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Experiences of Adolescents and Drama: "This is bullsh*t. I can't do it"

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**EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENTS AND DRAMA:
"THIS IS BULLSH*T. I CAN'T DO IT"**

by

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DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

To my assistant director, editor, collaborator, and life-partner, John E. Penery, III

You continue to fulfill your promise to support me and my aspirations

Also, in honor of John E. Penery II and Anne Markley Penery

Thank you for your love and inspiration

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank Dr. "Bee" Chacharatsri for his encouragement and belief in me. He saw the importance of using drama as a strategy to create places for adolescents to express themselves. His willingness to guide and support the work of this study was instrumental in the success I found in conducting it. Dr. Bee trusted my abilities and provided counsel for improvements in data analysis and the written expression of my findings. He facilitated my writing and processing information and made me think more deeply about my own literacy.

I would never have found my passion for the use of creative drama as a tool for literacy in the classroom if it had not been for meeting and working with Susan Pearson. I thank her for bringing Boal to me. Not only has Susan touched my life, she has modeled work with K-12 students across many demographics for students to find confidence, friendship, acceptance, and success through drama.

Thank you to Dr. Holbrook Mahn for encouraging me to revisit Vygotsky's work and deepen my perspective on adolescents. Consideration of the thoughts and language middle school students employ to navigate their daily realities was essential to documenting their perceptions. They brought to their interactions with others knowledge and experiences that enhanced the dialogue for addressing social issues and situations. In structuring the experiences and analyzing the data, Dr. Mahn's guidance presented a foundation for the work of the study.

The paradigm of practitioner action research (PAR) was exactly what I sought for my study. I thank Dr. Shelley Roberts and Dr. Shiv Desai for assisting me in appreciating the legitimacy in using PAR for this study. Your questions provided me with opportunities to reflect on the process of the study and your guidance through the reality of aspects of PAR as a researcher's tool validated my work.

I would also like to acknowledge my 'team', Anni Leming, PhD, Dr. Lynn Nordstrom, and Dr. LaNysha Adams Foss. Your help with collecting, organizing, and formatting data was indispensable. More importantly, you were there for me when I needed you. The three of you inspire me to continue to learn and explore new possibilities with my own literacy and 'ways of being in the world'.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge Amy Smith (pseudonym) and her drama class of 25 fantastic students at Eastside Middle School (pseudonym). They were willing to take this journey with me and were kind and patient. They will always be with me.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this practitioner action research (PAR) study was to explore experiences of middle school students enrolled in a basic drama class, creating a performance piece that allowed for the representation of voices and opinions of the participants. The use of PAR allowed the researcher to guide students and collaborate with their teacher through strategies not traditionally found in middle school drama programs. With the motivation of the work of Augusto Boal's (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed* (TO), seventh and eighth grade students developed work relating their perspectives centered on issues important to them--friendship, respect, social equality, secrets, and moving on. The questions of 1) how are trust, ensemble, and community developed with the participants? 2) how do students respond to drama games, specifically the use of TO strategies? and 3) how do participants express their perspectives regarding issues using the TO/creative drama strategies? The group built rapport and created a performance through trust, community, and ensemble. Students created a final performance of improvisational scenes related to the themes.

Much of the data were language based, and thus provided opportunities to analyze evidence around the context of the lessons. The use of drama games, dialogue journals, video-recorded sessions, pre and post surveys, and exit interviews provided data sources for analysis. An on-going reflective researcher's journal supported modifications for how lessons were implemented. Analysis of the data was through a critical literacy lens. Side conversations and personal responses in the dialogue journals provided insight into the realities of the participants.

While the current climate of public education is to standardize the outcomes of students' academic experiences, drama can provide safe, accepting circumstances for adolescents. The primary result of this study became the rapport created amongst the participants through the drama strategies. The structure of Boal and TO informed the space to give voice to students who may otherwise not experience their realities being considered by those in charge. This study can be the start of further exploration of the use of drama in middle schools and its influence on the academic and social aspects in the lives of adolescents.

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Setting the Stage

This study begins with two scripted scenes that could be expanded into a longer

piece. It is an account of two actual scenes which took place in a middle school drama

program. The names of the characters are pseudonyms, but the dialogue is as close to the

actual language as can be recalled. Now, without further ado,

MIDDLE SCHOOL CAN BE SO DRAMATIC

Cast

RAY: 14 year-old male middle school student. He has an easy smile, expressive
Manner, and is outgoing. He is a strong presence in the classroom—
whether he is engaged in the activity at the time or opting out and leaning
back in his seat.

MS. PENERY: 50 year-old drama resource teacher. Smiles come easily to her and
she enjoys working with adolescents—and is rarely surprised by their
language and behaviors. She has been invited to this school to help build a
drama program that offers an elective to students.

CLASS/TEACHER: 25+ adolescents students. They are paired and moving to
mirror the movements of their partners. The teacher is moving among
them and trying to determine who in each partnership is leading and who
is following.

AUDIENCE (second scene): 40+ adolescents and 4 adults. They are 6th graders
and their teachers who have just watched a group of students from the 8th
grade drama class perform monologues based on an historic event.

Scene One

Time: Early fall afternoon, about 2:00. It is early in the school semester. It is the
last class of the school day.

Place: A randomly organized music classroom at a middle school in a large
southwestern city. Pushed aside are chairs and music stands so that center
of the room is open and empty. Light comes from the florescent bulbs in
the ceiling fixtures high above the space. The walls are covered in

seemingly long-forgotten images of orchestral instruments, music notations, and classroom rules or expectations for behaviors. The soundproofing material found on the walls has been part of the infrastructure of this room for many years—and it shows. One wall has painted words expressing school spirit and the school mascot.

At Rise: Middle school students are center stage. They are arranged in pairs, working
simultaneously on mirroring their partner's movements. Due to the odd number of students available for partners, Ray and Ms. Penery are working together. Ray has become frustrated with the exercise.

(*Lights up*)

MS. PENERY: (*trying for eye contact*) Well??

RAY: (*frustrated*) This class is bullshit! I didn't want to take it anyway!

MS. PENERY: (*calm*) Why did you?

RAY: I had to. It was the only class that fit into my schedule.

MS. PENERY: (*shrugs*)

RAY: (*looks directly at her*) I want to change it to something else.

MS. PENERY: I think it's too late in the semester. Didn't you have to make

changes in the first two weeks?

RAY: Yeah, but this sucks! I can't do this shit.

MS. PENERY: Sorry, can't help. Just a guess—can't control the schedule.

RAY: Damn!

(*Scene*)

Scene Two

TIME: Several months later, mid-afternoon, about 2:30. It is colder outside and the audience on stage is dressed for the chill.

PLACE: The same music classroom. Half of the classroom lights are off to set a mood for performance.

AT RISE: There are 9 drama students in costume seated in the open space for performing historic monologues with characters from the US Civil War. There is an audience of 6th grade students and their teachers seated on the stage. All the monologues have been performed.

(*Lights up*)

MS. PENERY: (*to the 6th graders*) Thanks for coming and being a terrific

audience! Now we're gonna do a talk back where you can ask questions of

the performers. Anything you saw that you liked—tell 'em specifically!

Any questions you might have about their character, what it was like

doing the monologues—ask 'em anything. (*giggles from the group*) And

performers (*turns to the actors*), you can answer or choose not to. But if

you choose not to, be polite about it—"I'd rather not answer" is more

polite than "None of your business" (*more giggles from the group*).

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What's it like to be in drama?

RAY: (*stands*) I got this! Drama is the best class ever! We played drama games

and we got to yell at the teachers (*pause*) well, it was a game. And we had to talk

loudly and we couldn't mumble. And we had to be other characters and we played

Why Are You Late? and had to pantomime excuses to make people guess (*pause*).

Have to tell you, dude, that at first, I didn't want to be in this class. I thought it

was stupid. I wanted out. But it was too late. Now…you have to take this class—

and with these teachers! Ms. Penery is so cool (*turns to Mrs. Smith, the*

classroom teacher) and so is Mrs. Smith! They let us do what we needed to and

we came up with something (*turns to the drama students*)—

DRAMA STUDENTS: (*in unison*) What happens in drama stays in drama!

(S*cene*)

I have been in education for 26 years. For 10 of those years, I worked in my

school district's fine arts program as the drama resource teacher. This role offered me the

opportunity to encourage other teachers to explore the possibility of using creative drama

as an instructional strategy. I conducted workshops to train teachers to use creative drama

and visited classrooms to model lessons with students. I wrote drama standards for grades

K-8 and aligned them with the state language arts standards teachers were required to

use. I purchased support materials for teachers to expand their knowledge of creative

drama beyond what I was able to provide. However, with my time in this position, I

encountered attitudes held by many teachers that drama is only about studying the plays in the reading text or doing a play after testing in the spring. Even administrators expressed concerns about allowing teachers and students to do drama and not addressing established curriculum. It became a frustrating part of my job— advocating the academic benefits of integrating drama strategies with instructional tools already used in classrooms, but having my voice fall on deaf ears.

After some time, I began to find allies in unexpected places. Teachers at the few middle schools that had drama programs became my source of camaraderie. In visits and conversations, these teachers shared with me their optimism for the chance to explore teaching and learning using drama with their students. They also shared their own frustrations with policies that had been set in place that kept students from what they saw as an advantage—to engage these adolescents and help them learn. As a full-time middle school drama teacher expressed,

> Yeah, well [drama] will always be an issue now that kids are supposed to achieve a certain level of proficiency [in reading and math]…which I understand they need to read and write and do math…but it's unfortunate that … if they don't get a certain achievement level they have to take two reading classes and two math classes, so instead of an elective…[they] really don't get an elective and I just think that's wrong (interview with A. Grant [pseudonym], September, 2012).

Veteran teachers who felt empowered, either through support from their administrators or their experiences in working with adolescents, expressed their own concerns. What became clear was that these teachers' voices were also not being heard.

With greater expectations for students to perform well on tests, very few classroom voices are being heard (Ravitch, 2013).

Current Educational Experiences

From interviews and other conversations, what became evident to me was not necessarily what was being said by my peers, but whose ideas were not being expressed and whose voices were silent—the students. It seemed as though the experiences and perceptions of the people most impacted were not included. People who did not know the students made decisions for them. Shirley Steinberg with Joe Kincheloe (2010) in their review of critical theory maintain that academic standardization in the twenty-first century, with focus on means rather than end, offer that "instrumental rationality is more interested in method and efficiency than in moral dimensions of human action and socio-educational and political purpose" (p. 144). The adolescents I was observing and working with were very articulate and focused, and they knew what instructional strategies helped build meaning for them. I also realized that I was part of the dynamic of suppressing student perceptions and voice. I overlooked the obvious—I never asked them. The conversations with teachers and the opportunities I had working with adolescents made me consider how I engaged with students. I now recognize how I perpetuated the current educational model of conventional teaching in classrooms, where the adult provides most of the instruction and the students are to respond appropriately.

Researcher Positionality

My practices in teaching over the years have shown me that learning is fluid and dynamic and has many sources. I have my perspective. However, it is important that I take the time to explore how students learn and how they express experiences through

their perspective. It is important to recognize the hierarchical nature of an adult asking questions of adolescents. No matter the level of rapport and how it is established with the students, I adults are still an authority figure in a classroom and must use care when documenting student participant voice. The data collected will provide some opportunity for student expression, but there will still be an aspect of "hidden dominate power" (Robinson & Taylor, 2013, p. 39). Adults maintain control and power in many forms in a classroom with little if any input from students. The ultimate consideration I will need is to best honor the perspectives of the students.

Problem to Research

The current, common paradigm of public school education is that teachers are trained to impart curriculum to students and those teachers are held accountable for the learning of the students. However, the curriculum has become systemized and standardized to encourage teachers to support their students to achieve a common goal based on their age and grade level (Ravitch, 2013). Teachers are not questioned about what their specific students may need or to what instructional strategy or materials they will respond. Students are not asked about what motivates them and what approach their teachers can take to reach them. Former assistant secretary of education under President George W. Bush, Diane Ravitch (2013) states that

> …as students enter the upper elementary grades and middle school and high school, they should have a balanced curriculum that includes not only reading, writing, and mathematics but the sciences, literature, history, geography, civics, and foreign languages. Their school should have a rich arts program, where students learn to sing, dance, play an instrument, join an orchestra or a band,

perform in a play, sculpt, or use technology to design structures, conduct research, or create artworks (p. 7).

What Ravitch offers is that educational curriculum is becoming disengaged from the students meant to benefit from the learning experiences and "many schools have cut back on every subject that was not tested" (p. 234). Regarding the arts and dramatics, Ravitch offers that the arts are a "source of joy, a means of self-expression and group expression" (p. 240). This study will explore the use of dramatic instructional strategies as a form of self and group expression with middle school student students utilizing their own voices to express their experiences and perspectives regarding something that is important to them. Educational programs are moving away from the individuals that matter most—teachers and students (Ravitch, 2013). The concern is that while they are thoughtful, capable individuals who can articulate what works for them, many adolescents have little say in the structure or content of the school curriculum that they navigate.

Purpose of the Study

To encourage educators to broaden the perspective what of instructional strategies can be is one aspect of this study. To allow students a space from which they can declare their thoughts regarding educational practices is another goal of this work. The purpose of this study is to explore how students practice aspects of Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) in a middle school drama class. Specifically, how do students voice their experiences as they explore issues important to them in a non-judgmental environment that respects adolescents and their perspectives. The opportunity for adolescents to be part of the educational dialogue that affects them can offer a starting point for teachers to begin to collaborate with their students. Control and power in the

classroom does not have to be abdicated by the teacher, but it can be shared. This dynamic can empower students to take their learning to more meaningful conclusions.

Current media reports and educational rhetoric are driving policies and reforms in our schools. As a society, we are not considering those in the classrooms doing the work (Ravitch, 2013). I want to contribute to research that honors student experiences, perceptions, and voices regarding particular classroom instruction. This study can offer insight that is communicated by students, not the newspaper.

Significance of the Study

Sam Dillon wrote in the New York Times (March 26, 2006) that schools were responding to conditions from the federal legislation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) by adjusting academic requirements of students. The reading and math testing obligations set forth by NCLB (2001) were prompting school districts across the country to increase "the class time that low-proficiency students spend on reading and math, mainly because the federal law…requires annual exams only in those subjects and punishes schools that fall short of rising benchmarks" (2006, nytimes.com, para. 2). These choices made by school districts continue with the adoption by many states of the 2010 Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Current research (Rich, Leatham, & Wright, 2013; Huss & Eastep, 2011) reports that schools are curtailing electives for middle school students. A 2013 article in the Chicago Tribune reported that Chicago's Central Middle School was eliminating a Spanish course in order to "free up the core minutes to increase English/Language Arts instructional minutes to double current levels…" (Pratt, May 17, 2013, chicagotribune.com, para.12). Much of what engages students in learning in a school setting is found only in after-school clubs and extracurricular models (Huss &

Eastep, 2011). More often, schools "require students that underperform in language arts and mathematics to spend extra time studying these subjects" (Rich, Leatham, & Wright, 2013, p. 447). Districts create the structure for curriculum and instruction and schools follow that framework

Student motivation is linked to academic performance. Usher and Kober (2013), from the Center on Education Policy report that "[if] students aren't motivated, it is difficult…to improve their academic achievement, no matter how good the teacher, curriculum or school is" (p. 2). When motivation is diminished by limiting choice and student autonomy, students become disengaged and apathetic toward schoolwork. They must be included in the educational process through measures to support and increase their motivation. Students must have a voice in their education. They need to become part of the process of learning and be included in discussions regarding curriculum and pedagogy (Kidd & Czerniawski, 2011). The questions become how do students find ways to 1) engage in instruction that is meaningful and 2) express their experiences and perspectives of such lessons?

Research and Sub Questions

How do middle school students explore and express their experiences regarding issues they feel are important to them when engaged in drama strategies inspired by Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed?

This study will explore adolescents' overall perspectives as they engage in drama activities adapted from Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), as well as details specific to the implementation of the work. Elements utilized in the work of the study will consider students' thoughts regarding:

- How trust, ensemble, and community are developed with the participants?

- How participants disclose to the group issues that truly concern them?

- How students perceive instructional strategies used and their own learning?

- How students respond to the drama games, specifically the use of TO strategies?

- What are the experiences of students using the structure of Playbuilding (Tarlington and Michaels, 1998; Weigler, 2001) as a method of representing their views about a particular issue?

- How participants express their perspectives regarding a social issue using the TO/ creative drama strategies?

- How the participants decide who their audience should or would be if they choose to perform their playbuilt play?

As an adult whose daily experiences are different than those of an adolescent in 2015, the answers to these questions lie in the perceptions and voices of the students who participate in this study. It is their culture, their world, their language that must be honored.

Theoretical Framework—Critical Literacy

When discussed in an educational context, most people view literacy at its most basic level—reading and writing. Answers to questions about what 8-year-old children should be able to read or how 13-year-old students should clearly write about a pre-chosen topic are deliberated amongst policy makers. Students' abilities are measured based samples of their work generated through testing situations (Keefe & Copeland, 2011). However, literacy is so much more than reading or writing text. Critical literacy is a social construct and an instrument for social practices. It is "reflective and reflexive:

Language use and education are social practices used to critically study all social

practices including the social practices of language use and education" (Shor, 1999,

para.28). Literacy extends beyond classroom works and should be understood as "an

instrument for reading the world and for self and societal empowerment and

transformation" (Ntiri, 2009, p. 98). Hilary Janks (2000) states that "[c]ritical literacy

education…is particularly concerned with teaching learners to understand and manage

the relationship between language and power" (p. 176). Literacy can vary depending on

social groups and cultural context. It is not only the tools of the culture, but the skills

needed by an individual to use those tools in culturally appropriate settings. In her work

regarding functional and cultural literacy, Ntiri (2009) offers that "literacy cannot be

divorced from cultural and sociopolitical contexts, and though learning to read and write

is an achievement, the act of acquiring literacy has social and political consequences that

transcend the individual" (p. 98). Critical literacy is a stance that challenges traditional

situations to describe who we are and how we are in the world. Critical literacy "thus

challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social

development" (Shor, 1999, para. 2).

 In his seminal 1970 work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire warned

against treating students as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge provided by

teachers who have the societal background to possess their position in a classroom. There

must be a dialogue, a cultural exchange of the tools of literacy within a classroom. Freire

(1970/2000) states that many "educational plans have failed because their authors

designed them according to their own personal views of reality" (p. 94) and that open

dialogue and communication between educators and students contributes to the

knowledge of all. However, this dialogue must be grounded in societal and cultural stances and serve a purpose and provide guidance to the participants to work to alter or enhance the outcome of the work involved. In building communal knowledge for all participants in a learning situation, Freire maintains that "human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it" (p. 125). Educators must take critical literacy seriously and understand that many literacies are interdependent. Dominate literacies must be questioned. As Janks (2000) presents, "[d]omination without difference and diversity loses the ruptures that produce contestation and change" (p. 178-179). We don't just move through life. We examine, consider, and adapt to what we experience. Not all experiences are the same and that circumstance must be honored.

This study will provide a general framework through drama activities for participants to utilize their literacy skills—academic, social, and cultural—in a manner that encourages them to critically consider an issue important to them. The framework of critical literacy will enable students to use language "that questions the social construction of self…[and] to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it" (Shor, 1999, para. 4). The students will generate the content and the details of what will be investigated and determine how to present it. The pedagogy of critical literacy engages all participants in what bell hooks (2010) describes as a classroom where "initiative from everyone, actively inviting all students to think passionately and to share ideas in a passionate, open manner…[creates] a learning community together, [and[learning is at its most meaningful and useful" (p. 11). The use of oral and written language as well as non-verbal expressions to communicate

perspectives will provide a richer form of knowledge to contribute to the current discourse of critical literacy. The steps taken will be elemental to the goals.

The use of drama strategies with students will promote skills such as collaborative creation, oral discourse opportunities, dialogue through journal writing, oral narratives, and language process methods support the praxis of critical literacy. Drama requires the teacher to move away from the more traditional teaching of language and mandated syllabi in public school and engage all participants to explore who they are, where they are, and how they view their realities. Critical literacy pulls both teachers and students forward toward the goal of becoming an active citizen (Shor, 1999).

Methodology/Methods Overview

Practitioner action research, specifically "outsider in collaboration with insider" (Herr and Anderson, 2015, p. 49) will be the methodology of this study. There is, however, the lens of phenomenology, that is, "questioning the structure and the essence of lived experiences" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 6) as a pragmatic perspective for this study. Phenomenological studies look at individuals and how those people interpret their experiences. These studies sustain inquiry that is descriptive, interpretative, and self-reflective. It is also important for the researcher to reflect on the process, issue and area of study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The data will describe the lived experiences of the students' in their participation with strategies from *Theatre of the Oppressed* (TO). Since the primary focus is on the voices of the students, it is essential that the methods reflect and honor their perspectives.

In the dual role of researcher and drama specialist, I will be the primary instructor presenting the TO activities, responding to student written work, and crafting how the

final product will be arranged. I will be an outsider working with an insider—the classroom drama teacher—as she and I build an understanding of how the drama strategies provide space for students to explore issues important to them. Herr and Anderson (2015) have differentiated aspects of the definition of practitioner research to include "inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them…[and that] research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation" (pp. 3-4).

Limitations

This study is to begin a dialogue regarding student voice in their experiences with creative drama and issues important to them. The exploration of only one class of middle school students provides a very small sample size. This limitation may or may not affect the extension of the results of this study. However, with the ability to focus more directly on a limited number of students, I hope that the data I do collect will provide rich insight into the experiences of the participants.

Another limitation is that I will need to adhere to the schedule of the school. The data collection and on-going analysis will be during the spring semester. In this particular school district, mandated standardized testing is conducted during the second semester of the school year. Because of the timing of the testing, adjustments will most likely be required in regard to the work of the participants.

Next Steps

The spotlight for this research will be to explore the experiences of young adolescents in a middle school setting with a non-traditional class—drama. Specifically, the voices of the students will be the primary method for reporting the data. This study

will utilize observations, student dialogue journals, and student surveys to document and support the findings. The remainder of this paper will include a review of the relevant literature associated with this study as well as details regarding the details of the methods and methodology found in the research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Vygotsky and Adolescents

The Russian psychologist and educator, Lev Vygotsky, offers an approach to understanding the growth of children. His theoretical focus on the learning and development of children "are the result of adult *mediation*…the engagement of children in age-appropriate activities, in the context of which adults promote the development in children of new motives and teach them new tools of thinking, problem-solving, and self-regulation" (Karpov, 2014, p. 9). With his work on thought, language, and adolescent development, Vygotsky (2012) offered that the study of thoughts and language be conducted in tandem, so to develop "a clear understanding of interfunctional relations" (pg.1) between the two.

Throughout our lives, we work to communicate meaning with our language in order to express our thoughts. Our thoughts form and inform as we experience the world around us. There is an interdependence on thought and language in order to express ourselves. Meaning is an act of thought as much as it is a part of a word and "thus belongs in the realm of language as much as in the realm of thought. A word without meaning is an empty sound, no longer a part of human speech" (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 6). Working reciprocally, thoughts and words express ideas and understandings. Building deeper understanding of their world assists adolescents in navigating through what may be contradictory or confusing messages and expectations. Concepts that may be clear to adults are beginning to coalesce for young people who will benefit from opportunities to grow in these areas. The use of drama strategies that incorporate spoken language—and thus thoughts—as well as physical and visual meanings communicated with their bodies

provides support as students this age progress to a more stratified form of intellectual activity—thinking in concepts. However, Vygotsky (1931) warns,

> [t]he formation of concept is an extremely complex process which, by no means, can be considered to be analogous to the simple maturation of elementary intellectual functions, and for this reason resists any attempt to explain it by using superficial examples of rough eye estimates. The changes which occur in the thinking process of an adolescent who has mastered thinking in concepts, are to a large extent changes of an internal, intimate, structural nature, frequently not externally visible in any clear way and not always evident to an outsider observer" (p. 15).

When engaging adolescents in the use of drama strategies to explore their perceptions and thoughts about their "cultural sphere" (Vygotsky, 1931, p.10), recognition of the development of *content* in their lives as well as *thoughts* associated with these experiences is important. Consideration for both areas of growth when providing opportunities for adolescents to expand and examine ideas important to them will make meaning clear and comprehensible. For instance, improvisational scenes offer what Vygotsky would call a "new world of thought content" (p. 16). Students must express thoughts through spoken language, accept what is offered to them from their peers within the parameters created, and work with ideas and concepts that may be new to them in order to understand and communicate the meaning of the scene.

Specific to the growth of adolescents, Vygotsky (1998/1931) states that "an adolescent's thinking is intellectual thinking" (p. 18). Their thoughts become more abstract as they search for logical relationships of event and experiences in their lives.

These abstract thoughts heighten the imagination of adolescents and their "[f]ormal-logical thought makes it possible for adolescents to operate abstract concepts and ideas;…to understand those social norms and values that were 'hidden' from their understanding earlier" (Karpov, 2014, p. 113). With a more complex way of thinking, adolescents can analyze and test new social knowledge before accepting it (or not) and therefore develop ownership of that information. When adults provide an *authoritative* stance of guidance that offers open communication about these social norms rather than an imposed, *authoritarian* view, adolescents are more likely to adopt the positive social models presented (Karpov, 2014).

Because peer influence is stronger at this time in the growth of a child, the interactions with peers becomes a priority. Teachers who capitalize on this stance of peer interaction will find that it is important to connect "learning at school to adolescents' current interests; in other words, to involve them in cooperative learning that provides interaction among students" (Karpov, 2014, p. 125). Through the use of teaching strategies that support where adolescents are developmentally, educators can guide students to successful educational outcomes. However, it is essential that teachers listen to what the adolescents have to say, not just hear their words.

When Considering Adolescents

The ages between 10 and 15 years are the time when children undergo the most "rapid and profound personal changes" (AMLE, 2010, p.5) in their lives. Children at this age are beginning to consider their world beyond the concrete, black and white viewpoint of youth to the abstract, subjective perspective of early adolescence transitioning into adulthood. Situations are analyzed and contemplated logically; future considerations are

evaluated, with realistic long-term goals being set. There is a level of introspection and maturity in judgment that up until this point in their development, they were not cognitively positioned to act upon (Developing Adolescents, 2002). It is a time when they are conscious of their own development. There is a noticeable development in their emotional growth, where they are "establishing a new sense of who they are and who they want to become" (p. 5). Physical, intellectual, social-emotional, psychological, and moral growth are intertwined and adolescents benefit from the adults in their lives recognizing all these areas.

In school settings, support in these areas of growth can lead to academic success for students. For adolescents, educators need to understand that students' patterns of thinking and questioning are changing in order to figure out how the world functions. These changes are evident "in their reflections about personal experiences, in their views on moral issues, and through their perceptions of stories, images, and humor" (AMLE, 2010, p. 6). How they learn, how they plan, and how they view a variety of ideas comprises the experiences of adolescents. However, this growth happens gradually and sporadically and middle school students "still require ongoing, concrete, experiential learning" (p. 6). As adolescents gain more independence and ability to take care of their own needs, they are expanding their social groups and peer acceptance becomes an important aspect in their lives. Karpov (2014) maintains that "in the context of interactions within a peer group, adolescents use social norms and values adopted from parents as standards for the behavior of their peers and for their own behavior" (p. 110). However, there are times when peer influence can supersede adult input as to what are socially appropriate behaviors. When the opinions and positions of adolescents are

suppressed, they are relegated to follow the authority of those in power without question. Young people this age have very little say in how their lives will be lived and how their perceptions matter. The lack of expression and influence of children in early adolescence may trigger the development of negative behaviors (Developing Adolescents, 2002). It is at this time that adults should offer non-judgmental interactions and guidance (AMLE, 2010; Developing Adolescents, 2002; Karpov, 2014). The stated goals from educators are to develop within young people the desire to become lifelong learners, conscientious citizens, and support competence and self-sufficiency (Musoleno & White, 2010). To do this, teachers and other adults need to understand the growth of an adolescent. Those who have chosen to teach early adolescents encounter the exceptional challenge of meeting students where they are and supporting them as they find their voices to work to bring out the best in everyone (Shollenberger, 2007).

What is Creative Drama?

> Of all the arts, drama involves the participant the most fully: intellectually, emotionally, physically, verbally, and socially. As players, children assume the roles of others, and they learn about becoming more sensitive to the problems and values of persons different from themselves. At the same time, they are learning to work cooperatively, for drama is a communal art; each person is necessary to the whole (McCaslin, 2006, p. 4).

On any given day, at any given moment, children interact with one another and encounter situations that require them to think and consider possibilities that are new to them. Dramatic play is a naturally occurring, spontaneous result of the confluence of two of more children. It helps them "develop from a purely egocentric being into a person

capable of sharing and of give and take" (Hartley, Frank, and Goldenson, as cited in McCaslin, 2006, p. 7). It is a mode for students to learn about their world and how they exist in that world. Dramatic play is non-threatening and non-judgmental and allows for amendments to one's thoughts and perspectives. It is a starting point for creative drama in an educational setting (Heathcote, 1984).

The creative drama pioneer, Winifred Ward (1942) states that creative drama's "purpose is the developing of finer and happier people—people who because of this experience are more warmly human and understanding" (p. 445). It has more structure than dramatic play, but it is improvised and created by the players. It is a form of storytelling and story living that is relevant to the participants and guided by a leader, not structured by a script or a director. It is used to explore social situations and for students to "know how it feels to be in someone else's shoes" (Heathcote, 1984, p. 49). The key to creative drama in an educational setting is the necessity for a leader or a teacher trained in using drama as a complex learning tool for student instruction. If left to the uninformed, creative drama often becomes about memorizing lines from scripts; and also about sets and lights and costumes and makeup and the entire spectacle that is associated with a performance—what is known as *theatre*.

Theatre is what most people think when they hear the term drama. Theatre is formal and designed to entertain an audience. It is scripted and controlled and dependent upon visual aesthetics to initially invite the audience to follow the telling of the story. The main focus of theatre is not the actors and participants, but the audience (Pearson, personal communication, February 25, 2003). In this lack of focus on the student actors it becomes an intangible experience for the participants. They will learn a story and develop

a product, that, when done well, provides success and gratification. However, performance should be the *end-product* of a dramatic experience, not the *only* product. As Nellie McCaslin (2006) points out, "When children are trained rather than guided, praised extravagantly instead of encouraged, or featured as individuals rather than helped to work cooperatively with others, they risk losing all positive aspects of the experience" (p. 9). Students also communicate their viewpoints and think critically to solve problems and contribute to the communal endeavor of the group (Heathcote, 1984). The objectives of theatre for performance could possibly limit these skills. It is important for educators to recognize the differentiation of drama and theatre.

The Development of Creative Drama

The use of drama and theatre as an educational tool is not new. In ancient Greece, much of the education practices included the arts—music, movement, and story. Elizabethan England honored the reading and staging of classic plays, and drama was an integral part of the curriculum. Many nations and cultures have used drama as an educational tool over the centuries. However, in the United States, it has only been in the last 100 years that there has been an acknowledgement that there can be a connection between drama, theatre, and school (McCaslin, 2006). The connection can be seen as complicated. Do educators use drama as an instructional tool and a means to an end or should it exist as a valid art form in its own right? Augusto Boal (1974/trans.1985) asks the question, "should art educate, inform, organize, influence, incite to action or should it simply be an object of pleasure?" (p. xlll). Drama can do both and, in the care of a skilled educator who can envision multiple facets of the implementation and use, drama can be a powerful tool (Pearson, 2003). For educational purposes, integration with more

traditional academic areas is vital to the integrity of both the core subject and the art of drama.

Early in the 20th century, instruction in drama and theatre was limited to preparing people to become professional actors on the stage. This avenue of education was discouraged by many families because acting as an occupation was not seen as a stable form of employment. It was seen as a "highly questionable way of life outside the mainstream of society" (McCaslin, 2005, p. 14). It has become the motivation for educators who personally experienced drama as an opportunity for self-awareness and growth to then develop methods for drama to be integrated into general education classrooms (Pearson, 2003).

Ward (1942) saw drama as a means to build external skills in children such as oral expression and physical stance in reciting and presenting to a class. She also recognized drama as an occasion for a child to have "a legitimate outlet for his emotions… [and] by such expression he not only gains a sense of keen satisfaction, but he learns to see himself objectively" (p. 447). Drama became a cooperative project to be an integral component in curriculum, whether through guided dramatic play or the creation of an original play based on the needs of the students. A positive outcome of the origination of drama is that all students participate and the ideas of every member is considered and honored (Ward, 1942).

Presently, in the 21st century, education supports the need for classrooms to be spaces where collaboration builds community and learning can flourish. When integrated into the curriculum, drama provides the goal of achieving positive, united efforts. With creative drama as an instructional strategy in a classroom, educators can employ a variety

of frameworks for students to work toward classroom goals. It is encouraged, however, that teachers work to find a balance between drama as tool for instruction and drama for the sake of the art. Drama and theatre, in the context of education can be both instructional and aesthetically appealing (Eisner, 2002). At times, if an audience is entertained by a live theatrical production, that same audience can be informed and moved to advocate for knowledge and change.

Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)

Developed in Brazil in the 1950s, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979 trans. 1985) is a form of theatrical and dramatic exploration in the 1970s as "a response to the social and political turmoil present in Brazil" (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009, p. 69). Influenced by Paulo Freire's (1970, trans. 2000) work, TO and Boal's techniques use drama and theatre as means of promoting social and political change. Boal built this work on the idea that lessons and apprenticeships of individuals or peoples themselves were necessary when change is enacted to restore humanity (Freire, 1970, trans. 2000). With TO, the traditional theatrical idea of the *fourth wall*—the invisible barrier between actors and audience—is eliminated and the audience becomes part of the performance. Boal and TO do not recognize *audience* but *spect-actors*; individuals who, along with the actors are on equal terms as all participants explore issues and realities.

Boal (2002) contends that "anyone can act and that theatrical performance should not be solely the province of professionals. The dual meaning of the word 'act', to perform and to take action is also at the heart of the work" (p. xxii). Beginning with *games*—exercises to the participants to work with their bodies and get to know them better—the work of TO is to create a place for honest expression, verbally and physically.

These games are designed to overcome any barriers that individuals or the group may have that would impede the progress and the message being explored. Initial games are physical in nature and require participants to recognize how they occupy a space and how their corporeal being relates to the others in that space. Then the exercises incorporate sounds, either produced by the participants or generated externally by the nature of the space or planned and brought into the space by the leader. The games build upon one another, some requiring verbalization of experience while others are meant to be silent and communication of the participants is non-verbal. TO "moves from the individual to the general" (Boal, 2002, p. xxvi). These games—exercises—continue to lay the groundwork for more specific and detailed exploration of issues significant to the group. Two well-known TO strategies for examining issues are *Image Theatre* and *Forum Theatre*.

Image Theatre (IT)

When Boal (2002) began his work in Central and South America, his participants spoke different languages. He recognized that "[w]ords have a denotation which can be found in dictionaries and a connotation which can only be found in the hearts of each one of us" (p. 174) and it was the latter implication he wanted to employ. Boal asked his participants to use their bodies to create images of familiar elements of their lives—family, work, community, memories, desires—that could visually convey meaning. He offers that these images do not translate directly to words but that "they are a language in themselves" (Boal, 2002, p. 175). These images began as still images which could also be called tableau or tableaux. In a tableau, participants assume the "roles of characters…freeze in poses that represent a significant moment…" (Kelner and Flynn,

2006, p. 150). Because tableau offers a non-verbal representation of information, it is a worthy dramatic method for students who may have limited language or literacy skills. Students need to determine what is important to the tableau and create a visual image of that concept. However, Boal included in the creation of these images the process of bringing them to life and even including words. Rozansky and Aagesen (2010) state that image theatre includes "participants' use of sounds, including language, and movement of body positions in ways that are often distinct from one's typical, everyday repertoire" (p. 460). It is the task of the individual or group building the image to be true to its creation and honor the understanding that others will bring the visual creation. Others will see what the image evokes for them and the feelings associated with it. Meaning is multifaceted and dependent upon each individual (Boal, 2002).

In their action research study with low-achieving readers with two eighth grade classrooms in a mid-west middle school, Rozansky and Aagesen (2010) wanted to describe how students in small groups dialogued about texts that could be read from a critical stance. The researcher, Carol Rozansky (2010) and the classroom teacher, Colleen Aagesen (2010) also inquired about how Boal's image theatre (IT) might promote a critical stance of the students' discussions and experiences. The chosen texts focused on social issues not typically addressed in schools and ranged from points of view of people impacted by current world events to exploring possible actions and solutions to unjust situations for these people. The connections between peers and adults and the guidance that can be offered from all sources was important (Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010).

Vygotsky (1978) described how children cognitively develop in what he termed the "zone of proximal development" (p. 86). This theory describes the works and learning

in which children engage varies from tasks that can be completed independently by the child to those tasks which require guidance from an adult or other who may have knowledge regarding the goal of the task. Rozansky and Aagesen (2010) used Vygotsky's zone of proximal development to create learning opportunities that "encouraged and expected students to read texts from a critical stance" (p. 461). Image theatre was used to mediate participants' stance. Students were arranged into small groups and each group discussed the text they read. The groups then created an image based on their critical interpretation of the text and presented their images to the rest of the class. The entire class discussed what was presented. The researchers reported, "[it] is as if one is in an art gallery, responds to a piece of art, and then has the opportunity to talk with the artist" (p. 462) and that the goal to promote critical literacy of eighth graders was achieved. However, the findings were reported by the researchers with only three reflective quotes from the student participants. If image theatre and TO are strategies to be used to encourage critical analysis, participant voices need to be heard.

Forum Theatre (FT)

Once students are familiar with the work of IT, a natural step is to bring those images to life by adding movement. Moving from images created by participants, actors can expand into improvisations by bringing the image to life and developing a scene based on their understanding a perception of an issue being explored. Improvised dialogue is added and actors may not solve any problems, but they do have the opportunity to process thoughts and feelings. Once there is work the actors feel should be shared, the scene or work is then presented to the *spect-actors.* Boal (2002) called this type of improvisation *forum theatre*. It is a sort of

fight or game, and like all forms to game or fight there are rules. They [the rules]

can be modified, but they can exist to ensure that all the players are involved in

the same enterprise, and to facilitate the generation of serious and fruitful

discussion (p. 242).

With work of this nature, all participants have a say in what is offered, thus providing

many occasions for engagement and dialogue. The process is as fluid and dynamic as the

group needs it to be.

Forum theatre (FT) is presented twice; first as a straight scene, from beginning to

end, and the second time, the audience—the *spect-actors*—are encouraged to identify

changes for the scene to end in a more positive, less oppressive manner (Prendergast &

Saxton, 2009, p. 69). This relationship with the spect-actors if facilitated by one who

guides the interaction, a role Boal calls 'the Joker' (1979 trans. 1985). The Joker is seen

as the entity who assists in the transactions between the actors and the spect-actors and

eliminates the traditional, theatrical *fourth wall*. As Prendergast and Saxton (2009) attest,

"the intention of Forum Theatre, [is] to provide a space not only for discussion and

reflection but also as a rehearsal for real action toward change" (p. 70). Participants work

concurrently on the issue pertinent to the group and process as they move forward.

The expectations for FT (Boal, 2002) are:

- Easily identifiable characters both in speech and physical presence

- Original solutions to a problem contains one flaw to be analyzed

- The element that the group can concretely discuss the issue and explore solutions

- Logical evolutions to the characters' ideology and social function

- The means of presentation fits the nature of the issue

As the piece is performed, it should be presented as a typical play. The spect-actors need to agree on the flaw to the solution presented by the protagonist the first time the scene is presented. The second time the scene is played, the spect-actors will be invited and encouraged to stop the action, step into the scene, and present a realistic alternative solution to the problem. The idea is that "the actors stand for a particular *vision of the world*…until a spect-actor intervenes and changes the vision of the world *as it is* into a world *as it could be*" (Boal, 2002, p. 243, emphasis original). As a tool for a group of adolescents to explore issues important to them, FT in a drama class provides a non-judgmental, safe place to utilize their voice and experiences and possibly consider alternative solutions to issues they may be facing. Discussions can "empower and transform" (Hammond, 2013, p. 1) students' perceptions of issues they are working to explore.

Nick Hammond (2013) conducted a study with students in a rural school in the United Kingdom. The focus of the study was to use the strategies from FT to elicit student voices and to advocate for their needs. The audience for the study was educational psychologists to use the concept FT to open dialogue "where children can feel empowered to share their voice and feel heard in a space which *they* created" (p. 9). Hammond (2013) found that "[e]mancipatory factors of FT most cited in the literature include empowerment, social justice, and equality. However, contrasting factors which may present as barriers to emancipation include power imbalances, tokenism, and adult-led initiatives" (p. 7). The results of the study found that the use of FT did offer students a sense of empowerment and a space to communicate their views when engaged with significant adults. It is suggested that FT be used in the "tool kit" (Hammond, 2013, p. 9)

for educational psychologists when working with children. Hammond does acknowledge that a limitation to this study was that it was conducted by outsiders entering into the school setting and implementing the FT strategies. The classroom teachers were unfamiliar with the drama strategies used. However, there is no reporting on the issues students explored, where or how the topic or theme was originated, or how general education teachers might use FT in their own classrooms. This study will contribute to the research of using forum theatre with adolescents, specifically using their voices to describe and report their experiences and perceptions.

Another concern about the Hammond study is that the structure of the performance of the work the student participants offered was not clearly described. Since FT is not a scripted play and the communication of the topic is improvised, the presentation of the results of FT can be flexible and in a format that is non-traditional theatre.

Playbuilding

Once TO strategies have been utilized to explore themes or topics of the participants' choice, the group may want to formally share their work with an audience. TO strategies are not usually scripted in a traditional theatrical sense. Depending on the number of members of a TO group, the participants may actually divide in to smaller groups and create scenes that are unified around the theme being explored. Each group may develop its own interpretation and presentation of the issue. When this arrangement is the case—as it may be in classrooms—a framework is needed to present the work of all the participants to an audience. The structure of playbuilding (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995; Weigler, 2001) is a pragmatic framework to present these dramatic solutions.

Playbuilding is a powerful approach to drama "that encompasses learning experiences in a number of areas including theatre, human behavior, presenting ideas, co-operating, thinking, research, and the pursuit of excellence" (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995, p. 11). From a theatre perspective, participants develop skills in playwriting, acting, technical theatre, directing and even as audience members. They learn about the structure of a play and what an actor needs to do to present the story. To explore human behavior, participants must recognize their own stance on issues and explore the point of view of the others in the group.

Collaboration is a considerable part of playbuilding. Group members must listen to the ideas of others and offer suggestions in a respectful manner. Many times, the ideas that the group investigates begin with a question about a topic or theme the participants want to explore. To then sincerely and truthfully present the issue, it must be well researched. It is imperative for participants to strive for excellence. Group members should seek quality and merit through commitment to the work and focus on the process (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995).

Another way of perceiving playbuilding is that the participants are not engaged in telling stories as much as they are working to "*unpack* them" (Weigler, 2001, p. xiv). Group members search for and identify the most powerful elements that reflect the essence of the topic. They work to present their interpretation of these elements in a clear and specific manner. Participants work to deal with and negate preconceived ideas about situations and people and offer new enlightened views on topics (Weigler, 2001).

The structure of playbuilding in a sociodramatic domain begins with the building of ensemble within the group through drama activities that encourage identifying group

members and the building of respect within the group. The participants must come to an understanding of what the objective and purpose is for creating this playbuilt piece. They must reach consensus on ideas or issues to explore, agree to collaborate with all members, and must be ready to perform for an audience if that is the choice of the group. The result of a playbuilt play is that it is a series of "collages built around a central theme. People who have not experienced this type of play often think in terms of creating a linear story, rather than a series of thematically linked images" (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995, pp. 36-37). Participants must be flexible and comfortable with creating and performing in a non-traditional theatrical setting, if that is what is effective in presenting the play. Improvisation is the key to developing and perhaps presenting a playbuilt play. Traditionally, improvisation is unscripted, spontaneous dialogue between two or more characters created in the moment of a scene (Spolin, 1999). Once participants agree upon and study a particular issue, they can begin to craft their play. It can take the form of a very rehearsed and scripted piece developed through improvisation, or it can be presented as a work in progress in an improvisational form.

Carole Tarlington and Wendy Michaels (1995) offer a quick playbuilding strategy that organizes "a play in a day" (p. 36). This format offers an opportunity to explore an issue that is immediate and relevant to the participants. The steps are based on the group agreeing to the following: to work quickly, to co-operate, to listen to one another and to be ready to work hard. Participants agree on a topic. Small groups create still images around the theme or topic and then bring them to life in an improvisation. The group scenes are sequenced and rehearsed. The opening is created by the members completing one-liners related to the theme. The entire play is then rehearsed. It is then performed.

