

Creating Meaning Through Theatre:
A Qualitative and Phenomenological Study Exploring the Positive Power of Theatre for
Adolescent Girls in a Single-Sex Private High School

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December, 2013

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
degree of a Masters of Arts in Education and Society.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the link between theatre and positive development in adolescent girls. Using Portraiture and Performative Inquiry methodologies, I worked closely with eight girls at a private single-sex school in Montreal over the course of eight months, teaching a theatre curriculum that allows students to create their own dramatic works by looking at topics of concern to them and performing in front of their peers. The theatre class developed their communication, expression and imagination, among other skills. My research also shows how theatre allowed the participants to create deeper bonds of friendship, develop a sense of empathy and an understanding of others, and a greater ability to express their experiences, thoughts and feelings. These abilities enabled a shared experience with their peers and an understanding that they have anxieties, perceptions and fears in common with others. Therefore, this study shows how important it is for theatre to be an essential part of the high school curriculum, since it not only benefits adolescents in their present lives, but also develops individual capacities that will serve them in the future.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude examine le lien entre le théâtre et le développement positif chez les adolescentes. À travers l'utilisation de la méthodologie portraitiste et de la recherche-action sur la performance artistique, j'ai travaillé étroitement avec huit filles d'une école privée pour fille à Montréal pendant huit mois. J'ai enseigné un programme de théâtre qui permet aux élèves de créer leurs propres œuvres dramatiques en rapport avec des sujets qui les concernent et de les jouer devant leurs pairs. Les élèves de la classe de théâtre ont, entre autres, développé leurs compétences de communication, d'expression et

d'imagination. Mon étude montre également comment le théâtre a permis aux participantes de créer des liens plus profonds d'amitié, de développer un sentiment d'empathie et une compréhension d'autrui ainsi qu'une plus grande capacité à exprimer leurs expériences, leurs pensées et leurs sentiments. Ces capacités leur ont permis de créer une expérience partagée avec leurs pairs de comprendre qu'elles ont des angoisses, des perceptions et des craintes en commun avec les autres. Par conséquent, cette étude montre à quel point il est important que le théâtre fasse partie intégrante du programme d'études secondaires, car il bénéficie aux adolescentes non seulement dans la période actuelle de leur vie, mais développe également des capacités individuelles qui leur seront utiles dans l'avenir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge Kati Kemeny. Without you, I would not be where I am now. You were my first theatre teacher and sparked my interest and love for the theatre. Because of your belief in me, you gave me the opportunity to direct my first musical. Thank you for your strength and your commitment to teaching drama, as well as connecting me with the group of eight girls I've worked with this past year. Without you, my research would never have happened.

Secondly, to my incredible supervisor, Dr. Boyd White, without whom I would probably still be trying to understand phenomenology. You provided invaluable guidance along this path and always had vital insights that allowed me to push on.

To the eight inspiring young women in my class: Your bravery and openness surprised and inspired me every day. Thank you for being so flexible and working with

me this past year. I admire each of your talents and your willingness to try something new. Without your commitment, my task would have been much more difficult.

To my beloved parents and siblings, who have always believed in me and supported my theatrical endeavors. Thank you for your continual encouragement and affection. To my love and best friend, Dylan: Thank you for your patience and unconditional love, for your good humor in times of need, for re-aligning me when I was off-balance, and for helping me find the strength to continue. To all my inspiring friends, you provided me with the space to laugh and relax in between long hours of writing. To Connie, for being such a believer in my work and inspiring me from the moment we met. To McGill University, for accepting my thesis proposal and allowing me to work with such amazing professors. To the headmistress and directors of the school this research took place, thank you for welcoming me in and allowing me to work with your students.

And finally, to M.W.S., for everything you've done. You are my greatest mentor. Your wisdom, commitment and passion inspire me every day.

PREFACE

For as long as I can remember, the arts have been part of my life. I took drama and music classes all throughout high school, and the arts were a big part of my after-school activities. I never truly understood the power of theatre until I was undertaking my degree at McGill, when I had the opportunity to lead theatre workshops for an after-school program at a publicly funded high school. The workshops were open to all students attending the school, but the group I ended up with was comprised of ten girls, from grades 9 to 11. The after-school program director told me that these girls were some of the outcasts of the school. I quickly understood what she meant. Some of them were

aggressive bullies. Others were from newly immigrated families and had trouble communicating in English. There were a few girls who were extremely shy and introverted, and could not even look me in the eyes. They all had striking personalities that clashed in our first class together.

They reminded me what high school was like, since I think most of us try and blot it out of our memories as soon as we graduate. High school and adolescence is a time in our development when we are changing the most. We change to please others, to fit in, to feel *cool*, to feel accepted. We experience physical changes as well, which can lead to social awkwardness. We are faced with the world and want to be treated as adults, but society still treats us like children. Our interests and tastes change depending on the crowd we identify with. We put on personalities and put up defenses. Gossip is a big part of high school, and this environment leads to the creation of cliques and outcasts, popular groups and *losers*. What I realized is that there is no space for all of these different groups to interact and to really get to know each other. In the after-school theatre workshops I led, students were given the opportunity to show their true selves in a respectful space of non-judgment, to participate in group-building activities and games, and to become in touch with their physical bodies through movement, improvisation and play. They were learning about themselves and each other in a way that their other classes did not allow or provide. After only a few classes with them, the after-school program director told me how much of a change she had witnessed in their behavior and interactions in school. She told me that their teachers were also noticing a difference in their communication and expression. Those who were painfully shy were now speaking up in class. The bullies were becoming more compassionate and understanding.

This first experience with theatre education cemented my belief in the positive power of theatre for adolescents, particularly adolescent girls. Since then, I have worked with many different groups of young people, either teaching theatre or directing plays and musicals. From October 2012 to June 2013, I worked with a group of eight grade ten girls, and this is a compilation of my research, thoughts and discoveries.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging stages in human development is adolescence (Petersen et al, 1995). Adolescence is a risky period as the “challenges of tremendous change in all arenas of individual development and in all important social contexts can be overwhelmingly stressful for some young people” (Petersen et al, 1995, p. 7). Theatre is a powerful and positive tool for empowering adolescents and creating a space in which they can engage with and work through personal issues. My study examines the link between theatre and positive change among adolescent girls. My research offers a critical investigation into the art of theatre and explores its effects on the social, emotional and academic lives of a small group of adolescent girls living in Montreal. It further explores the personal impact of theatre and the need for integrating theatre arts into Canadian high school curriculums as a vital means for empowering adolescents to become active agents in their own development.

My premise is that theatre has the potential to create a setting that can mirror the inner lives of individuals, and that it can become a creative instrument for adolescents in high school. Participation in theatre provides the capacity for self-recognition and acceptance, and an awareness that people have their innermost perceptions, fears or feelings in common with others. Kathleen Gallagher (2001) has contributed to the field of

theatre education by studying the intellectual and emotional development of girls as they encounter drama in the classroom. My research builds on the findings of Gallagher's study since I am working with adolescent girls in Montreal, and my study furthers the scholarly dialogue on the emotional and intellectual development of this population. Other prominent scholars use phenomenology as a framework to explore the artistic and social dimensions of theatre (Wilshire, 1982; States, 1985; Rayner, 2006; and Garner, 1994). Whereas their research focuses on the plays themselves, my interest is in the process of theatre training and creating, rather than solely looking at the final performance. Connecting theory and practice, my study builds on the scholarship around performativity and links it to the lived experience of the students I worked with.

I worked closely with eight students at a private high school for girls in the city of Montreal. The research took place over the course of eight months. My curriculum allowed students to create their own dramatic works by looking at topics of concern to them and performing them using techniques they had mastered in the first part of the year, such as characterization, scriptwriting, improvisation, scene work, monologues, and voice and body exercises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

My research explores the many effects of theatre on the lives of adolescent girls. The following is a literature review relevant to my research. I begin with an overview of the history of theatre education (Gavin Bolton, 2007). I then briefly discuss the changes that take place during adolescence and the role of theatre in the development of young people. I also review approaches and theories from specific theatre practitioners who have impacted and influenced my work.

Overview of Theatre/Drama Education

Retracing the origins of theatre education brings us back to the classical period, when Plato's disapproval of "any form of representation, including dramatic recitation celebrating Dionysus" (Bolton, 2007, p. 45), encouraged all those opposed to school drama. For centuries, drama was not included in the educational system. Early Christians detested theatre because of its pagan themes, its disregard for the Second Commandment pertaining to idols, the emotions it roused, and "the degradation thought to be brought about by actors and indeed by theaters themselves" (Bolton, 2007, p. 46). Theaters were regarded as "sinks of uncleanness" (Coggin, 1956, p. 38). In the tenth century, the Romance Catholic Church reintroduced drama by asking adolescent boys to improvise words during liturgical chants. Slowly, the late mediaeval/early renaissance periods saw more forms of theatre. In fact, Jesuit Schools, being the dominant educators during this time, took on the Aristotelian view by encouraging the love of theatre in their pupils. By the seventeenth century, their influence on theatre spread to Catholic royalty and King Louis XIV encouraged theatrical performances.

There was nonetheless, opposition by the Catholic Church, best expressed by Father P. Lami, a French Catholic priest, who, in 1685 wrote:

Apart from the fact that the plays are usually pitiful, that they waste a lot of time, that they distract the mind, that they wreak havoc with studies, over-excite the brain, and go to the head, they are, moreover, contrary to the gospel and to our statutes. (Coggin, 1956, p. 96)

Even to this day, this negative view of theatre has not fully disappeared. By the late eighteenth century, drama was banned in many countries across Europe, and the

Reformation that took place in England made sure that any theatrical art would not appear again until the nineteenth century.

Drama first resurfaced in the classroom, when teachers began including in it English literature lessons in the 19th century. Drama was also reintroduced as speech training, or elocution, which became a very popular, yet individualized exercise, contrary to the social and interactive nature of this art form (Bolton, 2007, p. 47). At the turn of the 20th century, progressive education, “a new way of thinking about the nature of the child, classroom methods and the purposes of the school” (Reese, 2001, p. 1), began emerging in some schools. This movement began with educators like Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), and Maria Montessori (1870-1952). John Dewey (1859-1952) put freedom, self-expression, activity and the importance of the individual child at the center of his educational philosophy. In Stockholm, Esther Boman, the principal of a progressive girls’ school, used “drama to focus on aspects of the curriculum and on personal problems connected with the girls’ lives” (Bolton, 2007, p. 47).

The first full accounts of this new kind of teaching, which included drama and progressive education, were published by two British teachers: Harriet Finlay-Johnson and Henry Caldwell Cook. In 1897, Finlay-Johnson became head teacher at a village school, and used drama to teach the different curriculum subjects. Her students wrote and rehearsed their own creations and performed them in the classroom. Each performance depicted certain aspects of what they were learning and studying. Finlay-Johnson’s approach was in-line with democratic education promoted in America by John Dewey, which allowed the children and the teachers to see themselves as fellow workers in the

classroom, since they “shared responsibility for turning selected subject-matter into dramatic form” (Bolton, 2007, p. 48). In 1911, Caldwell Cook was a headmaster to a boys’ school in Cambridge and used drama in teaching English. His students made dramatic actions out of prose, poetry and Shakespeare.

Soon, drama was introduced into school as an elective, and teachers began learning how to use stories in the classroom. Nellie McCaslin (1914-2005), from New York, became very well-known across the globe for teaching teachers how to include their students’ personal histories to create dramatic presentations (McCaslin, 1984). Peter Slade (1912-2004), from the United Kingdom, was part of a movement that introduced children’s theatre into schools. Professional actors worked with Slade and went into schools to perform plays written by Slade for the particular age group. In the 1940’s, Slade was training teachers in his own methodology that introduced the idea that each child has his or her own *child drama* that can be tapped into and used in the classroom. Through play and music, Slade created spaces for the children to use their own stories in different modes of expression. Slade’s approach was highly physical and recommended large spaces for the children to feel free. Slade brought a therapeutic and psychological aspect to educational drama (Slade, 1995).

With Slade’s new methodology, drama was linked with physical education, and another influential pioneer appeared from Germany in the 1930’s, Rudolf Laban (1879-1958). His techniques are still used to this day (Maletic, 1987; Newlove, 1993; Goodridge, 1999). Laban was trained in theatre and classified basic human movements as a way of teaching physical theatre. Laban believed that training in movement was also a way of preparing actors. Therefore, teachers who used Laban’s method saw a link

between physical education (movement) and professional theatre (acting). Laban's method paralleled that of Slade's. The result was that school gymnasiums provided basic training for all the arts, even acting. Sometimes the gymnasium floor was used for large classes in visual arts, or doubled as an assembly and concert hall.

Questions arose regarding these carefully selected Laban movement exercises, which involved little imagination. Was this approach merely a preparation for future drama work? There was confusion about what should be taught in schools in England, whether it should be Laban movement, traditional theatre, speech-training or Slade's child drama. For some time, Slade's method became the most popular and any form of theatre that involved the children creating their own plays in the classroom was dismissed and forgotten.

Some teachers began to think that *child drama* offered a little too much freedom for the children, so they turned to Brian Way (1923–2006), who was also a friend of Slade's. He used physical education but concentrated on short exercises that mimed everyday life and “aimed at developing each child's intuition and concentration capacities” (Bolton, 2007, p. 50). In 1967, Way wrote a book called *Development Through Drama* about the benefits of creative drama, emphasizing the opportunity for students to gain personal confidence because of the non-judgmental and accepting space it creates. The term *creative drama*, originating from Way's method in which the personal development of the child was the objective, has circulated around the globe and is one of the most popular forms of classroom drama today. In Canada, Richard Courtney (1968) contributed to the theoretical basis of creative drama. I will look at creative drama more closely later in this paper.

From this point onward, many other theater practitioners and educators appeared on the scene, contributing to the ever-advancing field of drama education. Dorothy Heathcote, whom I will also discussed in greater detail, was followed by Betty Jane Wagner and Anne Thurman in the United States, and Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton in Canada. These theatre methodologies have greatly shaped the curriculum in schools today, and all point towards how theatre can be a useful tool in helping young people to express their feelings and emotions.

Adolescent Development and the Role of Theatre

Adolescence has been proven to be a very risky and challenging period in human development (Petersen et al, 1995). Many researchers have shown that there are negative consequences directly linked to stages of change (Petersen, Sarigiani, & Kennedy, 1991; Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton- Ford, & Blyth, 1987) and adolescence is a time of great change, “closely spaced in time [...] when the young person is making changes in several areas of life (e.g., puberty, school change)” (Petersen et al, 1995, p. 5).

Research has shown that puberty has effects on self-esteem and body image and the changes involved in puberty have a more negative effect on girls. Adolescent girls going through puberty see their bodies as strange and awkward, and “adolescents are particularly vulnerable [...] about their attractiveness, peer acceptance, academic competence, athletics, and conduct” (Petersen et al, 1995, p. 7). All of this contributes to a feeling of insecurity. Depression increases dramatically during adolescence and “the increase in depression during adolescence is greater for girls” (p. 13). Hypotheses for this problem include the different ways men and women cope with these feelings of depression. Men belittle or diminish them, while women intensify and expand on these

experiences (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). However, it has been argued that girls experience more challenges during adolescence, which accounts for their greater struggle with depression, self-esteem and negative body image (Petersen, Sarigiani, et al., 1991).

