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THEATRE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: PLAYING A ROLE IN
MULTICULTURAL IDENTITY, LITERACY ACQUISITION,
SPECIAL EDUCATION AND BEYOND

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Interdisciplinary Studies

by
Fergus James Loughnane

June 2013

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the benefits of theatre and theatrical practices across the curriculum. It is a counter weight to the pervasive argument that theatre does not offer adequate training and prospects to our students. I chose to focus on multicultural identity, literacy acquisition, Special Education, behavioral management and job market preparation as areas that report significant benefits from theatrical interventions. A student's own personal narrative can provide powerful material for dramatization. It validates and empowers students from diverse and low socioeconomic backgrounds. Theatrical practices have been shown to dramatically improve literacy acquisition by reinforcing the lesson. Students connect the words with the actions more readily. Improved math grades have even been recorded with drama interventions. Students with special needs and cognitive impairments, especially Autism Spectrum Disorders and learning disabilities, have been very receptive to theatrical strategies and register improved social interaction and academic results. The detachment that a student experiences when they are investigating a character and their motivations can be a more potent tool than conventional therapy to correct behavioral issues. The collaborative spirit and its perception as a reward activity also help engender prosocial behavior. Finally, job seekers with theatrical experience are more creative, flexible, collaborative, and dynamic and will be more sought after in the 21st century economy. Theatre positively impacts the curriculum and, therefore, needs to be afforded that respect and protection.

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Rosa, thank you for always supporting my dreams and aspirations. To Kai and Max, you guys are the reason I strive to always do my best. Love you guys!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO: MULTICULTURAL IDENTITY	5
CHAPTER THREE: LITERACY ACQUISITION	16
CHAPTER FOUR: SPECIAL EDUCATION	28
CHAPTER FIVE: BEHAVIORAL MANAGEMENT	38
CHAPTER SIX: AND ACTION	43
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION	46
WORKS CITED	49

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Theatre is more than just an opportunity to slip inside a character's skin; it is also an opportunity to become comfortable in one's own. In these challenging economic times, arts programs are especially susceptible to being culled from the academic roster. "With No Child Left Behind (NCLB) emphasizing math and reading ... and politicians citing lagging international competitiveness in science and math ... (d)ance, music, theater, and visual arts show up ever further down the priority ladder" (Bauerlein 42). I recognize the importance of cultivating math and reading skills, but I believe acquiring those skill sets is through the arts, not by expunging them from the curriculum. Such narrowing of the curriculum, as described in a New York Times article entitled "Schools Cut Back Subjects to Push Reading and Math" (Dillion), details such measures, especially in low-performing schools. One such school is Martin Luther King Jr. Junior High School in Sacramento, that devotes five of their six class periods to reading, math and gym, leaving just one period for all other subjects; 150 of their students are educated in this manner (Dillion). Administrators defend such steps as unavoidable and necessary to raise test scores. In my view, this disenfranchises the student body, particularly those of low socio-economic status, for whom exposure to the arts and the theatrical experience is often denied them. It disenfranchises them from other avenues to elevate their test scores. Theatre,

and the arts in general, can be that pathway to academic success. It is rather disconcerting then that "89% of California K-12 schools fail to offer a standards-based course of study in all four disciplines—music, visual arts, theatre, and dance—and thus fall short of state goals for arts education" (Woodworth, Gallagher, and Guha 4). The arts are not subject to standardized testing; therefore, their currency within the curriculum is diminished. Many principals and school districts are understandably under pressure to post improved academic measures, especially those schools in Program Improvement. Making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is of paramount importance and some schools, with a Program Improvement status, have chosen to double down on English and math classes with two periods apiece (Holcomb 2). The way out of such an unwelcome designation is through the arts and not by jettisoning them from the roster. Theatre, in particular, can touch those on the periphery and can act as a catalyst for advancing their academic standing and their school's AYP.

The purpose of this thesis is not to advocate for theatre arts in the classroom for art's sake. My purpose here is to research the value of theatre and theatrical practices across the curriculum to promote multicultural identity, literacy acquisition and as a strategy to reach those with special needs. Theatre students can connect with their own sense of identity and purpose and learn to see themselves on the same level as their more economically fortunate brethren. Theatre can instill in them a sense of confidence and poise and validates their life experiences as having value and worth. Theatrical practices can be a potent tool

for literacy acquisition and development as they engage students from multiple perspectives. Students script and produce their own stories, so they encounter literacy skills within a new context. This personal relationship with the literature can remove some of the obstacles in the way of acquiring literacy proficiency.

I view a thesis such as this as an opportunity to dismantle some of the conventional perceptions of theatre in education. It is so often regarded as being more of an extra-curricular activity and lacking any real and substantive academic merit. I believe theatre and theatrical strategies should be used as a vehicle to raise students out of the shackles that tether them to socioeconomic disadvantage. By validating their life experiences and fostering their sense of identity, they can graduate into a world as equals. The key to bridging these gaps is the attainment of literacy skills and competency. Students with special needs are exhibiting marked progress when they encounter dramatic practices in new and innovative ways. Theatre and special education were considered like two circles of a Venn diagram with very little intersecting real estate. However, research is emerging to support increasing this intersecting field due to the positive impact of theatrical practices on students with special needs. When these programs are sacrificed in times of budgetary austerity, we lose a myriad of opportunities to reach and teach these children.

Theatrical processes provide the educational community, and society at large, with a new mechanism with which to engage students who exhibit antisocial and troubling behavior. Theatre can hold a mirror to society and reflect

back the issues that assail it and, occasionally, offer solutions to counter them. In like manner, theatre can hold up a mirror to the face of an actor enabling them to learn something of the human condition, especially as it pertains to their own lives. They can potentially amend the trajectory of their own lives by living vicariously through the experience of another. That remove, when one sees oneself in another, creates a space in which a person can come to understand the emotions and motivations that fuel a character and may be able to link the character's experiences with their own. This circuitous route can bring clarity, a sense of responsibility and ownership to a young person who is engaged in deviant behavior. This profits the individual, the school and the greater society.

Theatre is a malleable entity can be adapted and molded to benefit a myriad of situations and needs. It is like a seasoning that can be added to almost any subject area, and by its mere addition; it improves and enhances that learning experience. Grades go up and so does the participant's confidence. It exercises one's creativity and problem-solving skills that will be invaluable skills in the 21st century global economy. Corporate behemoths are courting employees who are not only possessed of the requisite academic training, but also, the creative acumen to forge new directions and develop new concepts for global consumption. Job seekers needed to be multifaceted, multitalented and multidimensional beings in order to better secure their futures. Theatre is that discipline that demands people reach beyond themselves and cultivate those dormant areas and aptitudes within themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

MULTICULTURAL IDENTITY

Education is the great equalizer in our society, so it is a crucial first step to validate the cultural experience and celebrate the multicultural diversity in our schools. The rich cultural tapestry of our student population must feel that they are embarking on their educational careers on an equal footing; the curriculum must speak to them by speaking about their experience. This is a major step in soliciting their investment in their own betterment. The theatre classroom is the best venue to broach such subject matter, examine it and learn from it. Students, especially in high school, are in a liminal state as they are transitioning from being teenagers into adulthood while grappling with issues of identity. This is a phase that all teenagers must pass through, but it is especially challenging for those whose lives have been defined by marginalization, even discrimination. They are about to graduate into a world where they will not be afforded the same status and opportunities as their more culturally and economically fortunate brothers and sisters. "Educational theorists agree that the development of identity is a critical task of schooling and should disrupt socially imposed constructs around race, class, gender, sexuality, and traditional power roles" (Nelson 158). I am a big proponent of the high school theatrical canon, but re-envisioning and re-interpreting the works of celebrated 'old white guys,' does not help to move the needle sufficiently in the direction of identity awareness and multiculturalism.