When it is performed, it can be for an invited audience or to be filmed for just the group to view and process. The core of this form of playbuilding is that it can offer a sociodramatic component when the group chooses to explore an issue directly related to their lives and realities. If time is limited for the group to create a very detailed production of a playbuilt play, Tarlington and Michaels (1995) provide a framework for the group to share work with an audience—or spect-actors.

Steps for Quick Playbuilding (1995) include:

- Group agrees on theme or issue

- Smaller groups (3-5) meet and discuss what the issue means to them

- Small groups create still image (tableau) of their interpretation of the issue

- Other groups "read" the image with no response from the group that creates the tableau

- All tableaux are "read"

- Groups then work on bringing the still image to life and ad improvised dialogue

- Scenes come to an end and group creates a final tableau

- Scenes are shared with other groups—begin with first tableau, end with final tableau—order of scenes is established

- One liners related to the issue are created and traded

- Each member chooses a line they can work with

- One liners are spoken out loud and given an order

- One liners are then staged with a movement included from the person who speaks the line

- Entrance of performers is determined

- One liners open the show—can be repeated/interspersed between scenes presented

- Scenes are performed

- Exit/ending of performers is determined

Playbuilding as a format of presenting work created and processed using TO strategies allows for adolescents to perform in a way where actors support one another. The improvised dialogue remains true to the piece and can be adapted as needed with each performance (Weigler, 2001). The structure is informal, flexible, and provides opportunities for students to be invested in the outcome because the play is their words, work, and voices.

What do Students Say?

How do students perceive instructional strategies used and their own learning? There are limited opportunities for student decision making and learner self-management. Students have little say in what they study, how they study, and how they can demonstrate what they know. Policies are set for these students by adults who request no input from the students. Patricia O'Connell Schmakel (2008) contends that "[f]or the most part, schools are not structured to learn from their students' own voices" (p. 723). Little is done to create supportive educational policy for middle school students, even as teachers advocate for curriculum that is meaningful (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014; Robinson & Taylor, 2013; Schmakel, 2008; Wang & Eccles, 2013). While there are some inroads for teachers to have input to the discussion, there are limited opportunities for the voices of students. If teachers are to support and encourage the learning of early

adolescents, those who have the most to gain—students—must be a part of the discussion (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014).

The term 'student voice' requires "validating and authorizing them [students] to represent their own ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experiences throughout education" (Fletcher, 2005 as cited in Robinson & Taylor, 2013, p. 32) in order to have a say in characteristics of their school instances. Student voice is not only the words that are spoken, but also "the many ways in which [students] choose to express their feelings or view about any aspect of their school…experience" (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 6). Traditionally, "[e]arly adolescents' insights, theories, and recommendations have been for the most part unreported" (O'Connell Schmakel, 2008, p. 724). Studies and materials (Hass-Dyson, 2006; Kane & Chimwayange, 2013; Loch, 2012; Lodge, 2008; Robinson and Taylor, 2013; Kidd & Czerniawski, 2011) offer student quotes and perspectives to support findings reported in the literature. Some of the quotes are examples of student work while others actually contribute to the narrative of the findings. Other studies, the adults who conduct them tend to *report* on the experiences of the adolescent participants. While there are occasional quotes from students, there is little evidence of students' own voices to relate their experiences (Bragg, 2007; Fielding, 2004; Freeman, 2012; Kidd & Czerniawski, 2011; McDonald, Kidney, & Patka, 2013; Plank, Dixon, & Ward, 2014; Watson, Johanson, & Dankiw, 2014). Quotes from students are sometimes used in final reports, but the questions become who chooses those quotes and what aspects of "student voice" have been left out? The primary focus of this study will be to document adolescents' experiences and perceptions of being part of a drama program that provides

a place for them to explore issues significant to them. Student voice included in the findings provides a reflection of how they see themselves as learners.

The essence of student voice is that it is the perspectives of the students involved in the educational process to have a say in what and how they will learn in order to for classroom practices to be effective for them (Freeman, 2012). More specifically,

> Student voice covers a range of activities that encourage reflection, discussion, dialogue and action on matters that primarily concern students…[including] such developments as peer support arrangements…systems that encourage and enable students to articulate their views and see through appropriate changes…and a small but growing cluster of activities that encourage various forms of overt student leadership. (Fielding, 2004)

The main focus of student voice suggests empowerment of students in their learning and their engagement of lessons and decisions that are made to support their educational journeys. While it is not appropriate for students to assume complete control over curriculum design and school climate, student voice can contribute to collaboration in education (Freeman, 2012).

Currently, the concept of student voice is "often co-opted into managerial agendas, but nevertheless [Fielding] feels it retains transformational potential" (Fielding as cited in Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 7). The inclusion of student voice and perspective is seen as a necessity to improving classroom instruction. In their work with student voice, Carol Robinson and Carol Taylor offer four core values to using student voice in the transformation of educational practices. They are "a conception of communication as dialogue; the requirement for participation and democratic inclusivity;

the recognition that power relations are unequal and problematic; and the possibility for change and transformation" (Robinson & Taylor, 2013, p. 33). While the use of student voice to influence classroom practices is beyond this study, I will, however, begin the first step in validating the experiences of student by opening a dialogue.

With adolescents, research can take a more formal tone. In their study on adolescent perspective related to standards-based reform, Janine Certo et. al (2008) uncovered three themes based on the reports of the students. The 33 participants in the study were students from metropolitan public high schools in Virginia. They were interviewed regarding the implementation of instruction related to new standards set in place based on the 2001 federal legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB). These students were chosen because the remembered what classroom instruction was like before NCLB. The themes that arose from the analysis of the interview were:

- Authentic curriculum and classwork—students preferred hands-on strategies and opportunities for debate and discussion.

- Standards learning impact—students felt that the main focus of learning was the Standards of Learning (SOL) required by the state of Virginia. They felt that SOL was more important than them.

- Teacher support—perspectives varied on this theme, but many students could name a teacher or two who they knew they could count on for help (Certo, et. al, 2008).

Through student voice, researchers were able to discuss with some certainty that students preferred a variety of teaching strategies; that the SOL focus made them feel unimportant; and that "students tended to link teachers' caring with the way that teachers

taught" (p. 36). Reading the authentic words and language of the students made this study a credible one. The information was more of a primary source when it came directly from the participants.

Yet another study on student perspectives regarding the quality of their education, Mark Storz (2008) explored the experiences of middle schoolers in four urban middle schools in a large mid-western city. Storz and his co-researcher conducted focus group interviews, inquiring about their middle school experiences. The rich information that was presented in the article through the words and language of the students was informative. To capture the essence and the meaning in much of what the students reported would not have been as powerful had it been processed through the filter of a teacher, parent, or other adult. Students saw and could articulate inequalities and deficits in their education. They could highlight positive aspects and were very clear on their perceptions of what they felt was inappropriate. What Storz concluded what that the adults had "to commit ourselves to activity and seriously listening to our students, providing them…with a safe environment in which to share their understandings and questions" (p. 265). Adolescents are quite capable of articulating their perceptions of their world and if we are to engage students in their own learning, we need to listen to what they have to say.

The experiences and perspectives of the students who will participate in this study will need to be accurately represented. The use of their language and dialogue, will honor what they say, how they say it, and where they inhabit their world (Gee, 2011). To ultimately have student perspective influence classroom practices would be a long-term goal worth pursuing. Instruction in a classroom must have meaning to the participants to

"suit the learning needs of individuals, and [should include] learners having a say in how they would like to learn and to take on some responsibility for their own learning" (Robinson & Taylor, 2013, p. 34). The idea of teaching a student is for the student to eventually get along without the teacher.

For an open dialogue with students to honor their experiences and perspectives about drama strategies there needs to be a recognition of the limitation of hierarchy. Robinson and Taylor (2013) maintain that "power…is understood as overt authoritative power, where those in an authoritative position use their authority to empower or enable others in a less authoritative position be become legitimately involved in, and take forward, an aspect of practice" (p. 38).

Final Thoughts

The use of creative drama as an instructional strategy is not new. Connections between what are traditionally seen as basic areas of classroom instruction and the use of drama are fairly straightforward. With the framework of multiple literacies, creative drama strategies could be introduced in literacy classrooms. The question of value on the learning of students may arise, and the most sensible, sound way of determining this effectiveness is to go straight to the source—ask the students. It we are to honor and support what students do in the classroom, it is important to listen to what they have to say.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Methodology: Practitioner Action Research

Reflecting on time as a classroom teacher, I look back and recognize many times where I would ask myself 'how did that lesson go?' or 'I sure didn't anticipate those questions' or even 'what did the group get out of that?'. In discussions with my colleagues at school, I realized others had similar ruminations about their lessons. Teachers seem to frequently ask questions about their practice, especially when they are using new materials or implementing a new curriculum. They are practitioners who are exploring the *hows* and *whys* of what happens in their classrooms and what can be done to make the greatest positive impact on student learning. Educators who question classroom procedures in order to improve methods and systems are natural practitioner researchers. Practitioner research can be "a powerfully liberating form of professional enquiry because it means that practitioners themselves investigate their practices as they find ways to live more fully in the direction of their educational values" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 8).

This study was a collaborative effort. Herr and Anderson (2015) have differentiated aspects of the definition of practitioner research to include "inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them… [and that] research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation" (p. 3-4). The methodology for this study was Practitioner Action Research (PAR), specifically outsider/insider PAR. I had a dual role as an education drama specialist who assisted expanding the instructional practice of a middle school drama teacher as well as being the researcher who collected and analyzed data. I

introduced instructional drama strategies new to the classroom teacher while she provided input into the planning of the lessons. Students were in control of the details of what they explored through the use of drama. In the end, student voice and experiences informed all the participants on the implementation of drama instruction in order to answer the question:

> *How do middle school students explore and express their experiences regarding issues they feel are important to them when engaged in modified drama strategies based on Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed?*

Reciprocal collaboration (outsider-insider teams)

The insider/participant was the classroom drama teacher, from a middle school (grades 6 through 8) in a medium-sized city in the southwestern United States. With over 30 years' teaching experience, her background was in special education and this academic year, she mainly taught Language Arts/Literature at the middle school. Her license was the highest level for her state, Grades 7-12, with endorsements in Language/Literature TESOL and ESL; she was involved with the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program and is a National Board Certified Teacher. Because I collected her researcher journal, video/audio recorded her involvement with the lessons, and interviewed her, she was a participant. In order to maintain objectivity and to assure that students' grades for the class were not influenced by their participation in the study, Mrs. Amy Smith (a pseudonym) did not have access to student work collected.

Due to my previous work with staff members at the school, I had already made a connection with the principal/administrator at Eastside Middle School (a pseudonym). The school was establishing a drama class/program at the school with which I was able to

assist. The principal, Mr. Robert Carson (a pseudonym), also invited me to conduct a

professional development session with other staff members exploring the use of drama in

their curriculums. From this existing relationship, my access to the adolescent

participants required minimal effort.

The design of this study was to implement specific drama strategies as lessons with

the students, with the primary focus on an issue the students chose to explore. The work

of the teacher and the researcher was to guide the students through the process of Theatre

of the Oppressed (TO) strategies and creating a Playbuilt play. Playbuilding is a

presentation where improvisation not scripted scenes based on a central theme are woven

together to present the participants' perspectives (Tarlington & Michaels, 1998; Weigler,

2001).

During the study, participants kept a dialogue journal, which were collected after

each session so that the written conversation was maintained between the researcher and

the participants. Lessons and sessions were video/audio recorded, due to the nature of

drama and "creating in the moment". The recorded language and conversations of the

participants as well as the non-verbal communication captured with video allowed for

analysis. The classroom teacher also kept a dialogue journal, and along with the

researcher's journal, information was gathered through the perspectives of the adults

involved. All sets of data were analyzed for language used related to student experiences

of creating a performance.

Study Location

The site of this study was in a middle school drama classroom found in an urban

setting in a city in the southwest US. The classroom and the space used for drama

lessons, a larger room in the school, provided appropriate settings for the particular lesson for that session. In the smaller classroom, there was access to technology, which allowed for displaying any video recordings or still images of student work for discussion. The larger room provided space without desks or tables for physical movement needed for drama activities/lessons to occur.

The school was on a block schedule, with the odd numbered class periods meeting for an hour and 20 minutes two days a week, even numbered class periods meeting for the same amount on two other days a week. On the fifth day, all class periods met for approximately 50 minutes.

Experiences of All Participants

There are various approaches to conducting qualitative research. From exploring an entire social or cultural group of people in the spaces they inhabit, to considering the lived experiences of participants involved in a shared occurrence, qualitative research focuses on human behavior. Questions about the *how* the *why,* and the *what* we are in the world are basic to this type of research. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) assert that a systematic study of teachers' own classroom practices offer opportunities for those teachers to be "knowledge generators" (p.3) and to focus on the experiences of all participants. The main focus of this study was the perceptions and experiences documented by the voice of the adolescents. The collected data provided insight into the participants' descriptions of their shared encounters with specific lessons taught by their teachers. Since the primary focus was on the voices of the students, it was essential that the methods reflect and honor their perspectives. This study offered an understanding of the shared experiences of all the individuals involved (Creswell, 2007).

Participants

The participants in this study were a group of middle school students enrolled in a drama class as their 'elective' for the year. Most students were given the opportunity to choose to be in the drama class, but some students were placed in the class because it fit the needed schedule of their other required courses. Initially, there were 27 students and their teacher in the study. Two students moved away from the school during the study. The students were 7th and 8th graders, almost evenly divided between the two grade levels. The members of the group included students from the Middle East and Central America as well as from the region of the US where the school is located.

Consenting Participants

Because this study was a part of an actual class, all students in this class were invited to participate in the study. However, participation in the study, one way or another did not influence students' grades for this class. The consent forms for the classroom teacher (Appendix A), parents/guardians (Appendix B) and the assent form for the underage participants (Appendix C) were distributed in the classroom at the school by a research assistant, Kalama (a pseudonym). She possessed extensive knowledge in research techniques, including the consent and anonymity of participants in qualitative research studies.

During this classroom session, I gave an overall perspective of the study—that it was to use drama strategies to explore an issue that students choose. I also emphasized that the main focus was to record and report their experiences and perspective through their own words. I left the classroom and Kalama distributed consent forms for the teacher, the families of the students and the students themselves. She explained to

students and the teacher that they would use a pseudonym and all their work would be kept in confidence. Students were assured that any work from this study would not affect their grade for the class. However, they were told that the teacher would be there and be able to determine 'grades' by the level of participation in the lessons as they were presented. Students were guaranteed that even if they chose not to participate in the study--the collection of their work from the lessons--they would still be involved in the drama activities, as the activities themselves were part of the class. Kalama provided her contact information, so if a student decided to not to participate at a later date, they could inform her. The need for that option did not come up.

The students had approximately a week to complete their forms and return them. Most students did bring their forms back in a timely manner and Kalama was available to collect the sealed envelopes. This action minimized the chance for the classroom teacher to know who actual study participants were. Being unaware allowed for the expectation that students' course grades were not influenced by level of participation in the study. While any consent/assent forms were distributed or collected, I left the room; however, since she was a participant in the study, Amy, the classroom teacher, remained in the classroom to also answer any questions participants may have had. If students had questions about the study, Kalama was available to answer general questions.

Of the 26 student consent forms that were returned (one was never returned), 24 students consented to be part of the study. Once the forms were collected, Kalama gave them to me so I knew which students consented. This step was significant because I needed to know which data to use in this study and concentrate on that data as I proceeded.

Secondary Language Concerns

Some of the students were English Language Learners (ELL). Being a monolingual English speaker, I do not have the personal resources to translate written work. Amy was fluent in Spanish and available to translate where the student's primary language is Spanish. Translation services for any written forms were offered through the school district's main office. Students and families were given the option to have any written documents translated to a language with which they were more comfortable. None of the students or families needed this step in the participation in the study. The actual sessions were conducted in English, with students providing oral interactions and responses during the lessons. When students were asked to respond in writing in their dialogue journals, they were encouraged to use whatever language was most comfortable for them. They all responded in English. My surprise was that a few students had a difficult time reading my responses—they were not comfortable with cursive handwriting!

Research Design

Rapport with Participants

Qualitative studies are designed to develop an understanding of "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning their attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). One method for a researcher to build awareness of a group's individual and interactive dynamics is to situate one's self in the physical space that troupe of people are. Mendes as cited in Kaufmann and Lane (2003), that in order to be successful in their interactions with students, adults must "have a genuine desire to create a relationship with the students in order to elicit student interest in the content" (p. 15). The expectation of in-depth insight by all participants was

facilitated by taking initial steps to build mutual trust and a positive social bond. These important steps included the connection of student-adult (teacher) and student-student connections (Frisby & Martin, 2010). The need for the students to build rapport with peers was just as important as it was with adults. Traditionally, adolescents are at a place in their growth where peers and social interactions are important to their self-perception and self-esteem (Vygotsky as cited in Karpov, 2014). Adult guidance in fostering positive peer interactions is significant as adolescents develop "social norms and values adopted from [adults] as standards for the behaviors of their peers and for their own behavior" (Karpov, 2014, p. 110). According to the American Psychological Association (2002), adolescents are at the stage of development where:

> Peer groups serve a number of important functions throughout adolescence, providing a temporary reference point for a developing sense of identity… Peer groups also serve as powerful reinforcers during adolescence as sources of popularity, status, prestige, and acceptance (Developing Adolescents: A Reference for Professionals, p. 21).

It was important for me to build rapport with the students. With the focus of this study being the experiences and perspectives of the students reported in their own voice, it was crucial that I present a non-judgmental position in my role as facilitator of the drama methods used.

I was fortunate to have an opportunity to visit, observe, and interact with the students at Eastside just after the school year began. Although my official position began as a volunteer in the classroom, offering support for the lessons provided by the teacher, I did inform the students I would eventually be conducting a study about their experiences

with drama. To build rapport with all participants—students, teacher, and researcher—I was able to implement drama games created by Augusto Boal (2002). While the label 'drama game' may seem somewhat misleading as a serious instructional strategy, Boal describes the use of such endeavors with the insight that

> [life] is expansive, it expands inside our own body, growing and developing, and it also expands in territory, physical and psychological, discovering spaces, forms, ideas, meanings, sensations—this should be done as dialogue: receiving from others what others have created, giving them the best of our own creation (p. 2).

Use of such strategies to expand perspective and experiences and share them with others, allowed participants to construct shared experiences and develop a dialogue to create and express thoughts and ideas. Most importantly, participants also were able to cultivate an understanding that honors the perspectives of others (Rohd, 1998).

In building rapport, I had need to recognize the limitation of the power hierarchy between an adult and an adolescent. Regardless of the rapport created in the classroom, there was still an inherent aspect of teacher-child relationships that limited students' perspective on their own agency and therefore limit authentic responses to lessons in class (Bjerke, 2011). It needs to be noted that the exploration of power structures in a classroom is a detailed study in its own right and beyond the scope of the answering the questions in this current study.

Developing a connection with the principal/administrator at Eastside, Mr. Carson and my previous work with Amy in establishing a drama class and program at the school enabled me to work with students and begin building rapport. The challenge for me was two-fold. First, I was an adult coming into their world and space where they were

working to establish an understanding of drama and theatre in the general sense. Second,

I had to make sure that my interactions were non-threatening and that students began to

feel that my presence was not judgmental. However, that was not the only level of access

of which I needed to be aware and that I needed to consider that "access is a continuous

process of building relationships in the setting" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 146). My

presence, just by the reason I was there, affected the relationships of the others in the

space.

Researcher's Journal/Pre-study

Fall, 2015

Students also were either welcoming—Luna Purple, Mary Jane, Erica, and Helga—or almost wary of my presence—Roses, Lil Dicky, Forest, and Tony. I found myself willing to interact with those students who seemed to "trust" my being there, and found I was making an effort to reach out to the quiet students—Sweet Jelly, Mary Jane, and Cowgirl. Wasn't sure how to "win them over".

Now, I'm not sure how much of the welcoming group was doing that because they were eager to have another adult to work with and now much the wary group wanted to see what I was all about before they committed their trust to me. but throughout the semester, these were the groups that stuck together with their work and social interactions.

January 28, 2016

Well, I guess I've built rapport—they want me to be in the drama class picture for the yearbook. When I asked yesterday, there was a resounding Yes—no hesitation. One student said "you have to be—you're one of us" ego boost.

Forest had a better day—still wiggly but willing to engage at some level. He's an interesting guy. I'm not sure what causes his distractions and disconnections. There has to be something deep inside him that causes him to not want to commit to an exercise. It reminds me of me in the sense that "if I stay on the edges and don't get involved, I won't get hurt"---I so get that feeling. It's going to be interesting to begin a dialogue journal with him. I'm sure I'll learn more about how alike me he actually is.

Still have issues/concerns about the side conversations. How to balance wanting to give them space to "be" with expectations and respect for others who are presenting a scene or just making a statement or asking a question is driving me

crazy. I have to find in myself the ability to not go to the teacher who may take corrective action based on school policy and also recognize that I'm not their "friend". I want to guide not dictate and I am not sure how to do that (Researcher's journal, 2015).

Access to this group of students before I began the actual data collection was beneficial in the building of rapport. I was able to experience how they related with one another, how they responded to and interacted the teacher and myself, and their comfort levels regarding the verbal and physical expressions of ideas. Keeping a journal of my own offered me the continuing opportunity to reflect on my positionality and perceptions. I did have to acknowledge times when I felt I was asserting my hierarchal position as a teacher and an adult. It was difficult for me to find a balance where student voices could ring true and we could continue the work of the study.

I also had the opportunity to begin to use video and recordings of student work for feedback. The school kept on file, a general release form signed by parents that allows for minor students to be photographed and video recorded for classroom purposes. Typically, Amy's video camera was limited to student performances and so the novelty of having classroom lessons recorded was new to most students. Both Amy and I took the prospect of recording students as they worked in groups for a performance of scenes from Shakespeare as a means of providing students experience of their work, make changes they felt were needed, and become more at ease with the electronic tool for observation. When it came time for data collection via video, that element was already established.

Data

Collection

The key to research is to collect data related to the study questions. As Merriam (2009) maintains, "[d]ata are not 'out there' waiting collection, like so many rubbish bags

on the pavement…they have to be noticed by the researcher, and treated as data for the

purposes of his or her research" (pp. 85-86). Because my being in this classroom was for

a specific purpose, I had specific data to collect in exploring my question related to

adolescents and their experiences with drama instruction:

> *What happens when a middle school classroom teacher and an educational drama*
>
> *specialist use modified drama strategies developed by Augusto Boal to have middle*
>
> *school students explore and express their experiences regarding an issue they feel are*
>
> *important to them?*

The nature of practitioner research provided flexibility with the steps of this study to

adjust and adapt lessons and experiences to the needs of the participants due to

continuous collection and review of data. Students were not only video recorded, the on-

going dialogue journals with all students offered insight into their experiences.

The school schedule worked well in that Amy and I had an opportunity after most

sessions to debrief and plan--it was either her prep period or the end of the school day.

Those conversations generally about students' reactions to the work, but sometimes they

were about events that happened in class that frustrated both of us. The final data

collected for this study included

- Surveys

- Video/audio recordings/photographic still images

- Student dialogue journals

- Researcher's journal—debriefing after each session with the classroom teacher

- Interview with the teacher

Each of these sources was necessary, as drama is a dynamic, visual, auditory, and interactive process. Any one of these methods could provide a snapshot of an adolescent's experience in a drama class, but together they created a more comprehensive collage of what that experience.

Method for Collecting Data

Pre Surveys

Drama is a unique form of instruction. It requires students to use the skills of speaking and listening and being evaluated on that work on an almost daily basis. Because of this distinctive requirement, Amy begins the year with surveys get an overview of the comfort level of students. The results from these surveys inform her "about kids who are new to [Eastside] that I don't know or about kids I've seen, but haven't had in class" (discussion, August, 2015). With students being familiar answering survey questions, I felt comfortable using them in this study.

Beginning with a survey created by Amy and myself, participants were asked about their perspectives on being in this drama class as well as questions about issues. All students created pseudonyms and recorded them at the top of the paper survey provided, and these became their permanent 'names' for any paperwork for the study. The use of hard copies of surveys was necessary because access to electronic means at the school was random and unreliable. The results from the surveys were used to guide me in determining a specific drama strategy that was useful to with students to focus on an issue. Statements asking students to describe situations were part of the survey and the group was given about 30 minutes to respond to statements:

Figure 1: Guy Pre-Survey Responses

Figure 2: Pepe Pre-Survey Responses

When the surveys were administered, Amy left the room in order for students to feel free to respond as candidly as they were comfortable sharing. Students were informed that the results were for me to refine the steps in the study based on their thoughts and perspectives as a group.

Observations

It is important for a researcher to note obvious occurrences and items in a space, but even more essential is to notice the details (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Those details can include accurate quotes from participants, noting actions and reactions from members being observed, and even how to share the researcher's stance as an observer (Creswell, 2007).

Several observations during this study focused on specific details for specific data noting "events, activities, and speech" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 168). Witnessing which student interacted and how those interactions took place was significant as I began to build rapport with the group. Being an outsider, not only in my stance as a researcher but as an adult in a world of adolescents, I needed to work to develop a cursory understanding of the culture of these participants.

Fall, 2015

The students were hesitant about getting up and moving around. Except for ------. He couldn't sit still and he was impulsive with his speech and his movements. There were other boys who seemed to feed off the energy of ------. ------ moved and left Eastside around the 3rd week of school. The energy dynamic changed only in that it became less "random" and more like a continuation of a conversation from lunch—they have lunch just before class. The girls were quiet, but engaged in side conversations.

There was a gender divide with the exception of Helga and Erica and ----- and Mary Jane and Jackie. I recognized early on that there were going to be pairs and threesomes that needed/wanted to talk and visit. Forest, Megan, and Papi Chulo and sometimes Bling Bling were always in conversation. One thing I noticed about Bling Bling is he's sometimes in and sometimes out with that group. There is a fluidity of friendships and peer interaction (Researcher's journal, 2015).

In my first observations, I was able to review the participants' interactions and experiences as a group. I focused on how Amy approached her lessons with students to enable my lessons to build on her routine. Data collected during these observations

allowed me to formulate questions used for consideration and guidance on how to process the issues students chose to explore. The observations were not to assess Amy's teaching practices, but ultimately prepare for collection of data to chronicle students' experiences and perceptions.

Video/Audio Recordings and Still Photographs

A benefit of conducting research in the 21st century is the access to audio and video opportunities for recording observations and interviews. Video and audio recordings of events in a classroom can offer documentation of "patterns of discourse (speech acts), proxemics (use of space) and kinesics (body motion)" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012. p. 100). Raw data collected with audio or video devices were artifacts that allowed for analysis and interpretation to provide information for answering questions in the study. Visual images such as still photography were also a form of data available to this qualitative research. Any of these materials were revisited and reviewed to pinpoint answers to questions that arose. In the case of audio recordings, once they were transcribed, they could be analyzed in even more detail (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The ability to revisit an event hours, or even days after the event can be crucial to honoring the perspectives of the participants. With the tool of electronic recording and utilizing the skills of Kalama, the video and audio recording became imperative that these forms of data secured a method to preserve the integrity of the data.

The use of video/audio records and still photographs of each session related specifically to the study has allowed me to plan and conduct lessons and student group work. Ultimately, video recordings were used in concert with students' written responses and reflections of the lesson in which they engaged. Raw video shared with students

provided an opportunity to appraise the overall experience of the lesson. They then responded to the inquiry: *Describe what this lesson is like for you*.

Video recordings of improvised student work and still photographs of tableaux created in the technique of TO *Image Theatre* (Boal, 2002) were included in the collected data because of the physical, kinesthetic nature of drama. Images were just as communicative as spoken or written words and capturing them through video or photographs was important in data analysis. The pictures captured accuracy that audio recordings and my memory could not. The images and videos were shared with participants as a source of member checking, with group discussions about what was viewed as well as a starting point for entries in student reflection journals. Much of the language used was spontaneous and offered insight into the reality of the students. As I explored student voice, their reality was the primary focus.

Patrisha—
I'm not sure what I liked about my performance. I would put more emotion into my performance. Also to laugh less will we perform.

Yes I like that I could be heard. I think laughing was a small thing. but I believe we as a group can do well

Luna Purple—
Today watching the videos were funny. I saw somethings I would like to do better.

I liked that I was loud. I would sit up and pay more attention.

Pepe—
The video did show the things that we do that we don't notice, I wasn't there that day so…..

Well I'm the character who tries to persuade the other mean girls to play with the new girl. So the words I say will guide the story with trying to make the characters to be nice.

Student Dialogue Journals
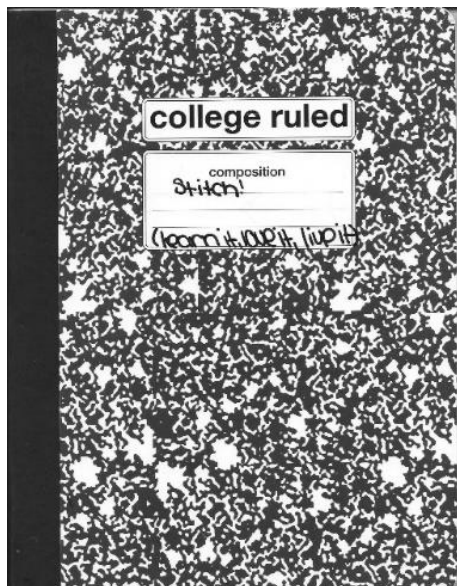
Figure 3: Sample Dialogue Journal

Through the drama strategies and the use of modified TO techniques such *Image Theatre* and *Forum Theatre*; playmaking and Playbuilding (Tarlington & Michaels, 1998; Weigler, 2001); and with the assistance of Amy, I was able to enhance the curriculum of the drama class. This integration generated opportunities for student prospects to document their experience and perspectives using dialogue journals. Such artifacts were seen as examples of how the students interpret the lesson being taught (Merriam, 2009). The work became what was generated from the lessons, and understandings produced by the students.

Video of the students' creation of tableaux and playmaking were a strong source of student work; however, written work produced from these dramatic experiences also offered insight into how the students experienced each lesson. Reality of the situation did not allow for me to have a direct spoken conversation with each student, therefore on-going conversations became written discussions in dialogue journals. Throughout the

study, I made it clear that dialogue journals were written forms of communication between individuals and myself for review of their creations and interpretations and were not assessed for a grade in the class. The only connection to class was that Amy had the chance to visually assess whether or not students were participating--writing or somehow responding in their journals. She had no idea of the content of student responses.

All students in the class kept a dialogue journal as a participation requirement from the school, yet journals were not graded for class and academic purposes expectation for class. Students responded in their journal during and/or after each session. There were times when they were provided a guiding prompt--may be times participants were asked to respond to a guiding prompt that might include

     a. For today's session, I_____

     b. Working with a group_____

     c. When we explore [this issue]_____

or prompts that weren't planned but manifested themselves during the lessons
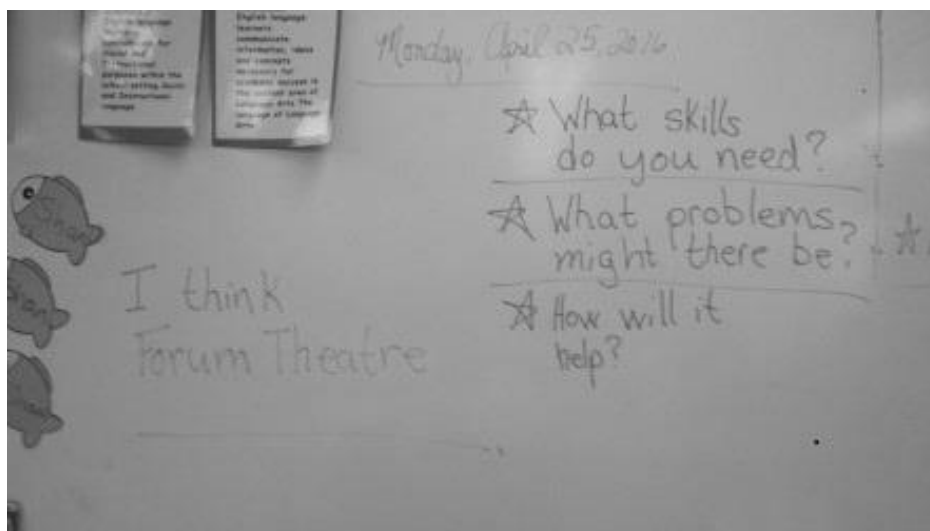
Figure 4: Questions during sessions

or students were spontaneously asked to record what they are thinking about and doing in the drama process they are using at the moment. All dialogue journals were collected after each session and I was able to provide a written response to the each of the entries each time. I did type responses from the journals into a document for ease of analysis of data related to the study questions; however, I recognize that in doing so, I have limited the voices of the participants. All journals were returned to the students at the end of my time working in the classroom, which ended up being the last day of regularly scheduled instruction time for the school year. No coding or analysis occurred in the actual journals.

Post Surveys

Closure to this study involved post surveys of the participants regarding their perceptions and experiences with the drama strategies used. Amy and I had planned 30 minutes for students to complete the surveys. I left the room so as not to coerce or influence responses. Thoughts were fairly general, with a few students providing details in their experiences.

Figure 5: Guy 5-19-2016

Figure 6: Pepe 5-19-2016

Due to time constraints, I was unable to consult with participants for clarification on their responses to the survey.

Researcher's Reflection Journal

To keep my own written documentation of my perceptions of the process and the study was integral to the data collected for this study. "Researcher-generated documents are documents prepared by the researcher…after the study has begun. The specific purpose for generating documents is to learn more about the situation, person, or event being investigated" (Merriam, 2009, p. 149). Many times, it was difficult to accurately describe events as they occur in the field. More often, recreating an interpretation of what was witnessed had been my method to record an experience. While I acknowledge that accuracy has been somewhat diminish when a journal entry was made after the fact, a researcher's journal was an appropriate tool to offer summaries and perspective after observing a lesson.

This journal provided opportunities for me to record impromptu conversations with students and the teacher. I was able to record a comprehensive summary of lessons I observed. I also had the ability to check the accuracy of my recollections with any electronic recording there was of the lesson. Amy and I conversed after each session about what we saw, noticed, and experienced during the session. These acted as informal interviews.

March 2, 2016

Amy had her spring observation today. She had explained to her principal that on Wed., I am usually leading the lesson and she is observes, assists, and learns new techniques—didn't he want to observe one of her ELA classes? He said he understood that I'm in the midst of my study and he wanted to see how she and I work together. He's been impressed with the behaviors of the students in the drama class because he sees them less often for discipline issues and he wants to see what we do.

Well, Amy, knowing that I'm struggling with family issues, actually planned lessons that would blend very well with the path my work was already on. We began with Mountain Pose warmup for focus. We had some students "distract" others—if they could. I participated too. It was fun to "show off" that I would not be distracted.

She planned "character walks". She had several emotional instances where the walk of the character might change based on the emotions. "Walk like you're headed to class after your boyfriend/girlfriend broke up with you" or "Walk like you just found out your grade in a class was better than you thought". She had about 7 of these….I didn't write them all down. The students responded a little chaotically…some just walked and some exaggerated their walk. She then asked me for any ideas. It was an opportunity to model how to minimize the chaos— sometimes you don't see it until you step out of the activity as I was and watch. It was good for me to take that role.

I offered to students—"Look where you are in the room. What is your proximity to the opposite space in the room? Now, walk to that space as if you have ice skates on and you are walking across a parking lot with 6 inches of ice…GO!" There were more students trying the walk as I described and heading to a specific point in the space. I then suggested that the ice melted and now they were on sand. I also had asked them about proximity. They moved almost back to the spot where they had begun. We then moved to taking off the skates (which they did) and walking through waist-high peanut butter. I mentioned proximity. Amy

stopped them and asked what I meant by "proximity". Bling Bling said "Where we are in the room, Miss". Luna Purple added, "And how we are around each other". Amy smiled and I smiled too! (Researcher's Journal, 2016)

Interviews

When conducting a qualitative study, researchers are examining human phenomena. Because the essence of a study offers participants, for the most part, an opportunity to directly report on their experiences, interviewing them should be an expected occurrence. Rossman and Rallis (2012) offer several reasons for including interviews in qualitative research. Interviews offer insight into understanding the participants' thinking and perspective regarding the reality and context of experiences. They also generate rich, descriptive data that can extend understanding. In-depth, primary information and viewpoints of contributors are data that assist in providing information for rich analysis (Turner, 2010). Data provided as the result of direct reporting from members of a study through interviews offers validity to the analysis and conclusions drawn by the researchers. "Interviews are a good tool to use when one wishes to know how another person feels about events that have happened or are happening" (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2002, p. 169). I was able to gain much insight via the words and discourse provided by the participants by engaging in a "conversation with a purpose" (Dexter as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 136).

Interviewing as a form of data collection in research seems to be obvious. Ask a question, receive an answer, record the answer as collected data, and move on to the next question. However, interviewing is not as clean as that. There are considerations to make before a researcher even begins an interview. Who will be interviewed? What questions will be asked and how will the questions be worded? What will the structure of the interview be and how will the theoretical framework be utilized? There are nuances to

conducting an interview. Will the interview take on an informal quality? Will there be certain questions to be asked of all interviewees? How the data will be analyzed, framed, and used in the larger study to answer questions is also a consideration (Creswell, 2007). "In short, the decision to use interviewing as the primary mode of data collection should be based on the kind of information needed and whether interviewing is the best way to get it" (Merriam, 2009, p. 88).

Through interviews, a dialogue can be established that offers participants a space to tell their story. Broad, general "grand tour" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 132) interview questions provide a context the opportunity for participants to relate their perceptions of an experience. Responses can then guide the researcher to ask more specific questions related to the TO strategies used. Stringer (2007) offers examples of questions that can extend participants responses and assist in their ability to "visualize their situation more clearly" (p. 71). Those examples include:

- Prompting questions—questions that will extend, encourage or ask for an example to more deeply explore the reality of the participant.
- Guided tour questions—questions related to the physical space that may be connected to the instruction.
- Task questions—questions that ask participants to do or create something that assist in providing details (Stringer, 2007).

Where appropriate, these questions should be planned ahead of time but flexible enough so as to provide participants to respond in their own words and modes. Combinations of these types of questions provide researchers with richer, more meaningful data to inform answers to the research question.

Limitations to interviews as a research tool

The method of interviewing as a tool for data collection in a research study is not without its drawbacks. Reliably recording answers to the questions can be a challenge. If the answers are written down, a researcher might lose something in the conversation. If recording of information by the researcher is done after the interview, recall of details may be uncertain. Non-verbal communication and body language are difficult to convey when the final answers to questions are written. In many circumstances, the human memory is faulty and not completely reliable, making answers to some questions suspect. There can also be times when the participant evades questions or does not fully disclose information. Doody and Noonan (2013) list several disadvantages to interviews as a form of data collection.

- They may seem intrusive to the participant.

- The researcher could lose focus on listening and allowing the participant to speak.

- They are time-consuming, not just conducting them but post-interview transcription and analysis of the data.

- They can be expensive compared to other methods.

- Interviews that elicit strong emotions need to be handled with sensitivity.

- They are susceptible to bias, including the participant's desire to please the researcher; reporting what they feel the researcher wants to hear instead of his or her own personal opinion; report on something off topic; and the researcher's views influencing responses by agreeing with or disapproving of a comment (p. 29).

Careful consideration must be given when organizing, planning, and conducting interviews. They are not to be taken lightly and can yield deep, rich, and valuable amounts of data for researchers to use to answer important questions. The participant's impressions and attitudes must be paramount to the administration of the interview and the subsequent use of data (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

Follow up interviews

Once the post surveys were conducted, exit interviews of students as follow ups to the responses in the surveys was a planned possibility. However, I did encounter a significant limitation to conducting student interviews for this study due to the fact that the school year ended before I was able to conduct any interviews based on the post survey results. Testing schedules, end-of-the year events for the students in 8th grade, illnesses—both mine and students—and a reconfiguration of the daily schedule all became challenges which could not be avoided.

Nevertheless, I was able to interview Amy over a friendly lunch in a small coffee shop away from school. We were able to find a quiet corner, with the only distraction being our discussion wandering into personal territory regarding our families and plans for the summer. This interview was semi structured and took on a feeling of a guided conversation for deeper understanding.

Answering questions in the moment of them being asked does not allow for a scripted response and many times, those nuances of speech cannot be recalled with written text; therefore this interview was recorded and transcribed. It was important for me to allow for the words of Amy to be the decisive point of understanding (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). By conducting the interview, I had the

opportunity to clarify responses, expand on topics or themes revealed and not initially

considered, or verify my understanding regarding Amy's insight (Creswell, 2007;

Merriam, 2009; Stringer, 2007). This rational for the use of interviews was to record and

honor the perspectives of my participant.

Method for Analyzing Data

Merriam (2009) offers "[t]he process of data collection and analysis is recursive

and dynamic (p. 169). Once data is collected—and even during the collection—it needs

to be analyzed, reviewed, considered, and interpreted in order to begin to answer research

questions. As the research process unfolds, there may be new questions or a need to

reconfigure original inquires based on the information collected. In essence, the questions

guide the collection of the data and the data guides the content of the questions being

asked (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

The use of practitioner research as structure for the course of this study provided

the flexibility to adapt lessons to the response of the participants. On-going collection and

review of data in the form of dialogue journals and videos provided insight into many

layers of the students' experiences. Data analysis began the first day of data collection

and has continued beyond the actual work of the study. Merriam (2009) states, "…to

analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (p.

173). For a study investigating student perspective about classroom instruction, it became

crucial to explore their experiences. Therefore, participant voice and responses guided

and inform the path of this study.

Dialogue Journals

Figure 7: Dialogue Journal work

What became a critical focus for data was the 'conversation' I had with the

participants through the use of the dialogue journals. Entries ranged from how they made

choices,
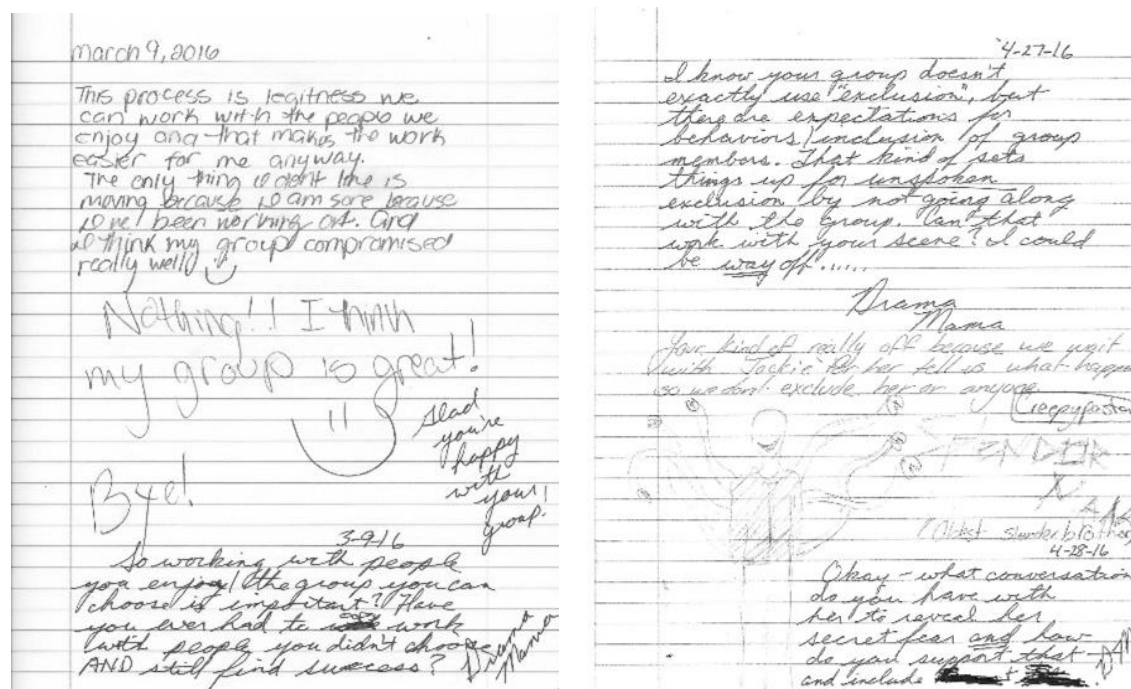
Figure 8: How choices are made

Figure 9: Thoughts on specific lessons

to perceptions of specific lessons
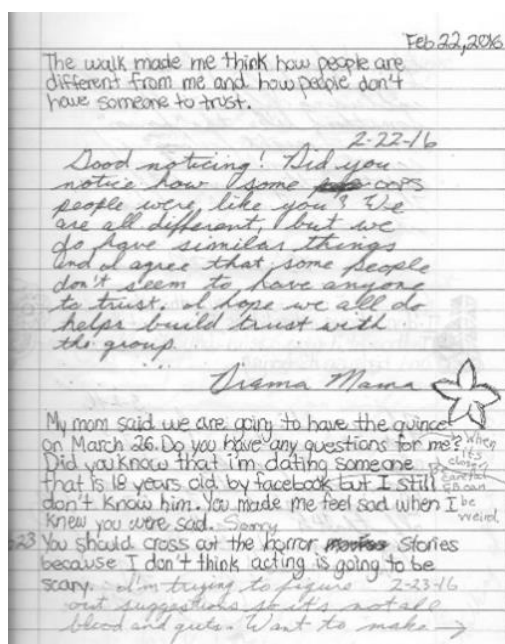
Figure 10: Invitation from Sweet Jelly

to personal invitations to participate in events beyond school.