The arts have been frequently used as a tool when working with adolescents and youth. Research shows that creative arts are well matched for positive youth development (Dutton, 2001). Getzel (1983) found that art projects done in groups were “intrinsically enhancing”, provided a “basis for group acceptance and socialization”, and that they are “seen as a broad means to personal and social ends” (p. 67). The arts are therefore a clear instrument to help youth “build competencies, increase feelings of self-worth and encourage the recognition of strengths” (Dutton, 2001, p. 41). Dutton (2001) also found that when youth are involved with creative arts such as drama, dance, and painting, they are given the space to become “active participants in their own education or healing, thus giving them more power to affect change in their own lives” (p. 41). Drama can also improve the self-esteem of adolescents by bringing them “out of disconnectedness into a controlled and connected state, which results in coping and managing behavior” (Widdows, 1996, p. 76).

Many researchers show that art programs such as theatre troupes and after-school drama clubs produce positive changes for adolescents (Americans for the Arts, 1999; Dutton, 2001; Walsh-Bowers, 1992). These changes include lower dropout rates, better communication and social skills, a greater sense of group identity, increased decision-making skills, and higher self-esteem. These results come from a wide range of theatrical activities, including collective group creation and expression. Dutton (2001) stresses that these drama programs should not be solely used to *fix* problematic youth, but should also

be recognized for the positive impact they can have on youth development in general.

Drama therapist Mario Cossa (1992) believes in the transformative power of the arts and states that they “...develop an empowering environment for youth within which greater self esteem would develop, communications skills might grow, an alternative peer culture could flourish, and unconscious material and issues might surface” (p. 53).

Other drama therapists write about the positive results of theatre with children and adolescents. Gavin Bolton (1990) describes how educational drama helps the maturing process and how drama is linked to personal growth and the child’s social development. Joy Widdows (1996) writes about Dorothy Heathcote: “Heathcote believes that the dramatic act helps us to explore the feelings of an experience, and thus decreases any anxiety we may have towards that experience, thereby increasing our control over it” (p. 68). Augusto Boal (2000), a Brazilian theatre director, writer and politician, theorized about how theatre can help young people progress. He sees drama as allowing students to be in two worlds, a real world and an imaginary world. Widdows (1996) discusses Boal’s theory of mataxis: “[It] is both involved and detached, experiencing and yet standing back and looking at the experience simultaneously. Drama becomes a form of learning by experience and form of evaluation simultaneously” (p. 68).

Drama and theatre have also been used in clinical and school settings for “a variety of therapeutic and educational purposes” (Freeman, Sullivan and Fulton, 2003, p. 131). Creative drama, an improvisational and process-driven form of theatre where participants enact and reflect on their own experiences, has provided students with a space to “role play, to analyze roles, and to work cooperatively in creative tasks requiring emotional control” (Freeman, Sullivan and Fulton, 2003, p. 131). Many researchers have accepted

creative drama as a process of nurturing social skills among children (Courtney, 1995; Freeman, et al, 2003; Pinciotti, 1993). As for adolescents, one study found that adolescents engaging in creative drama classes “gained in self-knowledge and self-confidence, [...] have become more tolerant of others, [and are] on their way to being more socially adept citizens” (Yassa, 1999, p. 48).

Dorothy Heathcote

Dorothy Heathcote (1926-2011) was one of England’s most renowned drama educators and her approach has had worldwide success (Wagner, 1976). Her many achievements include the development a specific approach to teaching drama called Mantle of the Expert. I will describe this approach in detail shortly.

Dorothy Heathcote’s intention was to “bring dramatic form back to classroom drama, to redefine the relationship between drama and education, and to recast the role of the teacher” (Bolton, 1985, p. 154). Heathcote treated all her students as fellow-artists, even if they were children. However, it did happen that many of Heathcote’s followers began to distort the medium of drama. In the 1960’s, many of them wanted to move away from “endless exercises and messing about” (Bolton, 1985, p. 155), and reiterated the importance of content in the drama classroom. Giving teachers a role in the classroom, besides being the teacher, allowed participants and observers to believe that the emotions they were feeling were real emotions, bringing life back to the drama classroom. Heathcote coined the term “in depth drama, implying a process of getting right inside a situation” (Bolton, 1985, p. 155).

Heathcote brought naturalism to children’s work and was greatly influenced by Bertolt Brecht’s idea of *distancing* (Brecht, 1964). According to Bolton (1985),

distancing, which involves different acting techniques that allow the audience to experience real emotions while at the same time realizing that the production is fictional or merely a reproduction of an event, is integral when trying to understand drama in education. What constructs drama's effectiveness is "the ambivalent position between fiction and reality" (Bolton, 1985, p. 155). Even though students can have real responses, they know that the situation is fictional.

During the 1970's and '80's, theatre experts developed methods and approaches of integrating real life and fiction while teaching drama in the classroom. Among these new methods and approaches was TIE (Theatre in Education). TIE was introduced in Britain in the 1960's, when British theatre was undergoing new kinds of thinking and had an "atmosphere of experiment" (Jackson, 2002, p. 18). It achieved great success in the '70's by examining social issues relevant to the children TIE companies worked with (Jackson, 2002, p. 24). TIE practitioners included Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton. Their methodologies and ideas began to spread among the TIE circles throughout the '80's. Dorothy Heathcote was most well-known for her approach called the Mantle of the Expert (1985), which is a method that integrates real life and fiction in the classroom.

Mantle of the Expert is a socially based system of teaching whose syllabus and structure is drawn from society (Heathcote & Herbert, p. 173). It is used in drama education and concentrates on groups of individuals, while placing "the student in the position of being 'the one who knows' or the expert of a particular branch of human knowledge" (p. 173). In more traditional models of education, teaching and learning takes place when the teacher transmits knowledge to the students, more commonly known as the banking model of education (Freire, 1970). In this model, teachers see their

students as empty vessels to be filled with information. Freire (1970) said, “it transform[s] students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power” (p. 77).

Heathcote’s Mantle of the Expert gives children roles that demand them to be experts, and the teacher, who is also given a role, needs their expertise (Warren, 1993). Heathcote argues that with the Mantle of the Expert, “the power of communication is invested with the group; the teacher does not assume the role of the main communicant. [...] The child now becomes the expert and the teacher assumes a more flexible enabling role” (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985, p. 174). There is a switch to the teacher becoming an *enabler* of knowledge, rather than a *giver* of knowledge, and the students take “an active part in the process” (p. 174) since they are given power in the title of *expert* in a particular field.

Drama in mind is a key step in the Mantle of the Expert process as well. This kind of drama is different from improvisation since it “does not expose the private being of the child” (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985, p. 176). The teacher instigates drama in mind by asking students to close their eyes and create images of the specific place that is being described by the teacher. “Having provided the information, presented the context, and modeled the task, the teacher gave the group responsibility for creating the site and thus enabled a curriculum of expertise” (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985, p. 177). It is important to note that the Mantle of the Expert approach can be applied to any subject matter, but it can also be used to teach drama in and for itself. In the case of the latter, a teacher would not necessarily choose the theme, concept or task for the students. A teacher could ask the students themselves to come up with one instead.

In an interview in 1983, Dorothy Heathcote spoke about how most learning is what she would call “over there” learning (Heathcote, p. 695). Students are always learning about people and things *over there*, while they are *here*. She continued to say, “in drama you can’t do that, because suddenly you are walking in the time of the event” (p. 695). Therefore, drama makes the *over there* a *here*. She explained it like this: To begin, there is “the whole energy of knowledge” (p. 696), and drama filters it to us through a “fissure”. That “fissure” gives us certain information, but we must use the previous relevant and “well-understood knowledge” (p. 696) from the past to introduce and create new knowledge, learning and meaning to the situation.

It’s the pressure, or the authenticity, of that dramatic moment that creates the new knowledge, that makes different connections, and that suddenly brings connections that have been dormant in my previous knowledge into active use in making sense of new information I encounter. (Heathcote, 1983, p. 696)

Dorothy Heathcote evoked drama; she did not direct it (Wagner, 1976, p. 20). She allowed her students to make as many decisions as possible about the drama piece they were creating. If she foresaw problems in their drama, she warned them about the potential difficulties their decisions would cause. The dramatic process was often put on pause so that the group could discuss and reflect on how the process was going. According to Heathcote, allowing students freedom to make the important decisions in their drama helps overcome group inertia, which is one of the biggest problems for teachers.

If they see their own ideas take shape they are more ready to participate. After they get started, there is the problem of keeping them going in a productive way; here

again, a group assessment of how it is going and student decisions help stimulate interest. (Wagner, 1976, p. 20-21)

Risk taking was a very important part of Heathcote's teaching process. When both she and her students move into an unknown area, everyone becomes more alive and interested. However, Heathcote never used risks that caused students lost sight of her leadership and authority. Wagner (1976) compares Dorothy Heathcote's approach to an American system with a lesson-plan approach. Wagner believes that American educators do not take into consideration the "energizing effect of improvising with a class" (Wagner, 1976, p. 21). Heathcote believed that the end product of improvisation was the experience itself. By allowing students to put themselves into the shoes of another and create experiences that permit them to understand or discover their point of view in a certain situation, they are improvising. This way, they end up discovering more than they knew when they first began the process (Heathcote, 1967).

Kathleen Gallagher

Dr. Kathleen Gallagher, a professor at the University of Toronto, published a book in 2001 titled *Drama Education in the Lives of Girls: Imagining Possibilities*, in which she presents case studies of adolescent girls in grade ten who are learning more about their identities in relation to the world around them through drama exercises. Gallagher combines research and classroom pedagogy as she writes about the stories created in the two years she worked with her students.

In the prologue of her book, Gallagher (2001) states that she has noticed that drama is considered a lightweight subject. This way of viewing drama is predominant in most educational systems. Society believes that drama has to do with the emotions, therefore

classifying it as a subject for girls. “It has a stigma as lacking weight and seriousness that is very prevalent in school” (p. 5). Unlike mathematics, it is not a *hard* subject. However, Gallagher explains that this view of drama is mainly associated with a more Western educational bias, and that other countries take drama more seriously. For example, Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed in South America is used to express the voice of a people, and Market Theatre in South Africa was used in the time of apartheid. In these societies, drama is powerful and important. John McGrath (1981) sees theatre as the most public and clearly political forms of art and Gallagher recognizes its ability to “mediate reality” and “ensures its active intervention in forming contemporary life and contributing to the future of society” (Gallagher, 2001, p. 5).

Keeping this in mind, Gallagher explains how these traditions in theatre have greatly influenced drama educators, especially the work of Cecily O’Neill (1995), whose theories and methods in teaching drama, or what she coined process drama, is about personal and group experiences. The prologue of *Drama Education in the Lives of Girls* expounds on why Gallagher embarked on this project and why she believes that when students do drama, they are thoroughly engaged in an educational experience. She writes, “the arts help to impassion students and recover their lost identity [...] For girls, this means freedom to construct themselves outside prescribed roles and imagine other worlds” (p. 6). The idea of imagining or creating other worlds is what Gallagher focuses her classes on. “Drama asks [students] to mediate reality by working with metaphor, analogy and symbolism, and, most significantly, it asks girls to speak their own understanding of the world” (p. 6). Gallagher uses her work with girls as a way of creating a picture of their learning together. She is adamant that the picture contains the

voice and perceptions of the girls themselves. She hoped that the stories she was evoking in her drama classes would help the girls create “inclusive and affirming worlds, helping them to gain confidence in social relations at a time when they most need it” (p. 28).

Gallagher (2001) explains two reasons why the arts and its research are important. “First, an aesthetic sensibility allows students to inquire and probe and realize their worlds poetically [...] Second, arts education can drive students to create something about which they can be proud of” (p. 25). In her experience as a drama teacher, Gallagher has seen girls bringing their gendered and cultural knowledge to dramatic creation. This type of creation allows them to see things differently and gives them an opportunity to be powerful in schools. Gallagher believes that working in role, process drama and improvisation are methods that have great value in drama education since they are “concerned with forging a production aesthetic during the process” and they “teach students about the social constructs that shape their lives while allowing them to shift perspective and seek truth in opposites” (p. 27). Creating improvised scenarios for students to direct or situations where they can bring their own lives into play, allows them to better understand themselves, the perspective of others, and can make them desire to search for truths in society.

By watching the videotapes of all the drama classes, Gallagher found four specific areas of learning in drama: Drama and Expressive Learning; Drama and Intelligence; Drama as Collective Process; and Drama as Personal Development (p. 44). Gallagher believes that it is the role of the drama teacher to pique the interest of the students and find out what interests them, which is one of the main tenets of constructivist pedagogy. Gallagher’s way of teaching is similar to an improvised mode of learning, where she uses

what Freire (1970) refers to as ‘prepackaged teacher education’ as a springboard for improvised education. The stories create a context that introduces the world in which the characters interact and experience situations.

Gallagher (2001) has found that most adolescents are “grappling with representations of authority” (p. 44). They are also dealing with conflicts such as right and wrong, truth and fiction, poverty and wealth, and self and other. Adolescents are “drawn to situations that ask them to explore their identity and individuality” (p. 45) and they are interested in social issues that include ideas of freedom, oppression and relationships.

Further Discussion

Heathcote and Gallagher are two prominent theatre practitioners who have greatly influenced my work and who have contributed to the ever-advancing field of theatre education. I discussed their approach in detail because I use their philosophy and some of their approaches in my own work.

Other researchers have studied the effect of different arts, such as dance, on adolescent girls. Margolin’s (2009, 2013) work in this field is of importance to my study, since the driving force behind her study is similar to mine.

Because dance transcended my shame and transformed it into deep compassion for my bodily self and, because, in my previous counselling work I observed a deep longing in girls to be heard, I chose to work with dance as my life work: to invite, reach, and teach girls to turn their attention back in on themselves—not on their external bodies but their inner ones. (Margolin, 2013, p. 3)

This is the same reason that I undertook my research with adolescent girls. Instead, I chose to use theatre as the tool to allow these girls to express themselves and to work through their fears and insecurities. Gallagher has begun the work in this field, and I hope to expand and add to it.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodological approaches used in this study and the research timeline. In what follows, I will describe my method of data collection and analysis, as well as the methodological framework of my research. I will also touch upon ethical considerations, since my data was collected from minors at an educational institution.

Ethical Considerations

All participants (students, legal tutor's, and educational institution) in my study signed an ethics approval form, which followed and adhered to the McGill Research Ethics Board (REB) rules and regulations regarding human subjects. I gave out these informed consent forms to the participants before the start of the study (See Appendix A). I submitted a sample of the research proposal, including the consent forms, which were reviewed and approved by the REB prior to the start of my research.