“(R)ead[ing] alternative texts and producing counter-texts ... (t)hese kinds of activities increase engagement and participation, and ultimately improve grades” (Lopez 78). Analysis of western dramatic works and the parallel and sub textual meanings therein, are often too deeply immersed in the work to be relevant to our multicultural and minority students. Their lived experience is a much more dynamic mechanism to connect and excite them. When their reality is farmed for theatrical subject matter, it empowers them with a sense of control over their destinies. “In effect, the incorporation of performance as an integral part of social justice curricula may deepen analysis and discussion of the normative discourses that track and marginalize some groups of students and teachers and privilege others” (Harman and McClure 381). One of the first orders of business for education is to establish a sense of egalitarianism in the halls and classrooms of our schools and this is best accelerated by blurring the margins of our social divides; theatrical practices can facilitate that process. Students are not just hoisted upon a stage; they can also be hoisted up the social and economic ladder, taking a giant leap forwards for future generations.

Ann Lopez chronicles the efforts of a teacher in Canada who struggled to inspire interest in her class for the textbooks they needed to study, as her students did not see the relevancy for them in the works (81). The teacher sought to remedy this problem by creating a course on “performance poetry as a way of implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in the curriculum” (Lopez 80). This educator manipulated the curriculum to include, not exclude, her demographic

and she found that hook in spoken word poetry authored by youths (82). Granted the subject matter was grisly and graphic, but it was reality for the student population. The class was initially the orators of these pieces from the street, but eventually they became the crafters of the words (Lopez 85). This teacher truly embraced her own agency within the parameters of the curriculum to develop lessons of more social and cultural relevance (Lopez 81). If we are going to be able to guide and educate our students, we first need to commandeer their attention and what better way than through performance of personally resonant material.

Redesigning theatre practice can be more demanding than initially anticipated. Ruth Harman established a master's program in River Town, MA, to instruct teachers on how to incorporate multicultural children's literature into their curricula, situating it within the context of their lives. The course comprised of theories of dialogism, multicultural and social justice education and critical performative pedagogy (CPP) (Harman and McClure 380). Informed by the work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, this fifteen-week program used observation, improvisation, data collection and feedback to create a more socially conscious classroom environment. "Instead of remaining within the comfortable confines of textbook theory, facilitators and teachers explored how oppressive lived realities could be challenged through subtle shifts in discourse and styles of intervention" (Harman and McClure 394). Essentially, this course was anchored in validation and empowerment; the lived experiences of the teachers and students were

acknowledged and validated thus leading to a sense of empowerment to engage with the hierarchical forces that they encounter in their lives. “For if whiteness functions in dominant discourse as the unmarked center of cultural power, then a performative pedagogy can and must ask how we can create a ground for subversion” (Warren and Fassett 415). The dominant discourse needs to be changed from a white sheet to a more quilted mosaic, where every culture and status is featured, all stitched together by the tight bonds that unify us as a nation.

Bethany Nelson’s “I Made Myself: Playmaking as a Pedagogy of Change With Urban Youth,” is a wonderful and insightful research project. Nelson is another agent who seeks to agitate the system so that it accounts for all, not just the dominant. Nelson selected a Drama 2 class at Chelsea high school in Boston, MA as the site for her research. The focus of this qualitative study was on the effects of Applied Theatre/Drama (AT/D) techniques as a means to explore societal inequality and unequal power divides “and the possibility of utilising (sic) AT/D strategies to facilitate students’ identity and skills development as agents of change” (Nelson 159). If students graduate high school with scrolls in hand, an improved sense of self and primed for change, then social disparities will be mitigated over time. Nelson worked in concert with the existing drama 2 teacher, introducing AT/D elements into the curriculum. A second dimension to this project, which Nelson termed “On the Shoulders of Giants,” involved studying “change agents from the past” (161), with a view to gaining inspiration from these

pioneers of social justice and equality. This study was ethnographic in nature with data collected by filming interviews with fifteen of the participants (Nelson 159). Nelson crafted scripts based upon student narratives of their life experiences and the realities that they encountered daily such as drug abuse, parental absence through imprisonment, unemployment and coping with abject poverty, to name but a few. Improvisation was an integral component where the participants, using their own words and physicality, dramatized events from their own lives. Nelson encouraged them to write and perform personal monologues, many chronicling the violence, abuse, racial and drug problems that plagued their lives. By sharing their personal stories and turning them into art, the students learned to appreciate and value one another, forging a communal bond built upon empathy and shared experiences, "the students felt power in their shared stories of surviving life's challenges" (Nelson 165). Nelson weaved these narratives together into a cohesive script that was ultimately performed to a diverse public audience. The students literally wrote, performed and scored the production.

Nelson deemed her research project a success as the participants reflected on the experience as one of empowerment and one that validates their existence and right to ascend society's social and economic rankings. One of the participant students, Ruby, reflected, "(t)hat no matter how messed up your life is, you can always overcome that" (Nelson 166). The second aspect of Nelson's work, "On the Shoulders of Giants," yielded a more muted response from the

students who, to her surprise, cited less the Martin Luther Kings of this world and labeled family members as the “giants’ in their lives. Rather than accepting the power divides as insurmountable, the students “talked about the fact that ordinary people, who looked liked them and their family members, came together to make change, and that made it seem more possible for them” (Nelson 169). When students recognize these powerful individuals in their immediate vicinity, it can propel them upwards as they stake out a claim for their community on a more equal footing with the established and dominant groups.

This study authenticates the importance of theatre in the curriculum. It elevates a student’s sense of self-esteem and personal possibility and neutralizes the chasm between them and those born into economic advantage. Improvisation and personal monologues were two simple strategies that helped shine a light upon the reality of their lives in a non-judgmental and affirming manner. These courses and studies are born out of recognition that as long as the status quo social and economic divides persist, then inequity will continue to fracture our society. Minority students already feeling disenfranchised by society, are often beset by apathy towards academic achievement. Theatrical devices can be the conduit to draw them in to invest in their own futures in a society more welcoming and accepting of diversity.

