout this dissertation to supplement my written descriptions.

Before and after each workshop, I asked participants to complete a survey. These included Likert scales, as well as open-ended questions. The Likert scales asked students to rate their feeling of community pre- and post- each workshop and therefore provided a quantitative element. In terms of the open-ended questions, they were later coded to discover recurring themes.

I facilitated one-on-one interviews as semi-structured conversations. All of the student interviews were facilitated in-person. They occurred on site during the UB summer session in a room within the participants’ residence hall, and they were conducted on a volunteer basis. I asked for verbal permission to record the interviews so that I could pull exact quotes. The interview questions included, but were not limited to, the following: Why do you want to be in this program? Do you see yourself staying in this program until completion? What, if anything, would cause you to drop out of the program? In what ways do you feel connected to or disconnected from your peers in the program? To program staff? What activities did you most enjoy in the applied theatre workshop? Why? What would you change about the workshop?
All but one of the program personnel interviews occurred in-person. One interview was conducted over the phone. I was given permission to audio or video record each one so that I could later gather exact quotes. The interviews were semi-structured and questions included, but were not limited to, the following: *Is student retention a concern in this program? Why or why not? What are the reasons behind students dropping out of the program? What are the reasons students stay in the program? What activities do you currently conduct with your students to help bolster retention rates? Would you be open to utilizing applied theatre activities within this program on a consistent basis? What concerns do you have in relation to this work? What benefits do you see in relation to this type of work?* Their answers provided me with a more personal understanding of this individual UB program, current community-building efforts, and retention concerns. Quotes from these interviews are included throughout this dissertation.

In 2015, I conducted a focus group with the participants from the “Theatre Workshops.” This occurred at the close of our third workshop (at the time not knowing that there would be a fourth). The focus group format was used because of time constraints and accessibility issues considering the participants’ schedules. However, since the students had experienced the workshops together, it was useful to process the experiences together in this way. From the start of this research, I invited students to share in the design of this work. This focus group provided another unique experience for students to share in this design and analysis. They could feed off one another’s responses, and group ideas were generated that may not have occurred in one-on-one interviews. I served as moderator for this interview, which was semi-structured and asked several open-ended questions. Participants were given the opportunity to voice their
experiences and perspectives. The session was video-recorded so that I could revisit it later and transcribe exact quotes.

**Ethical considerations**

I received IRB approval (Protocol #13-0281) from the University of Colorado Boulder in 2013. Since the program participants were under the age of 18, the informed consent forms were signed by their parent or guardian. Participation in the research was voluntary. There were two consent forms: one for participation in the workshops, and one for participation in an interview. If consent was not given, participants were still able to participate in the workshops, but their survey data (as well as any personal observations of them during the workshops) are not used in this dissertation. In some cases, a participant returned the workshop consent form, but not the interview consent form. If this was the case, they were not interviewed for this research.

In 2013 and 2014, I presented an overview of this work at a parent meeting on move-in day. I then asked for the parents and/or guardians to sign the forms either at the close of the meeting or to take them home and send them back later. This proved problematic for a few reasons. First, not all of the parents attend the meeting. I therefore had to send forms home with the program participants on the first weekend. The return rate was not great, mostly because they either lost the paperwork, their parents were not easily accessible on the weekends, or students would simply forget them at home. This delayed my work with the students and therefore, in 2013, I did not conduct workshops with participants during the crucial time frame of week one. The return rate improved in 2014 and the workshops occurred in the
first few days. However, the process became even smoother the next two summers. In 2015 and 2016, I instead worked with the UB program staff and they distributed the consent forms during the spring academic-year meetings as part of the pre-summer paperwork packet. Sarah Hass included a personal note on top of my own written invitation, and I feel this aided in developing trust with parents with whom I had not yet met. The return rate improved dramatically and I facilitated workshops during the first three days of the summer program.

Opportunities to explain and/or clarify this research were provided. Each summer, I attended the parent meeting that occurred on move-in day. I introduced myself and the research, often facilitated a theatre game so they had an idea of what I was doing in the workshops, invited questions, and then remained after the meeting for one-on-one conversations. Parents and guardians were also given my contact information so that they could contact me at a later date if they had any further questions or concerns. At the beginning of the “Theatre Games” workshops during the first week of the program, I took time to introduce myself and the research to participants, answered questions, and invited further questions or conversations with the participants throughout the summer session.

Throughout this research, appropriate steps were taken to safe-guard data and maintain confidentiality, when applicable. The program personnel interviews are the only interviews that are tied to real names in this report, as any interviews with students are not tied to their names. In terms of the surveys, I asked participants to write their names on the paper copies so that I could compare the data pre- and post- each workshop; however, like the student interviews, all student survey results are anonymous and not tied to the participant’s real name in this report.
Facilitation

In the workshop experiences, which serve as the heart of this research, I was in the role of facilitator. Crucial to the facilitator-participant relationship is the acknowledgement that “the community participants—both actors and spectators—hold the knowledge of the subject under investigation, whereas the facilitator holds the aesthetic knowledge of the theatre form” (Prendergast and Saxton 18). It is the responsibility of the facilitator to generate a productive experience that “permits a sense of group ownership” (Taylor 57). The relationship is therefore one where everyone involved participates in and informs the research.

As noted by Philip Taylor, “To be an effective facilitator in applied theatre is to be a reflective practitioner.” Reflective practitioners are “grounded in and powered by actual experiences,” they search for emerging themes and how they inform their “immediate and ongoing praxis” (70). Thus, in planning the workshops, I sought incompleteness and did not impose solutions on the work (55). I asked myself questions such as: “Why do applied theatre participants respond in the way they do? What leads teaching artists to make on-the-spot changes in the applied theatre? How do participants work their way out of the dilemmas presented to them?” (113). For instance, especially in the “Theatre Workshops,” I was prepared to implement a variety of possible activities and/or narratives and find the heart of the tension or dilemma. Ambiguity, struggle, debate, and dialogue are embraced in applied theatre work. Taylor states:

Teaching artists need to be able to draw participants into the imaginary world; they must be able to find the appropriate stance, gesture, question, or attitude that will enable the participants to notice what needs to be noticed . . . Teaching
artists need to put participants’ anxieties to rest so that they can practically and willingly engage with the work and reflect on its pertinent features. (54)

Likewise, in her book *Applied Theatre: Facilitation: Pedagogies, Practices, Resilience*, author and applied theatre educator Sheila Preston reminds us, "Participants of a drama workshop may experience a range of feelings about 'doing' drama and this will depend on how the facilitator is able to match the level/kind of 'doing' required with the group's need to feel safe enough to step outside their comfort zone a little" (39). This motivated the model used in this work, which included warm-up activities, main exercises, and closure. The design and scaffolding of activities aimed to not ask participants for too much, too soon. Also, throughout the workshops, I included moments of praxis where the participants engaged in processing the experience. In *Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual*, author Michael Rohd summarizes the characteristics of a good facilitator, which are key qualities that guided my work with UB:

- Is energized and enthusiastic about the process.
- Is a good listener.
- Is nonjudgmental.
- Deepens the discussion and moves the event forward.
- Is confident in your role as tone-setter and guide, not in having everything all figured out ahead of time.
- Is aware of the dynamics in the room.
- Understands that there will be people in the room who don’t want to be there.
- Asks every question truly wanting to hear an answer. (113–115)
The very act of “applying” takes the facilitator into a variety of settings and other disciplines. James Thompson suggests that “we are not expert in these areas nor should we seek to be. One of applied theatre’s strengths is in its status as the outsider, the visitor and the guest” (20). I recognize that I am not a UB participant, nor am I a first-generation college student, and I therefore acknowledge my status as “other.” I grew up in the suburbs of St. Louis, Missouri, went to a public school, and then attended a public university. Although both of my parents were first-generation college students, I grew up knowing that I would go to college following high school graduation. Therefore, when I first interviewed to work with UB in 2004, I had no concept of the experience of a first-generation student other than stories shared by my parents. I could simply offer UB my toolkit in theatre and dance. Over the years, however, I listened. I closely observed as student after student navigated their high school experience and postsecondary planning with the support of the UB program. And, over time, I was able to move beyond teaching students skills in performance and choreography and began serving the program in a more holistic way. The UB students taught me about their lives, voiced their hopes, and shared both their excitement and their trepidation in being a first-generation college student. Now, as facilitator of this arts-based research, I hold close the experiences that led up to this work and the individual students whose dreams inspired and informed it. In the next two chapters, I examine the “Theatre Games” and “Theatre Workshops.” I discuss the design, outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations. Up first—the initial community-building workshops, the “Theatre Games.”
Ch. 4—Developing an (upward) Bound Community Through “Theatre Games”

Are you going to stay in the program until completion?

No, I don’t think I’m going to stay.

Why not?

I don’t feel comfortable here . . .

—UB student
(Pre-workshop survey, June 2014)

Introduction

Sentiments like the one above propelled this research with the UB program. Time and time again, I had conversations with students at the beginning of a summer session and they said that they felt anxious, uncomfortable, and/or too shy and self-conscious to reach out to others and try to form bonds. Participants shared that they “didn’t really know anybody” or they were homesick. This was not the case with every participant, of course; but, it was not unusual for a summer session to begin with these conversations with several students.

The purpose of “Theatre Games” was to learn names and create an environment where students could drop their guard, have fun, and play together. The aim was to integrate the Mentor Groups and to build relationships among participants, as well as between participants and the UB staff members. On either Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday night of the first week of the program, every UB student attended “Theatre Games,” two Mentor Groups at a time. This meant that there were, on average, 17 participants in each workshop, which included a mix of rising juniors and rising seniors. When choosing activities, I kept the following foundational ideas in mind: providing a mix of one-on-one, small group, and large group community-building
experiences; including a mix of high and low energy activities; providing exercises centered on mindful listening, sharing, and focus, as well as exercises that fostered energy and a sense of play; and, providing activities with built-in risk-taking opportunities for those that were ready. Since participants attend two summer sessions during their program tenure, I included new arts-based activities each summer, with only a few repeated exercises over the course of this research. The basic structure remained the same, but I decided upon activities for each new summer session based on new ideas and input from the participants. In the following design section, I include a composite of the four different workshops to provide an example of the types of activities that were included in each section. I then discuss outcomes, lessons learned, recommendations, and provide concluding thoughts on this initial community-building work.

Design

“Theatre Games” took place in a large room that functioned as a lobby in the students’ residence hall. I would arrive early to push the furniture off to the sides of the room so that it was simply an open space. I also made sure upbeat, contemporary music was playing as the students entered the room. Upon their arrival, I asked participants to complete a short pre-survey that assessed their initial comfort level with the people in the room. It asked, “On a scale of 1-10, how connected do you feel to the other program participants in this room?” The survey also included open-ended questions, such as: Why do you want to be in this program? Do you see yourself staying in this program until graduation? What, if anything, would cause you to drop the program?
After completing the surveys, I asked students to join in a circle. As noted by Sheila Preston, "The premise of a workshop structure, beginning with the making of the circle, enables democratic participation, rebalancing previous hierarchies where everyone can assume an 'equal' place" (39). The circle was our home base, our neutral. Between many of the activities, we joined together again in the circle for processing and reflection and to transition into the next activity. I briefly introduced myself and the photographer for the evening, who was always another UB staff member that many of the students already knew. I explained that our goal for the night was to get to know one another better.

Our first activity provided a baseline for participants’ comfort levels. It enabled us to visually chart our journey together over the course of the evening. I refer to the baseline activity as “Object in the Center,” and it was first introduced to me through graduate classes in theatre education at Emerson College. I asked participants a series of questions, and, after each question, they were asked to stand somewhere in the room in relation to their response. Each year I started with a lighthearted icebreaker such as, “How do you feel about the cafeteria dinner tonight?” If students liked it, they moved closer to the center of the room. Students that did not care for it moved further away from the center. After a couple of examples, I asked the following:

- How well do you think you know everyone’s name in this room? (if closer to the center, you know everyone’s name)
- How comfortable do you feel with the people in this room? (if closer to the center, you are very comfortable)
This activity provided an opportunity for students to make meaning from the results and it helped me to quickly gauge comfort levels. I observed students looking around at one another’s positions and smiling. This activity also established that this would be an embodied process and gave insight into the workshop’s two primary objectives: learning names and building community.

The workshop was then divided into three parts: warm-ups, main exercises, and closure. The following are examples of activities that were in each of the categories sometime during the four summers of this research. After each activity, I name the source(s), if known. As is often the case with theatre games, they change as they are passed down and are modified depending on the participants. I note any modifications that I made from the original design. I also tag each game with descriptive words to give information on focus, energy, and group size.

**EXAMPLES OF WARM-UPS**

As stated by Michael Rohd, “The purpose of warm-ups is three-fold: to get a group of people playing together in a safe space, to energize that space, and to create a sense of comfort in the collective doing of specific and structured activities . . . It’s all about creating moments where participation is impossible to resist, moving forward into the process you have set up, and having fun along the way” (4). After completing the baseline activity, we jumped right into the first warm-up.

**Brain Invasion**
Source: Augusto Boal
Tags: build from low to high focus, medium energy, full group

**Directions:** Ask participants to walk around the room. When the facilitator says “walk,” the participants are asked to walk, when the facilitator says “stop,” participants are asked
to stop. Eventually add further instructions: “jump” and “say your name.” Participants are then asked to “stop” when “walk” is said, and vice versa. This is followed by “say your name” meaning “jump,” and vice versa.

**Purpose:** To build energy and familiarity with the space through physical movement. To serve as a lighthearted team building game.

**Pair Tag**

Sources: *Enacting Participatory Development: Theatre-Based Techniques* by Julia McCarthy; *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal (variation of “Little Packets” and “Cat and Mouse”)

Tags: high focus, high energy, full group

**Directions:** “Ask for 1 volunteer to be the ‘cat’ and 1 to be the ‘mouse.’ The other players form pairs and find a space in the room with one person standing behind the other. Explain that the cat has to catch the mouse. The mouse can avoid being caught by running up and standing IN FRONT OF one of the pairs. The person who is at the back of this 3-person line now becomes the mouse and has to run away from the cat. The identity of the mouse is therefore constantly changing. When the cat catches the mouse, the 2 players swap over, the mouse becoming the cat and the cat becoming the mouse” (McCarthy 46–47).

**Purpose:** To build energy and familiarity with the space through physical movement. To serve as a lighthearted team building game. This activity integrates touch and minimizes the physical distance between participants, which can serve to build trust.

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**Fig. 1 – “Pair Tag” (Photo credit: Leah Dieker)**
House Person Tempest
Source: Augusto Boal; Learned from a previous teacher, Bethany Nelson
Tags: medium focus, high energy, full group

Directions: Ask participants to get into groups of 3. 1 person should be left outside of the groups of 3. Within each group, 2 people raise their arms over their heads and touch their hands together, forming a “house.” The third person steps inside the “house.” The person outside of the groups then exclaims one of the following: house, person, or tempest. If “person” is called, the person in the center leaves their house to find a new house, and the house pairs stay in place. If “house” is said, the houses break apart and must find a new person to shelter while the people stay in place. They do not need to travel together. If “tempest” is said, everyone moves to find a new group of three. Participants do not need to stay in the same role that they were in. For each round, the caller tries to grab a place and the leftover person becomes the new caller.

Purpose: To build energy and familiarity with the space through physical movement. To serve as a lighthearted team building game. This activity integrates touch and minimizes the physical distance between participants, which can serve to build trust.
After warm-ups, we processed the activities through a brief discussion. Questions included, “What did you experience?” and “What do these warm-up activities tell you about the rest of the workshop?” After our initial warm-up reflection, I more fully introduced myself and this research. I found this to be a better time than at the beginning of the workshop because this later placement offered participants the opportunity to move and play together right away. The energy began flowing in the room and tensions eased through physical movement and laughter. Starting with activities also provided examples for what the night would “look like”; participants then had an experiential touchpoint before I discussed the work with them and invited questions. This introduction was short, typically no longer than five to eight minutes of introduction and dialogue. Within this time frame, I shared who I was and my history with UB. In an effort to develop a rapport with the students, I also shared the context of the research. In

Rapport exists when both investigator and informants come to share common goals or move to develop joint goals for the research. The participants in the setting or events under study must come to agree to help the investigator, however they understand the project. This means that it is the responsibility of the investigator to describe, at least in general terms, what the project is and what he hopes the product will be. (52)

I also asked the rising seniors to lead some of the discussion and to recount their feelings towards UB at the beginning of their first summer versus at the end of their first summer session. This provided an opportunity for the returning UB participants to remember what it was like to initially enter a UB summer session and to share that with the participants currently experiencing their first week. Responses included:

- It gets better.
- I was really nervous at the beginning last year, but, trust me, eventually everyone will feel like family.
- I didn’t want to leave at the end of summer.
- Just wait . . . we’ll all be really close.

I then shared with participants that they are helping design this work, guiding what works and what doesn’t. I also shared that I was excited to collaborate that evening, and invited their feedback and ideas every step of the way. At this point, we moved forward to the main exercises.
EXAMPLES OF MAIN EXERCISES

After enlivening the space through initial warm-ups, introductions, and a more personal invitation into this research, we delved into main exercises. The main exercises focused on learning names, sharing identities, building skills in listening and responding to one another, and developing the community. Scaffolding was utilized in the design as participants grew in comfort and trust. The exercises outlined below are examples of those found within the heart of the workshop.

Fig. 4 – “Catch a name/Catch a ball” (Photo credit: Conner Katsev)

Catch a name/Catch a ball
Source: Learned from a previous teacher, Lee Orchard
Tags: high focus, low energy, full group

Directions: Ask participants to form a circle and go around and share their names one at a time. Then invite participants to toss the ball from one person to the next, forming a pattern. When you toss the ball, say the person’s name who is receiving it. Go through this same pattern a few times. Then ask participants to keep an eye on the person who tossed you the ball. The facilitator then adds multiple balls into this pattern.
**Modifications**: To my knowledge, this activity did not have a name, so the participants helped name it. When forming the initial pattern, I asked all students to begin with their hands up in front of them. When they received the ball, they put their hands down. This provided a quick visual of who still needed to be included in the pattern. …I also added a rubber dinosaur or two into the mix of balls. Laughter ensued.

**Purpose**: To learn names. To build a sense of play and focus in the room.

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**Walk With Me**

Source: Learned from a previous teacher, Christina Marín

Tags: medium focus, low energy, full group

**Directions**: Ask participants to stand in a large circle. The facilitator then walks around in the center of the circle and completes the sentence: “Walk with me if________.” (e.g. “you are wearing blue pants”; “you have ever been proud of an achievement”; etc.) Participants that share the same quality then walk with the facilitator around in the center of the circle. Then one of the walking participants completes the same sentence with another quality. (Some of the same participants may keep walking, others may join the outside standing circle, and others may join from the outside standing circle, depending on what is said.)

**Purpose**: To provide an opportunity for self-disclosure and to celebrate commonalities in the room.

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**Do You Love Your Neighbor?**

Source: Learned from a previous teacher, Robert Colby

Tags: medium focus, high energy, full group

**Directions**: Arrange chairs in a large circle—one chair per participant, minus one participant who stands in the center of the circle. The person in the center approaches a person sitting and asks, “Do you love your neighbors?” The person sitting has two options. Their first option is to answer, “Nope,” at which point the two neighbors try to exchange seats before the person in the center sits in one of their chairs. The other option is to answer, “Yes, I do love my neighbors, (name) and (name), but I don’t love people who … (e.g. “are wearing jeans”).” At this point, everyone wearing jeans should get up and change places while the person in the center tries to sit in a chair.

**Modifications**: Since we did not have chairs in the UB workshop, I asked participants to sit in a large circle. I then gave each participant a small piece of tape to stick on the floor in front of them. This then designated the number of “places” in the circle.

**Purpose**: To build a sense of fun and energy in the room through the movement. To review names. To learn about the other participants, especially when “people who...”
moves beyond “jeans” to a deeper level such as asking who “has brothers,” “wants to go to a big university,” etc.

Points of Contact
Sources: Enacting Participatory Development: Theatre-Based Techniques by Julia McCarthy
Tags: build from low to high focus, low-medium energy, full and small groups

Directions: “Ask everyone to walk around the room filling up all the space. Shout out a number—participants then have to make groups with this number in them. For example, if you shout 4, then they should make groups of 4. Repeat this a few times” (McCarthy 28).

Modifications:
- I counted backwards from 5 after announcing the number for the groupings, therefore creating a sense of urgency to the task at hand.
- I included a technique that I learned from Bethany Nelson where, initially, I announced a number that would leave “leftovers” (e.g. In a group of 14, ask students to make groups of 4; there are 2 “leftovers” in this example who are participants that are not in a group). I then shared that within the next grouping, participants needed to ensure that the “leftovers” were taken care of and included in a group. After the next grouping number was announced, this required some participants who were already in a group to quickly step out of the group to ensure that the previous leftovers were included.
- After using the “leftovers,” model a few times, I then announced numbers that worked evenly based on the number of participants in the group at large (if an uneven number, I asked for a specific arrangement, such as 3 groups of 4 and 1 group of 5). I then asked students to share their names with their group members (and to make sure to do this, to not assume others may remember). I then asked them to share their answers to the question, “Where is home?” in terms of a broad understanding based on what “home” meant to them. I then called out another number, groups changed, and I asked them to once again state their names first. They were asked to then complete the following prompt: “If I have a day to myself...” We did this one more time, this final time sharing “a highlight of the past year” after sharing names.

