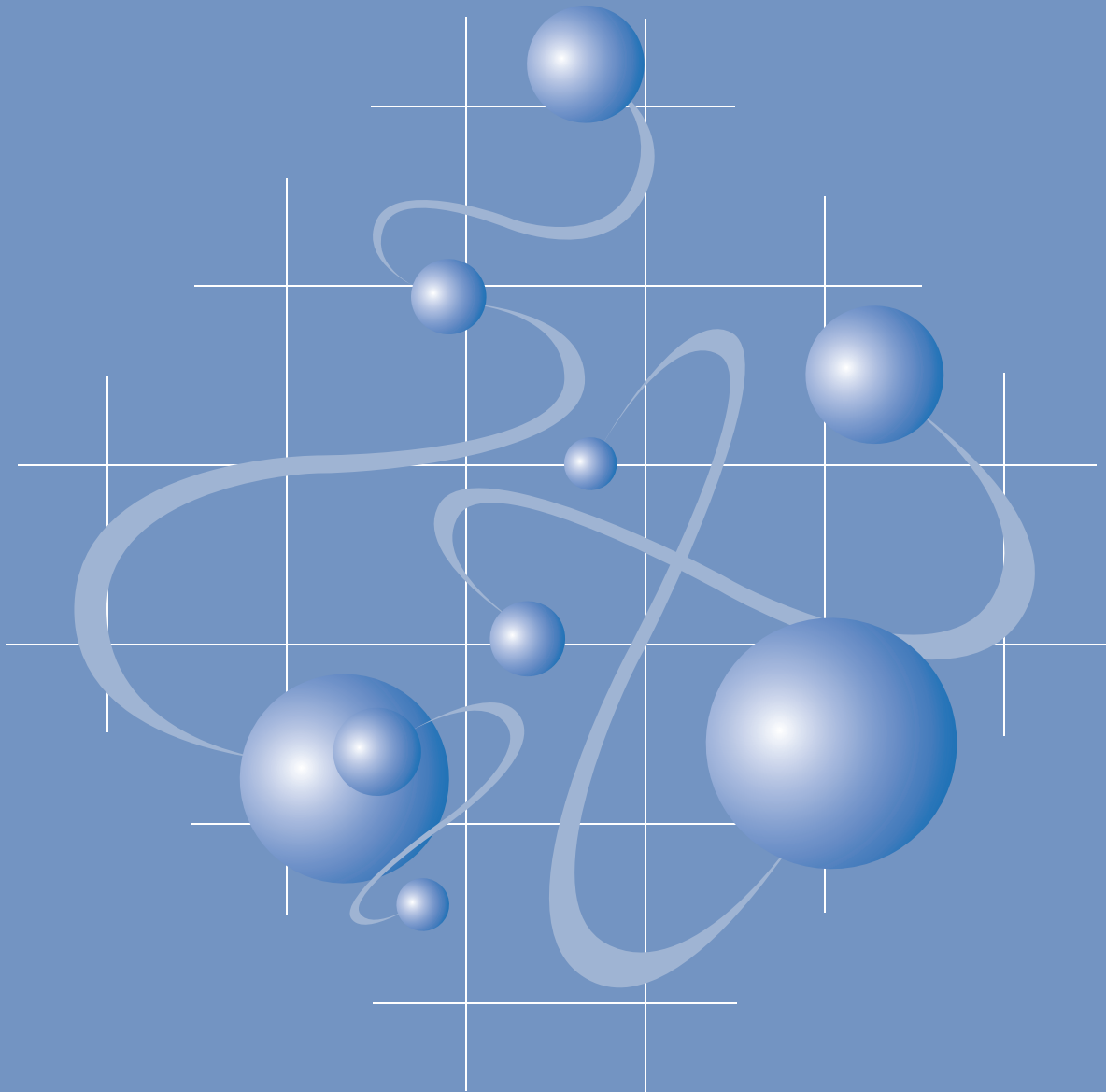


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**Youth Peer  
Education Toolkit**

# **Theatre-Based Techniques for Youth Peer Education: A Training Manual**



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The opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the policies of UNFPA, UNAIDS, USAID, or FHI. The principles and policies of each of the United Nations (UN) agencies are governed by the relevant decisions of each agency's governing body, and each agency implements the interventions described in this document in accordance with these principles and policies and within the scope of its mandate.