I would also like to explain that my study does not tread on drama therapy. I am not a therapist or counselor, and never pretended to be. The aim of the classes were not to discuss the girls' personal problems, but to talk about what was on their minds in relation to an exercise or an activity. My project involves addressing topics that are of concern to typical teenage girls. That is, my focus is on capturing the group concerns. I addressed

general adolescent concerns, and my intent was never oriented towards therapy. If something of great concern had come up, I would have suggested they talk to their school counselor.

Inquiry Details, Timeline & Curriculum

Framed within a phenomenological portraiture research design (described below), I worked with eight girls in grade ten at a private single-sex high school in Montreal, Quebec. We met during their regular drama class time, once or twice per week, from October 2012 to June 2013. Each class was approximately one hour long.

Phase one, from October 2012 to February 2013, focused on increasing theatre skills based on a curriculum I have developed over the past five years. My curriculum uses building blocks such as: *gesture*, a physical representation of something one is feeling inside (Lecoq, 2006; Boal, 1995); *status*, transactions between individuals in terms of dominance which are ways to express oneself in a situation or scenario (Johnstone, 1981); and *actor neutral*, which develops the physicality of an actor and includes posture, breath, projection and body movement (Bogart & Landau, 2006; Boal, 1992).

The second phase, from March 2013 to June 2013, was geared towards small performances for their classmates. My curriculum allowed the students to create their own dramatic work by researching topics or issues of concern to them, and then performing the work using the techniques they mastered in the previous semester, such as characterization, scriptwriting, improvisation, movement, scene work, monologues, and vocal exercises.

Methodological Approaches

My research focuses on portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann-Davis, 1997) within a phenomenological framework. To begin, I will briefly explain how I use phenomenology, and then describe portraiture in greater detail, since it is the main methodology my study uses.

Phenomenology. Phenomenology aims to “describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 5). It is concerned with the *lived experience* of those involved in the study. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the philosopher and mathematician who founded phenomenology in the 20th century, coined the phrase “back to the things themselves” (Kruger, 1998, p. 28). Phenomenologists aim to “understand the phenomena in their own terms—to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person herself” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96). Once this happens, the essence of the phenomenon emerges (Cameron, Schaffer & Hyeon-Ae, 2001).

I asked the participants questions about their “experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question” (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196). Lofland & Lofland (1999) discuss the importance of field notes by the researcher, who must be disciplined in this practice, and record her impressions, asking questions like, “What happened and what was involved? Who was involved? Where did the activities occur? Why did an incident take place and how did it actually happen?” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 15) They also emphasize that field notes “should be written no later than the morning after” (Lofland & Lofland, 1999, p. 5). When they analyze the interviews themselves,

researchers *bracket* their own preconceptions and “enter into the individual’s lifeworld and use the self as an experiencing interpreter” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 13). This *phenomenological reduction* requires effort on the part of the researcher to see an event or situation as a meaning-laden phenomenon.

Anybody can hear words that were spoken; to listen for the meaning as they eventually emerged from the event as a whole is to have adopted an attitude of openness to the phenomenon in its inherent meaningfulness. It is to have 'bracketed' our response to separate parts of the conversation and to have let the event emerge as a meaningful whole (Keen, 1975, p. 38).

Keen (1975) expands on phenomenology, saying that it is not like other methodologies that have a list of instructions like that of a cookbook. According to him, phenomenology is “more an approach, an attitude, an investigative posture with a certain set of goals” (p. 41).

Portraiture. *Portraiture* (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997), closely linked to phenomenology, is a way of recording and interpreting different perspectives and experiences of individuals that a researcher is studying. It is a way of “documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom” (p. XV). Portraitists aim to bridge the worlds of art and science “allowing for both contrast and coexistence, counterpoint and harmony”, and allow the researcher to “see clearly the art in the development of science and the science in the making of art” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 3).

Portraits are like painting with words (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Portraits show the complexity of human experience, always keeping in mind the

social or cultural context and backdrops, and convey different perspectives of the actors who are part of those experiences. “The portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image” (p. 3). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) wants her portraits to convey “the authority, wisdom and perspectives” of the individuals she researches, but wants her subjects to feel a little bit of distance from the portraits, since they should only “reveal their essence...so that in reading them they would be introduced to a perspective they had not considered before” (p. 4-5).

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) says that portraiture does not document failure. Portraiture searches for good and healthy parts of the process and “assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections” (p. 9). The first question the researcher should ask when writing up a portrait is, “What is good here?” This is quite different from the traditional scientific researcher who searches for general causes and effects. In my case, I am not studying the causes of girls’ behaviors. I am investigating their lived experiences of theatre. I am specifically looking for the good within the described experience. However, portraits are not supposed to be idealistic or document celebration. Goodness is very complex, and when looking closely, vulnerability and weakness can be found, among other features. Portraits try to capture the goodness, but they also want to document how the subjects define goodness. “The portraitist does not impose her definition of ‘good’ on the inquiry, or assume that there is a singular definition shared by all” (p. 9). A good portraitist tries to document the perspectives of participants as well as her own perspective. For the purpose of my study, I look for authenticity as well, since I believe it is one of the qualities found when looking

more closely at goodness. If I find authenticity in a performance or presentation, I would say that it has fulfilled its purpose for that student because it has struck a deeper chord with her.

The portraitist also aims to develop and search for the central story by writing up a “convincing and authentic narrative” (p. 12). This requires paying attention to details, as well as listening to and interacting with the subjects over a prolonged timeframe. Once they have done this, portraitists need to identify common themes and put them together into an appealing and unified whole.

The process of creating a whole often feels like weaving a tapestry or piecing together a quilt. The portraitist’s standard then is one of *authenticity*, capturing the essence and resonance of the actors’ experience and perspective through the detail of action and thought revealed in context (p. 12).

Portraitists give detail to the human experience of their research by showing a convincing and authentic representation of the participants. They do this by writing down detailed descriptions such as the gesture, voice or attitude of the subject, which, in turn, gives readers a broader picture of the actor. In addition, context is of paramount importance in developing an accurate portrait of the subjects. This is true for all researchers working with phenomenology. “Portraiture is a method framed by traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm, sharing many of the techniques, standards and goals of ethnography” (p. 13).

When discussing context, portraitists document the setting (physical, cultural, aesthetic, etc.) in which the research takes place, therefore making context the framework around the actors and research (p. 41). Portraitists believe that human experience is

framed and shaped by the setting. Readers should be “transported into the setting” and “feel as if he or she is *there*” (p. 44). However, this framework is dynamic, as it is always being shaped and re-shaped by the participants. “The context is not only a frame for action, it is also a rich resource for the researcher’s interpretations of the actors’ thoughts, feelings and behaviors” (p. 59).

Researchers who employ portraiture in their work are occupied with two processes: gathering data, and producing a final portrait. The process of gathering data “continues beyond the time spent at a site or interacting with a subject, throughout the actual writing of the finished product” (p. 60). When deciding which part of the gathered data to include in the final portrait, researchers need to question whether the description will help the reader to better visualize and understand the subjects. For instance, physical details might seem very important in the beginning, but it is possible that they lose importance ultimately.

One of the most important aspects of writing a good portrait is understanding that “the voice of the researcher is everywhere: [...] in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence and rhythm of her narrative. Voice is the research instrument, echoing the *self* of the portraitist” (p. 85). Personal experiences shape and produce a portraitist’s voice. Even though the portraitist’s voice is everywhere, it must also be disciplined and controlled. It does not overshadow the voice of the subjects.

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Mackenzie Hoffmann Davis (1997) describe six ways to use voice in a portrait. The following are what apply to this study: voice as witness,

voice as interpretation, voice as autobiography, listening for voice, and voice in conversation (p. 87). I will briefly outline each one:

When using Voice as Witness, the portraitist observes from a distance, and sees the whole picture of the action taking place. The researcher is able to “depict patterns that actors in the setting might not notice because of their involvement in the scene” (p. 87).

In Voice as Interpretation, portraitists take on an interpretive role and continually question, asking, for example, “What is the meaning of this action, gesture or communication to the actors in the setting?” and “What is the meaning of this to me?” (p. 91). Voice as Autobiography reflects the life story of the portraitists. They bring in their own history here, but they do not let their autobiography “obscure or overwhelm the inquiry” (p. 95). Listening for Voice means that the portraitist is focusing on the voices of the subjects. “When the portraitist listens for voice, she seeks it out, trying to capture its texture and cadence, exploring its meaning and transporting its sound and message into the text through carefully selected quotations” (p. 99). Here, portraitists also listen to silence, since it may have to do with areas of confusion or resistance from the subjects (p. 100). Finally, Voice in Conversation occurs when the researcher and the subject are in dialogue. It demonstrates the relationship that is developing between them. This is where “the portraitist purposefully places herself in the middle of the action” (p. 103).

This last way of using voice is important, since developing relationships is crucial in portraiture.

Portraits are constructed, shaped and drawn through the development of relationships. [...] It is through relationships between the portraitist and the actor that access is sought and given, connections made, trust built, intimacy negotiated,

data collected and knowledge constructed. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 135)

One final point that I think is important has to do with the language in which portraits are written. Portraitists must stay away from a coded or exclusive language, and write compelling narratives that attract readers and propel them to think deeply about the topics that they identify with. “Portraitists write to inform and inspire readers” (p. 10). Portraits aim to create a bond with readers. Therefore using appropriate language is imperative to make them feel included.

Performative Inquiry. In conjunction with Portraiture, I employed Performative Inquiry (PI), which addresses drama and theatre specifically because through this art form an aspect of the participant’s inner self because visible and can be reflected upon and analysed (Fels, 2012). “Performative Inquiry calls our attention to those moments that invite us to pause and reflect on the pedagogical significance of such moments for our work, for our relationship with others, for who we are in the world” (Fels, 2012, p. 51). Performative Inquiry is not a method or a list of steps to follow, but is a way of examining “what matters as we engage in drama or theatre activities” (Fels, 2012, p. 51). Performative Inquiry makes the researcher stop and question what is important, and then allows for deep reflection, which is what I did in my study.

In Performative Inquiry, the research begins with an open-ended question or curiosity that is “explored through a creative process, such as role drama or play creation” (Fels, 2012, p. 54). After this initial step, new questions and curiosities arise that the researcher addresses. As a researcher employing Performative Inquiry, I am actively engaged with the participants in theatre and am reflecting, exploring and creating

“a *journey landscape*, an *action site for mapping in reflection*” (Fels, 2012, p. 55) with all the exercises and activities done with the students.

Types of Data

I recorded all classes and took field notes during and after each class. Through these transcripts and observations, as well as individual interviews at the middle and end of the study, I examined the ways in which theatre creates meaning in the lives of these adolescents. Interview questions were open-ended, since this allowed more flexibility. Group reflections and discussions were a major part of the study since theatre is a public form of art whose true power cannot be fully revealed or experienced with a single individual (Gallagher, 2000).

Throughout the course of the eight months, I asked the students to keep journals of their thoughts and experiences, which they submitted every week and which I analyzed upon completion of the project. I also analyzed assignments and activities since they were a collective creation from the students themselves, emerging from the issues and experiences we discussed in the classroom. All of these multiple sources of data ensured integrity and thoroughness in my data collection and research. Since I used a phenomenological conceptual framework, the purpose of all the questions and interviews was to establish what the experience meant for the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Explication of Data

My study used basic qualitative analysis where I collected qualitative, arts-based data and analyzed it for similar themes. The participant chose an alias on the last day of the study. For the purpose of this paper, I grouped the results by major assignment or

activity. I wrote portraits of the setting and the participants based on my first impression of the students and how they were at the end of the research project. These descriptions are based on field notes, group interactions I observed, and journal entries written by the participant. The journal entries were a main source of data collection. In them, I asked students to reflect on certain aspects of each class, or discuss key questions that I would email them after the class. They were written at least once a week, and some are lengthier than others.

I also used Hycner's (1985) model for collecting qualitative phenomenological data. I used this method mainly for finding and developing the main themes across the interviews and journal entries, which I elaborate on in the discussion section. Hycner uses five steps in his procedure. The first step is bracketing and phenomenological reduction, which refers to the bracketing of, or actively putting aside, the researcher's preconceptions and acceptance of the everyday world, including what he/she is reading and analyzing (Cogan, 2006). The second step is the delineation of units of meaning. When reading a transcript, I take out statements that I find illuminate the research and the experience, and isolate them, creating a list of units of relevant meaning extracted from each interview, and eliminate all redundant units. The third step is the clustering of units of meaning to form themes. By examining the list of categories/units, I try to elicit the essence of meaning of the units. The fourth step summarizes each interview and validates it. This summary incorporates all the themes created from the data to give a holistic sense of the collected research. Finally, the fifth step involves extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a summary. I look for themes that are common to most, if not all, of the interviews, still taking into consideration the individual variations.

RESULTS

Through portraits of the participants and thematic descriptions of the work done in the classroom this section aims to show that a curriculum in theatre can promote positive personal and interpersonal development. My project focused on combining theatre techniques with the lives of the adolescent girls in the classroom, as well as their participation in the vulnerable act of creation. For the purpose of confidentiality, the name and exact location of the school, and the real names and socio-economic statuses of the participants are never revealed.

Setting

The educational institution where I conducted the research is a private school for girls spanning from kindergarten to grade eleven on the island of Montreal. The school aims to empower their girls and is committed to developing young women as leaders and life-long learners. Teachers are very dedicated to the students and foster a love for learning in each class. It is a very warm, vibrant and stimulating environment, where young women can focus their time on advancing knowledge without distractions.

When I first approached the school about conducting my research with one of their drama classes, they were very accepting and welcoming. They offered me their grade ten class, which was composed of eight girls. Grade ten and eleven were originally grouped together for their drama class, which takes place in the performance hall. Approximately twice a week I met with the eight girls in a separate room, teaching them my own theatre curriculum.

The room we met in was originally a math classroom, which is not the ideal location for a drama class, but the only available space in the school during those hours.

We had to make it work, so we pushed the desks and chairs to the back of the room, making space for the learning about to take place. There were times when the desks and chairs stayed in place, so that the girls could write their journals or work on their monologues. The math classroom has windows all along the left side, allowing a lot of natural light into the room on sunny days. But on cloudy days, the fluorescent tubes above us were the only source of light. I tried as much as possible to keep them off, but this was difficult during the winter months. Increasing natural light in the classroom is shown to have physiological and psychological benefits for teachers and students (Edwards & Torcellini, 2002, p. 17). Studies have found increased attendance (Hathaway, 1992) and academic achievement (Nicklas & Bailey, 1997) for students who study in classrooms with natural light.

Portraits of Girls

Combining how the students have described their own strengths and weaknesses with how their peers see them, as well as my own observations, I have written portraits for each of the eight girls this study is centered on. These portraits aim to provide readers with a closeness to the girls, an understanding of who they are and what areas might be more of a struggle for them, as well as how they are perceived by their peers. Keeping both my voice and the voice of the girls present in these portraits, I will attempt to weave a well-structured portrait of each girl. During one of the last classes, I asked the girls to choose someone in the class (everyone must be chosen) and identify her strongest qualities and ones that might be considered a weakness. These will also be included in the below portraits.