Analyzing the language in the dialogue journals was important not only for statements and comments related to the experiences and perceptions of the students but also the continued reinforcement of rapport and trust.

Transcription of Video/Audio Recordings

Transcriptions of video and accompanying audio recordings was also an invaluable data source for this study. While the words used by the students was routinely captured for transcription, vocal inflection was subtle and finding 'side conversations' was a challenge. Once the recordings were transcribed, they were ready for detailed analysis of tangible language and its expression.
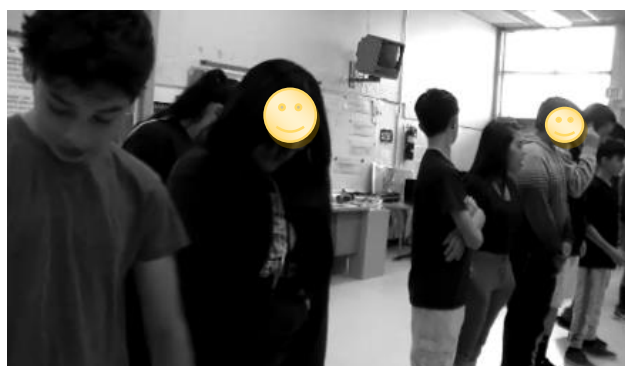
DRAMA MAMA: If if your answer if the answer is no you need to go back….thank you.
I know at least one adult I can trust.
S: (move)
DM: I can bring up any subject and discuss it with an adult I trust.
S: (move)
DM: I have at least one person in my life I can always count on.
S: (move)

Figure 11: The Walk

In reviewing the data collected during this study, there was a focus on what, specifically, I found to assist in answering the study questions. The focus was on the use modified drama strategies developed by Augusto Boal and middle school students exploring and relating their experiences about their choice of issues. In analyzing the language used and the physical engagement students took to look respond to lessons, I wanted to find reoccurring patterns. I also explored unique reactions to steps in the process.

S: What are you doing?

HELGA: I'm doing a one man play on treating others fairly.

KALAMA & DRAMA MAMA: (chuckle)

Figure 12: Advocacy for topic

Because this was a study related to students' experiences and perceptions on a chosen theme, it became crucial for me to check in with participants to check accuracy throughout the study.

Patterns

When a group of people experience a common event, such as students engaged in the same lesson, the language they use to report their experiences elicit patterns. Gee offers that the Discourse regarding people, incidents, and ways of being

is a 'dance' that exists in the abstract as a coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects, times and places and in the here and now as a performance that is recognizable as just such a coordination. Like a dance, the performance here and now is never exactly the same (2011, p. 36).

These patterns are related to the experience and change accordingly. In analyzing language, whether spoken or written, it was important to look for patterns. Through the use of observations, dialogue journals, electronic recordings, and researcher/teacher journals the data produced the ephemeral language of students and enabled a search for patterns.

An example of patterns explored were *collocational patterns*, that is patterns of words or phrases that "hang together" (Gee, 2011, p. 203) and are related in some way. Because the age and classroom experiences of the participants was similar, these types of patterns were informative to the study.

Being 'weird' or 'different'

Native Wolf—
Hey! Your <u>weird</u> and its awesome….

The Weird Potato—
Yeah people call me and I am <u>weird</u> cause normal people scare me.

Alex Morgan—
I think it is very important! also it's okay to be <u>weird</u>! no one is the same. if not somewhat <u>different</u>!

Helga—
Your right different is good for a heathy anything really we are a class 1 class that function's as one but we are all different

The use of the words 'weird' and 'different' in these contexts allowed me to see that adolescents, when they trust and are comfortable with the modality of communication, they use language to convey meaning (Vygotsky, 2012). In this case, the responses suggest that being weird and different (unique) speaks to the individuality sought at this stage in life.

Themes

When looking at the language participants use to describe their perceptions of an event, patterns in the words used and how they relate leads to the ability to establish themes within the data. In the very essence of phrases and sentences found in language, Gee (2011) offers that the theme "creates the perspective from which everything else…is viewed" (p. 66). Themes come not only from the data we collect, but from the

phenomena we study. Understanding the characteristics of an event provides a

background on creating themes. Bernard and Ryan (2010) offer themes with which I

organized data:

- Repetitions—repeated words or phrases

- Indigenous Categories—words that are unfamiliar to the researcher or used in

  ways that are common to the participants

- Metaphors and Analogies—the use of what something isn't (in reality) to describe

  what it is (in actuality)

- Transitions—shifts in content as noted by pauses, changes in vocal intonation, or

  the use of phrases that signal a shift

- Similarities and Differences—words or phrases that are synonymous or contrary

- Linguistic Connectors—words or phrases indicating attributes of connections to

  causal or conditional relations

- Missing Data—looking for what isn't offered in response to inquiry

One aspect of the data collected was that as the timeline became fractured due to

schedule

changes or absences of participants, responses in many student dialogue journals became

less introspective and more 'rote' and 'what the teacher wants to hear'.

Bling Bling—
I really believe this activity will be very beneficial to me as student in a whole I
thought (dialogue) Journal is a good Idea to communicate.

Raven—
I think it's a good thing that you're with us and make us learn more from you.

Erica—
watching my scene helped because I can see that we did and what we can change. It

Coding

As I examined data, I used traditional methods of coding in order to manage the amount of materials I was able to collect. "Coding is nothing more that assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (Merriam, 2009). The main perspective I was in search of was the structured connections between participants and how they related to and connect with the classroom experience. Related sections were color coded and highlighted. When working with student produced data, I used colors that were bright and rich, and when I coded Amy's and my own language, I chose pastel and muted tones. To do that enabled me to use, say, blue for 'general comments', with a deeper blue being a student's response and a light blue being an adult's response. It was important to include some sort of notation as to what and how the participants contributed the piece of data being categorized and how the responses related between students and teachers (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). For me as a visual processor of information, the use of color highlights became my main method of coding textual data.

I began with open coding for major themes and categories that appeared in the work. I searched for repetition of words or phrases or something from the literature that manifested itself in the language of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Repetitive language, personal pronoun usage, non-academic related language, and short word and phrase responses were entries initially analyzed. Themes/topics that were revealed included:

> **Friendship**: No, but Megan is always my partner.
> Friends are important
> You shouldn't have one friend per class, you should try and have
> like as many as you want

"isms": Sexism. Is that because of sexism in this class, too?
Racist remarks in this class are really bad.

Positionality: When I was in elementary there was times we had to leave someone out because they were being rude or mean. Then there would be times I would be left out because my friends that I consider "best friends" have better friends than me.

…I am trying to open up more some. I notice how its becoming harder for me to hold stuff in. Most of it is emotional and mostly anger…I am trying to open up more and since the only person who ever really got me to talked moved…so anyway… How are you?

In doing this, I found that there was 'overlap' in many of the responses and I had to step back and let the data speak for itself. In qualitative research, there is the miscalculation of a researcher to make choices of what to include and what to leave out of a study. I wanted the language of the participants to guide me in what I need to do with it, not the other way around.

The next step in coding was to formalize the categories that emerged in to what is called *axial coding* (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2013). Shirley Brice Heath (2008) suggests to note what "seems 'ordinary' or 'nonordinary' in language, behaviors, and context" (p.84) when collecting and beginning to analyze data.This is where interpretation is part of the analysis as the decision of what data is categorized into what category. Even the creation of the categories is an interpretative act (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). It was my goal to create categories and align the language and data to fit these categories and honor the perceptions of the participants. These categories included:

- Lesson-related comments—

A still image helps your group by demonstrating teamwork and strategy to make your group come together.

I choose the sentence stem "when I think of friendship I think of Donkey and Shrek" because I found it funny and true.
Forest I feel like is dragging our group down and it is bugging me because Guy and Luna were arguing with him just to get up.

- Personal perceptions of events

My connection to my story is fighting. I like fighting and I fight to protect people I care for. I also kinda have anger issues so when people piss me off I explode and hurt them.
I'm sorry I did not mean to write that all I mean is that the class have some problem because they just talk so that didn't mean you are old☺
You were right we are going to do these scenes so much we are going to get sick of them. Everyday I walk into drama we do this. I know even my peers lines as well as mine.

- General comments/daily experiences

I'm having a quinceañera. I don't really know if it's going to be this March but I was wondering if you are interested in going?
I'm just having a bad day and need to be kind of quiet. I wish I could be different, but I don't know how.
I am thinking about the stuff I am going to do after school. Nothing about the class today

- Personal communication

No I don't like taco's I love taco's and all types of taco's. Do you like people? If you do what type of people do you like?
Today hasn't been the best day it seems like it is going on forever!! Maybe this class can turn it around.
I want to go around the world being fablous. I need Lego. I hate crab apples. They hurt my finger. Snapping turtles are snapply sexy.

I found that some of the students used their dialogue journals to relate personal

experiences that may not have had anything to do with the study, the Boal exercises, or

the drama class. They felt comfortable enough to use their journals as a mode of sharing.

I always had at the back of my mind the interactions with the students. The idea

of hierarchy--that being an adult collecting information from an adolescent--required

consideration throughout analysis of the data. Regardless of the rapport and trust we

developed before the primary study began, there was still the idea of an authority figure (the researcher) collecting data from a secondary figure (the student). Complete and transparent disclosure from the participants was not expected yet it was considered as I analyzed and reported the data.

- Surveys--reoccurring themes/issues offered to students. Responses provided insight to the next steps to take in the study. These presented a *quantitative* measure of themes and issues related to the research question. Pseudonyms were chosen by students in order for anonymity.

- Student dialogue journals--coding language and terms student used to relate to the issue being explored

- Still images/video/audio recordings--analyzed language used but also non-verbal communication

  o Still images--student responses in oral and written form of "reading" a still image

  o Video/Audio Recordings--transcribed both, analyzed as above--NOTE: With video, after transcription, review and notate non-verbal communication/cues from video on the transcribed document.

- Researcher journal--analyzed for themes/surprises/progression and alterations needed to complete the study

  o Utilize same structure/criteria for student dialogue journals

- Interview with Amy--Utilized same structure/criteria for student dialogue journals and image/audio recordings.

It turned out that as I was coding, both open and axial, the analysis of student responses and voice needed incorporation into the context of the study descriptions. The variety of data sources encouraged me to look beyond traditional coding and analysis and to adopt more of a timeline of the study process to report my findings. This weaving of data and discussion became the method that would most honor the perspectives and experiences of the students.

Timeline

This study was expected to be no longer than one school year, at least for the data collection. The timeframe included the initial contact and building rapport phase, the request for consent, determining the issue to be explored by the participants along with the actual implementation of the TO strategies and the Playbuilding final product. It was also to include exit interviews with any participants regarding their experiences related to the study questions.

I did encounter the challenge of receiving approval for the study from the school district in a manner that would allow me to proceed. There was a considerable delay. Due to these delays, portions of the study had to be curtailed or omitted as planned. However, the district office that approves such studies was experiencing some obstacles of their own and could not be faulted.

Limitations

One limitation I knew I would contend with was time. As the school year progressed into the second semester, I began to reorganize my study structure. The testing schedule for the district was approaching and there would be times when only half the class was together. There were other times when other students who were not enrolled

in drama joined the class, again, due to testing configurations. Those days, work for this study was put on hold. The district's spring break occurred just before testing, and then many 'end-of-the-year' activities began and involved students in experiences beyond the drama class. I was able to adjust and modify some of the lessons and rehearsals for the students for their playbuilt play. Since the scenes the students created were improvised and not scripted, the group as a whole was able to adapt to some needed changes. With drama being the core of live theatre and live theatre being unpredictable, I found myself able to work around the time delays.

Another limitation in this study was, ultimately, the hierarchical nature of an adult asking questions of adolescents. No matter the level of rapport and how it is established with the students, I was still an authority figure documenting participant voice. The data collected did provide some opportunity for student voice, but there was an aspect of "hidden dominate power" (Robinson & Taylor, 2013, p. 39). The fundamental consideration used was to best honor the perspectives of the students.

This study was meant to begin a dialogue regarding student experiences with creative drama strategies and student voice. The exploration of only one class of middle school students provided a very small sample size. This limitation may or may not affect the extension of the results of this study. However, with the ability to focus more directly on a limited number of students, I hope that the data collected will provide rich insight into the experiences of the participants and a beginning point for further research.

CHAPTER 4: PREVIEWS

Creative Drama: is organized and structured by a leader; however, it encourages

spontaneity and improvisational work of the participants. It builds skills and

confidence in the performers. Work is shared informally within the group or an

invited audience of friends and family. The goals are educational and primarily

set for the participants.

Formal Theatre: is scripted, rehearsed, directed, with sets, costumes, and lights for a

paying audience. The spectators are usually expected to remain quiet and

attentive, with those abilities being the only skills needed to prepare for

attendance. The main goal of formal theatre is to entertain an audience.

(Susan Pearson-Davis, 2001)

In teacher-speak: drama is process, theatre is product. I approached this study

with the eyes of a researcher with a passion for creative drama and inspired by the work

of Augusto Boal. I wanted to provide a space for adolescents to find their voices and

articulate their realities. In just the building of rapport with participants, I realize that the

heart and core of Boal's work and Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is more than conveying

encounters. It is the core and the essence of equalizing the human experience. The use of

TO and its transformative power was the original focus of this study, however, due to

unanticipated time constraints and for the welfare and respect of the participants, much of

the work of Boal work was incomplete.

Throughout this chapter, I will present scripted encounters, capturing recalled

matters of discussions and interactions with participants and transcribed text from video

recorded exercises. The essence of drama and scripted scenes is that they are meant to be

read aloud. For the most part, these scenes originated in spoken language exchanges,

making them appropriate for scripted dialogue.

Building Rapport, Part I

<div align="center">

Scene 1—The Teacher

</div>

Time: Late morning, middle of June

Place: Home office of Erin.

At Rise: Erin seated at her computer. It is a desktop with a large monitor and papers
        stacked every which way on the computer table. There is another desk to her
        right, not being used but with many more stacks of paper. To the right of that desk
        is a locking 4-drawer file cabinet. To her left, in the corner of the room are two
        windows set at a 90° angle to one another, letting in natural light. Erin is checking
        her email.

<div align="center">

(*Lights up*)

</div>

ERIN: (*under her breath*) Why did I even suggest a blog? Teachers from the workshop
        aren't thinking about how to use the lessons. They want to start their summer. Oh
        well, I guess I do too.

        (*Notices an email from a teacher she recognizes but knows wasn't at the summer
        workshop—this teacher teaches middle school*)

ERIN: (*surprised*) Well, long time, no hear from Amy. What's it been—about 3 years?
        This will be interesting. (*Opens the email and reads*)
                Hi Erin.
                I'll bet you don't remember me but this is Amy Smith from Eastside
                Middle School. You helped me out a while ago with some drama stuff we
                were doing here at school. Well, I was asked if I would be willing to teach
                Drama as an elective this coming year. I was wondering if you had some
                drama resources you could suggest so I can start planning. Is your library
                open this summer? Can I come check out materials? Please let me know.
                Hope all is well with you.
                                                Amy
        (*sighs*) Of course I remember you. (*pause, to herself*) But I'm gonna have to tell
        you that we're not available for the summer. (*she begins to type a response*)

        Hi Amy!
        Of course I remember you! Congratulations on the new elective at
        Eastside. Glad to see the district begin to give middle schoolers something

new to do. I have to tell you that we at the library are all on teacher contracts, so technically, we are 'off duty' and the library is closed for the summer. If you want to begin exploring things electronically, I'd suggest looking for drama games and activities. You're going to want to start with building trust with the kids and getting them a little more comfortable in front of their peers. That can be a challenge with middle schoolers, as you know! We return in early August and I would be happy to help you with some of the things that are in the library. I've been trying to build the drama section to include more readers' theatre and 'how to' materials as far as starting something from scratch! Have an awesome summer and give me a holler early in August!

Erin.

(*Lights Down*)

Although unknown at the time, this email exchange was the first step in working with Amy Smith, the teacher participant in my study. When she is not teaching a drama class, Amy teaches language arts and literature to 8th grade students. She easily recognizes the support drama strategies offer to students in their literacy considerations. In earlier encounters with Amy, we established a cursory relationship, with Amy wanting theatre-based guidance to extend literacy work with students. I knew, based on her background, that she viewed drama as an extension of her program.

My background with teaching drama in a classroom setting is integrating drama strategies with my literacy program for 4th and 5th grade students. I have studied creative drama for children with a nationally known children's theatre specialist and past president of the American Alliance for Theatre Education. I also have a personal background and passion for drama, theatre, and performing arts. Amy had a similar background to mine with the differences being most of her teaching was with middle school students and her college coursework discipline was special education. I was able to spend extensive amounts of time with Amy as she began to build not just a drama class as an elective but a drama program to support all students.

The connections made during the first year of building the drama program at Eastside were beneficial to both Amy and myself. For Amy, I was able to offer alternatives and extensions to what many people I have heard comment that drama is just putting on a play. In her exit interview for this study, Amy offered this perspective "Drama has opened my mind and my heart by allowing me to see the light in my kids" (exit interview, June 2016). I asked how she saw the 'light in her kids' and Amy stated, "They had a different environment to be free to express themselves. Even though I was giving them things to do—readers' theatre scripts and stuff—they still had a chance to do it themselves….or at least I think they did. That's important for kids this age. They change from day to day, so I need to be ready for that" (exit interview, June 2016). The need for adolescents to explore ways of navigating through their own understanding of their reality is something drama offers. Using TO (Theatre of the Oppressed) influences provided a safe space for students to engage with peers and discover practical possibilities not considered by adults.

My access provided me an opportunity to work with adolescents in a new context. We were both practitioners who wanted further awareness and understanding of our goals in working with students. Exploring studies of the roles of *practitioner* and *researcher*, Herr and Anderson (2015) discuss how practitioner research is becoming more widespread in education with teachers studying questions they may have about their practices in their own classrooms or schools. In practitioner research, an outsider may collaborate with an insider (the teacher) to explore the study questions. Herr and Anderson (2015) propose another term, *action researcher.*

The term *action researcher* leaves the positionality (insider or outsider) of the

research open. The term *practitioner researcher* places the insider/practitioner at

the center of the research, but often tends to decenter other important

stakeholders, such as clients and other community members. Because of this,

many argue that action research should always be collaborative regardless of

whether the researcher is an outsider of insider to the setting under study (p. 3).

My years in my own classroom, I had never done a formal research study, yet would try

new things, observe the outcome, and adjust as needed. Implementing action research in

another teacher's classroom was a new experience for me.

The successful creation of the drama course at Eastside led to an expansion of the

program. This past school year, 2015-2016, Eastside added an introductory drama class

for 6th grade students, as well as making the class for 7th and 8th graders a year-long

elective rather than two separate semesters. Again, Amy and I had an opportunity to work

together investigating what adolescents experience in a drama class. This collaboration

took on new frameworks and significance because it became the cornerstone of this

study. The concerted approach of action research provided a guide for us to design a plan,

implement the plan with Amy as a participant, modify the plan as needed with Amy as

the collaborator and to include the students as participants in creating and exploring the

theme that they chose as a group. My role in the study was to introduce to Amy drama

techniques, inspired by the work of Augusto Boal (1979)'s *Theatre of the Oppressed*

(TO). The primary focus of this study was the experiences of the students as they work

with drama strategies.

On many occasions, Amy and I discussed educational trends tried, implemented, discarded, and repackaged during our careers as classroom teachers. We both have taught long enough and experienced many educational phenomena that claim to be the 'next' and the 'best' yet turn out to be ineffective for teachers and students. Almost every reflection we shared on practices in education arrived at the same conclusion, which is middle school students and their teachers were being asked to do and show more growth in standardized measures (conversation with Amy Smith, July, 2015). What we also discussed was how differently adolescents view the world and realities from those of the adults in their lives.

In his work examining Lev Vygotsky and his analysis of the meaning making of children, Dr. Holbrook Mahn (2012) explains that children develop meaning through a syncretic form of grouping experiences, which leads to *thinking in complexes* [Mahn's emphasis] and that children include "objects in a complex based on empirical connections" (p. 114). Children link thought complexes and develop deeper understanding through speaking and thinking.

> Thinking in complexes is by its nature associative thinking and, at the same time, objective thinking. These are the two essential features which raise it high above the previous stage, but at the same time this connectedness in its turn and their objectivity are still not the connectedness and objectivity which characterize thinking in concept achieved finally by the adolescent (Vygotsky, 1931, p. 39).

Mahn goes on to describe how *meaning* [Mahn's emphasis] can have varying perspectives. From a dictionary definition of a word; the knowledge of an individual in a sociocultural context; operational and social use of language; and the "constant interplay

between the sociocultural meaning and the meaning that is being created in the speaking/thinking system" (Mahn, 2012, p. 117). Educators must work to move beyond a traditional mode of working with adolescents.

Support of the development of students' critical and cultural thought processes offers opportunities to explore beyond conventional expectations which creative drama lessons provide. As Amy pointed out, students at this age are not 'standard' and do not fit neatly into categories. Each student is searching for ways to demonstrate their unique style and way of being in the world.

Amy and I also noticed that current education practices tend to focus on early intervention educational practices and social strategies to support students at two different points along their progression through a Pre K-12 system. The first area is as children progress through the primary grades, PreK-3. The second is later, as students reach high school age, with offerings such as charter schools with a certain academic focus or programs to support students at risk of dropping out all together. There seems to be a population of early adolescent middle school aged students ignored. Amy is seeing students in her school as well as other schools for students in grades 6-8 being "penalized" (conversation Amy Smith, August, 2015) and not being allowed to take an elective because they did not score 'proficient' on standardized tests. She is not the first middle school teacher to share this information with me. She and I were both curious about what students have to say as they consider their place in the world. Drama can provide a safe space for them to explore. I presented my ideas about middle school students, what she and I both perceived as their marginalized voices, and the theoretical framework of Augusto Boal's (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Providing a framework

to build trust in students and guide them through exploring issues *they chose* (not

assigned) was the core of what this study embraced.

Initially, Amy was hesitant to relinquish too much control over the content of her

classroom. She personally enjoys the flexibility she has with her ELA classes; however,

that flexibility comes with constraints set by the district and the state department of

education. The drama class and its broad parameters allow for the focus of building skills

for participants first, and then moving into theatre and creating something for an

audience. Amy knew there were many aspects to what the direction could be for this

class. Traditional script work with analysis, student-directed work, playwriting,

improvisation, and even non-verbal movement pieces were some of the elements that she

wanted to include. Due to timing and circumstances, we were able to incorporate most of

these into the work with the students. The work is not done independently and relies

upon, actually *requires*, interaction with peers. By implementing these strategies, students

can build upon the thinking they have developed and begin to give up "taking the

connections from his [or her] own experience for the actual connections between things

and he [or she] takes a decisive step forward along the road of rejecting syncretism and

along the path of success of objective thinking" (Vygotsky, 1931, p. 39). The role of the

adults is to provide the venue and the tenor of parameters in which the work originates. It

is also incumbent upon the adults, the teachers, to define their positionality with the

students. I had to recognize the difficulty of the hierarchy of my being an adult and

students being 13 and 14 years old. I also had to understand Amy's role as an adult

learner as well as a collaborator. Much of the work we did was new to Amy: "This was

something new to me. I compared it to learning to make a cake from scratch instead of

using a cake mix" (interview with Amy Smith, June, 2016). The most important phase of the work was my efforts to build trust and rapport with the students.

Because of my status as a researcher and not a staff member, I found it necessary to remind students I was not there to assess them or to give them a grade. I was there to explore how they responded to the work of drama.. There was the opportunity for all contributors to initiate a dialogue around issues related to equality and self-awareness as experienced by adolescents. As the adults participating in this study had to recognize was that issues to be addressed needed to come from the students. Amy shared,

> AMY: At first, I was apprehensive about the students having control over the topics. It was actually difficult for me to let them choose without my input.

> ERIN: Why is that?

> AMY: Well, I didn't want them to get into an inappropriate topic. But then when you said they'll do what they need to do, I realized I needed to trust them (interview, Amy Smith, June, 2016).

Amy had originally and on several occasions during the study, mentioned her hesitancy in relinquishing control to the students choosing their topic. I reminded her that at this point in their education, the students were 'school-broke', a term I had heard long ago. Being school-broke meant that the students had an understanding of their role at school--to follow the instructions of the adults--and to not exceed certain boundaries, lest they get in trouble. Students distinguish what behavioral and academic circumstances are expected and will comply accordingly. Teachers are also 'school-broke' in their positionality--deliverer of curriculum, assessor of student output, and manager of behavior--and this stance puts the adults in control. Ira Shor (1999) suggests that critical literacy should develop mutually for all participants. He states that the "problem of

adjusting to dialogic practice is complicated because students and teachers have already been deeply socialized by prior 'banking' models, that is, by one-way teacher-talk and non-negotiable syllabi" (para. 33). As we all traveled through the journey of this study, students and teachers alike, there needed to be an awareness that the status quo may be difficult to overcome. The climate at Eastside is one of expected behaviors from all, with punitive measures taken for deviations from what is accepted. I understood Amy's trepidation about the students' possible topic choice. Her apprehension stems from the rules expected of student behavior at Eastside. There are protocols for teachers and staff to follow when a student uses unacceptable language or is defiant in any way. They receive a 'referral' to administration and depending on the severity of the infraction, students receive a consequence. When Amy stated her concern that students would choose an 'inappropriate' topic, I offered that the TO inspired strategies provided opportunities for adults to guide students through appropriate exploration of controversial views. Amy and I offer a critical lens to students from our positionality of adults and teachers. Students give Amy and I a decisive view into their realities. What is appropriate and inappropriate becomes relative to the situation.

The first step I needed to take, as the outsider coming in to explore with the group, was to build a space of ensemble and trust. Recognizing that by the time students reach middle school, behaviors and expectations are regulated and entrenched. Attitudes about these traits "dull the expectations and educational experiences of students…Classrooms are filled with bodies—of both students and teachers—mechanized to behave, unconsciously, in expected ways" (Emert, 2011, p. 60). There

needs to be something different; something new and engaging. It began with my making

connections with students.

Building Rapport, Part II

<div align="center">

Scene 2—The Students

</div>

Time: Late August, beginning of the school year 2015-2016

Place: Eastside Middle School, large room with chairs and other furniture moved to the
     sides.

At Rise: Erin is standing in the large space; Amy is introducing Erin to the students, who
     are seated on chairs and on the floor across the large space from Erin.

<div align="center">

(*All names are pseudonyms chosen by the participants*)

(*Lights Up*)

</div>

AMY: (*getting attention of students*) Okay everybody! Quiet down. (*students
     quiet some)* I want to introduce you to someone. She is a friend of mine
     and she is a drama specialist. We're gonna work with her this year and so
     she'll be in and out every week. (*voices get quieter*) I'll let her tell you a
     little bit about what we're going to do. (*steps aside*)

ERIN: (*smiles, steps forward*) Hi everybody. My name is Erin. You can call me
     Miss Erin, or Drama Mama—I had a professor at the university call me
     that once and it stuck (*some students giggle*). Umm, anyway, I'm here
     because I'm working on my doctorate.

FOREST: (*raises his hand and speaks at the same time*) What's a doctorate?

AMY: It's a PhD.

ERIN: Yeah, when you go to college, you get your Bachelor's, your Master's,
     and then the last thing is your PhD.
HELGA: Why do you want to do that?

ERIN: I guess I'm weird….I wanna keep learning. (*pause*) Anyway, I want to
     work with this class and see what you all have to say about taking drama
     and what you think of it. Mrs. Smith is also going to participate because

there are some things I want to do that are new to her and she wants to see how they work.

JACKIE: Haven't you done this before? I mean you're a specialist and everything.

ERIN: Well, I haven't done it with middle school students—I taught 4th and 5th grade for about 25 years—and I want to see how you all respond to the work. And some of the work I haven't ever done with students, so I want to learn that part for me.

HELGA: So, aren't we just going to do a play?

MEGAN: Yeah, this is drama.

ERIN: Well, we're going to do a performance and it's gonna be about a specific topic, but you all are going to be the ones to pick the topic. It's gonna be your play, so it's gonna be your choice.
(*Side conversations begin. ....superheroes....Hunger Games....scary movies....Star Wars....Fast and Furious*)
Wait a minute! I'm hearing a lot about movies—that'd be really cool but, remember, we are going to be limited to what we can do here at school, so just keep that in mind.(*pause*) Now, what I want to start with is a….I don't have a better word for this…a game. You all know my name but I want to know your names so I can use 'em. Instead of 'hey, you in the black tee shirt' I can use your names. More respectful that way. (*pause*) Okay, what we're going to do is start in a circle, so come into the space and let's make a circle. Stand shoulder to shoulder. (*Forest and Megan are chatting, Erin sees this—to all students*) And if you are going to be tempted to talk to the person next to you, please make the choice to maybe stand somewhere else and remove the temptation.
(*students get in a circle, some are pushing other, in a friendly manner, stating 'removing the temptation' or 'stand over there, I don't want to get in trouble'*).

ERIN: First, let's start with an exercise that helps us feel what it's like to focus on our work. Not with just our minds, but with our bodies too. Actors tell stories not only through their words and voices but also through their bodies.

(*Lights Down*)

A note about working with students in a circle, either standing or seated; "Simply

put, a collaborative approach requires that everyone be able to see one another in order to

freely exchange ideas" (Weigler, 2001, p. 1). A circle provides the opportunity for all participants to see the others. Non-verbal communication such as eye contact, body posture, and facial expressions offer ways to build trust and connections when engaged in new forms of expression. The idea of working in a circle to build trust, community, and ensemble is beneficial to work with any group of people in any context, especially if that group will be collaborating on the same or similar content over an extended period of time.

Most academic classes require more mental focus and not much physical focus. At this point, students engaged in an activity where they create a neutral position with their bodies and find a point of focus. Boal (2002) states, "actors must always work on their bodies to get to know them better and to make them more expressive" (p. 18). I had learned *mountain pose* at a workshop and found it was a non-threatening way to prepare students to work differently with their peers.

Mountain or Neutral Pose

There are times when students need to feel how to focus with their bodies as well as their minds. This strategy is a good one for students to practice a physical type of focus. It is also a traditional starting point for many movement exercises in theatre. Remind them that mountains don't seem to move--they need to remain steady.

- Feet hip-width apart.
- Knees stacked over ankles, hips over the knees. Keep the knees loose--don't lock them.
- Straighten the spine, roll the shoulders back and down. This keeps the chest open and easier to breathe and project vocally.
- Head should be comfortably positioned on the top of the spine--like a bobble head that doesn't bobble.
- Ask students to focus on one thing in the room that does not move directly across from their gaze and to keep a neutral expression. Walk by them and try to make eye contact, encouraging them to stay focused.

NOTE: This can be modified for when students are seated in chairs or on the floor.

- Chairs: Slide to the edge of the chair, place feet flat on the floor, knees at a ninety degree angle, back straight, shoulders rolled back and down.

- Seated on the floor: Straighten the spine, roll shoulders back and down.

Once established, it became a quick way to get students to prepare for their work. All Amy or I had to say was 'mountain pose' and students knew what was expected of them.

Drama Games

When building rapport with student participants, there needs to be a multifaceted approach. Not only did I need to gain entry into the academic lives of the students, it became essential that the participants created a trusting, productive rapport with one another. That is the purpose of the drama games. Next, we played the game "Group Juggle" (Weigler, 2001, pp. 12-13). This is a game where soft items are tossed around the circle as names of the participants are called out. This enabled me to begin to learn the names of the students. There were some students who were new to the school and weren't familiar with all of the members of the class. Group juggle provided them an opportunity to learn the names of their peers. Using games such as these engaged all students, set the tone of the work and began to build a foundation of trust. During the course of the study, some students responded to mountain pose and other games and the purpose for them. In the post survey of participants, Bling Bling and Guy offered discernment beyond more common comments describing the games as fun or boring.

Bling Bling wrote

Tell me about doing drama games.

Some of them require your full attention, or else you will be unsuccessful! (handwritten)

"Some of them require your full attention, or else you will be unsuccessful!"

Guy stated

They can be fun and the help start the class. (handwritten)

Figure 13: Drama game thoughts

Some students wrote in a dramatic fashion a humorous stance in their dialogue journals :

February 17, 2016 **Helga** wrote: "Helga is destroyer of mountains"

Erin: *You mean mountain pose?*

Feburary 19, 2016 "No not mountain pose! [E]very time I walk mountain move

out of my way or else…They are turned from mountain to pebble. Helga learn

many trick's like this in Soviet Russia What magic do you know "Drama mama".

Establishing the expectation of physical control using the activity of mountain

pose creates an anchor of expected behaviors. As students worked in groups, they would

keep one another focused by saying 'mountain pose' to their peers and it became a signal.

The adoption of this language by adolescents demonstrates Vygotsky's (1931) contention

that "every element of a complex can be connected with the whole by the most

diversified associations, expressed in the complex and with separate elements" (p. 41).

The need for strategies to assist groups to be successful in their work and remain true to

the work became intrinsic for some students. What was truly encouraging was that this understanding was organic -- it came from the students. It was a reproduction of hierarchal language that seemed to benefit the small peer group.

We engaged with them not only to prepare physically, but to assist students with shedding inhibitions and "establish a form of theatrical communion" (Boal, 2002, p. 18). I found it was important to play the game and to debrief with participants once the game concluded. Most often, the final piece of the game was when the troupe has found success as a group. There are times when the ensemble had not found success. Those times were just as important for reflection and it became the role of the leader (in this case me) to guide the discussion away from blame and focus on how to play the game differently -- 'what could we change?' In this form of group reflection, problem solving and critical thinking skills were shared with peers. It was imperative that the members develop solutions to meet their needs and realities. Students used the games to negotiate position in the group and trust in their peers, "The games are a dialogue, they require an interlocutor" (Boal, 2002, p. 48). As members built ensemble and community, they also developed ownership of the project.

One drama game that provided a foundation for our work with TO Image Theatre was, *This Scene Needs A_____* . We had played this game before as a way to build trust and community, and revisited it as a prelude to Image Theatre. It is a game where participants are encouraged, if not expected, to listen to others to complete the scene. In this game, the group creates a tableau/still image of a scene. It could be people and objects that inhabit a familiar situation or an exploratory 'what if' setting. I was introduced to this activity in a previous workshop.

This Scene Needs A_____

- Students sit on the edge of a performance space, in the audience space. NOTE: Performance space should be large enough to accommodate all students in a tableau of the scene being created.

Performance space
Audience
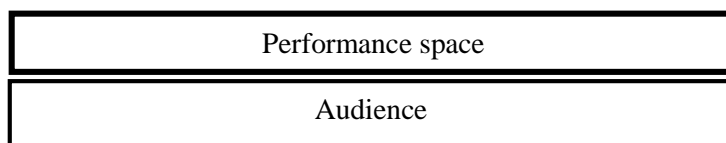
- Explain to the students that with their bodies, they will create a still image of a person or object in a scene. Once all students have become part of this tableau, you will take time to "read" it and tell them what you see.
- Call out a scene. "We are at a park (or the beach, or in the mountains, or at a birthday party)"
- Ask students to enter the scene *randomly*, one at a time with the phrase **This scene needs a _____** and they move into the performance space and create a still image of that object or person. Encourage levels and a variety of body shapes.

Example:

T: "We are at a park—go"

S1: "This scene needs a tree"—*student enters the performance space and holds arms up and becomes a "tree".*
S2: "This scene needs a water fountain"—*student enters and creates a fountain with his/her body.*

S3: "This scene needs a person walking her dog"—*student enters and becomes a dog walker.*

S4: "This scene needs a dog"—*student enters and becomes the dog S3 is walking.*

And so on until all students are part of the scene. You may be surprised by some of the things they will come up with.

Once all students are part of the tableau, you 'read' what you see—"I see someone walking their dog. I see a beautiful water fountain", etc.

NOTE: You know your students and you may feel you need to remind them of what is appropriate for this exercise—that's okay!

For the purpose of this study and Boal's (2002) use of Image Theatre, this was an appropriate game to introduce tableau or 'still image'. It allowed participants to make individual choices that connected to a larger picture. It also continued and deepened the trust and rapport students created when working with one another. This time, students were directed to pay close attention to what is created because we would 'read' the images.

Below is a transcript from a lesson with approximately half the class. The other students were out for district level testing. The lesson was planned to introduce Image Theatre; however, adjustments had to be made because all participants were not present.

Figure 14: This Scene Needs A_____

Time: Wednesday afternoon, early spring day.

Place: Eastside Middle School, large room for group work. Furniture is moved out of the space.

At Rise: Miss Erin (aka Drama Mama) is reviewing the expectations for this game. Students are seated in a semicircle on the floor in front of her. The groups have been divided into two groups. Each group will create a scene and the other group will practice 'reading' the scene.

(*Lights Up*)

DRAMA MAMA (DM): The scene is a beach…go…(*S1 stands and states he'll be sand*) Be sand

S1: I know, that's what I was doing (*lays with his back on the floor*)

DM: Okay do it! (*smiles*)

DM: Papi Chulo, hold on…wait, wait till he's sand…okay, Go! (*pause, Papi Chulo walks into the acting space*) This scene needs

PAPI CHULO: A lotea man

DM: Papi…

PAPI CHULO: I said it!

DM: What? I didn't hear you

PAPI CHULO: A lotea man…

HELGA: ELOTE

S2: What the heck's that?

HELGA: Ice cream

S3: No

(*Papi Chulo is pacing back and forth*)

S4: No

(*giggles*)

S3: God!

PAPI CHULO: Stop being so White

(*Pause*)

At this point, the student's language revealed a cultural boundary that did not physically manifest itself in class. Papi was a second-language learner and identified as Hispanic. His comment was made to another student who identifies as Anglo. From observable interactions, Papi and the other student were friendly with one another and his

comment about 'being so White' was more repartee in which these two frequently engaged. However, the deeper context is that Papi and his peers are cognizant of the societal structures they inhabit. Papi's referral to 'being so White' reflects discourse not introduced in the drama setting, but brought in from an outside source. For an 8th grader whose heritage background is Mexican, he is using a "new language with which to articulate [his] place in the United States" (hooks, 2010, p. 24). The need for conversations of this nature were significant in the work. hooks proposes that "when there are not conversations there is often a sense that argument and negative contestations are the only ways to address relevant issues" (2010, p. 45), yet expresses his perspective without apprehension. He seems to know that others will respect his positionality.

Papi Chulo has had cultural experiences that others may not have had. Helga, whose cultural background is Middle Eastern, drew on his own experiences of vendors selling frozen treats. Both Papi and Helga are second-language learners and their home languages are not the same. For those of us who do not share Papi's experiences with the type of item being sold, Helga and I assumed it was ice cream. Others who share a similar background with Papi knew his reference. Papi drew on his encounters with purchasing a corn tortilla-like snack from a vendor on a beach. In not taking the occasion to explore exactly what Papi was 'selling', I silenced him and a learning opportunity for the group was hindered.

(*Resume*)

(*Papi points to Bling Bling and encourages him to come be a part of the scene*)

S1: Just be a starfish

BLING BLING: (*enters, stands in front of Papi*) This scene needs a

HELGA: (*inaudible*) watery

FOREST: Stand on the sand, guys

PAPI CHULO: He's my customer

DM: No, don't stand on the sand….so Bling Bling, this scene needs what?

BLING BLING: Customer

DM: A customer, okay….Freeze…still image….thank you

S2: It's like a picture

DM: Okay, the rest of group number 1

(*Stitch enters the scene, but says nothing. Alex enters right behind Stitch and begins talking with Papi*)

S1: You're a starfish (*to Stitch as she walks by him*) Say, say this needs a starfish

STITCH: Starfish

DM: This scene needs a starfish. Come be a starfish (*Stitch lays down next to the sand*)

S1: You have to lay….

ALEX: Come on, Guy

DM: No. umm. Alex, hold on, let our starfish get into place.

MEGAN: Starfish put their arms out

(*Pepe gets up and enters the scene*)

S1: (*inaudible*)

DM: Sand! Stop talking….you're quiet…Alex, what are you?

ALEX: A second customer

DM: A second customer, okay…. Pepe?

PEPE: An (*inaudible*)

DM: Huh?

PEPE: (*louder*) An umbrella (*stands with her arms folded across her torso*)

DM: An umbrella! Okay, be an umbrella!

S4: A closed umbrella

DM: Great!

(*Guy stands and enters the back of the scene, freezes upstage of sand in a walking stance*)

MEGAN: Guy, you're on

GUY: This scene needs someone walking

DM: Someone walking?

S2: Man, we need water…..

ALEX: We have sand

DM: (*friendly*) Maybe we're in the middle of the desert instead…okay,

ALEX: Why is there a starfish then?

DM: (*sighs*) Please! Thank you. Goodness gracious. Alright, I see somebody selling…I'm not sure what,

PAPI CHULO: lalotes (?)

DM: Like juices and stuff?

S3: Tamales

PAPI CHULO: Corn

DM: Corn, okay…somebody is selling food…snacks…we'll just call is snacks

In the exchange above, there were numerous times when students' thoughts and ideas were not fully considered. I told a student to not stand on the sand (another student). The two could have worked that out themselves, yet I intervened with 'no, don't stand on the sand'. When Snitch enters the scene to be a starfish, Alex states 'Come on Guy' and I respond with 'No. umm. Alex hold on…' and asserted my control over the scene. With every 'no' I uttered, I chipped away at whatever capability students may have felt they had in the process. When Helga suggested that Papi was selling ice cream, I said nothing. It wasn't until later in the lesson did I ask Papi what exactly his character was selling. Another student built on the explanation Papi gave, but I reduced it to 'snacks.' Even my use of 'just' minimized what Papi felt was important for him to include with his character.

Researcher's Journal—February 19, 2016
> Introducing the reading of the images and thought bubbles was more difficult than I thought. Even though students were engaged, it was Megan and --- who chimed in with their ideas. Papi Chulo was also in the mix as was Helga. I was hoping that the girls would add to the scene but that didn't happen. I don't know why Luna Purple didn't speak up more. I thought calling on students individually would help. It seemed to, but we didn't get much detail. And then when Erica was supposed to come up with the 'once upon a time' part, she struggled. With her strength speaking out in class, I thought this would be a good thing for her, but I put her on the spot.

I allowed the traditional role of teacher/adult to influence the process. Throughout this game, I realize that my own voice of expectations and my limited experiences manifested itself with a culture different from mine. I was not engaged in what Ira Shor (1999) would call "critical teaching" (para. 29). Critical teaching encourages students to find alternatives to the traditional paradigm. In this case, the endorsement of the dominator culture experience of a vendor selling something on a beach and it must be ice

cream. The opportunity for Papi Chulo to teach others about an aspect of his culture was wasted because of my agenda.

Thought bubbles and still images were new to them, yet my behaviors suppressed the students' exploration of the process. As James Gee (2011) offers in his work with discourse analysis, the social languages we use are "styles or varieties of a language...that enact and are associated with a particular social identity" (p. 156). The identity of teacher, which I have worn for so many years, became my default method of engagement. With phrases such as 'maybe we're in the middle of the desert' and 'Please! Thank you. Goodness gracious. Alright, I see…', I continued to direct the exercise into what I wanted rather than looking to see what would come from the participants' experiences. My non-verbal actions--the sigh--signaled that the person in power was going to retain that power and not allow it to be taken away. With many of my responses, I hindered the process of developing "self-directed learners, teachers, and students who are able to participate fully in the production of ideas" (hooks, 2010, p. 43). Students must be encouraged to dialogue and create new and altered understanding of experiences. When they do, all participants, including teachers and other adults will learn.