Purpose: To have small group time with several people in the room. To begin to take care of the community at large (via the incorporation of the “leftovers”). To review names. To provide opportunities for self-disclosure and to learn about the other participants in the room.
**Compassionate Listening Exchange**

Source: Learned from a previous teacher, Christina Marín

Tags: high focus, low energy, one-on-one

**Directions:** Ask participants to find a partner that they do not know well and sit with them, facing one another. Ask them to decide who is person A and who is person 1 (1 and A are used so that they both seem “first” and no one initially takes a leadership role in this shared activity). Share that person 1 will talk first while the other listens. Talkers are asked to speak for 1 minute. The listener is asked to listen and not respond, being mindful that facial expressions and head nodding are also responses. They are asked to make eye contact and listen intently. The sequence is as follows:

- 1 minute—person 1 talks, person A listens
- 1 minute—shared conversation, follow-up questions
- 1 minute—person A talks, person 1 listens
- 1 minute—shared conversation, follow-up questions

**Modifications:**

- Talkers were asked to respond to the prompt, “Who is the most important person in your life and why?”
- Also, during one workshop we instead used 2-minute intervals instead of 1-minute intervals.
- After this exercise, I asked the participants about their experience as the “talker,” and then about their experience as the “listener.” We discussed how listening also sometimes refers to reacting and/or interjecting ourselves in the situation, and reflected upon times when this style of simply listening, of simply being present, could be useful.
- After this particular activity, I built out of the exercise into a series of prompts. For another minute, participants were asked to find commonalities with their partner. After one minute, they joined with another group, and now tried to find commonalities among this larger group. Then, they joined with one more group and repeated this exercise. They then decided upon one commonality to present to the full group through either a still or moving image. Each group performed their commonality and then the others guessed what they had in common.

**Purpose:** To share with another person one-on-one and then build to sharing with a small group. To develop skills in mindful and attentive listening. To create focus and develop others-centeredness.
Fig. 5 – “Compassionate Listening Exchange” (Photo credit: Leah Dieker)

Fig. 6 – Image responding to the prompt: something that you all have in common (Photo credit: Leah Dieker)
**Physical Life Charades**

Source: Learned from a previous teacher, Lee Orchard  
Tags: high focus, high energy, small groups

**Directions:** Ask participants to divide into two teams. Then ask the participants to sit in two lines, backs to one another. One person from each team comes forward. They are given a word or phrase to act out (e.g. tennis court, peanut butter, internet, etc.) They run in front of their team and begin. (Note: Both teams act out the same word at the same time.) If time goes by and the teammates aren’t guessing it correctly, the “actor” can ask another team member to join them in acting out the word...and then ask another...and another, etc., if needed. If there are multiple people acting at the same time, they are encouraged to collaborate rather than each take a separate approach. The first team to guess the word or phrase correctly receives a point.

**Modifications:**
- In UB, the two teams were the two Mentor Groups.
- I asked each group to come up with a team name, as well as a gesture and a sound/phrase that corresponds with their name. After this was decided upon, I asked each team to display their gesture and sound/phrase to the other team. The other team responded with theirs. We did this back and forth a few times, getting bigger and bigger and more and more energized before beginning the game.
- Also, many of the words in this context were related to their experiences in UB (e.g. college, ACT test, campus bookstore, FAFSA).
- At the close of the game, the teams went down the line and said “good game” to one another, much like at the end of a sporting event.
- Note: This game was repeated every summer because it was the most beloved by the students. This repetition also provided a leadership opportunity for the rising seniors who had played the game in the workshop the year before.

**Purpose:** To build community within the Mentor Groups and provide a leadership opportunity for the rising seniors, since they already knew the game. To provide an opportunity for students to present embodied understandings (often of college-related words/phrases) and work together to communicate those with teammates.
Fig. 7 – Mentor Group team names and gestures (Photo credit: Leah Dieker)

Fig. 8 – “Physical Life Charades” 1 (Photo credit: Conner Katsev)
Maria, Maria, Maria

Source: *Enacting Participatory Development: Theatre-Based Techniques* by Julia McCarthy

Tags: build from medium to high focus, low energy, small groups

**Directions:** “Ask the group to form a circle. Ask a volunteer to stand in the centre of the circle and to say the name of another group member 3 times, very quickly. For example, ‘Maria, Maria, Maria!’ The person who has been called has to answer with their own name before the person in the centre has called them for the third time. If the person called manages to answer in time, the same person stays in the centre and tries again with another name. If they do not manage to say their own name in time, they swap places with the person in the middle” (McCarthy 11).

**Modifications:** In UB, the small groups were the two Mentor Groups.

**Purpose:** To build community and check in on names first in smaller groups, before returning to the full group. To bring back focus after a high-energy game such as “Physical Life Charades.” As noted by McCarthy: “as the exercise progresses it gets increasingly difficult to get out of the centre as levels of concentration increase” (11).
**Name Tag**

Source: *Enacting Participatory Development: Theatre-Based Techniques* by Julia McCarthy

Tags: medium focus, high energy, full group

**Directions:** “This is a game of tag where there is no running, only fast walking. Ask a volunteer to be ‘on’. They must walk around the room with 1 arm outstretched with the palm of their hand facing forward. Their objective is to ‘tag’ someone with this hand. The group walks slowly round the room avoiding being tagged. To save yourself from being tagged, you can say the name of another participant. If you do this before you are touched, that person is now automatically ‘on’ and you are safe. However, if you get tagged before you say a name, then you are now ‘on.’ Each participant has 3 lives. So once they have been tagged 3 times, they must first tag someone else and then leave the game” (McCarthy 11–12).

**Modifications:** We did not use 3 lives within the context of the UB workshops. To keep the community together at this point in the workshop, participants stayed “in” throughout the whole game. The focus on not getting tagged and avoiding becoming “it” kept the stakes high.

**Purpose:** To revisit and lean on the knowledge of one another’s names (because of the fast nature, participants didn’t have much time to think...so this provided an apt name check-in). To create a sense of fun and play.
After each of these main exercises, we took time for processing and reflection. This sometimes took the form of a short full group discussion. At other times, I asked participants to discuss the activity in small groups. We sometimes utilized “one-word praxis,” which is an exercise I learned from Christina Marín during coursework at Emerson College. In this reflection, or “praxis,” I asked participants to go around the circle and share a one-word response to the exercise we just completed. Participants were invited to “echo” one another and repeat the same word if it also applied to their experience. This form of processing provided an opportunity for a more equal and often quicker reflection since participants shared equal space and voice.

EXAMPLES OF CLOSURE

After completing exercises that served as the heart of the workshop, we ended the evening together with closing activities. These examples of closure provided representations of our progress on learning names, as well as opportunities for reflection on our time together. The following are closure activities used throughout the four summer sessions.

Eye Contact/Walk Across
Source: Learned from a previous teacher, Lee Orchard
Tags: high focus, medium energy, full group

**Directions:** In the same way as in “Catch a name/Catch a ball,” ask participants to develop a pattern. One person says someone else’s name in the circle. That person says someone else’s name, etc. until every name is called and there is a pattern. The pattern begins again, this time the person saying the name walks toward the person whose name they say and they take their place in the circle. That person says the next name right after the previous person starts walking towards them. This pattern gets faster and faster, and the facilitator encourages that the names are said clearly and loudly.

**Modifications:** I am not sure of the appropriate name for this activity; this is simply the one I have utilized over the years. I worked with a group of about 17 students; however, I have done this exercise with up to 40 students, and it could
perhaps be done with an even larger group. We again developed the pattern by starting with our arms raised and then lowering them once included in the pattern of names. We sped up the pace of the crosses as we neared the end of the game, raising the energy and sense of play in the room. At the end of this exercise, I asked if anyone in the circle could go around and give everyone’s name. Volunteers then picked up this torch.

**Purpose:** To check in and see if we have learned one another’s names during the course of the workshop.

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**Pebbles**  
*Source: Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response by Jan Cohen-Cruz*  
*Tags: low energy, low focus, full group*  

**Directions:** “Everyone sits in a circle and ‘throws’ one or two words into the center about anything they saw, experienced, or remember from the day. In addition to encouraging each person to reflect on their own experience, this teaches them what other people found valuable that they may or may not have noticed” (Cohen-Cruz 132).

**Purpose:** To provide an opportunity for shared reflection and closure.

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**Gifting Farewell**  
*Source: Unknown*  
*Tags: medium focus, low energy, full group*  

**Directions:** A group member begins a farewell movement and sends it to the person next to them. The next person replicates the previous movement and then creates their own farewell movement and sends it to the person next to them. The motion then continues around the circle until it reaches the beginning.

**Purpose:** To provide an opportunity for individual gifting to another member of the community. To provide a chance for reflection and a sense of closure.

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Since these workshops occurred on three consecutive nights with different participants each night, at the close of each workshop I asked participants to not share the activities we experienced together with others so that the next night’s participants could experience the delight of the surprise. Therefore, on Monday and Tuesday nights, we ended with an oath. I
learned the model of the oath from one of my former teachers, Bethany Nelson. I asked the participants to hold up their right hand and repeat after me:

\[
\begin{align*}
I, \ (name), \\
promise \ not \ to \ share \ these \ activities \ \\
with \ any \ other \ UB \ students \ or \ staff \ members \ \\
before \ the \ workshops \ are \ completed. \\
I'm \ a \ great \ human, \\
so \ I \ will \ respect \ this \ request. \\
Also, \\
it \ will \ be \ way \ cool \ to \ have \ a \ secret.
\end{align*}
\]

We repeated the initial baseline activity, “Object in the Center,” to provide a visual image of our progress together as a community during the workshop. I asked the following:

- How well do you think you know everyone’s name in this room? (if closer to the center, you know everyone’s name)

- How comfortable do you feel with the people in this room? (if closer to the center, you are very comfortable)

We ended the night with a post-survey, where I asked participants to share their thoughts on their comfort level and their favorite and least favorite exercises. The survey also provided space for any further thoughts or questions. I began playing contemporary music as participants completed the survey and began exiting. I stayed after the workshop to talk with any participants individually and/or to answer any personal questions.
Outcomes

Outcomes from these workshops can be measured in relation to the initial objectives: to learn names and to build community among participants. To measure progress on these objectives, I pulled from interviews, surveys, and quantitative components, as well as from my own participation in the workshops and my observations of them. Photographs and video recordings of the workshops assisted in post-workshop examinations. As Dewalt and Dewalt remind us, “While the participant observer is learning to become a participant, s/he is also trying to identify the specific actions and products of action that are indicators of key concepts and components of a conceptual framework” (81). I therefore examine how the participants’ actions and responses give light to our progress on our initial objectives.

In my experiences with this UB program in the years prior to this research, I noticed that we would often get to the last week of the summer program and some participants still would not know everyone’s name. Consequently, utilizing exercises that assisted in learning names was foundational in this community-building work. Knowing one another’s names seems to go a long way in aiding approachability among students and creates an environment of respect. It therefore seems to be an indicator of successfully meeting the objective to build a community. Lana Brown shared, “It is difficult and hard work to do the tedious name-grasping. To get that first piece of connection so that you can start to put something else on it. Names are something” (Brown).

Our progress towards this initial objective was noted near the end of the workshop after the activity “Eye Contact/Walk Across.” When I asked if anyone could go around the circle and share everyone’s name, I had several volunteers. It was only because our workshop time
together was running out that only 2-3 students completed this task each workshop. I observed smiles and nods of appreciation as the volunteer correctly stated their name. There were a few instances over the course of the 11 workshops where the volunteer would forget a name, and, in these circumstances, the volunteer demonstrated disappointment at themselves for forgetting. Sometimes they shared that they would continue around the circle and come back around. At other times, the volunteer apologized and asked for assistance. At this point, other participants would chime in and share the name or offer clues. When this occurred, it seemed to create a shared sense of accomplishment, which was noted through smiles and laughter.

Progress on names was also noted when revisiting the baseline activity, “Object in the Center,” at the end of the workshop. At the beginning of the workshop, participants were spread farther apart throughout the room. In one particular workshop, when I initially asked this question at the beginning of our time together, participants simply stayed in the full group circle that they were already in and no one moved towards the center. At the end of the workshops, however, the physical distance between students changed. Students were nestled together towards the center, and although in some workshops there were still degrees to this closeness, no participants stood towards the outskirts of the room like they did when the question was first asked. During all 11 workshops, there was a noticeable difference in the answer to this question at the beginning versus the end.

To measure progress on the objective of building community, I utilized quantitative data, observations of the general atmosphere, a reflection upon our moments of processing the exercises, accounts of changes in relationships among Mentor Groups, and the baseline exercise, “Object in the Center.” First, an increase in the comfort level among participants is evidenced in
the quantitative component to the data, which was collected via pre- and post-workshop surveys. Participants were asked, “How connected do you feel to the other program participants in this room?” They were then given a scale from 1-10 (1 meaning very disconnected, and 10 meaning very connected). Combining data from all four summer sessions, 89% of participants noted an increase in their comfort level with other UB students after the “Theatre Games.” Table 1 illustrates the results of this quantitative component.

Table 1. Increases in Comfort Level Among UB Participants During “Theatre Games”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of the Summer Session</th>
<th>Total # of participants involved in this research</th>
<th>Percentage of participants whose number value (1-10) increased post-workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>80.49 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>98 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>85 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>91 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not included in the percentages were participants who both started and ended the workshops at a “10.” This included 5 students in 2013, 8 in 2014, 3 in 2015, and 5 in 2016.

The value of the point increases ranged from 1-5 points in 2013 and 2014, and from 1-6 points in 2015 and 2016. The average point increase is as follows: 1.88 points (2013), 1.78 points (2014), 2.23 points (2015), and 2.33 points (2016).
One of the most noticeable indicators of progress towards building a community was an observable change in the atmosphere of the room during the workshops. At the beginning of all of the workshops, there was a noticeable difference between the rising seniors and the rising juniors. The rising seniors seemed to enter the room with more confidence. This was exhibited through straighter body postures, more relaxed facial expressions, and many of them engaged in excited conversations and laughter. They had participated in a workshop with me the year before and therefore knew, more or less, what to expect. Although the rising seniors generally seemed more comfortable, they were not overly boisterous in their conversations, as they, too, were in a room with several strangers. Their pockets of talking and laughter in the room were balanced by pockets of deep silence, as the rising juniors entered much differently. Most of these participants entered quietly, immediately went to sit down around the sides of the circular room, and their body postures and facial expressions exhibited nervousness and uncertainty. There seemed to be only a few clumps of “friends.” The difference between the rising juniors and rising seniors was palpable every year of this work. Also, there was an observable physical separation between the rising juniors and the rising seniors at the beginning of each of the workshops. Despite the occasional exception to this, when revisiting the video recordings from these workshops, I noticed them sitting separately and, typically, not interacting. If I did not already know who was a rising junior and a rising senior, I would have likely been able to note the juniors versus the seniors by their entrances, posture, facial expressions, and perceived energy level.

The participants exited the room with a very different and observable energy than when they first entered. There were smiles, some participants bounded and/or skipped out of the
room as they moved to their next evening activity, and some even had arms linked or around 
one another. In particular, the soundscape of the room was much different. The room at the 
beginning of the workshop was noticeably quieter than at the end. At the end, the room was 
filled with laughter and loud and energized conversations. I also witnessed new groups of people 
talking and exiting together. In each workshop, I played music while they were completing their 
post-workshop survey, and, in one workshop, students started singing along together with the 
music on their way out of the room. I noted a greater sense of relaxed comradery. In my post-
workshop journaling, time and time again I noted a release in pressure by the end of our time 
together. The beginning of the workshop often felt like a tension-filled knot, but by the end, I, 
too, felt a release in the space. The room felt like it could “breathe.” On several occasions, the 
photographer and I would often loudly exhale and laugh with one another after the last 
participant left the room, which exhibited what an energetic and wonderful whirlwind the 
evening grew to be. In a one-on-one interview, a student noted this change in atmosphere. She 
said, “When you have a big group of people and you’re all trying to get on the same brainwave, it 
takes a little bit. So, I think at the end of the activities—we were, like, I think we were doing the 
charades—we were all on the same mental level and we could do it, but at the beginning it was 
just like strangers in a room interacting.”

Other indicators of our progress towards increasing the comfort level among participants 
were the participants’ comments and observations throughout the workshops. After several of 
the activities, I asked for reflections and responses from participants. As mentioned above, this 
reflection sometimes took the form of a discussion, and at other times I would simply ask for a 
one-word response. The choice of the type of processing was often made in the moment, based
upon observations of the activity itself. As noted by Michael Rohd, “The trick is to not allow these
discussions to dissipate the energy and forward motion of the activities and the session itself” (7).
He shares that even if participants are quiet, they are still thinking and that is valuable as well
(7). For instance, the one-word praxis was often utilized as a time-saving device so that we
would not run the risk of spending too much time reflecting on just one of the many exercises we
would join in together. In this particular praxis, there seemed to be a sense of pride when the
word a participant chose was also “echoed” by someone else. In response to “Walk With Me,”
one-word responses included: similarities, diversity, surprise, different, original, fun, relatable,
contrast, happy, energized, excited, calm, connected, chill, cool, closer, enthusiastic, pumped,
knowing, informed, and happy.

Progress was also noted after the “Compassionate Listening Exchange.” After initial
concerns that students would not take the listening component seriously, I was pleasantly
surprised to observe that, for the majority of the students, this was not the case. I noticed large
exhalations and initial laughter at the beginning of the “shared time,” the time when their
minute was over and students were finally able to converse freely with one another. There
seemed to be a sense of pleasure when both parties accomplished their goal of either talking or
listening—sometimes this even involved a high-five. Time and time again, the reflection after this
exercise provided a rich discussion. Participants shared that it felt “awkward” or found it
“difficult” to talk and have someone just listen, and a few self-reflected and noticed that they
struggled with eye contact. Others, however, commented that the conversation felt more
personal, and another student shared, “I felt important.” In the role of the listener, participants
reflected that it was “easier to comprehend without having to respond,” and that they enjoyed
the experience because they “could just take everything in slowly.” Another participant shared that it was hard to keep her questions in, but, “It feels good to hear about someone else like that.” Another student, who had been very quiet in the workshop up to this point shared, “I feel like I’m being too selfish when it’s just about me…but I liked it.” In the post-workshop surveys, several participants shared that this was their favorite activity. In our discussion about how this exercise might influence their communication with one another after the workshop, a student shared that she would think about this activity when talking with her friends, especially new friends. She also shared, “We need more one-on-one bonding with others.”

After the “Compassionate Listening Exchange,” students moved into small groups before returning to the full group. I can point to this progression as a key moment of transformation for several participants in the workshop. The task at hand was to find commonalities with one person, then as a group of four, then as a group of six. This opportunity outside of the full group was intentional, or, as explained by Preston, “By design, a workshop will often involve a series of task-based participatory exercises with a developmental goal in mind” (37). The task at hand was to find commonalities with one other participant, then more, and then more. It was designed to ease discomfort among participants through these shorter and more intimate sharing activities. The process also created a temporary sense of urgency, as participants rushed to find the one (or more) things they had in common with others. This “rush” helped participants avoid awkward silences before beginning their conversation. They had a task at hand, and were asked to complete it quickly, without much hesitation.

Another indicator of building community during these workshops was increased comfort with their Mentor Groups. There were several signs that exemplified reaching this objective.
First, increased comfort was exhibited as some of the groups continued to use their team name from “Physical Life Charades” throughout the summer session. I occasionally witnessed their name or gesture in the program Variety Show, which is a student production for their families and friends during the second to last week of the summer session; each Mentor Group designs and performs in their own skit. Also, “Physical Life Charades” was the first exercise in each workshop where participants split up into Mentor Groups. I observed participants sitting closely, working together, and supporting one another as they acted out the word or phrase. They called each other by name frequently throughout this game and sometimes clapped and cheered together and patted one another’s backs if their team won a round. The increased comfort among Mentor Groups was also noted through students’ post-workshop survey responses. One quiet rising senior shared, “These games really helped our [Mentor] groups connect and bring people out of their shell.” A rising junior, who had initially seemed uninterested in attending the workshop, shared that her “Mentor group [is] closer now than in the beginning.” A rising senior who seemed positive yet detached at the beginning of the workshop later expressed, “How comfy do you feel with your group? A lot more comfortable.”

Foundational to the choosing of the exercises was an emphasis on sharing. This stemmed from educator Rosa Pascual’s idea that “sharing is a giving of the self: the whole self, the total self, the inner self. By sharing one’s self we open the door for others to do the same. We learn from each other and we discover new insights. We learn how much we have in common and to appreciate our differences. By teaching as sharing of self, we learn that we are all Human” (qtd. in Dottin et al. 65). In the exchanging of self-disclosures, the participants learned about one another. These exchanges included names, qualities, and interests, as well as embodied
understandings of some words and concepts, as noted through “Physical Life Charades.” The community-building exercises that participants most enjoyed were included within the sampling of activities in this chapter. Their favorite exercises were “Physical Life Charades,” “Catch a name/Catch a ball,” “Pair Tag,” and the “Compassionate Listening Exchange.” At the end of each workshop in 2016, I asked participants for a one-word praxis in response to the following question: “What word comes to mind when looking back on our workshop experience?” Responses included: amazing, entertaining, fun, exhilarating, exciting, laughter, energized, great, good, awesome, positive, close, hopeful, happy, comfortable, excited, different, needed, fast. Many of these words were echoed several times.

When revisiting the baseline activity, “Object in the Center,” at the end of each workshop, there was a noticeable difference in the atmosphere from the first time we completed this exercise. Students were generally more silent during this activity at the beginning of the night, but at the end, the room presented a very different picture. The participants moved together in response to their comfort level with one another. Many also commented vocally during this exercise, saying, “Awwwh!” or “Well, this looks different than earlier.” Participants laughed together, sometimes put their arms around one another in a group hug, and they often willingly, and without prompting, made silly faces at the camera. The tenor of the room had changed dramatically from the beginning of the workshop. In each of the 11 workshops, students were closer towards the center in response to “How comfortable do you feel with the people in this room?” In Fig. 11, “2A” refers to the response to this question at the beginning of the workshop. In Fig. 12, “2B” refers to the response to this question at the end of the workshop.
The number/letter pairings were used so that I could differentiate the photographs when examining them post-workshop.