UNFPA is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man, and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

The Y-PEER (Youth Peer Education Network) Programme has worked since 2001 with country partners to build the capacity of national non-governmental organizations and governments to implement, supervise, monitor, and evaluate peer education programmes to prevent HIV/AIDS and improve reproductive health among youth. The Y-PEER initiative has been spearheaded by UNFPA in partnership with FHI/YouthNet, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and others. Y-PEER, launched in 27 countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, is now spreading to other regions of the world including the Arab states and Africa.

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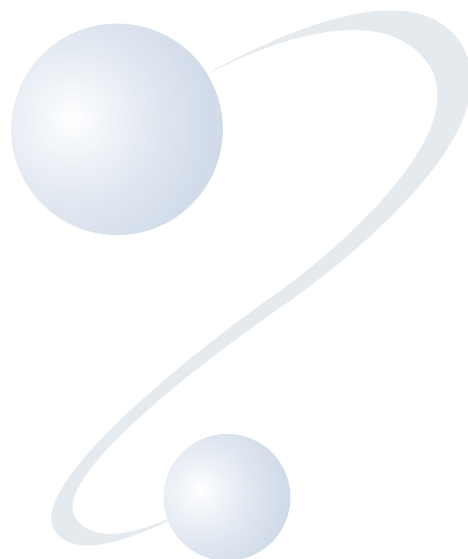
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Y-PEER has been using the techniques discussed in this manual to strengthen Y-PEER activities in Eastern Europe, the Arab States, and Eastern Africa. The authors have re-created the workshops and discussions used with the Y-PEER programme in this manual so that others may benefit from this approach.

Theatre games come from a tradition of being ‘passed on’, and many have been in use for so long that no one could reasonably claim rights as inventor or creator. For these reasons, many of the theatre games and exercises in this manual cannot be credited or referenced in the traditional sense. In addition, the authors have studied with many teachers, attended dozens of conferences and workshops as trainees and presenters, and have therefore borrowed from too many people to accurately name. Many of the actor/educators who worked with the authors shared their favourite games and exercises from their experiences, and the authors invented many exercises included in this manual.

Teachers and schools contributing to the authors’ development include Gail Cronauer, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX; Stanley Zareff; TheatreSports USA, New York, NY; Diann Ainslee; Augusto Boal; The Body Electric School; Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, New York, NY; Anne Bogart; Chris Coleman; Circle in the Square Theatre School, New York, NY; Department of Theatre Studies, Emory University, Atlanta, GA; Viola Spolin, teacher and author of *Improvisation for the Theatre*; and Deryck Calderwood, New York University, Program in Human Sexuality, New York, NY. Lastly, the authors would like to thank JLG for patience and support.

## Introduction

*Learning is finding out what you already know. Doing is demonstrating that you know it. Teaching is reminding others that they know just as well as you. We are all Learners, Doers, Teachers.*

– R. Bach

This manual is intended for programme managers and youth peer educators who are interested in adding a theatre component to their reproductive health and HIV prevention activities or in strengthening a theatre component that is already part of a programme.

Theatre in peer education can be used in many ways. Peer educators can weave role plays and scenarios into their usual outreach activities in schools or other settings. Peer educators might also develop a theatre piece to use as the core of a peer education session. Well-developed peer theatre programmes may even take a full-length theatre piece on tour.

The term ‘actor/peer educator’ – used throughout this manual – refers to peer educators who are members of peer education programmes that use theatre as an educational tool. These peers are not ‘actors’ in the traditional sense, as they are performing in a specific type of scene or play with an educational objective to affect knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour. They also are not ‘peer educators’ in the traditional sense, as they are not presenting educational material for their peers through traditional education methodologies.


To be effective, actor/peer educators should receive specialized training in both the theatre arts and peer/health education. Both disciplines must receive equal weight, thereby creating a new kind of educator who can present dynamic messages that engage young people and affect them more powerfully than messages presented either by adults or in a classroom lecture setting. Because these peer educators are drawn from the programme’s target audience, they should reflect the diversity of the audience they are trying to reach in terms of sex, age, ethnicity, geography, etc.

When possible, individuals with experience in the theatre arts should help train actor/peer educators and help develop theatre pieces. Such experts can be found in drama schools and universities, and in local theatre, drama, music, and drumming clubs.