Mackenzie: Friendly and Clever. Mackenzie is a Vietnamese-Canadian fifteen year old. In the first journal she describes how she views theatre: “The greatest thing I associate drama with is the capability to be whatever I want to be, because in drama, I can leave my own body and be someone else. It’s a great way to escape the chaos of life and just get some peace of mind” (Journal: October 29th, 2012). Her willingness to fully immerse herself in all forms of creation made her stand out from the group and excel in many of the activities we worked on together. Mackenzie brought personal life situations and experiences into the classroom, especially in the monologues we worked on. She regularly made the class teary-eyed with the incredible emotion she put into her work.

Mackenzie admits that she becomes stressed by schoolwork and the constant need to strive for academic excellence. Her parents, who she describes as “super Asian” (Audio Recording: April 24th, 2013), expect her to do really well in school and it is sometimes overwhelming. Her mother is sick, so this is another stress Mackenzie has because she might need be rushed to the hospital at any moment. She brought in the theme of her mother’s illness into many activities we did and monologues she wrote.

Mackenzie is very enthusiastic. Her friendliness and encouragement of others is a great asset in the classroom. Maya chose to describe Mackenzie’s strengths and weaknesses, saying, “I think her strong qualities are that she is sensitive and emotional in a good way, in the sense that she is really a people person. She is really good at absorbing emotion in the room and giving off at the same time. She understands people really well, and she is such a sweet and cute person. I think she doesn’t recognize she is such a people person, which could be one of her weaknesses” (Audio Recording, May 22nd, 2013).

Mackenzie wanted to gain more confidence over the course of the year. In one of the activities, I asked the girls to imagine they had a box with something very special inside. Mackenzie imagined there was a ball of confidence inside the box. “I’m very shy and I always want to work on that. I’m scared to be ambitious sometimes, so to be more confident in myself is something I’m always working on” (Audio Recording, May 15th, 2013).

Blake: Sensitive and Perceptive. From the very beginning, Blake said she is intimidated by drama even though she really likes it. I observed her becoming very shy when the attention was on her. In the first journal she wrote, “I don’t really enjoy getting in front of people. I tend to get scared that I will mess up or something will go wrong, or just look stupid for some reason” (Journal: October 26th, 2013).

Blake was always very present in the classroom. Her contributions were important and pertinent. Even though she was quiet, she was attentive. In a journal (October 26th, 2013) she wrote about how it was hard for her to find time to balance all the areas of her life and she found school overwhelming. This was a common theme throughout the year. But in an interview on January 9th, 2013 she said, “I feel better in this class. I feel less anxious and stressed. I am able to think about other things besides homework. I feel more relaxed. It helps you be more creative and I like that.”

Her classmate Noa described her as “such a sweet person, so nice. She is really fun and always gives good advice. I think she knows she is a little bit shy and needs to work on opening up” (Audio Recording: May 22nd, 2013). I think that gaining confidence and opening up was a common goal for many of the girls, including Blake.

Noa: Fair and Joyful. Noa's bright and happy face was a joy to see in every class. She was always smiling and full of energy. In the first journal she wrote, "I joined drama to become less shy and to help me be able to express myself" (October 29th, 2012). She saw drama as a tool to help with self-expression.

Noa is the middle child, which also has its challenges. The inequality between her and her two brothers is something that frustrates Noa a lot.

I find nothing is good enough for [my parents], not that they are mean, it's just sometimes they don't even give me a chance. You know, my average last year was 87% and my mom was super angry...that's not normal...my brother comes home with a 68% and they celebrate. Ahhhhh. (October 29th, 2012).

Julie described Noa as "super happy and always dancing, which is so much fun. She can really lighten the mood and when people are feeling really bad she can make them feel better" (Audio Recording: May 22nd, 2013). As for something to work on, Julie thought Noa should be more confident around certain boys who she has crushes on.

Noa has spent a lot of time in Kenya, since she goes there every few years with her family. In some of the monologues, she brought in topics of inequality of wealth, which were so apparent in Kenya. She invested her personal opinion in the exercises we did.

Teagan: Creative and Funny. Teagan's bubbly personality was present from the moment I first met her. She had left Montreal in grade 5 when her family moved to Vancouver. In an interview she mentioned that she missed Vancouver and all the friends she had made there, including her boyfriend, saying, "I'm content but I want to be back in Vancouver" (January 9th, 2013).

Teagan is a beautiful girl of Iranian descent, yet her self-esteem in regards to her physicality is quite low. Cecelia, one of Teagan's classmates, described her as "super photogenic" and listed her humor as one of her strongest qualities (Audio Recording: May 22nd, 2013). Cecelia also said that "[Teagan] needs to have more confidence in her beauty and needs to improve her self-esteem" (Audio Recording: May 22nd, 2013). Everyone in the class agreed with Cecelia, since it is obvious how beautiful Teagan is and how little confidence she has.

Teagan brought a personal experience into class when she wrote a monologue on depression. One of her close friends from Vancouver was suicidal and was diagnosed with depression. It was clear that this situation greatly affected her, so she showed courage when she shared it with her classmates.

She had a lot of pressure from her parents to perform well in mathematics. During class on April 24th, Teagan mentioned that her parents had cut off her social life because of her math grades. "They don't let me hang out with my friends anymore until I get my math grades up" (Audio Recording: April 24th, 2013). There were many classes where she was feeling down, due to stresses in other classes. However, this did not stop her from participating in the class and enjoying the assignments and activities. In her second journal, Teagan wrote, "I feel like I belong in this class" (Journal, November 5th, 2012).

Teagan's humor is quite sarcastic, and she used humor many times in the skits or improvisation activities we did. She is also very good at putting on different accents, her best being the Scottish accent. After a year of teaching her, I would say that Teagan uses humor as a coping mechanism (Erickson & Feldstein, 2006) to shield her insecurities, which is a common tendency for adolescents (Fuhr, 2002).

Julie: Generous and Caring. Julie's family just moved to Montreal. Before this year, she was homeschooled by her parents. She described it in her first journal saying, "It was not the most fun thing. My mom really wanted to do it and for the first two years I enjoyed it but the last two years I didn't want to be at home all the time" (Journal: October 29th, 2012). It was a big change for her, but she is really happy with the family's decision to move to the city. However, she said that her mother isn't giving her enough space to "do [her] own thing" (Journal: October 29th, 2012).

Julie is a very sociable person, who is attentive and caring with her friends and classmates. "I love everything about my school except there aren't any guys and I'm a social person and I only get to socialize with girls, which I think is weird" (Journal, October 29th, 2012). From the discussions in class, it was evident that Julie was missing interactions with the opposite sex. When she was homeschooled and lived in the country, she had many male friends, so she is comfortable around them, unlike some of the other girls in the class.

Being in school was a very difficult transition for Julie. "Academically, things are really difficult" (Audio recording: January 9th, 2013). But she seemed to be coping well and forming solid friendships with other girls in her grade. "All the girls are so nice, I'm sure you've noticed, but there's not even one who's not nice to me. It's been really easy to slip in, socially" (Audio recording: January 9th, 2013). When asked to describe Julie, Blake said, "She is smart and helpful. Whenever I need anything I can always ask her. She's a friendly person. Sometimes she blames herself and apologizes when she doesn't need to" (Audio recording: May 22nd, 2013).

Maya: Energetic and Charming. Maya's energy and charm is infectious. She is easy going and overall a happy girl. Like most of the others in her class, Maya gets stressed about school, and said she wished there was less pressure to do well. Maya also has added pressures in her extracurricular activities, since she is a dancer and competes in professional dance competitions. However, dance makes her really happy so that's why she continues it throughout the school year (Audio recording: January 9th, 2013).

Mackenzie described Maya saying:

[Maya] is very outgoing and always includes people. The moment something comes up she is so inclusive and makes sure everyone is involved and everyone has a good time. She isn't fake; she talks to people like they are real people. [She is] so genuine and honest, and that's something that is very refreshing. She is very confident, but maybe she doesn't think she's good enough when she really is (Audio recording: May 22nd, 2013).

This is a perfect description of Maya. She gets along with all of her classmates and is friends with everyone. I would say that she does doubt herself sometimes, which she agrees is something to work on.

Cecelia: Dependable and Outgoing. Cecelia is a very friendly and outgoing girl. She is extremely sporty, and is part of almost every sports team at the school. In the first journal she wrote about how "sports are a great source of happiness" for her and she joins every sports team she can. Sports occupy most of her time, even during the school year. "I do not regret spending so much time playing sports, but sometimes I wish there was more time in a day because I need to sacrifice time with my friends and family to be able to practice" (Journal: October 28th, 2012).

Speaking about school gives Cecelia mixed emotions. She likes coming to school but school can also be overwhelming and frustrating. She has very good friendships with girls in her class and her friends are a source of joy, but since she is so involved with sports after school, she is left with little time to join other clubs or try other things.

Cecelia is very close to her family, although she does not get along very well with her younger sister. She enjoys spending time with them though, and places a lot of importance on quality family time. Pax said that Cecelia's strong qualities are her intelligence and her quirky humor. "She gets passionate about very strange things, which is super cute. I don't think she realizes how smart and passionate she is, which are two of her best qualities" (Audio recording, May 22, 2013).

Pax: Enthusiastic and Inquisitive. Pax's eccentric humor and curiosity were such a great addition to the classroom. Her enthusiastic personality and willingness to commit to an activity were apparent in every exercise we did. Teagan said that Pax was "very smart and funny" (Audio recording, May 22nd, 2013). Teagan commented on how Pax thinks that her weaknesses are annoying to others, which makes her feel awkward around her peers.

In her first journal, Pax wrote about how being in the drama class was causing her a little anxiety:

I'm kind of socially awkward. None of my friends are in this class, and everyone [else] has at least two of their best friends here, and I'm just here being my geeky self. They're all really great people, but they aren't nerds like the people I usually hang out with, so I end up looking pretty weird (Journal, October 28th, 2012).

She wrote about how she hoped acting would allow her to bond with them and help her come out of her shell. In the first interview, Pax was very stressed about her grades in school, because they had dropped to the 80-85% range. “I know it sounds good, but I want to be a doctor, so I need to get better. I’m pretty worried about that” (Audio recording, January 9th, 2013). She was also contemplating breaking up with her boyfriend because she had found someone else who was very special to her, and wasn’t sure what would be the best way to break it off.

I saw that Pax was sometimes on the peripheries. She was different from the other girls in the class, and it took some time for her to be fully included in the activities and exercises. However, after playing many ensemble-building games and sharing some personal stories and monologues, I think she adjusted well and felt more included.

First encounters

The first time I met with the eight girls, I explained what I expect of my students in any theatre class I teach: courage, commitment, compassion, and creativity. For some students, theatre can be very frightening. To be the center of attention in a group, let alone speaking and acting in front of others, can be very intimidating. Therefore, courage and compassion are extremely important qualities to encourage in a theatre class, for both the performer and the audience member alike. I never allow my students to back out of something, so I asked for commitment to follow through in all activities and exercises. Lastly, creativity is needed in every class and I frequently reminded them of this.

The first few times we met, we played theatre games that developed friendship and ensemble. Since many of the girls, besides Teagan and Julie, knew each other for a number of years, they quickly learned to work together in all the activities and exercises

we did. In the first three classes we worked on actor neutral, status, gesture (*HASH*), how to mix emotions and status (*this is a pen*), storytelling (*collective fairy tale, sound scape*), and learning to work as a group (*one voice, point nod walk, flocking, sun and moon, layers*). I explain these activities further in Appendix B. I also introduced warm-up activities, vocal exercises and fun theatre games, which were part of every lesson. Reflection was a major component of the class from the very beginning, since I always asked the girls to name one great thing about their week. This is not something they were used to, but it was a good exercise to help them begin reflecting on what they were doing. It was also a good transition into journals that I asked them to write about each major activity we did.

Once the foundation was set in the first three classes, the next few weeks we worked on more advanced concepts and techniques. I incorporated Boal's Image Theatre into classroom activities, by asking the students to create tableaux of concepts like justice, freedom, love, and contentment. They also learned about developing the elements of earth, wind, fire and water as an actor, which is a technique for exploring body awareness and character development. I asked the students to interact as different elements, to discover what interactions occur when fire and water are put together, for example. Then they chose a generic archetype, like a heroic prince or an evil witch and added one of the elements to that character. Then they explored how the character changes with different elements. This was a great way to start exploring character development in greater depth.

Checking In

I would frequently ask my students how they were doing throughout the year. These 'check-ins' were a good time for them to unload if they needed to, or to give the

class an update on their lives. Sometimes I asked them to simply tell the class how their week was going, but there were other times that I would ask them to give us an update on four areas of their life; social, emotional, home life and academic/school life. After five classes together, I asked them to share how they felt the first few weeks were going. “Really cool” was a common answer, but I asked them to delve deeper to see how the classes may have affected them. “It’s really helped my confidence and I feel less shy when I speak to others now” (Mackenzie, Audio Recording, November 23rd, 2012). Mackenzie’s answer was met with many nodding heads and sounds of agreement. Teagan spoke up, saying “Cause [we are] so weird in [this class] and it’s okay, so I get less shy” (November 23rd, 2012).

The conversation turned into a discussion about performing, and Noa expressed how shy she is and how she does not want to perform in front of others in the school. Julie addressed her concern, saying, “If you get comfortable with us, like, you can become comfortable with other people...and anyway, it’s not you, you are a character” and Noa replied, “I know that drama really helps, in a lot of areas. Cause I remember in grade nine, I didn’t have a drama class, and I was always so scared and shy to talk in front of others, and this year I already feel a difference” (November 23rd, 2012).

The Awakening

This exercise was the first advanced activity they wrote a journal about. The entire narration took place over the course of 20 minutes. I narrated the following after asking them to find a place in the room to lie down. “You’ve forgotten what it is to be in your body. Very slowly, you wake up, but you are experiencing everything for the first time” (Audio recording, November 21st, 2012). The students slowly experienced breathing,

opening their eyes, moving their toes and fingers and sitting up for the first time. They stood up and tried walking. Then I prompted them with specific situations to see how they would react.