The students and their identity acquiesced to the hierarchy of established discourse. They also continued in their assumed roles of allowing those who have power and authority to sculpt and craft what they were to do. Students' attempts to support one another were made with phrases such as

- "you have to lay"
- "starfish put their arms out"
- "Guy, you're on"
- "This scene needs someone walking"

These suggestions facilitated the creation of the scene. Megan, Helga, and Papi were the more outspoken members of this class. Their confidence to speak up and speak out put them in a position of leaders in this class. What they contributed to the work being done was accepted by their peers and most often assisted in moving the work forward.

However, I recognize that I had taken advantage of the rapport built over several weeks and months and silenced students who engaged in create the scene. The students who deferred offering input and ideas were silenced by the few boisterous voices— including mine. As participants in a classroom, students and teachers align themselves according to expected, traditional roles. Adults are keepers of curriculum, while students are consumers of curriculum. When attempts to alter that dynamic are made, many times success is fleeting. To encourage critical thinking, hooks advocates that it is "an interactive process, one that demands participation on the part of the teacher and students alike" (p. 9). The predictability of behaviors between teachers and students limits discourse in a classroom. Again, hooks (2010) states, "Students often are afraid they will be shamed by teachers and/or peers. Unfortunately, this happens especially in classrooms where teachers claim that they want to hear students talk, but in actuality they dread having to listen to students" (p. 57). Perhaps it is due to ego or just expected, entrenched behaviors. I shushed sand, and did not offer an explanation why. I began statements with 'no' which reasserted my power as the adult in the room. I thought I was encouraging students to find their own way of entering the scene. The class had done this exercise before, but not with the added purpose of an audience 'reading' their image. Perhaps participants in this scene did not want to 'get it wrong' and were hesitant about their role in the scene. My words and behaviors minimized students' contributions to their own

creations. I found my own language withering into with what I am familiar—control and power in the form of teacher-speak. I minimized something that was important for students to include and I did not ask for details. Language is a powerful tool. Vygotsky (1931) states that for an adolescent

> The paths of dissemination and transmission of the meaning of words are given to him by the people around him in the process of verbal communication. But a child cannot immediately assimilate the adult's way of thinking and he acquires a product which look like the adult product, but which is acquired by means of completely different intellectual operations and is reached by a particular method of thinking. This is what we call pseudoconcept. To all appearances, what one gets is something which practically coincides with the meaning adults ascribe to words, but effectively it is profoundly different. (p. 50)

This activity provided students with a space for their voice and to create what they felt they needed and wanted. The work of hooks advocates that "[e]ngaged pedagogy assumes that every student has a contribution to make to the learning process" (p. 21). My intrusion placed unknown restrictions on the participant design of the scene. That students did not object to my intervention only seems to reinforce the hierarchical nature of the roles in the class.

<center>(Resume)</center>

PAPI CHULO: Oh my God

DM: Yeah, oh my God….somebody selling snacks with two customers, who are talking who shouldn't be talking right now cuz they're frozen. I see a big swath of sand….it's nice and long. I see someone walking by, maybe he doesn't need to buy a snack. I see a starfish trying to figure out what in the world is going on, and I see an umbrella who can't make up its mind as to

whether it's open or closed. (*pause*) Alright, freeze! Freeze in your positions. Group 2, what I want you to do is look at this scene

LIL DICKY: It's sexy

S5: (*smiling*) aahhhh

LIL DICKY: Payback

HELGA: Continue

DM: What I'd like to do…I'd like you to look at this scene…look at the elements of this scene. Basically what you're doing is you're reading it. It's not words, but it is images. And I want you to read this scene and each of you are gonna give me a thought bubble

FOREST: (*whispers*) a thought bubble

DM: So you…so like Luna Purple will give the thought bubble for the umbrella.

(*Forest gets up and moves to sit right next to Megan*)

DM: Now somebody had written…I think some of you are a little concerned a about imagination but an umbrella wouldn't talk or an umbrella wouldn't be thinking of something, but in this case, we're gonna let inanimate objects also think. So when I say thought bubble, think about when you look at comics and things like that and the character is there and they have a thought bubble here….they're not really speaking you see little bubbles that go to a little cloud? That's what I'm talking about when I'm talking about thought bubble, okay?

LUNA PURPLE: So we're giving them a thought bubble

DM: You're giving them the thought

S4: Bubble

DM: So what you're doing…so…so Luna Purple said…I like what she said. She said, so you're giving them the thought. Yes. Because what you're doing, Luna Purple, is you're reading the image. Does that make sense? (*pause*) Okay? (*pause*) So each of you are going to do it for one of the other students, okay…so when I say give me the though bubble for this particular item or character or whoever, you can do that. (*turns to the still*

image people) So people in the still image, freeze into the position you want because that's the thought bubble you're going to get. Because that's how your audience is reading your physicalization of this whatever it is. Whether it's sand or a customer or somebody walking by, whatever it might be. Got it?

(*DM walks behind each student in the still images*)

DM: Megan, thought bubble (*DM hands over Alex's head*)

MEGAN: I don't know…what is she supposed to be?

HELGA: She's buying something

LUNA PURPLE: She's buying food

DM: She's a customer

S2: She's the second customer

MEGAN: Oh…I don't even know what he's selling

DM: Snacks…it's what were calling snacks

HELGA: Corn cobs

S4: Hot corn

MEGAN: How much are the hot dogs?

S4: Corn

MEGAN: Corn

DM: How much is the corn?

KALAMA: Unuh

DM: Okay, Forest (*thought bubble over Papi's head*) thought bubble

FOREST: When am I gonna go home

DM: When am I gonna go home

DM: Lil Dicky (*over Bling Bling's head*) thought bubble

LIL DICKY: Your hand is warm

DM: Your hand is warm. Patrisha, thought bubble (*for Guy*)

PATRISHA: Why am I here?

DM: Helga, thought bubble (*for sand*)

HELGA: I'm sand. Why are all these people walking on me?

(*Pause*)

Again, in my teacher role, I dominated the conversation. Initially, I was giving instructions for the exercise. I then inserted myself into the dialogue between students and the roles they were portraying. I repeated statements made and when peers offered clarification on what the expectations were for the activity, I jumped in and silenced them. I recognize that I did this are a way to maintain control. I negated an important aspect of drama as a tool for voice, and that is conversation. hooks (2010) affirms that "[c]onversations are not one-dimentional; they always confront us with different ways of seeing and knowing" (p. 46). As students 'read' the scene and generated thought bubbles, their words came more naturally, if not cautiously. The belief of "engaged pedagogy" (hooks, 2010, p. 21), where studentrs and teachers share a mutual learning experience would be an ideal situation. hooks (2010) suggests that "[e]xpanding both heart and mind, engaged pedagogy makes us better learners because it askes us to embrace and explore the practice of knowing together, to see intelligence as a resource that can strengthen our common good" (p. 22) Yet, with this lesson being in a school setting where students attend other classes and conform to the traditional teacher/student

dynamic, old habits surfaced. The sharing of knowledge was one-way--teacher to student. I had forgone the praxis of critical teaching that supports what Shor (1999) advises is "a local critical discourse synthesized in the immediate setting for the purposes undertaken there, different from the everyday language of students and from the academic langauge of the teacher" (para. 37). To allow students and teachers to co-construct new language not used before and in any other academic situation provides fresh, additional insight and understanding of issues related to all participants.

<center>(*Resume*)</center>

(*DM walks behind each student in the still images*)

DM: Megan, thought bubble (*DM hands over Alex's head*)

MEGAN: My leg hurts (*giggles*)

DM: Megan, thought bubble

MEGAN: I don't know…what is she supposed to be?

HELGA: She's buying something

LUNA PURPLE: She's buying food

DM: She's a customer

S: She's the second customer

MEGAN: Oh…I don't even know what he's selling

DM: Snacks…it's what were calling snacks

HELGA: Corn cobs

S: Hot corn

MEGAN: How much are the hot dogs?

S: Corn

MEGAN: Corn

DM: How much is the corn?

KALAMA: Unuh

DM: Okay

KALAMA: Good

DM: Forest (*thought bubble over Papi's head*) though bubble

FOREST: When am I gonna go home?

(*giggles*)

DM: Lil Dicky (*over Bling Bling's head*) though bubble

LIL DICKY: Your hand is warm

(*giggles*)

DM: Patisha, thought bubble (*for Guy*)

PATRISHA: Why am I here?

(*giggles*)

DM: Helga, thought bubble (*for sand*)

HELGA: I'm sand

MEGAN: I am sand

DM: Sshh

HELGA: Why are all these people walking on me?

DM: Native Wolf (*for Stitch--starfish*) thought bubble

NATIVE WOLF: Where am I?

DM: Luna Purple, thought bubble (*for Pepe*)

LUNA PURPLE: It's hot. It's hot here

(*Pause*)

Students were engaged in the activity and supported one another in the process. The discourse was appropriate for the scene and provided a demonstration of a strong rapport these students had built amongst themselves. I realize that my insertions into the flow of the discourse was a reminder to the students of my positionality as teacher. At one point, when Forest says 'When am I gonna go home' as the thought bubble for Papi, I didn't respond or acknowledge his input. Forest is a student who can be impulsive. Initially, I took his contribution to reflect an impetuous response. In analyzing the setting and the context in which the comment was made, I realize it was his way of disengaging from the conversation. hooks (2010) states "In dominator culture the killing off of the imagination serves as a way to repress and contain eveyone within the limits of the status quo" (p. 60). I do, however, recognize the language participants used could have been constrained due to the school setting and the presence of the researchers. Ira Shor (1999) states that students "of all ages need adult coalitions to help them win language rights to free speech and to social criticism" (para. 11). As teachers work to include and value how students can influence a learning experience, we need to allow ourselves to enter into the conversation as learners.

I wasn't planning on this next step, but it seemed natural and a place where the pieces could come together. I know it made Erica nervous—her physical response was to tense up her body. Because we were a small group, I trusted that her peers would be kind

to her and support her—and because the rest of the thought bubble portion was going well.

<p style="text-align:center">(*Resume*)</p>

DM: Okay…sshhh… Erica. Give me a 'once upon a time' start of a story. And t think about all the thought bubbles…how much is a hot dog, when can I go home, your hand is hot,

GUY: why am I walking

DM:…why am I walking here, why is everybody on me, what am I doing here, it's really hot…give me the start of a story… 'once upon a time'

ERICA: Once upon a time, umm, I can't think

DM: Remember, they're at a beach,…

ERICA: I don't know, Miss.

(*Papi clapping his hands*)

DM: What pops into your head first? (*turns to Papi, points at him, holds her index finger to her lips to sshh him*)

ERICA: I have to tell a story about what everybody's doing?

DM: Yeah….what's going on here

ERICA: Umm, that they wanna buy something?

DM: Once upon a time….they wanna buy something

ERICA: Once…they wanted to buy something

DM: while they were

ERICA: while they were

DM: at the…

ERICA: at the beach. Or…what was the place?

DM: (*and a few students*) the beach.

(*Pause*)

I had put Erica on the spot. In previous, informal conversations, Erica has shared

with me that she likes the drama class and the time she spends with her friends. For her,

there is not much pressure with the work because she is comfortable. However, her

response to a previous statement 'I am most comfortable when I know what is expected

of me from other people' was 'yes'. Erica is not a second-language learner, is strong in

her verbal and written expression, and does well with clear expectations, yet being asked

to create in the moment made her uncomfortable. James Gee (2011), in his work with

meaning making in cultural context, offers that interpretation of meaning can be elusive.

With regard to use of language, Gee states that

> even simple interactions can be inexplicable, thanks to the fact that we do not
>
> know many of the figured worlds at play. This means that even if we can figure
>
> out the situated meanings of some words, we cannot see any sense to why these
>
> situated meanings have arisen (p. 82).

I hadn't anticipated her reaction. I assumed that she had a basic storytelling technique

common to the dominator culture to which I belong. Spoken language was not an

obstacle, yet meaning and context were. I hadn't recognized her background and position

in adolescent culture. Others did. Her peers know her and could sense her apprehension

and confusion about what I was asking her to do. They were quiet but supportive when

she needed them to be. When teachers negate students' language and emotional status,

they oppress. Erica was in a place where her voice was restrained. hooks (2010) asserts that "[i]magination is one of the most powerful modes of resistance that oppressed and exploited folks can and do use" (p. 61). If the goal of this study was to liberate and amplify the voices of the adolescent participants, this instance with Erica was the antithesis of that goal.

(*Resume*)

ERICA: You looked at me like I said it wrong, that's why…

DM: No! No, I'm just…I'm sorry. No…You can't….how could you say it wrong? You can't say it wrong cuz it's… it's just being creatied.

(*Pause*)

Erica touched on something I think all students struggle with—being correct. Gee (2011) points out that in classrooms, students are asked questions by the teacher (who knows the answer), the student responds, and the teacher "responds in some way that can be taken as evaluating whether the child's answer was 'acceptable' or not" (p. 119). In a situation like this, a drama class where things are new and there are opportunities for creating something out of (or almost out of) thin air, there is still that feeling that there is a correct way and a wrong way of doing things. Steinberg and Kincheloe (2010) attest to the reality embodied by students as "they walk into classrooms, in the ways they conceptualize the role of education in their lives, in their disposition toward learning the skills and concepts that make up the curriculum" (p. 145). Erica still saw me as the adult—the person with the power and the control. I now recognize my hierarchal position and building and maintaining rapport is on-going. Connections with others are nuanced.

Trust in others can be tenuous. Thoughts and behaviors are layered and what manifests itself for other to see is not all there is to be considered from a person.

<div align="center">(Resume)</div>

S1: (sand in the scene) Once upon a time (puts his hand up)

DM: (touches his hand) sshh

S1: and there was many customers

ERICA: Why don't you let him talk?

S1: and there's a lot of sand

DM: Cuz he's part of the still image..sand doesn't talk

(giggles)

S1: and there's a man jogging on the sand

ERICA: Yeah, there's a man jogging on the sand and there's starfish just like this (holds out hands)

S2: chillin'

ERICA: Just like in the wave…then like, umm, like an unbrella, just like…Umm

MEGAN: An unbrella just like there and a starfish in there

DM: Okay

KALAMA: Umhun

DM: That works! That works!

KALAMA: Umhun

ERICA: It works?

DM: Well, it's it's….

MEGAN: It's just a start

(*still image students begin to move back to where they were sitting*)

DM: Alright, give them a round of applause. Thank you very much you guys.

(*some students clap*)

James Gee (2011) discusses the use of registers or social languages to communicate. Listeners and speakers need to establish identities and roles--teacher/student; physician/patient; employer/employee--in order to carry on meaningful conversations. In this instant, I exercised my role of teacher to elicit a response from a student. However, my social register was that of influence and leading rather than that of invitation for Erica to create on her own. Her peers tried to engage in what Gee terms "collocational patterns" (p. 158) of social language to demonstrate solidarity with her. Again, I prevented that language to facilitate Erica's understanding and creation by repeating Guy--'why am I walking here'--and shushing Papi. My own academic teacher language silenced the very students I thought I was encouraging.

The second group to create a scene did so around the setting of a ski resort. They included skiers and and ski shops with clerks as well as snowmen and trees. Both scenes were chosen because I assumed there would be some familiarity and knowledge with such scenes, and enough opportunity to incorporate what participants felt needed to be there. The primary idea of building rapport with students in a drama class is to stive for the goal of group success--what adolecsents would describe as 'fun'. One concern I had with this particular game is that many of the students were out due to testing, and experience was not captured or shared by all.

It is important to let students know why they engaged in a particular lesson--expecially adolescents. To provide a foundation for future work, whether it is a week away or months away, is important for successful endeavours. However, with my actions in this process, I facilitated an opportunity for students to disengage and become passive in their own learning. As hooks (2010) offers "Genuine learning…is always mutual. In any engaged dialogue where learning is taking place between teacher and student, lecturer and audience, both parties are giving and receiving" (p. 64). My language and my positionalty as an adult instructor became the primary source of discourse. Contributions from the students were minimized or dissuaded by my control. I thought I had justified my position in the moment, yet I appropriated the entire conversation.

> DM: What we're gonna do….and I'm working….and I'm a little…I'm still trying to reorganize my thoughts right now…So I appreciate…if I got snippy with you, I apologize but I really do need your cooperation, umm, right now. (*pause*) What we're going to do, is you….with that game, 'this scene needs a', you had a chance to create a visual image. The readers, when you gave thought bubbles, gave meaning to what they saw in that image. And when you think about it…think about when you were really really little and you first noticed those golden arches, and they meant something. What did they mean?

> S: McDonald's

> DM: McDonald's, exactly. (pause) The golden arches don't spell McDonald's, they don't use that symbol system, but it's a sign to see it an you know 'oh, that's McDonald's okay….and and sometimes have you ever seen the wordless books, the picture books and you can tell the story from…..

> MEGAN: (*silly voice*) The pictures!

This exchange provided the opportunity to illuminate a situation in interpretation of meaning using symbols. The use of common cultural examples provided a basis for expanding the understanding of the students. Mahn (2012) explains Vygotsky's theory

that when developing generalizations, the "speaking/thinking system is created when children, in interaction with asults, apply language to amalgamated visual images" (p. 114). Megan and others recognized the point that was being made and seemed to appreciate the reason for the work as presented.

Student reflections on the drama games

Many other games were played with the primary purpose to build trust and rapport amongst all members of the group. As Boal (2002) asserts, games are "recommended when starting a new group with non-actors—for instance workers and students…[games] help people accept the idea of 'playing' as we play in the theatre; they help people lose some of their inhibitions" (p.165). As adolescents become more aware of who they are and make choices about how they want to be, it becomes essential to have a safe space to explore their world and their reality. Establishing that space was important to building rapport with the students. We took time to build trust and begin to see one another through new perspectives. Students became members of a group that required skills counter to their chosen social groups. The jocks, the bookish, the goths, the nerds all came together to participate in the drama games on an equal footing. These games were new to them and necessitated a new level of negation and collaboration.

Figure 15: Start over again

Figure 16: We were getting closer

Everybody Counts
Randomly counting to 23 (the number of people in the circle) without two or more people speaking at once—or we have to begin again.

Figure 17: What are you doing?

Figure 18: Get back to work

Why Are You Late?
Improvisation game where one actor is the 'boss', five others are the employees, and a sixth actor is the employee who is late for work. This sixth player doesn't know why he/she is late, but the others do and help by pantomiming the reason when the boss' back is turned. The 'late' employee must try to determine the reason for being late.

Responses from dialogue journals

Lil Dicky—
I like the games.

Raven—
I think were gonna do something better if everyone is respecting each other

Responses from the post survey

Forest—

Tell me about doing drama games.

They are kinda cool expet the mooutain pose

Jackie—

The drama games were really fun and I liked them. Also I think I have a curse I which I get people fired in why are you late.

Raven—

I like all drama Games because it make me happy and Forgget what happen in the Back.

Cowgirl—

Doing the drama games are fun and good learning skills. We didn't do them atot but my favorite ones were in the one were we threw the stuffed animals at the begging of the year and sayed each others names. the mongoose one was fun also. I only wish we had more time to play.

The Weird Potato—

Drama games are fun. There different which makes it better.

Erica—

There ok there not to bad, may favorite was wink murder.

Kash—

Tell me about doing drama games. wow. The drame games are amazing I really like "why are you late?"

Figure 19: Student Responses

Luna—

I love doing them and engaging With the other kids

Native Wolf—

I loved some of the games, like the one with the murdered and the mtrrowing one. Also the one where we had to work as a pair to stand up that was cool.

Pepe—

The drama games were very fun.

Figure 20: Student responses

The comments and feedback from the students reflected a general enjoyment and engagement with the process. Students enjoyed the games because from their perspective, they were 'fun'. Raven's comment from her dialogue journal was insightful. She is a second language learner and hesitates speaking in front of the group. The dialogue journal provided a space for her to express her thoughts. Because she mentions respect for others making things 'better' for everyone, Raven is cognizant of the behaviors of her peers. Not only is she navigating being in a new country and culture, but also being an adolescent. hooks (2010) offers that

> engaged pedagogy makes the classroom a place where wholeness is welcomed and students can be honest, even radically open. They can name their fears, voice their resistance to thinking, speak out, and they can also fully celebrate the moments where everything clicks and collective learning is taking place (p. 21).

The expectation for students to engage in the games provided them with the opportunity

to explore expanded limits with their engagement with peers. There was still the obstacle of an adult controlling the discourse, therefore true, authentic student voice remains vague.

Dialogue Journals: Whole group games

Cowgirl—
the one where we threw the stuffed animals and the mongoose game was fun also

The Weird Potato—
Drama games are fun. Their different and that makes them better

Lil Dicky—
That was fun. I really liked the mongoose one

The word 'fun' was mentioned quite a bit and it offered opportunities for students to express enjoyment. The building of a community of learners is the foundation for moving on to focused work. bell hooks (2010) offers that "it is essential that teacher and students take time to get to know one another" (p. 20). Through drama games, the sense of joy and happiness sets the expectation of work that is beneficial to all participants.

There were some comments where participants felt they could honestly express their thoughts. Although they were responding to the adult in control of the process, there seemed to be an attempt to offer some level of self-affectation. When referring to drama games, the language students used was cautious. Words like 'boring,' 'sometimes,' 'stale,' 'alright' and phrases such as 'they got boring,' 'I do not really like doing them' and 'I didn't really see how it benefited to us' provided a hint at participant perspective. However, due to the hierarchal climate in the classroom, expression of perspectives were muted. Trying to embrace the chance to voice their experiences with more detail, students struggled to acknowledge what Shor (1999) offers through the lens of critical teaching-- that it "invites students to consider options to fitting quietly into the way things are"

(para. 29). Students were still apprehensive to voice their own positionality. Amy had felt

the level of discourse had improved over what she has previously experienced as a

teacher. "They [students] are more open with their thoughts. They say what they are

thinking. I'm finding out more about them in a different way, and it's cool" (post-session

conversation, April, 2016). Amy was able to glimpse her students with a different

perspective from which she embraced.

Roses—

Drama games could be fun but some are boring.

Alex—

Fun (sometimes)

Megan—

I feel like they were fun at first but they got boring and stale.

Tony—

eh, the drama games are alright, Although I do not really like them.

Papi Chulo—

fun but I didn't really see how it benefited to us

Figure 21: Survey responses

This final comment is especially telling for me because Papi is a student who demonstrated a serious maturity when the group needed it. He was a leader with his peers and did not hesitate to hold Amy or me accountable for the purpose and goal of lessons used. Situations that provide insight to their particular values and ideologies allow students to represent their perspectives (McLaren, 2007). Papi's particular comment made me realize how important it is to adolescents to have a clear rationale for what they are doing. It is important that offering the space for students to express their perspectives needs a deeper understanding and commitment from adults.

Dialogue Journals

The work we were doing was part of the instruction for the course, and all students were expected to participate. I wanted to create discourse with individual students using dialogue journals. With dialogue journals, adolescents can honestly express themselves and are a "means to communicate one's hope, fears, challenges, and questions without the 'threat' of face-to-face interaction" (Phelps, 1992, p. 147). I had brought up dialogue journals with Amy. She told me that students were familiar with such journals because other teachers used them at the school. Since there were 25 students in the 7th/8th grade drama class at Eastside Middle School, I knew the dialogue journals would allow me to engage with each student on a regular basis. In her study exploring middle school teachers and their use of dialogue journals with students, Donna

Werderich (2006) found the journals to be an effective tool for learning with early adolescent learners. Werderich states, "With each student's dialogue journal, the teacher plays an important role in engaging the student in a reciprocal process of dialogue" (p. 54). This interaction assisted in building rapport on more personal level and provided 'conversations' that may not otherwise taken place. However, I recognize that there was still a hierarchal structure with my being an adult and an instructor. Many of the students kept the dialogue light and centered around what we were doing in class.

My role was to converse using written text with students about the work we were undertaking—no judgment or assessment involved. My stance offered opportunities for students to express their authentic perspectives. Mrs. Smith agreed that grades for her students and their work with me would be solely based on participation. Since she was also a participant, Amy was present during the lessons and could observe student engagement.

The journals were composition books whose coves had the same abstract pattern in different colors—red, blue, green, and purple. Students made entries during and after lessons, at times with a prompt from me. These journals were meant to capture the thoughts and experiences of the students through informal writing, thus grammatical conventions were not expected. Most spelling and grammatical corrections have been made for ease of reading. The first entry invited students to offer a greeting or ask questions about the study they may have.
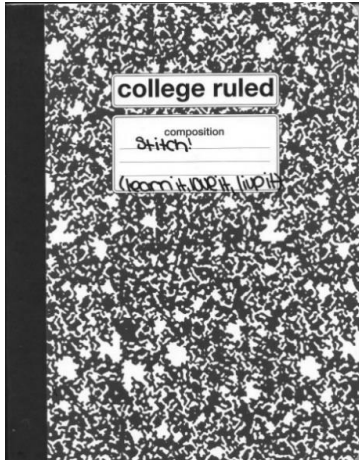
Figure 22: Sample cover of Dialogue Journal

- *How are trust, ensemble, and community developed with the participants?*

Stitch—

Figure 23: Personal journal entry

Sweet Jelly—

Figure 24: Personal journal entry

Native Wolf—
Hey! Your weird and its awesome. Do you like to write stories? I do I have one published book on the Wattpad.com What's your spirit animal? Mines a wolf. What accents can you do? I can do an Irish, British, Navajo and kinda Russian. Helga is better at Russian accents that me. So bye!

Luna—
Why do we have to do this? You might find out to much.
My response
You only need to share what you are comfortable sharing. And Mrs. Smith won't be seeing these so the conversations in your journal are between you and me. If you want to share them with someone else, it's your journal and you can do what you want. Hope this helps. Drama Mama

Bling Bling—
I believe this class (Activity) wiu

Guy—
Do you like tacos?

Cowgirl—
Hi Mrs. Erin how are you today. I hope your day is going good.

Lil Dicky—
I want to go home and sleep all day.

Pepe—
Hi Drama Mama how has your day been? That's great! I'm doing great too! I have a game today and I'm so nervous! Anyway! I hope your mother feels better.

Raven—
Hi I think you are a great teacher and you are the best but sometimes you get angry but that happen to any one.🖤

The Weird Potato—
Pizza is good!
I'm a weird potato (ugly)
My response
You have a natural beauty. When you smile your eyes smile and that's pretty. Please remember that we all are different and comparing ourselves to someone else's ideal can be unproductive. Drama Mama

Alex—
Hi Mrs. Erin your funny.

Luna Purple—
Hi I'm Luna Purple I love purple. I also love music.

Forest Gump—
Hi Ms. Erin. I would like to change my name to Forest Gump because that is one of my favorite movies My old name was Jack (his first pseudonym)

Dialogue Journals: 2-19

Native Wolf—
…What is your fav. movie book series? mine is Twilight and Harry Potter. And lastly if you could time travel when and where would you go?

Luna—
Okay but what if we say something that we "think" we'd like you too know about but like two minutes later we realize that that's too much. What if we just don't write because we're afraid of this idea?
My response
That's okay too. It's about the work we are doing and you can keep it there.
Drama Mama

Guy—
No I don't like taco's I love taco's and all types of taco's. Do you like people? If you do what type of people do you like?

Well, normal people scare me. The type of people I like as Metal heads car people. What is your favorite car?
My response
Normal people can be interesting—or boring. Scary? I'm not sure.
 '68 Camaro, cobalt blue with a white interior. Drama Mama

Cowgirl—
Good to hear that your doing ok. I like to hear that you are having fun in our class. Their maybe some people that are rude and disrespectful in this class. But you just have to deal with them.

Sweet Jelly—
I'm having a quinceañera. I don't really know if it's going to be this March but I was wondering if you are interested in going?

Pepe—
Hey drama mama how are you today? I hope you're doing great. I've been very confused lately about something but besides that I'm good. What have you been up to lately?

Raven—
I'm sorry I did not mean to write that all I mean is that the class have some problem because they just talk so that didn't mean you are old

The Weird Potato—
Yeah people call me and I am weird cause normal people scare me.

Alex—
I think it is very important! also it's okay to be weird! no one is the same. iF not some what different!

Luna Purple—
Hello! How are you I hope you're doing well. Today was a good day. Thanks for responding LP
Yay! Short week! I love Drama. Drama has done so much for me. Before drama I was really shy I still am but now I don't let the same things bother me. Because of drama I'm confident to try new things. And no I'm not doing anything special.
This class is fun but some students don't take it serious

Reflecting on the entries in these journals, I realized my plan of responding to

them once a week was going to have to change. There were students who expressed more

than just their thoughts on a lesson. From the first entries, students wrote about feelings and events in their lives they felt compelled to share. I felt I needed to acknowledge where they were at that day or moment in their life, and altered my dialogical responses to follow each session. Herr and Anderson (2015) offer that action research requires on-going data analysis and for the researcher to reflect and adapt to the participants based on knowledge and understanding which manifests itself during the study. They suggest a "spiral of action cycles" (p. 5) that progresses through the steps of *plan, act, observe,* and *reflect*. Repeating this cycle expands the researchers' knowledge of the initial question and possibly lead to a resolution to a problem or a change in policy or situation.

The dialogue journals became a valuable source of student language and perspectives on events in their lives. The journals offered adolescents a means to record and develop their thinking in complexes that Vygotsky (1931) describes as "the mutual process of completion and joining together using a collection, which characterizes this stage in the development of thinking" (p. 42). Prompts for journal entries were based on the same experiences of all the students—the lesson or activity—but the responses were individual and private. The written conversations were between the student and me. If entries were shared with their peers, that was their choice. It was never a requirement.

Journals and Trust

As we continued to work, connections deepened. There was a point where Weird Potato and I 'dialogued' about nothing related to the drama work we were doing. The trust that had developed felt very strong and she shared this:

May 6 o16

I Don't think i'm pretty im just
okay looking. -Hey, I think you're naturally pretty"
There is a girl in the front of my class
who i've never seen do anything but laugh
she's tall and she's smart, beautiful and strong"
and when someone's down she tries to
fix what is wrong how does someone so
loving learn to hate her own guts as to
scar her skin with cuts and burns and still
want to hurt more how does someone so
Perfect learn to hate her own guts as to
scar her skin with cuts and burns and
still want to hurt more. There is a girl
in front of my class who's eyes are glazed
over like newly cut glass ghosts of a
smile hints at her face as she laughs
as they tell her who's on first base how
does someone so loving learn to hate her
own guts as to scar her skin with cuts
and burns and still wants to hurt more how
does someone so perfect learn to hate her
own guts as drawing a pircture on her arms
with a blade as if her mind isnt dark
enough.
Sorry it's just a song stuck in meh
head.
            Powerful lyrics   →

Figure 25: Personal conversation with Weird Potato

5-6-16

Tell me if I'm wrong, but
you identify with the girl
in the song, don't you? If
someone wrote those lyrics
and set them to music, that
person felt it. My guess
is there are more people
than you might think
that identify with the
girl in the song. I do
but my self-harm is food.
It's not as immediate as
cutting, and the scars aren't
as telling. I'm just slowly —
very slowly — shortening my
life.
    I'm sitting at my mom's
house, getting ready to help
her get ready to sleep. Her
hatred of me is so telling in
the way she treats
me and how I'm not perfect
because I'm not thin or pretty
like my sister. But I'm here
early morning and late at
night—especially tonight, because
my sister has a date — I'm here
because it's thi right thing to
do. I hope you can find your
"right thing to do"— it helps... J. M

Figure 26: Personal conversation with Weird Potato

5/9/16

There are scars on my 4 arm my upper arm my thigh, stomach and left boob from cutting. it don't really do anything but ruin your skin there <u>were</u> days were i wanted2 but i <u>don't</u> cause it dont do anything good. i really dont think this song relates to me besides the cutting and at the end of the song she commits suicide and i've tried that last year, 6th grade and at the beginning of this school year some days i feel like some things are my fault i'm a mistake 2 my dad he wanted me dead when i was in my mom's stomach i found out on saturday one of my cousins from bernalillio got stabbed 12 times i swear im just a mess everyday sometimes i feel like giving up.

5-9-16

Giving up would be an unfortunate choice. You may not see it and others may not tell you, but you have a strong, mature energy. That's what I see. When it comes to life, you "get it". There are so many people who don't; but you do. If it counts; I care. DM

Figure 27: Personal conversation with Weird Potato

I didn't know what to do. In the consent form and the description of the study, students were informed that if they were to disclose anything that would cause them or anyone else harm, that it would be reported to the proper individuals per school district guidelines. That evening, after my response, I called Amy. As her teacher, she has a responsibility to her students and needed to know of this student's thoughts. She thanked me for the information and the next morning, first thing, she contacted the school counselor to give her background on this exchange. When I arrived around noon that day, Weird Potato approached me. I thought she would be angry for sharing her thoughts with Amy and the counselor. Her words to me were, "I'm having a great day, Miss! Are we gonna rehearse?" The guiding framework of critical literacy allowed for this exchange to invite Weird Potato to "develop critical thought and action [granting me to develop] as a critical-democratic educator who [became] more informed of the needs, conditions, speech habits, and perceptions of the students, from which knowledge [I] design[ed] activities and into which [I] integrated [my] special expertise" (Shor,1999, papa 31.) At that moment, I realized the power of trust and positive rapport. I attribute that to the drama work done that provided boundaries, but also space for adolescents to express and explore.

Connections in Other Ways

Drama games and dialogue journals were methods of entry and sharing in the lives of the participants. These connections gave way to students feeling more comfortable verbally expressing their perspectives. One such encounter occurred after a session where students gave feedback to small groups who had created still images. As I was leaving school, I came across Patrisha (a pseudonym) waiting for her ride home. She

wasn't the upbeat energetic student I had seen just an hour before. She was looking down

at her phone, her shoulders were slumped and her body language conveyed an agitated

state. I said hello and asked her what was up:

PATRISHA: I'm just mad. I didn't like what we did today in class.

ERIN: Why?

PATRISHA: People don't get it. They just don't seem to want to work on the hard
      things.

ERIN: What makes you say that?

PATRISHA: Megan (pseudonym) ! His comments piss me off. The thought
      bubble he gave Helga and the whole way he talked about our scene. He
      couldn't be serious.

ERIN: (*pause*) I've noticed there is a group who are sometimes not focused—
      Megan's one of them. In my years of teaching, I've noticed kids who do
      that are trying to avoid other things and build walls. I wonder if that's
      what Megan does. (*pause*) And maybe they misread the image because
      you guys had the giggles.

PATRISHA: But we stopped, Miss, and they still didn't get it. They're always
      doing things that're racial or mean. I wish they'd stop. They just don't get
      it!

ERIN: Yeah, I see your point. Let me think of some things and see what we can
      do. We're not gonna solve all the problems….

PATRISHA: I know….thanks. Gotta go….

ERIN: (*pointing at the car*) That your ride?

PATRISHA: Yeah!

ERIN: Nice car! (*convertible charcoal gray Mustang. I waved to the driver*)
      Sorry to keep her! She's all yours!

PATRISHA: Bye, Miss (*smile*)

ERIN: See ya Friday!

(*Patrisha leaves*)

This interaction illuminated something I suspected was happening with the group but I didn't want to bring it up. Phrases such as 'piss me off' and 'always doing things that're racial or mean' may not have used by Patrisha with me if there wasn't a level of comfort or trust. I found myself having a difficult time to try to remain professional, because I knew what she was talking about. By acknowledging her position, I meant to reaffirm her trust. It also provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my position. The orientation of myself as the researcher in this study was one of "*practical* interest [which] refers to an orientation toward gaining understanding through interpretation" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 35). Not only was it essential for me to hear what she was saying, I needed to take cues from her non-verbal statements—her body language. The subtle physical changes in Patrisha as she waited for her ride were as telling as the words she spoke. Interpretation can lead to understanding when the experience moves beyond the obvious.

This exchange identified an energy I had been feeling in the class anyway. Replaying in my head the session we had just completed, I thought about the physical expression of the groups. As we were debriefing the lesson, there was a chasm between the students who were in Patrisha's group were sitting and the other groups who "didn't take it seriously" (conversation with Patrisha, March, 2016). Once again, with outsider/insider Participation Action Research, I knew there was a need to adjust the plans and address the situation that seemed to be coming to a boil. I called Amy that night and discussed with her the idea of an 'issues circle'. We agreed that these students might need to air out issues and ideas and I constructed a plan based on techniques I had learned

long ago and would use in my own classroom. The next time the group came together,

Amy and I provided space for participants to attend to concerns.

Issues Circle

Creating a perfect situation for adolescents to engage in honest, respectful

discourse is a fallacy. The positionality of the adults is still one of power and disclosure

by the students is guarded. What may seem like a collaboration for all participants and

researchers can actually become unintentional collusion on the part of the leaders (Herr &

Anderson, 2015). Amy and I discussed the goals and possible difficulties, yet felt the

opportunity for the students to speak was too important to pass over.

Researcher's Journal/March 11, 2016

> Well, the 'issues circle' was mixed. I made a point not to record any of it so
> students could feel free to express their ideas. We did begin by setting the
> expectations of:
>
> - Sit in a circle—chairs or on the floor
> - Discuss that this an 'issues circle' and that it's a chance for each of the
>   members of the group to offer their perspective on what is happening in
>   class
> - Solutions to concerns should be offered
> - Outline the expectations for participation in issues circle
>   - About 30 ***uninterrupted*** seconds each participant each round
>   - Respectful language—no name calling or cheap shots
>   - Use **I feel_____ when_____because_____**
>   - Rebuttals, if needed, will be during the second round
>   - Interruptions and use of disrespectful language and that person will
>   be immediately asked to leave the circle/room. No warnings.
>
> **Round 1**
> Explain what is noticed about current behaviors
> Each person given opportunity to speak to what they notice
> Quiet time between each comment
> **Round 2**
> Rebuttals/explanations
> **Round 3**
> Realistic solutions/suggestions for change

The students who spoke up the first go around were the ones I thought would. Comments about feeling disrespected by racial comments and 'not taking things seriously' were made. Many students 'passed' on that first go around. Round 2 and dialogue then brought out comments from those who had been quiet. A couple of students who can be the most disruptive didn't see a problem with things. The comment was even made that "This (issues circle) is a waste of time and we could have been more productive if we didn't do it".

This same student said "I'm offended that you pointed me out" and I said that I was offended that --- didn't see the problem and has continually given 'empty apologies' for disruptive behaviors—for months.

Others began to tell me that I was disrespectful for calling out this student and another one. And then other students began asking, "How many times does Miss Erin or Mrs. Smith have to ask us to behave?" and "We're going to high school next year, well the 8th graders are, and we need to grow up and start acting like it" "But she didn't have to call --- out in front of the class. She should have done it privately." I asked "So the concern is 'public shaming'?" "Yes, you could have done it privately" "I have done it privately and it doesn't seem to help".

As we went around the circle, comments were made like 'if the teacher has to take 5 minutes out of a lesson to privately ask us to behave, that takes away from the rest of us'

Then students began using the pronoun 'you' as in "You need to grow up and contribute" or "You need to realize that the teachers are human and have feelings too." The 'you' was a general 'you' and didn't seem to be directed at anyone specifically. I jumped in and asked students not to use the word 'you' because it becomes accusatory; that this 'issues circle' was not meant to be a bashing of any one in class. I cried. It came and I think it was because I really didn't want this to turn into a bash fest. We did get to a place for 'solutions' and the terms *respect, our work,* and *listen* came out.

Amy and I discussed the process after class. She said she would talk with students on Mon and Tues without me there. I have to see her on both days because we haven't had a chance for her to see the lessons on video that she missed. And then she told me she was going to be out again on Wed. I suggested that we have students do a 'secret ballot' as to where to go next—stay with the subject they chose (horror stories and big secrets); change subject matter/theme?; or move on to a scripted play, with costumes and sets and stuff. If they choose the third one, I'm going to have to decide if I want to take what data I have and do something with it (it is telling) or do I want to scrap it and shut down the study and start it again at another school in the fall. Again, I'm confused……….

When there is trust among the participants in a project such as this study and concerns arise, the discourse around solutions needs to be honest and clear. Students acknowledged my behaviors as well as their peers, however, students spoke without interrupting one another. The background of critical thinking includes reflection on actions and behaviors that distract as well as benefit a group. bell hooks (2010) submits that "When students are offered the opportunity to engage in discussions that either focus on or include discussion of personal experience, they are more able and willing to speak out" (pp. 57-58). The first round set expectations and students were not interrupted as they spoke. As the rounds continued, more students stated what they had to say. Because the oral session was not recorded in any way, I must rely on general statements and feelings expressed rather than direct quotes. The dialogue journal entries continued to speak to the process:

- ***How participants disclose to the group issues that truly concern them?***

Dialogue Journals: 3-11 Issues Circle

Native Wolf—
About the negative energy I don't know maybe. I feel exposed whenever I am called out or have to say my feeling or opinion of to say something because I have very bad trust issues and I don't like when you guys get upset at some people who didn't even do anything. I also keep many things in so I don't have many people asking if I am okay. I have learned to hide what I feel. I mostly do this for me and others so I don't get hurt. Everyone thinks I am strong but I am not. I have had so many thoughts but I don't say that is why I write. It helps me. I just hold everything in because I am scared. Even with writing to you I feel uncomfortable. And now I feel even more uncomfortable with writing this because with that I said a lot…Just please don't…….Don't show anyone this or mention it because again I will feel exposed like I feel exposed now saying (of writing all this).
Many times I have tried to say what on my mind but no one knows that I'm scared. I know what I want to say and do but when I try it I turn to goo. But no one knows I'm scared I'm dieing inside I always hide, but no one know that I'm scared.
Everything I say what I feel or anything its personal I am just ready to with anger, fear, and I just near done cry and I don't like to cry because it shows to much of what I feel

Luna—

I think this may have helped but I don't like how a few students were still being disrespectful and it's just not a healthy environment I go through enough crap at home I don't need it at school.

(*aside*)

Luna touched on an element of a drama class that may not be available in other classes—experiences beyond what happens at school. While all students at Eastside have access to the school counselor to discuss personal issues, not all students take advantage of that opportunity. Staff members at Eastside state a position of working with students on all levels of their needs, yet the primary focus on academics is pervasive. Luna acknowledged situations beyond school that can affect her perceptions of events at school. bell hooks (2010) maintains that teachers, "we can create a climate for optimal learning if we understand the level of emotional awareness and emotional intelligence in the classroom" (p. 19). As teachers, we need to know whom we are teaching. With this drama class being an elective and the ability of Amy to structure the content to meet the emotional needs of the participants, it is still a school setting. Students still exhibit behaviors that conform to expectations in a traditional school setting. That Luna felt she had a place to express her needs speaks to the importance of Eastside to provide that space through a drama class.

Guy—

I just want to say thank you for the session I think it will help us.

Erica—
I am so sorry you feel this way. I seen you really upset and it hurt me because you should not feel that way and just so you know I respect you 100%. Your awesome and I love that your here to help us.

Pepe—
Today's session was wild. I think that it helped everyone say that was on their mind. I think you calling out Forest was good. I'm sorry you started crying and I'm sorry people don't respect you.

Raven—
I think today was really important because we talk about thing that was should do it in the first time.

The Weird Potato—
I wanted to apologize for not really talking I have a whole bunch of family confusing problems right now

Luna Purple—
This was good and really needed I now know how people feel and what not to do!

Jackie—
How I feel about this was that almost everyone is messing around I will not explain anymore because I know I will say something I shouldn't
This is your journal…you can say whatever you need or want to
3-16
What I want to say is that most of the boys not all but most are messing around like when you were crying --- was making fun of you not in the circle a few months ago. Also people are never listening in class so why not embarrass them and tell them you mean business. No special treatment to like for Forest he doesn't do a lot in class while everyone else does.

Forest—
For this activity I felt like it was a waste of time and I will not help anyone solve anything and we could done something more productive sorry that just how I feel!!!!!!

Helga—
I love you guys

Megan—
I feel like the reason that the class fights is because every single person in this class is very unique. Personally I have nothing against anyone. I respect everyone. It's hard to control all of these very special people at once and I feel like Helga. I can depend on you guys. I am sorry for my bad behavior but I respect you guys.

At the conclusion of the Issues Circle, student-spoken responses were mixed.

Some thanked us for the opportunity to express their thoughts. Others felt I had been too

punitive to the few students who I 'called out' for behaviors. Critical literacy in the

classroom encourages power-sharing processes, yet there are some situations "where some students' disruptive behavior overwhelms other students and the teacher, making control the issue instead of knowledge-making or power-sharing" (Shor, 1999, para. 33). Those students who I specifically identified did not comment to Amy or me. They took their things and went on to their next class.

