

What is it about theatre that has captured the interest of people for thousands of years and in every culture? Theatre is an important part of many people's lives, bringing the gifts of entertainment and story sharing to people around the world. Theatre takes different forms in different cultures. No matter the styles of theatre, performances have always had the potential to create magical and unforgettable moments for their audiences. Theatre has always been a bridge between education and entertainment. From earliest times, live theatre has been used to spread the news, share history, or educate and inform people about events within and outside of their communities.

The term "theatre in education" refers to using theatre for a purpose beyond entertainment. Its purpose is generally to affect/change knowledge, attitudes or behaviors (or perhaps all three) of audience members. In the context of this week's discussion the goal of theatre in education is to improve young people's reproductive health, to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and to reduce the stigma and discrimination that come with unintended pregnancy and HIV infection.

One of our objectives for this week, as we explore live theatre as a tool to reach young people with prevention messages, is to briefly describe some effective theatre models. Below are descriptions of two such programs, each directed by one of our three facilitators for this week's forum:

The NiteStar Program, under the Executive Directorship of its founder, Dr. Cydelle Berlin, uses drama, music and peer education to help guide adolescents and young adults as they confront the many challenges of growing up in the age of AIDS. Productions are all original, created by the members of the company. They are culturally appropriate and age-specific, designed to diffuse myths, provide HIV/AIDS awareness, pregnancy, substance abuse and relationship violence prevention, help youth to make informed decisions, provide options for changing attitudes and prejudices, and create opportunities for behavioral change.

The Issues Troupe at Emory University in Atlanta, GA, is under the direction of Ken Hornbeck. Currently the troupe is active twice per year: fall freshman orientation, and founder's week in January. The Issues Troupe is sponsored by the Department of Multicultural Programs and Services and recruits actors from a pool of interested students for each new project. The focus of programming is normally race relations, bias and discrimination. In 2004, however, the Issues Troupe actors created scripts and performed in four short films about psychosocial and health-related issues created to educate and raise awareness among students on the Emory campus.

We will hear from Colin, the Head of Global Partnerships and Development at Dance4Life, later in the week, who will describe the model used by his agency.

For more background information look at the [Theatre-Based Techniques for Youth Peer Education: A Training Manual](http://www.unfpa.org/adolescents/docs/ypeer_theatre.pdf), published by Y- PEER, UNFPA and FHI/YouthNet (you can download it here: http://www.unfpa.org/adolescents/docs/ypeer_theatre.pdf). It contains a complete description of the NiteStar theatre model and the four core

workshops that we have created. In addition, take a look at the NiteStar theatre web site at <http://www.nitestar.org/>.

Questions to consider this week:

- * What is the difference between “theater” and “educational theater’ or “theater in education?”
- * How can peer theater deliver compelling messages to young people and still be seen as entertainment?
- * Can live theater influence and/or change knowledge, attitudes and behavior?

We look forward to an engaging and interesting discussion about the use of theatre as a health education/prevention/social change model and to your questions and comments about your experiences using this venue.

Thanks,

Cydelle and Ken