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An Exploration of how Performance Art can Activate Empathy in High-Risk Youth

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Integrative Master's Project, Independent Study
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Abstract

“You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive (Baldwin, 1924-1987).

James Baldwin frames the context of this paper with his eloquent understanding of empathy. The purpose of this project was to design a workshop that would cultivate empathy in high-risk youth through performance art and voice exploration workshops conducted at the Hudson Guild, and a storytelling workshop conducted at the Ali Forney Center of New York.

As Baldwin states, all human beings experience heartbreak on this earth (Baldwin, 1924-1987). Unfortunately, some of us may not be provided with a medium to process that hurt. Individuals who cannot express their pain may find it more difficult to process the pain of others and relate to the social world. Through reading, Baldwin realized that others could share his emotions and that realization allowed him to see the bond that connected him to mankind. This paper looks at how performance art storytelling workshops and inner voice exploration can be used to inspire empathy within high-risk young adult populations. I explore how mediums such as storytelling, spoken word, reality TV, film and socially conscious theatre can be tools that broaden young adults’ perceptions of self and community.
Design

This paper is framed by concepts derived from empathy driven research conducted by Victoria Foster (2007), Dennis T. Regan and Judith Totten (1975). Foster conducted participatory research projects with low-income families in England. She discovered that she could generate authentically empathic responses from participants allowed to explore their voices through performance art. Regan and Totten claim that empathy can be cultivated in small controlled groups. Regan further implies that people can learn to turn their empathy into social action by responding to intentional directives from group facilitators. I explored these concepts in a voice exploration performance art workshop conducted at the Hudson Guild of New York and a storytelling workshop conducted at The Ali Forney Center of Brooklyn, New York (Regan & Totten, 1975).

I explored Foster’s claim that inner exploration of voice encourages youth to become invested in their community. I followed this workshop with a two-month participatory qualitative pilot case study conducted at the Ali Forney Center. I explored how empathy could be inspired in at-risk young adults. The workshop featured storytelling and videos as a method of introducing the concept of empathy to the residents. Once the concept was introduced, residents were encouraged to discuss what their opinions were on empathy, and how it applied to their lives. The workshop concluded with participants in the program creating a story/performance that depicted their understanding of empathy and how it related to their lives.
Findings – Gablik (1991) states that rather than seeking to impress our own images upon the world, a radical art...is one that helps organize people who can speak for themselves, but lack the vehicles to do so” (p.112). In my research, I discovered that the young adults I encountered were subjected to unfair characterizations placed upon them by their educational and community institutions. As a result, they adopted behaviors to protect themselves from caring about the viewpoints of others. In their minds, no one could truly come to their aid, because people could not authentically relate to their current situation. I discovered that encouraging voice exploration and storytelling through performance art was highly effective in helping these young adults experience empathy for others. Reflecting on the Hudson Guild and Ali Forney Center workshops allowed for the creation of an empathy-centered Performance Art workshop that promoted student exploration of voice and storytelling.

Keywords –Empathy, Cultivate, Sympathy Performance Art, Transient Youth,

Paper type –Integrative Master’s Project
**Conception and Definition of Empathy vs. Sympathy**

The term empathy is often incorrectly placed in the same category as sympathy. Although the two terms may share similar qualities, the definitions differ. According to Wispe (1986), sympathy comes from “the Greek sympatheia, or the Latin sympathia, [which] literally means (with syn) “suffering” (pathos)” (p.314). Adam Smith “took the position that sympathy was an innate endowment, instigated by the perception of the fortunes of others whom one wants to see happy” (Wispe, 1986, p.314). This definition of sympathy does not require action beyond experiencing varied levels of sorrowful emotion for one's fellows.

David Hume and Adam Smith are credited with introducing the concept of empathy to behavioral science. Empathy is a two-step process that begins with sympathy and progresses to imagining how another person’s pain actually feels. The term empathy is derived from the Greek word empatheia, which means passion. The term was later adapted by Hermann Lotze and Robert Vischer into the German word *Einfühlung* which means “feeling into.” Theitcner translated the word into the English word, empathy. He proposed that empathy could be viewed both as “a way of knowing another’s affect” and “a kind of social cognitive bonding” (Wispe, 1986, p.316).

It can be argued that the ability to empathize with others is what allows human beings who are distinctly different in terms of class, race and gender to collaborate with one another. According to Davis (1996), “almost all members of our species... possess the ability to imagine perspectives or to experience compassion for
distressed others” (p.444). Despite differences in their experiences, humans possess at their core a primal biological capacity to choose to care for others.

**Performance Arts and Performance Art**

The performance arts have long been a mode of expressing the emotions of humankind through varied art forms such as theatre, dance, spoken word and music. The performance arts typically include movement, theatre, and voice structured into storylines that follow a traditional beginning, middle and end. In contrast, performance art is “a nontraditional art form often with political or topical themes, [and... typically features a live presentation to an audience or onlookers (as on a street) and draws on such arts as acting, poetry, music, dance, or painting” (as defined in Merriman Webster dictionary).

The performance art genre emerged in western culture in the 1960's and 1970's and forced audiences to view theatre in a new light. Audiences were required to look at the meaning behind the content and develop a connection with the performance piece or presenters on stage. Although master artists may take decades to perfect their craft, performance art is an easily transferable form. It can be taught to the general public regardless of previous exposure or sophistication. I chose this genre as a medium, specifically focusing on how acting, spoken word, and visual art can encourage empathy driven epiphanies in high-risk young adults.

The non-traditional aspect of performance art frees facilitators to encourage novice artists to genuinely express individual beliefs and sentiments through a form of their choice. This can help them access emotions and thoughts that are either submerged or deemed as a non-priority. According to Foster (2007), “one means by
which we can interpret our lives is through intuitively analyzing our own emotive experiences” (p.15). Performance art centered workshops allow participants to access emotions and re-interpret them through an artistic lens. In doing so, young adults are able to experience and analyze their emotions through creative/dramatic mediums. The analysis of individual experiences can then be used to encourage young adults to envision the emotive experiences of others.