You come across a flower; explore the flower. There's a little ladybug on top, how do you react? It flies away. Now you notice water, a stream, what do you do? You start to remember what thirst is. You hear something behind you. What is it? Make a decision about what you see and how you react to it. You now remember what hunger is. Suddenly, you are extremely hungry. You need to find food. You now realize you are not alone. You see everyone, and they are just like you. How do you react? You try and speak. (Audio recording, November 21st, 2012)

This exercise was a way to get them out of their own bodies, start working from a neutral place and explore how their new bodies react to different situations. During the discussion afterward, Julie said "I put my hands on my hips, like I usually do, and then I realized, wait, would I do that?" (Audio recording, November 21st, 2012)

I asked them to write a journal entry on their own time after class about this exercise. They reflected on how this exercise changed their perceptions of the world around them as well as of their own bodies. Cecelia wrote about how this exercise felt a bit strange because "knowing how to do all these things is something I take for granted and never really think about" (Journal, November 22nd, 2012). Pax liked the exercise because "it brought [her] back to the basics" and let her re-examine her own body. Pax also like the exercise because not all eyes were on her. "Thanks to this class, I'm starting to be more and more comfortable with acting in front of a crowd, but having a lot of attention on me still makes me feel kinda awkward" (Pax, Journal, November 22nd,

2012). Mackenzie's reflection was similar to the others, but she described how she felt in the exercise, saying:

Every sensation, every movement, was a new unfelt feeling. It was kind of weird to 'rediscover' in some sense the world, how confused and terrified I would be if after a number of years I was replanted into society. It was fun to explore that and really get into character, also because we were creating an entirely new person. (Journal, November 23rd, 2012)

As for my own field notes during the activity, I saw how seriously the girls took the task before them. They all fully immersed themselves into the exercise. It demanded them to put themselves in a completely different situation, but they were still allowed to be themselves. However, their daily ticks, like in the case of Julie putting her hands on her hips, were stripped away and they became aware of how unconscious they were of their daily physical responses and movements.

First Monologues

Their first assignment was to create a character backstory and monologue. I guided them in this, explaining and discussing what a character backstory might look like. We came up with the following basic list: name, nicknames, age, gender, favorite color, hometown, fashion style, profession, hobbies, and favorite music. Then we went further to discuss how a character story could include their favorite memory, a favorite trip, or the best or worst relationship they've been in. I mentioned that the more detailed they are in creating this backstory, the more their character will come alive. After giving class time for them to create their character's backstory, a few of them shared what they had written. I was impressed with their creativity and imagination, and also intrigued to

hear how similar some of the characters were to the girls who created them. Their assignment was to write a monologue that takes place after a very significant moment in the character's life. It was supposed to be their reaction right after this event. They had one week to complete it.

On the performance day, there was a buzz of excitement and nervousness in the classroom. They had never done something like this before. Noa felt worried about the monologue presentation because she was nervous to speak in front of others. Julie, Blake and Pax said they found it hard to find time to write it, since they have so much other schoolwork as well. Mackenzie admitted that she got emotional while writing her monologue. They were all worried that their monologues weren't going to elicit any sort of reaction in audience members, and Maya tried really hard to find a subject that would engage people. After I patiently listened to their complaints, excuses and worries, and dissipated them all, they were more confident and ready to present. Every monologue was well done, but to discuss their content and their performance in-depth is not the purpose of this paper. I am more interested in readers understanding how the students felt *during* and *after* their presentations. I also want to touch on the similarities I found between some of the students and the fictional characters they created. Not all eight girls will be mentioned, only those who had written or said something pertinent to this inquiry.

All the students really enjoyed the creative aspect of this assignment. Noa wrote, "It was a good experience. I now know how to write a monologue better and it was interesting listening to other peoples stories" (Journal, December 6th, 2013). Maya said, "Writing the monologue was the best part for me because there were no restrictions as to

what she could say or what her story was” (Audio recording, December 5th, 2012). The monologue made Teagan more excited about writing:

I really enjoyed creating and writing about a fictional character that I made up on my own, I got to decide everything about her and I loved how it made me feel empowered and happy, it even encouraged me to start writing more, I got a blank journal and have begun writing a story about another character that I’ve created.
(Journal, December 7th, 2012)

Mackenzie’s reflection about the writing process was very well expressed in her December 6th journal. The following is part of what she wrote:

It was so weird because I wasn’t really having that great of a day and then all of a sudden I was writing, and my voice was going hoarse, and I felt kind of flush, and then I was crying. I felt so emotionally bonded to the character because I was writing as if I was her and she’s so stubborn and doesn’t like being attached to any situation and then this person who is so important in her life, this person that she respects more than anything, and that truthfully, is the only one that’s always been there for her, is suddenly gone and she’s all alone and then she has to identify his body and as she’s saying the monologue, she doesn’t want to cry, doesn’t want to show how impactful that moment was, but she loses that fight because it was so traumatizing. As I was writing, it was as though I was building layers to her, constructing a completely different person (with some similarities to myself) and I kind of got lost in her for a bit.

Noa was very nervous before reading her monologue to the class. In her journal she wrote, “I probably turned bright red when I was reading. I don’t really have that much

confidence in myself. I did feel really nervous throughout the whole thing, but at the end, when people said they liked mine, I felt better” (Journal, December 6th, 2012). Mackenzie and Pax’s nervousness did not come from anxiety to speak in front of others, but from their attachment to what they had written.

When we had to say the monologue in class, I have to say that I was so nervous.

Not because I was scared about reading my work, but because I was so attached to what I had written, so deeply moved by my character, that I was scared I wasn’t going to do her justice because I felt like that’s what she deserved after all that trauma. (Mackenzie, Journal, December 6th, 2012)

The presentation to classmates....that was my least favorite part. I was really nervous to present because my monologue was very personal to me and I wasn’t sure how people would take it. (Pax, Journal, December 6th, 2012)

Teagan compared herself to others, saying, “When I finished writing [my monologue] I thought it would be one of the best in the class but after I heard everyone else’s I realized mine was crap in comparison to theirs” (Journal, December 7th, 2012). Pax also compared her monologue by writing how “everyone else’s were so emotional and intense, while [hers] was kind of more on the funny, lighthearted side” (Pax, December 6th, 2012).

Mackenzie was the only one who wrote in detail about the process of reading the monologue to her peers and how she felt after the presentation.

When I was reading it, I kind of just got lost once again and my hands were kind of shaking and I was scared to look up at the end. I just remember that there was this quiet fog in the room for a moment and I didn’t want to look up because I was

scared everyone was containing their laughter or that people weren't paying attention. When I did look up though, the first thing I saw was Maya's red tear streaked face and it just warmed my heart because I felt proud that I had been able to show her what Blanca was feeling. As if I had accomplished something. It was liberating and thrilling really. I mean after pouring so much heart into this character and then getting people to respond emotionally, to feel something for some person that I had created was crazy. (Journal, December 6th, 2012)

After each presentation, I gave the student some feedback on her piece. I think they really enjoyed hearing about the strengths of their work and areas where they could improve. Teagan said, "I went back and fixed it up a little using the comments you gave me and now I think its sounding a lot better" (Journal, December 7th, 2012).

Interviews

I had done a preliminary interview when I first started with them in October, but they responded to my questions in a journal instead of face-to-face. They did not know me yet, so I thought that responding to my questions in writing would help them more feel comfortable discussing personal topics and opening up. I asked them to address the following questions in their first journal:

- What comes to mind when you think of "theatre" or "drama"? Be as descriptive as possible. Is it linked to a certain emotion/feeling?
- What has been your experience with theatre, if any? How do you feel about participating in or doing/creating theatre?
- Tell me about your present life. How do you feel about your life these days? Are there areas of your life you wish were different? What kinds of things make you

upset or sad? Just write about yourself and your life, like as if you were writing to a friend.

I wanted to know what their relationship was with theatre and how they felt about it. Drama is an option course in grade 10 and 11. Students in grade 10 have a choice of drama, music or art. The first two questions helped me assess what they thought of theatre, and what experiences they have had with it. The range of experience varied to some degree. Most had no experience at all, only taking drama in middle school, while a few had been in plays or other productions before. Regardless of their experience, I wanted to teach the basics at the beginning to make the vocabulary clear for everyone. The third question helped me gain an inside glimpse into their psyche, and this is much of what shaped their portraits.

When classes resumed after winter break, I decided it would be a good time to conduct one-on-one interviews with each girl, which I audiotaped. They were open-ended questions and, depending on the interview, sometimes I asked additional questions to help them further expand their ideas. The following are the main set of questions I asked each girl.

1. What is it like to be in this class?
2. How do you feel when you know you have a theatre class today?
3. How do you feel after this class?
4. What kinds of things have you learned in this class?
5. Has this class affected you or other areas of your life?

The purpose of these questions was to see how the first semester had gone, what they had taken from the classes, and how it had impacted them. These questions also

helped shape the portraits, but it also helped me get a better feel for what was working and what was more of an interest to the students.

Social Issues Monologue

After the one-on-one interviews were completed, I asked each girl to pick a global issue that she felt strongly connected to. Blake chose bulimia because a friend from camp had experienced it and she witnessed her friend destroying her own body. Noa felt connected to poverty because of her frequent trips to Kenya. Julie chose drug addiction since she has met a few prescription drug addicts and her mother has always tried to help people who were in need. One of Teagan's best friends was diagnosed with depression and tried to commit suicide, so she discussed this very difficult issue with the class. Maya chose the issue of injustice and how some people are just luckier than others. Her cousin recently died of cancer. Pax's friend was raped a few months back and so she chose the topic of being taken advantage of. Cecelia's greatest fear is being alone in old age. She discussed how some older people don't have friends or family to take care of them. Mackenzie's choice was pertinent to her own life and the struggles her mother is going through. She chose the concept of not being in control and time being the worst enemy.

I asked them to choose a character and to write a monologue about their chosen issue. I emphasized that writing with emotion behind the words was key and to do this they must think about how the character feels in the situation she (or he) is faced with. The presentations a week later were very emotionally intense, so to end that class we played some games and fun activities.

After each presentation, I asked them to explain how it felt to write the monologue. The answers varied, but all of them felt it had a positive effect on them, even though

some felt sad writing it, they felt it was a good release of emotion. Pax decided to take the point of view of an old man who was hearing his neighbor being physically taken advantage of. She said, “It was pretty hard to write about. I actually couldn’t even read it over. It was difficult, but it was an emotional experience, which is good. I reacted to it and felt a release” (Audio recording, January 18th, 2013). Similarly, Maya, who wrote about injustice in a non-narrative form, said, “It felt emotional and it was a bit hard to write. But it was good. It was a good release. It was great to be able to express these feelings” (Audio recording, January 18th, 2013).

Mackenzie had a strong connection with her monologue since she wrote about a personal experience. Similar to when she read her first monologue, there wasn’t a dry eye in the room. “When I set the topic, I was like “ok wow, maybe I shouldn’t do this.” It was personal for me and it was very difficult to write. After three drafts everything came together. I didn’t really know how to write about a topic that was so close to me” (Audio recording, January 18th, 2013). This situation reminded me of Gavin Bolton’s (1971) claim that when a group is sharing in a dramatic situation, it is more powerful than any other type of education.

This assignment was so different to anything they had done before. They felt empowered and heard in the class, since they were able choose something that they were interested in, passionate about, and connected to. They felt like they had an important voice and perspective in the classroom and this continued in other assignments throughout the semester.

Body Image

After we finished the global issues monologue, I decided to choose a topic that they could all discuss and make a personal connection with: Body image. It's that one topic that nobody really wants to talk about. I asked them to say the first word comes to mind when they hear "body image." They mentioned: body, self-consciousness, short, yourself, insecure, confidence, and uncomfortable (Audio recording, January 23rd, 2013). Then I asked them to rate how confident they were about their own bodies, a ten being very confident and a one being not confident at all. Their answers varied between a three and a seven, but the average was a 5.6.

We then discussed the image of the perfect body. The first image they all said was Victoria's Secret models. However, Julie said, and most agreed, "That's not real. They don't eat" (Audio recording, January 23rd, 2013). Noa brought up how she and her friends compare themselves to actresses and even to each other. "Even other people our age, we can look at them and see how pretty and skinny they are, so we obviously compare ourselves" (Audio recording, January 23rd, 2013). Mackenzie added to the conversation saying, "Some of them eat so much and they are still so skinny. I eat one pudding and it's over!" (Audio recording, January 23rd, 2013) I asked if they had an ideal image of what they wished their bodies looked like. Their answers included being taller and thinner, being more tanned, having bigger breasts and being curvy instead of stick-straight.

We discussed feeling envious of friends in greater detail, since it had come up before. They all agreed that they had, at one time or another, been jealous of a close friend.

Julie: I have this one friend, I don't even know how it's even possible but she's perfect, and she's such a flirt. So there's this guy I like and she will be like 'oh my gosh you are so funny' and laugh and then the guy is like 'oh my god she's so hot' and I'll just be there like 'right. Here we go again.' (Audio recording, January 23rd, 2013)

Mackenzie: But sometimes it's not a bad jealousy. Sometimes it's not like 'oh my gosh I hate her', it's just like 'aw she has such a good body.' (Audio recording, January 23rd, 2013)

Noa: Yeah, I have a friend like that. She gets every guy. It's so annoying. But it's not like, 'I hate you', it's just like, 'I wish I was like that too.' (Audio recording, January 23rd, 2013)

Mackenzie: One of my friends, I go over to her house and she'll be like kind of just getting out of bed and I'll be like, 'how are you pretty right now?' When I get out of bed I look like the Loch Ness monster! Also, there are some people who have a smile that glows and I'm so jealous of people who have that, whose face just lights up. (Audio recording, January 23rd, 2013)

Trying to make the conversation to a more constructive and positive, we shared one thing we loved about our bodies. This was a very difficult task for most of them. After a while, some said they liked their fingers, their calves, their hair, or their eyes, but it was followed by how much they disliked their body shape, their thighs, their butt, or their mid-section. I explained that if they are constantly looking for things they don't like, they are never going to love what they have. Maya added to this point saying,

There's a difference between feeling like you hate your body because it's not what you want and having a realistic image of what you can get or do to change your body. As long as you're healthy, that's good. If you aren't healthy and you hate your body because it's not healthy or fit, then it's good to use that as motivation to get a better body because it's better for your health. But if you hate your body because you don't look like a Victoria's Secret model, then that's just extreme. (Audio recording, January 23rd, 2013)

The following class, we represented body image in tableaux, using Augusto Boal's Image Theatre, which they had used before when exploring topics like justice and freedom. In this case, representing the topic of body image with Image Theatre was more challenging. Image Theatre is a system of non-verbal theatre exercises, collectively created through non-verbal images that are shared by a specific group. "Boal stresses that images created in Image Theatre are not symbolic. [...] Rather, 'signifier and signification' are the same. [...] Images, therefore, do not merely represent language, they are language" (Perry, 2012, p. 107). The girls used their bodies to create an image that represented their relationship with their own bodies. They were able to show the ideas we discussed during the previous class without using any words, and they were more comfortable showing it physically than discussing it verbally.

They wrote a journal about the discussion on body image and the follow-up exercise, and many found it helped them encounter their relationship with their body and see that their peers also had similar challenges and perspectives. They felt a closer bond to their classmates after sharing how they felt about their bodies. "We all got to share what we thought and I think that it did make us closer. I think we should do more

activities like this. It let everyone trust each other. We were really able to share what we thought and think about things that we wouldn't usually think about” (Noa, Journal, February 6th, 2013). “I think, although it’s a little difficult and awkward, it is a good and important thing to talk about, especially among girls. And it really helps when we express it with our bodies” (Julie, Journal, February 7th, 2013). “I did find it a little awkward to talk about, but I thought it was really interesting to hear what other people had to say and also to really think about and express what my body image is like in a different way” (Blake, Journal, February 6th, 2013).