Reading the responses of the students, there is still the language that speaks to being in school and wanting to please the adults. I am seen as a 'teacher' and 'adult' who has power over the process. I am not seen as a guide in the sense that I did not have control over their grades and such. The trust I felt I had built was precarious and I needed to honor that. I am not sure that is what happened. Phrases that apologize for behaviors— 'I'm sorry' or 'I am sorry for my bad behavior', or state an alliance—'I love you guys' or 'I respect you guys' or 'Your awesome and I'm glad your here to help us' are written because those types of words are what are expected in a classroom setting. What is insightful are the statements and phrases that students feel they have a voice to express their perspectives. 'Even with writing to you I feel uncomfortable' or 'it's just not a healthy environment' as well as 'For this activity I felt like it was a waste of time' provided information. There were no accolades or repercussions for any of the language used. The methodology of PAR and diverging from a planned course offered discernment of experiences that produced "knowledge grounded in local realities that is also useful to local participants" (Herr & Anderson, 2015 p. 121). Learning from students through their experiences and perceptions is a valuable paradigm for adults working with adolescents.

The Core of the Work

This study contributes to the body of work of adolescent expression and experiences. Through lens of critical literacy and the work of outsider/insider practitioner action research, results of this research offers additional perspectives toward middle school students. Ira Shor's (1999) description of critical literacy is that it "challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development" (para. 1). What has become most evident in the data collected has been the need to build rapport and trust of the adolescent participants. Recognition that regardless of positionality of subordinate or superior, we all have experiences that impact us in public and private arenas.

> Life is expansive, it expands inside our own body, growing and developing, and it also expands in territory, physical and psychological, discovering spaces, forms, ideas, meanings, sensations—this should be done as dialogue: receiving from other what others have created, giving them the best of our own creation (Boal, 2002, p. 2).

Adolescents can thrive in this type of environment, yet I realized I was exploring my own perspectives and behaviors. I had some growing to do and dialogue in spoken or written form supplied a mirror for my comportment.

Providing a place where judgment is limited and opportunities for expression are expanded and enhanced is a start; however, the traditional framework of a school setting and expected behaviors from the individuals can impede true expression of ideas. Adults and students are presumed to fit in certain categories and when that framework is reconfigured, new learning is possible and old habits can be discarded.

CHAPTER 5: ACT 1

Build awareness. Interactions that require individuals to learn about others often

leads to a deeper understanding and appreciation of self. The ultimate focus of this study

was to offer dramatic techniques to explore areas of students' lives in ways for them to

experience their truth as they saw it and their personal role in that reality. My

positionality in this truth meant I had to reflect on my interactions, developing an

impartial language for collaboration. Augusto Boal (1979) professes in his work that any

person regardless of dramatic talent can speak the language of theatre. He offers that

"[t]here are many languages besides those that are written or spoken. By learning a new

language, a person acquires a new way of knowing reality and of passing that knowledge

on to others" (p. 121). We began this study by building rapport--a sort of language for

expectations and interactions--and now it we were ready to move into the work of

developing that language.

Act 1: The Beginning

Researcher's Journal/February 3, 2016

> Today was a challenge. The distractions with the students continues to be a
> concern. I guess I should reflect more closely on what is causing the distractions.
> Forest and ----- continue to lack focus and appreciation for group work. I hear
> under the breath of some of the students negative comments about the two boys'
> behaviors. Need to find a balance between being a 'teacher' and being a 'leader
> and guide' to the drama processes that are happening. I shouldn't have detailed
> information about things affecting their behaviors beyond the classroom, but I
> can't help but think there is something deep going on and it won't be 'fixed' in a
> short amount of time.

Amy has shared with me that while she understands the need for her students to

find a place to "be themselves" (Amy Smith, personal conversation, September, 2015),

she also is faced with the expectations from the district for adherence to policy and

protocol. That expectation comes from administration—the principal, Mr. Carson—who

are given the directive from upper district administration, and ultimately the state

education department. What is forgotten in this endeavor we call public education is the

voice of the students. Gerry Czerniawski and Warren Kidd (2011) have examined the

inclusion of student voice in cultivating judicious learning for students and teachers. In

their review of studies conducted primarily in the United Kingdom, Czerniawski and

Kidd describe

> Student Voice that is authentic and inclusive has the potential to subvert,
>
> undermine and transform limiting and limited market cultures and this means that
>
> there is some genuinely exciting, diverse, radical and meaningful practice 'out
>
> there'. However, all too often educational practice is invisible—hidden away with
>
> academic and policy-makers' voices taking priority over the stories of the
>
> teachers and learners themselves (p. xxxvi).

The focus of this study is to offer insight into the experiences of adolescents through their

own words as they develop and become more independent. The data gathered during this

study speaks to not only the drama strategies employed, but also a glimpse at what

middle school students are considering as they move forward. Student voice became the

guiding influence of what we were to do and how we would accomplish our goals. We

met some of these goals, and came up short on others. The strongest, perhaps most

significant theme to emerge from this study was the need for rapport. Along with rapport,

I it was necessary to inform students what my goals were for this study—and how they

would participate.

Consent

With the exception of Amy, the participants in this study were minors in a school setting. In order to minimize the impression of coercion for students to consent, a colleague from my department at the university, Kalama, described the study and presented the consent forms. Students had met Kalama before, and she had actually played some drama games. I made a point not to be present while the discussion was taking place. Amy stayed, as she was also identified as a participant and could offer reassurance that students deciding whether or not to participate would not affect their grade. Consent letters and forms were organized with the formal letter on top, the signature page printed on yellow paper, and an envelope for students to return the signed yellow page, sealed in the envelope. I went to the teachers' lounge to plan for the pre-survey and more games that would build on and maintain the rapport being developed.

Researcher's Journal/February 10, 2016

> I had given the principal, a letter explaining my study and the approval letter from the district. He shared his perspective of a decline in behavior referrals for students who were in the drama class—that they seem to "act out less" (Private conversation with Mr. Carlson, February, 2016) than they used to. I expressed that they have a little more latitude in their behaviors in drama without judgement, and that Amy and I were working to make it a safe space.

February 12, 2016

> Amy had the room set up for 'poetry slams' with her other classes. The chairs were set around in a circle, it was perfect to do some improv to create a story and listen to one another. We played "Yes, and…." Because there was a Valentine's dance that night, I started the story with a girl who liked three different guys. She was sitting in the cafeteria and all three guys were coming her way to ask her to the dance that night. The story then went around the circle a couple times and there were humorous additions and some serious statements. And of course the obligatory 'and then she woke up'….(this seems to be the default ending of a story)

Yes, and….
This is a variation of the game Telephone. The game is played to create a narrative story and responses are given aloud. In this improvisational game, participants sit in a circle, and one person begins a story. The next person adds to the story with the phrase, 'Yes, and…', accepting what has been offered as the narrative and progressing the story. When that person has added their piece, the next person in the circle begins with 'yes, and'. The process continues until the narrative has been passed around the circle and returns to the original participant. (Jones, 2006).

Maintaining Rapport

Having established rapport with the students, I wanted to maintain positive connections. Adolescence is a time of growth and change, with need for frequent reassurance that support is there when there are questions or request for guidance.

Professionals must find a way to relate comfortably to adolescents, and be flexible enough to accommodate the wide range of adolescents they are likely to encounter. And, professionals must recognize that developing effective communication with the adolescents with whom they work requires effort on their part. It may take a number of sessions of nonjudgmental listening to establish the trust needed for a particular adolescent to share with an adult what he or she is thinking and feeling. It may take even longer before an adolescent feels comfortable asking an adult for help with an important decision (Developing Adolescents, APA, 2002, pg. 3).

What I have seen in the work with the students at Eastside is that there are definite roles that all members of the school community take. Mostly, the hierarchal structure of teacher/student is in play and enforced. Rarely have I experienced students interacting with school staff where student perspective is regarded. Even Amy has expressed concern allowing students to have the freedom to explore beyond their expected academic

curriculum. She stated "I'm worried about how appropriate they'll be when they choose a topic" (personal communication, Smith, February, 2016). When I mentioned that they would have opportunities to explore topics and process ideas with the group, Amy saw the value of creating a trusting environment using drama games. As hooks (2010) offers, "[w]hen we see the classroom as a place where teacher and students can share their 'inner light' then we have a way to glimpse who we are and how we might learn together" (p. 20). Amy was willing to expand her teaching focus and allow her students to provide more input into their learning.

How students respond to the drama games, specifically the use of TO strategies?

It was essential to sustain trust and respect between all members of the group as we moved forward with our work. Over several sessions, we continued with some Boal's (2002) games using our bodies:

Minimum Surface Contact (Boal, 2002 p. 56)

Working very slowly, participants explore how parts of their body can be used to maintain minimum contact with the floor—hands, feet, elbows, fingers, buttocks, etc. Movements from one position to another must be made purposefully, allowing the actor to experience the muscles used to create and complete the movements. This activity is about "de-mechanising, de-structuring, dismantling" (Boal, 2002) perceptions of how something is done.

> ERICA: This is like yoga, Miss.
>
> FOREST: I'm just gonna stay on my butt.
>
> MEGAN: I'm gonna do a handstand!
>
> ERIN: (*to Megan*) YIKES! Maybe not…the floor is kinda hard and I don't want to clean up the mess.
>
> PAPI CHULO: I'll clean it up! We're all working together, aren't we?
>
> ERIN: (*to Papi*) How 'bout we work to protect each other instead?

Students were able to share some of their knowledge about how something like this game might expand beyond the classroom and school environments. I did not ask Megan about his ability to do a handstand, and he did nothing to reassure me he could. My comment about the hard floor was sarcastic, with a note of caution. I exercised my status as the teacher to alert students in order to maintain control. My ultimate responsibility as an adult is to acknowledge instances where physical safety is needed. Megan and Papi understood the limitations of what Megan could do physically. Papi stating that he would 'clean it up' demonstrated that he knew the outcome for Megan may not be perfect, and he was offering to assist with the aftermath. What I missed by making the statement 'protect each other instead' was the humor students were infusing into the game. I felt I was providing students with opportunities to explore alternative ways to find success—Forest staying on his 'butt' or Erica noticing yoga-type movements—providing a place for students to try something new. The opportunity I rushed through was that of community laughter. As bell hooks (2010) asserts in her work on critical thinking, "…wit and regular everyday humor could really serve to create a more open atmosphere in the classroom. Simply put, laughter shared can draw groups closer together" (p. 71). I overlooked the chance to laugh as a group.

Slow Motion (Boal, 2002, p.71)

The winner is the last person home. Participants begin on one side of the space as though they were all in a running race. However, this race is to be 'run' in slow motion. Every movement, from feet to arms and hands must be done as slowly as possible. Foot falls must be loud, and all movements should be exaggerated and muscles used should be explored. Also, both feet should never be on the floor at the same time—as one foot moves down and to the ground, the other should be picked up and begin to move forward.

FOREST: Oh My God!! I can't move this slowly!!

HELGA: For the first time in your life, try it!

> FOREST: But it hurts!
>
> LUNA PURPLE: Drama queen….

Forest stating that he 'can't move this slowly' offered insight into what students are asked to do by those in charge—teachers, parents, other adults. Many times, adolescents are told 'hurry up,' 'you need to finish,' 'we gotta go,' and rarely offered 'take your time,' 'no need to rush.' With a sarcastic twist, Luna Purple and Helga have assumed the role of peer coach possibly because the adults in their lives have offered certain expectations of compliance. Helga, with a note of frustration in his voice, specifically pointed to a behavior that Forest was capable of completing successfully-- 'for the first time in your life, try it!' Ira Shor (1999) proposes, "there is simply not universal teacher authority uniformly empowered in front of standard students. Teachers, students, and settings differ (para. 33). Helga and Forest had other classes together and both had been students at Eastside for seventh and eighth grade. Helga was aware of Forest and his mannerisms beyond what I experienced in class. Luna Purple was also familiar with Forest in other school related contexts. She felt emboldened to follow Helga's comment with a label she and her peers use for exaggerated behaviors--'drama queen". Forest did not respond to Helga and Luna Purple and continued with the activity in silence.

While Forest is an active young man, he may not have opportunities to slow down and pace himself. As a teacher, I ask myself, 'How often do I rush students through something?' Perhaps promptness is something to consider when we ask adolescents to complete a task. Again, hooks (2010) offers that teachers who appreciate conversation as a "key to knowledge acquisition" (p.44) recognize that people tend to overlook roles in

communication and become inert consumers of information. The adjustment may need to be in adult expectations rather than in responses from those who are younger.

This game also provided students the *physical* experience of completing a task at a different pace. Focusing on how their arms might move in relation to their legs. Noticing how they move their feet when actually taking a step. Many of them looked down at the floor to see where to place their feet and not impede someone else's progress. The expectations for this game stipulated thought before action.

There are times when non-verbal communication expresses thoughts beyond spoken words. Forest chose to express himself physically, with his goal of attention manifesting itself through movement. It was also a chance for him to disengage and distract from the focus of the activity and exert some of his own power. Forest displays a certain level of leadership with his peers. He belongs to the outspoken group in the class; however, within that group, his membership can vary due to his actions. He is the 'funny guy' of the group and when his peers want to be serious, his actions can leave him excluded from the group.

DRAMA MAMA: Forest, your group needs you. They're over there (*points across the space*).

(*Forest begins to roll on the floor toward his cast of students. DM steps back and watches*)

FOREST: (*to Kalama, as he's rolling*) You're not videoing this, are you?

KALAMA: Yes I am (*pause*) Roll dramatically.

(*Forest smiles, continues to roll until he reaches his group*)

Figure 28: Dramatic response

The slow-motion game could very well have been painful for him—not in a physiological sense as much as in the challenge of doing something very different. Kalama and I found that rather than punish Forest for being off task, it was important to stay true to the implied contract with students—give them space to do what they need/want to do within expanded boundaries.

> *Stick in the Mud* (Boal, 2002, p. 80)
> This is a game of tag. Two people are 'it'. As the group runs around the space (we did this outside on a grass field), the two who are 'it' will tag the others. Once a person is tagged, he/she must stand with his/her legs apart and cannot move until another player comes and crawls through the legs of an immobilized player. NOTE: Students developed an alternative to the crawling portion of the game— all that was needed to release a frozen player was to gently kick the empty space between their legs.

> RAVEN: I like being outside. It's fun. Not everybody is looking at me.
>
> ERIN: So, what if we stayed in the big room?
>
> RAVEN: I wouldn't want to play. I get nervous.
>
> ERIN: This works?

RAVEN: Yeah, for me.

Raven is a second language learner whose first language is spoken by only a small percentage of students at Eastside. She has shared with me through informal conversations that when others ask her to count to 10 or say hello in her first language, she feels like she is on display—that it's "a game or show for them" (Raven, personal conversation, March, 2016). Her comment about others not looking at her, Raven disclosed that not only was she uncomfortable revealing her language, but also her physical self. The grass field was a space used by students at Eastside for their PE classes and for socializing during lunch breaks. This activity was the first time we used the field as a learning space and it was a new context for students. The field offered a freedom to Raven to engage with the lesson safely. Letting me know that this structure for the game provided a safe space for her indicated that Raven trusted in the work. Gee (2011) speaks to the physical context of discourse, where setting frames the language in which participants engage. He states,

> Context includes the physical setting in which the communication takes place and everything in it; the bodies, eye gaze, gestures, and movements of those present; all that has previously been said and done by those involved in the communication; and shared knowledge those involved have, including cultural knowledge, that is, knowledge of their own sheared culture and any other cultures that may be relevant in the context (p. 84).

The grass field granted Raven unspoken permission to participate at an extent with which she felt comfortable. She ran along with her close friends and they worked together to not get caught. Raven's friends would help out others and unfreeze then, which allowed Raven to engage in her own way.

In many classes in public schools, there are students who are not as vocal and outwardly engaged as others. Those students need to not only be recognized, but also accommodated. The opportunity to work in a different setting—the grass field—provided a 'level playing field' for the participants. It wasn't a space with tables and chairs; it wasn't a place where there was room to work, but still the boundaries of four walls. Invisible boundaries were established and with the trust we had developed as a group, we knew the expectations.

Pushing Against Each Other/Variation (Boal, 2002, p. 60)

In pairs and standing, students lean against one another, back to back. Never breaking contact with their backs, the pair gradually works together to sit on the floor. Once they are seated and remaining back to back, the pairs work to stand again. An additional challenge is to try to stand without the use of their hands.

NATIVE WOLF: This is my favorite game! Me and my partner were able to get up and down—but we had to use our hands. We giggled a lot.

LIL DICKY: My partner was too short. We couldn't do it.

ERIN: But you got to choose your partner.

LIL DICKY: Yeah, but I didn't know what we would have to do!

PAPI CHULO: Yeah, I'm shorter than he is. He should have worked with Megan.

FOREST: No! Megan was my partner.

ERIN: Did it work for you two?

FOREST: No, but Megan is always my partner.

For this game, some partners worked to find success—'Me and my partner were able to get up and down', while others were focused on established parameters of comfort--'Megan is always my partner'. It could also be that Forest is uncomfortable with change. Due to the nature of the dramatic work, many of the lessons were new for Forest, which made him search for what he knew rather than explore and expand his understanding of

experiences. Gee (2011) proposes that language is used to "build and sustain relationships" (p. 89). The statement from Forest about Megan always being his partner displays the social construct of the friendship between these two young men. Forest acknowledging that he and Megan were not successful, but that Megan as his partner— 'No! Megan was my partner'—was a priority for Forest. Amy has shared with me that Forest has an untraditional home life and that "could be why he feels the need to be impulsive" (Amy, personal communication, February, 2016). Forest's experiences beyond school may also contribute to his need for familiar, achievable goals.

Native Wolf was a newer student to Eastside, and she was building friendships. She was outgoing and enjoyed having a space to develop her social presence at Eastside. The drama games created opportunities for interactions and assisted her in developing connections. Native Wolf's passion for writing supported her through the dialogue journals.

> **Native Wolf**
> It is not hard from me to hide from my feelings I can evade them for vast period of times. Also to be honest there is not one. I keep almost everyone out of my heart so I don't get hurt. I am not exactly strong I just build a wall around my heart.
> *Erin: I get it. You are me when I was in eighth grade. I hadn't moved or anything but I needed my friends to give me strength. Still have some of them to this day. And when I was in high school, drama helped.*
> …I am trying to open up more some. I notice how it's becoming harder for me to hold stuff in. Most of it is emotional and mostly anger…I am trying to open up more and since the only person who ever really got me to talked moved…so anyway… How are you?
> *Erin: I've been noticing … that Jackie may be distracting you….*
> I guess so. Okay. Anyway, I think it is both of us who are distracting each other. We are becoming friends and it is fun. Also as we mess around we also work.

As the semester progressed, Native Wolf was able to trust the written dialogue of the journals and allow me to peek over any walls she had built. When she wrote that she

kept 'almost everyone out of my heart so I don't get hurt', I saw myself at that age. Adolescence is a time when we transition from holding fast to our parents, guardians, and protectors and try to navigate unknown or unclear expectations. We look to others--our peers, teachers, trusted adults--to fill roles of guides in our lives. Through the work of the drama games, Native Wolf found a place where she began to create trusting relationships to offer support. The connection between Native Wolf and her partner was made relevant to others with the sharing of their success. She and her partner are of similar physical stature, which may have helped in their success. The phrase 'we giggled a lot' speaks to the joy shared by both Native Wolf and her partner.

Then there was the perspective of Papi and Lil Dicky. They recognized that the work *with* a partner was the emphasis for this game. Lil Dicky stating that his partner was 'too short' and Papi offering that Lil Dicky 'should have worked with Megan'. Both seemed to understand the objective in the game and were willing to adjust to meet the goal. The reaction to the paired activity highlighted "that social groups and cultures have norms and standards about how actions should be done" (Gee, 2011. p. 98). Gee also suggests that we look at language and activities as a broad construct and not isolated to a single incident. These students could be direct, clear, and concise in their assessment of their work. Yet, while all four young men are members of the same social group, Forest's insistence to work with Megan sometimes leaves him on the fringes of the group. He has difficulty finding his place in the group. There were several obvious perspectives from partners in this game. One was to maintain social connections and another to accomplish a goal.

Good Day (Boal, 2002, p. 85)

This is a good game for groups who have come together to work for the first time. The first time through, each person has to shake hands, make eye contact, and say their name with another person; they can only let go of that person's hand when they are able to shake hands with another person. For a variation, the second time through, participants must try to remember the names of the people they have met. As they shake hands with that person, they must say the name of that person.

> NATIVE WOLF: (*before the game began*) Miss? (*looks Erin in the eye*) I can't make eye contact. It scares me.
>
> ERIN: Why does it scare you?
>
> NATIVE WOLF: I think it's part of my stage fright.
>
> ERIN: (*reassuring*) Well, try it. Start with the people you like. (*pause*) You know that one day, you will have to go for a job interview, shake the hand of the person doing the interview, and look them in the eye.
>
> NATIVE WOLF: Okay…I guess if I can do it with these guys, it'll help.

Students in this drama class have known one another for a while, yet making purposeful eye contact with peers was intimidating. For Native Wolf, who had only been at Eastside for about six weeks, it scared her. Her cultural background was one where children do not make eye contact with adults, yet she was relaxed with me. I assumed that with her peers, she would be comfortable with the interactions. As Amy and I debriefed, she asked how Native Wolf did. As a newer student, Amy wanted to "know how she [Native Wolf] is adjusting to the new school and the class" (personal conversation, February 2016). It was then I realized what I was asking Native Wolf to do and that it was contrary to everything I knew about her culture. I recognized that as she and I spoke, I could see the apprehension in Native Wolf's eyes. She was a student who did well in her academics and loved to write. Native Wolf's passion for writing provides a solitary practice where

she could maintain her comfort level--and distance--with social interactions. She was being asked to engage in an activity that required trust not only with her peers, but also with the adults in charge. Her statement of 'I guess if I can do it with these guys, it'll help' demonstrated a level of trust that was built in a relatively short period of time. However, in the discussion I had with Amy, I saw my own ignorance in assuming Native Wolf's participation.

While my culture is of the dominate culture, there was a level with which I could identify with Native Wolf's position. I was never the 'new kid', but I was known as 'painfully shy'. By finding groups with which I could take risks and trust in the others— choir and drama classes—I found agency from peers that assisted me in building positive social skills. Native Wolf was beginning to find that same space. In her work with critical thinking, bell hooks (2010) maintains that "[e]motional awareness and the expression of emotions necessarily have a place in the classroom" (p. 81). Native Wolf needed that short amount of time to tell me how she was feeling and teachers need to take a moment for students to position themselves to lessons that may be unfamiliar to them.

The Plain Mirror (Boal, 2002, p. 130)

In pairs, participants choose who will be 'A'—the subject, and who will be 'B'— the image. The subject begins with movements that the image must follow. This includes large physical movements as well as small, facial movements expressing different emotions. The idea is not for the subject to challenge the image to follow, but to create synchronistic motions so that an outside observer cannot tell who is the subject and who is the image. After a minute or two, pairs switch roles and the subject becomes the image and the image becomes the subject.

ERIN: (*debriefing*) There were some pairs who really fooled me. I couldn't tell who was leading and who was following. Why do you suppose that happened?

ALEX: Well, my partner moved slowly and it was easy to follow her.

ROSES: (*to Alex*) But then you went really fast!

ERIN: So speed of movement made a difference?

COWGIRL: Yeah…we really had to watch

STITCH: And pay attention…

ERIN: Focus is important?

KASH: Yeah! We need to know what's happening on stage.

ERIN: What about other parts of your life?

KASH: Yeah.

<div align="right">(from Games for Actors and Non-actors. Augusto Boal)</div>

The mirror game is basic in the repertoire of most drama work done with students. They were familiar with the game and needed very little instruction how to play it. Students were asked to choose their own partner, which provided some reassurance at finding success. Roses and Alex are friendly to one another. One is in seventh grade and the other in eighth, so drama is the only class they share. Roses' response—'But then you went really fast'— made to Alex's observation that 'my partner moved slowly and it was easy to follow her' allowed Roses to tell her older peer of her frustration with their work. The comment was not accusatory, but there was some exasperation on Roses' part toward Alex. Nothing more came of this exchange, and both students continued to work well together.

During debriefing, Cowgirl suggested 'we really had to watch' and Stitch followed up almost immediately with 'And pay attention'. Kash provided the reason for the need to focus with 'We need to know what's happening on stage'. All three young ladies offered different levels of spoken participation during most sessions in the past. The willingness of Cowgirl to offer her insight without specific prompting was a risk

with which she felt comfortable. She is a quiet student who aligns with other girls who share her demeanor. The girls had also paired with different members of the group, yet they all provided answers to my question of why the group felt things went the way they did. They were not the first to offer comments and the comments they reported were safe. The statements were obvious from the point of having done the activity; the students knew that to work at a certain pace provided success.

Dialogue Journals—Responses to games

The oral, whole group debriefing we did after each game limited the time for students to record their thoughts and the actual written responses. However, the responses to the games were positive and in most cases, succinct. The brevity of the entries was due to students focus on the games where they felt successful or the need of the diversion of the games. There were no expected outcomes or need to complete a task--just engage and participate. Students rarely have the opportunity in school to share activities where the only purpose is to decompress and step away from any pressure. Drama games provided that outlet.

Luna Purple—
The slow motion game worked for me because I was the first one.

Helga—
This game taught us to take turns

Megan—
I thought this was a very fun activity for (incomplete)

Pepe—
It's been awhile since we've played games.

Erica—
It was something new today and I enjoyed it

Luna—
This was more fun than usual so I like that.

Lil Dicky—
I like the games.

Amy and I discussed the games and their purposes after each session. At one point in our post-session debriefing, Amy pointed out that there was a stressful atmosphere at the school. Teachers and students were feeling "less engaged" and "somewhat distracted" (Amy Smith, personal conversation, March, 2016). Teachers at Eastside were feeling pressured to follow district-wide expectations and pacing guides while accommodating the needs of students that impact students beyond academics. Students' lives at Eastside outside of school were impacted by social and economic circumstances over which they had little control. The diversity of the student population varied both culturally and economically. To turn away from the needs of the students separate from the classroom was stressful for all staff members. Students from varying backgrounds were expected to achieve success with material that addressed standardized curriculum unrelated to their realities. Those expectations caused pressure for students to achieve when, for some, they just wanted to get through the day.

Amy and I discussed what was being done for staff and students at Eastside. We wondered what we were doing to relieve some of the pressure students felt. We stated, almost in unison, 'drama games!'. Amy said she felt the drama games and the class offered a diversion for students from some of the more academic classes and expectations. bell hooks (2010) articulated her position as she began her teaching career that the classroom is a learning community and that all members, teachers and students, need to be engaged. She encouraged her students to believe that they were participants in

creating and maintaining an interesting space for learning. hooks reminds us that the teacher is ultimately responsible for the classroom, "but students also shape dynamics." (p. 118). While drama games may seem frivolous and 'fluff,' they provide not only opportunities for building ensemble and trust among the members of the group, games also relieve stress. They provide a strong foundation for future work, and are appropriate for use with groups looking to find commonality, support, and release from tension.

- *How students perceive instructional strategies used and their own learning?*

Expectations—Students and Adults

Creating an ensemble of people who work together to explore experiences of members requires commitment to participate on all levels from all constituents. The expectations of students and adults—Amy, the teacher and me, the researcher—were set early. Amy was concerned about the engagement of the students and wanted to find a balance in the work to for students to "find ownership and empowerment over their work" (Amy Smith, personal conversation, February, 2016). She struggled with letting go and encouraging students—the balance was her personal learning goal. Because she needed a direction for this dramatic journey, Amy and I discussed a framework to structure the lessons for the study. In my work as the drama resource teacher for the school district, I developed a simple diagram for working with students who were new to drama. We followed the steps from this structure to engage students at a pace that allowed success at different stages of the study.

First, it was individuals and simultaneous work, and then it was with partners. Amy worked to find the balance of 'grading for participation' and not 'grading for quality'. She was a participant and she and I kept that in mind as the students engaged in

the experience without being 'graded' on the actual work they produced. Amy and I both saw the value in creating a climate where boundaries for students were a little less formal and a little more inviting. The environment in which we worked required commitment from all participants, and "[j]ust as the students' will to learn must be encouraged and nurtured, teachers need to learn effective ways to teach" (hooks, 2010, p. 119). Amy was willing to work with the structure provided, as she saw a benefit for her students who were more tentative about the work of drama.

In my previous work with using drama as an instructional tool, I attended a workshop where the presenter was discussing strategies for working with students. This presenter was well-known in the community for working with adolescents and with very serious theatrical genres. As the workshop unfolded, the diagram below came to my mind and I had jotted it down in the since-lost notes I took that day. As a drama resource teacher, I created this diagram as a useful visual to assist teachers to understand how to address the needs of young performers.

Figure 29: Feedback from others
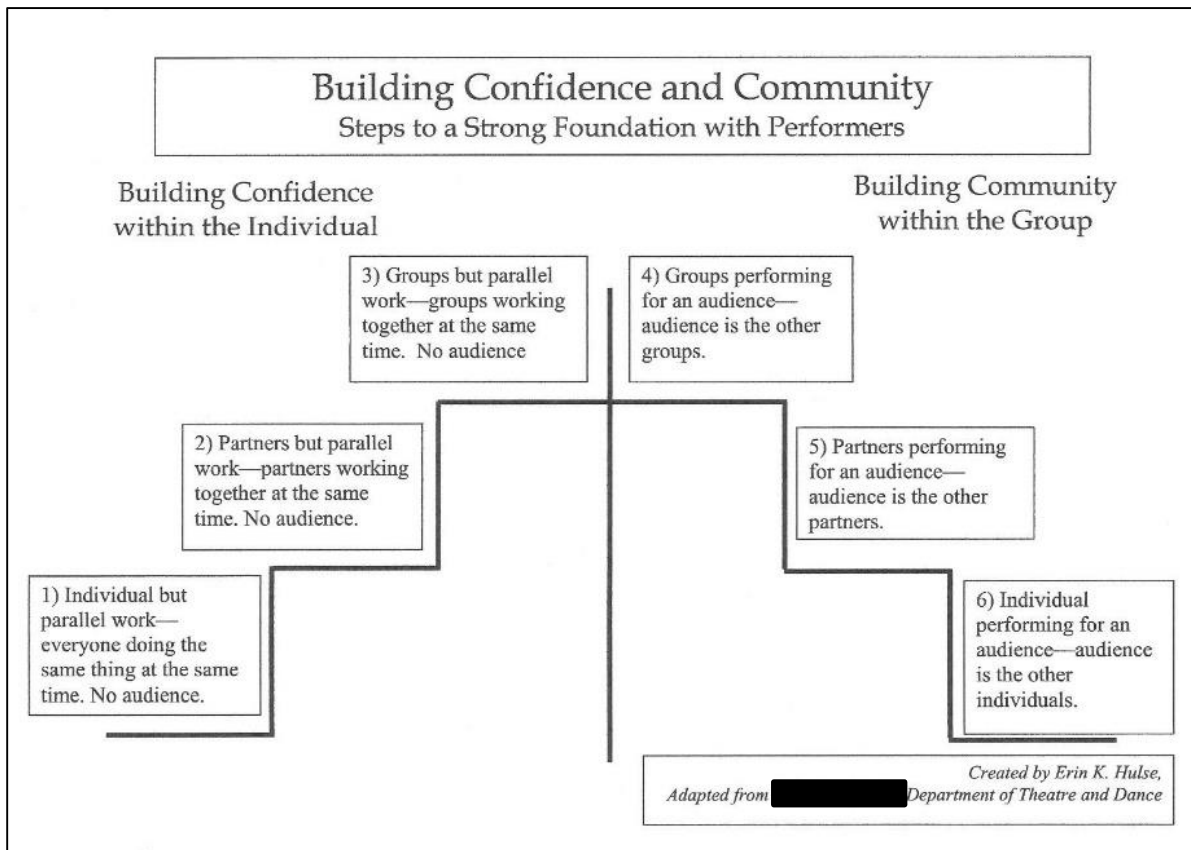
Figure 30: Steps for working with groups

Beginning with simple drama games, students work individually. They become physical as well as oral storytellers. This work fits well with Boal's (1979) "knowing the body" stage of TO work, getting to "know one's body, it's limitations and possibilities" (p. 126). This step is done with all participants simultaneously, with only the guide/teacher watching the progress. Boal suggests that games help the participants use physical elements as a means of self-expression (p. 130). This work leads to the next step of working with a partner, again with only the guide or teacher as the audience. Partner work urges interaction, yet negotiations of content of the representation of the work requires only two psyches. Collaboration and compromise are essential to the success of the pair. Then the partnerships move on to larger groups. Boal states that the importance of the games is that "all the participants try to express themselves through their bodies,

something they are not used to doing" (p. 130). For adolescents, the physicalization of

their thoughts and ideas is more of a challenge due to the physical changes they cannot

avoid. It is important to implement techniques for students to bolster their confidence--in

themselves and others--before they move on to performing for any audience. Once

participants are comfortable with the first three steps, they are ready to move on to

creating a community or ensemble with the entire group.

In the fourth step of this approach, the participants are in a space where others are

watching them. The 'others' should be members of the community who understand and

accept the work that has brought them all to this point. Beginning with groups provides

'safety in numbers' and students can rely on their peers to present the story of the group.

This step supports Boal's (1979) idea of audience as spect-actors and the elimination of

the traditional 'fourth wall' of theatre--the invisible separation of performers and

audience. Here, and in subsequent steps, focus can be on "the theme to be discussed and

furthers the transition from passivity to action" (p. 132). Even if the ensemble is not

considering direct action, these steps support successful work with performers. When

those performers are adolescents, these steps become vital in the overall accomplishments

of the community.

Researcher's Journal/February 17, 2016

> I had the students take the pre-survey. I used their responses to help me develop
> statements for a 'Middle School Walk' about positions that they feel are important
> to their lives. ----- really didn't answer the questions—and that should be telling
> too. There is something I may need to focus on, even if he doesn't consent, where
> he can find a way to participate.

Pre-study Surveys

Student perspective is the concentration of the work of this study. Participants

completed a pre-study survey in order to inform me on the observations of this group of

adolescents. It was important to frame the work in this study around their thoughts and experiences. Purpose should be intrinsic with lessons presented in classrooms. By incorporating students' realities and views of their worlds, there is a relationship and richness in learning. When the teacher creates a space for collaboration, students can "name their fears, voice their resistance to thinking, speak out, and they can also fully celebrate the moments where everything clicks and collective learning is taking place" (hooks, 2010, p. 21). The surveys provided a direction for the content of the lessons for this study. The two impediments I needed to recognize were: 1) the reality of constructing lessons from the input of such a varied source as a class of 26 middle school students, and 2) these surveys were administered in a school setting and student responses would be limited. As the researcher and director of the lessons, I also became the arbiter of what to include and what to leave out. The ability to include all points of view was impractical and I had to choose those themes that were most prevalent.

Pre survey

⑥ Respect: ℍℍ |

⑰ Reality: ℍℍ ℍℍ ℍℍ ||

⑱ Being w/ friends: ℍℍ ℍℍ ℍℍ |||

㉕ Unfamiliar TT or FT: ℍℍ ℍℍ ℍℍ ℍℍ ℍℍ

㉑ Working w/ others: ℍℍ ℍℍ ℍℍ ℍℍ |

⑩ Being alone: ℍℍ ℍℍ

⑩ Learn skills: ℍℍ ℍℍ

④ War/Action/Horror theme: ||||

⑳ Drama Games/likes: ℍℍ ℍℍ ℍℍ ℍℍ

⑤ Drama Games/boring: ℍℍ

① Depression: |

③ Open to play topic: |||

① Funny play: |

⑦ Choice/Ownership: ℍℍ ||
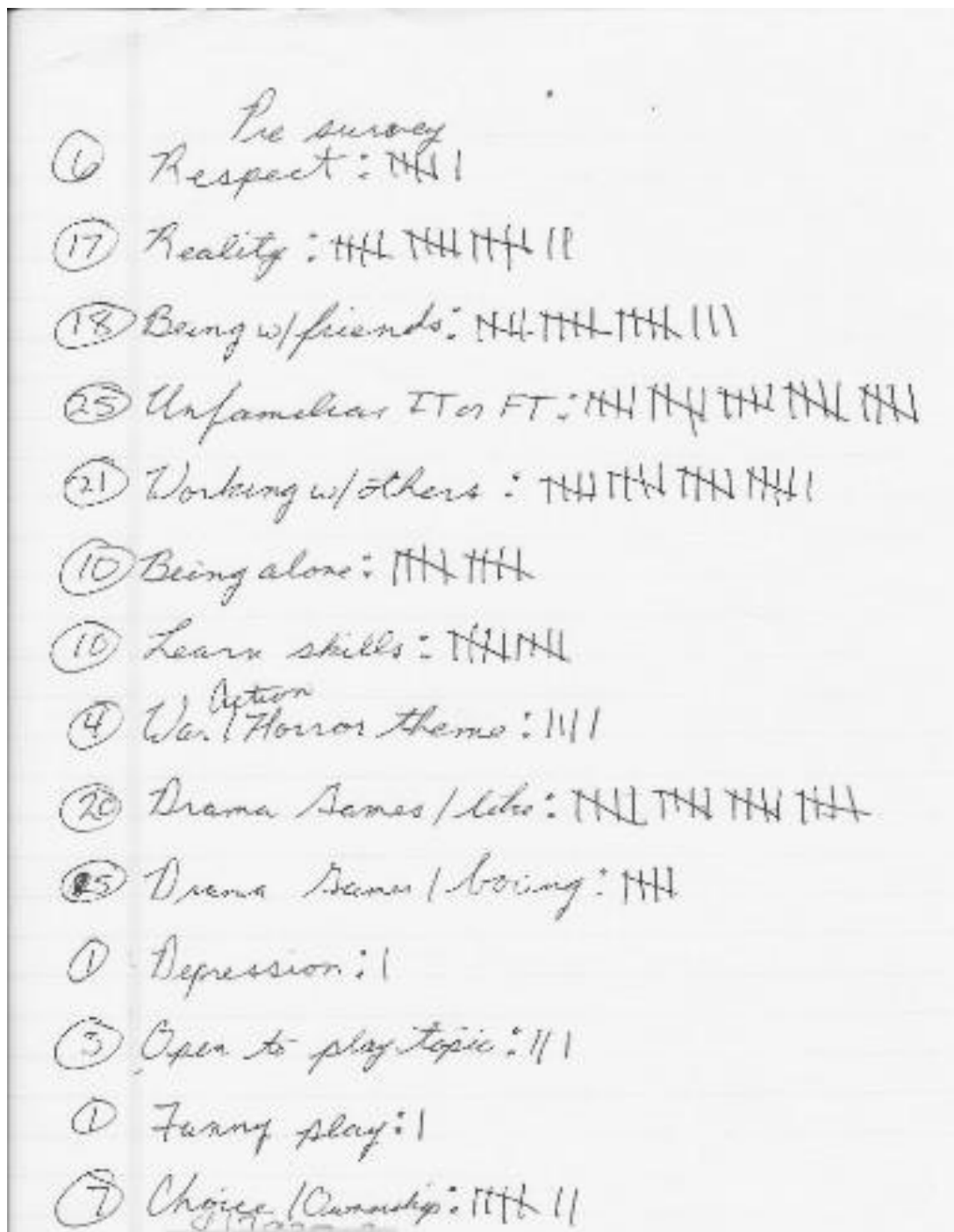
Figure 31: Pre-Survey Tally

2-17-16

Pre Survey Middle School Drama Students

Pseudonym Cowgirl

Please respond to the following comments with what you are comfortable sharing. If you are not sure of an answer, give me your best guess.
Tell me about yourself—things you would like people to know about you.
I like to

___✓___ hang with my friends
_____ find quiet time and be alone

Describe what you expect from being in this drama class and working with the other students.

I expect how to be more socialized and not be scared of presenting in front of others.

Tell me about doing drama games.

Doing drama games is fun sometimes when I feel like doing them

If this group were to create a play, what would you like it to be about? Why?

If this group were doing a play I would like it to be about animals or friends.

Figure 32: Cowgirl p. 1

Tell me what you know about Image Theatre (still images/tableaux) and Forum Theatre (improvisation of scenes).

I do not know what this is.

The group will have a choice to perform what the group creates for an audience. Describe for me what you think about that.

I think its a good idea to learn certain things.

Tell me anything else about you that you would like me to know about you.

My favarite animal is a horse.
I like to hang out with my friends
My life is good.
And I love my family

Figure 33: Cowgirl p. 2

Pre Survey Middle School Drama Students

Pseudonym Roses

Please respond to the following comments with what you are comfortable sharing. If you are not sure of an answer, give me your best guess.
Tell me about yourself — things you would like people to know about you.

I like to
___X___ hang with my friends
_____ find quiet time and be alone

Describe what you expect from being in this drama class and working with the other students.

To become friends with others.

Tell me about doing drama games.

Its kinda fun and boring at the same time.

If this group were to create a play, what would you like it to be about? Why?

Nothing

Figure 34: Roses p. 1

Tell me what you know about Image Theatre (still images/tableaux) and Forum Theatre (improvisation of scenes).

Nothing

The group will have a choice to perform what the group creates for an audience. Describe for me what you think about that.

I don't know

Tell me anything else about you that you would like me to know about you.

nothing

Figure 35: Roses p.2

Pre Survey Middle School Drama Students

Pseudonym Megan Fox

Please respond to the following comments with what you are comfortable sharing. If you are not sure of an answer, give me your best guess.
Tell me about yourself — things you would like people to know about you.
  I like to
    ____✓____ hang with my friends
    _____ find quiet time and be alone

Describe what you expect from being in this drama class and working with the other students.

I expect to learn skills that can help me in the drama field.

Tell me about doing drama games.

I think they are fun sometimes but it gets boring after a while of doing them every day.

If this group were to create a play, what would you like it to be about? Why?

I would like it to be a horror play, I think it would be fun to get fake blood and act scared.

Figure 36: Megan p. 1

Tell me what you know about Image Theatre (still images/tableaux) and Forum Theatre (improvisation of scenes).

I dont know anything about image theatre. I know that forum theatre is where you make up the story/dialogue as you go along.

The group will have a choice to perform what the group creates for an audience. Describe for me what you think about that.

I think its cool but I dont do very good in front of a big audience.

Tell me anything else about you that you would like me to know about you.

I like to do stuff but not too much of the same thing.

Figure 37: Megan p. 2

Pre Survey Middle School Drama Students

Pseudonym _Pepe_ _____

Please respond to the following comments with what you are comfortable sharing. If you are not sure of an answer, give me your best guess.

Tell me about yourself—things you would like people to know about you.

I like to

_____✓_____ hang with my friends

_____✓_____ find quiet time and be alone

Describe what you expect from being in this drama class and working with the other students.

I expect everyone to participate.

Tell me about doing drama games.

Drama games are the most fun thing about Drama

If this group were to create a play, what would you like it to be about? Why?

I want it to be a funny play.

Figure 38: Pepe p. 1

Tell me what you know about Image Theatre (still images/tableaux) and Forum Theatre (improvisation of scenes).

I don't really know what that is.

The group will have a choice to perform what the group creates for an audience. Describe for me what you think about that.

I think that's a good idea, because we have a choice if we want to or not.

Tell me anything else about you that you would like me to know about you.

My Name Is

Pepe! People say I look like a frog and my fav color is green.

Figure 39: Pepe p. 2

2-17-K

Pre Survey Middle School Drama Students

Pseudonym **Helga is name**

Please respond to the following comments with what you are comfortable sharing. If you are not sure of an answer, give me your best guess.

Tell me about yourself — things you would like people to know about you.

I like to

_____ hang with my friends

___✓___ find quiet time and be alone

I like plaing game's on my Xbox becouse my family is weird like one time my dad smashed his head on the freezer and befor this he claimed that all the pots in the house were his so I like to keep to myself.

Describe what you expect from being in this drama class and working with the other students.

I just thought we would be doing alot of play's not stueles

Tell me about doing drama games.

love it

If this group were to create a play, what would you like it to be about? Why?

If it was diffrent from usal.

Figure 40: Helga p. 1

Tell me what you know about Image Theatre (still images/tableaux) and Forum Theatre (improvisation of scenes).

I dont know eny thing about that

The group will have a choice to perform what the group creates for an audience. Describe for me what you think about that.

I understand how that would be good but alot of these this's are anti sooial

Tell me anything else about you that you would like me to know about you.

I like learnig about dos's
I like plading gomes
I have 2 dog's
I love being frendly

Figure 41: Helga p. 2

2-17-16

Pre Survey Middle School Drama Students

Pseudonym___Guy_____

Please respond to the following comments with what you are comfortable sharing. If you are not sure of an answer, give me your best guess.

Tell me about yourself — things you would like people to know about you.

I like to
___X___ hang with my friends
___X___ find quiet time and be alone

Describe what you expect from being in this drama class and working with the other students.

To have a good time and learn to act things good.

Tell me about doing drama games.

They can help In a lot of ways.

If this group were to create a play, what would you like it to be about? Why?

Any kind of trubals in School.