**Neurological Support for Performance Arts and Empathy**

Researchers have long investigated the connections that performance art has with the evolution of human empathy. James S. Catteral compiled a significant amount of research geared toward validating the positive effects that performance arts can have on young adults. In a 12-year longitudinal study of neuroscience and the art of human empathy, Catteral (2011) and his researchers found data to support the claim that empathy can be cultivated through the arts and produce positive outcomes for high-risk students. He drew data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 which “describes the arts experiences of youth over middle and high school as well as long term statuses through age 26” (p. 1). Additionally he studied Jean Decity and Phillip L. Jackson’s 2004 meta analysis “outlining the neural architecture of empathy, and a systematic review of recent studies exploring the neurosciences of visual and performing arts experiences” (p.1).

Their findings revealed that arts centered programs encourage young adults to invest in personal and community growth. According to Catteral (2011) “Students deeply engaged in the visual and performing arts during middle and high school
reported significantly and more pro-social or empathetic behavior as young adults.”

The increased attention to others also inspired civic responsibility within participants. Catteral observed that “high school art students were 15 percent more likely to register to vote, and more than 30 percent more likely to have voted in the most recent presidential election...” (p.4). According to the data, exposure to the arts generated investments in self and community as well as prosocial behavioral patterns in high-risk students.

The question that Catteral and his team were left with was how to display these new interests in self and community in neurological terms. According to Catteral (2011) “performance art (s) involve representations that convey much of what day to day experience brings...with ample opportunity for observers, players and the artists themselves to engage in self and other understandings.” (p.9). This engagement creates patterns of sense memory that activate the “neuro-architecture of empathy” (Catteral, p.9). Researchers were able to narrow down which areas of the brain were mostly activated when students were repeatedly exposed to performance arts centered activities. “The common areas of activation included: the prefrontal cortex, the parietal junction, and the anterior cingulate cortex” (Catteral, p. 13). The prefrontal cortex rests in the frontal lobe and is largely credited for monitoring cognitive behaviors such as emotional and appropriate social expression.

According to Catteral, the anterior cingulate cortex is located in the frontal cortex and is thus far believed to be responsible for sympathetic, emphatic, and goal
directed behaviors. Utilizing fFmri imaging, Catteral and his researchers observed that exposure to the arts consistently lit up the frontal areas of the brain. They determined that the fFmri images could be interpreted as the beginning of pro social behavior patterns that eventually could produce empathy driven actions. They concluded that people “empathize because of what we see, feel, and mirror in another’s symbols. But the human voice carries emotion as well as feeling that may mix with other signals prompting empathic response...the arts have provided an essential species survival advantage of enabling us to empathetically connect and succeed together” (Catteral, 2011,p. 12). Performance art enables human voices to connect and relate to one another. This relation is what allows the empathy centers of the learner’s brain to develop.

Current neuroscientific links between empathy and the arts do not provide indisputable evidence that arts driven programs facilitate the development of empathy in participants. However, the research does document increased activity in the frontal brain regions associated with empathy. Additionally, several studies performed on young people in high-risk environments show increased prosocial behavior amongst students who were living in high-risk environments and were originally believed to exhibit asocial apathetic behavioral patterns (Baston, 2012; Hornbeck, 1996).

In this section I address how the research conducted by Regan and Totten (1975) creates a foundation for introducing the concept of empathy to high-risk students. I also discuss the impact that exploratory empathy sessions could have on transient youth in non-traditional settings. In 1994 University of Michigan
researchers published a study indicating that empathy could indeed be taught and measured in high school students. Hatcher et al. (1994) surmised that students were more apt to experience empathy when placed in controlled environments with fellow students and teachers who had experience in peer mediation.

Although researchers are able to show indications of empathic growth within students in controlled environments, there are few studies that indicate how empathy can be measured in non-traditional learning environments. Statistical measures of New York City’s high school graduation rates indicate that of 79,476 students in the same four-year cohort, 9,631 of those students dropped out of school (Dept. of education NYC statistical measure, Retrieved December 27, 2012, http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/GraduationDropoutReports/default.htm). A study conducted by the Scott Foundation for Public Education indicated that African American and Hispanic male students in New York had the worst four-year high school graduation rates. According to this report only 37% of Black and Hispanic males were graduating from high school in four years (Scott Foundation). Those students who fall away from traditional educational centers often find themselves in community based programs. In these non-traditional settings they learn how to engage in productive activities geared towards improving their overall welfare.

Dennis T. Regan and Judith Totten (1975) provide a framework for interpreting how observers who have fallen away from highly structured systems can be led toward experiencing the empathy of which they are capable. They theorize that by providing intentional commands to empathize for a target person,
participants will be more inclined to empathize with the target.

The researchers devised a study in which participants were told to empathize with a person whom they were watching via videotape; they found that “subjects who witnessed the conversation after receiving empathy instructions provided relatively more situational and less dispositional” (Regan and Totten, 1975, p.854) attributions about the person they were viewing. Thus, participants did not need to be taught empathy they simply needed to practice it. This leads to the natural assumption that if the concept of empathy can be introduced through a simple directive, then perhaps it can also be trained, shaped and cultivated.

Thus, constructing a performance art workshop based on the principles employed by Regan and Totten should provide positive outcomes for transient high-risk populations. Catteral’s (2012) analysis of arts achievement and high risk youth revealed that, “young adults who had intensive arts experiences in high school are more likely to show civic minded behavior than young adults who did not. They take an interest in current affairs, as evidenced by comparatively high levels of volunteering, voting, and engagement with local or school politics” (p.18). That is, the arts provide just enough structure to allow disconnected youth opportunities to cultivate empathy for a society they originally rejected.
The following sections display Performances Art workshop and methodology used to engage youth at the Hudson Guild Community Center and the Ali Forney Center.

At the end of each section, a summary of findings describes the effectiveness of performance art strategies in cultivating empathy within participants.
Methodology

The Hudson Guild – How Voice Develops

The Hudson Guild is a multi-service community center in the Chelsea neighborhood of New York City. The center serves approximately 14,000 people a year and prides itself on providing services that are academically and socially beneficial for low income residents of the Chelsea community. According to its mission statement, the Hudson Guild aims to, “create and sustain a strong, effective community that acknowledges and responds to the potential, achievements and interdependence of its diverse members” (Hudson Guild of New York, 2012).

In an effort to bridge the gap between race and economic class divisions, directors of the Hudson Guild partnered with El Museo Del Barrio, a museum committed to using arts programming as a medium to unite multicultural communities. El Museo provides residencies for public schools and community centers that challenge students to take pride in their community and personal cultural heritage. The mission is delivered through Classroom Connections, a program that connects teaching artists with staff members from partnering educational institutions to produce relevant programming for students. “These partners design and implement programs that enable participating students to develop and apply their visual literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills to subjects they are studying at school while exploring their own culture and identity” (El Museo del Barrio Museum, 2012).