This manual has five sections:

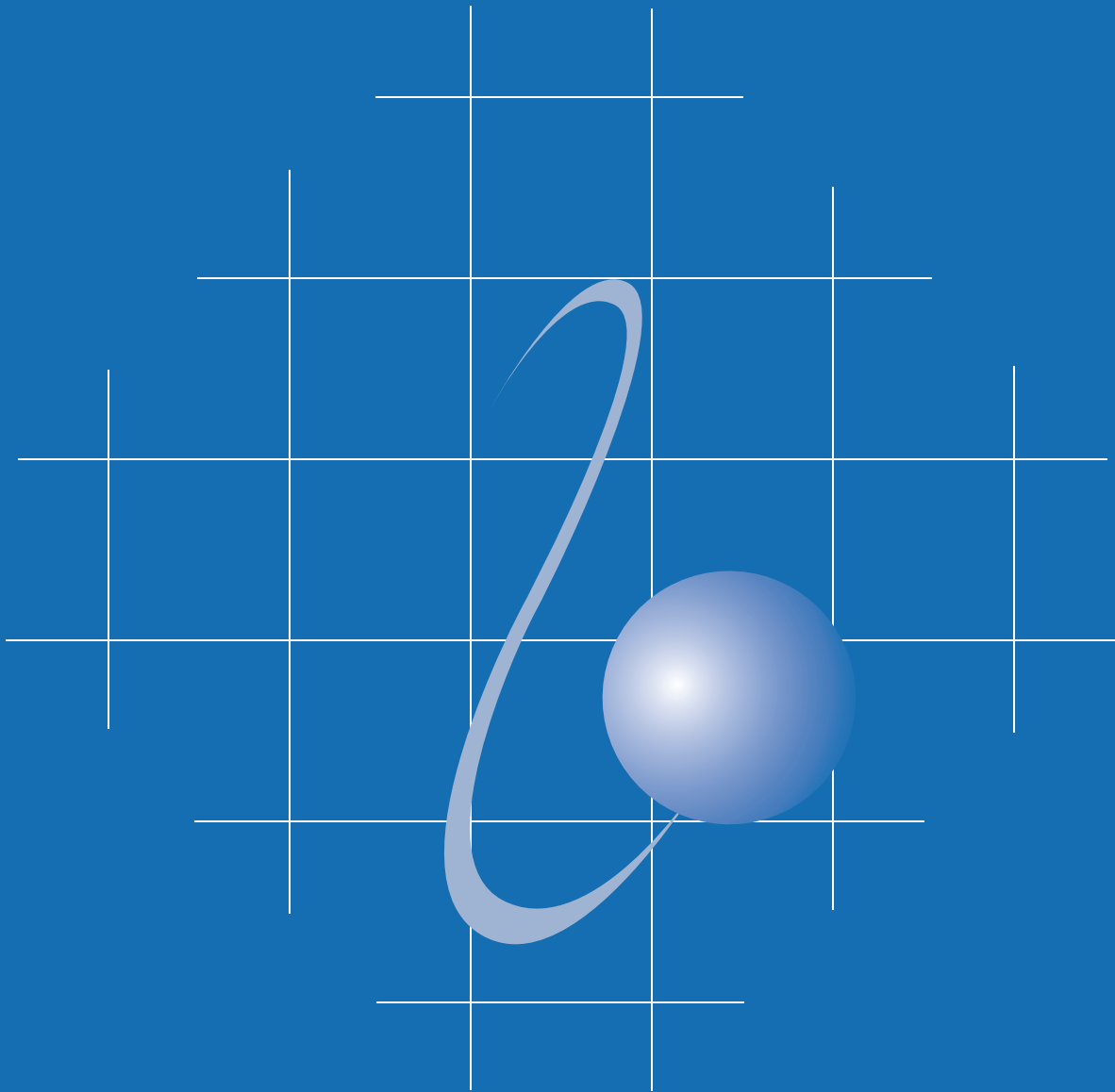
- **Section 1. Starting with the Basics** provides an overview of the historical and theoretical use of theatre in education, makes the case for using theatre as a means to educate young people about reproductive health and HIV issues, and explains the authors' approach to developing improvisational theatre pieces.
- **Section 2. Four Peer Theatre Training Workshops**, the core of this manual, is a curriculum for training actor/peer educators, developing theatre pieces, and practising post-performance debriefings with audience members.
- **Section 3. More Theatre Games and Exercises** provides additional training tools to help improve peer educators' acting and improvisational skills.
- **Section 4. Advanced Peer Theatre Programmes** offers information on building a theatre company, casting and rehearsing theatre pieces, directing, and other issues faced by organizations developing full-length peer theatre pieces and taking them on the road.
- **Section 5. Annexes** includes a list of theatrical terms for peer education, a handout about the stages of adolescence, suggested resources, and sources.