Fig. 11 – “Object in the Center” at the beginning of the workshop (Photo credit: Leah Dieker)

Fig. 12 – “Object in the Center” at the end of the workshop (Photo credit: Leah Dieker)
Outcomes of this research are also noted through responses on the post-workshop surveys. All comments, without exception, were favorable towards the workshops. The following is a sample of students’ post-workshop survey responses to the question, “Any other thoughts you would like to share?”:

- I loved it.
- I really had fun, and got to bond with people too! Thank you.
- I actually liked all the games. Brought me closer to everyone.
- This was fun. I knew them [other participants] pretty well but I feel closer cause we have something to talk about.
- Loved tonight.
- Do it more often.
- This really helped. Kinda broke everyone’s shell.
- This was so much fun! I really thought it worked. Thank you! 😊
- I love this! I didn’t know many names until we came in here! Thank you!
- It was a great team learning activity!
- This was awesome. I really liked all of these activities.
- I like these theater games.
- Loved IT!!
- This was great bonding.
- These games are AWESOME.
- These games helped me learn everyone’s name and feel more comfy with them. Thank you! 😊
A few of the comments, in particular, stood out to me. First, a bit of context: when I was with two of the Mentor Groups in the workshop, the four other groups participated in another “Community Council” activity. Community Council time occurs Monday-Thursday nights during summer session and involves a range of activities—from time at the recreational center on campus, to board game nights, to movie nights. One rising senior who loves going to the recreational center was scheduled to be in “Theatre Games” the same night that “Rec Night” was planned. She came in and seemed upset to be there. Her usually smiling face was more neutral and she sat quietly over to the side of the room after entering. However, once we began the workshop, she became enthusiastic and positive. On her post-workshop survey, she wrote, “I was sad about not going to the Rec for Community Council, but not anymore.”

Another instance that stood out to me when looking at the post-workshop surveys was the response from a very shy rising junior. She entered the room alone and with hesitation. She made little eye contact and was soft-spoken throughout the entirety of the workshop, only contributing vocally when asked, such as in a one-word response. However, she seemed engaged and began smiling as we progressed through the exercises. At the end of her survey, she wrote, “I feel better about UB.”

I received a similar response in interviews with students. When asked if the “Theatre Games” made a difference in their first week experience, one participant replied, “Yeah, it did. I think it did a lot. At the end of it [the workshop], I could wrap my arm around people and not feel really weird.” In terms of the relationship to the Mentor Group members during the workshop, a student shared, “I like that you can connect with your [Mentor] group. That it’s like a mini family inside your UB family.” Another student, too, noticed the effect on the Mentor
Groups. He shared, “When we came as our [Mentor] group, it built you together and chained you all together. It made you grow on each other a little bit better than if you were just with random people. You’re going to be around this group of people for sure, probably a lot more than the others, and it helped you get closer together.”

When program personnel were asked about the effect of the “Theatre Games,” they, too, observed a noticeable change. Erika Sterup shared:

I think students are skeptical about it at first—I see it in counseling, in therapy . . . anytime you can get people to interact, any time you can get them to talk about something—but then the students really think it’s fun. They talk positively about it . . . My impression is that it’s a good thing. I think all the students tend to get something out of it. It does something to loosen people up a little bit, which is important especially at the beginning of summer session when they’re nervous and meeting new people. (Sterup)

In terms of the relationship of the workshop to program retention, Janet Blohm-Pultz shared, “It’s that human interaction. That’s what it takes. It’s not necessarily a system, it’s just having people there and doing things that connect people” (Blohm-Pultz). She continued:

They [theatre games] build relationships and trust . . . trust in each other. Because if you’re in an atmosphere where you trust each other and you feel like you’re not being judged and that you’re being supported, then you’re going to learn so much better. Then, you’re open to anything, as opposed to being convinced “I’m incompetent and not very good at something” . . . So, to start off the summer with these methods of building community and building trust and making
everybody accepted . . . that’s a big part of what comes out of those games, that I could see. You’re telling them trust each other. And you’re not *telling* them to get to know each other’s names—you do it through play, which is the way kids learn . . . They [theatre games] work brilliantly, they just work brilliantly. (Blohm-Pultz, emphasis added)

**Lessons Learned**

One of the lessons I learned in this work is that smaller groups seem to work best. In 2013, I facilitated only two workshops, therefore splitting the full student body into only two groups: 21 students were involved in the workshop on one night, and 25 students were involved the next night. From 2014-2016, I instead utilized three groups, which ranged from 14-22 students, with an average of 17 people per group. Having two Mentor Groups per workshop made more sense since these groups spend quite a bit of time together during the summer session. Also, students were able to participate more in the full group games when the number was smaller. Based on both observing and participating in these workshops, the Mentor Group model seemed to be less intimidating to participants because the group was not as large initially.

In terms of the survey design, if doing this work again, I would add more context surrounding the question, “How connected do you feel to the other program participants in this room?” I would provide more description to each of the numbers 1-10. I have wondered if some of the students did not remember what number they circled pre-workshop, and then by the end, perhaps did not increase numerically as much as they would have if I had provided more context.
I perceive this because their responses to the open-ended questions on the post-workshop survey made it seem like the workshop made a larger impact than the numbers exhibited.

I also learned to challenge my own experience as a participant versus as an observer. I recall a high-energy game that was a bit difficult for one of the groups to grasp. Our effort to learn how to play the game may have appeared to be chaotic to an outside observer, and, it, too, felt a bit chaotic to me as a participant in the game at the time. In the moment, I decided not to interject or stop the game. I wanted to see if we could work it out, accomplish it together, and not squash the forward momentum. And, sure enough, we did. As I later watched the video, the perspective I had as a participant was challenged. It did not appear to be nearly as chaotic as it felt in the moment. Now in the role of observer, I saw students laughing and problem-solving together. There was a sense of pride as they figured it out together. As Preston reminds us, "A critical pedagogical perspective challenges facilitators to challenge their own cultural and moral expectations of what they see being 'performed' in the room, choosing not to view it only through the dominate behavioural lens which might define it as 'bad' or 'compliant' behaviour." (27).

Another lesson I have learned from these workshops is that they don’t work in isolation. Now knowing which students left UB post-workshop during the summer sessions, I can revisit their pre- and post- workshop surveys and see that their comfort levels increased that evening. However, an hour and a half community-building workshop is not enough. This reflection therefore serves to build a bridge between the “Lessons Learned” and the following “Recommendations” section. These workshops are a great starting place and can aid in developing the climate and setting the tone of the summer session, but continued focus on
building this community would be ideal. Much work towards this goal can be done throughout the first week, especially. I learned that everyone, participants and staff members alike, needs to continue the forward momentum and remain actively engaged in continuing to build the UB community. Learning names and deepening comfort levels among participants is purposeful time. It is time well spent.

Recommendations

My first recommendation would be to start these workshops as close to student summer session move-in as possible. One of the main obstacles to this work is scheduling. If another UB program were to begin implementing “Theatre Games,” I would recommend approaching what they are co-scheduled against mindfully. For instance, these workshops were at the same time as Community Council, and so workshop participants missed the other planned activity for the evening in its entirety. To move these workshops closer to move-in day and to also avoid students missing other activities, perhaps these workshops could instead be included in a rotation with other activities. For instance, on move-in day or during the afternoon of the next day, there could be three groups and a three-hour (or more, if possible) time frame. While one group is doing a campus tour, perhaps another group sets up their rooms, and another group is in “Theatre Games” ...and then we rotate. Therefore, no student is missing anything else. They will all participate in all of the activities, just at different times. The connections made between participants during the workshops could then start even earlier. Donna Fude said, “If they don’t have a connection, they don’t have any reason to stay. Connecting with that individual as an individual and helping them get a vision for where they’re heading . . . I think that’s why they
stay. They start to believe in themselves and see themselves as something different. They’re not who they were in their hometown or their high school. They can be who they are” (Fude). A celebration of this right away may further the impact of this workshop.

I would also recommend continued workshops to nurture Mentor Group bonding. A potential road map could include an initial “Theatre Games” community-building workshop, and then, to continue to strengthen and deepen Mentor Group relationships and ties to the UB program at large, we could move towards applied theatre work (which is outlined in Chapter 5). Perhaps there could be one applied theatre and arts-based workshop a week built into each student’s summer schedule.

If facilitating this work, I recommend utilizing the rising seniors as leaders. It is the “elephant in the room,” as everyone knows that they are returners, and, because of this, they play a large part in setting the tone of the summer session. Their openness and positive leadership serves as a model to the first-year students. In relation to these workshops, the rising seniors seemed excited to help lead the discussion on how the community becomes closer over the course of the summer. Acknowledging this then sets the bar high to develop the same type of journey for this new cohort as well. The rising seniors seemed equally excited to be in-the-know when we played “Physical Life Charades.” Including even this one exercise that they already knew and enjoyed demonstrated their leadership potential. Because of their familiarity with the game, it thrust them into the positive leadership role that many of the rising juniors likely already expected them to take. Time and time again, I witnessed the rising seniors encouraging the rising juniors as they acted out the word, and, on several occasions, a rising senior in the group would step up and offer help if they needed it. The openness, enthusiasm,
and support exhibited by several of the rising seniors seemed to pave the way in building these smaller Mentor Group communities.

Throughout this work, I also acknowledge a certain level of fluctuation in group dynamics. What works well with one group may not create the same kind of energy the next night. Therefore, when planning these workshops, I recommend that facilitators have several activities in mind for each section of the workshop. For instance, when interspersing high energy and low energy games, note that what is “high energy” for one group may even exhaust another, as some groups will “play hard” and be worn out after. Therefore, have a couple of cool down activities in your toolkit in case a group seems exhausted after a game. Continuing to reflect and process the work after each exercise also assists in this transition.

Conclusion

In relation to program retention, Blohm-Pultz stated, “The ones who leave are the ones who cannot or do not want to form a relationship with somebody or have trouble forming a relationship. Those are the ones, I think, who leave . . . who are just so, so homesick” (Blohm-Pultz). The purpose of the “Theatre Games” was to assist in forming these essential relationships in a space that was familiar, their “home away from home” for the summer session. Within the course of the workshops, we worked together to not only learn names and build community, but to also provide participants with communication tools and starting-off points for future conversations with one another.

In several of the workshops, I noticed outward signs of students’ joy in sharing pieces of themselves with others. In one of my post-workshop journal entries, I wrote about how long it
typically takes to form meaningful relationships in life. First, you must get the confidence to approach someone and have a conversation. You often start with generalities, perhaps comments on the weather or the space you are in. More personal self-disclosures, such as likes and dislikes, values and aspirations, often come later down the road. It takes commitment and sincere follow-through to deepen that initial connection with someone. In these arts-based workshops, however, participants were invited to share with one another quite quickly. That invitation came as part of the structure, and it was a task that everyone was invited to complete. Therefore, as noted by a participant, no one was being “selfish” or “self-centered”; these self-disclosures were instead a genuine and integrated part of the journey together. After re-reading this particular journal entry, I reflected upon how these workshops provided an opportunity for sharing that does not often come easily to a group of teenagers sitting in a residence hall lounge area together for the first time. Sarah Hass noted that these arts-based activities “encourage them [participants] and require them to engage with one another . . . to do certain things at a rapid pace so that they don’t have time to let those nagging feelings of self-doubt or self-consciousness overtake their actions. And, so, those activities have been successful in helping them feel more comfortable around peers” (Hass). No weather conversations needed...unless desired, of course.

“In the field of education, images of classroom life can be made articulate by what the arts-based researcher sees in the situation and what he or she makes of it. The task is a constructive one; we make sense of the world. In making sense, we give a certain power to what we have described” (Barone and Eisner 159). In making sense of the “Theatre Games,” I observed that these workshops contributed to the building of community. I witnessed tangible
progress towards meeting our initial objectives of learning names and growing in comfort with other participants. I experienced a palpable difference in the atmosphere of the room from the beginning to the end of each workshop. Physical proximity between students decreased and the soundscape of the room became filled with conversations and laughter. I saw how bodies in a room, sans phones or snazzy entertainment efforts, could have fun and play together. Looking back, I realize now that I witnessed the beginnings of what would become close and lasting friendships among many participants.

In the next chapter, I discuss the “Theatre Workshops,” which moved our theatre work together beyond learning names and building community. Although these were certainly still goals, the workshops utilized applied theatre techniques and arts-based activities to help students articulate, navigate, and confront challenges that may arise during their UB program tenure and subsequent postsecondary career. The “Theatre Workshops” involved games, role-play, playmaking, tableaux, improvisations that assisted in problem solving, communication, community building, and decision-making. Participants were given an opportunity to critically reflect on challenges they face within a community of support and engaged dialogue in an effort to strengthen their ties to one another, to the program, and to their postsecondary goals.
Ch. 5—On Campus, On Board: Building a Foundation Through “Theatre Workshops”

If I have to go to somebody for something,
this is the circle I go to.
I feel so connected to everyone here.

—UB student
(Focus group, July 2015)

Introduction

The “Theatre Workshops” were facilitated during summer session 2015. In the preceding summers, 2013 and 2014, I facilitated “Theatre Games” and reintegrated with the UB program. I utilized those first two summers to listen, observe, and talk with students before adding this next set of workshops. This time and these conversations helped in the planning of the 2015 summer series, which included both the initial community-building “Theatre Games,” as well as the new addition: a sequence of small group “Theatre Workshops.” Although community-building was certainly still a focus of these new workshops, we moved to exercises that focused on the participants’ experiences and aspirations, as well as their thoughts surrounding the college experience. A group of 13 volunteer participants attended a sequence of four workshops. I had initially planned for only two sessions, but the students requested more and we therefore added a third, and then a fourth.

Within these workshops, participants utilized applied theatre techniques and arts-based activities to reflect upon why they wanted to go to college, develop a support system for their high school journey and beyond, navigate potential obstacles in achieving a postsecondary education, and develop further connections to their larger postsecondary and career goals. The
hope was that within this smaller community of support, the relationships, exercises, and discussions would also serve to assist in the retention of these students. Our journey together included examining individual experiences, as well as creating an awareness of the larger academic system.

These arts-based workshops were designed to supplement UB’s current support services, many of which provide concrete outcomes, such as guidance on completing the FAFSA and college applications, summer coursework opportunities, ACT prep and tutoring, and a career internship program. These workshops integrate arts-based exercises to provide a space to examine the college-bound journey through praxis. They offer a continual weaving of experiencing activities and then reflecting upon them, and these new understandings are then applied to the participants’ actions in the world. Patricia Leavy reminds us, “Arts-based practices can also promote dialogue, which is critical to cultivating understanding. The particular ways in which art forms facilitate conversations are important as well. The arts ideally evoke emotional responses, and so the dialogue sparked by arts-based practices is highly engaged” (14).

In this chapter, I combine the design and outcomes sections through detailed descriptions of the work, and I include observations and responses. After which, much like Chapter 4, I discuss more overarching outcomes, lessons learned, recommendations, and concluding thoughts on this work.

Design and Outcomes

The first three workshops occurred on Sunday nights from 7:00-9:00 p.m. before weeks three, four, and five of the summer session. The fourth workshop occurred from 1:30-3:00 p.m.
on Wednesday afternoon during the final week of the summer program. They occurred in the same location as the “Theatre Games,” which is a lobby area inside the participants’ residence hall. Although these workshops were each very different in structure, some aspects were typical to every workshop in the series. For instance, I always played music upon the participants’ entrance and exit. Also, participants completed a pre-survey before the first workshop, and then completed a post-workshop survey after each individual workshop. Throughout the planning and implementation, I remained mindful that “[g]ood applied theatre aims to devise roles and situations that explore the human condition, not as a way of answering the problems of the world but to help develop a perspective on the world and to understand or at least struggle with the perspectives of others as we move toward a sense of social justice and equity” (Taylor 72).

**Workshop 1**

The focus of Workshop 1 was to connect participants to their experience base, their surrounding landscape, and to their aspirations for the future. At the beginning of our time together, I shared that we would examine the bigger picture in this initial workshop, and then funnel down to their individual journeys within that larger landscape during the second workshop. To provide a structure for our experience together, I utilized the “Framework for Applied Theatre,” which was originally developed in collaboration with Beth Osnes for work with the Navajo Women’s Energy Project (Osnes et al. 246). This framework, which we later designed to include the word “activating,” is illustrated in Figure 13.
I drew the framework on a large piece of butcher paper and taped it to the wall so that we could add to this visual piece throughout the course of our journey together. Within the context of UB summer session 2015, I made a few adjustments to the design. The theme of the summer was “Rising Above” and the lobby was decorated like a mountain summit. So, in the middle of the paper, I drew a mountain. The “current story” was on one side of “the climb,” and
the “new story” was on the other. The trees scattered on and around the mountain represented the landscape of people and organizations in the participants’ lives that they could lean on for support. This interpretation of the framework is shown in Figure 14.

To make our way through this framework, we utilized a series of creative practices, through which, students "were engaging in their own self-reflexive observations, the starting place for an emerging, intuitive process of understanding of the relationships of their
performative responses in different situations and to their cultural contexts” (Preston 27). We began with a discussion of participants’ foundations and values, which first involved the following exercise:

**Same Journey**

Source: *The Geese Theatre Handbook: Drama with Offenders and People at Risk* edited by Clark Baim, Sally Brookes, and Alun Mountford

Tags: medium focus, high energy, full group

**Directions:** “Ask the group members to walk around the room in any direction, randomly filling up the space. Ask them to stop walking when you clap your hands. When you clap, the group members should be randomly spaced. If not, repeat until they are: Look at where you are in the room and try to remember where you are standing. When I say ‘go!’ I want you to touch all four walls, the floor, a table, something red, and something green (not anyone’s clothing) and shake at least three people’s hands, in any order, and then return to your spot. (What you ask them to touch will obviously depend on the room). This is to be done silently and as efficiently as possible. Don’t bump into anyone. So again that’s all four walls, the floor, a table, something red, something green and shake at least three people’s hands, then return to your place. Remember your journey as you go. Ready? Go!

After the first attempt: *Try the same thing again, repeating exactly the same journey. Go!*

After a couple of rehearsals: *Now think about the journey that you have just taken. Go through it in your mind and think about what problems you encountered. If you found that you were always cutting across the same person, think about how you might solve this. If you need to negotiate with anyone, do it now in order to make your journey as smooth as possible. This time I am going to time you.*

After this attempt: *Try again and let’s see if you can improve your time. What goal do you want to set yourselves? Give the group several attempts*” (Baim et al. 75).

**Purpose:** To build energy in the room and familiarity with the space. To lead to a discussion of the journey to college and to physicalize the idea that all of the participants in the room shared this same goal, but would have different journeys to achieve it.

There was laughter throughout this exercise, and when the group met their timed goal, they all cheered at their accomplishment. I asked them to remember their “home base” for this exercise,
as we would use it again later. The pay-off of this exercise was a group that seemed energized for the rest of the workshop. We then joined in “Walk With Me,” which is an exercise that was outlined in Chapter 4. It was not utilized in “Theatre Games” during summer session 2015, only in this “Theatre Workshop.” This activity was included to build community and to learn about the similarities in the room. We then moved to “What am I? What do I want?”:

**What am I? What do I want?**

Source: *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal

Tags: low focus, low energy, individual then full group

**Directions:** Participants each have a sheet of paper. On it, they write three words to describe themselves and three things they want. The facilitator then collects them and begins reading them aloud without giving the corresponding participant’s name (Boal 170).

**Modifications:** I asked participants to write their responses with the awareness that they would be shared aloud with the full group. I asked them to write “What am I?” on one piece of paper and “What do I want?” on another, as these were shared at different points in the workshop.

**Purpose:** To allow participants to name their own values and dreams. To provide an opportunity for reflection and self-disclosure. To serve as a touchpoint throughout this workshop.

When I read the responses to “What am I?” aloud, some descriptors like “Ninja” evoked a lot of laughter; however, most were very serious such as “an introvert,” “a hard worker,” and “a nice person.” Participants listened attentively to all of the words shared. I noticed some students looking around, trying to guess who may relate to the words as I read them aloud. One student had written “I am a UB-er” as one of their three main descriptors. We then explored this response with a discussion on why the participants chose to be UB-ers and why they want to go to college. This provided an unanticipated, yet perfect transition into the next activity.
I then invited participants to gather around and write these reasons within an outline of a human form, which I had drawn on a large piece of butcher paper. Reasons included: stability, knowledge, being more open-minded, independence, to get away, money, connections, a better future, job opportunities, to help myself, learn work skills, to provide for a family, travel, know more people, every life should have goals, purpose, to get a job doing what you want to, to make money later, become a well-rounded individual, gain experience, go somewhere in life. We then created a socio-poem together, which is an exercise that invites students to walk around the form and read responses aloud. They were invited to overlap, change volume and rhythm, and repeat their words. The participants took this task very seriously and the poem went on for several minutes. We then hung this human form on the wall in the room and utilized these words and phrases often throughout this workshop. This early focus on participants’ own values and hopes gave us a foundation for the rest of our journey together. This initial focus on self and choice related to the idea:

If an educator is concerned with helping a student grow toward maturity, he/she must recognize the characteristics of stratification and socialization as important aspects of the student's existence and address him/herself to the question of their educational implications. The pedagogic task is to awaken people to awareness of their own being thus enabling them to choose for themselves who they will be. (Dottin et al. 63)
We moved from the reasons participants want to attend college to a discussion of their “current story” and their perceptions of college, both their own and what they hear from others in their lives. Because some students shared that not everyone in their lives supported this journey, this quickly developed into a conversation on potential obstacles they may face along this journey, and I invited them to write these thoughts under “current story” on the framework. The current story included the following: confusion, stress, unsure, loneliness, homesickness, the climb, parents, insecurities, time, poverty/money, don’t know what to do, self-doubt, relationships, money, and fear. “Money” was listed several times. We then returned to arts-based exercises that helped us explore potential obstacles. The first was “Excuses.”
Excuses
Source: Learned from a previous teacher, Robert Colby
Tags: medium focus, low energy, small group with full group observing

Directions: Begin with four volunteers—the person who is late, the boss, and two workers. The “person who is late” goes into the hallway while the rest of the participants decide upon two things: why they are late and how they got to work that morning. Once decided, the “person who is late” comes back in while the boss questions the latecomer. The latecomer should guess why they were late by watching the employees (who are behind the boss’s back) act out the decided scenario. For example, if the person was late because a tree fell on their car, the employees should act that out so that the latecomer can look PAST the boss to guess. However, at any time, the boss can turn around to face the employees, who must FREEZE in the positions they were in while acting out the excuse. Then, the employees must give their own excuse as to why they are in those specific positions. If the boss is unhappy with their excuses, they are fired and two more "employees" must take their places. If the latecomer has trouble guessing, the boss can give hints verbally. For example, using the "tree falling on the car" excuse—"you had to LEAF pretty late, I suppose, to get here at this time.” Also, the latecomer should guess each thing one at a time. Usually the latecomer guesses why they were late BEFORE moving on to how they got there. The boss can prompt that as well.