I created a residency for the Hudson Guild that consisted of eight theatre arts workshops designed to engage young adult GED students from multicultural
backgrounds and help them invest in themselves. In order to create a curriculum that would fit the needs of the students, I scheduled several meetings with Arts Therapy director Jennifer Johnson and Arts Therapy intern Jenifer Friede. I worked closely with Jennifer Friede during weekly sessions to collaborate on a curriculum that would develop unity within the GED group. Following our meeting and the observations that I conducted of the GED group, we agreed that the best way to achieve group cohesion would be to create a project that would encourage students to explore their sense of self.

Our choice was grounded by research conducted by facilitators for the Positive Youth Development Institute, (PDYI). The facilitators at PDYI believe that “young people need opportunities to engage in meaningful activities, have a voice, take responsibility for their actions, and actively participate in civic discourse” (Positive Youth Development Project, 2011). Accordingly, I created a performance and visual art workshop entitled, The Color of my Voice, which allowed participants to explore what their voices looked and sounded like. I utilized community walks, monologues, and videography to explore how one’s voice could be heard and accepted by the community at large.

The following section outlines the goals and activities of the eight-week performance art workshop I facilitated at The Hudson Guild of New York.

**The Process: Workshop Title- The Color of My voice**

**Residency Goal:**

In each session, students were exposed to examples of visual and performance art that showed how people could be heard. The goal was to use these examples as a springboard to encourage students to find out where their voices fit within their community. Students were asked to explore what it felt like when they thought their
voices were not being heard in their community. If the students lived in the neighborhood near Hudson Guild, they were encouraged to write about what it felt like to see the neighborhood change. They were asked to consider how they felt when neighborhood organic food stores took over sites once occupied by family owned bodegas. Students were encouraged to speak candidly about how presence of White people in their community impacted what was once their neighborhood. They were asked for examples of how performance art could be used to express their frustration toward changes within their community.

**Creative Skills and/or Visual art skills**

**Theatre Sessions:** Students viewed live and recorded performances to see how performance art could be used as a tool to help spectators empathize with the artist’s cause. Students learned how to translate their fears, desires, and feelings of isolation into words that were then structured into works that could be performed.

**Visual Art Sessions:** Partnering Art Therapist intern, Jennifer Freide, expanded upon work done in theatre class by teaching students to seek out objects in their community that they closely identified with. Students translated the objects into found art pieces or photographed and turned them into portraits. The pieces they created served as backdrops for the monologues they created about how their voices fit into society.

**Creative Terms used in Workshop**

**Performance:** “The fulfillment of a claim, promise, or request”(as defined by Webster Dictionary).

**Performance Art as defined by facilitator:** When actors fulfill a claim to themselves that their voices have purpose in this world, they promise themselves to not to be silenced. The art they create is their request to their community to be heard, loved, and valued.

**Visual Testimony:** A visual picture, sculpture or object that displays how the artist feels about the community around them.

**Theatrical Testimony:** A performance that consists of a monologue or spoken word piece in which performers provide personal accounts about how the community has shaped their voice.

**Gentrification:** “The process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents” (as defined by Webster Dictionary).

**Activist Art:** Art produced by artists to express communal concerns.

**Rituals and Routines:**
In the beginning of each session, we gathered in a circle for a check in. Students described how they believed their voice sounded on that day. They drew upon a variety of objects (ex. basketball bouncing on floor could be the sound of a voice) to
describe individual voices. Sessions ended with an Ashe circle (Ashe- Yoruba command that allows what is said in the circle to come to pass) in which students spoke about one positive aspect of why their voice mattered in their community and/or what the community would be like without their voice.

**Session 1**
**Date:** Monday, March 26, 2012  
**Theme:** (Storytelling)  
**Guiding Question:** The importance of being heard

The following ethnic groups were represented in the session: Panamanian, Russian, Asian American, Blackfoot Native Black American, Non ethnic specific Latina, British, White American and Senegalese.

**Activity:** I performed a piece about a student who is upset about how his- story (history) was being explained by his teacher. He rebelled against the system and faced a consequence. Based on notes taken during observations, students believed that the character was upset because he wasn’t being heard. Students were deeply impacted by the performance and several students admitted to identifying with the character. Two of the young Black men in class admitted that when they get singled out as disruptive for asking questions, they assume it is because they are Black.

Following the discussion, students split into pairs and drew outlines of each other’s body. They wrote assumptions that people make about them on the outside of the outline. Inside the outline they wrote positive aspects of their voice that often go unheard because people do not venture beyond their superficial assumptions. Following the activity, students were able to see discrepancies between the way they judged other students and the way those students saw themselves. Students remarked that the activity helped them to see past their personal prejudices.

**Session 2**
**Date:** Thursday, March 29, 2012  
**Theme:** (IDENTITY)  
**Guiding Question:** What does my voice sound like?

**Activity:** At the community center, new students would often flow in and out of workshop sessions. Today we received two new female students. Students recapped for new students what they did in our last session. We began with our opening ritual and spoke briefly about what it means to choose how we identify. I asked students if they were ever positively or negatively judged by society based on their appearances. The students unanimously agreed that they were often negatively judged because they chose to wear jeans, high top sneakers, and hoodies. I told the students that we would be exploring the color of our voices. We would question how societal perceptions affects self-perception.
The art therapists and I encouraged students to choose a location in their community where they felt like their voices were challenged the most. The students voted on going to the Highline Public Park, a popular tourist spot located in the upwardly mobile Chelsea neighborhood. The Highline Park is only one block away from the Hudson Guild Community Center, which is located in the neighborhood’s City Housing Project Building.

The students were instructed to split up once at the park and take pictures of people or objects that depicted how their presence was accepted or not accepted in the public space.