Letter Writing

Turning inward, I asked the girls to write about the best memory they had of their childhood in as much detail as possible. The only requirement was that they had to be less than ten years old. I gave them some time to write during class and then they read their stories aloud. The assignment that week was to write a letter to their child-self, and the childhood story was a tool to allow them to access memories from their childhood. Their letter was meant to impart wisdom or advice to themselves as children. Kathleen Gallagher uses letter writing with her students, and she noticed that her students developed a personal engagement with a story or topic, constructed many perspectives and experienced form and context working together (Gallagher, 2001). After the girls presented, we had a small discussion about how it feels to relive memories. The consensus was that childhood stories are nostalgic and quite sad because it made them realize that they are no longer children. “It’s very bitter sweet. Once I remembered one memory, other memories came back as well and it was fun just to think about my past

and when I was little” (Maya, Journal, May 4rd, 2013). “I never realized how much I miss being a young, innocent kid” (Blake, Journal, May 4th, 2013).

Pax found another benefit of this exercise and wrote about it in her journal, saying:

I think this activity was intended to bring out an emotional side, which I don’t do very often because I focus on humor, but I definitely tried to. I really enjoyed writing it. It was a challenge for me, something different. It really made me understand the “dramatic” side of drama instead of the one that just amuses people. (Journal, May 5th, 2013)

This was a different perspective from others. The other students wrote about how sad and nostalgic the assignment was, but Pax focused on the benefits it had on her understanding of theatre. Before she read her letter she told the class, “It’s different, it isn’t what I usually write. It’s very emotional” (Audio recording, May 15th, 2013). Her letter revealed some secrets to her child-self, like how some animals never get better and eventually die, or how her early drawings were going to get much better and how she should never stop drawing. The last paragraph of her letter was about finding love and friendship.

You went with this family to Marineland, if I recall correctly? A family with a boy who was awkward and dorky and you were pretty sure hated you? Yeah, he’s going to be your best friend one day, and even a little more. You’re going to be so, so happy, even if you won’t become a vet or a cartoonist, because throughout all the changes and melodrama of what you’ll soon come to know as your regular every day life, he will stand by you. Unlike time, which you’re sure will run out, he will

be constant. That happiness you felt on that week at Marineland is something you'll feel every single second you're with him. (Audio recording, May 15th, 2013)

I noticed that this activity brought out a different side of Pax. She was not awkward or dorky, like she usually describes herself, but confident and serious. This exercise was unlike anything she had done before.

Box activity

The final big activity we did required a lot of creativity because I wanted to end the year with something that challenged their imaginations. I asked them to find a place in the room that was not too close to someone else. I directed them in a simulated situation with a very special box, and the following is what I said.

Close your eyes. Imagine a box. Pay attention to the details of the box. It's a special box. Inside this box, there is something very special to you. Now, open your eyes.

The box is right in front of you. You love this box. Is the box what you imagined it would be? Is it heavy, light, big, small, dusty, clean, shiny, old? Now you open the box, and you see that very special thing inside. You take the special thing out of the box. Put the box down. Look at the thing very closely, look at all the details of it.

Use it however it's meant to be used. Oh no! You just chipped it, you just broke it, you just hurt it. What are you going to do? How do you fix it? Phew, thank

goodness, it's fixed. Now walk around the room with your special thing. How do you walk with it? Now it's raining really hard outside, how do you protect it? It's

very cold, what do you do? Someone's trying to steal it, what do you do? Now you see your best friend, a fictional person, just pretend someone's there, do you show

them your precious thing? Are you careful, cautious, friendly? They are really jealous of you and they want it... But they only want to borrow it. Can they borrow it? Please can they have it just for one day? For a few hours? Can they just hold it? Decide whether or not they can take it in their hands. If you do, give it to them. They ran away if you gave it to them. What do you do? If you didn't give it to your friend, they are crying, right in the middle of the street. What do you do? Ok you caught up to them, they gave it back to you. They stopped crying and they left. Now you are walking with your special thing. You come back home. You want to take care of your thing, what's the best way? How do you treat it super well? What do you do to it? Now you put it back in the box, and close the box. Now put the box on your lap, and you will, one at a time, show off your box and what's inside. It's like show and tell, show it to everyone here in the class. (Audio recording, May 20th, 2013).

Then, one at a time, they showed off their box and object, but without talking. I prompted them while they were doing it, saying things like "show us how much you love your object" or "can you go around and show everyone your object?" At the end of their turn, they had to put their object back in the box and then say goodbye to box and the object inside. Most did not want to say goodbye, but I prompted them again saying "I'm so sorry but you really have to say goodbye" or "No, you can't take it with you" or "It's time to go and leave your box now. You will never see it again. How do you say goodbye?" For some, it was a very dramatic departure, but others left quickly because they couldn't bear to say goodbye.

After everyone had their show-and-tell turn we tried to guess what the objects were. Cecelia chose her journal, which she writes in regularly. She said that if her house was burning down and she had time to take one thing with her, she would bring her journal. Pax chose her dog, Blue, who doesn't live with her anymore and who she misses a lot. The first thing that came to Julie's mind was a gem, which doesn't have a very personal connection for her, but it was a special and expensive gem. Her box was very intricate and was lined with satin for the gem to be placed inside. Teagan's object was a shell her aunt gave her when she was little, that she really believed was from King Triton from *The Little Mermaid*, who was sending her a message that she was secretly a mermaid. She used to talk to the shell everyday, pretending to be Ariel. Maya chose her first dance shoes, which represent her first years of dancing. This is also something that she shares with her mother, so there are many pleasant memories linked to the shoes. Noa's object was a locket that has been passed down to the women in her family. Inside is a picture of her great, great, grandmother, and she could never imagine losing it. Inside Blake's box was a special necklace her father bought her while on a trip. It was special to her because her birthstone is on it.

Mackenzie chose something quite different to the rest of her classmates. Inside her box was a ball of confidence. "I am very shy and I want to work on that. I'm scared to be ambitious sometimes, so to be more confident in myself is something I'm working on" (Mackenzie, Audio recording, May 20th, 2013). When I prompted them to do something with their special object, Mackenzie decided to eat the ball of confidence so that it was inside of her. In her journal about this exercise, Mackenzie wrote how "it was a bonding

moment to be able to show something of such value to friends who also probably need a dose of confidence” (Journal, May 16th, 2013).

As soon as the activity was finished, I asked them how they felt. They all thought that it was a lot of fun. They liked how they only had a few seconds to choose the special object in their box, because it forced them to pick the first thing that came to them. Pax spoke about how she felt so many different emotions during the activity, including sadness, happiness, fear and remorse. She picked up on the goal of the activity, which was to feel a variety of emotions, all relating to one object, or in Mackenzie’s case, a personal characteristic.

I came up with this activity because I wanted to allow my students the chance to improvise without words, to feel emotions deeply, and to show off to their peers as a way of gaining confidence. This was the last major activity we did before the final interviews at the end of the year.

Final Interviews and Reflections

The final interviews took place in June, 2013, and each interview was approximately 15 minutes long. Since the girls were already in exams at this point, the interviews did not happen during class time. Together, we scheduled individual times that would best suit them to meet at the school and conduct the final interviews. Similarly to the mid-term interviews, the final ones were loosely structured. I had formulated a list of seven questions in advance, but sometimes the girls needed extra questions to help them elaborate further. The following pages address the questions I asked the girls in their interviews.

1. If you can look back to the beginning of the year, why did you decide to take drama?

When I asked them why they decided to take drama a year ago, most of them replied that they chose drama because it is fun, they really like it, and they prefer it to music and art, which are the other options they had. However, Noa's answer was a little different. She said, "Well I actually wanted to become less shy because I felt like I was less shy in grade eight when I took drama, but then I didn't take drama in grade 9. I felt a difference when I was doing presentations and stuff, so I wanted to improve that" (Audio Recording, June 3rd, 2013).

2. How do you feel after taking a year of this drama class?

This question had a variety of answers. Some said that it was very interesting, that they had experienced new things, that they really enjoyed themselves, and that the class was really fun. A few of them dared to dive deeper. Noa said that she feels better able to speak and perform in front of others without feeling as shy as she did. She said it was a result of the activities we did throughout the year, since they allowed her to get used to speaking in front of others. Teagan said that she feels like she learned a lot about herself and her emotions in this class and she also learned about how other people feel. Pax felt a lot more confident. "I have more friends because I'm closer to all the people in my class now and I think it's because of drama" (Audio recording, June 19th, 2013). They all expanded more on these thoughts in the last question of the interview. Blake's response to the second question sums up what a few of the others also said about the class.

It's really different than anything I've done before and it's so different than what we do in other classes. So it's like a little break. It's different because you aren't sitting at a desk the whole time and writing things down; you're moving, [and] you

get to interpret things. I learn best when I'm actually doing things. (Audio recording, June 7th, 2013)

There are different ways in which people learn best. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1987) would suggest that Blake is a kinesthetic learner, since she learns best when she is active and physically doing things with her hands or her body. I would suggest that theatre does engage kinesthetic intelligence learners in most activities, although other types of intelligences can also be engaged in a theatre class. For example, interpersonal intelligence, which is the "ability to understand other people, what motivates them, how they work, [and] how to work practically with them" (Garner, 1987, p. 29), is also used in theatre since it requires them to understand others and feel empathy.

3. *Do you see yourself as different in this class compared with other classes? Do you think you behaved differently in this class than in others?*

It is common for academic courses such as mathematics and chemistry to be prioritized in this school. There is also a lot of emphasis put on athletics, but the arts are usually put on the backburner. Cecelia acknowledged that she prioritizes academics and athletics, and said that drama class is a time to "let go and do something you enjoy" (Audio recording, June 3rd, 2013). So in that respect, she did feel different in this class because she could express herself more and feel more relaxed. A few others felt this way as well, saying things like, "In this class I let myself out, because drama is more about self-expression" (Pax, Audio recording, June 19th, 2013), "I know I'm still quiet, but I get to be more expressive and say things more, like my opinion" (Blake, Audio Recording, June 7th, 2013), and "I'm much more open and loud" (Teagan, Audio

Recording, June 7th, 2013). Noa and Mackenzie discussed how they felt less shy in this class because of the friendship and unity that was developed early on. Noa also added to this saying, “Everyone is doing silly things and not judging you” (Audio Recording, June 3rd, 2013), and this helped her be less shy.

4. *Do you think there are characteristics or aspects of yourself and your life experience that you brought into activities we worked on together? What part of you was engaged in class activities?*

Their school is very small. Almost everyone knows each other, regardless of what grade they are in. However, being in such a small class with only seven others is rare. Some of the girls discussed how they felt able to share a personal side of themselves in this setting, one that they might not want to share with the rest of the grade. They were also discussing topics that they would not usually talk about in other classes and sharing things they wouldn’t normally share. Cecelia said that she might have shared them with the people in the class because she is close to most of them, but it would not have happened in a classroom. They all said that they speak more about their life in this class than in any other.

Noa, Pax and Mackenzie discussed how the activities really brought out their inner thoughts and experiences surrounding different subjects. “I feel like we all brought aspects of ourselves to [all the exercises]” (Mackenzie, Audio Recording, June 3rd, 2013). Pax specifically discussed the monologues and how her character was a reflection of herself.

There were times that I was scared of going into detail about issues but the most recent assignment we did about the childhood memory got me really talking about my childhood and I mentioned that it was a little bit rough, but it was nice to let go.

Monologues were also intense for me. The monologue about the character was super reflective of my own life. Well, it was happening back then when I wrote it. And it helped because I was able to get my thoughts out on paper and work through it. And it's funny because at the end of the actual monologue she goes for the best friend, and in real life I also did. (Pax, Audio Recording, June 19th, 2013)

Pax was able to freely discuss personal experiences she was going through with her peers, get them on paper and work through them. This is a good example of one of the many powers of theatre. Cecelia believed that the emotional side of herself was worked on most in the class, which is another way that theatre can affect participants.

5. *Which activities did you most enjoy?*

Most of the answers the girls gave for this question involved a list of some activities they enjoyed the most. A few of them explained why they liked a certain activity more than others. For example, Teagan said, "I really liked the box activity, because it's like all these emotions coming out into one little object or item" (Audio Recording, June 7th 2013) and Cecelia said, "I liked writing about those global issues that touched us because it was personal and we were passionate about whatever we chose. I felt connected to the assignment" (Audio Recording, June 3rd, 2013). Feeling connected to the assignment was the goal of many activities we did together.

Julie, who was new at the school, discussed how these activities allowed her to develop deeper friendships with the girls, saying,

I think I enjoyed the monologue one the most, because it was really fun and really touching. And because it is my first year at this school I feel like I got to see the heart of a lot of girls here, which was really interesting. You see people's everyday

self, but when you see something touch them and see how they react to that, that's really amazing. Especially when people start crying or sharing emotional things, I really felt like I know them a lot better and felt closer to them after that because you feel like you share the same kind of thing...it's like getting to know all sides of a person, which is really cool. (Audio Recording, June 7th, 2013)

This is precisely the goal of these theatre activities: To foster deeper bonds of friendship between these adolescent girls by creating and sharing personal experiences and ideas, and realizing that they are going through similar experiences and feeling similar things.

6. *Do you think this class helped you to feel important or made you feel you were making a personal contribution? If so, in what ways?*

Some of the girls felt like they had a voice in this class and that their opinion was not only valid but important too. The following is what Mackenzie, Blake and Pax had to say.

This is going to sound silly, but like, in this class, I really felt like I had a voice. And um, doing the monologues, like hearing people's responses to my writing because I don't usually show my writing, and it wasn't just an essay or something like that, it was personal. And that experience made me feel more confident about my writing. It made me like writing a lot more and in general feel more confident. (Mackenzie, Audio Recording, June 3rd, 2013)

Every time Mackenzie read her monologue to the class, everyone got teary. Her writing was very powerful and I think she discovered that in this class. To have her

writing so well received by her classmates was very encouraging for her and gave her more confidence, which is what she hoped to gain from the class.

We all got a chance to read or present out things out loud in front of others, so it made everyone feel included in some way and feel like we had a voice. (Blake, Audio Recording, June 7th, 2013)

Even though Blake is very shy, she felt like she had a voice and was able to present her work in front of others, which helped her work on her shyness.

I definitely didn't feel like I had a role in my class before, I felt like I was just kind of there, and I always thought I'd graduate and just be the person that's just 'there', but now I feel like I'm a lot closer to everyone and I feel like I have a part to play now. So that's awesome. (Pax, Audio Recording, June 19th, 2013)

I think that Pax's transformation was the most notable in the class. At the beginning of the year, she was not as involved in the activities and exercises because most of the girls in the class were part of a different group of friends. But the bonds of friendship created in this class over the course of the year allowed her to feel closer to these peers.