Purpose: To serve as lighthearted entry into a discussion of excuses that participants use in their daily lives.

The UB participants loved improvisational games and they embraced “Excuses” wholeheartedly.

We therefore repeated this activity several times so that multiple students were given the chance to perform. When later processing this exercise, I asked participants how it related to the college-bound process. One participant shared that one of her friends chose to wait and didn’t go straight to college after high school. Even though she said she wanted to go, her friend kept making excuses. The participant shared that this friend still wasn’t enrolled after several years.

Another student reflected upon how it is not always easy to do what you need to do. This developed into a larger discussion about the times participants made excuses to get out of doing something. This included a reflection on their initial thoughts upon joining UB, which for some,
was a difficult decision. To continue to broaden our conversation on the “current story,” we utilized the following:

**Colombian Hypnosis**
Source: *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal
Tags: high focus, medium energy, with partners then build to full group

**Directions:** “One actor holds her hand palm forward, fingers upright, anything between 20 and 40 centimeters [approximately 7-15 inches] away from the face of another, who is then as if hypnotized and must keep his face constantly the same distance from the hand of the hypnotizer, hairline level with her fingertips, chin more or less level with the base of her palm. The hypnotizer starts a series of movements with her hand, up and down, right and left, backwards and forwards, her hand vertical in relation to the ground, then horizontal, then diagonal, etc. – the partner must contort his body in every way possible to maintain the same distance between face and hand, so that the face and hand remain parallel. If necessary, the hypnotic hand can be swapped; for instance, to force the hypnotized to go between the legs of the hypnotizer. The hand must never do movements too rapid to be followed, nor must it ever come to a complete halt. The hypnotizer must force her partner into all sorts of ridiculous, grotesque, uncomfortable positions. Her partner will thus put in motion a series of muscle structures which are never, or only rarely, activated. He will use certain ‘forgotten’ muscles in his body. After a few minutes, the two actors change, the follower and the leader. After some more time, both can extend a hypnotizing right hand, becoming leaders and followers at one and the same time” (Boal 51).

**Modifications:** To describe this next level, I utilize the model provided by Christina Marín: “One person volunteers and will hold up both his right and left hand ready to hypnotize two additional volunteers. Once this relationship is formed the two players being hypnotized hold their two arms out and four more volunteers step forward to be hypnotized by these hands. The layers can be built outward.”

**Purpose:** To examine leadership. To spark awareness and discussion about unequal access to higher education.

A one-word praxis followed the partner portion of this exercise, and responses included: awkward, fun, silly, synchronized, connected, and weird. I then asked for a volunteer to stand in the middle of the room and we moved to the group modification of this exercise. Participants were asked to do this silently, but there was slight laughter present throughout the entirety of
this exercise as participants molded and twisted their bodies to follow their leader. The conclusion of this exercise sparked a burst of laughter. I then asked how this activity related to the college-bound process and one participant noted, “This activity made me step out of my comfort zone, which, I think, is what college is going to be like.” Participants then shared the college-related experiences that they thought may be out of their comfort zones, such as living with a roommate, visiting a professor during office hours, and participating in group projects. Other responses “Colombian hypnosis” included:

- You have to get used to working with people. And all leaders and teachers are different... you may not agree with all of their decisions.
- It’s not possible for everyone to follow the exact same person or model.
- College is a big system that works like a machine.

This discussion went on for several minutes, as students had a lot to share after this exercise, and it eventually developed into a conversation about power and access. They noted how the people closer to the center had a lot of power, that “they perhaps had a whole lot of opportunities, and the people on the outside didn’t.” This knowledge of unequal access to higher education is not meant to dishearten participants, but rather to confront the issue. The foundation of this discussion was that perhaps an understanding of this disparity will—if built within this supportive community—inspire their educational goals and give them a greater sense of pride in their pursuit of a postsecondary degree. Participants reflected upon issues of privilege and leadership and continued to relate this to the group version of the exercise. One student shared, “This exercise also relates to work and the distribution of power” and correlated it to his current job and then to his future career.
We then moved to the exercise, “The Hunter and the Hunted,” which the students chose to rename, “The Wander Games.” They made this change because they noted that participants are wandering around in the center of the circle.

*The Hunter and the Hunted (or, “The Wander Games”)*

Source: Learned from a previous teacher, Christina Marín

Tags: high focus, medium energy, small group with full group observing

**Directions:** Ask participants to stand in a circle, and place an object in the center (ex. empty water bottle). Three volunteers enter the center of the circle and are then blindfolded. Those in the center are instructed to find the object. Announce when the object has been found, so the person holding it knows he/she is the “hunter” and the other two students are the “hunted.” The hunter then tries to
tag the hunted, and the hunted try to avoid being tagged (possible strategies: silently creeping, staying still, moving quickly, lying down, etc.). Meanwhile, the participants in the circle act as protection against collision and redirect students back into the center when they start heading beyond the center of the circle. When only one “hunted” is left, announce that the hunter has 30 seconds left. Either the hunter or final hunted can “win.”

**Purpose:** To physicalize feelings of control or lack of control.

In our reflection that followed this exercise, a student shared that college will be a “new place.” She continued, “I won’t know where to go, what to do, or anything . . . but, you can either run from your problems or confront them.” The discussion then took a turn from feelings of control and/or being afraid to taking charge of the situation. A participant shared, “It’s more fun to be the hunter—and when you go to college you have to decide if you’re going to be out there, building your life, or not out there.” Another participant reflected, “I see the bottle as the degree, and you go in blindfolded—you may not have any idea what you want to do when you graduate—but you’re feeling around for the opportunities and will find something.” Another student added, “No matter how alone you feel, there will always be people...like around the sides of the circle helping you stay in,” which prompted another student to share, “Yes! The outside are the supporters saying ‘No, stay in there!’ . . . and we need them.”
I did not expect for the discussion on “The Wander Games” to move towards support, but, as noted by Philip Taylor, “The facilitator is not merely the one who asks questions, or who initiates task, but someone who shares with the participants versions of how she or he as the teaching artist is responding to the evolving work” (67). This wonderful build in the discussion provided an unforeseen, yet fitting transition into actions that move us forward through the “current story” to the “new story.” We first utilized the following exercise:
The Glass Cobra
Source: *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal
Tags: high focus, low energy, full group

**Directions:** Players standing in a circle all turn to their right. Closing their eyes, they put their hands on the person’s shoulders in front of them. They feel the person’s hair, neck, shoulders, and texture of their shirt. Next, players scatter around the room, blindly. They try to find the person that was in front of them, non-verbally and with touch only. Once they find their person they keep moving, but while holding onto their shoulders. Players will find themselves back in the circle where they started (Boal 118).

**Modifications:** Rather than asking participants to “scatter” with their eyes closed, I moved participants around the room until they were spread apart. I then invited them to begin searching for the person who was in front of them initially.

**Purpose:** To help participants physically connect to what they are feeling as they try to navigate the college application process and visualize the college experience. To generate shared empathy and to also initiate support and discussion.

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Fig. 18 – “The Glass Cobra” (Photo Credit: Conner Katsev)
After this exercise, I asked participants to reflect upon the experience first with a partner, and then in a full group discussion. One participant reflected that the activity made him think about how they “will all be entering freshmen, so we’re all bumbling along and learning as we go,” but “figure out who can lead you. [In this exercise] we all found our person.” Another student shared that he and his partner discussed how “when you first start, you’re walking around blind and don’t know where you’re going...and then you lean onto that one person” His partner chimed in and talked about attaching to one thing. She shared, “For instance, if you did Anime Club in high school, and then you find the same club in college. That’s a great ‘known’ and could lead to friendships.” This prompted another student to say, “You’re entering adulthood and trying to grab onto friends, connections, things that will be useful later and can help you get farther.” Another student reflected on communication and how when you meet someone you remember one small thing about them (such as their hair or the feeling of their shirt in this exercise), and then the relationship builds on that. She shared that you should put yourself out there and continue to build on the initial foundation to connect you to more people. Also, since she is the first in her family to attend college, she felt like she was paving the way and doing something very different. The last comment of this reflection was, “There may or may not be someone leading on the path, but you’re also always building it yourself.”

This reflection propelled us forward into further discussion of the “new story.” We then read the responses to “What do I want?” I passed them out randomly, asking students to read someone else’s aloud. Responses included: to go around the world, to be a music teacher, to go to college, happiness, good health, to travel, to get my degree, a family, to follow my dreams, to be happy, to make others happy, to help.
They listened intently to one another’s wants, and, after sharing, we taped them up under “new story” on the framework. Next, we joined in the following exercise:

**One person we fear, one person is our protector**  
Source: *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal  
Tags: high focus, high energy, full group

**Directions:** “All the participants must be scattered around the room. Without saying anything, each person must think of one person in the room who frightens him (for the purposes of the game only). Everyone moves around the room, trying to keep as far away from the person who frightens them as possible, but also not letting that person be aware of the fact that they have chosen them as the one they fear. After a short time, the Joker [facilitator] asks everyone to think of another person who is their protector (who should also not be able to tell that he has been chosen as such). Now everyone moves around again, trying to keep their protector between them and the person they fear. Eventually, the Joker [facilitator] gives a countdown and everyone must freeze where they are—then the players find out who has succeeded in evading the one they fear” (Boal 141–142).

**Purpose:** To physicalize feelings of concern/fear versus feelings of support. To develop a discussion on support systems that will assist in overcoming challenges.
This was a lively activity and participants raced around the room, often making verbal exclamations when they felt fear. After, I asked participants, “Who succeeded in keeping their protector between themselves and their fear?” Many said that, although difficult, they felt that they accomplished this goal. Participants reflected through discussion on how this is a skill for college—finding a support system and using resources. One student said, “There may be things you fear, but you hit them head on…and there’s always someone there you can talk to about your fears.” These experiential practices led to identifying key resources. As Lana Brown shared in an interview, “It gets instilled in them, ‘Who are my resources, and where do I go, and how do I make decisions?’ And I have no doubt it affects how they will make their decisions whenever those times come” (Brown). I asked participants to think of one person who has their back, and then think of yet another person (or broader organization, community, etc.) that they knew they could turn to. We then wrote these key figures or organizations in the trees on our framework, which represented the “landscape of support.” This landscape included names of friends and family members, as well as the names of teachers, UB staff members, and other mentors in the students’ lives. We then moved to our last main exercise for the evening:

**Who Started the Motion?**  
Source: Unknown  
Tags: high focus, low energy, full group  

**Directions:** Participants stand in a circle and one person volunteers to leave the room. Those inside the room choose a leader to follow. This leader will develop movements that the others in the room must mirror. When the person outside is invited back into the space, they have three guesses before the leader is revealed.

**Purpose:** To physicalize the feeling of leading and setting something new into motion. To witness how initial actions lead to the larger embodied response.
After this exercise, we talked further about how participants were “starting a motion,” as many of them reflected on how they were the first in their family to attend college. One student shared how they felt “honored” to set this example for their siblings. Another student felt “empowered.” Actions for this “new story” included: making the most of UB and using the program’s resources, especially during senior year; actively engaging with mentors, family members, and friends who support their dreams; graduating high school and enrolling in college the fall semester after high school graduation. Also, they shared that they will seek a community of support on campus right away, which could be other UB-ers, people in their classes, or people in organizations that they join. They will get this group in place immediately in case obstacles
arise and they need someone to lean on to help them persist. For workshop closure, participants joined in a concentrated counting circle.

**Concentrated Counting Circle**
Source: Unknown
Tags: high focus, low energy, full group

**Directions:** Participants stand in a tight circle and everyone holds hands and closes their eyes. Players try to count to the highest number they can without two or more people speaking at the same time. If they do, they must take a deep breath and start again at #1.

**Purpose:** To promote a sense of togetherness and unity.

The students were pleased to reach “10” together and burst into cheers after they made it. They set a goal to make it to “15” in the next workshop. I then asked participants to return to their “home base” from our first exercise of the evening, “Same Journey.” Their challenge was to complete their journey in a shorter amount of time. They were laughing the whole time they worked on this task, and, when they didn’t reach it, groaned and quickly asked for another shot. The second time, they beat their time. The room erupted in cheers, jumps, and high fives. We gathered in a circle once again and concluded by reflecting upon how they will not all have the exact “same journey,” but they are connected in many ways, especially in their path through UB.

On the post-workshop survey, one participant reflected, “I had a tremendous time getting to know the group better. If I had a comfort zone, I would have been pushed outside of it in a good way. They [the exercises] are a great way to connect with people in a deep way while having fun.” Other post-workshop survey responses included: “I loved them [the activities] so much. I came out knowing my fellow UB people so much better.”; “I loved every second of it!!”; and, “I felt closer to everyone afterwards.”
Workshop 2

The next workshop occurred before week four of the program and involved the same group of participants. The focus of Workshop 2 was to utilize experiential activities to examine the participants’ perceptions on college, their careers, and their futures. I also heard their cry for more improv-based games, so we built that in as well. We began with “Rose, Thorn, I am Rooted in Feeling...” which is an exercise that served as a check-in with participants.

Rose, Thorn, I am Rooted in Feeling...
Source: Unknown
Tags: low focus, low energy, full group

Directions: Participants stand in a circle with the group and begin with a collective breath. Each member of the group takes a turn moving into the center of the circle and completing the following statements: “My rose is (something exciting happening in your life, a great moment in your day, etc.)”; “My thorn is (something that is weighing you down or makes you nervous, a rough moment in the day, etc.””; “Right now I am rooted in feeling (an adjective to describe your current mood—ex. happy, anxious, energized).” Between each statement, the participant moves to a new place in the center and takes a breath. The exercise ends with a collective breath from the group.

Purpose: To check-in with the participants and to create group focus and awareness.

We then played “Do You Love Your Neighbor?,” which is a game that was described in Chapter 4. This exercise was not used in “Theatre Games” in summer session 2015 so that it would be a “new” exercise for the participants in the “Theatre Workshops.” This served as an introductory warm-up activity and served to learn similarities in the room and build energy for our continued work together.

The series of main exercises for the evening first involved a series of scaffolded image-based activities. We began in two circles, one inner and one outer circle. The outer circle was
responsible for “sculpting” their partner on the inner circle into a physical representation of their thoughts on one of the following topics: high school, college, financing college, and college graduation. This involved sculpting both their physicality and their facial expression. I had planned all the topics except for “financing college” ahead of time, and asked participants what was foremost on their mind when they thought of the journey through college. Money came up, so we added “financing college” as the middle part of our first image-based task. The inner and outer circles switched after each word or phrase, so each participant had an opportunity to be both a sculptor and the sculpted. If participants were uncomfortable with physical touch, they were invited to verbally direct their sculpture, rather than use touch. After each word or phrase, the outer circle toured around the sculptures and reflected upon what they saw. The sculptures then turned inward so that they could also see and react to one another. For “college graduation,” three of the images looked almost exactly the same, as students were sculpted to have one arm extended up in the air and a look of accomplishment on their face, shown through smiling, open mouths, and wide eyes. When the sculpting students realized this, they started giggling and running from one side of the circle to the other to compare. When the sculpted students turned in, they burst into laughter as they seemed to be looking in a mirror at the similarly constructed images.
We then transitioned into larger group image work. I asked the students to separate into four groups and to create a visual understanding of each of the following: college and my family, college and community, success, and (the summer’s theme) “Rising Above.” After each image, we discussed what the participants saw in each image. For example, for “college and my family,” one group created an image of parents pushing their daughter out into the world, while the daughter was in a runner’s pose halfway out the door. She looked excited, smiling and focusing straight ahead. Another group placed a daughter in the center of the image, with a worried expression on her face. Her parents stood on either side behind her and pulled out empty pockets. One parent looked at her daughter lovingly, while the other parent looked forward and had a worried expression on her face. In response to “college and community,” a group created
an image of someone stepping on the back of someone else, reaching upward. Another student in the image was on the ground, looking up at the student with the outstretched arm. A participant reflected that the person stepping on the other may represent how those that go to college may think that they are above others who do not. Another participant reflected that this showed access—the person stepping on the back had all of the opportunities. Another student said that the mother was on the ground looking upward at her son, and the participant reflected that this image seemed to represent the parents lifting their son up to move farther in life. This image is shared in Fig. 22.

Fig. 22 – Image Work (Photo credit: Conner Katsev)
We then listed the differences between high school and college on a large sheet of butcher paper, which I had taped to the wall prior to the workshop. We employed the embodied understandings we had just gained through image work, and now created a visual listing of those differences. Examples of differences include “less stress” in high school and “more stress in college.” Also, high school involves “less freedom and flexibility,” whereas college involves more. A participant shared that in high school she does not care about her grades quite as much, but she voiced that, in college, “grades are everything.” Participants also noted that high school provides textbooks, and, in college, students must pay for them. We closed with a discussion on motivation. Participants related that they have to be in high school, but in college, you pay to be there, so you are more motivated to succeed.

I then asked participants to create three groups, and, in each group, to create a scene or movement piece to physicalize the difference. Each of the three groups performed two scenes, the high school version and the college version. For example, one group performed “freedom and flexibility” in high school versus college. Their high school scenario involved a scene about having a curfew; their performance about college involved two participants deciding whether to go see a movie and then go out after, or stay home and do homework. The student who chose to go out came home at 4:00 a.m. and was then tired and very concerned about going to classes early in the morning. We then talked about what we noticed in each and processed any new understandings about these differences. For the scene described above, students reflected upon how having that much freedom comes with responsibility and potential consequences if you make the wrong choice. To process this entire series of image work, participants joined with a
partner to share in a “Compassionate Listening Exchange,” which is an exercise that was discussed in Chapter 4.

The image work was followed by some improvisational activities, which focused on why the participants have chosen to persist through both high school and college. The exercises examined participants’ hopes for the future and then the creation of this future. We first utilized the following activity to examine the participants’ childhood dreams:
The child’s dream—what I wanted to be when I grew up
Source: *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal
Tags: medium focus, medium energy, full group

**Directions:** While standing in a circle, ask the students to close their eyes and think of what they wanted to be when they grew up (examples include: hero, superhero, mythical figure, famous person, character from a book or movie, etc.). Then ask them to consider questions such as: How does this character move? How does this character relate to others? What fascinated you about this character? When they have a good idea of their character, with their eyes closed, ask them to raise their hand and wiggle their fingers. Then ask the students to jump in the middle of the circle and begin moving about the space as this character, without speaking. Then conduct a series of exercises where they can speak:

- Find a partner and dialogue as this character
- Find another partner and discuss dinner plans for the evening
- Within the group of five, solve a problem

Then ask participants to walk around the space again, this time exaggerating their characters. Ask them next to form two lines. Each character receives a chance to move/dance/freestyle down the center of the two lines while observers call out behaviors they saw in this character, characteristics, and adjectives to describe the character. (One of the observers serves as a scribe and writes down these descriptors.) Participants then receive their paper, have time to add to it, and are asked to think of careers that could be connected with these traits (Boal 166).

**Modifications:** For the “problem” that the smaller groups were asked to solve, I shared that they were members of a Mentor Group and they were trying to figure out their skit for the UB Variety Show.

**Purpose:** To reveal what the participants once wanted to be, how they wanted to develop themselves, and the characteristics they still cherish. This can begin (or serve to continue) their research and exploration into possible college majors and career choices.

We then used the lists of careers for our next activity. Participants wrote them, and other career choices, on small individual pieces of paper and we played the popular improv game, “The Party,” using careers as descriptors of the people coming to the party:
The Party (also known as “Party Quirks”)
Source: ImprovEncyclopedia.org
Tag: medium focus, medium energy, small group with full group observing

**Directions:** “One player plays a character that is having a party. The other players will be the guests, and the audience provides us with who the guests might be. Of course the host does not know who the guests are. His task is to guess who the guests might be, based on hints the guests offer. The game is over as soon as the host has guessed all guests” (“The Party”).

**Modifications:** Because we were discussing potential careers, rather than “quirks,” the guests were professionals in different careers. We utilized the pool of ideas gathered by the students in the previous exercise. Participants embodied these careers through what they said as well as through their physical actions.

**Purpose:** To provide an opportunity to step into and embody an understanding of a particular career. To broaden the perspective on various careers and professions available.

We discussed exploring these career options in the participants’ UB Postsecondary Planning class and in future conversations with UB staff members and high school counselors. Participants reflected upon how their childhood dream provides valuable information on the type of work they want to do and/or the personal qualities that draw them to a profession. We then moved into the following exercise:

Imaginary Ball
Source: Unknown
Tags: medium focus, low energy, full group

**Directions:** Participants stand in a circle. Explain to the participants that you have brought in an imaginary ball that can be changed into any shape, size, consistency, or form. They are invited to mold the ball into whatever form they wish, make eye contact with someone across the circle, and “throw” the ball to them. The person must catch the ball however the person threw it to them (for example, if it was thrown as a heavy ball, the person catching it must also act like it is heavy); then they mash up the ball, mold it into something completely different, and throw it to someone else in the circle.

**Purpose:** To physicalize the notion that participants’ can sculpt themselves into the person they want to be, just like they did when molding the ball.
After, we reflected upon how the sculpting process that we went through during the exercise relates to the sculpting of their lives, in particular, during their years in high school and college.

I shared a quote from Thich Nhat Hanh: “Every thought you produce, anything you say, any action you do, it bears your signature.” To respond to this quote, I asked students to turn out in the circle and to think about their core values and the signature they want to leave on this world. I asked them to turn back in to the circle, having morphed their body and face into an image that communicates this to the group. While watching the video recording of this moment post-workshop, I noticed participants smiling to themselves as they faced outward in the circle, reflecting upon their signatures. I almost felt like an intruder, being able to now see them creating their image before revealing it to their peers. One participant smiled the whole time she was facing outward, seemingly empowered as she figured out how to craft her signature. Another participant took a deep and noticeable breath, almost as if getting ready to jump into a pool, before turning in to the circle with zest, transforming his body and facial expression into his signature. When participants turned in, they moved their eyes around to see everyone else’s image. I noticed students making sure to linger on each of their peers’ signatures, seemingly not noticing that we were silently frozen for quite some time as they delighted in one another’s images. One student made sure to make eye contact with others and nodded at them in appreciation of their image. To close this exercise, we talked about how we all have a different journey and different mark to make on the world, but how they all came together for this journey in UB.