Figure 42: Guy p. 1

Tell me what you know about Image Theatre (still images/tableaux) and Forum Theatre (improvisation of scenes).

It is live, acting, any thing

The group will have a choice to perform what the group creates for an audience. Describe for me what you think about that.

That is a great Idea.

Tell me anything else about you that you would like me to know about you.

Nope I think Im good.

Figure 43: Guy p. 2

The survey questions limited participants to generalities about their lives but specifics about their drama experiences. The design of the first question was to elicit details about what students do with their free time. Many students checked off how they spent time, either with friends or alone. Most did check that they enjoyed spending time with friends, yet did not provide details. Helga stated that he likes 'playing games on my xbox because my family is weird'and due to behaviors he seems unclear about, Helga prefers "to keep to myself". Helga is one of the more vocal students and positively interacts with most every student in class, so it was a surprise that he mentioned he sought time alone.

Walk In the Shoes of a Middle Schooler

Reoccurring themes that appeared in these responses were feelings of differences and trust. Social groupings and friends also were prevalent themes in these journal entries. Participants offered expended perspectives on the results of the walk and that may be due to our engaging in purposeful drama games and debriefing at the end of each session. After completing a pre-survey with students, we began lessons related to the study. This first activity I called *Walking in the Shoes of a Middle Schooler*. We began with students positioned in a shoulder to shoulder line, with a strip of tape on the floor. This place was termed our 'neutral' place. As I read statements, students were to take a step forward to register a 'yes' or a step back to register a 'no'.

Scene 1

Time: February afternoon, 2016

Place: A large space in a classroom at Eastside Middle School

At Rise: Drama Mama (DM) is discussing with students what the activity will be. There is a line of masking tape on the floor. This is to provide a visual cue for participants to find the neutral spot for the activity.

Lights Up

DM: Go ahead and leave your dialogue journals

S: Squat

DM: right where they are and come stand on the line, please.

MRS. SMITH: Everyone knows how to stand, right?

S: No, you're not going to (*inaudible*)

S: No, I was here

S: How can you do anything?

AMY: Okay, last time I gave you participation grades, I will do the same this time.

S: Scoot over

AMY: Some of you were worried about your grades last time (*inaudible*) some of you can (*inaudible*) Make sure you are on the line….look at your feet and make sure your arch should be on the middle of that line down there…the arch of your foot

S: Scoot up just a little….-----is not there

DM: (*slowly*) I am calling this…and I will call this in my final dissertation report, Walking in the Shoes of a Middle Schooler (pause) and that's what I decided to name this ….there's different names for this depending upon the topics and…and the ideas that are presented, but this is… this is an exercise in….kinda the things, I mean the things that…that impact you or

the things you think about. Now, like I said, the ones that we're going to do as a group, right now, physically are ideas that were kinda popping into my head as I was reading through those pre study surveys I gave you. Some people just took the survey and like I said back in class, we'll…..I'll weave those back into tomorrow's exercises if there's something that's really different, critical, or unique…..

Alright, so remember for this….and we don't have a whole lot of space…but remember for this, if it affects you 'yes'… (*students take a small step forward*) if you would answer 'yes' to this, I would like you to take a step forward…. If your answer to this is 'no', I want you to take a step back….okay? Are there any questions about this?

AMY: And I'm going to be writing names down of any people who have points deducted, I'll be writing names down.

DM: Okay…and Mrs. Smith is looking for participation, remember? You're not graded on the yes or no, you're just graded on whether or not you're participating, okay? Are you ready?

S: Ya….Ya….Si

S: with what?

S: (*murmur of voices*)

PAPI CHULO: Stop talking!

DM: Those of you who are ready, thank you. (*pause*) I have at least one friend in each of my classes.

(*Lights down*)

This 'walk' continued with different statements related to student responses from the pre-surveys. The challenge for me in this activity was to find a balance between lecture and providing the basics of the activity. When an instructor is lecturing, hooks (2010) suggests that "a good portion of the audience has ceased to listen, that their minds have wandered off, away from the speaker toward all that really matters in their life" (p.

64). After the instructions, when I asked for questions, Amy stated that she was only grading based on the participation of the students.

Figure 44: The Walk

Walking in the Shoes of a Middle Schooler

Pseudonym:_____Date:_____

Statement		
I like horror stories and movies.	Yes	No
Video games are cool to play.	Yes	No
I like to play sports and be active.	Yes	No
I think action movies are cool.	Yes	No
I have at least one friend in each of my classes.	Yes	No
I like anime.	Yes	No
I know at least one adult I can trust.	Yes	No
I like the idea of telling others about troubles we may have at school.	Yes	No
My life is interesting.	Yes	No
Friends are important to me.	Yes	No
I feel respected by others most of the time.	Yes	No
Social equality is very important to me.	Yes	No
I can bring up any subject and discuss it with an adult I trust.	Yes	No
I like war stories and movies because they have neat sound effects.	Yes	No
I think animals need to be treated with love.	Yes	No
I try and treat others the way I want them to treat me.	Yes	No
It is important to talk about bullying.	Yes	No
I have at least one person in my life I can always count on.	Yes	No
I am most comfortable when I know what is expected of me from other people.	Yes	No
Someone I know trusted me with a big secret.	Yes	No
I like funny stories and movies.	Yes	No
I've gotten sad because someone I trusted let me down.	Yes	No
I like to be spontaneous and unpredictable.	Yes	No
It's important to share things about peoples my age because it's what I know.	Yes	No
I am comfortable with things that are different than what I normally do.	Yes	No
I prefer to spend time by myself doing things I enjoy.	Yes	No

Figure 45: The walk statements

That interruption signaled to students that the adults were still 'in charge' and to

almost not question what we were to do. She and I had not acknowledged that the

intrusion chipped away at rapport. As Gee (2011) points out, "when we speak, we are always doing things and not just saying things or communicating information" (p. 48). Once the authoritative voice of a teacher interjected an academic perspective, the doing became a silencing.

The activity itself brought about a statement of encouragement. A student offered 'take a chance' during the process. Gee (2011) suggests that "language almost always works in tandem with non-language 'stuff' (bodies, actions, objects, and circumstances)" (p. 74). The actual physical engagement brought about this utterance to his/her peers. On a broader plane, this statement fits what Heath (2008) describes when she discusses the "later language development of adolescents…[and that it] tends to take place in the normative frame of school achievement…[and the] focus [should be] on the interdependence of reading, writing, and uses of multimodal literacies in adolescents' range of learning environments…" (p. 97). These students reflected on their own positionality when offered an opportunity to physicalize their perception of self.

Dialogue Journals--February 22, 2016

Sweet Jelly—
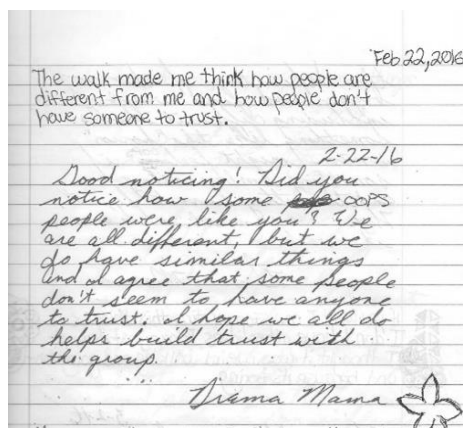
Figure 46: Student journal reflection about The Walk

Native Wolf—
The walk made me think about how alike and different some people are. It made me think about the different cliques and groups of the school.

Luna—
The walk made me think that I'm not like others. I'm not as outgoing and trusting as most.

Bling Bling—
Drama mama; how will this activity affect me as an overall student? How am I benefiting from this?

Guy—
The walk made me think I need to work harder on trusting people such as adults.

Cowgirl—
The walk made me think about my life and who I really am. It made me look at the line and see that some people are more outgoing than me. Some people are less outgoing. Some people are in the middle. I was in the front of the like but only just a little bit. I did at first stand there in the middle but then I started to go back more and more. Then I answered a few of the last questions. And that's what got me up more. Ahead of the line.

Lil Dicky—
The walk made me think about how other people think.

Papi Chulo—
The walk made me think I'm up in life.
I meant "up in life" as in I seemed higher in life because the position I was at in the walk.

Tony—
The walk made me think about others feelings and what's going on in their life.

Roses—
The walk made me think that most of my friends where at the same place of me.

Pepe—
…I don't know why there are students who <u>never</u> listen or follow directions. It's not that hard to do?? I don't know how it is with adults, but I bet they can be difficult too.
That's good that you're going to college. I hope everything is okay with your graders and all that school stuff. I haven't been doing anything just school and basketball. We have a tournament tomorrow so it we lose, we're out of the whole thing. So I'm a bit nervous over that.

The walk made me think that there are people who are kind of similar, like me. Some people are spontaneous. I saw people who can or can't trust someone in their life.

Patrisha—
The walk we just did made me think people all have different ways.

Stitch—
The walk made me think idk how it made me think I can't express my feelings

Raven—
The walk made me think about thinking about what others gonna say and why they take back steps.

Luna Purple—
I don't like when other students bring each other down. It's sad to see. LP
The walk made me realize that some people in the class don't have people they can trust. Some people just said yes to everything to get in the front. And some were shy.
Racist remarks in this class are really bad. They don't respect each other in the class.

Jackie—
The Walk
It made me think about how much I can't trust anyone. I also think that much more people have better lives in school than me too. I would rather talk to people in my own group than talking to some other group. I trust my friends and not others but I can't trust them as much as I did before because of 1 of my friends.

The Weird Potato—
I don't think I'm going to do or say anything weird because I'm having family problems right now so….yeah

The walk made me think_____
The walk made me think about how others had a lot of yes then no. It also made me think I had more yes than no.

Alex—
The walk made me think not many people have someone they can count on. They don't have someone they can trust and that they need help. Not physically but also mentally.

Forest—
The walk made me feel not a lot of people have someone that they trust in their life.

Helga—
The walk showed me that everyone is different than each other even if there were a few follower's that just went with other people because there friends it was pretty weird why --- was so forward.

These responses in their dialogue journals provided an opportunity for students to privately share their thoughts on the 'walk'. Several students mentioned the feeling of trust. Guy felt he needed to 'work harder on trusting people such as adults'. Jackie reported that she 'can't trust anyone'. Guy nor Jackie provided a reason for their comments or hinted at finding a solution. In both their journals, I had responded with a comment about the drama work in which we were to engage was designed to begin to develop trust with others. Forest and Alex spoke of trust apart from themselves, but as an issue in the lives of their peers. Their point of view evades their own positionality regarding trust, yet when Alex details 'physically but also mentally', she hints that she may have her own concerns.

Journal responses also provided insight into how these adolescents saw themselves in relation to others. Roses comment of her friends being 'at the same place' was a validation for her about the social relationships she had with the other members of the class. Patrisha, Raven, and Helga mention 'others' and 'difference' as recognition of the diversity within the members of the class. Gee (2011) submits that we are "all members of different cultures, social groups, and institutions, and have different sorts of roles and relationships" (p. 106). These three students address variations within the sub-groups of the adolescent peer group to which they belong. They write in general terms, perhaps limited with the language of details describing distinctions in their peers. One student found the use of the dialogue journals as a space to voice her concerns. As we

begun the use of the journals, she only eluded to aspects occurring beyond her school experiences.

The walk emboldened The Weird Potato to reflect on her personal place in her familial situation. Disclosing 'I'm having family problems right now so….yeah' in a private journal conversation allowed her to provide notice to me her disposition, a way to let me know she needed someone to have her back. Side conversations with Weird Potato revealed some of her insecurities with her physical appearance and self-described 'loner' status. The revelation of family problems was one more layer of complexity she felt. Bling Bling's response in his journal, asking how he was 'benefiting from this' revealed his apathy toward whole group work. He was a capable student who functioned well when he had very clear expectations of how he needed to participate. The focus of his comment was egocentric, demonstrative of his demeanor on most days--independent, yet willing to interact at his own discretion. The American Psychological Association's (2002) guide for adolescent development recommends that adults remember that, "for adolescents, exercising their new reasoning capabilities can be exhilarating, and they need the opportunity to experiment with these new skills" (p. 11). Bling Bling was working to clarify on his terms the reason for the activity. When we debriefed and I asked students if they felt their position was accurate and representative of who they are in relation to their friends, Bling Bling had not asked for clarification from others. I moved on with the group, assuming all members were informed.

There were two journal entries that expressed more than just the perspectives of the walk. Pepe and Luna Purple used the platform of the journals to express frustration and divisions within the class. Pepe's declaration, 'I don't know why there are students

who <u>never</u> listen or follow directions. It's not that hard to do??' conveyed exasperation with the behaviors of some of her peers. Pepe's non-verbal communication--her body language--confirmed her frustration. In brief conversations with her, Pepe has shared "They are like this in other classes, Miss" (personal conversation, Pepe, February 2016). Luna Purple reiterated observations she and I had discussed before: ·Racist remarks in this class are really bad'. Of the fairly diverse population of the class, Luna Purple was the student whose appearance differed from everyone else. Prior to the walk, she had shared with Amy and I her concerns: "You probably haven't heard them and there may not be much you two can do, but the racist comments are getting old" (personal conversation, February, 2016). Amy and I discussed what could be done and concluded that we could only set and model the expectation of respect for the students.

What was most interesting is that Pepe and Luna Purple were close friends and the two of them would sit together in class. They also pursued interests beyond school that required collaboration and compromise with others. Pepe was on an athletic team, and Luna Purple was a member of a local youth theatre group. Perhaps opportunities for adult-guided group work beyond the classroom prepared them for expected behaviors that their peers had not experienced.

The observations reported in the dialogue journals ranged from noticing differences in others to positionality as individuals in the peer group at the school and even recognition of events beyond the school setting. James Gee's (2011) work in language usage encompasses much of what students expressed. Gee notes many uses of language including but not limited to Identity, Relationships, and Connections (Gee, 2011). He offers that "[w]e often enact our identities by speaking or writing in such a

way as to attribute a certain identity to others, an identity that we explicitly or implicitly compare or contrast to our own" (p. 18). Expressions such as Native Wolf declaring 'how alike and different some people are' and the 'different cliques and groups of the school'; Sweet Jelly stated 'how people are different from me'; Luna remarked 'I'm not like others. I'm not as outgoing and trusting as most.'; and Helga noticed '[t]he walk showed me that everyone is different than each other even if there were a few follower's that just went with other people because there friends it was pretty weird why --- was so forward', echoed behaviors Amy and I had noticed in class. Even some of the student journal responses seemed to view the walk exercise as a competition rather than an exercise to build awareness in self and others. Students who supported acceptance of others were less competitive than those who were cautious of new comers to their social circle. Amy and I were aware where students sat when they came into class and whom they chose to work with for the drama games and ultimately their groups for their final performance. Most students chose like-minded peers, and those who didn't seem to align with any certain group, eventually found comradery with others who were also individuals.

Individually, students completed a more comprehensive list of statements with yes or no. With this extension of the walk exercise, students were able to express their positionality around issues brought up in the pre-surveys. Trust and the levels which were felt or recognized by students was another key theme to arise from this activity. Luna Purple offered that the walk 'made me realize that some people in the class don't have people they can trust'. Jackie related her perspective from a personal position:

>'It made me think about how much I can't trust anyone. I also think that much
>more people have better lives in school than me too. I would rather talk to people

in my own group than talking to some other group. I trust my friends and not

others but I can't trust them as much as I did before because of 1 of my friends'.

Alex and Forest provided their interpretations of how others contributed to the activity.

Alex noticed that she thought 'not many people have someone they can count on. They

don't have someone they can trust and that they need help. Not physically but also

mentally'; and Forest frankly stated that the walk 'made me feel not a lot of people have

someone that they trust in their life'. Adults need to acknowledge that adolescents are

engaged in who they are and how they fit--their identities, relationships, and connections

to others, and offer opportunities to demonstrate what they know and how they feel.

Adolescents need to appreciate the life experiences adults offer in guiding them with life

preparations that support problem solving and critical thinking. The issue of trust should

be a dialogue with all participants. Respect should be a cornerstone of any work done.

Contrasts should be valued as learning opportunities for all members of a group, either to

verify positions or to reconsider possibilities.

Walking in the Shoes of a Middle Schooler

Pseudonym:_____ Date:_____

Statement	Yes	No	Other
I like horror stories and movies.	Yes 12 (21)	No 2 (3)	1 (1)
Video games are cool to play.	Yes 12 (21)	No 3 (4)	(0)
I like to play sports and be active.	Yes 14 (20)	No 1 (5)	
I think action movies are cool.	Yes 13 (22)	No 1 (2)	1 (1)
I have at least one friend in each of my classes.	Yes 14 (20)	No 1 (5)	
I like anime.	Yes 4 (10)	No 9 (12)	3 (3)
I know at least one adult I can trust.	Yes 13 (22)	No 1 (2)	1 (1)
I like the idea of telling others about troubles we may have at school.	Yes 5 (7)	No 9 (17)	1 (1)
My life is interesting.	Yes 12 (17)	No 2 (7)	1 (1)
Friends are important to me.	Yes 12 (21)	No 2 (5)	1 (1)
I feel respected by others most of the time.	Yes 12 (16)	No 2 (6)	1 (1)
Social equality is very important to me.	Yes 10 (16)	No 4 (8)	1 (1)
I can bring up any subject and discuss it with an adult I trust.	Yes 9 (13)	No 6 (12)	
I like war stories and movies because they have neat sound effects.	Yes 5 (9)	No 7 (13)	3 (3)
I think animals need to be treated with love.	Yes 14 (24)	No (0)	1 (1)
I try and treat others the way I want them to treat me.	Yes 12 (22)	No 2 (2)	1 (1)
It is important to talk about bullying.	Yes 11 (20)	No 3 (4)	1 (1)

	Yes	No	Other
I have at least one person in my life I can always count on.	Yes 12 (21)	No 3 (4)	
I am most comfortable when I know what is expected of me from other people.	Yes 10 (15)	No 4 (9)	1 (1)
Someone I know trusted me with a big secret.	Yes 12 (22)	No 2 (2)	1 (1)
I like funny stories and movies.	Yes 13 (22)	No 1 (2)	1 (1)
I've gotten sad because someone I trusted let me down.	Yes 9 (19)	No 6 (6)	
I like to be spontaneous and unpredictable.	Yes 10 (13)	No 3 (8)	2 (5)
It's important to share things about peoples my age because it's what I know.	Yes 8 (13)	No 6 (11)	1 (1)
I am comfortable with things that are different than what I normally do.	Yes 12 (15)	No 2 (9)	1 (1)
I prefer to spend time by myself doing things I enjoy.	Yes 9 (16)	No 2 (4)	4 (5)

Figure 47: Walking in the Shoes of a Middle Schooler

Choosing a Topic

Researcher's Journal February 23, 2016

> I'm conflicted. I was hoping students would take this opportunity to address issues that would be more serious. They want to do a play about a horror story. I'm afraid they are influenced by the movies that are popular—blood and guts and slasher movies. I tried to explain that this is not a movie and we may not have the resources to come up with the effects they envision. Helga was even vocal about the lack of support for "trust", "social equality" and "friendship" as themes/topics. He stated he wanted to do a one-man show that highlighted those ideas. Made me start thinking about how I could help blend them. Spoke with Amy afterward and she was of the same thoughts I am. She sees them Mon and Tues and may begin to plant the seed about blending them.

> I talked to Kalama yesterday and she reminded me that my positionality in Practitioner Researcher includes what I learn and can guide this study a little more. That made me a little more comfortable with what the next step is—creating sentence stems that will provide one-liners. I think that needs to be done before we start with Image Theatre because it won't be fair to the students to have them create images that might not benefit their work with Forum Theatre.

> Just had a thought—did the students choose a 'known' less threatening topic because the more serious themes are too close to their heart and thus could be open up a vulnerability they are not comfortable with? Trust and lack of it did come up in many of the dialogue journals. Am I asking too much from these students? I was hoping the amount of time I had to build rapport (5 months) would have created some trust. But maybe the trust isn't with me….it is between students and their peers. Damn, I don't know what to do to get around that…..

Reflecting on my own journal entry, I notice that trust is a huge issue. In building rapport, trust is the driving component of creating an ensemble of learner. Creating a relationship of trust requires adults to appreciate the physical, cognitive, and emotional transitions occurring with adolescents. Adults need to demonstrate acceptance of these changes non-judgmentally, and offer guidance through the daily difficulties experienced by adolescents (American Psychological Association, 2002). I needed to trust the students as well as trust myself. The adolescent development guide from the American Psychological Association (2002) reminds me that students this age "will be most openly

questioning or critical of adults with whom they feel especially safe. This can be quite a change to adjust to, particularly if you take it personally or the youth idealized you in the past" (APA, p. 11). If they wanted to work with horror stories, I needed to consider their position. Yet I was compelled to address the needs of the smaller group of students who wanted a theme that was more along the lines of social justice.

It was also important to recognize generational differences between the adults and the students. Amy and I were not 'tuned into' the media culture these adolescents were and if we were asking them to participate in the ideologies of this study, we needed to guide students as best we could. APA causes me to consider that "…media will continue to be a growing influence on the development of adolescents, [and] the ultimate effects will depend upon the extent to which positive possibilities can be harnessed and negative influences minimized" (p. 27). Understanding my positionality to the trust of the students and as the guide of the work, navigating a course that is new to all participants was ultimately my responsibility.

The next step was to identify a topic or theme for which students would create a performance. Students had offered their perspectives based on the pre-survey and it felt as though the study would progress. I found two, maybe three, camps or sides that manifested themselves. From the social groups that were evident in the classroom came the two main themes and it was no surprise as to how students would align themselves based on theme.

Scene 2: Choosing a Topic

Time: 1:00, a late February afternoon

Place: Large working space at Eastside Middle School

At Rise: Students at tables arranged in rows with all students facing one direction. Erin (aka Drama Mama--DM) is in front of students, discussing the list of themes.

(*Lights up*)
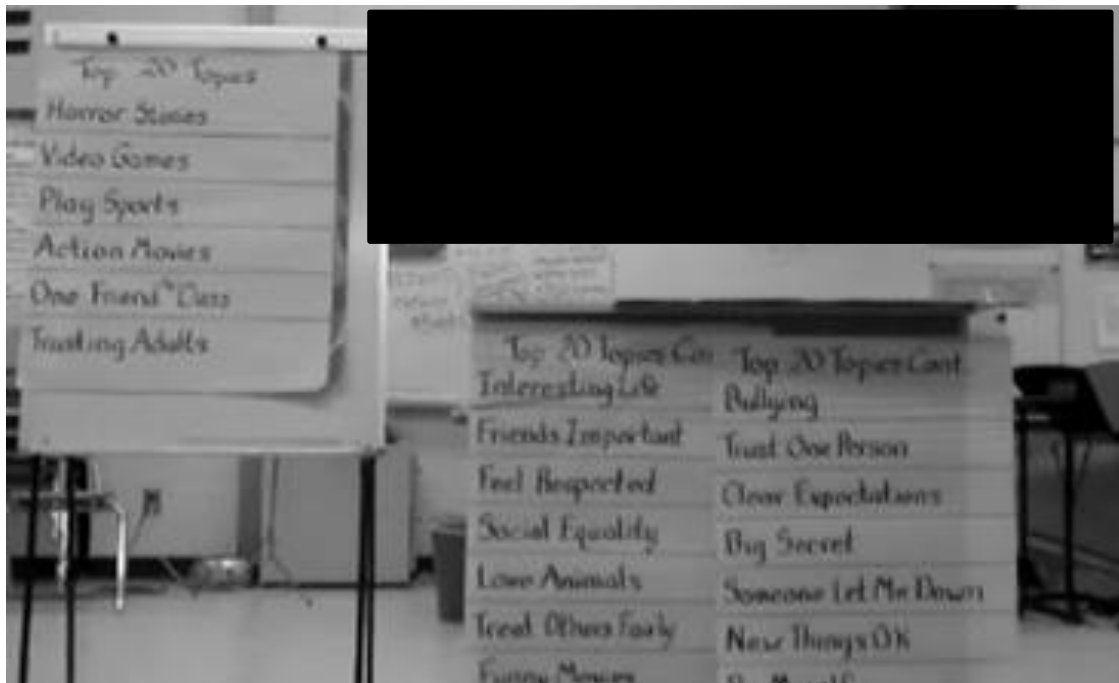
Figure 48: Topic List

> DRAMA MAMA (DM): So the top 20 topics (*to students sitting on the edges of the group*) You guys, please move in
>
> AMY: Move in, come on….
>
> DM: Or…we…you….we may end up creating a play that none of you like.
>
> AMY: Come on Papi Chulo, move over
>
> FOREST: Aahhhrrg
>
> S: Forest, stop!

The students get annoyed with the behaviors of others. There is a recognition of those students who tend to distract. Some students who are not part of certain social groups are 'called out' on their behaviors while those who distract but are part of certain social groups are 'allowed', even encouraged to distract. In his work with discourse analysis, Gee (2011) offers that "we gain information about a context in which a piece of language has been used and use this information to form hypothesis about what that piece of language means and is doing" (p. 20). My suggestions were to encourage students to position themselves physically in a manner that could facilitate their contributions. I was hoping to blur the barriers of the social groups in the class and create a space for all to feel at ease with their thoughts. My lack of knowing students beyond the class left me with a level of naiveté that caused me to rely on my 'teacher' instincts. My role in all this was as a facilitator, not as a teacher who give grades. At this moment, I was confounded by the desire to share power, but the need to control student behaviors that were interfering with the process. Ira Shor (1999) suggests that the power-sharing paradigm, in some instances needs to be adjusted. He offers that because "there are classrooms where some students' disruptive behavior overwhelms other students and the teacher, making control the issue instead of knowledge-making or power-sharing" (para. 33), somebody needs to be the guide. The subtle expectations students had of my behaviors and absence of 'power to punish' through grades allowed students to alter their behaviors some. Amy, on the other hand, knows her students and can chose the battles in which she engages. As long as the distractions are not causing chaos with others, she decides not to push it.

DM: Alright…(*moving on*) Start again! Horror stories, video games, playing sports, action movies, one friend…you…a lot of people said they have at least one friend per class, trusting adults…a lot of you said yes, you have adults you can trust, …umm, an interesting life, … a lot of you said that friends are important to you, a lot you said that you do feel respected, a lot of you said that social equality is important to you, a lot of you said that you love animals…I think nobody said that they didn't (*chuckles*) so that's a good thing…one person wasn't sure, but that's okay,…umm (*long pause*) oh gosh, I can't remember exactly how it was phrased but the way it came out from me was that…that other people need to be treated fairly, somebody said funny movies or some people said they like funny movies, bullying did become a big….there were a lot of people of people who responded to that one, a lot of people said they have at least one person they can trust, a lot of people said they prefer clear expectations…of themselves, so if somebody is asking them to do something that it's clear what they are being asked to do. A lot of you said that somebody told you a big secret, …umm, a lot of you said that somebody let you down and it made you sad

S: (*gasp)*

AMY: sshhh

DM: A lot of you said that it's okay for you to do new things…if somebody says 'let's do something new, let's do something different', you're good with that, you're comfortable with that, and a lot of you did say that you like being by yourself, doing things by yourself. Alright, now, in looking at these, first step…are there any that you think, as a group, we can just kinda get rid of. That there's nothing….it's like….to try and do a play about whatever the topic is…it's gonna be really hard because it's really limiting.

DM: you've gotta give us a reason why

PAPI CHULO: I've got a reason

DM: only one person at a time. Helga, it was you. You said action movies. (*pause, turns to students*) Please stop talking.

S: Hold on

DM: Helga, give us a reason *why* action movies.

HELGA: Okay, action movies usually involve like crazy things like jumping off buildings

S: Violence

HELGA: or like explosions…violence which we can't have in the school and

S: That's retarded

HELGA: and, plus, like you said yesterday some plays might need, like….some of us might be envisioning something like something that's like super cool, but we don't have like CGI and whatever to put like graphics in and whatever so it's not like your gonna make an action movie by a bunch of kids running on stage is all I'm saying.

PAPI CHULO: That's cooool.

(*Pause*)

Again, the position of guide and facilitator clashed with my expectations as a teacher. I became frustrated with what seemed to be a lack of focus from the students and their 'taking things seriously'. My behaviors throughout the work of this study maintained a barrier between the adults and the students. Augusto Boal (1979) reminds us that the "dominate classes crush the dominated ones through repression; the old crush the young through repression; certain races subjugate certain others through repression" (p. 149). The dominated group accepts the status quo and must consciously strive for methods to break that domination. Boal (1979) offers that the practice of "breaking repression consists in asking a participant to remember a particular moment when he felt especially repressed, accepted that repression, and began to act in a manner contrary to his own desires" (p. 150). Our dominate culture requires roles of child/adolescent and

adult/authority to be preserved in public school classrooms. To fight against that expectation is unique to this study, yet I had difficulty allowing that discourse to occur.

The perceptions of Helga and Papi differ from Forest and other students. Forest was a student who self-identified as 'White', making him a member of the controlling cultural class at Eastside. The school was a public school in a large district and while it had a diverse student population, Eastside was still required to follow the tenants of the district and state standards. For this group of students to be encouraged to question societal practices was out of the norm and perhaps Forest and others preferred a safe and familiar topic. Forest would advocate for what he was familiar with, and could be impulsive with his statements. He had declared that action movies were his favorites and other students agreed with him. Action movies were popular with Forest, his friends, and many adolescents, so it is reasonable that that particular theme was where they are most confident in being successful.

Helga's perspective was one of social interactions. He demonstrated an acceptance of his peers and tended to process events and comments in class before he responded. Helga was a student whose family was from a Middle Eastern country, and was keenly aware of his positionality and that of his peers. Papi was also of a minority culture and shared
 some of the same social perspectives as Helga. Both young men were outspoken about inclusive, fair, and just treatment of their peers. Both young men personify what hooks (2010) states when she describes being a subgroup within a larger peer group. She offers

> [w]hen you are a member of a group that is disenfranchised, exploited, and/or
> oppressed you know intimately that any thinker or writer who supports dominator

culture, even if they do so with the innocence of ignorance, supports a world that is wounding to you (p. 108).

In their own way, Helga and Papi tried not replicate inequalities and biases that they seem to have experienced in their lives. Helga's tone was one of carefully thought out explanations for his positions, while Papi searched for balance for himself and his friends. The use of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) techniques was appropriate for some students, while others may not have been at a point where they were ready. TO provided the former group a space to explore issues of which they were acutely aware. The benefit for the latter group of students was to have had peers model consideration of topics and themes that influence, consciously or subconsciously, their daily lives.

Figure 49: Advocating for a topic

Figure 50: Discussing topic votes

(*Resume*)

DM: Does anybody second that?

S: I second that.

S: Good job, Helga.

DM: That was a very good explanation, so, ssshh, so my question is…

DM: Okay, anything
    else? Forest?

FOREST: One. Friend. Per. Class.

DM: One friend per class

FOREST: How do we do that?

DM: Do we want to keep it or do we wanna….

FOREST: Get it outta here. How would you….How would you make a play just
    about have one friend per class?

DM: Okay, well then here's my question…there was another one about friends

S: Better be good

DM: Could this (*pointing at one friend per class*) be combined with another…see
    there wasn't another one about action movies (*Forest is distracted by
    another student*) Forest! Help me!...This one says 'one friend per class'
    and then this one

S: Friends are important

DM: says 'friends are important'…is there anyway we could combine those two?

S: Which ones?

S: Nah

FOREST: Well, I..I mean I get it

S: No cuz like…you have one

KASH: You shouldn't have one friend per class, you should try and have like as
    many as you want.

DM: Kash, Kash

DM: You missed the walk that we did yesterday. The walk that we did yesterday
    said 'I have at least one class…one class…

S: One friend

DM: 'one friend per class'…is what the actual statement was.

KASH: Oh

DM: So yeah, you can have as many as you want. That's fine. But
that's…that's…I had to shorten it cuz otherwise I'd…me and the cat
would still be fighting over the paper.

S: Papi Chulo has his hand up.

FOREST: Wait!

DM: So Forest, could we still use it to go with the other friend one? (*pause*) No?

FOREST: I think 'friends important'….we should keep that one but not 'one
friend per class'…that would be kind of a silly one…

DM: But could this (*one friend*) be a sub-category of the friend one?

FOREST: (*slowly*) I guess……
<center>(*Pause*)</center>

Friendship is a very significant focus in the lives of adolescents. They tend to

concentrate on their friends and the perceptions peers have of them. While family and

parents are still important, the social aspects of belonging to a group to help with

developing a sense of identity, apart from their families. A foundational study from the

American Psychological Association (1999) presents that in early adolescence,

"involvement with the peer group tends to be most intense, and conformity and concerns

about acceptance are at their peak" (p. 21). During this process, not only were students

considering their stance on friendship and what it means, they were enacting verbal

support of those who were vocal about their views. James Gee's (2011) work with critical

discourse points to the role language plays formation of identity, relationships, and

connections with others. Language is fundamental in building and sustaining

relationships and the social construct of friendship.Statements like 'Good job, Helga' and 'Friends are important' are ways students demonstrated their encouragement of others in this progression along with social affiliations.

(*Resume*)

DM: Okay….we're gonna….I gonna put a…does everybody agree

AMY: These two had their hands

DM: Oh, I'm sorry.

AMY: These two gentlemen.

S: Mine's about a different topic.

HELGA: I was gonna say that we all should (*inaudible*) cuz it's kinda like irrelevant, ya know, we don't *need* it

DM: Okay, is there anyone who thinks we absolutely *do* need it.

S: No

ALEX: Cuz also, like, let's say we're already acting out in the play, like, the audience won't really be interested in that scene

DM: Okay, but, remember how we did the short little Shakespeare scenes?

ALEX: Umhm

DM: and they came from different plays

ALEX: Umhm

DM: The way we're gonna structure this playbuilt play is you guys are each gonna do little scenes. So if we chose the topic…the big topic of friendship, one of the scenes could be about this (*points to 'one friend per class'*), one of the scenes could be about how friends are important, one scene could be about one friend telling another friend a big secret. Do you see what I'm saying? Because it would all still fit under the same theme …..of 'friends'….my brain is not working right now.

HELGA: If that's what you're saying, then you should not put like 'one friend per class' 'friends important' 'big secret'. You should just make like one like rectangle called friendship

DM: Oh! Okay. So I'm gonna put a star

S: Good job, Helga!

DM: But that's what I'm saying, is can we combine them that way?

S: Friendship

DM: Alex, are you okay with that.

ALEX: (*nods her head*)

S: Good

S: Good

DM: Forest, where did you go? Would you be okay with that?

FOREST: What?

DM: What Helga is saying and what Alex are saying is that we kinda combine stuff and make one big rectangle that's 'Friendship'

HELGA: Not just like, one thing

DM: and then we could cover a lot of different (*turns to Helga and Alex*) aspects of friendship?

ALEX: Yes.

DM: Okay, so we'll keep that one. (*pause*) Anything else?

S: Play sports.

DM: ---, what about it?

S: I don't think we could like be playing football on a stage or playing basketball on a stage….

DM: Why not?!

S: I don't know, it's gonna be weird.

PAPI CHULO: Especially because of it's gonna be like (*inaudible*) what's it called?

S: It'll be like High School Musical

DM and S: (*laughter*)

PAPI CHULO: Guy, help me out. What's it called? (*pause*) We can't be playin' all kinds of sports…

DM: Okay now, ….well now, my brain just went somewhere. My brain just went somewhere.

PATRISHA: Uh oh, where'd it go?

PAPI CHULO: Sexism. Is that because of sexism in this class, too?

S: What?

PAPI CHULO: It's gonna mess up the sports.

S: Yeah

S: Like you?

S: Sexist

PAPI CHULO: Like volleyball…like I'm not gonna do volleyball.

S: Why not?

S: Why not?

PAPI CHULO: I'll be fine because girls will be doing it.

DM: (*look of surprise, hands on her hips*)

S: No, he's saying that he will

PAPI CHULO:I'm just saying it's sexist, like in the class.

S: So you're saying

S: Papi Chulo, you're saying a girl can't play football??

S: Nobody's saying that.

DM: (*walking to the big chart tablet*) If we create (*begins to write*)

S: You're saying sex is life?

S: You can't even throw.

ALEX: Yes I can!

S: Miss, I still got a job we gotta

ALEX: Wait, Miss. Also like you know how we (*inaudible*) be in the gym? Like we couldn't be in there cuz the school (*inaudible*)

HELGA: Okay, it's different

DM: Okay, there may be a problem with playing of sports because of gender issues?…

S: Yes!

Helga: And also like sports isn't a thing like everyone plays.

(*Pause*)

The conversation about sexism and sports was unexpected but necessary. For adults to recognize and acknowledge what adolescents are thinking and considering is big. Students this age are exposed to cultural 'isms' and are at a point where they need to discuss them. In many traditional classrooms, adolescent language development is structured in the content of the academic course, yet it should support the interdependence of reading, writing, visual, and kinesthetic literacies (Heath & Street,

2008). Students' knowledge and realities are nuanced. How they enter the conversation and what they bring to it is an important starting point. Awareness of social issues was a topic that was lying just beneath the surface of the energy of many of our sessions. To have had this discussion about sports and genders was the most overt conversation of an 'ism'. Papi Chulo mentions 'it's gonna mess up the sports' and 'Like volleyball…like I'm not gonna do volleyball'. At Eastside, volleyball was a sport for females and Papi insinuates that it is an easy sport and gender-specific with the statement 'I'll be fine because girls will be doing it'. Papi played basketball off and on at Eastside and seemed to be in good shape. He was small compared to his male peers and thus worked harder at the sport than most. Papi did become somewhat defensive when another student asked 'you're saying a girl can't play football??', yet he was the student who labeled the issue 'sexism'.

Alex appeared to be offended and spoke up when told 'you can't even throw'. Her response 'yes I can!' was very much in line with who Alex was. She played on an after school soccer team and had dealt with a nagging knee injury most of the semester. Her peers knew of her athletic ability and demonstrated compassion when she would limp into class. With the social positions of Papi and Alex in the class, for them to speak to the idea of sexism in the group was generally accepted by their peers. Augusto Boal (1979) offers that theatre should be a form of dialogue and that "the people's code [the students in this case] allows and encourages the spectator to ask questions, to dialogue, to participate" (p. 142). The study began with a vision of how and where to start, but there was no clear path to where it would end or what it would even look like. When students brought up 'sexism', there was a clear need for them to process what that meant to them

and their reality. The side conversations from some students was a signal of levels of

comfort.

DM: If we do a short scene, could one of the scenes be about

S: Friendship and sports?

S: Naw

DM: Do you see? Do you see how friendship…do you see how when you get a broader subject, you can start putting some of these other things in there? (*pointing at 'playing sports'*) Do you want it or not?

JACKIE: Naw

PAPI CHULO: Not today.

DM: If you don't want it, tell me…. Helga.

HELGA: Plus, like, not everyone plays sports so like what…

PAPI CHULO: Exactly!

HELGA: It might like make these people like the play but we're not just like trying to make the play for like 5 people, we're trying to make…

DM: Do I cross it off?

HELGA: it for everyone.

S: YES!

FOREST: NO!

S: YES!

FOREST: NO!

(*DM cross it off*)

S: Yeah!

FOREST: NO!!!!

DM: (*turns to Forest*) It doesn't mean, Forest, that you can't create something about sports.

PAPI CHULO: Bullying, take off bullying.

DM: Take off bullying?

PAPI CHULO: Yeah.

MEGAN: Yes

DM: Megan….sshh

S: All plays in the past have been about bullying.

S: No, something that has to do with bully in general.

PAPI CHULO: That kills the vibe.

      I'm sorry Papi Chulo, what? Say that again?

PAPI CHULO: I'm saying we should take out bullying because there's always things about bullying that people do that. Also, kill the vibe….no one wants to do that. We wanna be (*smiles*) bright…bright, yes, yes it is.

DM: Okay. So Papi Chulo wants to not have bullying. (*pause*) There's a group here in the middle of the of the….of the room…

S: That's just staying quiet.

DM:…that is not speaking up. Ladies, what do you think?

PAPI CHULO: Let your voice be heard.

(*Pause*)

One student mentioned that 'all plays in the past have been about bullying', indicating that it was a subject that lost meaning with that student. This discussion about bullying confirmed what Amy and I had discussed when I approached her about the

study. We both had felt that students had become desensitized to the issue and that a recreation of existing materials may not be what this group wanted. Again, Papi assumed the leadership position that his peers have given him and voiced his view (possibly the perspectives of others?) and that 'there's always things about bullying that people do that'. His statement provided an opportunity for others to offer their thoughts about the subject of bullying. Luna Purple advised that the general notion of bullying may not work, but that bullying can take on different forms--'it could go over all the topics' and 'it could go hand in hand with something else'. She continued on with detailed suggestions. Heath (2008) states, "young people are 'in one another's heads' to such an extent that they can anticipate what another will say and therefore say the same thing at the same time" (p.91). I saw this portion of the dialogue as an opportunity for deeper discussion or, at the least, an activation of Luna Purple's peers to begin to explore their own thoughts about bullying.

<div align="center">(Resume)</div>

LUNA PURPLE: I think bullying….it could go over all the topics, umm…

DM: Okay, listen guys….

S: There she is

DM: Listen, we might have a mashup here.

LUNA PURPLE: Like it doesn't have to be specifically on bullying…like it could go hand in hand with something else.

DM: Something we already have listed?

LUNA PURPLE: Yeah,

DM: What do we have listed that bullying could go with?

LUNA PURPLE: Like trusting one person

NATIVE WOLF: Or big secret

LUNA PURPLE: Umm …feeling respected and treating others fairly.

DM: Okay, you guys,

PAPI CHULO: You see that!

DM: I want everybody to listen to what Luna Purple just said. (*turns to her*) You're gonna have to say it again. And you're gonna have to say it nice and loud

AMY: People are talking

DM: Some people are still whispering (*pause*) Okay Luna Purple

LUNA PURPLE: With bullying, like a whole play like doesn't have to be just like…on that specific topic of bullying? Umm, it could go along with like trusting one person, big secret, or like feel respected, friends are important, and trusting adults.

DM: Okay so what…what Luna Purple is saying, Forest, since you were a little noisy over here, what Luna Purple is saying is that the bullying could go in with….could be blended into something about trusting people, umm, what did you say—working with adults?

LUNA PURPLE: Or trusting 'em

DM: Or trusting adults and

PAPI CHULO: Itsy grits

DM: Native Wolf said a big secret. It could even go in that way. (*pause*) Helga?

HELGA: Okay, like we shouldn't have bullying even…yeah…yeah it could be like put into like trusting someone…or like everything can be put into a little set, but bullying, like, you're like…like some people have had really bad experiences with bullying…

DM: Alright

HELGA: and you don't want to just like bring it back and make them feel that again.

LUNA PURPLE: That's hard.

PAPI CHULO: We want a positive vibe, Miss.

HELGA: Like and like you're not trying to make yeah like tragedy, like it's like like Romeo and Juliet it's about like yeah, a guy loving this girl and how he's gonna get to that girl, but bullying is just being rude. (*pause*) like

DM: So you agree with Luna Purple that it could

HELGA: (*smiling*) no (*giggles*)

DM: that it could fold into….no to get rid of bullying because it could fold into like trust of adults, sharing of a big secret, so if somebody truly wanted to do a scene about being bullied,

S: We don't want that

DM: …well, no, no, no, hold on, let me, no, cuz I'm kinda riding on Luna Purple's coattails and your's Papi Chulo, too is that….is that somebody may want to do 'I've been bullied'. And somebody else comes in and says 'I'm here to help me…you. You can *trust* me. I can trust you, you can trust me. I will help you out.' Do you see what I'm saying? And that might take out the icky vibe, that you (*points at Papi Chulo*) were talking about cuz you don't want to leave it as a 'hey, let's go beat the crap out of somebody'

(*Scene*)

When Helga mentioned 'like with some people have had really bad experiences with bullying', others nodded. Perhaps bullying was a subject too close to Helga and he mentions that 'bullying is just rude'. Helga held social status in class to say what others may have been considering. Luna Purple found a way into the conversation and to support Helga. There were strong personalities in the class and the more vocal students usually had the first comments about a topic of discussion. Luna Purple was a student

who is watchful and observant. While she was rarely the first person to speak, what she offered in her discourse was insight to what was currently transpiring and how it related to the bigger picture. She found allies in Helga and Native Wolf to consider the discussion for a clearer, more nuanced perspective on the subject of bullying.

My comment about not making it a play about 'beat the crap out of someone' was motivated by Papi's desire to have a 'positive vibe'. Luna Purple offered ideas about extending the issue of bullying by bringing in the idea of 'trust' and with these nuanced suggestions about a depleted subject, perhaps the group could create something new. With her considerations on conversation in the classroom, bell hooks (2010) states that with discussions in the classroom

> "that are not conversations there is often a sense that argument and negative contestation are the only ways to address relevant issues…[these] discussions almost always invites the mind to close while conversation as a mode of interaction calls us to open our mind" (p. 45).