Visitors at the Highline Park in Chelsea

Hudson Guild participant allegedly bumped by gentleman on the left at the Highline Park in Chelsea.
This session allowed students to visually document a stranger’s initial reaction to their presence. They were then able to vocalize how they felt within the confines of a safe environment established by the facilitator. The images above were taking by a young man who identified as Black American. Two gentlemen at the park allegedly bumped into him without apologizing. Later the student shared that, “It was not just that he pushed me, he didn’t realize that I was there and I felt like I was like nothing and nobody” (Isaiah, personal communication, May 2012). Providing this student with the opportunity to voice his frustrations encouraged other students to take risks by sharing their personal struggles. Several students shared how they felt when they were racially or culturally profiled. Following this session, students expressed relief at having an opportunity to share their frustrations. As a result of the work done in Session 2, participants started committing to coming to sessions on a regular basis.

Session 3
Date: April 2, 2012
Theme: (INCLUSION)
Guiding Question: How does my voice fit in my community?
Activity: Students gathered around the objects or photographs they brought in from their trip to the Highline Park. Students shared that they felt that the Highline Park sent mixed messages to the community. They expressed that the park was supposed to be public space, yet they felt, or were made to feel, like outsiders. I asked them how they thought their voices could fit into a community in which they did not feel welcome. I introduced them to performance artist Ping Chong and shared a video performance of his Undesirable Elements-Secret History series. Following the video, students reflected aloud about their reactions and how the performance related to their experience at the Highline Park.
The class responded with what they thought the commonly held stereotype of their culture was. We discussed how negative and positive perceptions could help to enhance the performance art monologues they were now eager to construct using Ping Chong’s model to help frame their frustrations in dramatic text.

Resource:

Ping Chong Undesirable Elements- Secret History Excerpt

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhsHaVuFWbs

Session 4
Date: April 5, 2012
Theme: (Vision and Inspiration)
How can your experience in these sessions so far translate into a performance piece?

The students gathered into groups to brainstorm about how they would like to express their voices through words and/or art.

The following two prompts began the brainstorming segment:
1. When people look at me they might think of me as .........
2. When I think of my voice and what the community would be like without my voice I think of...

They each read their piece individually and the other students offered constructive criticism on how to further develop the piece. Then the students gathered on a mock stage and rehearsed how to integrate their pieces into a collective performance. Students were invested in being heard but still had some hesitation about sharing their voices with the general public. The rituals that we established in our opening and closing circles were beginning to take root. I observed students taking initiative by leading opening and closing circles. If I missed a ritual element, they were quick to remind me of the correct order in which opening and closings were supposed to be performed.

Session 5
Date: April 19, 2012 /STUDENT TRIP TO EL MUSEO
Theme: (Vision and Inspiration)
How do the pieces from El Museo’s collection inspire you to create a performance piece of your own?
Artists Presented: Variety of Artists from testimonies
Activity: Students took a trip to El Museo Del Barrio and participated in a walking tour given by the teaching artist. They were encouraged to document their reactions and reflect on how the works could help them further develop their monologues.

Featured works: The exhibit-featured works by trained and untrained artists. The artists expressed their activism through the arts. They considered their art form as a subtle means of relaying a message to a wide variety of people in engaging ways.

Students gravitated towards two visual art forms. El Casitas, which were little houses, built by Latinos in New York to celebrate their culture while in homogenized American environments. The second medium were the “Chilean arpilleras, small tapestries made from leftover cloth that told the stories of a variety of human rights abuses at the hands of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. In Spanish, "arpillera" means "burlap" (El Museo del Barrio, 2012).

Students expressed feelings of solidarity while visiting the exhibit. Several students shared that they felt encouraged that people from other cultures experienced similar situations in terms of race, class and social injustice. They were encouraged to continue in their journeys to express their voices through visual and performance art. After the exhibit, they inquired about how they could incorporate elements of the artwork into their pieces. They began to see how their stories and feelings of rejection, fear and hopelessness were emotions expressed by people across nations.

Dancing at Casitas, Eljat Feuer
Session 6  
**Date:** Thursday, April 23, 2012  
**Theme:** Vision and Inspiration that encourages performance  
**Activity:** Students began with their opening circle and concluded the session with a closing circle. Although a week had passed since their museum visit, the experience remained vivid. One student who struggled with feelings of exclusion had this to say, “I never thought that Puerto Ricans could do good things” (Anonymous, personal communication, April 23, 2012). The participant admitted to being Puerto Rican and said that she felt ashamed because she did not have positive Puerto Rican role models in her life. Visiting El Museo and seeing the Casitas celebrate Latino life allowed her to take pride in who she was and deal with some of the stereotypes she had accepted of herself and her people.

Following the group discussion students continued to develop monologues from previous session.

Session 7  
**Date:** Thursday, April 26, 2012  
**Theme:** Vision and Inspiration that inspires performance  
**Activity:** Students continued to develop pieces from previous session

Session 8  
**Date:** Monday, April 30, 2012  
**Theme:** My Voice, My Testimony, My Vision, My Community  
**Activity:** Students presented their piece to Hudson Guild Arts Therapy Director Jennifer Johnson and invited guests. The piece that they performed combined the original stereotypes they had constructed for themselves and others with personal testimonies about how they identify. In conjunction with their monologues, they
included visual art pieces that they created to help express their feelings about their voices and how voice connects them to community.

*Final day of workshop, participants present for invited administrators and get feedback on their work.*

The following is a partially transcribed interview recorded on December 2012 with a multi-ethnic male Hudson Guild GED workshop participant named Brian. The post workshop interview provided a general sense of the impact the workshop had on select students. Brian’s explanation of his positive experience during the workshop supports Foster’s hypothesis that beginning with exploration of voice in high risk populations can potentially shift perceptions of how individuals self identify and view others.
Nancy Moricette- Teaching Artist/ Workshop Facilitator  
Brian- Hudson Guild Program and Workshop Participant

Nancy: So how did you feel about the Color of my Voice Project?

Brian: I thought it was good.... it was like a different way of expressing yourself. Normally I would express myself in a different way ... I never expressed my self through drawings or acting... it was definitely something different?

Brian: Tell me about what you did specifically?  
It goes um... I had a dream it's like one... the top half of the portrait is day and the other half is night... and you have pyramids and then you have the stars...and clouds and stuff like.... that...(Brian drew a portrait of clouds for the installation piece that accompanied his monologue)

Nancy: Did your perception of yourself change after participating in the workshop?

Brian: Yeah I realized that after the project I wasn’t afraid to express myself more in front of other people. I am a multi-talented person when it comes to mediums... lately. Now I have been doing things through lyrics... I keep a really big book now with all of my lyrics.

Nancy: How did your perception change of other people in the group after learning about their experiences?