Julie described how she sees drama class as a safe space where she can express herself. I was glad to hear this, because, without that trust and security, some of the discussion we had would not have been as successful. The first step for students to feel important and feel like they can have a voice is to trust others and feel secure.

For the final question, I asked each girl to look back at everything she learned over the year and all the activities we had done together, to reflect on how she might have changed or developed because of this class. All of them answered that they felt a change or development, so I asked them to identify specific areas or specific things that had

changed or developed within them. For this question, I am including the pertinent transcription of the audio recording for each girl's answer.

Cecelia: I think I was more confident when talking in front of people about just general things, and I felt more comfortable than I thought I was going to feel, which is good. I wasn't as nervous as I thought I was going to be. I was more open, like, in class I shared things that I might not have shared before. It exposed that side of me. Some activities we did made me think about what was really important [and] it made me put more focus on those things. (Audio Recording, June 3rd, 2013)

Maya: This class definitely made me closer with the people in the classroom. It made me more creative, and, like, for the issue thing it made me more reflective. I thought about things a lot deeper. (Audio Recording, June 3rd, 2013)

Mackenzie: I used to think that I wasn't so confident about things, but after this year I kind of realized that there are some aspects that I am more confident about and I am generally more confident. I also don't want to doubt myself as much because I feel like another thing that ties into that is that because I didn't think of myself as confident, I put limits on myself and I feel like once those things were pushed away it's easier to do stuff and be ambitious and expressive. Loving the environment that I'm in and realizing that I'm not alone and we are all going through the same kind of thing; that was a really important discovery. (Audio Recording, June 3rd, 2013)

Noa: I became less shy and writing the monologues and reading them made me feel more comfortable writing things and presenting them. I didn't feel like they would laugh at me. (Audio Recording, June 7th, 2013)

Julie: I've noticed and become more aware of the way people are, like their status. I've noticed that you can really tell when someone feels like they're important. I learned to pick up facial expressions a lot more and understand them better. Like when we did the expressions exercise, when you look around the class and see what people's expressions are when they are super happy, then you can see it later on. So that was also helpful because it's like "ok I know she's upset, but now I know she's angry upset, not just upset." I think it helps a lot to talk about things that are close to your heart. I think it helps to share with people because then they share something with you, you can hold up the burden all together. I've never seen this side of my friends before, like when they are upset about things, but once I had seen that I was like "ok we can share this together and get through it together and talk about it all together and it will be ok." (Audio Recording, June 7th, 2013)

Blake: Something that has definitely changed is that I got more comfortable talking in front of people, especially when we were reading our monologues. I was really shy in the beginning to read what I wrote, but then it became much easier. I have this huge resistance to speaking in public, especially when it's something I write myself. I feel like I got closer to people in that class because there are some people I don't really hang out with, even though we might be friends, we aren't close friends. So I got close to a few people that I wasn't really that close to before. (Audio Recording, June 7th, 2013)

Teagan: I think I want to think about things more in depth from now on, like we did in the journals and reflections. It was really great. I want to feel more proud of my accomplishments. This class helped me realize that I do have things to be proud

of, even if I don't get good grades, and there's more to life than just good grades. I was already fine with speaking in front of groups of people, so I wasn't really shy. But I think I still improved my confidence to speak in front of others. (Audio Recording, June 7th, 2013)

Pax: This class actually did change a lot for me. It made me more social with other people in the class. This class had no cliques, which I always thought this school was full of. It was more open, and that also goes with talking about childhood and stuff like that. I've never been the kind of person to talk about stuff like that. I've always been more 'shallow', you can say. So I'm also more open about stuff, like, things that are bothering me, I would always just cover it up with jokes or whatever. The class also helped me to get back into writing, like, when we were writing the journals. I hadn't had the time to write in a while, so this class really allowed me to do what I love. I think I'm going to start writing again because I'm in the habit of doing that. (Audio Recording, June 19th, 2013)

The above answers are a crucial part of my findings and will be further discussed during the next section of this paper.

DISCUSSION

To begin this section, I will review what I stated in the introduction to reorient readers as to what the purpose and aim of my project was. This will re-emphasize the purpose of my study and initiate a discussion of my findings.

I began this project eager to examine the link between theatre and positive change among adolescent girls. I have always believed that theatre is a powerful tool that can help empower adolescents, and that a theatre classroom is a safe space where students

can personally engage with their peers, create deeper bonds of friendship, and develop the capacity for self-awareness, empathy, creativity and imagination. Wanting to explore the effects of theatre on the social and personal lives of adolescent girls, I hoped that my research would uncover the positive changes and developments that participants in a theatre class would undergo over the course of one year. As well, I hoped to provide justification for the inclusion of theatre as a highly valued subject in high school curricula.

To demonstrate how my research answered the aforementioned areas, I will address the last subheading of the results section of my paper. The final interviews provide an overview of the entire year, and the last question addresses the areas in which the participants felt a change or development. From their answers to the seventh question, I created six main themes or areas of development and change that these adolescent girls underwent. They are as follows:

1. Deeper friendships and a sense of belonging
2. Confidence to speak in front of others, as well as a general higher self-confidence
3. Deeper ability to reflect and think about what is important
4. Better able to share personal thoughts and experiences with others
5. More expressive and creative
6. A heightened awareness of others and a better sense of empathy

I will now discuss these six areas in more detail, with examples of activities or assignments that promoted the changes and developments the students felt.

Friendship

From the very start of the year, the students were actively creating friendships by participating in the group ensemble exercises I incorporated into the curriculum. This

created a sense of belonging in the classroom. The activities demanded creativity and vulnerability that allowed the students to feel part of an ensemble or group since they were collaborating and sharing personal aspects of themselves. When the students were working towards a common goal in certain exercises and assignments, they made deeper and stronger friendships because they had a shared common experience. Finally, sharing personal thoughts, stories and feelings allowed the girls to get to know each other on a deeper level.

In terms of my own impressions of the classroom, I saw a great improvement and change in their friendships throughout the year. This was especially notable for Pax, who at first I noticed was somewhat excluded from the rest of her classmates. They did not do this purposefully, but she was in a different clique than the rest of them. However, by the end of the year she was fully integrated and the exclusion was no longer apparent. Another smaller observation I made was in regards to the layers (see Appendix B) activity we did regularly. This exercise requires a high level of concentration and group ensemble. The first time the girls played the game, it was difficult for them to accomplish the objective. Over the months that followed, we played more ensemble games and activities, which in turn helped the students achieve the objective of the layers activity. By the end of the year, I noticed a significant improvement in their ability to play this exercise and focus on the objective of the game. This is a practical illustration of the deeper bonds of friendship they cultivated throughout the year.

Confidence and Self-Esteem

Confidence and self-esteem are areas that almost all the participants in my project felt they developed or improved. These two are closely related to each other, because if

someone feels more confident, then her self-esteem can also positively change. The girls who participated in my research felt more confident talking in front of others, as well as a personal confidence or rise in self-esteem that was a result of the activities and assignments they did in the class.

Activities that helped with this development or improvement were the improvisation exercises and all the monologue and performance work. The curriculum I created allowed them to write and perform their own work, which nurtured their creativity and consequently affected their confidence and self-esteem. The girls acknowledged how reading their work in front of others and then receiving positive feedback made them feel valued and confident. Some of the girls used to feel scared or shy to speak in front of a class, let alone read and perform their work in front of others, but this class helped them gain the confidence necessary to do so. The frequency with which they performed in front others permitted them to get over this fear and the confidence they gained seeped into other classes as well.

Reflection

Reflection was an important part of my curriculum. I encouraged the participants to delve deeply into every subject we broached. Almost every class involved a journal entry where the girls answered questions I formulated to help them develop a fuller reflection on the activity or assignment we had done in class. Some girls discussed this in the final interview, and said that they really enjoyed the introspection involved in journal writing.

The journals were not the only area that required reflection. I always started our class by asking everyone to share something great that happened to them in the last week. I obligated the girls to be present and focused, and then look back on their week. At first

this was very difficult for them, and they didn't have much to say. But as time went on and they became used to the exercise, they had more to say and remembered what significant things had occurred.

The monologues that involved topics on global issues made the girls think and reflect on ideas and subjects they have not normally done in a theatre class. Not only did they discuss these topics in a group but I also asked them to write a monologue about their chosen topic and perform it. This added a deeper level of reflection to the activity, because they had to try and make it personal in some way, and create a character that they became.

Sharing Thoughts and Experiences

Sharing may not come naturally to some people. In my curriculum, sharing personal thoughts and experience are a natural part of the class and group dynamic. By beginning each class with the participants sharing something of import, students are more willing to share throughout the rest of the class. It becomes something natural in the classroom and is fundamental for the curriculum to progress.

Opening up is dependent on the participants trusting each other. Therefore, this area is developed with a foundation of trust and friendship. It ties in closely with the first of the six themes that the adolescent girls have developed. Once again, introductory activities that focused on group ensemble created trust and collaboration between the participants of my project, enabling them to be courageous enough to share personal thoughts and experiences with their classmates. The interdependence between trust, courage, and friendship to empower the girls so that they felt able share inner thoughts and personal experience was something that I was very aware of from the start of the

project. I paid special attention to this and made sure that this foundation was clearly and adequately developed. Then I began the more advanced assignments and exercises that required the foundation to exist so that the students could develop their full potential.

After the necessary level of trust, courage and friendship was developed, we discussed personal topics like body image and childhood memories, and created monologues and characters that they performed and shared. I do not think the students' work would have had the same effect on them, or even the same quality that it had, if the appropriate foundation was not effectively developed and achieved before the advanced topics were introduced.

Expressive and Creative

All assignments I gave the students demanded creativity and expression. I told them at the start of the year that my curriculum requires them to be creative, and that their ability to be expressive was going to develop over the year. In the final interviews, some girls discussed how their creativity and expression had changed and how it had affected them. There are two specific exercises that required a greater sense of creativity: The Box and The Awakening. They have been earlier explained and described. They also require imagination, which is part of being creative.

As for expression, they developed it along with their confidence and courage. To express an inner feeling or idea takes practice, and they had experience practicing this during both monologues and exercises that demanded them to describe something they were feeling. Even during the discussions we had after each activity, the girls had to think about what they just did, understand how they were feeling, and then express that feeling in words.

Mackenzie discussed this in her second journal, saying how the atmosphere of the class made it such that it was easy to bond with everyone and be more open with her peers. “There are no worries about having to keep things in; we’re free to express ourselves the way we want to” (Mackenzie, Journal, November 7th, 2012). This was a common feeling throughout the year. The girls always told me how comfortable they felt in the classroom and this made them feel that they could share anything with their peers and me.

Empathy and Awareness

I grouped empathy and awareness together because empathy cannot exist without an awareness of others. My curriculum develops awareness and understanding of other people, and consequently allows students to feel empathy. Empathy is described as “walking in someone else’s shoes” (White, 2009, p. 49) and the monologue work did exactly that. Empathy is “the capacity to share and understand another’s emotion and feelings” (p. 49) and when the girls became different characters, in either the two monologues or other activities that required them to become someone else, they practiced having empathy. To speak and present a monologue as another person who experiences different life situations constructs a link between the actor and the character, creating that level of understanding and empathy.

My curriculum also enabled the participants to empathize and better understand their peers. This was fulfilled through group interviews and discussions throughout the year regarding global issues, body image and childhood stories.

Theatre creates a space where the inner-lives of adolescents are mirrored and shared. Theatre is a creative instrument for adolescents. This manifested itself in many activities we did in the classroom, and the creativity, empathy and willingness to share their inner-lives and express personal thoughts and experiences developed over the course of the year and was encouraged by their openness. My results have built on Gallagher's study of adolescent girls participating in theatre, and further add to the scholarly dialogue surrounding the positive development of this population when they participate in theatre.

My results demonstrate the personal impact of theatre on adolescence, and point to the high desirability of drama being integrated into the high school curriculum. Theatre classes build friendships, confidence, self-esteem, reflection, expression, creativity, and empathy. Adolescents feel like they belong and are actively engaged in their own development and learning.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Theatre is most concerned with the study of humanity. Students in theatre classes prepare performances that allow them to experience and value the perspective of another human being. When students take part in this process, they are learning to act and entertain audiences with the art of theatre. Along the way, they are also gaining understanding of themselves and of others, including their peers. Therefore, theatre is an educational tool that allows students to study culture, diversity and the human experience as a whole.

Theatre is creative and collaborative. Students learn to be dependent upon each other and the audience. In short, they learn about the ensemble process, which involves

preparing, writing, rehearsing and creating with others. Theatre also provides opportunities for personal, social and physical development. This is especially important for adolescents, since they are in a stage where all of these areas are being developed. Academic, career, and social skills are also able to flourish in a theatre class, whether or not the students desire to have professions in the performing arts. As Jensen (2001) said, “The real driving force behind dramatic arts is what it does for the emotional, physical, and cognitive abilities of the student” (p. 76). However, after researching high school theatre arts/drama curricula across Canadian provinces, I find that this subject area is under-represented, this despite the fact that, as my literature review indicates, there is substantial literature to show how potentially beneficial drama is schools. Why is there this gap in the curriculum?

Every culture has a set of values and ethics that guides it. These values permeate all areas of that culture, including the education system. Our society is largely a consumerist culture, and governments at both the provincial and federal levels are driven by concerns for economic competitiveness. Thus, schools aim to prepare children for employment, and the arts tend to be disregarded as likely sources of employment. Examinations and academic qualifications to that end are the primary goal of high schools (Robinson, 1989, p. 4). This economic focus is misplaced. In this final section, I address the value surrounding the arts in our culture, focusing mainly on theatre education and adolescence.

From the time they are born, children are surrounded by the arts. Whether it is lying in a crib with a mobile overhead, hearing songs and seeing bright visuals in day care, or watching educational television shows, children are exposed to the arts from a very

young age. As they grow older and begin going to school, the arts are not as present. They become less and less important as the years go by.

The rich tapestry of the arts as ways of knowing and feeling, and sources of delight and enjoyment are sacrificed for arts activities that are soul destroying and meaningless. Children are not taught the basic knowledge and skills in the arts and therefore their education lacks depth and dimension. (Boyd, 1998, p. 1)

There is so much literature on how important the arts are in education, but at the high school level the arts are, in most jurisdictions, optional—this, despite acknowledgement by various educational ministries that the arts are beneficial. For example: The arts are a “powerful mode of expression” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1995, p. 1); theatre can “develop the whole person—emotionally, physically, intellectually, imaginatively, aesthetically, and socially—by giving form and meaning to experience through ‘acting out’” (Alberta Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 1). Yet theatre is not a primary subject in any provincial curriculum.

What are the reasons that our education system places emphasis on so-called core subjects and test results? Dr. Ken Robinson (1989) believes that there are three reasons for this. The first is living in the present. If we see education as something that only prepares children for their future, we are not seeing the needs of children in the moment. “Children do not hatch into adults after a secluded incubation at school. They are living their lives now” (Robinson, 1989, p. 4). What they later become or the employment they gain all depends on who they are as individuals, what qualities, capacities and capabilities they have developed, and all this happens when they are their formative years in school. Schools therefore need to allow children to experience a well-balanced curriculum, which

enriches and fulfills them on various levels. The arts need to be part of that curriculum since they help with many different kinds of learning.