Those for whom it is intended do not always welcome well-intentioned change. Wendy Coleman and Stacy Wolf experienced failure in their “Rehearsing for Revolution” program. The goal of the program was to examine African

American performance through texts, acting and journaling, culminating in a public performance of their original work entitled, "The Spirit of Africa." Even Coleman, herself an African-American professor, conceded having reservations about a white student portraying the spirit of Africa. Their effort at producing revolutionary theatre disintegrated amidst charges of racial insensitivity and lack of understanding. The African-American students were interested in underscoring their 'essentialism' with each other, whereas the white students were focused more on the aesthetics of the piece (24). Ultimately, the final production had to be canceled as the experiment imploded. They concluded that the project still had merit and value, although it did not achieve its initial aspirations. "We did not expect that the performance would change the world or even that it would change attitudes, but we hoped ... we ourselves might consider that perspectives other than our own do exist" (Coleman and Wolf 21).

We can appreciate that instituting a revolutionary concept of theatre pedagogy is fraught with challenges, but generally, the positive upside is worth the investment. "When children learn about different cultures and ethnicity they become accustomed to it and this helps to eliminate fear of something or someone who is different than they are" (Annarella 3). Our education system has for so long been dominated by the white perspective and voice in our literature and other educational texts that it has become accepted as the 'only' valuable voice. Warren and Fasset examine "race as one form of oppression ... [and they] examine whiteness as a systematic production of power—as a normative social

process based upon a history of domination” (411). The introduction of the multicultural voice into our educational milieu is a constructive development that will foster understanding and a more equitable society outside the walls of academia.

By utilising (sic) curriculum, pedagogy, and structural dynamics that integrate opportunities for students to think critically, explore multiple perspectives, experiment with a range of identities, and draw connections between the oppression they experience in their lives and larger social dynamics, students in schools will be better prepared to participate in redefining themselves and the society of which they are a part. (Nelson 158)

Few would argue against a more socially balanced posture in our educational system, but many may doubt that by injecting some theatrical aspects into a diverse or minority situation could magically boost their sense of identity and their academic measures. “Performing Identities Through Drama and Teatro Practices in Multilingual Classrooms” by Carmen Medina and Gerald Campano explores this role of drama in multicultural classroom environments. The authors advocate for drama serving as a bridge between the students’ sense of identity and their acquisition of literacy skills. Real systematic change can be brought to bear and thinkers like Medina and Campano are compelling proof of this fact. The article opens with an illuminating story of a highly regarded and valued teacher running afoul of her school’s administration for incorporating

dramatic exercises into her assigned literacy time. This class time was sacrosanct in the eyes of her superiors who took a dim view of using improvisation, movement, poetry and personal narratives to interpret texts. These theatrical devices allowed the students to connect the words to the physical expression of them, thereby helping to reinforce the learning of new language.

We concur with researchers in the areas of critical multiculturalism and biliteracy ... that the marginalization of alternative literacy practices, with drama serving as a paradigm example, does a disservice to students, especially students in low-income, ethnically and linguistically diverse schools. (Medina and Campano 332)

The researchers analyzed data from two disparate bilingual fifth-grade classrooms where drama was used to negotiate the space between the students' cultural backgrounds and their educational needs and goals.

The Teatro movement has a rich and distinguished history of political and social advocacy and "(t)hrough teatro, the students found a safe space to *fictionalize reality* and enact more empowering individual and collective representations" (Medina and Campano 333, emphasis in original). An example of one of the teaching scenarios involves newly arrived immigrant students negotiating their way through the first day of school. The students dramatized the stresses and tensions that they encounter using frozen tableaux, journaling and interview style questioning of the players. This process fostered empathy and understanding in the fifth-graders for the immigrant situation and "(t)he children

also understood that they needed to acquire a survival language to understand important words” (Medina and Campano 336). The product of this exercise was not just to engender sympathy in the young audience; it also served to underscore the importance of acquiring English language skills. By dramatizing the tension and struggles that the immigrant actors encounter, the point is subliminally disseminated to acquire proficiency in these skills quickly. Dance, puppetry and ‘living texts,’ based on the personal experiences of the students, were also employed as alternative literacy acquisition strategies, facilitating both the augmentation of vocabulary and cultural understanding (Medina and Campano 338). One of the fifth-grade teachers, Angelica, established a dance troupe with her class called “Dancing Across Borders” to instill in her students a sense of their own promise and potential in order to avoid being marginalized and defined by their minority status. The Dancing Across Borders ensemble was even retained to present a piece to faculty on classroom management during in service development sessions (337). The piece drew on the students’ journal entries and living texts to address classroom management from the students’ perspective (337). They presented their reality off campus; caring for younger siblings in the absence of parents and some having to financially contribute to their households. This helped explain some of the lethargy and fatigue that the teachers witnessed in class. Another addressed the students’ sense of isolation in a dominant culture.

The researchers concluded that drama should be utilized as a form of inquiry based instruction that affords educators alternative means of teaching literacy especially in multicultural settings. By being active learners the students are engaged more fully in their own learning. It values their experiences and acts as a bridge between their primary discourse of family and culture and the secondary discourse of their school. Medina and Campano cite an example of an innovative pre-service teacher who applied movement and dance to 'spoken-word poetry' to help convey the lesson to her students (332); the children learned to associate the words with the movements in that particular language. Using theatrical practice served as a reinforcing agent for the lesson, which is especially important for students learning a new language. This study is another example of the practical application of theatrical practices in aiding students acquire literacy skills and empowering them as individuals. It is interesting to me that a simple dramatic exercise like a frozen tableau can yield such academic dividends. By endorsing the multicultural structure of the class and connecting to it through theatre, it creates a space for literacy acquisition to take hold.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERACY ACQUISITION

Theatrical practices have been shown to enhance literacy skill and expedite their acquisition. Boal was retained by the Peruvian government as part of the ALFIN project for literacy that was conducted there in 1973. At that juncture, three to four million of Peru's total of fourteen million was estimated to be illiterate (Boal 120). The numerous languages that were spoken throughout the country further exacerbated this monumental task; forty-five different languages were spoken in the northern parts of the country alone. "We tried to show in practice how the theater can be placed at the service of the oppressed, so that they can express themselves and so that, by using this new language, they can also discover new concepts" (Boal 121). The indigenous people acted out various scenarios that pertained to their lives. The audience or spectators would interject and contribute to the narrative so that they became active participants in the production. By getting people actively involved in the creative process allowed them to be more open to the literacy lessons inherent in the exercises. Newspaper Theater was another Boal innovation where articles were read in various styles from simple reading to rhythmic reading, in and out of context and with improvised action (143).