Since this was meant to be the last “Theatre Workshop,” our closure activities involved community gifting and reflection. If I had known that we would have two more workshops
following this one, I would have saved the next exercise, “Web of Support,” until the end of our time together.

**Web of Support**
Source: Learned from a previous teacher, Lee Orchard; Also known as “The String” in *Enacting Participatory Development: Theatre-Based Techniques* by Julia McCarthy
Tags: high focus, low energy, full group

**Directions:** “The group sits in a circle. Give the ball of string to someone in the circle. She holds onto its end and throws the rest of it across the circle to another player. She then gives a message to the person who catches the string . . . The receiver then holds onto the string and throws the ball across the room to another player. The process continues until everyone is holding onto the string, which has made a spider’s web pattern” (McCarthy 105).

**Modifications:** I invited participants to share something about the person they threw the string to—something they have learned from them, or admire about them. Also, after all participants were connected, I asked, “What does this look like?” (answers included: web, dream catcher, stars, link to resources, connectivity, support)

**Purpose:** To connect the students (literally) and provide an opportunity for them to gift words to one another. To provide closure to our time together.

Fig. 24 – “Web of Support” (Photo credit: Conner Katsev)
During this closing exercise, students became quite sentimental and they gifted one another beautiful statements. For example, one student shared with another that she thought he was such a genuine and nice person and that it was refreshing to be around him. Another gifted to their peer, “You stand up for what you believe in, and I really admire that.” Several students teared up throughout the course of this activity, which seemed to exemplify their care for the people in the room. This exercise went on longer than I had expected, so, after its conclusion, we were at the end of our workshop time. However, the participants chose to stay and complete another “Concentrated Counting Circle” in an effort to meet their goal of “15” from the week before. They met their goal on the first try and the room erupted in clapping, hugs, and laughter.

On the post-workshop survey, one student wrote, “I loved every second of it. I also learned how to appreciate the goals and hardships—they teach us how to become stronger.” Another participant shared, “I’m not a person that goes up to someone and introduces myself, so if they don’t, then we don’t get to really know each other.” I have since reflected that these workshops seem to assist by providing ways for students to communicate with one another, more quickly and more deeply. In terms of building those skills, a participant shared, “It helped me connect and think on the spot,” and “they are a great way to connect with my peers.” Another participant reflected that she feels more connected to her UB peers than she feels connected to people at her school. In relation to this small group, a student shared that she felt “100% connected...this has been the best summer.” She continued, “I really liked it [the workshop series]. We had a bond that I feel I never had last summer. This is the best thing I’ve done since joining UB.” When I asked on the post-workshop survey, “What would help you feel more connected to this program, peers, staff, etc.?”, the same student shared, “More of this.”
Workshop 3

As mentioned, I had only planned to facilitate two workshops during summer session 2015, however, the participants requested more. Therefore, the same group met again before week five of the summer program. The focus of Workshop 3 was to take the participants through a process drama. As mentioned in Chapter 2, a process drama involves a series of units that take participants on a journey together. The impulse for this drama was the central question, “Will Henry return to college?” The context was fictional, and, as is the case in all process dramas, the students took on roles in the drama to maintain distance from the real world. Peter O’Connor and Michael Anderson, professors and specialists in applied theatre and arts research, shared, “Fictional frames use theatre conventions to move participants away from actual engagement in the event (in research this might be the central question or issue under study) . . .” (67). UB participants were asked to embrace each role fully within the fictional context so that we experienced a rich discovery process along the way; and, as the students tried out different scenarios, they imagined different paths. “[I]nside the fictional frame there is no risk in the real world for the decisions that are taken, although there are always consequences in the fictional world” (67). O’Connor and Anderson state:

[F]ictional framing provides participants in research the safety for them to engage emotionally, aesthetically and through the body to talk honestly about matters of significance. In designing the fictional frame it is necessary to design spaces for research participants to be sufficiently distanced from their real lives to be free to work within the fiction, but close enough to the fictional world so that their engagement with the fiction resonates with their real lives. (68)
As is common in process dramas, the units delved into the subtext, inner monologues, and voices of characters that are bystanders in significant moments in the continuing drama. In essence, the units served to look “in and around” the theme or issue being explored. Improvisation is key to this technique because the interactions within the drama create moments of tension—moments of conflict, points where surprises are revealed, moments where opposite views are disclosed—and participants react to the situations they have shaped. These reactions then inform the continued work together. As Cecily O’Neill states, “Participants are in a continual state of tension between representing an experience and being in an experience” and they “actively inhabit both the real world and the imagined world” (118–119). She shares, “The participants in process drama are faced with much the same task as spectators in a theatre. They must also labor to make meaning as the parameters of the imaginary world are created and revealed. These details are emerged gradually, are subject to change, and are not fully known until the work is ended” (118). By allowing personal understandings and experiences to be used in the dramatic practice, those understandings may change as a result. O’Neill writes, “When the drama world takes hold and acquires a life of its own, all of the participants will return across the threshold of that world changed in some way, or at least not quite the same as when they began” (151).

This is different from how a drama therapist operates. “In a drama therapy session, the client comes with an expectation of healing from some physical or psychological scarring . . . While in the applied theatre there is a desire to transform the nature of the world in which we live, teaching artists are not operating from a therapeutic perspective” (Taylor 85).
In this type of theatrical practice, “teaching artists are often sensitive to maintaining psychological distance so that too strong an emotional response from participants can be curbed. . . . Scenes that may be too painful can be dealt with through analogy, or by finding a distanced frame of reference where connections to real-life incidents are made through indirect observation or, perhaps, a culminating discussion” (82). When talking about this workshop with Janet Blohm-Pultz, she noted, “What you’re doing in that instance is you are not talking to them about potential issues they may have, but you are letting them experience it emotionally in a pretty safe environment. And it’s pretend. It’s a pretend game” (Blohm-Pultz).

The following provides a narrative description of our journey together during this workshop. I owe the ideas for several of these units to Robert Colby, Christina Marín, and Bethany Nelson, with whom I studied at Emerson College. I then modified them to serve the context of this particular drama. Within the outline of events, I also note my personal observations, as well as student responses.

**Process Drama—Will Henry return to college?**

I first asked participants to draw a picture of their family, based on whatever the concept of “family” means to them. Participants then presented these drawings to the group and shared what makes their family special. This activity placed participants in an introspective space—reflecting upon their family, its uniqueness, and the emotional ties to their family members. One student shared that she loved learning about the other participants’ families in this activity because it was not something that they usually talked about together.
I then introduced another family: The Jobes. Pam and Ray have been married for 23 years and they have four kids—Sara (22 years old), Henry (20 years old), and twins, Roy and Billy (11 years old). They live in the fictional town of Hillmount, Missouri, which has a population of 5,423. I invited participants to the current moment in this family. It was now the end of the summer, two weeks before Henry has to go back to college for his sophomore year. Everyone is gathered at a family reunion, and even the distant cousins came in to town. Because of this, the family used name tags at the reunion. At this point, I stopped the exposition and invited the participants to become members of Henry’s extended family. They decided upon their names, occupations, and how they were related to Henry. They put on their name tag, and then introduced themselves to the group.

When it became my turn in the introductions, I said that I was Henry’s mother. I shared that Henry was getting ready to go back to college, and I admitted that I was upset about this. The UB participants, already well in role, immediately started asking me questions. I was therefore able to set up the situation: Henry attends Missouri State University in Springfield and is the first in his family to go to college. He is studying to be a history teacher and is very excited about the future. About 1/3 of his friends went to college and 2/3 did not. His first semester was pretty rough—he juggled 15 credit hours, failed two classes, and was homesick quite a bit; but, second semester was better. He made friends and became more involved. During our conversation, I also shared that his dad was recently laid off from the factory and that I wanted Henry to stay home and help out, both financially and in caring for the twins. I shared that no one in our family has ever gone to college, so why now? I also shared that there are plenty of
places to work in town, that Henry has a great job at the grocery store, and that he has been told he may one day be the manager.

I then invited participants, in their current roles, to think about their opinion on this decision based on the information provided thus far: should Henry stay in school or should he instead stay home and help out? The “extended family members” created a spectrum, or diagonal line, across the room based on their answer. One side represented the opinion that he should return to school, the other side represented the opinion that he should stay home. Based on where participants were in the line, I asked them to talk to people near them and share why they were standing where they were standing. We then discussed these answers in full group. Answers included:

- I understand the importance of family. If my mom needed me to come home and help with younger siblings, I would drop everything.

- My parents would never put me in that situation...but I know that you need family support...but I do think he should return.

- The first year of college is generally the hardest and he’s already done 15 hours, so he should go back.

- When I first started hanging out with Henry when we were younger, he’s always been talking about college...and you shouldn’t teach your kids to quit. Once you quit, you’ll probably never go back.

- If you’re always keeping your foot in your old life, it won’t work. You have to work to create your own life.
We then split into two groups to step back in time and create a scrapbook of “Henry’s relationship to his family.” I asked each group to figure out where Henry would be in the image and what he would be doing, but to not put him physically in the image at this point. Each group then created a “photograph,” which was a frozen image. I then asked a participant to go in role as Henry, and step into each image and take his place in it. Participants reflected on these images and made meaning from them. One group seemed to portray a close family unit, whereas the other seemed to point to tension.

Fig. 25 – “Henry’s relationship to his family” (Photo credit: Conner Katsev)

We joined together in a full group circle and each person turned facing out. They created an individual image of the moment when Henry realized he wanted to go to college. I counted
down from 10 and students turned back in to the circle, their bodies and facial expressions transformed. They looked around at one another and we had a brief discussion about what we saw. We repeated this exercise with images of how Henry felt when he received his college acceptance letter. Participants turned in to the circle in their frozen image and joined with others who seemed to share a similar reaction. We discussed in the large group what we saw, which included a discussion of his excitement, that he felt powerful and had a path ahead of him, and the honor and pride he felt when he received the letter.

Fig. 26 – “Henry’s reaction to his college acceptance letter” (Photo credit: Conner Katsev)

After this, we decided to fill in some gaps. Every week in Hillmount, a different person is interviewed for the town paper and Henry was chosen to be interviewed this week. Participants
sat in a circle, with the same participant in role as Henry in the center. Again in their roles as extended family members, the other participants were invited to offer ideas on Henry’s background and personal traits. Henry listened, without responding at this time. He would later respond to questions in the interview and draw upon these ideas, yet he had the ability to add to or change the content. In this interview-prep unit, we learned that his dad really wanted to go to college, but didn’t have the opportunity, and that his grades weren’t great in high school and he had to work hard in school. We also learned that he wants to travel. After several minutes of this prep period, I went into role as the interviewer and asked Henry the following: Tell us about your family; What is your favorite childhood memory?; What are your hobbies?; What do you like most about yourself? In this interview, the student in role as Henry decided that his sister didn’t go to college, and that his family was “halfway” supportive of his college choice because they had wanted him to stay in the area. I noted that the participant in role as Henry changed his occupation. I had earlier offered that he was studying to be a history teacher; yet, in this moment, Henry revealed that he wants to be an open-heart surgeon. This was an exciting moment for me as facilitator because it communicated to me that the student in role was moving forward from the initial foundation. This was not so large of a change that it altered the overarching story; instead, he was creating his role and this change felt right to him in his journey. He also shared that he hoped to travel and work internationally. While the other participants listened to the interview, I noticed smiles when Henry chose to use the ideas they provided. One student looked over to me and pointed towards him with glee when he utilized her suggestion. She then leaned forward in her seated position, rested her chin on her hands, and maintained a huge grin for the entirety of this unit.
The next unit involved Henry’s two best friends. They lived down the road and they all grew up together. Participants went into role as these friends and they were interviewed by the others. “Cody” decided that he works at the factory, like Henry’s dad. He also revealed that it was a toaster factory. “Ally” decided that she went off to a different college, but was also planning to head back to school in the coming weeks. Another participant became Henry’s sister, “Sara,” and also joined in the conversation. Cody was asked if there was talk of transferring employees to another factory, but Cody shared that he hadn’t heard anything. We also discovered that Cody hoped to go to college after the factory closes. When he said, “I’ll try, but I feel like it’s too late,” the other participants quickly chimed in, “It’s never too late!” Ally related that she has a lot of debt, but thinks her degree is going to help her pay it off quickly. She doesn’t regret her choice at all. She was also asked, “How did you earn money during college and did you have enough to send some back home to help support your family?” She answered that she had a work-study job and that her financial aid package also helped. She said she could have had some extra money if she had eaten in the cafeteria more, rather than eat out. We also learned from Sara that she has a small child, Anika, that she is raising her on her own, without the support of her boyfriend. She shared that she would go to college if she were given the chance, although she felt that she would never get that chance. After this unit, we reviewed what we learned about these characters in a full group discussion.

We then flashed forward to the week that Henry was supposed to leave for college. Henry had just been called into the office at the grocery store and his boss, Lisa, offered him a promotion. He must stay in town in order to accept the promotion, since the offer is for full-time employment. Henry and another student in role as Lisa improvised this conversation. At one
point in the dialogue, the student in role as Lisa turned to me and said she didn’t know how to answer. I responded by reassuring her that it is up to her. I encouraged her to listen and to answer honestly based on what we had developed in the story thus far. She then returned to her in-role persona with renewed confidence and never dropped character again throughout this unit. Another particular moment that stood out to me in this unit was when the student in role as Henry asked if his dad could instead have the job. The participants observing this conversation burst into cheers at this moment, and the student in role as Henry couldn’t help but grin at causing such a reaction from the other participants; however, he remained focused on Lisa and kept moving forward in the drama. Two participants moved from sitting on the floor to leaning forward in a kneeling position, showing their interest in the conversation unfolding before them. Lisa asked about Henry’s dad’s credentials, which Henry shared, and then added, “He’s probably more qualified than I am for this position.” I chose to end the conversation at this moment of tension so we could continue to explore this new idea provided by the participants, without Lisa giving a solid answer at this time.

The next unit involved creating frozen images, or tableaux, for Henry’s inner turmoil. I asked participants to divide into groups and create images of “The Decision” and “Henry’s future.” After examining each image, we processed as a group through discussion. For “The Decision,” one student laid down on her back and the two others kneeled beside her, with one of the kneeling students’ hands hovering above the chest of the student lying down. One student thought this represented Henry as an open-heart surgeon, taking care of someone who just had a stroke. Another commented that perhaps Henry was the one lying on the ground and that his parents were molding him into what they wanted him to be. This image is depicted in Fig. 27.
We then improvised a scene at the family dinner table. The entire family sat down for a meal the night before Henry’s possible return to college. As was constant throughout this drama, the same student was in role as Henry. Also, the student who was in role as his sister Sara in an earlier episode returned to this role. Other participants stepped into roles as Henry’s dad, his younger twin brothers, Roy and Billy, and two guests that stayed over from the family reunion. I also stepped into role again as Henry’s mother; however, if I were to do this again, I would instead ask a student to take over in this role so that a participant could experience another perspective during this unit. During the dinner, a significant moment occurred when Henry announced that he turned down the promotion at work and shared that he had asked his boss if
his dad could have the position instead. He shared that he didn’t know whether it would work because he didn’t receive an answer. The student in role as Henry’s dad appeared touched and told his son that it meant a lot to him. The twins started playing patty-cake after this and dinner quickly turned a bit chaotic; however, before the dinner’s end, one of the students in role as an extended family member declared that she was the twin’s godmother and would be happy to help in caring for them if needed, therefore adding another unexpected twist to the drama. The student in role as Henry seemed to pause and reflect upon this before continuing to eat his dinner.

Fig. 28 – “Family dinner” (Photo credit: Conner Katsev)
Based on the information provided by the participants and the experience of the family dinner, for the next unit, I decided to reveal that Henry’s dad had a letter waiting for him on his bed that night. I then read the letter aloud to the group.

Dear Son,
I know you are in the midst of a tough decision right now. I didn’t have the heart to say this at dinner, but I got a call from your boss at the grocery store and it turns out that it’s not going to work out. You have opinions flying at you from all directions. I will stand by you whatever you decide. I am proud of the man you have become and I look forward to what your future holds, no matter what that may be.
Love, Dad

One participant immediately responded, “Ahh, I’ve got the feels!” and tried to hold back tears. Another participant shared that the father seemed really supportive, and understood why he chose not to share that information at dinner. She continued by sharing that her mom writes her letters because she’s not a “touchy-feely” person, so that is how she communicates her support. This student shared that she even had a letter in her bag when she moved to UB for the summer, which discussed how proud she was of her for being in the program. Participants then shared reactions to the boss. Some students were very upset at Lisa for not giving Henry’s dad the position. They spoke angrily and passionately about how she should have at least given him a chance. One student even looked over at me and mouthed, “Whoa!” in reaction to another participant’s heated reaction to this moment. We then exchanged a smile that seemed to communicate, “Yeah, isn’t this neat?” Other students chimed in and said they understood Lisa’s decision because she had never worked with Henry’s dad before. This developed into a lively debate.

For the next unit, I stepped into role as the newspaper photographer from the Hillmount Daily who had come to capture images for the article Henry was interviewed for in an earlier
unit. Participants then constructed a family photo for publication, as well as another non-official image that revealed the underlying sentiments within the family at this point in time. Participants walked around the images and shared what they saw. Fig. 29 reveals participants’ investment in and commitment to the creation of these images. The non-official photo depicts a family in turmoil, which participants revealed through the placement of their bodies in relation to one another, as well as through sustained facial expressions.

Fig. 29—“Non-official newspaper photo” (Photo credit: Conner Katsev)

Before leaving for the fall semester, it is a tradition for many of the recent graduates in Hillmount to visit their high school teachers during their in-service days to say hello. Henry
headed back to his high school and caught up with a few of his teachers, played by students in role. Several participants wanted to play teachers and they excitedly hopped up into the “hot seat,” which was the sofa in the room where this conversation would occur. Henry’s teachers hadn’t seen him since graduation, so they needed to catch up a bit; therefore, his big decision immediately came up in this conversation. Henry shared that he really wanted to go back to college but was still feeling torn. The high school teachers provided their advice, which included having a one-on-one conversation with his mom and sending money back home to help out if he had a job while he was away at a school. One of his teachers also revealed that there was a staff job open at the school if his dad wanted to apply. Another shared that Henry would likely be able to help his family financially even more after he gets a good job after college. We then reflected upon what was said in these exchanges and reviewed new information.

I asked participants to line up in two lines facing one another, forming a narrow passageway in their town. Henry stood at one end, and participants took turns standing, in role, at the other. They were invited to walk down the street towards each other and share a “moment of truth,” where they could choose whether or not to interact. Sara noticed that Henry was walking with his head down and asked if he was okay. She said that she thought he should go back. When Henry walked by his dad, they shared a hug and his dad patted him on the back. His boss, Lisa, revealed that the job was still Henry’s if he wanted it. I asked another student to step into role as his mom, and she shared that she found other jobs for him in town if the grocery store wasn’t working. Henry quickly interrupted her and burst into the following exclamation: “Mom, I’m going back to college! I’m going!” He then ran to the other end of the “street.” His mom walked on, appearing befuddled by the interaction. Henry, appearing to notice
this, exited the room, where he then bent over and put his hands on his knees before returning. This all happened in rapid succession and these moments resonated in the room. Participants stood by silently watching and then remained quiet and invested after Henry’s exit. One student started to head out after him, but stopped herself at the door and decided not to. When Henry re-entered the room, the participants joined in smiling and remarking on how committed everyone was to the drama.

In our final unit, participants were invited to take on any character from the story, one they had played, or one that they felt connected to and would like to step into. As Henry slowly walked down the passageway once again, I asked participants to share anything they would like to say to him. Before Henry started walking, I revealed that when he arrived at the end of the passageway, it was the morning and he either needed to stay or leave. During the course of this unit, I observed participants telling Henry that he was strong and brave, offering to help his family while he was away, hugging Henry, near tears or experiencing tears, and having long moments of eye contact. Another participant shared that he knew what Henry was going through and that he had been working 15 years at a fast food job and wishes he had gone to college. Another asked why he looked so sad, shared that he’s usually happy, and that she hoped he would find happiness again. Between some interactions, participants were so quiet that you could have heard a pin drop in the room. Other interactions elicited exclamations such as “Awh” and even the occasional burst of laughter. The final participant in the line chose to go back into his role as Henry’s father and shared, “Follow your heart, son.” When Henry reached the end of the line, participants couldn’t help themselves and a couple joined in whispering, “Choose college, choose college, man!” Another knelt to the floor in anticipation, with her hand over her
heart. Another participant, also very emotionally invested and in tears, moved closer and leaned forward, waiting to hear what Henry would decide. The student in role as Henry also teared up when announcing his final decision. After sharing that he was returning to college, the room immediately burst into collective laughter and clapping. The excitement in the room lasted for several minutes. The feeling was similar to the rush experienced after winning a big game, when you are completely drained from giving so much of yourself, yet still swept up in the sustained cheering from the crowd and the energy of the moment. The room felt invigorated.

Throughout this drama, the participants explored several angles in Henry’s decision. They took on each role with both believability and commitment, and, as they did, the story and the details of these fictional characters’ lives became deeper and deeper. Dorothy Heathcote writes:

Dramatic improvisation is concerned with what we discover for ourselves and the group when we place ourselves in a human situation containing some element of desperation. Very simply it means putting yourself into other people’s shoes and, by using personal experience to help you to understand their point of view, you may discover more than you knew when you started. (33)

Both the lived experiences of each participant and the fictional narrative that developed, informed their roles and their decision-making throughout. I truly had no idea where the participants would take this story or what Henry would decide, as we explored numerous perspectives. Students shared multiple times along the way that this would be a very difficult decision if they themselves had to experience it.