The second area Robinson discusses is structural unemployment. Opportunities for employment are continuing to decline, and unemployment is very high among young people. “This is not a passing feature of the recession. It is the result of long-term structural changes in the industrial economy” (Robinson, 1989, p. 4). With the development of new technologies, higher levels of unemployment are bound to occur in the future of most professions. This means that changes must occur in our approach to education, so that it is broadened and not narrowed. It is not the lack of qualifications that make it difficult for young people to get jobs, but the lack of jobs that exist.

It is clear that there must be a response within the schools to what is taking place outside them. To see education mainly as a preparation for forms of work that are fast disappearing is clearly short-sighted. (Robinson, 1989, p. 5)

Thirdly, Robinson suggests that academic constraints and the emphasis placed on education for employment creates pressure for students to attain academic achievement. “These tighten the grip of examination courses on the curriculum and make it resistant to change. Academic success is also often pursued at the expense of other equally important abilities in young people” (p. 5). If capacities other than academics are undervalued in the education system, students who underperform in these areas will feel an “undeserved sense of failure and waste enormous reserves of talent and potential” (p. 5). What it boils down to is placing value on more than just academic abilities.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Young people experience much change during adolescence. This study looked at how theatre affects youth in the stage of adolescence, particularly adolescent girls.

Working closely with eight girls at a private single-sex school in Montreal, I developed a theatre curriculum that allowed the students to develop their communication, expression and imagination, among other skills, and my research has shown that these skills enable adolescent girls to create deeper bonds of friendship, develop a sense of empathy and an understanding of others. The exercises encourage the students to express and share their experiences and inner thoughts. Along those lines, the positive changes the girls experienced have not only to do with self-acceptance and self-recognition, but also the awareness that others, specifically their peers, share and understand their experiences, thoughts and feelings.

I used portraiture to give readers a deeper insight into the lived experiences of these eight girls as well as what the classroom and setting is like. Using Performative Inquiry, I reflected deeply on what was most important in my study, and included those findings in this paper. I analyzed my data, mainly the final interviews with the girls, for similar themes and came up with six areas that the participants identified as areas they changed or developed over the course of the year.

Finally, I also addressed how undervalued the arts are in the Canadian high school provincial curricula. My hope is that someday curriculum developers will see that incorporating drama as an essential component in the high school curriculum will greatly benefit adolescent students, not only in their present lives and interactions, but also in developing their individual capacities, which will serve them in the future.

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APPENDIX A(1)



Minor Informed Assent Agreement (13-17 years old)

Dear grade ten student enrolled in the Stagecraft course at The Study school,

My name is Amelia Haskell and I am a Masters student at McGill University. For my Masters thesis research, I will be working with your class from October 2012 to June 2013. **Please read this assent agreement with your parent(s) or legal tutor(s) before you decide to participate in the study. Your parent or legal tutor will also have to give permission to let you participate in the study.**

My study will explore the many effects of theatre on the lives of adolescent girls. Theatre can be a transformative tool for empowering adolescents and creating a space in which they can engage with and work through personal issues. My study will examine the possible link between theatre and personal growth or learning in terms of social relationships, emotional development and self-esteem among adolescent girls. I will be working with you during your regular Stagecraft classes. If you decide you would not like to participate, you will be in Ms. Kemeny's class with the other students who are not participating.

As part of my study, I would like to ask you to be present in all your classes. Trust, honesty and respect are necessary qualities to create a positive and respectful atmosphere in all classes during the upcoming year. I would like you to feel free to express your thoughts and opinions at any time during class.

There is no extra time commitment on your part beyond your regular classroom attendance.

The information that you give to me during this study will be kept private. The list linking the code name assigned to your real name will be destroyed after all the data is collected. Interviews and discussions will be recorded and all classes will be videotaped. The videotapes are only for my personal use. I will be transcribing the interviews and discussion myself. I will keep everything locked up and all private data, transcriptions, audio recordings and videotapes will be destroyed one year after the completion of the research. In addition, audio and videotapes will be password protected. I will be compiling all my research in a Masters thesis. I hope to also present my findings at conferences and in scientific journals.

You do not have to participate in this study, but if you choose to, and even if you don't, your grades will not be affected in any way. You will still be given assignments and work from your teacher, Ms. Kemeny, who will be grading you.

You can stop doing the study at any time. If you want to stop doing the study, please let me know. There is no penalty for stopping. There are also no risks in participating in this study.

You will not receive any money if you do participate in the study. If you have questions about the study, please contact me, Amelia Haskell, at amelia.haskell@mail.mcgill.ca or at 514.961.9296. You can also contact my supervisor,

Dr. Boyd White, with any questions you may have at boyd.white@mcgill.ca or 514-398-2444. His office is located in the Education building at McGill University, Room 351. If you have questions about your rights in the study, contact the McGill Research Ethics Board at 514.398.6831.

I, _____, agree to participate in the study described above and I consent that the information collecting during this study can be used in further research.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(You will receive a copy of this form for your records.)

Thank you for your time!

Amelia Haskell

APPENDIX A(2)



Parent/Legal Tutor Informed Consent Agreement

Dear Parent/Legal Tutor,

My name is Amelia Haskell and I am a Masters student at McGill University. For my Masters thesis research, I will be working closely with the grade ten Stagecraft class from October 2012 to June 2013. **Please read this consent agreement carefully. Your daughter will also receive a consent form; please review the form with your daughter.**

The main purpose of my research is to explore the many effects of theatre on the lives of adolescent girls. One of the most challenging stages in human development is adolescence. Adolescence is a risky period since there are numerous amounts of changes in all the different areas of their lives, and this can be extremely stressful for some young people. Theatre can be a transformative tool for empowering adolescents and creating a space in which they can engage with and work through personal issues. My study will examine the possible link between theatre and personal growth or learning in terms of social relationships, emotional development and self-esteem among adolescent girls. My research offers a critical investigation into the art of theatre and explores its effects on the social, emotional and academic lives of female adolescents. The results will be analyzed and used to write my thesis, which I will then publish in a scientific journal. I will be working with your daughter during her regular Stagecraft classes. If your daughter decides to not participate, she will remain in Ms. Kemeny's class with the other students who are not participating.

The list linking the code name assigned to her real name will be destroyed after all the data is collected. Interviews and discussions will be recorded and all classes will be videotaped. The videotapes are only for my personal use. I will be transcribing the interviews and discussions myself. I will keep everything locked up and all private data, transcriptions, audio recordings and videotapes will be destroyed one year after the completion of the research. In addition, audio and videotapes will be password protected. I will be compiling all my research in a Masters thesis. I hope to also present my findings at conferences and in scientific journals.

You will have no involvement in the study since the students are the subjects being investigated. This study will hopefully help us in determining the positive effects theatre can have on the social, academic and emotional lives of adolescent girls.

Your daughter is not expected to commit extra time beyond regular classroom attendance to this study. If your daughter decides to participate in my study, Ms. Kati Kemeny, who will be giving them assignments and work throughout the year, will still grade her.

You have the right to withdraw your daughter from the study at any time without penalty by contacting me directly. There are no risks in participating in this study. You and your daughter will receive no payment for participating in the study.

If you have questions about the study, please contact me at amelia.haskell@mail.mcgill.ca or at 514.961.9296. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Boyd White, with any questions you may have at boyd.white@mcgill.ca or 514-398-2444. His office is located in the Education building at McGill University, Room 351. If you have questions about your rights in the study, you may contact the McGill Research Ethics Board at 514.398.6831.

I, _____, agree to allow my daughter to participate in the research study described above.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

(You will receive a copy of this form for your records)

Thank you for your time!
Amelia Haskell

APPENDIX A(3)



Permission from The Study school

Dear Ms. Low,

My name is Amelia Haskell and I am a Masters student at McGill University in the Integrated Studies in Education department. For my Masters thesis research, I would like to work closely with adolescent girls, specifically in grade ten, who are enrolled in a theatre/drama/stagecraft class from October 2012 to June 2013. It is my understanding that The Study school offers this class. Therefore, I would like to ask your permission to approach these girls and recruit them for the purpose of my research.

The main purpose of my research is to explore the many effects of theatre on the lives of adolescent girls. One of the most challenging stages in human development is adolescence. Adolescence is a risky period since there are numerous amounts of changes in all the different areas of their lives, and this can be extremely stressful for some young people. Theatre can be a transformative tool for empowering adolescents and creating a space in which they can engage with and work through personal issues. My study will examine the possible link between theatre and personal growth or learning in terms of social relationships, emotional development and self-esteem among adolescent girls. My research offers a critical investigation into the art of theatre and explores its effects on the social, emotional and academic lives of female adolescents. The results will be analyzed and used to write my thesis, which I will then publish in a scientific journal.

I understand that this year the grade ten's and eleven's are combined for the Stagecraft option class. I would like to propose the following: any grade ten student who would like to participate in my study will form a small group with me and we will meet during their regular Stagecraft class. Those who do not want to participate will remain with Ms. Kati Kemeny and the grade eleven's. Ms. Kemeny will still give the girls participating in my study assignments and work, since she will be the one grading them, not I. Participation in my study will not require extra time beyond regular classroom attendance.

Consent must be given by both the participating student as well as their parent(s)/legal tutor(s). These forms have already been drafted. There are no risks in participating in this study.

If you have questions about the study, please contact me at amelia.haskell@mail.mcgill.ca or at 514.961.9296. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Boyd White, with any questions you may have at boyd.white@mcgill.ca or 514-398-2444. His office is located in the Education building at McGill University, Room 351. If you have questions about the ethics of my study, you may contact the McGill Research Ethics Board at 514.398.6831.

I, _____, agree to allow Ms. Amelia Haskell to conduct research at The Study school for her Masters thesis.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

(You will receive a copy of this form for your records)

Thank you for your time!
Amelia Haskell
McGill University- **Faculty of Education**
Education Building, 3700 McTavish Street
Montreal, Quebec H3A 1Y2

APPENDIX B

Activities/Exercises: I use these terms interchangeably throughout the paper.

Actor Neutral. Actor Neutral is when the actor's body is in a very neutral position. This requires that their arms are by their side, their spine is straight, their gaze looks forward, their feet hip-width apart and their shoulders rolled back. They should pretend that a string is pulling up from the top of their head. From this neutral position, an actor's body can transform and develop different physical characteristics.

Status. Keith Johnstone (1981) developed status exercises that analyzed transactions between characters and actors in terms of dominance. He realized that people clearly display how dominant or how submissive they feel in their behavior, so this is an ideal way for improvisers to create characters since behavior is always experienced in the present moment. Exercises include developing low status characters (physical characteristics include touching your face nervously and intermittently, using long rambling sentences, fragmenting your speech, making the middle of your body smaller, keeping a distance from others, hate making eye contact, giggling nervously, etc.) and high status characters (physical characteristics include gesturing infrequently but purposefully, making the middle of your body bigger and taller, entering someone else's personal space, speaking in very short sentences, pausing and comfortably sustaining silence, holding eye contact, reacting minimally to the presence of others, etc.). Extremes of status usually lead to comedy, while small status gaps tend to lead to drama.

Gesture. Gesture is the physical representation of an internal feeling or thought. Gesture can either be behavioral or expressive. Behavioral gestures are part of the physical world that we observe. These include waving hello with your hands, or yawning as a sign of exhaustion. Expressive gestures are abstract or symbolic representations. These include happiness, anger, depression, or excitement.

HASH. Each player counts to ten. As they count, they move through the emotions: happy—angry—sad—happy. (For example, on 1-2-3 they might be happy, on 4-5 they might be angry, on 6-7-8 they might be sad, and on 9-10 they are happy again.) This exercise allows players to explore feelings and emotions.

This is a pen. Participants stand in a circle and learn a specific script. They cannot deviate from the following:

Person A: "This is a pen."

Person B: "A what?"

Person A: "A pen."

Person B: "A what?"

Person A: "A pen."

Person B: "Oh, thank you."

They each have a turn being person A and then person B since the dialogue moves around the circle. Once they are comfortable with the script, I ask Person A to have a specific emotion and Person B to embody another emotion. For example, during one rotation around the circle, Person A must be extremely excited to give this present to Person B because it's the best pen ever, and Person B must have just woken up and be very groggy.

Storytelling. Theatre and drama always tells a specific story, but there are many different ways to tell a story. The following two exercises are examples of ways my students learned how to tell a story.

Collective Fairy Tale. Students stand in a line and the teacher stands facing them. They choose objects or things that are alive (examples: umbrella, cockroach, dancer) and actions or verbs (example: flying, bubbling, dying). The teacher makes the title of their fairy tale (example: the flying dancer). The teacher points to someone and they start the story. They must continue the story until the teacher points to someone else. If the next person hesitates or does not pick up in the exact same place the last person left off, they must sit down and watch.

Soundscape. Choose a story that everyone knows. Students tell the story, or part of the story, with sound only. Discuss what kinds of sounds would take place and when to introduce them.

Ensemble building. The following four exercises are a few examples of ensemble exercises we did during class.

Point, nod, walk. Students stand in a circle so they can make eye contact with everyone. There is no talking during this exercise. Point to someone. When they

acknowledge you with a nod, you may walk to their place. The individual that nodded to you must point to someone else and receive a nod before they can move. Adjust your pace so you get to the place after it has been vacated rather than while the individual that nodded to you is still there. After the class feels comfortable, you can speed up the pace or give students the option of shaking their heads no instead of nodding. Explain to students that they are working as an ensemble. The object is to accomplish tasks together regardless of difficulty.

Flocking. Students are organized in a diamond pattern with enough room to move their arms freely. They are all facing in one direction. All the students follow the physical movements of whoever is at the front of the flock. As soon as the leader changes their head position either left, right or 180 degrees to the back, the student who is now at the front of the flock takes over and everyone follows him/her, just like a flock of birds.

Sun and moon. Students silently choose someone to be their sun and someone to be their moon. They do not reveal who they have chosen. The goal of the exercise is to be as close to your sun as possible, and as far away from your moon as physically possible. Variation of the game is choosing an enemy and a protector. In this scenario, you must always have your protector in between you and your enemy.

Layers. Students stand in a circle. Everyone raises their right hand. The first person points to someone in the circle with their hand up and says "you." The first person then put down their hand, and the person they pointed to choose someone else to point and say "you" to. This continues until everyone's hand is down, and the last person has pointed back to the first person who started, thus completing the circle. The "you" layer is a pattern that never changes. Repeat the pattern until it feels comfortable. Once everyone is comfortable with that, everyone raises their hand again. The same first person begins but instead of saying "you" this time, they choose things in a category (food, animals, colors, etc.). They cannot choose the same person they chose last time with the "you's". Once everyone feel comfortable with this layer, which also keeps the same pattern and the same chosen thing in a category, the two layers are done at the same time. Start with "you" and add the next layer.