Readers' Theater is another great literacy tool, especially for native speakers as students gain fluency and comprehension simultaneously. Effective

Readers' Theater is not merely reciting the written word in front of you; rather it demands that the text be emotionally full and sent forth with a subtextual objective. "(R)eaders' theater performance becomes an effective vehicle for reading at an appropriate rate while attending to meaning, rather than reading fast without understanding the contextual meaning of the words" (Jensen 23). This versatile teaching device has been documented as having positive benefits across the curriculum. Anthony Palumbo and Joseph Sanacore observed:

middle school students, including those who struggle with reading and writing, effectively use Readers Theater and Curriculum-Based Readers Theater with varied texts "... Some teachers and their students turn chapters of social studies texts, math texts, and science texts into Curriculum-Based Readers Theater ... [resulting] in improved reading ability and increased subject-matter knowledge. (277)

Even in the above-cited example, Readers' Theater reached across the curriculum in support of math and science comprehension. It takes ingenuity on the part of the teacher, but theatrical strategies can emerge from dimly lit auditoriums and be of service in subject areas on the polar opposite side of the academic spectrum.

Elaine Walker, Carmine Tabone and Gustave Weltsek authored "When Achievement Data Meet Drama and Arts Integration." The authors' purpose was twofold, namely: (i) the positive effect of theatre arts techniques upon language

arts and mathematics test scores and (ii) the longevity of such academic improvements once the students returned to traditional instructional methods from the theatre infused curriculum of the study. The researchers randomly chose eight New Jersey middle schools, four serving as test sites for the integrated curriculum and four as part of the control group. Practically eighty percent of the participants came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and “(w)ith respect to academic performance in language arts, the selected schools had the lowest percentage of students who were deemed to be proficient” (Walker, Tabone and Weltsek 366). At the beginning of the academic year, the teachers were instructed on the mechanics of combining theatre lessons with the state mandated curriculum. The control classes proceeded to teach literature in the typical fashion, whereas participant classes would explore passages from the literary texts through “the use of theater games, scenery design activities, process drama, improvisation, script writing, and enactment” (Walker, Tabone and Weltsek 366). Dramatizing episodes from novels such as *The Midwife’s Apprentice* helped the students comprehend the moral dilemma facing the novel’s characters. The figure of Alyce must decide whether to imperil her own safety by coming to the rescue of the drowning, Will, or whether to remain safely entrenched in the boughs of a tree from the marauding mob. Students would improvise lines, in keeping with the spirit of the text, arguing the merits of both choices for Alyce. The teachers then had the classes pen letters articulating the contrary arguments, which became the basis for a culminating

stage reading experience. Such integration meant that the students had a fuller learning experience and the value of the lesson could reside with them longer.

The researchers proposed four standards of measurement for their work: academic achievement, school involvement as measured by attendance, the independent variable of arts integrated groups versus the control groups and the control variable of the socioeconomic station of the participants (Walker, Tabone and Weltsek 369). They strove to control for any extenuating factors that might compromise their results like gender and socioeconomic factors (369). The state tests provided a resounding endorsement for the academic benefits of their integrated theatre arts approach. *"In fact, being in an arts-integrated classroom increased the odds of students passing the state assessment by 77 percent"* (Walker, Tabone and Weltsek 370, emphasis in original). The above quotation pertains to language arts, but mathematics also saw a 42 percent increase in passing grades for those who benefitted from this theatre-integrated curriculum. The researchers tracked the state scores of the test subjects the following year and found that they maintained a nine percent advantage, in language arts, over their traditionally educated peers. A staggering fourteen percent difference was registered in mathematics in favor of this new model.

This study really speaks to the positive cross-curricular benefits of theatrical praxis. A study such as this should serve as a template for schools, especially those in crisis. This integrated approach had a significant impact in lifting the scores of these students who, hitherto, had the lowest percentage of

proficiency in language arts. This approach helped to elevate these socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils to academic parity with those who enjoy more privilege. I am also excited by the fact that theatre arts were again able to suffuse the math classroom and have a positive bearing upon those results also. Simple drama techniques were credited with substantial gains in state tests and such evidence should be proclaimed so that theatre and its practitioners are not arbitrarily cut by those blinkered and draconian legislators and administrators who do not comprehend its value and potential. "Over the past decade, however, California has consistently spent less per pupil than the national average ... [for arts education]" (Woodworth, Gallagher, and Guha 14).

The arts are a favored target for those in power seeking to burnish their fiscal credentials. However, to deprive students of alternative avenues of learning is the antithesis of responsibility, fiscal or otherwise. "Research Links the Arts with Student Academic Gains," by David Gullatt is an article that makes the case for the importance of arts programs in schools, even though they are perpetually vulnerable to the vagaries of educational budgets. "A public awareness campaign survey (Davidson and Michener 2001) revealed that 73 percent of respondents felt that arts were important to children's development and that arts should be available to all students, not just the economically privileged" (Gullatt 212). Yet a national report suggests that, despite the favorable public view of an arts education, the reality is that it is rather deficient when "(o)nly 8 percent of dramatic arts programs offered were taught by drama specialists," (Gullatt 213).

Music, dance and theatre have to some degree been branded as frivolous “provid[ing] poor preparation for a viable career” (Gullatt 212). The author argues that the contrary is the case and that there is significant evidence to support arts education developing higher order thinking, problem solving, creativity and self-expression. I bristle when I read evidence such as that contained in the Gullatt study when there is overwhelming public support for arts education, yet it is denied the respect that other subjects command being viewed as the stuff of dilettantism and narrow professional prospects. However, the evidence is clearly starting to mount that theatrical devices can be adapted to supplement instruction in disparate curricular areas leading to tangible and verifiable gains therein.

One of the unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind legislation with its focus on standardized testing, is the sacrifice of arts education programs in favor of more practical subjects. “Former United States Secretary of Education Rod Paige, one of the architects of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), sent a letter to all U.S. superintendents of education advocating the reinstatement (or the preservation) of arts education” (Gullatt 214). When such programs are purged from the system, the entire educational ecosystem suffers. Perhaps drama instructors could work in concert with teachers of core subjects to develop cross-curricular instructional methods that benefit both departments. I argue that when drama professionals show their true worth and the value of drama, then a shift in perception will occur with drama coming to be seen as a good “preparation for a viable career “ (Gullatt 212). The arts change the

classroom dynamic and compel the students to become active learners, rather than passive receptors of information. Teachers can use theatre, music, and the fine arts as a gateway to instruction in other areas, soliciting student interest through artistic measures. According to Catterall “students who learn in the arts and those who learn through the arts experience an increase in academic success” (qtd. in Gullatt 215).

Harvard researchers analyzed a myriad of sources in an effort to “ascertain the causal relationship of the arts to enhanced academic performance” (Gullatt 216). They found evidence to support a relationship between music and spatial reasoning (217). “(A) causal link was found between classroom drama and verbal skills. This link not only involved a connection to the texts enacted by the students, but also to new reading material” (Gullatt 217). Arts and theatre education courses address some of the multiple intelligences that are not tested within the standardized testing framework. Therefore, students who would otherwise be classified as struggling according to the existing system might find themselves connecting with their other subjects through the avenue of the arts. “Because these intelligences are derived from arts, teaching through the intelligences parallels teaching through the arts” (Gullatt 218).