Brian: Elhadji (A recent immigrant from Senegal)... he seemed black but at the same time he spoke French and I was like... woaaaaahh...

I learned that ... don’t be quick to judge people, and that you... You can’t just put every one in the same category.

Nancy: What do you think that people in society think about you when they see you now.... after taking the group?

Brian: I think they see something else... It's like they are like...there is something about that guy..." (In an initial conversation with Brian he participated in a group where he stated that he felt that people judged him based on how he looks, and that he sometimes felt negatively effected by that)

Nancy: Why do you think that is?

Brian: ummmm I am just not afraid to do my own stuff anymore. I have a lot more confidence than I did before... It comes with a little bit of ego though.... (laughs) but you gotta stay humble.... stay humble by remembering that everyone is different
Nancy: What did you think about the workshop overall? Would you have changed anything?

Brian: I liked the experience...if someone were to leave or disappear from the group it would have been different because I learned that everyone's input matters, it was like, a life changing experience or changing the perception of the way I see the world....

Nancy: What are you up to now?

Brian: I completed the GED program and am going to Duchess Community College next year. I am going to go back to Hudson from time to time, because they really helped me a lot...and I wanna just stay in contact.

Hudson Guild staff also noticed the positive impact that the workshop had on their students. Art Therapy intern and Hudson Guild group facilitator, Jennifer Friede had this to say:

“The nature of the program (at Hudson Guild requires) people constantly coming in and out. I felt like they [GED students] gained a lot of group cohesion during the project. It felt like they were all in it as much as they could be, for GED students they showed a lot of allegiance to the project...that was the most that I had seen. The project kept them engaged and kept them coming,” (J. Friede, personal communication, December 2012).

Results

Performance Art was used as a medium to encourage GED students to connect to their neighborhoods and explore their voice. They learned how to write self-reflective monologues and produce visually stimulating performance art pieces. Throughout the workshop, I realized that the key to increasing student investment in the GED program was to increase their investment in themselves. I began the process by honoring their voices. It was important for them to know that their
voices mattered. In the workshop, they developed a communal trust that challenged their previously held perceptions of self and external communities.

Beginning with voice proved to be an effective method for creating an empathy driven arts workshop. According to Foster (2007), one cannot achieve authentic results from at risk communal groups without including them in the skill development process. She suggests that participants must be offered a vehicle “to develop new skills and maintain an element of control in expressing their experience and feelings” (p. 13). Beginning with voice and including community perspective begins the process that promotes a “democratic and transformative approach ...giving voice to those involved in the research process, hence improving the lives of individuals, ameliorating communities, and ultimately, liberating the oppressed” (Foster, 2007, p.14). This workshop encouraged participants to foster an environment where they felt empowered. As a result, they were more inclined to invest in themselves and what others had to say.
The Ali Forney Center-Cultivating Empathy through Storytelling Workshops

The Ali Forney Center (AFC) is a non-for profit agency that provides short-term and long-term housing for homeless Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) youth of color. Carl Sicialiano founded Ali Forney in 2002 in response to the unsolved murder of a young transgender Black American youth named Ali He’shu Forney. Ali He’shu Forney, an advocate for HIV and LGBTQ rights, was fatally shot on December 5, 1997 in front of a housing project on East 131st in New York City. Sicialiano founded AFC to honor the memory and life work of Forney and to help provide safe spaces for LGBTQ youth of color.

Data sources for this descriptive pilot case study were conducted over a two-
month period. The data collected consisted of transcribed interviews, participatory observations, field notes, archival records and journal entries. The study was exclusively conducted, with permission from the site director, at an Emergency Housing AFC facility in Brooklyn, New York. Residents at the two story, twenty bed residential facility were permitted to stay for two months, with the possibility of receiving a month extension if they could not secure permanent housing. During the study the Brooklyn site served nineteen residents who identified as Black or Latino and one resident who identified as White American. According to AFC case records, residents in the house all experienced some form of rejection from relatives for choosing to identify as LGBTQ and as a result were driven from their homes.

According to AFC intake data, approximately 50% of the residents living in the facility resorted to stealing and trading sex for food or clothing to survive in New York. Once residents secured housing in the AFC site, their activities in sex work or theft continued and was not directly addressed because the agency operated under a harm reduction model.

“Harm reduction (or less commonly known as harm minimization) refers to a range of public health policies designed to reduce the harmful consequences associated with human behaviors, even if those behaviors are risky or illegal. Examples of behaviors targeted for harm reduction policies include recreational drug use and prostitution. Criticism of harm reduction typically centers on concerns that tolerating risky or illegal behavior sends a message to the community that these behaviors are acceptable (as cited in Wikipedia, 2012).
I decided to construct a workshop based on empathy instillation methods established by Regan and Totten in their research. Regan and Totten believed that participants could be led to empathic results through basic instructions to imagine life from a subject’s perspective. In this section I describe the methodology I used to develop empathy in AFC’s high-risk adult population using storytelling, reality TV and direct commands.

I was the researcher in this study and also served as one of two youth counselors charged with monitoring twenty residents in the facility. As a result, I often had a participatory role in workshops. Residents were encouraged to discuss what their opinions were of empathy. Additionally, they were encouraged to discuss how they thought empathy could apply to their lives.

Workshops were conducted during 90-minute sessions on Sunday afternoons during residential downtime. The workshops were optional and as a result, residents were not required to attend. Workshop attendance consisted of approximately seven residents; of those residents two residents were present for all sessions. Initially the purpose of this case study centered on exploring the impact that arts driven programs could have on cultivating empathy in high-risk populations. However, the data collected during five ninety-minute workshops, interviews, and archival records provided data that transformed the study into a pilot case study. Interviews conducted with youth counselors were recorded in a semi private staff office at the AFC Brooklyn housing facility. Youth Counselors were not permitted to be completely isolated from clients. As a result, residents would occasionally interrupt the interviewing process. Interruptions rarely occurred and if
they did the interviewer would stop to maintain the confidential nature of what was being discussed. Residents were interviewed in the same location and experienced fewer interruptions. Additional youth counselors on duty intercepted clients before they could interrupt the resident interviewing process. The pilot case study I initiated at AFC could lend itself to a more extensive case study that could be conducted in the future.

This section contains excerpts of workshop setup, observations and interviews selected from the pilot case study. The following section outlines the goals and activities of the five-week performance art workshop I facilitated at the Ali Forney Center in Brooklyn.