Several moments that I had not anticipated became key parts of this drama, such as Henry fighting for his dad to get the job at the grocery store, as well as Sara’s child and her wish
that she could turn back time. I also was not sure how participants would develop this family, which turned out to be a very close family unit. “Teaching artists must embrace a collegial and collaborative model in which there is a recognition that their outlook on life also can be changed by the participants. The praxis of applied theatre recognizes that while the teaching artist is an informed leader, the created work demands the input and control of all those involved with it” (Taylor 65). One participant noted, “It was very unpredictable, much like a real-life situation would be.” When talking about this workshop with Blohm-Pultz, she shared, “That’s something that they’re going to remember. So, when they do get to college and they’re faced with those kinds of conflicts in their own lives or their friends are, they will have already had some experience with that. Not in the same way, but they will have had an emotional experience. And that’s what life is: I remember how that felt. That’s how you learn about things” (Blohm-Pultz, emphasis added).

This third workshop was, without exception, all of the participants’ favorite one. At the close of the workshop, I facilitated a focus group and we reflected on this experience. A participant noted, “This [workshop] was more relatable to me ‘cause I feel like that’s sometimes what I feel at home—pressure from family to stay and pressure from family to go, and just, money, and stuff, serious stuff, that I’m just not ready for.” One student noted, “It gave us all the opportunity to take it in different directions and change the story. Then I liked that all of us as a group, the different things we came up with, were rational. They weren’t stuff about unicorns—we stayed on track.” Another student shared, “I liked how it wasn’t all puzzle-piece. There was nothing really set that you had to do. You were free to expand where you wanted to and fill in the missing pieces where you wanted to.” Likewise, another participant jumped in, “Like with
UB, it’s nice to have that input . . . knowing that you have a say and have something to say.” Also, a participant shared, “We started with the concept and we didn’t really understand it, but then by the end we really got emotionally connected to it...kind of like a TV series. At the beginning you start, and, well, and then it’s like so good!” Another student shared that she has been in a similar situation in terms of a promotion at work. She explained, “This is a struggle that everyone’s probably going through. My boss just offered me a promotion, so I wanted to take it. But, she said, ‘Once you become manager, college is going to be super hard because you have to clock in over 40 some-odd hours.’ And I was like I don’t even want to accept crew trainer because I don’t want the next step to have to take me back from college. Because in a year, that’s where I’m going to be—in college.”

The units that participants enjoyed most included going to the high school and talking to their former teachers, the family dinner, and the final passageway. One student shared that the passageway unit seemed so real because she, too, is from a very small town and that is what it is like when she walks down the main street; she knows everyone and they all stop and share their views, whether opinions are asked for or not. Another participant responded, “We got to watch what it would be like if we were in those situations.”

Post-workshop surveys responses included: “I feel close to these people. I know them so much better.” One participant shared, “I feel wanted,” and another wrote, “This helped me connect with the people in the room and get to know them better and build relationships with them.” When reflecting upon the different units in the process drama, a participant wrote, “They are all unique and I learn how to see things from a new perspective.” Another student shared, “It was one of my best experiences at UB.”
Workshop 4

Since these participants hoped for another workshop, I worked with the same 13 participants to find an afternoon together during the last week of the summer program. Since this happened so quickly and we did not have as much time together as in previous workshops, I thought of two potential paths for our work together and let the participants choose. Option 1 involved a story circle on resilience, followed by monologue-writing and performances of those monologues. Option 2 involved a series of improvisational games that asked participants to improvise scenarios that they may face in the future. The participants chose Option 2; so, after completing a few warm-up games together, the focus of this workshop became role-playing scenarios that they may face in the coming year and in college.

The students decided upon the scenarios and then volunteered to act out the scenes. Scenarios included roommate issues, friends developing different interests, people being left out of social activities, conversations with family members, and relationships with professors. For example, in one scene, two students were in roles as professor and student. The student needed help with an assignment and had a few questions about the syllabus, so they improvised a visit during the professor’s office hours. After the scene, we discussed what office hours could be used for and how to go about this particular interaction with their professor. Students offered opinions on timeliness, preparedness, looking at the syllabus beforehand, and getting to know the professor a bit better. We then played the scene again and the participants utilized some of the ideas from our discussion. Another scenario involved two longtime friends that went to the same college. One friend was trying to convince the other to party with him all weekend, rather than stay in the dorm and work on his research paper. We then discussed this scenario and the
perspectives of both friends. One student shared that she had experienced a situation like this in high school and that she already had to make difficult decisions like this. She imagined it would only get harder with more freedom.

We improvised scenarios for much of this workshop time. We also discussed many of the scenes so that we could both review what we saw and also brainstorm different ways to handle the situations. During the last 20 minutes of the workshop, however, participants shared some of their favorite exercises from past “Theatre Workshops” and we played them again. If fellow participants could not remember all the rules to the exercise, the participant that suggested the game re-taught it to the group.

This workshop did not involve quite the same journey as the first three, but it provided a nice sense of closure to our time together. The participants seemed to enjoy the improvisational scenarios and reflected that those situations may happen in their future, so it was beneficial to have the opportunity to work through some of them in advance. When discussing this work with Erika Sterup, she shared:

Having them already play through that scenario—what does one do? and what should one do when that happens?—I think it’s really valuable. I think it gives them a chance to think through and get some perspective on things that are really going to happen in a safe way. I also think it helps them build a community . . . and to start to identify with other students who have similar goals. Any kind of community-building with other students that are similar to them I think is helpful in preparing them for college and for overcoming barriers they’re going to face.

(Sterup)
Based on the students’ energy, smiles, and laughter, it was clear that they also enjoyed revisiting some of our favorite exercises. This time served as a review of our journey together—almost like a quick recap of the “Theatre Workshops’ Best Moments.” When revisiting certain activities, participants recalled funny instances from the first time we played the game together, which often brought the group to hysterical shared laughter. In circle-based games, they sometimes remembered who was in the center of the circle when we ended the last time, sharing that this person should therefore begin in the center on this new round. I enjoyed seeing them interact like this, often playfully teasing one another as they walked down memory lane. At the end of Workshop 4, the participants instigated a large group hug and took photos together. These served as a visual example of how close they had all become throughout our time together. Participants lingered in the room after the workshop was over. I turned on music and they were slow to leave, instead talking and laughing with one another and reminiscing about the summer session.

**Summary of Outcomes**

Outcomes of the individual exercises were included throughout the discussion of the design of each workshop; however, there were some outcomes of the “Theatre Workshops” series at large. First, just like in the “Theatre Games,” these workshops also involved a quantitative component. When asked, “How connected do you feel to the other program participants in this room?,” 4 of these 13 students were consistently at a “10.” 100% of the other 9 students increased in their comfort level over the series of workshops.
One of the most influential outcomes of this work was that the students wanted more workshops. I had originally planned for two, but then added a third, and then a fourth. These additional workshops were requested by the participants, who willingly gave their free time to come together for this work. It was clear that they would have participated in even more if time had allowed. They even asked if we could have a workshop while on our Cultural Trip, which is a trip all the UB students take together for three days at the close of the summer session. Although this was not feasible within our busy trip schedule, I have no doubt that they would have happily participated if we had the time. Additionally, one day when I visited the lobby during the students’ free time, we played one of the warm-up games. Participants referenced the workshop experiences several times in conversations with me during the last week and on the trip.

The connection of these students was also exhibited through observations of the atmosphere. These 13 students were not all close friends at the start of this workshop series. A few of the students were admittedly very shy and remained fairly quiet during the first workshop. When watching the videos, I noted that by Workshop 2, the students seemed to more equally share the space. No one was on the outskirts, no one was not contributing or off to the side of the group. The atmosphere exhibited a group of friends—talking, laughing, hugging, joking along together. They sometimes brought each other food, or if one student was a little late getting back to campus on Sunday night, another knew why. They shared stories from their experiences hanging out together outside of the workshops over the weekend or in other UB activities. Some had nicknames for one another. Also, they were slow to leave at the close of these workshops, often lingering around to talk to one another and plan activities for the next
week. I also personally witnessed them hanging out outside of these workshops. As we journeyed through these four workshops, this group seemed to grow in their enjoyment of one another’s company and genuinely seemed to support one another.

These workshops, as a whole, seemed to assist in students’ communication skills and problem-solving. During the scenarios in Workshop 4, students shared the vocal space and genuinely listened to one another as they came up with action plans. Their ideas built off of one another as they discussed the different ways to handle each situation. When I talked with program personnel about this work, Jeanie Casady shared, “As we get older we learn by experience, trial and error, and mistakes we’ve made. And in applied theatre—try this, change it, try that—in an hour, they get 20 years of experience if they play it right. Lots of perspectives in there” (Casady).

These students also grew in their self-disclosures. They became very open with one another, and no student seemed hesitant to respond to the larger questions that asked participants to examine their values and what matters to them, their concerns, and their aspirations for the future. A participant shared that these bigger conversations did not happen in her friendships at home, and that her friends knew what she liked for dinner and what movie she would want to see, but they had never really discussed the “deeper stuff.” She shared that she enjoyed participating in these kinds of conversations with her peers in the workshops; it made her feel more connected to them. I, too, noticed that participants seemed to value this chance to be heard and understood on this different level. This was evident especially at a moment in Workshop 2 when the room was full of high energy, loud vocally and enlivened physically. Then,
in an instant, a serious question came up and the participants calmed immediately and actively listened to and engaged with one another in conversation. Casady shared:

Plus, as we say, understanding comes. So, they get a chance to hear other people talk about things or relate to an experience, and they talk about it in that safe environment. I think that’s a real plus. What it teaches me is, “Oh, what I think is important, and what I feel is valid. And I’m not that different from everyone else, but even if I am that’s okay.” And then to realize someone else—“I understand them, too.” To have a chance to slow down enough, person-to-person, not on social media, but with that personal dynamic . . . The big thing I think is it gives them a chance to feel self-worth and the value of being heard, the value of expressing, and the value of hearing other people do that same thing. The confidence you get in that. And then when you do that, you also broaden your experience base. All of sudden, it’s not just what I think or feel. There’s a whole different perception out there and it makes sense. (Casady, emphasis added)

At the close of Workshop 3, I facilitated a focus group. As noted by Philip Taylor, “One strength of the focus group is that you are gaining multiple perspectives on the applied theatre. Sometimes it can be easier for participants to open up when they are with others” (127). We first talked about the process drama since we had just experienced it together, but we then moved to a larger discussion of the workshop series. One participant shared, “I definitely enjoyed the ones [the workshops] we’ve done with this group of people partly because we chose to be here. So, that makes a big difference.” When asked if “Theatre Games” and “Theatre Workshops” should continue to be included in UB summer sessions, one participant said, “Yes, keep them. Keep
them. Keep them. They helped a lot.” Another said, “Can the Bridgers crawl in during the
games?” Since she was not going to be in the high school program the following year, she
wanted to know if she could still join in if she were a part of the Bridge program. Another shared,
“I wish we had done this last year because it would have made me feel a lot more connected to
everybody.”

Lessons Learned

One lesson I learned was that the amount of “Theatre Workshops” could be increased. I
had originally intended to facilitate two, thinking in terms of scheduling and valuing the
participants’ free time; but, in retrospect, I could have approached this more broadly.
Participants’ seemed to value this time together. I had always hoped that this would be the case,
but I never imagined the request for more workshops or the depth of the connection that they
would make with one another. If I had known, I would have planned for a workshop every week
of the program and would have designed the journey accordingly; the closing activities that
occurred at the end of Workshop 2, would have instead provided closure to the entire series of
workshops. Although Workshop 4 was treasured time together, because of the quick turnaround
in planning it, I was not able to put as much thought into how to fit it into the flow of our
broader journey. Reflecting upon it now, the scenarios could have been drawn explicitly from
discussions in previous workshops, and I also could have formed a bridge between our last
workshop, the process drama, and this final session together.

Another lesson that I (re)learned was the merit of a process drama. I have participated in
process dramas and have also facilitated them, and, for me, this experience reinforced their
value. Now, looking back, I ask myself why this medium was not included initially in the design of the “Theatre Workshops.” Had the participants not requested more workshops, we would not have even experienced that workshop together, so I am grateful, once again, for the participants’ involvement in this research—they forced me, too, to dig deeper. Out of all four of the workshops, the participants most enjoyed the process drama workshop and that evening together seemed to strengthen students’ connections to one another. I wonder now what the overall “Theatre Workshop” series experience would have been like if that had instead been Workshop 1. Although many of the activities in Workshops 1 and 2 asked participants for rich reflection and dialogue on their experiences, the fictional frame of the process drama allowed for students to involve their experience base in a very different way. Thrusting the students into a narrative and into roles right away could have perhaps served to inform our discussions of their college-bound journey in the later workshops.

I had originally intended for summer session 2015 to be my last summer, but due to personal reasons, was able to return in 2016. In summer session 2016, due to both personal and programmatic scheduling, I was not able to again facilitate a series of small group “Theatre Workshops.” However, I was able to come together once with a group of student volunteers who assisted in planning future applied theatre work with UB. I place this summary of the 2016 small group workshop under “Lessons Learned” since it serves to inform my continued work with UB.

The participants in this 2016 workshop knew that they were helping with this research. I shared that in our time together we would go through a variety of exercises and examine how each activity would fit within the scope of the UB program at large. As we progressed through
the exercises, sometimes participants stepped out and observed the others so that we could gather their observational perspective. In terms of workshop design, I listed the activities on several sheets of paper and taped them to the wall in the room. After each game, participants reflected on how and when the exercise could serve the UB program and we wrote these ideas under each exercise. For example, after playing “The Bear of Poitiers,” the participants thought the exercise would provide a great springboard into discussions of self-control and/or peer pressure. They thought “The Antiquated Telephone Exchange” would provide a great lead-in to discussions of working towards the same goal, as well as cause and effect. At the end of the workshop, one participant shared, “It was really fun and great to see everyone work together.”

The following are descriptions of the two activities mentioned, in case they are useful to another program:

**The Bear of Poitiers**
Source: *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal
Tags: high focus, low energy, full group

**Directions:** “One participant is designated the bear of Poitiers . . . She turns her back on the others, who are the foresters. The latter busy themselves with their forestry tasks—woodcutting, planting, tree-felling, taking a break, whatever. After an interval, the bear must give vent to an enormous growl, whereupon all the woodcutters must fall to the ground and ‘play dead,’ not making the slightest movement . . . The bear goes up to each one of them, growling at will . . . tries any trick she can think of to make them laugh, to make them move; in short, her goal is to force them to reveal that they are alive. When the bear succeeds, the forester who has given himself away becomes a second bear, and the two bears set off to do the same thing to the other foresters, who still try not to move. Eventually there are three bears, then four, and so on” (Boal 78).

**The Antiquated Telephone Exchange**
Source: *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal
Tags: high focus, low energy, full group

**Directions:** “A circle of people watching each other. All are numbered from 1 to however many people there are in the group. If there were 10, say, the surveillance might go like this: 1 watches 4, 2 watches 5, 3 watches 6, 4 watches
7, 5 watches 8, 6 watches 9, 7 watches 10, 8 watches 1, 9 watches 2, 10 watches 3. The numbering need follow no particular mathematical formula—as long as everyone is watching someone, and being watched by someone else. The instruction is to do nothing, unless you see your quarry do something. So you watch carefully without doing a thing. But whenever anyone moves the tiniest bit, his observer is also to move, a tiny bit more. As someone else is watching him, that person will now move a tiny bit more than he did and a tiny bit more than his model did. The whole thing escalates. With the instruction ‘Do nothing’ as the starting point, we end up with all extremes of behaviour” (Boal 144).

In this workshop, the participants and I brainstormed together how applied theatre and arts-based exercises could be utilized consistently throughout a program—perhaps at the beginning of an academic-year meeting to begin a deeper conversation, or in classes during the summer program to provide an experiential foundation to delve into another topic.

Recommendations

My first recommendation would be to find a time in the schedule for “Theatre Workshops” that works for all the interested students. Scheduling is tricky, but important. Sarah Hass suggested the Sunday night time frame, and after also asking interested students about this, it worked well for us in 2015. Although this time frame worked well for this particular group of volunteers, it may not be feasible for other programs. There are both pros and cons. Pros included the fact that no UB program activities were scheduled on Sunday evenings and some participants were therefore looking for something to do. Also, participants were fresh from the weekend and returned energized to start the week. In terms of cons, the students typically have until 10:30 p.m. to return on Sundays in this particular UB program. Therefore, although it did not seem to affect this pool of volunteers, in future manifestations of this work, it could affect
who could participate. Some students may not be able to get back in time because they are
dependent on others to give them a ride back to campus, have family commitments that day, or
they have a job on Sundays. Others may simply not want to give up that family, work, or free
time. This theatre work could also be thought of in many ways—perhaps as a supplemental
portion in morning classes or as an afternoon interest group, if better for some programs. Or,
the Sunday night time frame may also work well; it does provide an activity for students to
participate in, when otherwise there are no planned activities on the schedule. As one student
shared in the focus group, it “kept me out of my room by myself.”

Another recommendation would be continued focus on the involvement of students in
creating it. In part because participation by the community is a core aspect of applied theatre, I
encourage other UB programs to ensure that the participants are an integral part of the design
and planning of this work. This sense of ownership seemed to invigorate their commitment to
these activities. As we traveled through the activities together, I was mindful that “[t]eaching
artists must be able to read the context in a way that enable participants to feel valued” (Taylor
51). This work encouraged them to think deeply and it reinforced that their thoughts,
experiences, and voices matter. Taylor notes, “In innovative partnerships, participants should
join with their teaching artists and share their knowledge, and in doing so gain a sense of
increased power” (65). The participants expressed to me that they enjoyed being a part of the
planning of this research, and those that participated in the 2016 “Theatre Workshop” also
seemed genuinely excited to do an activity and then have power to decide why and where it
should go in the UB curriculum. Paulo Freire argues, “[T]he teacher-of-the-students and the
students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-
teacher. The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in
dialogue with the students, who, in their turn, while being taught, also teach” (qtd. in Taylor 66).

**Conclusion**

The purpose of the “Theatre Workshops” was to continue to build community and to provide a space for participants to examine their college-bound experience. In reflecting upon the workshops, one participant shared, “They work. Keep doing them. Everyone likes them and enjoys participating in them.” Another happily stated, “I’ve made friends.” Sterup shared, “For students that keep coming back and keep doing it—just the time spent around each other and going through it together, but especially scenarios that maybe are emotional—it does bond them together and make them feel more connected.” (Sterup). When provided a blank space on a post-workshop survey to respond to “What would help you feel more connected to this program, peers, UB staff, etc.?” 9 of these 13 students chose to express that more of these arts-based workshops would assist.

Although some of the structure and activities were determined in advance, the participants guided and informed our continued journey together in this workshop series. As Taylor reminds us, “Applied theatre works best when participants are actively engaged in critically exploring the implications of their own and others’ actions. This dual stance—the willingness to both participate in the work and to understand the nature of the participation—might usefully be described as *participant-observation*” (5–6). These workshops provided a space to examine actions, clarify values, and share hopes for the future. The participants joined in rich discussions and reflections in a community of engaged support.
It was a community within the larger UB community, and I observed these students as positive forces in the summer program at large. The applied theatre work they journeyed through together seemed to strengthen their ties to one another and to the program, and my observation was that their positive energy seemed to radiate throughout the larger student body. These students volunteered their time and enthusiastically invested in these activities and discussions. Casady shared that applied theatre “gives an opportunity to slow down and really process what’s going on. Not the world at large, but that room’s world. We’re so busy with an onslaught of what is happening, we don’t have any time to stop and process, ‘Ok, what do I do about it?’ Applied theatre allows that slow down. I think it gives our students a chance to process what’s going on and what alternatives are there” (Casady). The “room’s world” was a place of rich sharing, the trading of ideas, genuine support and trust, and hope for the future. In reflecting upon the “Theatre Workshops,” one participant said, “It was my best experience this year.”

In the next and final chapter, I summarize the results of this work and relate it to my initial goals to support, build, and bolster. This includes a reflection on how this work relates to sense of community theory, as well as a discussion of the retention rates of the participants in these four summer sessions. I also summarize suggestions for future research. The chapter includes a discussion on how this work could be utilized with students in other programs with similar goals or upon first-generation students’ arrival to a college campus.
... the biggest picture is shaping one’s own corner of the world, of which art-making is a small but vibrant element in a large, collectively-created mosaic.

—Jan Cohen-Cruz

Summary of Findings

My “corner of the world” during this research was the Upward Bound program in northeast Missouri and the 140 participants that joined in this journey. The purpose of this research was to examine the effect of utilizing applied theatre techniques and arts-based activities in a UB program. It situated around the following central question: how can applied theatre and arts-based techniques serve to build community and bolster retention rates in an individual UB program? After facilitating four summers of “Theatre Games” and one summer of a series of “Theatre Workshops,” I found that this work had an impact.

During the “Theatre Games,” which occurred at the beginning of each summer session and involved all of the UB participants, there was a quantifiable effect. During the workshops, participants noted an increase in comfort level with their peers. Of the participants who did not begin and end at a “10,” 80.49% experienced an increase in 2013, 98% in 2014, 85% in 2015, and 91% in 2016. Progress on our main objectives, to learn names and to build community among participants, was also exhibited in our baseline activity, “Object in the Center,” as members of each group moved closer to the center of the room at the end of the workshop. There was also a noticeable change in the atmosphere of the space. In general, students entered more reserved and many quietly sat off to the sides at the beginning of the workshop; however, by the end of
our time together, the room was filled with laughter and energy. I witnessed participants talking to one another, and oftentimes talking with people that they had not interacted with at the beginning. Through the post-workshop surveys, participants noted increased comfort levels with their Mentor Groups and participants shared that the games “broke everyone’s shell,” that they were “awesome” and provided “great bonding,” and to “do it more often.” Sarah Hass noted that the “Theatre Games” “encourage them [participants] and require them to engage with one another . . . to do certain things at a rapid pace so that they don’t have time to let those nagging feelings of self-doubt or self-consciousness overtake their actions. And, so, those activities have been successful in helping them feel more comfortable around peers” (Hass).