This article really advocates for the constructive role that an arts education plays in the school environment. It allows students to tap into some of the other multiple intelligences that are not catered to in the current academic environment. Students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged can really

benefit from exposure to an arts education, as they would be less likely to be introduced to the arts outside of the classroom. Theatre, in particular, can really instill confidence in students and according to this article, will even increase their confidence and proficiency in other areas as well.

The evidence continues to coalesce to support the positive and substantive gains that dramatic tools bring to students who struggle with conventional instructional methods. Carol Lloyd Rozansky and Colleen Aagesen authored “Low-Achieving Readers, High Expectations: Image Theatre Encourages Critical Literacy.” This study was borne out of a frustration with the existing method of testing a child’s reading aptitude, which consigned a number of students to be branded as low achieving. Colleen Aagesen, a middle school teacher, noticed that her low-achieving students actually exhibited genuine critical literacy skills that the current methods did not cultivate and develop. Aagesen joined forces with Professor Lloyd Rozansky to create an action study using Aagesen’s students to examine material from a critical perspective, specifically using Augusto Boal’s Image Theatre as a medium for this critical approach (Rozansky-Lloyd and Aagesen 459).

Critical literacy is concerned with power dynamics; who has it, how is it used and whether oppression is the product of its misuse. Augusto Boal was a pioneer in the field of using theatrical techniques to expose and counter oppressive forces; he introduced this process to oppressed peoples in South America to help them recognize the forces that subjugate them and learn to find

their own voice to answer such aggression. Boal's methods are tailor made for those in the low socioeconomic brackets. They compel people to engage with the material in new ways. "In Image Theatre, participants display their ideas by creating a static sculpture with their bodies or by 'sculpting' another person" (Rozansky-Lloyd and Aagesen 460). The intimacy of Image Theatre really brings the material alive and makes it present for the students.

This research project was conducted in two of Colleen's eight-grade classes, which were categorized as low-achieving readers. The classes were composed of sixty-six percent African-American with the remaining third being principally Caucasian with a small Hispanic contingent; eight in ten qualified for free/low-cost lunches (Rozansky-Lloyd and Aagesen 461). The study was conducted over three ninety-minute class periods. The researchers sought out texts that had some social resonance for the participant students, like material that dealt with undocumented immigrants, familial separation and the surrendering of one's dreams. Small groups would critically read and assess the texts, discuss them from numerous perspectives and then stage their interpretation. The staging involved students using their bodies to represent the fundamentals of the story, e.g. students would portray the border fence separating fathers from their children. The class would respond to the dramatization they had just witnessed which led to further critical engagement (Rozansky-Lloyd and Aagesen 462). These exercises also compelled the

students to research around the topic to understand the political and historical contexts for the material they were processing.

The researchers concluded that their study did advance the students' reading ability by utilizing the mechanics of Image Theatre, "if given opportunity and support, eighth-grade, low-income, racially diverse students who had been identified as less able readers and relegated to prescriptive reading programs could demonstrate critical literacy" (Rozansky-Lloyd and Aagesen 464). This is a fascinating study that underscores the simplicity and accessibility of Image Theatre techniques. Image Theatre does not demand that the student possess considerable acting aptitudes, but rather that they can merely create powerful human sculptures. This frees the class from any real pressure to perform and focuses their energies on interpreting the story. Three different texts were examined over three class periods through the prism of Image Theatre with the researchers noting real growth and progress. "(T)he arts can provide students who have been unsuccessful in traditional educational practices with opportunities to show that they in fact *do* understand the texts they have read" (Rozansky-Lloyd and Aagesen 460, emphasis in original).

Having examined theatre's role in literacy, I would like to consider the concept of literacy itself. James Paul Gee argues that 'language' is an inadequate term, as it is synonymous with the idea of grammar. Gee says that "(i)t is less often remarked that a person could be able to use a language perfectly and *still* not make sense. It is not just *how* you say it, but what you *are*

and do when you say it" (5, emphasis in original). He posits the idea of replacing the concept of 'language' with the concept of Discourse, which denotes "*saying (writing)—doing—being—valuing--believing combinations*" (6, emphasis in original). His little 'd' discourse is applied to segments of language. We are all, as children, indoctrinated into our primary Discourse through the socialization process in our homes and immediate environmental situations. We garner our secondary Discourse by venturing out into the world and acquiring it in the public sphere of schools, community organizations and so forth. Mastery of the Discourses is difficult and often elusive for some.

Very often dominant groups in a society apply rather constant 'tests' of the fluency of the dominant Discourses ... they are tests of 'natives' or, at least, 'fluent users' of the Discourse, and they are *gates* to exclude 'non-natives' (people whose very conflicts with dominant Discourses show they were not, in fact, 'born' to them). (Gee 8, emphasis in original)

This is where identity-centered, multicultural performance practices can act as a conduit to fluency for those struggling in their secondary Discourse. It validates their life experience in the primary Discourse and their struggles with secondary Discourse acquisition. Gee defines "'literacy' as *the mastery of or fluent control over a secondary Discourse*" (9, emphasis in original). This is not just about language and literacy acquisition, but also, how one ultimately 'owns' them.

Those for whom full ownership eludes them, Gee suggests a hybrid strategy of “mushfake” Discourse, which amounts to “partial acquisition coupled with meta-knowledge and strategies to ‘make do’” (13). I sense that, for most people, this is the realm that we principally inhabit. In theatre, actors mine their own experiences and imaginations in order to fully connect with the essence of another. In other words, rarely if ever, does our life narrative mirror that of the character; we must make do with what we have. By truthfully connecting with the character, the audience will accept the actor in the part. We master the role by basically mushfaking our way through it. Minority students, whose sense of identity is in flux, can use their mushfaking skills in concert with theatrical techniques to access their secondary Discourse. Illiteracy is one of the greatest agents of repression in the world. When a quality education is made available to people, it is tantamount to their first step up the social and economic ladder. Theatrical techniques are a wonderful literacy resource and they also offer another avenue to connect with those who struggle in a traditional learning environment.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Theatrical practices have even traversed into the special education domain and, have even been shown to yield remarkable results. Drama has often been considered beyond the purview of the special education community and, as a result, was never considered a viable strategy to connect with them. In addition, drama has been dogged by a reputation for providing scant professional opportunities and training, especially for those with special needs. However, when theatrical strategies have been uncoupled from the confines of theatre departments and used with the special education population, these students have made remarkable progress. Melanie Peter notes such in her article "Drama: Narrative Pedagogy and Socially Challenged Children." She concludes her article by saying that "(d)rama as narrative pedagogy can offer even the most remote, hard-to-reach, socially challenged children the opportunity to develop a sense of narrative identity, and to move towards more effective participation within a social world" (16). The goal is not to produce a polished product; rather it lies in the process. Depending on the manner and complexity of the special needs and behavior of the students, then the theatrical exercises can be tailored to meet those needs, while challenging them to reach within and beyond themselves. "There were concerns from the special school staff that unstructured situations would be detrimental to their children and ... reinforce failure in the special-

school children” (Bayliss and Dodwell 56), yet in this instance of commingling a mainstream and a special needs school, the special needs students relished and excelled in the experience (56). It takes ingenuity to create programs that cater to those with needs; yet, it is worth ignoring the cynics and pursuing such for the benefits that can be garnered through them.