**Session 1:** I introduced the concept of empathy through the reality television show *The Bad Girls Club*. *The Bad Girls Club* is a reality television show created by Mary Ellis Burnam and Jonathan Murray. The show features seven young women with extreme psychological and social adjustment issues. They live under one roof and are filmed as they sabotage one another in an attempt to get individuals kicked out of the house.

Resource

You Tube *The Bad Girls Club* Excerpt: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-pQBw8F6jw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-pQBw8F6jw)

I asked the residents to choose one person in the series to empathize with, and to think about what they thought the culture of the *Bad Girls Club* community was. The following is an excerpt from an observation taking from this session:

*YC Nancy = Youth Counselor Nancy Moricette*
YC Nancy: What do you think empathy is?

Third Resident: Empathy is like when you can put yourself in somebody else’s shoes.

YC Nancy: Yes Exactly. How would you all define culture? Do you think that as residents in this house who identify as LGBTQ you have your own culture?

Residents remain quiet for about thirty seconds.

Resident 5: Culture is like the color of your skin.

Resident 3: Nah it’s like hip-hop can be it’s on culture.

YC Nancy: Well some people believe you are both right, most people define culture as “a sharing of language, customs, or arts in a dominant group. A sub-culture is set of customs followed by a group within the dominant culture” (Read from dictionary on iPhone).

Resident 1: Yes, we do have a culture in this house, like when we curse we don’t mean it that’s just how we talk.

Residents needed to come up with a definition of empathy and culture on their own before I could begin asking them questions about empathizing with the women represented in the episode. Once they were able to do this they were more willing to describe how watching violent media, like Bad Girls Club, could affect how they speak and act in their personal environments. I incorporated the strategies practiced by Regan & Totten, to initiate empathy geared thinking within the group. In doing so empathy driven conversation was able to flourish on a superficial level. However, it was too early for the construct of empathy to begin to take root.
**Session 2:** A single viewing of video of Shirley Jackson’s short film *The Lottery* followed by an in depth discussion. Residents had a grasp of the concept of empathy and could now be shown an example of what a society without empathy looked like.

Based on AFC records residents often partake in violent verbal and physical fights in the house. As a result, they began to consider moderate violence as an acceptable social norm. I wanted them to see an example of the potential consequence that results from a community’s acceptance of a violent social norm. I showed them the short film and asked the residents present to compare and contrast the film to their lives.

Based on notes taken from my observation, residents were not pleased with the viewing. I notated in my journal the following “Kammie and Nikkie laid on the couch in silence…Nikki said,” Miss…why would you us that?” (as cited in researcher observational notes, November 2012).

I was surprised that the residents reacted so intensely to the movie. I asked them to relate it to their lives and according to one resident; the movie shocked her because the people in the town “looked like nice people”(Kammie, personal communication, November 2012). This observation supports Regan and Totten’s (1975) initial hypothesis that observers “make superficial observations of target groups based on appearances” (p.851).

I wanted to get them to see past social stereotypes and realize that as humans we all share basic qualities of character in common. We are capable of good, bad, empathy and apathy. The roles we are given in life are not set in stone and do not have to be dictated by the environment we are in.

**Resources:**
Larry Yust’s short film *The Lottery*
Part 1
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plm93Xuij7k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plm93Xuij7k)
Part 2
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMhV3fwx5Sg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMhV3fwx5Sg)

**Session 3:** I conducted an open discussion on how session one and session two affected them thus far. Due to scheduling issues two weeks passed since the last workshop and residents were not eager to enter into a conversation. I cut the session short and told them they would be part of a live storytelling performance for the next session.
Session 4: I performed a Haitian Folk tale entitled Mother of The Waters. The story relays the tale of a young girl who loses her family and must therefore rely on an ill-tempered benefactor. Her fate changes and she is given two options to maintain her survival. She has to choose to show compassion for another creature or be cruel to it in order to maintain her current standing.

The performance required audience participation and residents were not too happy about this initially. However, once the injustices in the story were reveled they became more excited as the story progressed. A fellow youth counselor stated that he “observed different behaviors from different groups…. as the story progressed and as you (the facilitator, Nancy Moricette) started to get really into it people sort of became really interested because it was a really interesting story” (R. Williams, personal communication, November 11, 2012). I did not consider how the level of investment on the facilitator’s part affected how participants would react to a performance piece. Although this was a children’s tale, residents were deeply impacted by the story and partook in a lively discussion following the performance. They were asked how they could apply themes from the story to their lives. They created drafts of stories to be used for a storytelling workshop to be conducted in the next session.

Session 5 (Final Session): Residents drew from examples from the first four sessions to create a story about what it meant to be homeless and a survivor. Residents were enthusiastic about composing the story but did not want to perform it once they finished writing it. I asked each of them to share a line from the piece
that they created. Although they did share, they seemed to be afraid of being vulnerable in front of the other residents. I thanked them for combining their stories to write a story based on the culture of people represented in the house. I ended with a closing circle. I thanked each participant for his or her personal contribution to the group. Residents were pleased with this ending; some hugged the facilitator as they departed from the group.

Residents living in the Ali Forney Shelter system appeared to erect walls to prevent outsiders from accessing inner truths they had already established for themselves. In retrospect the workshop could have benefited from beginning the session by allowing them to explore their voices. Although I did not focus on voice in this workshop, exploration of empathy through media and storytelling also proved to be effective. One resident remarked that during the storytelling sessions,
“the people in the group...they were listening, they were attentive, they wanted to discover the point of the story” (Kammie, personal communication, November 11, 2012). She admitted that this sort of behavior is rare because there were always so many distractions in the house. Although she did not want to tell her own story she revealed that she had a better grasp of empathy and how to apply it to household situations. She observed that “empathy is only shown in this house if someone is brought to tears” (Kammie, personal communication, November 11, 2012). She was able to realize the extreme circumstances that needed to be in place for residents to empathize for one another. She chose not to characterize the person brought to tears, instead she commented on the environment that brought about such an outcome. This leads me to believe that employing Regan and Totten’s method during the workshop allowed her a broader perspective in assessing her environment. According to Regan and Totten (1975), “when actors or observers saw a videotape from a different point of view, they may have received some totally new information” (p.851). This new information counters previously made assumptions subjects make about an environment or person. This particular resident was exposed to new perspectives presented in the form of deconstruction of culture through reality TV and empathy through film and storytelling. The performances engaged the participant and she therefore was able to slightly expand her perspective on how empathy played out in her environment.
**Voice + Storytelling= Empathy Driven Performance Art Workshop**

To be clear I do not profess that performance art can teach high-risk youth empathy. However, based on results gathered from observations at the Hudson Guild and the Ali Forney Center I believe the concept of empathy can be authentically introduced to at risk youth in meaningful ways. Based on principles practiced by Foster, Regan and Totten, I devised an empathy driven workshop model that should empower young people by honoring their voices. Activating young adults sense of self creates an opportunity for them to broaden their perspective and explore how personal narratives relate to their communities.