Luna Purple found her way to voice what she was thinking and her peers backed her up. Pepe, a close friend of Luna Purple's, did nod her head and smile at her friend's insight. Pepe wasn't as vocal as Luna Purple, yet her dialogue journal provided her a space to say what was on her mind.

Pepe—

The topics that aren't crossed out are good topics to do for a play. I like the options that we have. Like social equality is a good play to show other people so they can be aware of it.

Desensitization to a subject was what these students were discussing. Addressing the issue of bullying has become a trend in the curriculums of many public schools. There are 'programs' that encourage students to find ways to deal with bullying. Amy states

"what these kids have done with bullying is the 'same old same old' and they're getting

tired of it. They don't have ownership about the solutions and they are numb" (personal

communication, Amy Smith, August, 2015). Having students share their perspectives and

create something that belonged to them was important to Amy. We also discussed

bullying may not be a priority for these students, that there may be a more pressing issue.

Dialogue Journals: February, 23, 2016

Native Wolf—
I feel strongly toward Horror Stories because a majority of people like a good scare or thrill once in a while. I say that the horror story should be about a group of friends just out of school all go on a trip a camping trip….for this it could be a mix of friendship, let down, Big Secret and Horror Story.
Guy—
…I think we all have a little bit of something that we can trust everybody.
I strongly feel good about Horror Stories Big Secrets and friends important in a play

Cowgirl—
I think that the results from this Top 20 topics were pretty good. I feel really good about them. I think this play is going to be really good on what we decide on. But I still think that if might be better if we left out Horror stories and video games because it is really boring and horror stories are just the same things over and over again.

I think that this play is going to be really good. I like were all this is going. The people that are going to be in a group with me are Sweet Jelly, Raven and me Cowgirl. But we are still not sure what are theme is about.

Erica—
I honestly think its going to take this class forever to decide what the play is going to be about. and I hope its good, the first idea someone came up with seemed it would get boring right away. It seems like most people picked Horror stories, that sucks.

Lil Dicky—
I think it's going to be fun cause this is the first time us doing it ourself.

Papi Chulo—
I, Papi Chulo feels that the ones that stayed deserved to stay because we all voted on it and the ones that got crossed out deserved it.

Roses—
I am feeling tired. I think horror stories should be out.

Sweet Jelly—
You should cross out the horror stories because I don't think acting is going to be scary.

Kash—
I think most of them are good and fun like Big secret and all that. I'm glad that I am in this class this year. 👻

Stitch—
I want to do a big secret play. I don't really want to do horror. But if I have to whatever that's life. sometimes you have to do things that you don't want to do.

The Weird Potato—
I want to be a turtle in the beautiful sea LOL Just kidding Tacos are smexy.
I feel like that are good ideas. I like Horror things because I just like scary thing

Raven—
I found that we should leave funny movies because we can do a play that all of it is funny or something like that😊
I think we can do a lot things with Big secret and Horror Stories because we can take ideas from other and found out way to make it work.

Alex—
Hi Mrs. Erin! how are you? I'm kind of not feeling good today I hope you don't take it personal and make you feel I like I don't want to participate.
I feel good about this!
Honestly I don't know what I want to write about at this moment but I would surely go with a horror theme!

Luna Purple—
Yeah. What do you hope to get from this study?
Social equality is really really important to me. Me and Pepe are in a group together. She' my BffL. And I have to run because I need to pee!

Jackie—
I feel strongly about Horror Stories because it has different subjects and also is not like the movies. Stories have different subject not like a monster running after a girl. I like the things we have I have a idea of it.

Forest—
I really don't know what to do for a scene yet!!!!
I think the topics that we chose will be good together a horror story with a big secret when be good.

Helga—
ok look half of them are irrelevant and don't make sense like why is someone let me
down with big secret it does not make any sense one man play, treating each others
fairly

With implementing both the group discussion and the individual dialogue

journals, the language utilized offered clarity and intensity that would not have been

present had students been told the topic or theme of their play. In her work on

ethnographic research, Shirley Brice-Heath (w/Street and Mills, 2008) shares that young

people tend to think along the same lines regarding familiar topics. They can fill in gaps

of understanding when presenting ideas. The use of both spoken and written modalities

provided students who are comfortable sharing opinions verbally to do so. Those who

prefer to write their perspectives were able to do so in their dialogue journals. This wealth

of data afforded the opportunity to uncover patterns, which Heath maintains is "nowhere

more important than in studies of multilingual and multimodal situations" (p. 91). This

written forum provided a space for expression about the process: individual concerns and

collective ideas that could contribute to the group's success. Students who tend to remain

silent during group verbal conversations expressed their viewpoints. Guy offered that 'we

all have a little bit of something'; Cowgirl said she felt 'really good about them'; and

Raven, who is a second language learner and usually very quiet in class offered 'I think

we can do a lot things with big secret and horror stories because we can take ideas from

other and found out way to make it work'. These comments contributed to the primary

focus of the discussion.

Other students expressed concerns about the discussion of the topic or what would

come next. Erica was clear about her position--'It seems like most people picked horror

stories, that sucks' and Roses seemed to share her concern, 'I think horror stories should

be out'. Stitch summed things up by maintaining 'sometimes you have to do things that you don't want to do'. I recognize that I needed to take Stitch's statement to heart. I was encouraged by students who expressed wanting to explore a deeper social perspective and disappointed in the desire to work with a familiar, popular genre.

Final Topic/Theme
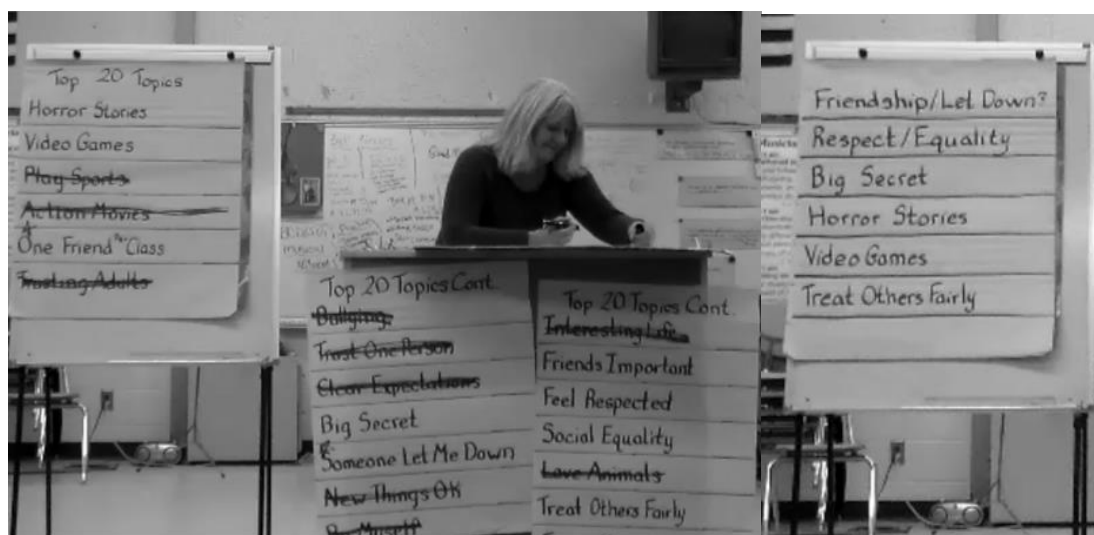
Figure 51: Final topics

Once students discussed the theme/topic they wanted for their play, I was able to condense the list, removing the rejected subjects. There was an agreement that many of the remaining topics/themes could become a thread in the story the class was weaving, so I kept them on the list. I felt it provided a balance for the perspectives shared in the verbal discussion and the written positions. However, there was a divide within the group and Amy and I were unsure how to address it. Herr and Anderson (2015), in their work with Practitioner Action Research (PAR), emphasize the fact that investigators in the field of PAR have the unique position of being a member of the group in the study. This positionality requires self-reflection on the part of the researcher. They offer that "a

central concept within this approach is *dialogue* (their emphasis), and a variety of forums have developed in which dialogue is encouraged and guided" (p. 15). Students had four colored dots to vote on the final list. For me, I needed to find the balance, I had to share my thoughts.
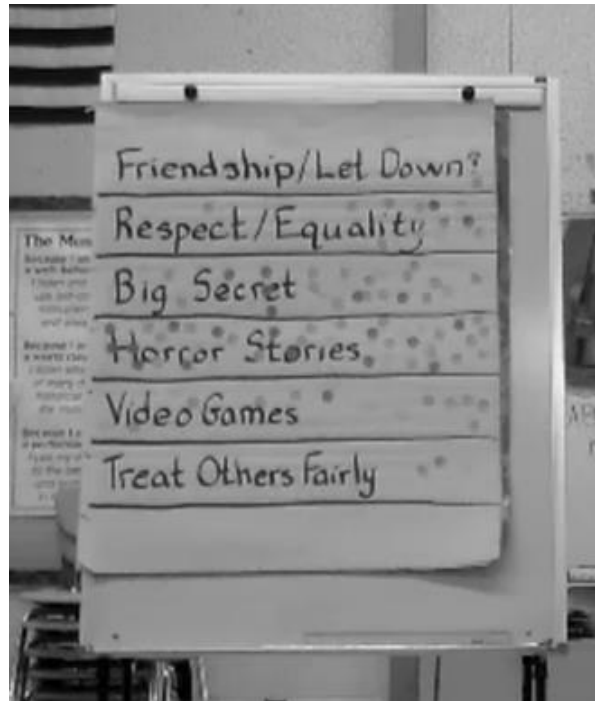
Figure 52: Final vote

Scene 3: Processing it All

Time: February afternoon

Place: Large classroom, Eastside Middle School

At Rise: Chart paper with 6 themes listed; colored dots on the themes indicating number of votes as student choice. Amy is out of the room because Erin (Drama Mama) will be addressing some dialogue journal entries.

(*Lights up*)

DRAMA MAMA (DM):(*talking about dialogue journals*) First of all, it hurt my heart (*pause*) cuz (*pause*) I think everybody, on this planet, needs to have at least one person they can trust. (*pause*) And it hurts my heart that that

may not be the case. (*pause*) (*addressing the list with colored dot stickers as 'votes' for topics*) Umm, and that kinda goes along with 'treating each other fairly' and 'respect' and 'equality' and 'friendships' and stuff like that (*pause, hesitates*) so I guess the thing that…..I…I honor and respect how you voted. That's fine, we'll work with this (*pause*) Umm, (*long pause*)I'm thinking that maybe…(*slowly*) you stayed away from (*pause*) more (*long pause*) (*sigh*) emotional topics, I guess? I…I…I can't think of a better way of saying this. Miss Kalama, you're the (*chuckles*) linguist….maybe you can help me….if she's even still here….she's still here. Umm….(*pause*) because it's just too close and too personal and it will hurt *you* too much. And if that's the case, I *absolutely* get it (*pause*) a hundred *fifty* percent. (*pause*)Okay?(*pause*) We can work with….what are the two, umm, topics….okay, end of my spiel…my speech….umm, (*pause*) What do you, Miss Kalama, do you have any thoughts about….about

KALAMA: No

DM: Alright, umm, sshh, (*pause*) is Mrs. Smith out there? She can come in now…

S: (*goes to door, tells teacher to come in*)

AMY: Can I?...Should I (*indicates chair*)?

DM: Okay, please listen you guys (*Amy steps in front of the students*)

AMY: I'm gonna….ssshhh…I'm going to give you dots (*reaches in a basket*)

DM: Sshhh

AMY: You'll each get 4 dots, the colors are irrelevant. It's not 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, place…

DM: (*loudly*) You know what? You're not going to know what to do and you're going to end up having to participate in a play that you're not real happy with

AMY: Sshhh guys, please, you need to come choose….you get to choose four of these topics. You narrowed that big…those 20 topics to six— Friendship/someone letting you down; Respect/Equality; Big Secret; the Horror Stories; Video Games; or Treat Others Fairly.

HELGA: Which one we *don't* want?

AMY: Then you get to vote on four (*DM holds up 4 fingers*) that you think you
would be interest….(*looks at students to her side*) I'm waiting…you get to
vote on four you think you'd be interested in writing about, performing in
a play for these topics. So with the (*looks to students across from her*)

DM: (*looking at the same students*) Please listen

AMY: With the dots that you'll be given, you'll (*stops again*) with the dots
you're given, you're able to come and select four things .Make sure that
you don't put them on the black lines that she underlined. Put them within
the spot so that we know where it's at. It could be anywhere on there.

DM: You could put it on the words, too. Alright, you guys, sshhh,
please listen, Mrs. Smith, do you have anything else?

AMY: Nope

DM: Alright, I have one thing. Sshhh….and if this happens to you, please do not
get upset -----, why did you move?

S: Move

AMY: You're supposed to be over here

S: Yeah

PAPI CHULO: -----, hit that little boy.

FOREST: Oh yeah, okaaaaayyy….it's because I'm White

PAPI CHULO: Hey, see I'm not racist, Forest. I didn't call you White!

FOREST: I told you not to call me that

DM: (*sighs*)

S: Sorry

<center>(*Pause*)</center>

Another 'ism' came out through the interactions of the students. Again, the opportunity to address what adolescents are dealing with and the information they have was lost. My sigh was an indication to the students that the subject was not important to the discussion. What was missed was a chance for students to engage in what Shirley Brice-Heath (2008) offers as "situations that involve scenario development, hypothetical reasoning, and comparative analysis of problems, learning environments [that] offer critical language practice needed for individuals to gain fluency" (p. 100). Students were ready to discuss and define their experiences with the ism of racism, yet I maintained my agenda. I continued to engage in the marginalization of these students, not only because of their age, but also their cultural background.

Racism has come up several times and Papi, who does not share the same background as Forest, was a student who was vocal about the positionality which he has and shares with close friends in the class. Forest is a secondary member of the core group of Papi's social group and acceptance of Forest's presence is situational. James Gee (2011) submits that in social situations, there are two statuses of speaking when presenting information—vernacular of everyday conversation and the speaking style of a specialist. Gee offers

> [t]he vernacular is the style we use when we are speaking as 'everyday people', making no claims to expert or specialist status knowledge… [and that]…[s]pecialist styles are used by experts or specialists when they are speaking and acting as experts and specialists…(p. 70).

Forest's background is that of the dominate culture and his in-class experiences of judgment based on race has been limited. Papi (and other students who self-identify as

'not White') mentions his cultural background frequently. Statements such as 'But I'm Mexican' or 'Mexicans do it this way' or even Luna Purple stating 'I'm a light-skinned Black girl and hear it all the time' make Papi and Luna Purple experts and specialists with racism in ways which Forest may lack experience. Forest engaged in discourse he felt would allow him entry to the social group at that moment; however, the results were not what he expected. I more closely identify with Forest while Amy's experiences align more with Papi, yet both Amy and I overlooked the interaction between Forest and Papi. Disregarding the 'ism' expressed was not the only demonstration of power of the adults. Amy and I both wielded our power and again moved on without consideration for the conversation.

<center>(Resume)</center>

DM: Alright…(slowly) here is….the disclaimer…

AMY: Listen carefully.

DM: Here is the disclaimer; if you take….the dot and tear it in half and say I wanna put one vote here and one vote there, neither vote will count. I will only count full dots.

MEGAN: Did someone actually try that?

DM: I've had it happen before, yeah.

MEGAN: Crap

DM: I know, So I guess the thing is, is commit

(side conversations)

DM: The other thing is if you don't want to use all four dots,

S:Ssshhhh

DM: You don't have to. (pause) If you wanna put more than one dot in a

space….if you wanna put all four dots and use all four of your votes for horror movie or whatever, fluffy pink bunnies, then you can do that. If….I will stand here and watch. If I find anybody *moving* a dot that has already been placed…from one place to another, I will take your votes away. (*pause*) The only reason I'm saying that is that I'm a mean, nasty old lady….and the whole process needs to be fair…to everybody.

MEGAN: So it's one each.

DM: Megan, if you wanna put all four of your dots on one thing, you can. If you wanna put two dots on one and two dots on another, you can. If you wanna put three dots on one and one on another, you can. If you wanna put three dots some place and not put a fourth dot at all, (*looking at student next to Megan*) put it on your nose (*pause*)

PAPI CHULO: You do that

PAPI CHULO: Now we talkin' bosses

(*Patrisha approaches Helga, puts her head on his shoulder*)

S: Horror stories

(*Papi Chulo approaches and places a vote? Some votes? and begins a conversation with Helga. Smiles, taps Helga's shoulder, points at Helga's face. Helga smiles then talks 'aside' to Papi. Serious expression.*)

HELGA: (*to student placing a vote*) Yes, just so you know. (*walks away from the chart, back toward where he was sitting*) doing this fairly (*sweeping his right arm indicating students who have voted and returned to their seated places*) All of you guys are savages

S: Why?

HELGA: Not all treat others fairly (*pause*)

(*several students giggle*)

HELGA: Just so you guys know

JACKIE: There's three!.....There's three up there!

(*side conversations are getting louder; Helga approaches the chart again as the last few students are placing their votes*)

(*Jackie is the last to vote, Helga approaches Drama Mama; Jackie, pointing at the votes, joins the discussion with Helga and DM*)

HELGA: (*turns to the class*) Is everyone done? (*Jackie remains next to the chart. Smiles when Helga is talking*) With their stickers?

S: What?

HELGA: Alright, see, all I wanna say is that I'm really fascinated by the whole majority of us that (*moving the chart, indicating the last position with three dots*) likes to 'treat others fairly'

S: That's just Helga

HELGA: There's no

S: Oh! I got you. I noticed that too

HELGA: I just want you to know (*inaudible*) party this was

(*Papi Chulo walks behind the easel holding the chart and behind Helga, DM, and Jackie*)

PAPI CHULO: (*pointing to a group*) They said they don't want to do horror

HELGA: (*holds up 3 fingers*) Three. (*puts hands up motions with them as if wiping down a surface*)

HELGA: (*indicating class with his right index finger and a smile*) You should all be ashamed of yourselves.

(*Kalama enters the room*)

S: Hey Miss Kalama

DM: Hey everybody! Say hi to Miss Kalama. (*smiles*)

DM: Okay, you guys, Helga wanted to point something out

(*side conversations*)

HELGA: (*indicating the votes on the chart*) At least you guys, I mean like at least you guys like to respect slash equality, I mean that's decent. What I also don't like it like 'big secret'…Really?? More than (*indicates 'treat others fairly'*)…I'm just gonna go sit down before I say something

JACKIE: He's gonna have a spaz

DM: Although, Helga…sshhh…

(*side conversations*)

HELGA: (*approaches the chart*) We have an even bigger majority on 'friendship' (*there was one dot chuckles*)

(*Pause*)

Figure 53: Discussing results of vote

Helga's advocacy for a topic related to social justice did not surprise members of the class. Being a student who self-identifies as a "minority--I'm not even Mexican, Miss" (private conversation, Helga, February, 2016), Helga has positioned himself as the

voice of reason and maturity in his social group as well as the class. He playfully scolds

the class with 'you should all be ashamed of yourselves'. He then goes on to point out

why he feels strongly about the positions listed that received fewer votes than the popular

horror stories theme. Helga demonstrated that peer social groups "serve as powerful

reinforcers during adolescence as sources of popularity, status, prestige, and acceptance"

(APA, 199, p. 21). There were two threads of thought with the class; one that was

comfortable with creating a story in a genre with which they were familiar and another

that seemed to want to speak out about issues that personally affect them. Helga was not

only a minority in the societal sense, he was also a minority with his social peers—yet he

felt empowered to speak out.

Researcher's Journal/February 23, 2016

> My own positionality--
> I really do need to honor the outcome that the students came up with. The whole
> idea of this study was to give voice to students who may not have the
> opportunities to speak out or speak up. I have been silenced and castigated for
> being emotional and know how much it can mean to stay in a safe place and not
> be judged. This has happened to me even recently--not a fun trigger.

End of Act One

This process was lengthy but necessary. The use of drama and the building of

work that the participants can own is typically not what is expected in a middle school

drama program. The traditional format is for students to engage in lessons and activities

that will develop skills for them to perform an existing script for an audience.. Augusto

Boal (1979) and his work with TO, describes certain aspects of 'theater'. Aristotle

promoted theatre as the "poetics of oppression" (p. 155) and that theatre evolved into a

space described as a place where the spectator would delegate power to the performers to

act in his or her stead. Boal maintains that TO is the *poetics of the oppressed* (original

emphasis) and that it is "essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer

delegates power to the characters either to think or act in his place. The spectator frees

himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action!" (p. 155). What this study

sought to encourage was the creation of a piece of art as a means to express voice and

ideas unconventional to adolescents. The use of steps for playbuilding "promotes

ownership, so that the script is a result of the cast's own analytic and creative work, not

something written for the actors by an adult" (Weigler, 2001, p. xiii). The work presented

was meant to become unique, individual, and sustaining. Adolescents yearn for the

opportunity to say what they need to in a manner that supports their positions. Elements

of the intent of this study remained as we progressed to the next stage. However, due to

the positionality of the adults in this study, me in particular, students' perspectives were

imprecise and influenced by status.

CHAPTER 6: ACT 2

As we began the next step, Amy and I worked to approach it from implementing

structures familiar with most students as a way to frame the work of the students. Will

Weigler (2001) in his work with playbuilding techniques, suggests that

> each piece will have a beginning, middle, and an end. The actors will design each
>
> piece to reflect what they have learned about the nature of a certain type of
>
> situation and they may emphasize the turning points—how and why the situation
>
> changes (p. 52).

The beginning for this entire piece was to use the language of the students regarding their

perceptions of the themes of friendship, trust, equality, horror stories, big secrets, and

moving on. In the spirit of Boal (1979) and his work, the focus was to be what the

participants wanted or needed to say and what they learned from one another.

Act 2: Rising Action

Researcher's Journal, March 4, 2016

> Today was the day for one-liners. I took the most popular themes—horror stories
> and big secrets—and tried to blend them with the other themes that were listed but
> avoided when we discussed them. I really don't want to lead them or steer them to
> what *I* think they should do, but I do want to honor every students' passion.

> Kalama was also there to help with a couple consent forms. She stayed for the
> whole lesson and when we were done, she and I had the same question—when the
> class had discussed social equality, there seemed to be no ambiguity in the
> concept. When they saw it in print, they questioned what it meant. Interesting
> view of aural comprehension versus textual comprehension.

> Amy really liked the one-liners. She liked "that the students wrote for each other.
> It's a great way to have them have some say in what we're doing. They don't get
> that chance too often" (personal conversation, March 8, 2016).

One Liners

  The next step in this study and the process of students creating an opportunity to share their voices was to synthesize their thoughts. We began the first step in playbuilding. Carole Tarlington and Wendy Michaels (1995) promote utilizing playbuilding as a dramatic form of group expression to participants to experience "theatre, human behavior, presenting ideas, co-operating, thinking, research, and the pursuit of excellence" (p. 11). Playbuilt performances offer a series of scenes that are related by theme, yet are short scenes that represent a small group's interpretation of the unifying topic. Through improv, each group builds their own vision the theme of the entire playbuilt piece. To sum up what Tarlington and Michaels (1995) declare as the five principals of playbuilding, it should be:

- Group work--members are encouraged to work together.

- Collaboration--members share power in their group. Decisions can be delicate when working with adolescents in a school setting because, traditionally, adults have the ultimate say.

- Rigorous thought--critical thinking is necessary for presenting and representing ideas.

- Trust--working to build rapport between peers is essential for groups to work together and maintain ownership over their work.

- Aesthetic--playbuilding offers the occasion to share ideas of the group using the art form of drama and theatre (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995).

  The distinguishing aspect of peers creating lines allows adolescents to use colloquial language to "build things out in the world, make things happen, try to make

them true" (Gee, 2011, p. 73). Playbuilding techniques and the language generated

through the work was a new experience for students and for Amy. The language

produced through playbuilding becomes the catalyst for designing the production. bell

hooks (2010) proposes

> [w]hen everyone in a classroom, including the teachers, shares personal
>
> experiences, the uniqueness of each voice is heard. Even when two people write
>
> and speak about common experiences, there is always a unique aspect, some
>
> detail that separates one experience from the other (p. 57).

The one-liners provided an opportunity for students to voice their own perspectives on

the chosen topic without fear of judgment from their peers.

Scene 1

Time: Friday afternoon, early March, 2016

Place: Amy's classroom, Eastside Middle School

At Rise: Students seated at tables, all facing the front of the classroom. Drama Mama is
standing in front of the class, explaining the process of the one-liners. Kamala is
assisting from the opposite side of the room.

(*Lights up*)

DM: What I have right now are some sentence stems (*pause*) that what I would
like for you to do (*pause*) or what you're going to need to do with 'em this
is for all of us, so I keep using the first person pronoun of myself and I and
I shouldn't, I… I need to break out of that habit (*Lil Dicky and Pepe are
watching me*) so what we need to do is when you get this paper, do *not* put
your name on it, do *not* put your pseudonym on it….nothing. (*pause*)
What you will do

S: Shut up

DM: is you will respond to the very first thing that pops in your head to finish the sentence stem. And remember we talked on Wednesday…we talked a little bit kind of at the end of class, we talked a little bit, umm, how to try and be inclusive of everyone…we're expanding that idea of 'horror stories' and of 'big secret'. Some of you were even saying those two things can go together, and I will point him out because we all know who he was (*turns to Helga and looks at him*)

HELGA: (*smiles*) Hi everybody (*waves*)

DM: Unhun, Helga even had….he was very passionate about some of the other things…the things like friendship and and social equality, and trust

HELGA: Treating others fairly

DM: That too…alright…so I'm hoping that that because…and Helga had those ideas, in a group this large other people I'm sure other people had some of those ideas…umm, perhaps they're not as vocal (*turns to Helga, smiles*) shall we say as Helga, but, umm, and that's fine umm so so what I tried to do with these sentence stems is to try and be as inclusive as I can. Now, here's what's gonna happen. You're going to complete these, and you're gonna give them back to me. Do *not* put your name on them, or your pseudonym or happy faces or I don't know like your trademark image you might draw, I don't know, whatever. Do not….no indication of that. However, this is what I'm going to ask…two things. First thing,

S: Do something

DM: …make it legible. It should be able to be read. Okay? Nobody should have to sit there and have try and guess it out (*smiles*) guess what you're try to talk about. And number two, answers of 'I don't know' 'I don't know' 'I don't know' are not acceptable. You have to…you *have* to finish the sentence some way. (*pause, starts to count*) There are 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9….there are nine sentence stems that I ….like I said I tried ta ta do mashups of ideas and stuff. And then there's one at the very very bottom that if you feel compelled, you can write your own. That make sense? (*pause*) So all I did was put some lines there. (*pause*) Are you gonna put your name on these?

SEVERAL STUDENTS: No

DM: Are you gonna put your pseudonym on these?

SEVERAL STUDENTS: No

DM: There's not gonna be any indication…Miss Kalama, can I ask you for some help (*gives her a small stack of papers*) If you start at that back end, I'll start at this end and we'll just hand 'em out.

Once again, I engaged in 'teacher talk', reminding students not to put their names or pseudonyms on the papers. I also did not complete my reason why--'there's not gonna be any indication'--which may contributed to confusion. My tone and positionality was as the leader, yet I moved on without any opportunity for input from the students. I was teaching the way I was taught and replicating for years in my own career. There is a pedagogical framework for dominate culture public schools where the adult is the disseminator of information and adolescents are the consumers of that information. I implemented this framework, perhaps as much as a habit as an expectation. When discussing the integrity of the teacher and methods used in the classroom, hooks (2010) stipulates that

[e]ducation as a tool of colonization that serves to teach students allegiance to the status quo has been so much the accepted norm that no blame can be attributed to the huge body of educators who simply taught as they were taught (p. 29).

The enlightening element to come out of this work is that I have the power to change and to grow from reflecting on my own practices. I need to break away from the replication of the dominate pedagogy which I demonstrate. At that point, I recognize that what is truly needed is for students and learners to determine their own learning path.

The Weird Potato was part of the group conversation about the one liners, yet writing in her journal indicated a level of preoccupation with something else. For her, the writing was more of a method to use language to process internal experiences.

The Weird Potato—March 4, 2016
I'm sorry Miss. I'm just having a bad day and need to be kind of quiet. I wish I
could be different, but I don't know how.
My response
It's okay to have bad days. When we recognize bad days, we can appreciate the
good days. Trying to deal with the bad days is hard, but a life long lesson. I still
struggle with how to deal with 'em. Knowing that there will be better days--no
kidding--seems to help.

There are times adolescents feel as though they are the only one who is experiencing

situations where how to navigate their way is unclear. This ambiguity and questioning in

adolescents is common. From my own personal experience, I tend to have the perception

that I am the only one facing instances. In reality, many others are challenged with

similar situations. It is our response that is unique.

It is possible for the self-doubt felt by Weird Potato to have an anchor in her self-

identity. In its report on adolescent development, the American Psychological

Association (2002) asserts that self-concept and self-esteem vacillate for children in this

stage of life. They try on different ways of being in their search for who they are and how

they fit into their world. They work to create a reality where they are accepted by others

which is critical. That they can accept themselves is crucial . According to the report

> The process by which an adolescent begins to achieve a realistic sense of identity
>
> also involves experimenting with different ways of appearing, sounding, and
>
> behaving. Each adolescent approaches these tasks in his or her own unique way.
>
> So, just as one adolescent will explore more in one domain (e.g., music), another
>
> will explore more in another (e.g., adopting a certain style or appearance) (p. 15).

The Weird Potato was asking for guidance from someone she trusts (me) using a safe

space (her dialogue journal) without calling attention to her from others (her peers). Her

behaviors in class did not betray any insecurities she felt, as she was quiet on most days. Writing and words were her way of expressing herself. The dialogue journals offered her that space.

Students continued to work on completing their one-liners. Amy was out that day, yet she had shared with me that students were familiar with sentence stems. From these lines, we would begin to create the story students would tell. hooks (2010) offers "[s]tory, especially personal story, is one of those powerful ways to educate, to create community in a classroom. This is especially true as classrooms have become more diverse" (p. 56). The sentence stems provided another tool to build community and ensemble within the group. The ownership of the development was meant to be collaborative, and I was hopeful these sentence stems would allow that process to happen.

Some of the students needed a restatement of expectations 'Do not put your name on it' or 'Finish the sentence'. Perhaps they needed clarity or perhaps they were assessing my positionality and if their responses were truly to be accepted. Perhaps they were following habits and conventional norms that are expected of students--put your name on all your work. I felt I needed to clarify that it was not only acceptable but expected that they not label work with their name. This study seemed to bring new, unexpected, and tentative responses from students. It was enlightening to me, too, seeing how I am still working to find a balance between imposing curriculum and guiding it.

An interesting question arose as students completed the sentence stems. Several asked about the meaning of 'social equality.' When narrowing down the topics in the previous session, there were no questions about social equality, yet when students saw individually and in writing, they were curious. To admit to confusion or ambiguity in a

public setting like a class discussion, adolescents are hesitant. Identity and the influence of peer interactions are the drivers of adolescent group behaviors. Students can be unwilling to publicly admit a perceived deficit in knowledge or understanding due to the notion of being the only one who is in that situation. Admitting to trusted adults provided a space for these students to build their understanding in a more secure approach. Kalama and I looked at one another and I questioned whether or not to provide an explanation to the questions students asked.

I did approach Sweet Jelly, who was an ESL student. With a connection to math, I tried to provide a basic idea of people being equal. I then asked her what social means. She told me friends and I said yes, that's part of it. I then encouraged her to put the two together. A paraphrase of her response was friends are equal. I said that was a start, and that all people should be equal. She smiled and nodded her head. Erica and Cowgirl were there, could hear the discussion, and also nodded their heads.

After this short discussion, I looked up and saw Kalama. She and I were both surprised that the question of what social equality was came up. I'm glad these students were participants in this study. In discussions, both small group and whole group, equality and respect were threads that were strong components of the discourse voiced by students. To have this language introduced and become part of the daily dialogue provided students with another tool for expression. The idea of social equality came about from some of the responses on the pre-survey so I know it is not a new concept for every student, but it is good to know a few more students now know the phrase.

Friendship, Equality, Respect & Moving On One Liners

DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME OR YOUR PSEUDONYM ANYWHERE ON THIS PAPER!

Complete each of the sentence stems with the first thing that comes to your mind. Please make sure your handwriting can be read. Thanks.

Respect _____

_____

When I think of friendship_____

_____

Not being respected can feel like a horror story because_____

_____

Equality is_____

Moving on _____

_____

I consider social equality _____

_____

Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because_____

_____

A thing I find horrific_____

_____

A big secret I don't mind sharing_____

_____

(Your own statement)

_____

_____

Figure 54: Sentence Stems

Once students completed the sentence stems, Kalama and I collected them and redistributed them. Students were asked to make sure they did not receive their own work, but that of a peer. Only then did they put their pseudonym on the sentence stems. Students read the responses and asked to choose one that they liked or that was significant for them. Students then read the line they chose aloud to the class.

Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because _Its not,_
Its just life.

Equality is _everyone is treated the same way._

When I think of friendship _I think of My best friend_

A big secret I don't mind sharing _is that I scream like_
a girl when I get scared.

Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because _I've lost their_
friendship

A thing I find horrific _is Myself_

A big secret I don't mind sharing _Its not, a big secret if_
you dont mind sharing it...

Respect _Something we all say we_
should be but we ~~dont~~ arent

Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because _I don't want_
to lose any friends

Equality is _something that everyone should recieve_

Figure 55: One liner choices

Moving on _is sad_

A big secret I don't mind sharing _is nothing_

Respect _Being nice to each other_

When I think of friendship _I think of Shrek and Donkey._

Moving on _to great adventures is life_

Equality is _very Important_

I consider social equality _important_

Respect _being nice even if you don't agree_

Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because_you've become very close to them and it's hard to move on._

I consider social equality _super important_

Moving on _in our lifes is normal_

Figure 56: One liner choices

Researcher's Journal, March 16, 2016

> One-liner sheets were completed anonymously and then students exchanged one-liner sheets and chose one on the sheet they got. Amy liked this because she felt it gave them a place of 'ownership' over the words they will speak. She also liked the idea of writing lines for each other, but the whole process being about the lines not who wrote them.

Dialogue Journals

Bling Bling—
I choose the sentence stem I choose because I found it interesting and the most readable.

Guy—
I like the one liners because we can see how people feel about some stuff and I pick the one I picked as because I feel the same way THE END! tada

Cowgirl—
I chose this like because it was the line that stood out the most to me. I also chose this line because it was the longest and the best fact. And because I liked the line.

Erica—
When I think of friendship I think of my best friends. I picked that one because they had nothing else.

Lil Dicky—
Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because I don't want to lose and friends. I chose this one because it was the first one I say.

Papi Chulo—
I choose the sentence stem 'when I think of friendship I think of Donkey and Shrek' because I found it funny and true.

Tony—
I chose that lie because it seemed very interesting. And it seems true and cool.

Sweet Jelly—
I choose the sentence stem because it was the only one that I liked the other ones are stupid.

Patrisha—
I picked 'Moving to adventure is like' because I didn't like the others.

Raven—
It is a good think that the line that I just read was very important to me. To be respect is very important.

Jackie—
The sentence stem was easy.

Pepe—
Yes, it's very important to respect each other. I hope all of us realize that soon. These one liners are easier that the last ones we did. 'Equality is very important.' I chose this line because equality is very important. I'm glad this person knows that.
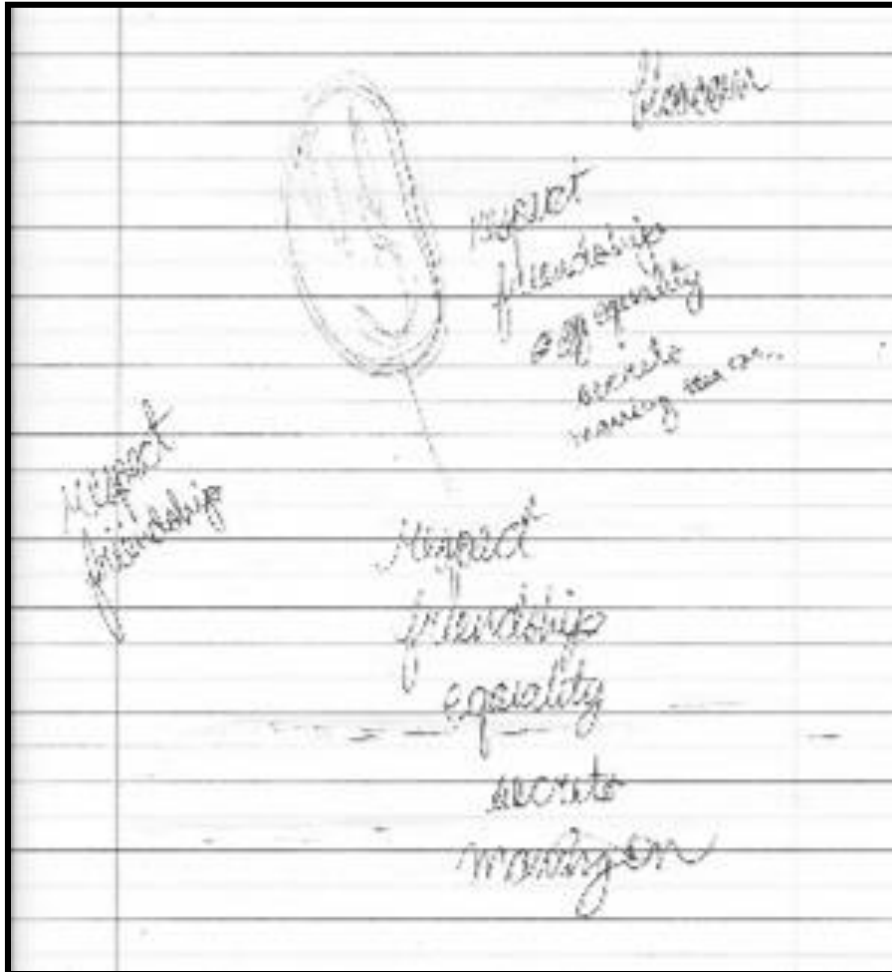
Figure 57: Pepe's reflection on her one liner choice

The Weird Potato—
I choose that one line 'moving on in life is normal' because it's true eventually you'll get older and you'll get mature and eventually you'll move on because at one point you'll move on and start all over again new and a fresh start in life.

Forest—
My one liner was a big secret I don't mind sharing is that I scream like a girl when I get scared. I picked that one because when I get scared I scream like a girl too. Forest Gump

Helga—
My sentence Stem 'A thing I find horrific is myself' No it was someone else's paper and I read what was the funniest.

In their dialogue journals, students expressed the how and why they chose the line they did. Some lines were chosen for humor--Papi "I choose the sentence stem 'when I think of friendship I think of Donkey and Shrek' because I found it funny and true". It is in his nature to laugh with his peers. Sweet Jelly surprised me for her reason for the line she chose--"I choose the sentence stem because it was the only one that I liked the other ones are stupid". Sweet Jelly is a second language learner and her use of the word 'stupid' was possibly her way to express her thoughts, modeling what she has heard from her peers. In her reflections of teaching and teachers in the classroom, bell hooks (2010) proposes that

> there are those cases where a teacher is wedded to dominate culture and, as a consequence, sees students as unworthy of regard. The only hope in such a situation is that students can find support and affirmation in their interactions with one another (p. 120).

Knowing that one student wrote their line and that another student chose a line written by them provided a glimpse of acceptance voice and perspective. The participants using language that was theirs created the lines was important to the work.

Once students chose their lines, they read them aloud and we established an order of lines. A spontaneous, natural reaction from the group to each of the lines provided the

next step in the playbuilding process. Carole Tarlington and Wendy Michaels (1995)

describe the one-liners as "rather like designing an overture" (p. 45), and unprompted

responses provide complexity and intensity to the spoken statements. Through her work

on critical thinking, bell hooks (2010) suggests that when students are contribute to

pedagogy, teachers "no longer assume the sold leadership role in the classroom. Instead,

the classroom functions more like a cooperative where everyone contributes to make sure

all resources are being used, to insure the optimal learning well-being of everyone" (p.

22). Guiding students to claim the writing of their peers to express perceptions on the

theme presented the chance for students to engage in the process. Amy and I did wield

our hierarchical power to control the theme, yet felt the two factions created--horror

story/violence versus friendship/respect--needed to be bridged in order to respect all

perspectives of the participants. The final version of the one-liners and reactions became

the structure for the play.

Name	One Liner	Reaction
Alex	Respect is a formal way of life.	Life
Weird Potato	Moving on in our life is normal.	Wow!
Luna Purple	Equality is something that everyone should receive.	Everyone!
Bling Bling	Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because it's not—it's just life.	Oooooo
Jackie	A big secret I don't mind sharing; It's not a big secret if you don't mind sharing it…	Sssshhhhh
Concert Tickets		
Raven	Respect is being nice even if you don't agree.	Yeah!
Pepe	Equality is very important.	Really!
Papi Chulo	When I think of friendship I think of Shrek and Donkey.	Hahaha
Megan	A big secret I don't mind sharing is nothing.	Nada

Figure 58: Scenes and One Liners

Planning a Surprise		
Kash	Respectful is something we all say we should be but we aren't	For real
Sweet Jelly	I consider social equality super important.	Super
Guy	Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because I've lost their friendship.	Ah, man……
Patrisha	Moving on to great adventures is life.	Life
Helga	A thing I find horrific is myself.	Yourself???
At the Mall……		
Forest	A big secret I don't mind sharing is that I scream like a girl when I get scared.	(scream)
Luna	Moving on is sad.	Doesn't have to be.
-------	Equality is also important.	Can't say it enough
Roses	Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because you've become very close to them and it's hard to move on.	Agreed
Jump Rope		
---	A big secret I don't mind sharing is I would not share a big secret because then it would no longer be a secret.	True
Cowgirl	Equality is everyone is treated the same way.	Awesome!
-----	Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because maybe after they leave, they will talk to others and that scares me.	We're here for you.
Erica	When I think of friendship I think of my best friend.	Awww
Lil Dicky	Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because I don't want to lose any friends.	Same!
PFC		
Native Wolf	Respect is being nice to each other.	True
Tony	Moving on is forgetting the past and moving on with your life.	Profound
Everyone	Let's move on!	(Exit w a partner/small group)

Figure 59: Ending scenes and one liners

Figure 60: One liner rehearsal

Of the 25 one-liners chosen, there was a balance of elements of the themes we on which we collaborated: Respect--16%; Moving on--20%; Equality--20%; Big secret--16%; and Friendship--24%. Helga chose a line about finding himself 'horrific' because he thought it was funny. Amy felt it was informative. She responded, "This is how many of these kids feel. I've been working with middle schoolers for so long, I've noticed most of them have some level of insecurity" (personal conversation, March, 2016). Helga was unconsciously addressing an all too common adolescent emotion. Self-awareness and the ability to move beyond familiarity of mad, sad, glad as responses to 'how are you doing?' is a cornerstone to the development of self. To refine their experiences and sources of their emotions, adolescents develop productive ways to manage situations in which they may find themselves (APA Adolescent Development, 2002). Many of the responses to the sentence stems, consciously or unconsciously, addressed feelings and emotions these student may have. The expectation of writing the 'line' for someone else provided some anonymity and for the completion of the sentence stems to be more candid.

Another facet of the one-liners were the responses students provided to the lines. Even if the reactions were short, they were powerful. Most of them were the initial reply to the spoken line. They came from the participants. When the group first responded to Helga's line about being 'horrific', there natural response to him was 'You? Really?'. Helga was a strong presence in the class and his peers knew this, so their reaction was spot on and based on what they knew of him. His peers know enough of him to ponder his choice of line. The American Psychological Association (2002) in their guide to adolescent development offers that, "[r]ecognizing their own emotions lays the groundwork but does not ensure that youth will recognize that others have feelings and that they need to take these feelings into account" (p. 17). The one-liner aspect of playbuilding provided the participants a glimpse of what peers are experiencing and that perhaps, they are not alone in feeling the way they do. As adults speaking in hindsight, speaking to an adolescent and stating to him or her that many of their contemporaries experience the same feelings, is not as powerful or enlightening as hearing it from peers.

Researcher's Journal, March 18, 2016

> Today was a good day! Students got into their groups and created characters and discussed a Time Place At Rise for their scenes. They also wrote a short, 2-3 sentence description of the basis of their scenes—or at least I hope they did. I'll look in a minute.

> What I really liked was that two of the groups included the names of people who were absent. There are two girls I 'worry' about because they are so quiet and reserved—and they were absent. As I went around and recorded the names of the group members, one group of three girls said that the two quiet girls would also be a part of their group. I didn't have to ask, it just happened.