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) have become extremely prevalent in recent years and the severity of the condition can range widely within this condition. “Autism is usually distinguished with sensory-processing and motor-planning challenges ... as well as expressive and social issues that may affect speech and language, coordination, and learning” (4), according to Elaine Hall and Diane Isaacs in their book *Seven Keys to Unlock Autism*. For a child with autism the world is a cascade of sensory stimuli that with each environmental change, brings a fresh assault upon their senses, as is similarly stated in Hall and Isaacs (64). This explains why children with this disorder withdraw socially and tend to cocoon themselves in their own world (Hall and Isaacs 87-88). However, this should not be misconstrued as a rejection of society, rather as an inability to process all that comes with being open to the sensory stimulation all around (Hall and Isaacs 88). Melanie Peter quotes Ramachandran noting that in “people with autism, neuroscience has revealed that there is impairment of the amygdala – that part of the brain responsible for the initial evaluation of meaning” (11). However, Peter goes on to articulate that “drama as an enlivening experience targets the under-functioning of the amygdala, which could address

this primary disconnectedness in autism” (11). Drama, so often dismissed for its superficiality and perpetually amongst the first targets to be defunded, is continuing to prove its reach, even penetrating the minds of the autistic and aiding in their care.

In the early developmental stages of an autistic child’s development, they do not engage to the same extent or at all, in the necessary play that helps, according to Bruner and Feldman, their “‘cultural framing’ in infancy” (qtd. in Peter 9). In other words, they lack the rubric that would enable them to better negotiate societal norms like “anticipating routines, coping with changes, offering comment and chatting, and in understanding intentions and consequences” (Peter 10). Theatre’s ability to align with the demands and aptitudes of these students should be underscored in order to make its excision from the curriculum more difficult. Its ability to transport its practitioners and, for that matter an audience, has been documented in medical research. “Findings from neuroscience provide support for the use of drama by highlighting the significance of emotional engagement and its links with cognition, with memorable learning contexts more likely to be favourably edited and etched on the brain” (Iveson qtd. in Peter 10). By engaging in play these children are being rewired to become more receptive to external stimuli and more adept at reproducing behaviors considered more socially acceptable. This is in no way to suggest that theatrical practice and play is a quick fix for Autism Spectrum

Disorders, but it is one more tool in the arsenal of managing the behaviors and condition and in improving the quality of life for those with the condition.

People with autism have a remarkable capacity for focusing their energies on certain matters, often to the exclusion of everything else circulating around them. As adults and educators, there is a tendency to redirect their attention onto more productive endeavors (Hall and Isaacs 75). Elaine Hall and Diane Isaacs suggest that educators and parents should allow the child to assume the lead and literally follow their direction before scaffolding upon those particular “interests to help the child move up the developmental ladder” (76). In other words, show interest in their interests and then steer it into a broader territory. This approach takes play back to its most basic level and uses it like a foundation upon which to construct more complex interactions. A mirroring exercise or basic pantomime work may prove suitable to insert into the activity as the child becomes more engaged in the process. Their capacity for focused work could be maneuvered into these more collaborative experiences, which can be built upon for increased social engagement. It is imperative not to dismiss even the most complex cases, as they are all human beings craving human connection. Hall and Isaacs recount a touching tale of a non-verbal young man who was taught to express himself through typing; one day his mother asked him what he had been doing during his years of silence, to which he replied, “listening” (90).

“The triad of linguistic, imaginative, and social dysfunctions of autism is caused precisely by an inability to ‘read’ or process verbal and non-verbal

information” (Figueira 282). When one is immersed in play or theatrical exercises, one is required to ‘read’ one’s partner and register the cues emanating from them. This is lacking in the formative years of autistic children and one of the most significant areas that trained professionals seek to address. Naturally, the milder the condition along the spectrum, the better the prospects are for rehabilitating those with ASD. However, no matter where along the continuum a person may fall, there is evidence of theatre’s ability to improve their interaction with society at large. Phil Bayliss and Cherry Dodwell authored “Building Relationships Through Drama: The Action Track Project [1],” which documented a theatre production featuring students from a mainstream school and a special education environment in Britain and they noted that even the non-communicating participants were focused and appropriately behaved throughout extensive rehearsal periods and during the production (52). For me, this reinforces the fact that drama is a big tent community that provides a place at the table for all talents, abilities and aptitudes; it just takes a little imagination.

Caro Gray used a little imagination when she created “Social Stories®” (Hall and Isaacs 112). The philosophy behind this program is simple, yet enlightened, in that it attempts to disengage students from the immediacy of a situation by creating narratives in the third person (Hall and Isaacs 113). Therefore, the daunting experience is set outside themselves and they can approach it with less personal trepidation (Hall and Isaacs 113). “This dovetails into the use of play-acting and role-playing and progresses children to be able to

manage sensorial and emotional reactions with a grounded context” (Hall and Isaacs 113). Recreating situations in narrative form is freeing and yet, carries the message and solution clearly to the students. Again, I reiterate that theatrical practices are not a magic pill that will eradicate the condition overnight, however, I would encourage that the theatrical domain be harvested for ideas and processes to connect with these students.

The theatrical domain was the spawning ground for a program called “Social Emotional NeuroScience Endocrinology (SENSE) Theatre, a community-based intervention program” (Corbett, Gunther, Comins, Price, Ryan, Simon, Schupp and Rios 506). The goals of this program were to show, using standardized neuropsychological tests, that autistic children and teens would exhibit increased perception of faces, increased sensitivity to emotional signals in others and an increased awareness to manage behavior in themselves and others (Corbett et al. 506). Samples of salivary cortisol levels were also collected periodically throughout the process (Corbett et al. 507). The catalyst for this experiment was “Disney’s The Jungle Book” which would feature autistic actors and peer actors with attendant psychologists and behavioral specialists (507). They took the unique step of producing secure, password protected videos of the peer actors portraying the roles of the autistic participant actors. The autistic actors could access these videos and mimic the facial expressions and emotions being transmitted therein (Corbett et al. 507). This was in conjunction to the regularly scheduled rehearsals, where both groups worked in unison. This is

another example of thinking outside the box to include, engage and reach those who, hitherto, would have been consigned to the audience, at best. The results of the SENSE tests reveal “statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-treatment measures for the identification of matching faces” (Corbett et al. 508). Behavior awareness measures were also elevated, whereas, the cortisol levels declined between the first and last rehearsals, which they interpreted to reveal a certain ease with the process (Corbett et al. 508). SENSE’s practice of modeling for their autistic participants allowed them to make strides towards interacting with their onstage colleagues. Perhaps such mirroring and modeling procedures could play an even greater role in special education departments and not be just on the perimeter with community organizations like SENSE.