The following table depicts the ideal stages that should be employed to begin fostering empathy in high-risk youth through the performance art:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Begin with Foster’s approach: Empower participants by allowing them to explore their community, their voice and how the two relate to each other.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Progress to Regan/Totten approach: Provide participants with an image from popular media (i.e. Bad Girls Club) and direct them to empathize with character depicted on the screen. Provide space for reflections afterwards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Provide performance art samples (live performance or recorded performance) of performance artists who used their art to share their perspective with the world.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Create a space where participants can model performances after performance art samples they were inspired by.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>Provide participants with a space to share their voice with an audience. Supporting Foster’s theory that shared experience between performer and audience creates a space that generates empathic results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The workshop stages listed above was constructed from activities taken from Hudson Guild and Ali Forney sessions that produced the most empathic outcomes within program participants. In order to achieve ideal results, the workshop should contain two-hour sessions conducted during a weekly period, over the course of two months. The only major requirement that is vital to the workshops success is that sessions are conducted in sequence without disruption. For instance, if the session is conducted at a facility that gives students time off for spring break, the time away from the project could have a negative impact on maintaining student engagement.
The following workshop model provides a framework where empathy can be cultivated through performance art. This workshop model was created from best practices obtained from previously held workshops at the Hudson Guild and the Ali Forney Center.

**HG-Concept derived from Hudson Guild Workshop**

**AF- Concept derived from Ali Forney Qualitative Study**

**Session 1**

**Time:** 1 ½ - 2 hour session

**Featured Performance Art Sample:** Teaching Artist will perform a monologue excerpt from JASPORA/Imitation One Woman show about a Haitian girl’s struggle against completely assimilating into American Culture, written and performed by Nancy Moricette. The character being presented is named, David.

**HG: Ritual opening and closing:** Students will begin each session gathered in a circle and stating their name, what the color of their voice is and what it sounds like. Students within the Ashe circle will give thanks for the thoughts and or performances that were brought forth that day. They will do this by gathering in the circle, and mentioning an adjective that describes how they felt about what took place during the session. Adjectives could be positive or negative. The session ends with all students saying Ashe in unison.

**HG-Guiding Question:** How important is it for you to be heard? Do you feel like your voice is honored in society? If so, how?

**Activity:** Facilitator will ask participants to define empathy? Once everyone in the session has a grasp of what empathy means, facilitator will pass out sheets of paper with this command written on it: (When you are watching David imagine how he feels when his voice is not being heard? Empathize with him. (This is taken from the Regan/Totten (1975) theory that “an empathic orientation would make observers more likely to provide situational attributions” (p.853) to the individual being viewed.

Following performance facilitator will ask the following questions:

What were you first impressions about this character?
Do you think his voice was being heard?
How do you think not being heard made him feel?
Do you empathize with this character? If so, why? If you do not want to comment aloud, write down your responses on the space provided on paper. I will come around and collect the responses and read them anonymously, and we can discuss further.

During the last half hour of the session students will pair up and draw outlines of their partner on chart paper. The person who is drawing the outline will write words that he or she thinks best describes the person being drawn. Participants could also write down how they think that person is viewed based on how they dress or act. Individuals being drawn will then write within the outline a truth about themselves that others may not see. Everyone in the group will have an outline drawn of them. Outlines will remain hung in the space and can have descriptors added to it throughout the week.

Session will close with Ashe circle.

**Session 2**

**Time:** 1 ½ -2 hour session

**Featured Performance Art Sample:** AF- Reality Television Show, *The Bad Girls Club* Created by Mary Ellis Burnam and Jonathan Murray. The show features seven young women with extreme psychological and social adjustment issues. They live under roof and are filmed as they sabotage one another in an attempt to get individuals kicked out of the house.

[Resource](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-pQBw8F6jw)

**HG: Opening and Closing Ritual:** Students begin each session gathered in a circle and stating their name, what the color of their voice is and what it sounds like. Students close each day with an Ashe circle where they give thanks for the thoughts and or performances that were brought forth that day.

**Addendum to Opening:** Following opening activity participants will be directed to add additional comments to hanging outlines from previous week. If they cannot think of an adjective they can add one at any time during the session.

**AF-Guiding Question:** What do you think culture is? What are some of the elements that make up an environmental culture? Does your environment dictate how you empathize for others?
**Activity:** Students will pair off with their previously set partners to watch *Bad Girls Club*. Before the viewing begins a member from each group will be instructed to empathize with either Natalie or Portia from the video clip. Pairs will write a monologue from that character’s perspective and present for class in a performance art format of their choosing.

Following the performance, participants will be asked to reflect on what role they play in influencing behaviors of people in various communities that they inhabit.

**Weekly Challenge:** Encourage students to actively refrain from using a word that encourages un-empathic behavior. Examples: Not partaking in watching jump crews beat up on their victims on YouTube or not taking part in a conversation that puts some one down.

Session will close with Ashe circle.

**Session 3**

**Time:** 1 ½ -2 hour session

**Featured Performance Art Sample:** *AF- Larry Yust’s The Lottery* Based on Short Story by Shirley Jackson. The story depicts a small town that strictly follows a town tradition without knowing how it originated or why they continue to practice it. The tradition requires the head of each household from the town to draw lots. A respected townsman draws the ill-fated black mark, which means that some one in his family must die at the hands of townspeople. In the end his wife draws the black dot that signifies that she must die. Her family and friends stone her to death while she objects to the unfairness of her death.