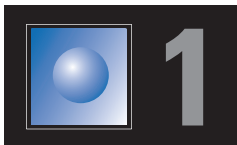
Many of the exercises in this manual originated from theatre practices used in Europe and North America. However, many exercises have also been adapted successfully in developing countries. The manual is designed for adaptation to any cultural context. To successfully adapt the workshops in particular, facilitators should read them in advance and prepare them for the needs of the audience.

As you make your way through this manual, refer as necessary to the supplemental materials and list of terms in Section 5. 

Section 1

# Starting with the Basics





## Starting with the Basics

*Be the change that you want to see in the world.*

– Gandhi

This section is divided into two parts: theatre in education and the building blocks of a peer theatre programme. The first part provides an overview of the historical and theoretical use of theatre in education and public health. It explains how theatre can influence people's behaviour, the need for culturally and developmentally appropriate theatre, the key parts of a good story, and the concept of peer educators as actor/educators.

The second part explains the difference between improvisation and traditional playwriting. It discusses educational objectives and the process of developing the 'who, what, and where' in an improvisational script. The information in this section provides critical building blocks for those who may want to develop theatre activities in a peer education programme. This basic information will be needed for using the more advanced materials in this manual.

### Theatre in Education

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 – Indonesian shadow puppets, Chinese opera, traditional African storytelling and drumming, and fully staged Broadway-style shows. No matter the style of theatre, performances have the potential to create magical and unforgettable moments for their audiences.

The term 'theatre in education' refers to using theatre for a purpose beyond entertaining an audience. This purpose is generally to change the knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours (or perhaps all three) of audience members. In the context of this manual, the goal of theatre in education is to improve young people's reproductive health, to prevent HIV, and to reduce the stigma and discrimination that come with unintended pregnancy or HIV infection.

## **The History of Theatre in Education and Theatre for Public Health**

Theatre has always been a bridge between education and entertainment. From the earliest time, theatre has been used to spread news, share history, or educate people about events outside of their communities.

Recently, the use of drama and theatre arts for educational purposes has undergone a remarkable resurgence. In particular, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has provided a focus for countless dramatic presentations. Television dramas, radio plays, mass media campaigns, comic books, and other imaginative offerings have been used around the world to convey information and influence behaviour. Audience members often relate to characters on stage or in the radio or television drama and are motivated to participate in interactive opportunities for discussing the controversial and sensitive issues of sexuality, intravenous drug use, violence against women, and other health-related topics.

## **Research on the Use of Theatre for Educational Purposes**

There is a growing body of evidence on the utility of theatre in education (see the resources in Section 5). Increasingly, it is seen as a powerful tool for social change. Theatre can strengthen the emotional and psychological appeal of messages and provide a believable and interesting way to explore sensitive issues, particularly with young people. Watching a carefully designed educational show can change the way a person thinks and possibly the way she or he acts. Using theatre as a creative educational tool provides an opportunity to debunk myths, present a balanced view, and influence behaviour. If used effectively, it is an excellent way to present sensitive topics not usually discussed in public, particularly in educational settings. Theatre allows audiences to receive these messages in an entertaining and exciting way. Under the best circumstances and conditions, live theatre can change how people act: It can play a role in leading youth away from risky, dangerous behaviour towards safer, healthier lifestyles.

## **How Does Theatre Influence People?**

At its best, theatre captures people's attention. Even young people bored by school work or bland television programmes are animated by live theatre.

Theatre engages the audience, focusing their attention and actively involving them in an experience. Active involvement means that the audience's emotions, not just intellectual or cognitive skills, are affected. It is this ability to touch emotions that allows theatre to influence attitudes in ways that traditional instruction cannot. However, in order for theatre to change the behaviour of young people, it must do more than simply create an emotional response. It must deliver its messages in a way that youth can understand and act upon.

Hence, theatrical presentations and workshops must be based in educational and behavioural theory. Theatre designed for educational programmes should also have an evaluation component so programme managers can see how theatre is affecting their target audiences.

### Word sense

The use of theatre to educate audiences has many names. In this manual the terms **edutainment** and **theatre in education** are most often used. However, other terms such as **infotainment** and **entertainment-education** are also commonly used in the literature.