Some dietary restrictions have shown promise particularly in regards to behavioral management, and perhaps dramatic techniques belong in this purview. However, I would argue that drama goes further in that it also furnishes them with the resources to navigate social circumstances. Sherratt and Peter wrote that with drama “autism may appear to lift, with indicators of improved social competencies” (qtd. in Peter 11). At present, there are no ready answers as to the causes or remedies for Autism Spectrum Disorders, but perhaps drama may be at the service of the medical community in helping to complete the circuit for those with this condition. Dorothy Figueira puts it rather succinctly in her “Autistic Solitude and the Act of Reading,” when she says, “what science cannot explain, art perhaps can” (285).

Readers' Theater was detailed earlier for facilitating literacy acquisition and fluency in more mainstream populations, but even this device can enable those in the special education community to thrive. Readers' Theater can compartmentalize a reading assignment for those with learning challenges and offer them an array of avenues with which to engage with the material. One study used guidance, modeling, echo reading and copious amounts of practice before a group of second and third graders performed for a pre-kindergarten class (Corcoran and Davis 106). Echo reading involves the teacher reading the piece and imbuing it with the necessary coloring, emotion and intonation to be ingested and then repeated by the participant (Corcoran and Davis 108). We need to invert our perceptions of Readers' Theater, as students do not have to approach it already fluent in their execution of it, rather it can be that vehicle that enables them to acquire that fluency. The twelve students who participated in this study were selected from a Learning Disabled and Emotionally Handicapped classroom (107). Eight of them had Attention Deficit Disorder and one had severe vision and hearing issues (107). Through working this Readers' Theater process, breakthroughs were recorded, with 95 percent feeling positive about this approach and a full sixteen-point jump was registered in their comfort levels for reading aloud in school (Corcoran and Davis 109). Few things in life enjoy a 95 percent approval rating, so again this illustrates a theatrical strategy paying dividends across the curriculum.

Readers' Theater is a multi-dimensional strategy that can be essentially performative in nature or, as Joan Kennedy writes, it can really facilitate the interpretation of text. "Students' participation in reading, interpreting, discussing, writing, assessing, and performing their own creative responses to a literary work promotes a learning activity that leaves an indelible mark on their educational process" (Kennedy 71). When one truly interprets a piece of literature through the use of Readers' Theater, it removes the impediments that prevent greater comprehension and retention of the material as it brings "a literary text and student closer together than what is possible with silent reading alone" (Kennedy 76). Active reading has reinforcement built into it; there is the text and the action that ingrain the message of the lesson more so than passive ingestion of text. "Theatre allows students to take in new information through many sensory channels, such as auditory, kinesthetic, and visual, increasing the likelihood that information will be remembered and stored in long-term memory" (Beyda 66). Teachers may feel intimidated about the time investment to accommodate theatrical components throughout their lessons, but they may save time re-teaching some of the same fare that failed to resonate on the first pass through. By being selective in peppering their lesson plans with these strategies, they can find the time and save time in the long run. Sandra D. Beyda documents studies where traditional educational techniques were pitted against drama techniques for students with learning disabilities. In one case where twelve schools participated from grades 2 to 8 "students improved their reading skills by an

average of 4.6 months within 3 months of instruction, even though national norms predicted just 2.6 months' improvement" (Beyda 68). Such results were not atypical nationwide with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) recording, on average, a three month disparity in the scores in favor of the drama groups over the control groups (Beyda 68). These are real positive gains in reading for those who struggle with learning issues as they are receiving information on so many levels. Their ability to process information is augmented by dramatic practices like a tableau or frozen picture when used as a response to a question (Beyda 69). State test scores are jumping from frozen pictures! Students who struggle academically are often dispirited and so are less likely to commit to their own education (Beyda 67), but non-threatening and fun exercises are courting their interest and covertly implanting the lesson in their brains.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEHAVIORAL MANAGEMENT

Theatrical interventions have been shown to yield positive gains in the academic and social arenas, even for those who struggle or have issues in those fields. Behavioral management is another beneficiary of the theatrical experience. The theatre department can be a positive reinforcer in a school community and plays can be a unique prism through which students, especially in alternative education environments, view and work through their issues. In analyzing a character, a student may encounter that character's dilemmas with a certain remove that enables him or her to process those lessons from a detached perspective. Therefore, a play can be a cathartic experience that reverberates with the individual more than other psychoanalytic approaches. Krista Hagstrom, Allana C. Lindgren and Warwick Dobson speak of a "projective technique' ... that engagement in spontaneous play or even structured improvisations [that] provide opportunities to 'project' or externalize problems that then can be perceived, diagnosed and treated" (63). This is another example where theatre and theatrical practices are able to access areas; especially those entombed in the mind, and be of service in their treatment. Drama therapy is more overt with its investigative and treatment agenda, but drama can also be more subtle by allowing students to arrive at personal insights that are framed within their characters. Lorraine Moller, who studied a prison theatre program, noted such

saying that, “inmates resist anything overtly therapeutic; however ... under the guise of playing a character, they take off masks that shield them ... [and] reenvision themselves from aspects of the characters they play, or ... objectify themselves in a way that develops self-awareness” (65). Moller’s analysis is situated in a prison, but human nature being what it is, her reflection would hold true in any setting. The very act of inhabiting another character and understanding their motivations, can bring personal clarity to the actor. They grow to understand themselves on their journey to know another. This is not to insinuate that theatre is the great social panacea for every individual that has lost his way, but for some, it provides answers and direction that will help them right their course.

It is hard to sustain interest and commitment in those who probably lack the self-belief that they will be able to achieve their goals (Hagstrom, Lindgren and Dobson 63), but for those who do attain their goals, it is empowering and can be life altering. “For many of these at-risk and incarcerated minors, the opportunity *to play* itself is transformative” (Elkin Mohler 92). Some of these kids have grown up without the parental filter that preserves and protects them from social vices. They are mired in situations fraught with danger and temptation and the simple pleasures of childhood play are abandoned or lost to the oppressive issues in their lives. Many of these kids cherish the opportunity to play, to imagine and to step into other realities or reconnect with a stolen youth (Elkin Mohler 90). Theatre programs may be one of the few areas in our schools that

can give these at-risk youths a place to play and learn. The concept of play can be minimized and trivialized; yet, its absence at a young age has huge ramifications for those with autism or those on the margins; therefore, play is important!

At the conclusion of a report produced by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and authored by James S. Catterall, Susan A. Dumais and Gillian Hampden-Thompson, they surmised that “(a)t-risk teenagers or young adults with a history of intensive arts experiences show achievement levels closer to, and in some cases exceeding, the levels shown by the general population studied” (24). Theatrical experiences and practices, as part of the overall arts immersion of these at-risk students, can be credited with the marked gains these students are posting. There is such a focus on core subjects at the expense of all else; yet, the secret sauce for academic achievement and behavioral propriety seems to lie in the electives. These elective subjects are benefitting all students irrespective of their socioeconomic position and at-risk designation. I would argue that during times of budgetary austerity, these programs need to be enshrined within the curriculum; taxpayers will be saved from future investment in expansive welfare and incarceration programs for these troubled youth. A modest investment in the arts at the school level will record enormous future savings, by turning the tide in the lives of at-risk youth prior to their high school graduation. Lest the mathematics lobby become too vocal against the arts, another finding from this NEA report maintains that, “students who took arts

courses in high school achieved a slightly higher grade-point average (GPA) in math than did other students" (13). Such research needs to be trumpeted, as there are broad scale advantages to preserving and augmenting the arts in the curriculum.