**Resource**
- YouTube Excerpt from Larry Yust’s *The Lottery*:
  - Part 1  
    [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIm93Xuij7k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIm93Xuij7k)
  - Part 2  
    [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMhV3fwx5Sg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMhV3fwx5Sg)

**HG: Opening and Closing Ritual:** Students begin each session gathered in a circle and stating their name, what the color of their voice is and what it sounds like. Students close each day with an Ashe circle where they give thanks for the thoughts and or performances that were brought forth that day.
**AF- Guiding Question:** What are the consequences of losing our ability to connect to someone else’s situation? What are the consequences of staying silent?

Following film facilitator will ask the following questions:
Who do you empathize with the most in the town? Why?
Can you relate this film to society today? If so, how?

**Activity:** Students will collaborate on creating an improvised scene where they interpret how themes from *The Lottery* play out in current society. Then they will present and discuss their process with the rest of the group.

**Weekly Challenge:** Encourage participants to think of a scenario in their lives where they can practice empathy. Remind them to seek out traditions that they may have created for themselves or followed to conform. If they do not feel strong enough to break the tradition encourage them to write about how they felt about following a tradition without being able to voice concerns or opinions as to why the ritual exists.

Examples: Hazing, bullying a new person, stealing from weaker members of a group or using language considered by some to be obscene.

Session will close with Ashe circle.

**Session 4**

**Time:** 1 ½ - 2 hour session

**Featured Performance Art Sample:** Performance Artist Ping Chong Performance Art Piece: *Undesirable Elements-Secret History*. A performance art piece where members of ethnic groups share how they identify culturally in response to stereotypical characterizations of their ethnic group.

**Resource**

**Ping Chong Undesirable Elements- Secret History Excerpt**

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhsHaVuFWbs

**HG: Opening and Closing Ritual:** Students begin each session gathered in a circle and stating their name, what the color of their voice is and what it sounds like. Students close each day with an Ashe circle where they give thanks for the thoughts and or performances that were brought forth that day.
**HG-Guiding Question:** Whom do you empathize with the most in the piece? Why?

**Activity:** Following the piece participants will pair up with their partners from previous sessions. They will gather around chart paper with the original outlines they drew of one another. The body outlines should have accumulated several assuming adjectives and internal descriptors by now. Each participant will be guided to write a monologue based on the external and internal descriptions. The piece will be modeled after the Ping Chong performance they viewed.

Session will close with Ashe circle.

**Session 5**

**Time:** 1 ½ -2 hour session

**HG: Opening and Closing Ritual:** Students begin each session gathered in a circle and stating their name, what the color of their voice is and what it sounds like. Students close each day with an Ashe circle where they give thanks for the thoughts and or performances that were brought forth that day

**HG-Guiding Question: Breaking the Silence**

**Activity:** Participants will pair with their partners and continue to work on their autobiographical cultural stories. Facilitator will track progress of their monologue development and mold it accordingly. Halfway through the session partners will switch stories with their partners. The partner will be responsible for memorizing his or her partner’s autobiographical monologue and rehearse how they want to present it.

Session will close with Ashe circle.

**Session 6**

**Time:** 1 ½ -2 hour session

**HG: Opening and Closing Ritual:** Students begin each session gathered in a circle and stating their name, what the color of their voice is and what it sounds like. Students close each day with an Ashe circle where they give thanks for the thoughts and or performances that were brought forth that day

**HG-Guiding Question: Breaking the silence**
Activity: Partners will continue to rehearse and stage their monologues from previous session.

Session will close with Ashe circle.

Session 7

Time: 1½ -2 hour session

HG: Opening and Closing Ritual: Students begin each session gathered in a circle and stating their name, what the color of their voice is and what it sounds like. Students close each day with an Ashe circle where they give thanks for the thoughts and or performances that were brought forth that day

HG-Guiding Question: Breaking the Silence

Activity: Partners will continue to rehearse and stage their monologues from previous session.

Session will close with Ashe circle.

Session 8

Time: 1½ -2 hour session

Featured Performance Art Sample:

HG: Opening and Closing Ritual: Students begin each session gathered in a circle and stating their name, what the color of their voice is and what it sounds like. Students close each day with an Ashe circle where they give thanks for the thoughts and or performances that were brought forth that day

HG-Guiding Question: My Brother’s Keeper

Activity: Participants will perform their pieces for an invited audience of administrators, peers, and workshop participants. Once the performances have ended, participants will gather and partake in a question and answer session with the invited audience. They will have the opportunity to reflect on how the workshop affected them and if they feel more inclined to empathize for others after taking the workshop.

The session will end with an Ashe circle that includes everyone in the room, including administrators. Session participants will lead the Ashe circle.
Conclusion

Performance Art provides a bridge to young adults to reconnect to society. Empathy must be introduced, nurtured, and cultivated in order for high-risk young adults to embrace acting on impulses that produce empathic decision-making.

“Drama ...is a fitting way to achieve this sense of empathy, having the potential to effect instrumental change through the insight it gives to the audience” (Mienczakowski, 2000, p.139). In order for this workshop to be successful there are key components that need to be in place. They are as follows:

- 1-2 Meetings with site coordinator or administrator to discuss expectations of participants and facilitator.
- Predetermined space dedicated to workshop, free from peripheral distractions
- On Site partner who can collaborate on best methods to approach the site’s participants. Partner will also be responsible assisting workshop facilitator as needed during the workshop
- Commitment from Site Coordinator to attend or provide an audience of community members for end of session performance.

According to Foster (2007), “the role of the audience is crucial to the telling of stories...it is an implicit social act” (p.20) that creates a collective narrative wherein audience and actor are allowed to perceive the viewpoint of another. The hope is that this exchange will encourage young people to feel empowered by their community’s interest in their personal narrative. As indicated in Catteral’s report, performance allows students to be seen heard and praised by others. Investment in self inevitably encourages investments in others. Implementing this type of
investment in high-risk youth could expand their willingness to empathize for others. Primarily because workshop participants would be more inclined to contribute to the community that embraced viewing or listening to their personal narrative.

I observed that the concept of empathy could be introduced to high-risk young adults through performance art workshops. The performance art empathy workshop I created is suitable for traditional and non-traditional environments such as schools, community adult learning centers, juvenile detention centers, homeless shelters or any facility serving high-risk young adult learners. I do not believe this workshop can teach empathy to high-risk youth. However, I do believe that, by properly following the aforementioned stages and workshop components, participants will be more inclined to embrace empathic concepts. In doing so, participants could learn to foster empathy for one another. As a result, participants would be more inclined to genuinely investment in their personal and communal growth.
Bibliography


Resources