## Theoretical Framework

Educational theatre, like other forms of ‘edutainment’, is based on the theories of Albert Bandura. Bandura recognized that people learn how to behave – and how to change their behaviour – by watching other people. In edutainment, actors demonstrate behaviour for an audience. The audience notes the behaviours of both positive and negative role models. Of central importance for the health education aspect of theatre is the transitional model: the character who changes his or her behaviour from risky to safe, demonstrating to the audience that change is possible and that a young person is capable and powerful enough to control his or her own behaviour.

Health-oriented educational theatre also draws on the insights of other researchers and learning theorists (see Section 5 for suggested resources). Research has shown, for example, that adolescents tend to adopt the behaviours of those whom they regard as role models. Because adolescents are often attracted to riskier behaviours – and to those who exhibit them – this insight is particularly useful in the creation of transitional models. Those who provide health education through theatre must be careful to craft characters capable of conveying attitudes that are attractive to young people while also demonstrating desirable behaviours. Successful youth theatre often portrays:

- ‘Hip’ or ‘cool’ characters who wear stylish clothes and use age-appropriate language (for any given community).
- Types of characters who are familiar to the audience. These characters may have succumbed to, or be considering, high-risk behaviours.
- Believable motivations for characters to change their behaviours and avoid the consequences of unsafe actions. For example, a dramatic piece shows how and why characters are converting to safer sex and adopting less risky behaviours.

## **Culturally and Developmentally Appropriate Theatre**

For theatre education to be successful, it must be culturally and developmentally appropriate. Adolescents will not be moved by theatre designed for younger people. Urban youth may require a different vocabulary than youth in rural settings in order for the messages to be powerful and effective.

## **A Great Story**

At the heart of great theatre is a great story, with various elements working together. As with any art form, the success or lack of success of theatre is subjective. One person's idea of a wonderful play is the next person's wasted hour. Below are the elements that contribute to an engaging story:

- The story has well-defined **characters**, with complex, realistic, and relevant relationships that move the story forward.
- The characters experience some sort of **conflict**, which engages the audience.
- There is a sense of **truth** about the story, which is not to say that the story itself is true, but that there is a sense of honesty and believability about it.
- The performance uses **humour**, if appropriate. A story that makes people laugh – at least some of the time – leaves people feeling entertained.

## **Peer Educators as Actor/Educators**

Researchers have found that some of the most effective educational theatre programmes for young people are those designed and acted by young people who have received training in theatre techniques and in peer education in a technical area such as reproductive health or HIV prevention. When theatre-trained peer educators use theatre to communicate with their peers, they can bring enormous power to the messages they wish to share.

## **The Building Blocks of a Peer Theatre Programme**

In the context of this manual, the term 'peer theatre' refers to live, original theatre presented by young people for their peers. (This manual defines young people as those age 10 to 24 years, but you should define them in a way that fits your programme.) Peer theatre is used as a starting point for discussion and communication, enabling the audience members to not only think about the health issues presented, but also to begin talking about them with peers, peer leaders, family, and friends.

## **Improvisation versus Traditional Playwriting**

There are many different ways to develop theatre pieces for peer education programmes. Some take a traditional playwriting approach – where adults or young people write a script about a specific topic and actor/educators perform

the script. This manual, however, focuses on using a different model to develop theatre pieces: improvisation.

Improvisation is a process of creating a scene in the moment without using a script. By its nature, improvisation is creative and immediate. It gives young people control over the creative process and encourages them to use their bodies and emotions, not just their intellect.

One or more scenes developed through improvisation and then recorded can be developed into a script. Thus, the script comes directly from the young people without sounding stilted, as can happen when an adult tries to sound like an adolescent. This is not to imply that bringing scenes from an improvisation to a finished product is easy. On the contrary, the process can be arduous. This manual describes the steps involved in creating scenes and a script and provides a series of workshops to help programme managers create engaging theatre using improvisational techniques.