The “Theatre Workshops,” which were facilitated in summer session 2015 with 13 volunteer participants, also seemed to have a tangible impact. Of the students who did not begin and end at “10,” 100% of the remaining participants increased in their comfort level during the series of workshops. Although I had initially planned for two, the participants requested additional workshops, and so we added a third, and then a fourth. If time had allowed, they expressed that they would have requested more. Together, participants examined their experiences as college-bound students, discussed potential obstacles, and role-played scenarios that they may face in the coming years. In “Critical Interventions: The Meaning of Praxis,” author Deborah Mutnick states that “the process of rehearsing experience enables both the full development of an idea and of the dramatic relationship of spect-actors . . . Boalian theatre can thus deepen the rhetorical underpinnings of Freirean pedagogy through its emphasis on the importance of learning through the senses and its literal enactment of the relationship between actor, character, and audience.” (42). The participants critically reflected upon their experiences
within an engaged community of support. They delved into rich discussion, and they also laughed and played together along the way. Throughout the course of the summer session, I observed these students genuinely caring for one another. I witnessed them spending time together outside of the workshops and I am aware that several of them keep in touch to this day, even though some of them are now living miles apart while attending different colleges. During the focus group, one participant shared, “I wish we had done this last year because it would have made me feel a lot more connected to everybody.” When I asked if these workshops should continue to be a part of UB, students joined in a chorus of “yes” and “keep them.” On a post-workshop survey, a participant shared, “It was my best experience this year.”

I would like to note that I am not merely pulling the best quotes from surveys and interviews, nor am I trying to simply paint a vision of this work with rose-colored glasses. In all of the interviews and surveys related to the “Theatre Games” and the “Theatre Workshops,” students’ comments were positive. Although there were sometimes ebbs and flows of the energy in the room (as described in more detail throughout Chapters 4 and 5), no one seemed continually disengaged or genuinely upset to join in this work. In general, students were positive, participating, and working together to build these summer communities throughout each workshop.

There were also several unforeseen benefits to this work that were not included in the original objectives of this research. For instance, this work seemed to assist in developing and implementing the UB Variety Show. As described earlier, the Variety Show is an annual summer event where students perform skits, songs, and dances for their family and friends in a large theatrical space. I directed this show each of these summer sessions and I noticed that the initial
community-building work not only helped the participants form relationships with one another, but they also helped me to build both relationships and trust with the UB students. The payoff of this in terms of the Variety Show was that it paved the way for participants’ self-confidence and creative risk-taking. Donna Fude noticed how these theatre opportunities brought students out of their shells. She shared, “They come out with a greater comfort level. They’re okay being them. The Variety Show then pulls them up on the stage and in the spotlight. Many of our students aren’t in the spotlight at their school . . . This is their opportunity to shine” (Fude).

I also noticed that these arts-based activities began to spread. For instance, over the years, program staff used these games and exercises as “rain plans” when outdoor activities needed to be cancelled because of the weather. Participants also requested to play some of these games or revisit these exercises within the classes I taught during the summer sessions or during their free time when I visited the lobby. I also learned that several staff members continued to use these exercises out in the UB centers during the academic-year meetings in the fall and spring semesters. Over the course of these four years, this work has grown in its presence in this individual UB program.

Conclusions

In my “Statement of Purpose” in Chapter 1, I mentioned that I kept returning to three key words throughout the course of this work: support, build, and bolster. I reflect now on the impact of this work in each of these areas.
How did this work support the UB program mission?

A key question in this research was how these methods supplement and support the mission of the program. The U.S. Department of Education’s “purpose” and also the “goal” of this program is to “generate in program participants the skills and motivation necessary to complete a program of secondary education and to enter and succeed in a program of postsecondary education” (“Frequently Asked Questions—Upward Bound Program”), and, “to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education” (“Upward Bound Program”). This arts-based work serves to supplement current program services in achieving these goals. In terms of generating skills, these workshops provided a space for the UB participants to come together and build their community, which is a skill they need not only during their high school years, but also one that will benefit them when they arrive on a college campus. Issues relating to community were expressed early on as potential factors relating to these participants’ retention. Therefore, taking the time to nurture a sense of support, trust, and connection provided participants with a support system as they worked towards those larger goals of high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment and completion. These workshops also provided participants with tangible tools to use when communicating with one another. Susan Finley notes, "I believe that the arts make more forms of communication available to people and provide opportunities for self-expression" (79). Participants practiced various ways of sharing with one another and expressing themselves, and they practiced actively listening and responding mindfully. Additionally, this work provided a space for students to problem-solve. The “Theatre Workshops,” especially, invited participants to articulate and navigate potential obstacles and
solutions through role-play, which, in turn, I hope will assist with persistence through these obstacles if they arise in the future. In terms of motivation, these workshops provided a space for students to reflect upon their journey through the UB program. They provided opportunities for students to express what their college future means to them within a community of others who are also pursuing postsecondary goals.

Janet Blohm-Pultz said, “You’re changing their mindsets by doing those kinds of things and getting them to think in a different way, which is what Upward Bound is all about . . . And I think this would be a very effective way to do it because you’re involving that emotional impact in what they’re doing” (Blohm-Pultz). This emotional impact may serve to benefit participants in terms of both skills and motivation because it further connects them to their college-bound journey. In the “Theatre Workshops,” participants moved from an experiential base and developed avenues of persistence through potential obstacles, as well as a general action plan for the coming years through high school and college. As noted by Mutnick:

To achieve praxis, action must emanate from reflection, which in turn produces a new set of reflections, leading to the next action, and so on, in an ongoing dialectic. Unreflective action leads to adventurism and recklessness; passive reflection leaves the status quo intact . . . Our work as educators or artists should not be to mold people but to enable them to become craftsmen and women—artists, writers, actors, teachers—themselves. (42)
Did it serve to build community within an existing program?

Erika Sterup reflected upon the importance of UB students being drawn into the group and feeling that they can share with the group. She stated, “That keeps them coming back and makes them choose coming to UB after school or for the summer” (Sterup). In the examination of the goals and outcomes of this work, sense of community theory provided a framework for continued reflection on each UB cohort and the community they built together in the summer sessions. I return now to David W. McMillan’s renamed key components of spirit, trust, trade, and art. Throughout this reflection, I include, in italics, the questions that were initially posed in Chapter 2.

I first consider participants’ spirit of belonging together and whether students felt welcomed by the group. First, *do the students know one another’s names?* In the “Theatre Games,” activities such as “Eye Contact/Walk Across” and “Maria, Maria, Maria” demonstrated that these workshops did assist in students’ learning one another’s names. After “Eye Contact/Walk Across,” several students volunteered to go around the circle and share the names of everyone in the group. There was a great sense of pride when they accomplished their goal. Even if they forgot one, the group at large jumped in to assist. Also, when asked about progress on learning names in “Object in the Center” at the end of the workshop, there was a visible difference as participants moved closer to the center of the room.

*Do they feel comfortable in the space?* All of these workshops occurred in a space within their residential hall in a room that looked just like their main UB lobby. The atmosphere in the room changed significantly throughout the course of each workshop. In every “Theatre Games” workshop, the initially subdued room became enlivened. Participants moved quickly throughout
the room, filling it with laughter and energy. Throughout the course of the “Theatre Workshops,” the space also became invigorated as the students bounded into the room, excited to spend time together once again. In workshops two, three, and four, the space both began and ended this way because the students had increased their comfort level with one another during the first workshop. They also came early (sometimes with their dinner) and left late, which demonstrated that they felt comfortable in the room. This evidence demonstrates a positive connection with the space and a sense of “home.”

**Do they feel like they are a member of this group?** These workshops provided opportunities for students to connect with their peers in this particular UB program, as well as opportunities to reflect upon their relationship to the UB program at large. Regarding the community of their UB peers, the quantitative element of this work noted an increase in comfort among participants. One student noted, “I like how everyone is positive and this is a non-judgmental environment.” In activities such as “Points of Contact,” participants cared for one another and ensured that the “leftovers” (the students not included in a group when they were asked to quickly form groups of 4, or 7, etc.) were part of the next round, sometimes surrendering their own membership in a group in the care of another participant. In relation to the UB program at large, students shared what being in UB means to them. Sometimes this took the form of a discussion, other times I noted students including a reflection on what UB means to them in the “Compassionate Listening Exchange.” One participant shared that they are in UB “to grow as a person educationally, socially, physically . . . to be a part of something that can make me a better person.” Another participant shared, “I love the amazing opportunities that
are possible by being in UB. The outcome is awesome and the people you get to meet are one of a kind.” Another shared, “I just love it here.”

*Is there a spark?* In the “Theatre Workshops,” the spark was exhibited as participants developed nicknames for one another and inside jokes, as they posed for silly pictures together, and through their lingering in the room after each workshop. It was demonstrated in their request for more workshops. Likewise, the “spark” was revealed in the soundscape of the room and the change in the atmosphere from the beginning to the end of the “Theatre Games.” The soundscape changed from pockets of both soft sounds and silence to a room filled with talking, laughter, and sometimes even singing together. To employ the mountain theme of UB summer session 2015: the beginnings of the workshops felt like standing at the top of a black diamond trail for the first time—holding in tension, nervously watching skiers around you, noticing that some seem more confident, trying to gauge if the others feel as anxious as you do. At the end of the workshops, however, I felt the rush of momentum. It was like finally getting the confidence, pushing off the summit and then succeeding—zipping down the mountain with newfound conviction, breathing in the fresh mountain air, feeling a rush of satisfaction and joy.

In relation to the second component, *trust*, I reflect upon the activities that assisted in helping participants know what they could expect from one another and from the overall UB experience. First, *how can applied theatre and arts-based workshops assist in developing an understanding of UB?* When introducing this research in the “Theatre Games,” I expressed that this would be a shared process, that the participants were a vital part of this work, and that their voices throughout would be respected and valued. We connected this to an understanding of the UB program at large; just like the workshop experience that evening, their path through UB
would provide full group, small group, and one-on-one moments, and everything tied to their active participation in the journey. In the “Theatre Workshops,” several activities invited students to reflect upon and develop action plans for moments in their journey through the UB program. UB was also noted as a key resource when students built their “landscape of support” in Workshop 1. Both the “Theatre Games” and the “Theatre Workshops” worked to develop and then demonstrate to the students that UB was a place where they could be comfortable being themselves, where their voices mattered, where they could express their thoughts in a community of support, and where they could gather tools to help them succeed on their path to a postsecondary education.

*Will leaders emerge?* In the introductory discussion of this work, I invited the rising seniors to share their thoughts on the beginning versus the end of summer session and how the community changes. This addressed the “elephant in the room”—that the rising seniors held power because they had already experienced a summer session and it also placed them in a leadership role. In voicing the growth in community that occurred during their first summer session, the rising seniors took on responsibility for ensuring that change again that summer. The rising seniors were given another opportunity to explore their leadership potential through the activity “Physical Life Charades,” which was repeated in the “Theatre Games” each summer. Through several of these activities, participants learned one another’s strengths. For instance, one participant in “Theatre Games” was very good at learning names right away and began addressing others by their names early on the in the workshop. The other students seemed to think that this was pretty neat. I thought so, too. Another participant was noticeably good at communicating embodied responses, such as is asked for in “Physical Life Charades.” His
teammates kept asking him to jump up and join in when they got stumped, to help the person acting out the word or phrase. In this particular game, I also observed that often team captains would emerge. In addition, students emerged as leaders in group discussions. A particularly quiet rising junior became a vocal and enthusiastic participant in the reflections throughout the course of the workshop. Other students processed quickly and added insights that furthered our conversations and sparked the thoughts of others.

How will the activities facilitate interactions among smaller subsets of the larger group?

The exercises provided a variety of structures—some were full group, some were small group, and others were one-on-one. We started and ended in full group, but along the way there were opportunities for large and small group sharing, as well as more individual bonding. In the one-on-one time, students could choose to spend more time getting to know their roommate or another student they did not already know. These structural changes provided movement in our journey together and expanded participants’ circle of comfort by the end of the “Theatre Games” and the “Theatre Workshops.”

How will the program staff function within these workshops? The “Theatre Games” attended to the organization of the UB summer session, where smaller subsets of students were mentees under a UB staff member, or Mentor. Within the workshops, a few activities split the participants into their Mentor Groups so that they would have time to build community with this smaller subset of the larger group. The UB Mentors fully participated in the activities alongside the UB students. The students were able to see the Mentors commit to the exercise, seemingly increase in their own comfort level with the group, take on a “fun” leadership role in guiding the development of the team name and gesture for “Physical Life Charades,” and often act silly, too.
I believe this helped participants expand their view of their Mentors. For some, this meant perhaps seeing their Mentor beyond “the enforcer of rules,” which is typically a main aspect of their role during the first few days of the program while the summer session expectations are established. Trust also refers to an authority structure that can be trusted; therefore, building participants’ relationship with their Mentors is crucial. As Blohm-Pultz shared, “College student mentoring is a key part of the success. They’re [the Mentors] just old enough that they’re respected as authorities and someone who knows more, but they’re close enough in age to think, ‘Oh I want to be like that person,’ and they’re close enough in age to understand all the language and music, and still be able to be alongside the students” (Blohm-Pultz). Over the last four summer sessions, there have been a few instances where UB alumni have served as Mentors or UB staff members. In 2015 and 2016, an alum that completed his bachelor’s and master’s degrees came back to work with the program. This was such a unique opportunity for the participants—to see someone who went through the same program and then decided to come back and work with UB, or, as he often said, “to give back.” He participated in the “Theatre Games” right alongside the students. Hass stated, “I think when students can identify with people who have been successful in their college-going pursuits, or when they can identify with mentors, counselors, staff, or alumni of the program and see themselves and their own struggles reflected in those students who have persevered and overcome obstacles, that also helps them identify with the program” (Hass).

Trade refers to whether the participants created a community economy, which uses self-disclosure as the medium of exchange. It also relates to the benefits of being together. First, how does this work allow them to discover commonalities and differences? Since the “Theatre Games”
were facilitated at the beginning of summer session, the participants did not know one another well (or sometimes not at all) at the start of the workshop. Creating opportunities for self-disclosures was therefore key, as it allowed students to get to know one another. Participants first worked to bond over similarities in activities such as “Walk With Me” and “Do You Love Your Neighbor?,” as these exercises asked participants to share aspects of themselves with the group. These activities, and ones like them, provided opportunities for students to see the similarities in the room, yet students remained in control of what they chose to disclose. Likewise, sharing in activities such as “Points of Contact” and the “Compassionate Listening Exchange” asked students to search for commonalities. They were also able to see one another’s personalities emerge throughout the course of our time together. In the “Theatre Workshops,” students participated in similar sharing-based exercises. Students traded ideas and reflections upon how they would handle specific college-based situations. Additionally, they shared more in-depth reflections with one another, such as in “Who am I? What do I want?,” and emotional reactions within the process drama and in exercises such as “Web of Support.” McMillan states, “In a social economy, the most risky and valuable self-disclosures involve the sharing of feelings” (321).

*What tools does it give them to continue to explore these bonds outside of the workshops?* Several of the activities provided tools for continued sharing outside of the workshop setting. For instance, the “Compassionate Listening Exchange” fostered skills in active listening and responding mindfully; several students shared that this was their favorite exercise. These games and the opportunities for self-disclosure included throughout the workshops
provided starting-off points for future conversations. The students also worked to learn one another’s names, which served to create a sense of approachability and respect for one another.

*What are the benefits of being together?* These students are all joined together by their want to achieve a postsecondary education. These workshops assist in building relationships among students with similar goals, students who will serve as motivators for one another and as a support system if obstacles arise. Developing close ties with members of this UB community will also likely assist with participants’ persistence in the program, as well as in college. Hass stated that students stay in the program because of “the community they build, the family-like environment that they have, the support that goes beyond academic, but extends to the social and personal. It’s what keeps them in the program, keeps them connected, and also gives them the motivation that they need . . . It motivates them to want to do well because they have a reason to want to belong” (Hass).

In reflecting upon *art*, the final component, I consider the value of the collective experience, the shared dramatic moment. The idea in *art* is that the community chooses what becomes part of the collective heritage. First, would *UB participants and staff want to continue this work?* Students sharing that they enjoyed the workshops and asking for more exemplifies that many of the students enjoyed the time together. When asked if the program should keep these workshops, one student in the focus group shared, “Yes, keep them. Keep them. Keep them. They helped a lot!” Another shared, “I wish we had done this last year because it would have made me feel a lot more connected to everybody.” I found that UB program personnel would also support continued use of this work. Hass said, “I’m absolutely supportive of including theatre-based activities as a part of the program, not just for new students’ retention, but also
for returning student engagement and involvement” (Hass). Fude shared, “I can see that it certainly creates more of a bond quicker with students. And it’s purposely doing that. It’s not just doing an activity and assuming it . . . these are more purposeful and more insightful activities” (Fude).

Is there a lasting impact? Did it become a part of the participants’ collective heritage? Patricia Obst reminds us that “the more people interact, the more likely they are to form close relationships. The more positive this interaction is, the stronger the bonds developed from this interaction” (273). In my exchanges with students throughout the summer sessions, moments from the workshops were brought up time and time again. As mentioned earlier, workshop memories sometimes even served as starting-off points for Mentor Group inside jokes, and groups sometimes used their team name or gesture from “Physical Life Charades” in their Variety Show skit. In the last three summers that I facilitated the “Theatre Games,” the rising seniors came in knowing, generally, what to expect. It was a known and expected part of the summer session, and one that many seemed genuinely excited to revisit. The majority of the rising seniors seemed fully present throughout the experience and served as leaders for the new students in the room. I saw one UB alum the next summer at her job in town, and she asked if I was doing the workshops again that year. She even asked if she could come back and join. Especially with participants who were a part of the “Theatre Workshops,” the experience together often came up in later conversations. This community spent a lot of time together, and each experience was positive.

Was it worth it? When examining the notion of art and worth, I reflect on the fact that this work was artistic practice—it was designed, it called upon the students’ imagination and
creativity, and it delved into moments of emotional connections and beauty. It was crafted in relation to the bodies in the space, the soundscape of the room, and the pieces gathered from participants as we built a journey together. The work also involved several artistic mediums; participants created drawings, displayed embodied understandings through image work, and invested in their roles in the fictional scenarios. It was *art*, in the literal sense of the word. And art is “worth it” for several reasons. Blohm-Pultz reflected, “Art touches your soul in a way that nothing else does. And people are affected by it, whether you know it or not” (Blohm-Pultz). The emotional connections and the empathy exhibited through the process drama, especially, seemed to signify worth in the experience. Blohm-Pultz shared, “That’s what you’re doing, you’re making them feel this as opposed to just talking about it” (Blohm-Pultz). Students were genuinely committed to and invested in the journey. And as they, too, helped craft the narrative, they were art-makers as well.

As noted by Jeanie Casady, “Connectedness does not equal just staying, but being present . . . I begin to see it when they [students] become others-centered, and then when they begin to allow themselves to be propped up by the people around them in a healthy way” (Casady). Throughout the course of these workshops, I saw students grow in comfort through their bodies and voices, I witnessed them lift one another up, and I watched them play and discover together as a group. I believe that a sense of community developed in each of these summer sessions, and the applied theatre and arts-based workshops may have served to jump-start and foster that journey.
Did it serve to bolster retention rates?

The key assertion of this study was that this work serves to build community, which I argue leads to bolstering retention rates in an individual program. The UB program at large has struggled with retention rates. The MPR report found that less than 45% of students complete the program (Myers and Schirm xx). Alan Nathan’s reanalysis found that only 35% of the group completed the program and “the level of attrition the Horizons study researchers encountered was not unusual” (54). Margaret W. Cahalan and Thomas R. Curtin’s 2004 study stated that “one might estimate that about 42 percent of those served at least 12 months left prior to graduating from high school” (35). Also, Laura G. Knapp, Ruth E. Heuer, and Marcinda Mason’s report found that 40.9 percent of students left UB before their expected high school graduation date (5–6). In relation to the individual case study in this research, Hass shared:

I think that retention can be difficult . . . It fluctuates from year to year. The problems behind retention are varied, and so it goes up and down based on what that reasoning is. Sometimes the reasons are academic, sometimes they’re social, oftentimes they’re financial, and sometimes they’re personal. So we see the numbers of students who are not retained in the program vary for a lot of different reasons. But, again, it’s a consistent concern. (Hass)

The following is a reminder of the retention numbers surrounding this UB program’s summer sessions in the few years leading up to this research: In 2008, 6 students out of 61 left either right before or during the summer session. In 2009, 4 out of 56 students left. In 2010, 14 out of 53 students left. In 2011, 4 students out of 56 left, and in 2012, 5 students out of 52 chose
to leave the program. Table 2 illustrates the summer retention numbers from this UB program from 2013-2016:

Table 2: Retention Numbers from UB Summer Sessions, 2013-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total # of UB students as of June 1 each year</th>
<th># of students that dropped out of the program...</th>
<th># of students that dropped out of the program...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-Summer or Pre-“Theatre Games”</td>
<td>Post-“Theatre Games”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: “Pre-Summer” means between the close of the academic year and the start of summer session. The total number of students does not add up to 140 because students experienced two summer sessions, and, in 2013 and 2014, I did not receive consent forms from every student. These numbers do not include any students who were dismissed from the program.

From 2013-2016, I was able to examine the retention numbers in relation to participation in the “Theatre Games,” which occurred during the first few days of the summer session. Of the participants who participated in a workshop in 2013, 96% were retained. In 2014, 98% were retained. In 2015, 100% were retained. In 2016, 94% were retained. 100% of the 13 participants who participated in the “Theatre Workshops” series were retained throughout the summer. Those that were rising seniors have since completed the UB program, and those that were rising juniors, remain in the program to date.