Theatre teaches discipline and fosters a collaborative spirit when a community of students produces a stage play. Each person that treads the boards is dependent upon another, both on and off stage; they need to be ready and on point so that the overall endeavor works seamlessly. Those with antisocial and disruptive tendencies have an outlet to exorcise some of this behavior from their system and become part of the collective in creating positive energy. Students acquire similar lessons from team sports and the stage is another avenue to further ingrain this important life lesson.

Self-actualization is an obvious derivative of theatre, where students, especially those in the liminal teenage years, gain a personal perspective that accelerates maturity. Theatre is possessed of both academic and prosocial dimensions that can connect with students on multiple levels simultaneously. It is not necessary to be involved in a full-scale production to reap these benefits; the constituent parts of theatre practice can also provide them. For those who are intimidated by the specter of being in a production, they can still experience profound self-actualization from theatrical practice when used in other curricular areas. Confidence, empathy, cooperation, teamwork, self-esteem and a social and personal consciousness are amongst the supplementary areas touched by

theatrical praxis. "Drama education adopts experiential learning approaches where the learning outcomes are tacit within learning experiences" (Chan 192). The learning is costumed and cloaked within the theatrical endeavor, so students are less aware and more receptive to the lessons being taught. Acting should ideally be an organic expression of the character and perhaps by suspending intellectual resistance, the message penetrates further. Theatre primes them for the learning to follow and so, the theatre doors need to be thrown open for the betterment of all.

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CHAPTER SIX AND ACTION...

So what now? Theatre and its strategies are the unsung heroes across the curriculum facilitating learning in areas and amongst students who have been all but abandoned by traditional curricular means. The theatre department is like an untapped energy source that can remedy major deficits in our educational system; once this area is mined then the entire educational body can thrive. I mentioned earlier about the perception that theatre and any of its offshoots, are deemed to provide scant occupational prospects and narrow training for the job market (Gullatt 212), especially when the rallying cry is for more math and science majors, more engineers. However, this is part of the tunnel vision that creates problems in the first place. While engineers and math and science majors fulfill essential economic roles and prime this country for a more competitive economic posture for the future, employers also covet the creativity and ingenuity that comes from the arts and theatre in particular. "In 2002, the *National Governors Association Center for Best Practices* stated arts education is one of the best methods to improve the workforce and reduce incidents of crime" (Elder, Hovey and Jones 7, emphasis in original). When the core and elective subjects are available to all, then a more viable and dynamic job applicant is the result. This narrow focus on certain prized curricular areas is detrimental to the overall economic machine that needs to be established to ensure our future

prospects. One cannot purge or underfund all creative pursuits and then expect those creative sparks to be magically ignited in our workforce. "In theatre arts, students learn practical problem-solving and critical thinking skills ... taking risks and making bold choices: skills that will serve them well in whatever profession they pursue" (Elder et al. 8). It is time that theatre and its practices receive the support that they need, considering the support they proffer other areas, both within and outside our schools.

However, even as employers covet the creative synergy that a comprehensive education brings, third level institutions are seriously considering eliminating their theatre departments. The University of Nevada, Reno proposed disbanding its department by June 2012 (Weinland). The University of Maine, Cornell and the State University of New York at Albany were all countenancing such extreme actions (Weinland). If theatre helps to prime our future workforce, then we should not turn off that spigot when they enter college. It would be a shame to have theatrical praxis play such a pivotal role in a student's life, only to have the opportunity for further study in the field to be deprived them. Perhaps, some of these students may have developed into formidable theatre practitioners in their own right and reinvested in our educational system spreading the value of theatre across the curriculum. Let us hope this trend is not pervasive in our third level institutions.

What will happen to the vast numbers of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders if they are denied theatrical interventions in their schooling? Society

stands to benefit from their contribution, but they need to learn the tools to negotiate social circumstances on their way to the job market. What will happen to those who are marginalized and sense hopelessness in their future? Their stories and experiences are underrepresented in our textbooks. What is to happen to those with behavioral and impulsivity issues, if they lack the discipline and commitment to hold a job? What will happen to the literacy challenged who never mastered the basics prior to graduation? This does not bode well for their respective situations and for the economic vibrancy of this nation. For many of those mentioned above, theatre is their salvation and their best chance to engineer productive and successful futures for themselves.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

In closing, this thesis sought to investigate the value of theatre and theatrical practices across the curriculum and beyond. When theatrical praxis and its impact are examined on multicultural identity, literacy acquisition, special education and behavioral modification, I think a new appreciation is earned. The tentacles of theatre can reach and improve many curricular domains and in the culture of standardized testing, this needs to be touted before it is routed from the curriculum. Schools seeking to claw out of Program Improvement or those trying to commandeer the top achieving title, focus with laser-like attention upon reading and math test scores. Those administrations need to recognize that a probable solution may lie in the most unlikely of places, the theatre department. Theatrical praxis needs to be invited out of the shadows and into the mainstream.

The fabric of our country is made up of every other nationality and this rich multicultural mix needs to be acknowledged and embraced in our curriculum; otherwise, they will be consigned to a permanent underclass status. When texts reflect their experience, it opens up a channel to connect with students from different cultural backgrounds. Johnny Saldaña refers to the education of children via ethnic literacy that teaches about the traditions and customs of a people principally through folktales (xii). Dramatizing these folktales is wonderful for

those whose ethnicity is being showcased and for the rest of the class to appreciate that culture and recognize the familiar in those tales.

Theatrical practices can also provide the marginalized and those of low socioeconomic status with the platform to achieve social parity with those born into more fortunate circumstances. While it does not bolster their immediate financial situation, by validating their identity it can have powerful long-term effects on their upward mobility.

Literacy acquisition is another beneficiary of dramatic practices and these techniques provide educators with a constellation of approaches to teach those with challenges in this area. Dramatizing the work demands the active participation of the students, which can indelibly imprint the lesson in their minds more so than the traditional passive methods.

There is documented evidence of the ability of theatre to positively affect the Special Education population. The performing arts are a place where students with disabilities and cognitive impairments can develop critical thinking skills through activities like playing a character. The theatre can serve as a tool for behavioral modification for all students, as it teaches the essentials of collaboration and self-discipline. All areas of an educational environment can benefit from learning responsibility, which is an integral part of the dynamics of the theatre.

Every actor and director pines for the burst of applause, the unbridled and enthusiastic ovation at the end of a production, but more importantly, I hope that

this examination of the value theatre across the curriculum will compel the naysayers to their feet in celebration of the power of theatre...bravo!

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