## How can you teach acting, let alone improvisation?

Many skeptics think one cannot teach acting (or improvisation). Their argument is that since so much of acting involves the actor's emotions and imagination, there is very little that can actually be taught. However, an acting teacher has many roles, such as:

- ▼ assisting the actor in the effective expression and communication of what is in her or his imagination
- ▼ providing a safe environment for the acting student, primarily one in which he or she can feel free to fail, which allows a person to take risks and fully explore the creative process
- ▼ facilitating trust building within the company of actors
- ▼ leading exercises to improve physical strength, flexibility, and relaxation
- ▼ assisting with improving vocal technique

Improvisational acting demands a strong technique in the skills listed above, as well as skills more specific to improvisation such as:

- ▼ learning how to accept 'offers' (lines of dialogue, pieces of a character's backstory, or other elements put into the scene by a scene partner)
- ▼ avoiding stopping scenes 'dead' with simple yes or no answers or statements
- ▼ keeping the scene moving towards the agreed-upon ending
- ▼ looking for ways to do the unexpected rather than the predictable
- ▼ keeping the focus on the characters on stage rather than on other characters
- ▼ letting the focus be on the story and message rather than comedy

No matter what approach a project uses, scenes or plays are never truly ‘finished’. The more you work with the issues, the more you and your actors will learn. You will likely want to go back and revise your material several times because everything can be made better.

### **Specify Educational Objectives**

The educational objectives should be clearly identified prior to working on a scene. For example, if your peer education programme targets young people ages 12 to 14 and seeks to help these young people to delay their sexual debut, you would probably want to educate these young people about how their bodies are changing, explain why they might want to delay their first sexual experiences, and give them some skills to help them be successful in remaining abstinent. These would be your educational objectives.

Reproductive health and HIV-related issues are complex because they involve physical, mental, and emotional health. They also involve relationships with one’s family, friends, and community. When using drama, it is tempting to want to address too much or solve all of the world’s problems with one scene. Instead, keep your work focused and specific.

Well-focused, educational objectives serve as guides for creating scenes. To determine your objectives, work with your team of peer educators to answer these questions:

- Want do you want to say about the health problem?
- What attitudes do you want to change?
- What new knowledge do you want the audience to have?
- How would you like the audience to behave after seeing the scene?

As the theatre piece evolves, it is important to return periodically to the objectives to ensure that you are contributing to your overall goal. One or two educational objectives are usually enough for one scene. If you try to address too many objectives, the piece often becomes unfocused, making the message harder for an audience to receive.

### **Determine Who, What, and Where**

After developing your educational objectives for the scene, determine who, what, and where. These elements provide you with tools to create scenes that are logical and relate directly to your educational objectives.

First, identify **what**, which refers to the conflict or struggle in the scene. Make sure the conflict relates to your educational objectives for the scene.

- What is the scene about?
- What are the opposing forces that create conflict?
- What do the characters want and how do their differing needs cause disagreement or struggle?

Next, create **who**, which refers to the characters in the scene.

- What characters are going to be involved in this conflict? Remember, drama must have logic, or it will not be believable.
- What are the characters' relationships to one another? How long have they known each other? What are the power dynamics in their relationship?
- What are the characters' backgrounds? How old are they? Where are they from? What ethnic or economic groups are represented? (This is also known as a character's backstory.)
- What is each character's point of view about the issue?
- What kind of personal beliefs and values do the characters have about the issue before the scene starts?
- How will these points of view change or not change during the scene?

Be as specific as you can be about all of these facts as you create your scenes. You do not have to finish designing the characters or the conflicts before you begin an improvisation, but you should at least have some general ideas as you begin. Allow your characters to evolve. One thing that should be determined before you start improvising is a character's name. Avoid using the actors' real names in order to protect them from being overly identified with the character.

Now choose **where**, which refers to the location or setting for the scene. Knowing where the scene takes place before you begin helps the actors better understand their roles. Be sure that your locations, like your characters, are logical to your conflict. Your choice of location can also serve to increase the dramatic tension in the scene. For example, if you are doing a scene about a couple negotiating condom use, it may heighten the tension to set the scene in a bedroom rather than at a bar.

### **Improvise, Revise, and Do It Again**

Once your group has brainstormed who, what, and where, make sure everyone is clear about the character names, what happens in the story, and how the scene will end. Now you can start the first improvisation. Each character spontaneously makes up the dialogue of the scene, without any script. Have someone record the scene (videotape, audiotape, or note-taking). When you finish, immediately discuss the scene as a group and identify what you would like to change. Then do the scene again and discuss it. How was it better or worse? What worked this time that did not last time?

Using the who, what, and where process will help create the raw dramatic material for your theatre piece. What you choose to do with the material once it is created is up to you and your team. You may only need one scene for a specific peer education session, or you may want to create a menu of scenes that can be used as part of a one-act play presented in a community theatre or on a street corner. Tie scenes together with music, songs, dance, drums, and monologues. Peer theatre has a lot of potential and flexibility. Use your imagination!