Retaining a student is the result of several factors, including, but not limited to, a sense of community. These workshops do not work in isolation. I do believe, however, that these
workshops provide an avenue to develop key relationships that will help students feel comfortable and supported in this program. They work to supplement current UB program services by creating a sense of connectedness to the people and to the program in the initial, and critical, days of the summer session. Then, the broader series of applied theatre workshops serves also to connect participants to their college-bound journey and to their postsecondary goals. When considering the effect of this theatre work with the UB program, Hass shared:

Their [the students’] participation in theatre-based activities is positive and helpful for their retention to the Upward Bound program. I think it also teaches skills that will be beneficial as they go to college and find themselves in a very similar environment, surrounded by people they don’t know that are from a different school, maybe from a different state even. And, so, I think just the process of breaking down those barriers shows them that it can be done and that they can . . . there’s a way to navigate that process to get comfortable and to feel like you’re part of a group. Then maybe next time when they find themselves in that situation, they’ll have the confidence and the knowledge to know that it will pass, and that there’s a way to get over that hurdle of being uncomfortable. So I think the sooner we can help them start to be comfortable and understand that they are part of our group, then it would only serve to increase retention. (Hass, emphasis added)
Reflections and Recommendations

In reflecting upon this work, I thought a lot about why building a community is so vital. Blohm-Pultz, too, provided an example as she recalled a very shy student who was a participant a few years back. This student only spoke when she was asked, and, when she spoke, you struggled to hear her and often had to lean in and/or ask her to repeat what she said. She often followed along with a few of her friends, but did not seem to actively participate in the conversations or activity-planning with them. In her classes or in social activities with the full group, she often would isolate herself and go into moments where her face would appear very sad and reflective. However, this was not the case in the “Theatre Games.” Blohm-Pultz shared, “I still remember her face in those theatre games—definitely participating . . . UB could keep her safe. That’s all that matters. If you do not feel safe, nothing can happen. That’s part of what you do in those games, you build that trust amongst a community so that people feel safe . . . and she couldn’t say that about home” (Blohm-Pultz).

When reflecting upon the UB program, Hass shared, “The strength of our program is again in those relationships and the sense of community that instills, and so that’s something that we want to continue to focus on as we go forward and to see how we can improve with those issues” (Hass). She continued:

I think part of the improvements [in retention] can be attributed to the activities that we’re doing to foster community within the group and part of those are the theatre-based activities. So while, yes, it’s still an area of concern, it’s perhaps less so. But, we need to continue doing those kinds of outreach to make them feel
comfortable and feel a sense of bond with other members of the cohort so that we continue to see that be less of a pressing issue. (Hass)

In continuations of this work, I would first recommend attention to the timeline and scheduling of these activities. Hass shared, “I think we do a pretty good job of getting the students into some theatre-based activities right at the beginning [of summer]; however, time is so critical. We see students that don’t even make it 24 hours on the campus, and so accelerating that timeline in terms of when they get in to do those activities I think could be useful” (Hass).

As recommended in Chapter 4, the “Theatre Games” should come as soon as possible, in rotation on move-in day if feasible. As recommended in Chapter 5, in scheduling the “Theatre Workshops,” I would recommend continued opportunities for this group to come together—perhaps once a week as we did on Sunday nights in 2015, or as a recurring experience included in one of the morning classes. Participants in the “Theatre Workshops” noted that they all volunteered to attend the series of workshops and they believe that made a difference. Therefore, “Theatre Workshops” could instead be included as an afternoon interest group that students sign up for. (Interest Groups are more hobby-based classes such as “Cooking” or “Ultimate Frisbee,” and students participate in them two times per week.) Or, if this applied theatre work was made to be an integral part of the UB program experience, then the aspect of “volunteering” would be removed. For instance, if students simply expected that this was a part of the UB journey, much like the expectation of participating in ACT prep work, the appearance of the “volunteer” would be removed.

Time and time again, I have observed theatre work benefiting introverted students. As an introvert myself, I empathize with the participants that are thrust into the “Theatre Games” and
perhaps would rather be anywhere else. I always kept these students in mind in both the design of the workshops and in the implementation, constantly observing the room to gauge interest levels and involvement. If this theatre-based work were to become an integral part of a UB program, I encourage facilitators to consider a design that serves both the introverted and the extroverted students. For instance, the wedding of full group, small group, and one-on-one opportunities provides breath in the workshop journey, as well as opportunities to slowly broaden a student’s circle of comfort. Also, in terms of processing activities, discussions are volunteer-based. Sometimes it involves drawing or writing instead. Reflections such as the “one-word praxis” offers less risk for participants, yet ensures that the voices of quieter students are included in the room. I scaffolded the exercises so that risk-taking opportunities were built in for those that were ready, but the activities did not require students to step into a spotlight before they were ready. One of my favorite aspects of this work has been observing shy students grow in their comfort level and decide, for themselves, when they were ready to step out and take more risks. I recall so many of these moments that perhaps only I noticed, but, for me, it was like the roof suddenly flew off the room and the space was bathed in sunlight. I’m sure I was grinning from ear to ear. I have observed these moments in both the “Theatre Games” and the “Theatre Workshops.” In the “Theatre Workshops,” especially, as the community grew closer and participants outwardly showed their support for one another, students who were more timid at the beginning came out of their shells and grew in both their physical and vocal expression. The active participation of the more introverted students exhibited a growth in their self-confidence level and a growth in their individual comfort level in larger groups.
When I first started this work, the summer session seemed to be the most critical time frame; however, during recent years, program personnel have noted that students are dropping out of the program during the 60-Day review time period as well. Sterup noted, “Before this year, I would have said the beginning of summer session is the big time, and that was where we lost most of our people last year. This year, it was really before the 60-day review” (Sterup). Likewise, Hass reflected, “More recently we’ve found that we’re having trouble retaining students at the very beginning, which is puzzling because they haven’t had a chance to experience the program and decide that it’s something they don’t want yet” (Hass). She continued:

I think at one point it used to be the beginning of summer, just because students had such a hard time acclimating to the college environment . . . being students from rural small towns who have long been used to knowing everyone in their community, going to high school with the same 30-40-50 students . . . coming to a different town and being surrounded by strangers was very concerning to them and they had a hard time adjusting. I think that we have lost fewer students in summer sessions in recent years and now we’re seeing ourselves losing students between the time that they’re accepted, which is in December, to when they start receiving program services, which is in January . . . We’ve probably lost almost 20% of our accepted class before 60-day review this year, and we had to open back up recruitment and get back out into the schools to start doing new application reviews. (Hass)
I would therefore recommend also using theatre activities during this 60-day time period. This was an initial hope of mine when first beginning this research, but I was unfortunately not able to travel from Colorado to Missouri during that time frame because of other responsibilities. Since new students are being integrated into a group of students who all already know one another, the integration of this community-building work at this time makes sense. Fude shared, “We’re really pushing to put something else in those first few meetings other than, ‘Here, let’s do paperwork’ and tutoring . . . they’ve got to have something to link them in and connect them first” (Fude).

I also think these activities could be included at several points throughout the academic year, not just during the 60-day review. Rather than thinking of it as a workshop journey, some of these exercises could be teased out of the overarching model and used as an experiential activity to start a deeper discussion. For instance, often during the academic-year meetings, alongside tutoring, there are full group times that focus on building study skills or walking students through the financial aid process. A group theatre-based activity could serve as a dramatic metaphor for the issue or task at hand, as well as a lead-in to these discussions. Drawing upon the embodied experience could assist in creating deeper understandings. As Lawrence A. Baines and Ruslan Slutsky noted in their article “Developing the Sixth Sense: Play,” “the entry point for lessons, especially at the beginning of a unit, should be accessible, low-stress, and fun . . . Amalgamating play to learning can direct the focus and energy generated by play toward academic goals” (99). These activities could also be utilized at the beginning of meetings to consistently attend to building the community at the UB centers. Hass agreed, “I believe we could be better about using theatre-based activities and would like to see it expanded
or better implemented during the work that we do in the academic year and with incoming students” (Hass). Fude also recommended that these activities could be utilized during Campus Day, which is a day in the spring semester when the participants visit Truman’s campus, have a tour, meet other UB participants from other schools, participate in some icebreaker activities, and sign up for their summer session classes. These activities could serve as a way to begin learning names and building the community during this important day for participants as well.

When I asked program personnel about their concerns in relation to this work, several conversations turned to facilitation. I, too, acknowledge that facilitating this type of work is a trained skill. Hass shared:

My concern would be the actual execution of the activities . . . making sure staff understood how to conduct the activities and execute the activities, and weren’t just sort of going through a checklist. There’s a certain level of awareness—of other people in the group, monitoring students, their level of engagement, how comfortable they are and how not—that is more sophisticated than that. So, it would be important to me that in other applications of the activities that there’s someone who understands and is qualified to do it, so it doesn’t just become another icebreaker. (Hass)

Casady said, “The only downside would be if it’s not part of the big picture . . . In inexpert hands, it could be used as just activity-fillers and not part of growing a big thing.” She would want for it “to be integrated in the central purpose of where it’s going.” (Casady). Likewise, Blohm-Pultz noted, “There is something about being trained that makes you better at coordinating those kinds of activities. It’s not something that you could just read about and do. I think you really
need some training. They’re not necessarily complicated or tough, I don’t think. I think it’s something that could be taught and spread” (Blohm-Pultz). If a program is not able to access a person who already holds knowledge of applied theatre, I would advise that a future facilitator first study the purpose of applied theatre work. There are several resources on applied theatre that someone interested in this work could study. For instance, the new Bloomsbury Applied Theatre series edited by Michael Balfour and Sheila Preston, Michael Rohd’s *Theatre for Community, Conflict, & Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual*, and *Applied Drama: A Facilitator’s Handbook for Working in Community* by Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton, to name a few.

Philip Taylor offers six characteristics of successful facilitators: critical thinkers, risk takers, theory generators, open-minded and flexible, collaborative, and storytellers (74–75). I would also recommend returning to Rohd’s characteristics, which were referred to in Chapter 3. In preparing to facilitate this work, Rohd also reminds us that this work can become emotional; that this type of work is therapeutic, but not therapy. He states:

> There is no doubt that intense feelings and responses will sometimes arise as you do this work with youth and adults . . . The key is to remember that this work steers away from being psychodrama specific to any one individual because you are not trying to use a group to work through one person’s problems. You are using a group to explore a social problem compressed into a specific, fictional interaction that is culled from the collective consciousness of the participants you are working with . . . This work is group problem solving, exploration, and dialogue. (71)
For example, in the process drama, we utilized a fictional framework, not a participant’s own story. I encourage facilitators to be mindful of these details in the planning of this type of work. Taylor notes, “Facilitators are most likely to produce significant work in applied theatre when they *activate* the dual artist-educator role; *reflect* on their own contribution to the applied theatre partnership; and *transform* understandings of the participants’ worldview” (68).

When asked about qualities that a facilitator should hold, Lana Brown noted:

Someone the teenagers feel like they can relate to—life, energy, fun, and yet with enough maturity and focus that they know where they’re going and they can pull that group to go where they want them to. And if you’re tenacious with that, they get 10 times more out of it . . . If an inexperienced but exuberant employee tries it and it doesn’t go well, they don’t have the confidence sometimes to pursue—to believe they had a good idea, it will go somewhere, they [students] will like it in the end, and they’ll get that feedback they need. (Brown).

If other UB programs consider adding this theatre work into their program, I would advise finding a person with these characteristics, as well as those outlined by Taylor and Rohd, and having them plan the work alongside someone who holds a lot of knowledge about the UB program. Mine through and develop exercises together so that the facilitator has an expansive toolkit of activities available. As noted throughout earlier discussions of this work, I often changed direction in the moment in relation to either the energy of the room or what was offered by participants in the narrative-based work. One of the keys to a successful workshop is the ability to read the room and access what would be best for forward momentum.
Furthermore, I would encourage practicing facilitating. For instance, if an exercise were
to be included in an academic-year meeting, I would encourage the staff member to practice the
language of the instructions and then the facilitation of the entire game or exercise with other
staff members who can give feedback from an informed perspective. The experience of playing
the game in a staff meeting can also assist in gauging potential focus and energy levels, as well as
outcomes. I often did this with the staff during my time as assistant director of the program.
Blohm-Pultz recalled, “You started every staff meeting with a theatre game. And during staff
training in the summer, you would make each one of them do the warm-up in the morning so
they practiced it” (Blohm-Pultz). This seemed to be valuable time because it helped to work out
any kinks in the structure and sparked ideas on how to adapt the exercise to a particular group
or space.

For those new to this work, I recommend thinking of the “Theatre Games” as something
beyond icebreakers. Even if using exercises outside of a full workshop setting, such as at the
beginning of an academic-year meeting, I encourage staff members to think of them as part of
the community-building fabric of the program. Hass shared, “The success of those activities is
largely dependent on the staff that is in charge and how much they understand the purpose of
the activities . . . That it’s not just a silly game that we have seven minutes to do and let’s move
on, but to try to understand what the purpose of it is and commit to it, and to let students see
their commitment to that activity” (Hass). When the participants see a commitment from a staff
member to the activity, they will more willingly come along for the ride as well. For example, I
have often heard facilitators say, “Now we’re going to play a little game” as they transition into
an activity. This diminishes the activity; it is not “little.” The exercise is serving a larger purpose,
and, if staff are mindful of that—if they lead participants through it with enthusiasm and commitment, if they utilize their ability to read the room in relation to what they’re hoping to achieve—the “little” game can go so much further.

**Serving a Broader Landscape**

As shared by Jan Cohen-Cruz, “Artists who aspire to make a difference in a social situation must assess the relationship between their goals and the scale on which they are able to work” (196). I worked with an individual UB program, and, over four summer sessions, 140 students participated in this research. This was my corner of the world during this time. However, this work could be adapted to serve programs other than UB with similar community-building or retention-related goals.

Blohm-Pultz shared, “I do think it could be much, much broader than UB . . . I think it could go throughout all of TRIO for sure, but I also think it would be a great toolkit for anybody working with teenagers. I think even more so because teenagers now are so electronically focused and don’t have a lot of training in person-to-person interaction” (Blohm-Pultz). During our years working together, I remember Lana Brown also relating the idea of person-to-person interaction and sharing with me that UB work is “one student at a time.” Now, reflecting upon this arts-based work, it seems to also serve this idea and could do so, too, in another program. Applied theatre and arts-based work opens up possibilities for human interactions, for an embodied experience followed by reflection and dialogue. It provides the time and space for a participant to process and reflect upon their individual experience within a broader landscape of support. It may lead to an individual student finding their community, their voice, or their path
through a postsecondary program and/or towards a dream. In a broad sense, arts-based work provides a different way of looking at this path and creating understandings. When asked why the arts were included within this northeast Missouri UB program, Casady said, “I saw them discover a whole part of them that they didn’t know they had, and that was enough for me” (Casady). Blohm-Pultz shared, “I think art reaches something that goes beyond words . . . It touches something inside of you that you don’t have access to in your daily life, and is not valued in your daily life. Art touches your soul in a way that nothing else does. And people are affected by it, whether you know it or not. I think it connects people; it can connect people” (Blohm-Pultz).

Applied theatre techniques and arts-based activities could also serve first-generation students on a college campus. The retention concern does not end when students arrive on campus, as “studies consistently indicate that first-generation students are at greater risk with respect to both persistence and degree attainment than are their traditional peers largely because of lower levels of academic and social integration (Billson and Terry, 1982)” (Terenzini et al. 3). This work offers students an opportunity to build community, responds to persistence-related factors, and provides a toolkit if obstacles arise in their postsecondary career.

Much like the way these activities were used with UB, these exercises could first assist in building a community of support among these students when they arrive to campus. When analyzing factors related to college persistence, retention specialist Edward “Chip” Anderson notes, “A support system within the college environment which fulfills students’ needs to belong and through which they can feel they are members of the campus community also contributes to students persevering in college . . . It can counter negative forces, including loneliness; build
Applied theatre techniques provide an avenue to quickly build this community of support. Workshops could be utilized during orientation activities in an effort to build a sense of sharing and trust among strangers, and they could include a group of only students, or the workshops could be thought of more broadly, with students, teachers, and/or residential life staff members. In the article, “The Impact of Faculty and Staff on High-Risk College Student Persistence,” researchers note that one of the factors that could shape faculty and staff practices with high-risk students “is the recognition that connecting with students makes a difference in their ability to succeed and persist and that this connection is the responsibility of faculty and staff” (Schreiner et al. 336). Likewise, “the primary behaviors of staff that were described by students as making a difference were that they cared about students, helped them meet their needs and get their questions answered, knew them by name, encouraged them, and spent time with them” (332). Sterup, too, noted that one of the keys to success for a first-generation student is “knowing how to get help when they need it . . . knowing who to ask, where to get help, knowing how to advocate for themselves, and having a sense that there are people out there that will help them” (Sterup, emphasis added). Attending an applied theatre workshop together could serve and assist in several of these areas.

Another persistence factor highlighted by Anderson is “[h]elping students identify and clarify purposes for attending college and the anticipated outcomes of the college experience . . . Affirming students as persons in terms of potential, abilities, skills, gifts, talents, worth, and uniqueness” (56). The activities described in the “Theatre Workshops” offer avenues for students to articulate their college goals. Exercises often ask students to reflect upon their journey to college and why they want to pursue a postsecondary degree. These activities are
typically, then, surrounded by community-building exercises, many of which provide opportunities for self-disclosure and offer students ways to express their talents and uniqueness. Because sharing is often an integral part of these activities, students are asked not only to self-reflect and appreciate their own talents, but since everyone is sharing, it is done so in a way that still allows for a sense of humility and does not put the student in a (perhaps unwanted) spotlight.

This work also serves to build an experiential toolkit that could be utilized if obstacles arise during the students’ postsecondary career. Blohm-Pultz noted that it is important to have “a creative way of teaching them [first-generation students] to handle the barriers that they will inevitably face. That’s what you’re doing; you’re giving the tools to deal with those barriers that they have that other kids don’t have” (Blohm-Pultz). Brown shared:

If we can build in them an experience that they go through that helps them develop a problem-solving process, that’s going to get applied all down the line—whether or not I’m going to stay in college when the going gets rough, what kind of job I’m going to seek, am I going after money or am I going after pleasure, am I going after ease of schedules because family and home is really important to me—all those things that are out there. It gives them the skills they need. (Brown)

Skill-building occurs not only in the experiential aspect of this work, but also within the reflections on these activities. Through discussion, students share ideas with one another, and take the time to think through and process a situation from several perspectives, rather than jump to a conclusion. Casady said that these exercises provide “the chance to be heard, the chance to understand self, and the chance to process what’s going on” (Casady). This work
therefore could not only be utilized during orientation activities, but also could serve in continuing support efforts. For instance, this work could be implemented within Student Support Services, which is another TRIO program that focuses on TRIO-eligible students’ postsecondary years.

In *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States, 45 Year Trend Report* (2015), Laura W. Persna states, “Improving equity in higher education attainment is a complex, multi-faceted challenge that cannot be ‘solved’ by changing just one policy or practice” (42). An inclusion of applied theatre work cannot “solve” the issue of access to higher education, nor can it solve all issues related to retention; however, it could make a difference. And, if programs or postsecondary institutions are interested in utilized applied theatre work, it would be an inexpensive addition. The exercises described in this research may sometimes involve a piece of paper and some markers, a ball or a rubber dinosaur here and there, but none involved any large equipment or needed media. It simply involves a trained facilitator. Blohm-Pultz shared, “This is not an expensive reform for education, but yet it could have a huge impact in making students succeed in this particular situation” (Blohm-Pultz). This work revolves around a group of participants in a room, using their voices and their bodies, and in many activities, accessing a sense of play. Researchers have discovered that play “enhances creative thought, fosters trust, helps develop divergent and conditional thinking, and reduces stress—all of which can lead to increased learning” (Baines and Slutsky 100). Blohm-Pultz shared, “I guess I’ve always seen this much, much wider than Upward Bound . . . Really, what I think you’re saying is that everybody learns well through play. And adults can learn through play, too. And certainly, teenagers can
learn it all through play. So, yes, I could see this going much farther than the UB community”

(Blohm-Pultz).

Closing Thoughts . . .

Summer Session 2015 celebrated the 50th year of the Upward Bound program. In preparation for a commemorative moment in the Variety Show that year, I invited students to participate in another arts-based activity. During a full group meeting, I asked them to respond to the following statements on individual pieces of paper: “When I think of UB, I think of/feel...” and “When I think of 50 years of UB, I think of/feel...” I then constructed the following poem that was read aloud by multiple participants. Each line in the poem demonstrates a new speaker.

*When I think of UB,*
*I think of a* family, coming out of our shells, and preparing for something greater. 
*When I think of UB,* I think of people coming together from different places and having fun. 
*I think of learning.* 
...of the opportunity given to me and the new friends that have been made. 
...friends with the same goals. 
...it’s a place where the unpopular can be popular. 
*I think of all the unbreakable friendships I have gained...* & the french fries. 
*I think of Ryle food.* 
*I think of family. Because they are my 2nd family.* 
*I think of my future.* 

*When I think of UB, I feel...* 
Happy. 
Supported. 
Awesome. 

*When I think of 50 years of UB, I think of...* 
...all of the people that had a chance of being something great. 
...of being a part of something bigger than myself. 
*I think of a lot of years and a lot of students going through school.* 
...a successful family...growing each year. 
*I think of 50 years of helping kids.* 
...and I feel special.
When Casady reflected on this show, she shared, “At the Variety Show this year—you can sit back and see things. I saw an evolution of community and I saw it come to something. I saw it as strong this year as I’ve seen it . . . That group is connected to themselves, I think, and to what the program is, to what it’s trying to do, and to what it’s going to do” (Casady). Summer 2015 included both the “Theatre Games” and the “Theatre Workshops” and served as a model for what I had hoped would happen as a result of this work: there was 100% retention post-workshop, the students formed a community that seemed to genuinely support one another, and they created the words above, which showed me, too, that they felt connected to one another and to the UB program.

When reflecting on building a UB community, Casady shared, “That’s where it starts. It’s again that soil and that water, that thing where they can grow. It’s what nurtures” (Casady). Perhaps that’s all any of us need when pursuing a dream—a group of people who know you, believe in you, and can provide a road map to help you get there. Throughout the course of this research, 140 UB students shared their talents and uniqueness, their energy and big dreams, their silliness and laughter, and their ability to raise each other up. Along this journey, we discovered ways in which applied theatre and arts-based work provides a space to build a sense of community with one another, as well as how it offers a space to process and reflect upon participants’ college-bound experience and their postsecondary futures. It is my hope that this
research will aid other programs—that it will serve as part of the road map in cultivating a UB community, and that it will assist in retaining UB students and supporting the continuation of the UB program at large. The stakes are high, because, in the wise words of a UB student who stayed in the program until completion, “To me, Upward Bound is more than preparing for college . . . Upward Bound is about growth, with others and within myself.” . . . and, yes, she’s now a freshman in college. The UB community nurtured, and she grew.
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