> Amy had suggested that she and I create the groups, but I told her that I had told them that they could choose their groups—it's their play/creation. When she saw the final groups, she was pleased. So was I. The students are taking this seriously and seem eager to move on. Amy is still impressed with the one-liners and how insightful the comments are. I'm getting the feeling that, even though I've never

had a doubt about the respect she has for these students, she's seeing them in a new light and the respect is growing in a new way.

DM: Okay, ladies and gentlemen. Sshh… Patrisha, Erica, turn your phones off…Alright, the next step to this…you know, while….while we're waiting, let's go ahead and do this. What I'd like you to do is go ahead and open…umm…your dialogue journals…to the very next entry so I don't have to hunt it down. date it please and just….tell me what's going through your head. What are you thinking about, if you're thinking about anything on these sentence stems and if you do have a question about something that was on the sentence stem and you're still not sure if you got the answer or whatnot…I've got all weekend. I can sit down… I can write you an answer. I appreciate that….(*moves to Kalama*) I'm now going to explain to Miss Kalama what we're going to do next

Dialogue Journals, March 4, 2016

Native Wolf—
I feel neutral about the sentence stems.

Luna—
I don't have an "imagination" Sorry
Sentence Stems—too personal…
My response
Remember, you don't have to respond to anything that makes you uncomfortable.
General thoughts are okay. This whole study is not meant to make you uncomfortable.

For Luna to state that the sentence stems were 'too personal' was not a surprise. In passing conversations, she has shared with me that she feels she doesn't always 'fit in' and she attributes that to her life outside of school. I had the impression that Luna struggled to find an adult in her life which she could trust. I am not sure my reassurance helped, and Luna did become more engaged with her peers. She still exercised caution and protected herself in the space, yet she smiled more often and dialogued more with her group. The scene set in this classroom provided a space for

Luna to allow herself to look over the walls she may have built and notice her world

and what it can offer.

Bling Bling—
These sentence stems were exhausting. But they were interesting.

Papi Chulo—
I think the sentence stems didn't make sense.

Kash—
I know how to read some cursive but not all but thank you for always being here and always being here even though I can bug your life sometimes or all the time. What is social equality mean cause I'm confused.
My response
First of all, you don't bug. I guess I'm worried about you sending a wrong message to the other kids in class. I wouldn't want you to be in an uncomfortable situation. Social equality is like when everyone is treated the same, no matter if they are a boy or a girl, if their skin is a different color, or if they speak a different language.

Forest—
I don't really have anything to say today
This process is ok I guess it's not the funnest thing but it's ok

Helga—
Some of the question's made no sense

The responses in the dialogue journals were not extensive. Most students did not

respond and there was a lack of engagement or enthusiasm about the process. Forest

stating that the process was 'ok I guess it's not the funnest thing' or Native Wolf's

comment 'I feel neutral about the sentence stems' seem to sum up what the energy level

was like. Bling Bling and Papi Chulo indicated some exhaustion or confusion from their

perspective. hooks (2010) provides the view that knowledge acquisition is centered

around conversation. While the one-liners were not face-to-face dialogue, there was still

an exchange about ideas in a written form of discourse. However, she also points out that

"we are living in a culture in which many people lack the basic skills of communication

because they spend most of their time being passive consumers of information" (p. 44).

This seemed to explain some of the journal responses. Bling Bling's personality was one where when given specific expectations for responding to elements of a lesson, he was fine. When a lesson was open-ended and he was asked to provide additional information from his point of view, he hesitated. That hesitation could have been from an insecurity about his abilities, or an unwillingness to put forth an effort, or a combination of both.

Papi Chulo was an English Language Learner (ELL) and perhaps was truly confused by the sentence stems. His English language ability was strong, demonstrated by his reading and writing skills in his Language Arts class. His ability to read the stems and the completed sentences was never in question. His confusion for the one-liners and their use was more likely what added to his misunderstanding or uncertainty. I realized that acknowledging the nuanced behaviors of adolescents was going to be a mindfulness I would need to hold onto for the remainder of the study.

The responses to the sentence stems provided insight into the thoughts and perspectives of the participants. To disregard them would silence student voice. Citations for these statements is problematic in that the names on the forms are the pseudonyms of the students who received that page and not the writer of the original sentence stem. Through the use of the sentence stems, students had an opportunity to illustrate their thoughts and experiences. These adolescents were able to explore a platform for developing their voice and to trust that others would accept their position. Vygotsky's (1931) work on adolescent thought and concept development asserts that at this point in human development, children are transitioning from more concrete forms of thought to thinking conceptually. He presents

specific investigations show that only after the age of 12, i.e. only at the beginning of the pubescent period and after the end of primary school age, to the processes which lead to the formation of concepts and abstract thinking begin to develop in children (Vygotsky, 1931, p. 21).

Adolescents readily articulate the concepts of friendship, trust, equality, as well as others. Students live these beliefs as they build self-image, develop connections beyond family, and explore ways to be in the world. The phrase 'sometimes it's hard' purports difficulty; 'kids are creeps' and 'people are crap and can be mean' suggests the perception and intentions of others. It was important for students to distinguish what they see as negative aspects of life. There are direct, personal events that make things challenging and the global observation of behaviors of others that are detrimental. Adolescents experience their world and reality in ways adults might dismiss. The articulation of perceptions by students needs to be heard and honored by their teachers. This perspective can be the beginning of an intergenerational dialogue to help adolescents navigate the transition at this life stage.

Students also expressed positive qualities with the idea of 'people deserve being treated equally' or that social inequality is a horror because 'it is' are very telling statements based on conceptual perspectives of adolescents. Recognizing abstractions of behaviors over concrete expressions of feelings are characteristic at this phase of development for adolescents. These concepts may have surfaced through other means, yet the use of drama tools to establish trust and the exercise of the one-liners as a portion of the larger creation put into context a space for these adolescents to exercise their voice.

There was only one concern--interest for building a play around horror story felt

inauthentic to the underlying perspectives of many of the students.

Introduction of Still Images/Image Theatre

Scene 2

Time: March, 2016, early afternoon.

Place: Eastside Middle School, large room, furniture pushed aside.

At Rise: Students are being asked to choose groups with whom they will work based on their interests in the themes voted on earlier. There is a sub in the class; Miss L. Kalama is video recording the lesson. Drama Mama (DM) has described the process based on a previously played drama game and that this is an extension-- the basis for Image Theatre.

(*Lights up*)

DM: Alright….so look around. See who's gonna be part of your group…

MISS L: Everybody sit up. Find your group.

DM: I'm letting you….this is your choice

Students chose their groups based on the social groups they demonstrate in class.

There are two distinct cliques with core members in each combination. Helga and

Patrisha lead a group whose focus is respect and social equality. Members could be

described as studious, artistic, introspective, and willing to explore new ideas. They are

devoted to one another, yet inclusive of peers who may not normally engage with their

crowd.

Papi Chulo and Megan lead the other group. While they are serious about their

work, they enjoy popular culture and physically expressing themselves. This group tends

to be more selective of its participants and rarely invite others to join. By encouraging

choice in their groups rather than being assigned, students had opportunities to augment

the ownership of the work.

Adolescents' peer relationships become a primary focal point for development of

identity, acceptance, moral parameters, and positionality in the community. It is

important for teachers and adults working with middle school students to recognize this

important phase in the maturation of adolescents. The American Psychological

Association (2002) offers a resource for professionals working with adolescents and

states that "[p]eer groups also serve as powerful reinforcers during adolescence as

sources of popularity, status, prestige, and acceptance" (p. 21). By advocating students

choose their working groups, the goal of what hooks (2010) describes as self-directed

learners who "participate fully in the production of ideas" (p. 43) can guide the pedagogy

in the classroom.

(Forest begins to roll across the floor, like a log, in front of DM)

DM: We can make it a group of 7 (*indicates Luna Purple and Pepe joining Native Wolf, Stitch, Helga, Erica, and Patrisha*)
FOREST: (*as he is rolling toward DM feet*) Excuse me

DM: (*to Luna Purple and Pepe*) You ladies okay with that (*they indicate yes*)

FOREST: (*still rolling*) Excuse me

DM: (*stepping back*) Forest, we're getting this….Oh, thank you Miss Kalama.

FOREST: (*stops, looks to Kalama*) You're not recording this again?

DM: Yeah

KALAMA: Sweetie, yes I am.

FOREST: AAagggggg

KALAMA: Make your rolls perfect!

FOREST: Aarrr

KALAMA: Dramatic!

(*Kalama moves to the group of 7*)

PATRISHA: How we gonna start off?

HELGA: So, let me see the locations (*picks up a list of settings created with Amy in an earlier session*). We have to…which one first (*looks at paper*) Okay, so Bikini Bottom?

STITCH: Sponge Bob (*Patrisha laughs*) like their friendship?

(*Patrisha nods her head and smiles*)

PATRISHA: support

STITCH: I *am* getting support… blue plankton

HELGA: Except for Karen

STITCH: Caesar love and friendship are right there. There's friendship there.

PAPI CHULO: Orange is the new black

MEGAN: There's no jail on there (*indicates the setting list*)

DM: (*to Megan*) Do you want to change the story of…they were…but you're not going to be able to talk. But is this, of the setting…of what the place is gonna be like…is that what some of the ideas you guys came up with?

PAPI CHULO: (*smiling*) Hey that's awesome…we can (*inaudible conversation*) I swear to God….don't take the keys….I swear Noooo (*reaches for something, to Megan*)

KALAMA: Stay on task, gentlemen…..

MEGAN: Okay

KALAMA: Pretty please

PAPI CHULO: (*jingling coins from his pocket*) See, I told you….it says everywhere for place so fucking (*inaudible*)

PAPI CHULO: In jail, at the pokie

MEGAN: Is he gonna be stabbing you? Me and --- are gonna be like (*points a finger at Guy, puts other hand over his mouth*)

GUY: (*smiles, rubs hands together*) Yeahhhhh

PAPI CHULO: (*to Guy*) You wanna stab me because I'm a snitch

MEGAN: Okay, so we got a murderer (*points to Guy*) you're gonna die (*points to Papi Chulo*) and I'm gonna be a witness…

KALAMA: How does that happen in jail?... sorry

PAPI CHULO: They make shanks

MEGAN: Yeah, we made a shiv

GUY: Oh

PAPI CHULO: (*makes discrete stabbing motions*) and ---'s like the bodyguard

MEGAN: It's an abandoned

PAPI CHULO: Abandoned

MEGAN: Me, you and --- wanted to go

PAPI CHULO: (*to Guy*) You wanna be the killer?

(*Guy nods his head*)

MEGAN: Videotape the inside of it.

PAPI CHULO: Yeah, okay, it's like us, we fight

MEGAN: We go to Alcatraz

PAPI CHULO: Yeah, (*punches his fist into his hand*) we go to Alcatraz (*turns to Guy*) we see your ass (*Guy smiles*) we fuckin' (*hits fist in hand*) we go, we bounce out

(*Guy is smiling the whole time*)

MEGAN: (*indicates video camera*) Watch out ….you're on camera

PAPI CHULO: It's okay, they can cut it out

MEGAN: We can't

PAPI CHULO: (*looks at the camera*) Don't cut it out.

MEGAN: Alright then, we're in Alcatraz

PAPI CHULO: Alcatraz

(*Pause*)

Papi Chulo and Megan know one another well enough that they can converse with incomplete thoughts. Megan discussed "It's an abandoned" and Papi responded "Abandoned". What was abandoned was a jail and their verbalization of that assisted Guy in following their train of thought. Knowledge of transactions in a jail and the use of a "shank" and a "shiv", with Guy's response being "Oh" revealed a social context that some students this age may not immediately understand. The exchange about Papi's use of the word "fucking" recorded on the video--Megan "Watch out…you're on camera" with the response from Papi "It's okay, they can cut it out" and Megan's response "We can't"--may lack detail about what Megan is warning Papi against, but again, these two have a rapport that allowed for the details to be inferred. This dialogue demonstrates what bell hooks (2010) describes as conversation-based learning. Papi and Megan were using a familiar vernacular to process and create the scene. The short exchange regarding the

expletive Papi used acknowledged the expected parameters of language usage at Eastside, yet conveyed meaning, intent, and drama to tell the story. Megan was hesitant. Papi was insistent. Papi brought to the scene what his understanding of the situation could be, and was working to align it with Megan's and Guy's knowledge.

Kamala was only video recording the interactions which provided freedom for this group to talk "in a conversational manner, [and] defensive barriers [were] less likely to be put up" (hooks, 2010, p. 45). The focus for Papi was to emphasize the dramatic tension of the image the group was to create. Only through discourse specific to this trio of students did Papi feel as if he could get his point across. Recognizing how students express themselves is fundamental to their thinking critically.

<center>(Resume)</center>

(*Kalama comes to Alex, lying on the step with Miss L behind her on the upper step a room with built in risers that act like deep, carpeted steps. Students will lie down on them*)

ALEX: Oh yeah, he's a customer cuz he don't wanna die

BLING BLING: You're the victim (*looking at Alex*)…you're the perp

DM: Is that gonna be….how are you going to stage that? How would you stage that?

MISS L: (*indicates Alex*) She's the one that finds him with the knife

ALEX: Ooo I call the PoPo

BLING BLING: (*turns to Miss L*) Are you a waitress?

ALEX: I didn't know she was in our story…Yeah, you could be the cop, Miss!

BLING BLING: but we don't want to go in that direction

DM: You could take it in that direction if your group agrees to it, but

ALEX: The PoPo

MISS L: So you could be….do you have your phone on you?

BLING BLING: Okay, we got this

FOREST: I literally have nothing

ALEX: (*to Miss L using her pink cellphone as a gun*) Oh, you have a pink gun

FOREST: Nooo Bling Bling is going to die first

DM: (*to Miss L*) They can't talk

ALEX: (*pointing to the others—to Bling Bling*) You would be like this (*holding a knife*) you would be like this (*to Miss L holding a pretend gun—to Forest*) you would be on the floor

FOREST: I don't wanna be on the floor

(*Pause*)

The dialogue for this scene is more along the lines of how adolescents behave when adults are present. The content of their scene went unchallenged, yet their language was constrained by the presence of adults. I had interfered with "You could take it in that direction if your group agrees to it, but", and this scene became less the participants' ideas and more what is traditionally appropriate for a school setting. One word--but-- removed any true ownership students may have had in this scene. As Lev Vygotsky (2012/1934) states, "there is a specific balance between impaired thought and impaired speech" (p. 73). My utterance of the word 'but' not only circumscribed the groups' speech, it also disregarded their thoughts. Limitations may have also been in place due to the presence of Miss L, an adult the students knew as a staff member at Eastside who had

connections to authority figures at the school. The power was ultimately in the hands of

the adults.

<p align="center">(Resume)</p>

(Kamala moves to the third group)

KAMALA: You guys know you're working on still image, right?

PATRISHA: Yep

STITCH: But I don't wanna sit on the floor….it's cold!

PATRISHA: You don't have to sit on the floor.

STITCH: But I'm a snail!

HELGA: (asking) So what does Bikini Bottom have to do with treating each other fairly?

NATIVE WOLF: It's a frame

PATRISHA: It's a framework

HELGA: Listen…listen, (gestures hands over head) I have an idea. Patrisha's gonna be like this (holds hand out) and I'm gonna be helping her up, and you guys are going to be laughing at her, but it's like 'treat others fairly' (Patrisha sits on the floor, Helga puts hand out to help her up)

PATRISHA: Still image

DM: (enters the space) Still image

HELGA: Then you all say 'ha ha'

DM: No, still image, you can't talk

HELGA: Okay then you all go like (opens mouth, puts hand to mouth)

This last group deferred to Helga who advocated for social equality and justice

experiences with the entire class. He is comfortable with his role and the others follow his

lead. Helga has the reputation with teachers at Eastside as a capable student whose

behaviors and attitude align with their expectations. His peers recognize this and have

little trouble adapting to his ideas and thoughts. At this age, adolescents seek approaches

to help them withstand peer pressure, not only from trusted adults but also from peers

they identify as successful. According to the guide published by the American

Psychological Association (2002), adolescents pursue social groups that offer "alternative

'cool enough' groups that will accept them if the group with which the adolescent seeks

to belong is undesirable (or even dangerous). The need to belong to groups at this age is

too strong to simply ignore" (p. 21). Adults ought to create time and space where students

can work with whom they choose and interpret their reality. The work using drama

strategies with this group was one way to build that place.

In a debriefing discussion with the group, I asked students to recognize elements

of the process and describe their thoughts. Students raised their hands and contributed as

I called on them. My positionality as an adult/teacher was meant to guide, yet I accept

that student responses were limited in that I was in control.

> DM: A couple things I want to ask you about about the tableaux—the still images.
> Umm, the idea of Image Theatre is to be able to create a story with just the
> actors' bodies…umm and to be able to begin discussions with that. Now
> your own tableau…what did you hear your audience say or how they
> responded to your particular tableau that may have surprised you or that
> maybe you went 'yeah, that's what we were going for, they got it' or
> 'wow, I didn't think of that. I didn't think my body showed that'
> (*pause*)….Yeah, Helga

> HELGA: I don't see how someone falling would be like…(*softer*) never mind…I
> was gonna say something like

> DM: No, say it

> LUNA PURPLE: Say it, that's why we're here

> HELGA: Well, I was saying, it doesn't make sense how like Megan would want
> to be the person who fell…

MEGAN: Well, I thought it was someone on the floor and you were helping them up

DM: Forest, yeah, what did you think?

FOREST: I want to say sorry for not being in a very good mood today

DM: Well, I'm sorry you're not in a good mood today…that something happened that put in you a place where you didn't feel good. Thank you….Luna Purple….

LUNA PURPLE: I feel like our point didn't get across…like what we were trying to say cuz we were all laughing at her cuz she fell and Helga was the only one to help her up.

MEGAN: I thought they were shocked that she fell

FOREST: That's not very nice

DM: Okay Forest, what do you mean by that?

FOREST: That wasn't a very nice scene to do

LUNA PURPLE: But that was the point. It was friendship and he wanted to help her up. I feel like our point didn't get across.

(*Two minutes later*)

DM: What about the other two scenes? The jail scene and the Hooters scene?

HELGA: Someone being held hostage at Hooters?

MEGAN: No one was being held hostage…there was just going to be a fight. And she was a police officer and she was gonna shoot the person

HELGA: Shoot someone because…you don't shoot an unarmed person

PAPI CHULO: He had a knife!

FOREST: Obviously…he was like that….he was gonna stab him.

MEGAN: Oh, he had a knife….I thought he was gonna punch him.

BLING BLING: I still didn't get the Bikini Bottom scene

(*Two minutes later*)

DM: …Someone on the ground and someone trying to help that person up and others laughing at them. Could that be a lack of respect? Could that be applied to the other scenes?

BLING BLING: Not ours

PAPI CHULO: Nah, not ours

DM: So killing another human being is not lack of respect?

S: Nooo

MEGAN: You're disrespecting my friend.

DM: No guys, think about it…right now, even in this space…even at school, we have a group of people who feel like they got disrespected. So I think maybe…maybe …whoa…this is where the old lady brain goes right now, so just live with me for this moment…I sit back and I'm thinking 'Gosh, maybe the whole idea is respect more than anything else'…more than horror stories, more than big secrets…this is a level of respect too. If somebody doesn't respect another person's life and is willing to take it…does that make sense? So maybe….maybe…okay, there's my old lady two cents.

(*Scene*)

Researcher's Journal, March 9, 2016

Today was supposed to be the big intro to Image Theatre, but only had 15 students out of 27. Only had 8th graders. 7th graders were testing. Had to rethink what we were doing. I modified what I planned and still got to having students "read" images/tableaux through thought bubbles for each of the characters.

Figure 61: Hooters Attack

This group decided to create a scene that took place at Hooters and there was someone being attacked, someone calling the police, a bystander watching in shock, and a police officer pointing a gun at one man attacking another.

Figure 62: Jail Betrayal

A second group created a scene in a jail—Alcatraz—where one character was stabbing another character in the neck while two others were watching in shock. In this group are students who seem to want to shock. *Papi Chulo's and Megan's behaviors on any given day may give other adults cause to want to chastise them and I admit I fall into that reaction more often than not. I do it with Forest and Bling Bling too.*

I was surprised at my initial reaction to these two images. I went into 'teacher mode' and wanted them to back off the violence. Then my researcher voice said 'This belongs to them, not you. If this is what they create, you have to honor it'. Hard for me to do, since violence isn't my thing—never has been. Perhaps there is

a level of catharsis for them or this is a reproduction of what they have seen or know. Honor it Honor it Honor it!

Figure 63: Sponge Bob Helping a Friend

The last group created an image where one character was on the floor as if she had fallen, another character was holding her hand and standing over here as if he were helping her up. The other five were standing in a circle around the pair and pointing at the two, with facial expressions of laughing. Helga and Luna Purple are of like minds as are the others in this group. They have been the two most outspoken in class about supporting the themes and ideas of trust, respect, equality within the group. They have even mentioned racially tinged comments that come out in class and their exasperation in their dialogue journals. I know I can't solve it or create a utopian class, but maybe we can at least address what feels like a dark cloud hanging over the work I am encouraging them to do.

There was a definite gap between the two groups who created the violent scenes and the third group. The members of the third group presented their image but had some challenges with giggling. I'm guessing it was a nervous giggle, but I don't know. According to the third group, the other groups 'misread' their image when the reading came back as one character pushed another character down and the rest thought it was funny. I could feel the frustration and disappointment in the members of the third group that things were misread.

We debriefed and some of the comments that came out supported my feeling of the 3rd group's frustration. Group 3 was trying to cover friendship, trust, and respect. Perhaps due to their giggling, the other two groups didn't get that read from the image. My 'aha' was that what seemed to be woven into all three images was the idea of respect. I mentioned that—how can you have respect for another human if you are willing to take his/her life? And the comment came out (---? Papi Chulo? Megan') that 'betrayal' (Papi's word not mine) could also be a theme running through these scenes. My question is how much of those feelings come from the images and situations and how much of it may come from personal

experiences. I did mention that perhaps we need to rethink the theme for the performance and make it more about respect and/or betrayal.

Reflecting on my positionality and reaction to the scenes, I admit I had a concern about the attack at the restaurant and in the prison. My personal tendency is to avoid confrontation of any kind and it was and still is difficult for me to support violence in any way. Herr and Anderson (2015), in their work on action research, suggest that

the researcher/practitioners themselves must be open to reorienting their view of reality as well as their view of their role. All involved in the research should deepen their understanding of the social reality under study and should be moved to some action to change it (or to reaffirm their support of it) (p. 69).

My surprise at what the students were creating had me thinking of what in their realities they brought to the scene work they did. The focus of the work was to develop dialogue and discourse directly related to the participants' reality in order to discover interpretations of problems. Theory and practice felt beyond my reach. I encouraged students to trust and share their realities. However, I had come to this group with the narrow concentration of envisioning them working on social issues that personally affected them. It was at this point that TO pedagogy was more a source of inspiration to guide the study and that 'building rapport' became the strongest piece of this work.

Figure 64: How can you tell your story in one still image?

When Papi mentioned 'betrayal' as a component of the theme, I appreciated his position. He articulated a nuanced stance that eluded me until that moment. It was the reminder where I had to admit there were many perspectives to which I was blind. When I used betrayal in our debriefing, most students acknowledged their understanding of the term as it would apply to their still image. The concrete representation of betrayal and respect through the physical representation of the scenes supported the deeper, abstract concepts underlying the images. There remained the third group who felt that as participants, they found little respect from their peers. They accepted responsibility for nervous giggles, yet were frustrated that their image was not read as intended. While this exercise with a modified version of Image Theatre was misperceived and vague, the dialogue with students was informative.

For responses in their dialogue journals, students were asked the following questions. Written responses fell into two categories: those who enjoyed the experience and those who expressed frustration and even exasperation with the process.

- What is this process like for you?
- How did your group compromise?
- How would you do anything differently with your group?

Dialogue Journals, March 9, 2016

Native Wolf—
the process is fun. we didn't we all liked the idea.
I don't know how we could have done anything different. I like our idea and I liked what it portrayed

Bling Bling—
What was the process for you?
No, I personally liked it, but we should have been able to use props

Guy—

I like this process because we can see how people look at things and I like it because I get to stab someone. Something different is to use props.

Papi Chulo—
The process is easy 'sept do the still image because you can't move.

How would you do anything differently with your group?
Nothing cause we good with what we got

Patrisha—
this process was nice. we took out time and got time to finish our still image. I would have less people laughing and a lot more different acting/still images

Lil Dicky—
It was hard I guess because we didn't know what to do.
I wouldn't change anything from my group.

Stitch—
This process is legitness we can work with the people we enjoy and that makes the work easier for me anyway. The only thing I don't like is moving because I am sore because I've been working out. And I think my group compromised really well. 😊

Alex—
This is really fun working with our sub is great!
We had a couple of difficulties with our group but we got it!
I would stay it bit more focus and not laugh with the crowd. and I would definitely tell them to stay in place.

Luna Purple—
This process was fun and I had friends in this group.
I don't think I would change anything with my group. I feel disrespected in this class it they don't care why are they here

Helga—
This was pretty fun to make an idea for treating each other fairly
I made the idea
Maybe tell my group to be more serious when we got up

Megan—
Still images help your group work together. You guys have to talk about what every ones role is. Ours didn't help the audience because no one knew what they were doing…

Erica—

The process was long to figure out what we were gonna do! My group compromised by just coming up with an idea that was not too hard.
What I would do differently is maybe be more enthusiastic and changed the topic.

Forest—
Hmmmm…..I would maybe want to change how the character is about to die

Pepe—
What is this process like for you? oh well, it's kinda boring
How did your group compromise? I don't really know we just did what we were told.
How would you do anything differently with your group? I wouldn't change anything, but with other people trying to understand our image was confusing? It wasn't hard??

One of the group of students was working with an adult who was an educational assistant at Eastside and filling in as a substitute for Amy, who was out ill. The students knew this substitute and they had a positive rapport. Miss L (pseudonym) worked with the group where someone was about to be attacked at a restaurant. Alex reported that the group had some "challenges", but were able to work them out. Perhaps they were able to do so because Miss L was there. What was ambiguous was how significant her presence may have been to what the students created. Did her positionality as a staff member at Eastside influence students to curb the content of the scene for fear of retaliation? Did her presence assist the group creating an image that was easily read by the others? The idea of guiding students versus imposing tasks on them was a precarious balance in the context of this study. There seemed little difficulty with Miss L allowing the space for expected parameters and roles at Eastside to be broadened and ideas begin to find a place for presentation.

Several students mentioned the flexibility of working with their ideas and owning their work. Native Wolf--"I like our idea…and what it portrayed"; Helga--"pretty fun to make the idea and "I made the idea"; Erica--"coming up with an idea that was not too

hard". These comments were qualified with thoughts about how things might be done differently. Bling Bling and Guy wanted to use props. Alex, Helga, Patrisha mentioned that not laughing as much and trying to be more serious would have assisted in the process. Stitch validated her experience with the term "legitness"…and that "we can work with the people we enjoy and that makes the work easier for me anyway". She approaches the work in class sincerely and appreciates a balance of humor and gravity drama can achieve.

Comments that underscored frustration with the process varied from Lil Dicky mentioning "we didn't know what to do" to Pepe offering that "with other people trying to understand our image was confusing? It wasn't hard??". That the students trusted to share their confusion and frustration demonstrated the need for building some level of rapport. By communicating with the dialogue journals, students had the opportunity to express themselves.

As students continued working in the environment of the drama class, reoccurring themes became obvious. Education and learning had become a means to an end rather than an exploration to find new questions while adapting to existing modes. To move beyond the formulaic structure of school--that of adults setting expectations and students complying with standards set by teachers--was a goal I needed to rethink. These adolescents had to trust in extending boundaries and exploring the use of their own voice without punitive repercussions. As hooks (2010) offers, "engaged pedagogy highlights the importance of independent thinking and each student finding his or her unique voice, this recognition is usually empowering for students" (p. 21). I had the illusion of having

opened that door through previous work, yet I realized there were deeply rooted

behaviors and issues the work of this study could not shake.

Students wanted the comfort of familiar, traditional methods they expected of a

drama class. To use props and movement to tell stories was a need they had and were not

allowed. I expected that previous work had demonstrated occasions for expanding the use

of their imaginations, yet that was not the case. The reality was that there were

educational methods set in place long before this study and those approaches would

continue beyond our final performance. Rarely had these students had an opportunity to

exercise some control over their learning, and this study was unfamiliar to them.

One specific theme that continued being declared was lack of respect. There

continued to be a small collection of students who were aligned with social justice and

equality ideas. Luna Purple expounded on her experiences in class with "I feel

disrespected in this class they don't care why are they here", and did have members of

the class with whom she could find allegiance. She identified as Black, and while there

were other students at Eastside who also identified as Black, she was the minority in this

drama class. Amy and I had never heard any derogatory remarks directed at Luna Purple,

yet they must have been happening or at least perceived by her. She did share with me in

a brief, side conversation that, "I've had to deal with these attitudes for a while, but they

still bother me" (personal conservation, Luna Purple, February, 2016). She did value the

work we were doing, as she had asked me directly at the beginning of the study, why we

were doing it. Her comment suggesting that her peers 'don't care' signaled me that Luna

Purple and Helga saw value in the work of this study. I had suggested to both of them at

separate instances that perhaps the experiences of other students had not brought them to a place where they felt compelled to explore social issues.

As I reflect on the divide in this class between the small group committed to friendship and respect and the larger group wanting to work through more popular culture themes, I recognize that perhaps the larger group was less experienced and unsure how to explore their unknown. There was an unspoken fear, trepidation of what was expected, and that they could fail. No reassurance I offered would have altered that fear. There was still the hierarchal structure of adult/teacher and student and the obstacles were still in place.

Amy had been out for this particular session, so she and I watched the video recording the next afternoon. We both came away from the experience with a feeling that there was a fractious nature in the demeanor of the students. I had felt this same way as I had responded to the dialogue journals the previous night. Amy asked, "Should we stick with these themes? They (students) don't seem to engaged with them. I'm worried about the violence" (Personal conversation, March 10, 2016). I mentioned to Amy that if we truly wanted to explore the positions of the students, we had to let this be theirs. Then I thought about Amy being a participant as well, and shouldn't her position be honored, too? In their text on classroom research, Nancy Fichtman Dana and Diane Yendol-Hoppey (2009) propose that "[m]aking your tacit knowledge more visible can often lead to significant discoveries when you are individually or collaboratively analyzing and interpreting your data" (p. 62). Practitioner Action Research (PAR) requires on-going data analysis, allowing for adaptations in the study to report the experiences of the participants. Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson (2015) advocate for action research and

PAR to benefit all members of a community and that the work become "the transformation of relationships in ways that recognize that all around the table have important contributions and responsibilities toward improving the public good as manifest in their sites and communities" (p. 29). I appreciated the hesitancy of Amy in her role as a veteran teacher, because my teacher soul was also concerned about the content chosen by two of the groups. I also was concerned about losing the voices of the students. I identify with not being heard in so many aspects of my own life, even as an adult. Conceivably, this work was predicated on the personal experiences I had and continue to encounter. It had become vital to me to do what I could not to replicate the structures of silence in my world. This study was meant to provide a means to record their experiences and perceptions using their voice and that balance was precarious.

Time, Place, At Rise

The group was ready to move forward with the project. Allowing students to choose whom they would work with provided a deeper level of engagement with the scene and all the elements members wanted to include. Based on the generalizations created with the steps of developing a central theme for the performance and the theme of the one-liners, students now built scenes centered on their personal experiences. Participants had the space to bring their perspectives and interpretations of the elements of the work. As Vygotsky (1931) maintained in this stage of thought and concept development,

> words cease to be signifiers of separate objects or proper names…During this
>
> period, to provide a child with a word, means to point out a family of things

which are intimately connected with one another according to a great variety of

kinship (p. 42).

Students built understanding and appreciation of the conceptual notions of friendship, respect, and equality by bringing their personal pieces to the production and fashioning a mosaic of the groups' individual, subtle contributions.
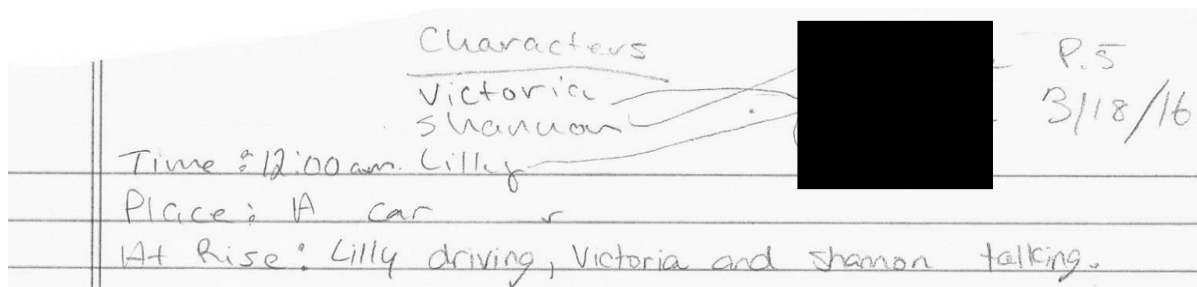
Figure 65: Planning a Surprise
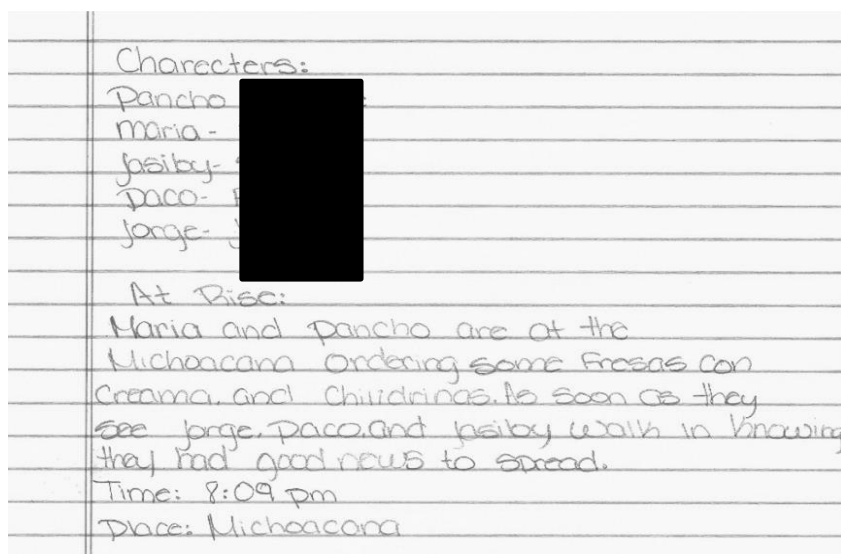
Figure 66: Concert Tickets

Characters

- forest
- lake
- cabin
- cave
- bear
- dock

[redacted]

Jackie Watson — curly hair, brown eyes, tall, and wears glasses.

[redacted]

Asheley — Mendez. wavy hair, dark brown eyes, and a little bit shorter then Jackie.

[redacted]

Beth Suoriza — black long hair, tall, brown eyes, and like the internet.

[redacted]

~~Bessey~~ Kimmy Manka — long hair, brown hair, short, brown eyed.

[redacted]

Suzy Capsicom — short hair, dark brown hair, dark brown eyes

Time: 5:00 am
Place: Cabin
At Rise: Everybody is ~~getting~~ ready to go hiking.

Figure 67: At the Mall…

Time: 12:00pm
Place: School Playground
at Rise: Children playing jumprope

Twilight: Hey gup can I play with you.

Bubbles: → NO.
Blossom:

Buttercup: Wait what.
Bubbles: shes new what do you mean.
Buttercup: We have to give her a chance.
Blossom:

Figure 68: Jump Rope
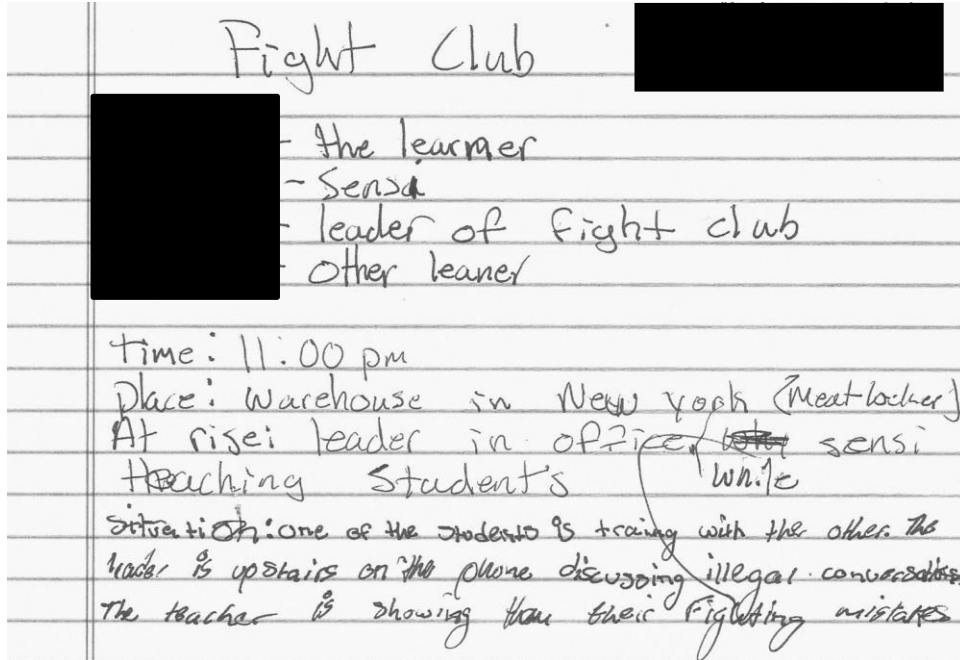
Figure 69: PFC

Each group met and discussed their ideas. By recording ideas each group developed,

students were able to commit to a basic framework for their scenes. With a rough plan in

hand, the last step in this session was for groups to create two still images--the first

showing the at rise image, and the second, an image of how the scene would end. The

still images were shared with the other groups. Students responded in their dialogue

journals.

There was some difficulty in this step in that students wanted to enact their scene

to convey the story. These adolescents were asked to communicate their ideas through

visual means and not spoken or written words. Their peers were to look at them and for

the students this was uncomfortable. The reference for adolescent development published

by the APA (2002) states that, "during adolescence… physical appearance commonly

assumes paramount importance" (p. 8). This manner of communication was relatively unfamiliar to students and even though we had played drama games where others watched them, still images and Image Theatre was for a specific purpose. Students knew their peers would retain a certain objective with viewing the images. Apprehension was not directly expressed, yet it was the responsibility of the adults to recognize that physicalization of an idea would have many layers, one of them being comfort. Amy and I moved forward with this experience with disregard of the level of self-consciousness students would feel. My understanding of this was after the fact and as the dialogue journal entries reflected narrow answers students might offer.

Dialogue Journals, March 18, 2016

In response to the question *how did the still images help your group's story and your audience?*

Patrisha
Still images helps My group because it helps us get into character. It helps our audience be showing what might help with what we are gonna show them.

Luna Purple
Thank you! The still images helped my group work together.

Helga
It help the group by setting the scene and mood. It help's the audience by (telling) showing them what's going on I like making these still images

Jackie
Still images help my group is that is helps us by not using words. It helps are audience is thinking about what's going on in the image.

Forest
I don't think it helped either of them because couldn't really understand what the people were doing.

Bling Bling
A still image helps your group by demonstrating teamwork and strategy to make your group come together.

Raven
It help them by showing what move My group did. it help the audience by what move the did.

The Weird Potato
I think the still image would get the audience attention so that they can pay attention to the people.

Luna
Still images help your group to get in character. A still image helps your audience by showing them what your scene is gonna be about. Can you get Forest & Bling Bling to cooperate please I don't want to fail because of them.
Thanks for that

Guy
They help the group by working together.
They help the audience by having them guess.
Sweet Jelly
Still images help our group by making them stay still. I think it helps the audience by staying quiet to see what it is about.

Kash
I think the still image because you can create and be cool and funny
Because the audience can see what the actors are doing for a minute and it helps my group I think because we only have to do two images instead of a whole play

Tony
The still images don't help our group sorry but I find it useless. My audience probably confused too.
My response
I get it. Your group has members that are kinda in and out of class. It can be frustrating and confusing to get something going and have to change it a lot. Let me know how I can help make it make sense for you—then it might help you figure out how to share with your audience.

The word 'help' was echoed in many of the journal responses. Perhaps the word

was used because it was part of the question. Yet many of the student responses had what

has become a familiar refrain in many of the other interactions with the adults--telling us

what they think we want to hear rather than what they actually feel. The positionality of

teacher/student continued to be a barrier to more authentic acceptance and responses from

all participants. For action research, Herr and Anderson (2015) remind practitioners that the work is treating one's

> personal and professional self as an outside observer rather than as an insider committed to the success of the actions under study…[and that] it is difficult and perhaps deceptive to attempt to separate the study of one's self and practice from the story of the outcomes of actions initiated in a setting (p. 42).

As a practitioner researcher, straddling the line between outsider/guide and insider/learner was a position I had to continue to visit. As a teacher, I was learning how the discourse I automatically used with students was perpetuating the dominate paradigm of traditional educational practices.

There were two students who offered frustration regarding the process. The first, Luna, reported that the work itself was helpful, yet she was exasperated by the behaviors of two of her group members. She asked "[c]an you get Forest & Bling Bling to cooperate please I don't want to fail because of them". Luna included this in her journal and knew that Amy would not see her comment. However, I felt compelled to advocate for Luna because her success would translate to success for the group. Amy had noticed behaviors from the two boys that was impeding the work of the group, so when we discussed Luna's concern, Amy was already aware of the situation. She did offer that "Forest is having some things to deal with at home" (personal conversation, March, 2016) and his friendship with Bling Bling was a "constant" in his life. Yet, because of Amy's role in as a participant in the study, we decided I would speak to Forest and Bling Bling about their perspectives during our next session.

Bling Bling said he was okay with the work, yet conceded that interactions with Forest distracted him. Forest said he was unsure of the work and asked to step out of the project and work on something independently. Forcing Forest to continue to work toward an unclear goal would be oppressive on our part, so Amy and I asked him for his alternative. He wanted to write scenes for another drama class at Eastside. Without fanfare or overt acknowledgement, for the next few sessions, Forest slipped quietly into a comfortable spot and wrote short scenes around informational texts.

The second student was Tony, who found the still images ineffective. She remarked that they were "useless" and that "[m]y audience probably confused too". Tony's response felt genuine and unapologetic. It seemed that she had gotten to the point where she felt comfortable enough to express her thoughts and I had to honor that. My response in her journal acknowledged her position--and then positioned myself as the person who could help her and save the situation. My stance was one of authority and power, positions misaligned with the pedagogy of Theatre of the Oppressed. My response and actions with Tony were contradictory to the consideration I had given Forest. I continued to move forward with the work and only now realize my actions. I also question how many times in my 25-year teaching experience I have exerted such behaviors. We moved on.

When Amy and I read the beginnings of the scenes, Amy commented on the "collaborative efforts made by the kids" and how she saw "value in them choosing their groups" (personal conversation, March 18, 2016). She noted that the groups would be empowered to have a say in their work. The stories that the students share are not necessarily stories to which Amy and can relate. hooks (2010) shares that "[s]tories help

us to connect to a world beyond the self. In telling our stories we make connections with other stories" (p. 53). Teachers share some overlapping experiences with students, however, ultimately meaningful stories must be told by the people who have lived them.

I viewed the work as a place of safety for the groups. They were beginning to form scenes of situations familiar to them--hanging out with friends, including someone in a game, planning a surprise--all are familiar to events current in the experiences of these adolescents. The one scene Amy and I did question was the Fight Club scene. Neither of us had seen the movie of the same name, but I knew the plot and I shared it with Amy. She was resistant to the idea based on the violence in the film. I was disheartened that Forest, Guy, and Bling Bling would defer to a known storyline that would be a retelling rather than a creation of something original. I began to consider how to guide the group away from a subject that personally made me uncomfortable. Then I stopped. I had to step away from my own positionality and consider the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

The work of Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson (2015) was the foundation for the methodological approach of practitioner action research (PAR) in my study. I had to remember that my work was not about me--it was about us. The goal of a collaborative study guided by PAR was to benefit all contributors engaged in the work. Herr and Anderson remind researchers of democratic validity.

This refers to the extent to which research is done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation. If not done collaboratively, how are the multiple perspectives and material interests taken into account in the study? For example, are teachers…using action research to find solutions to

> benefit them at the expense of other stake holders? Are … students and
> community members seen as a part of the insider community that undertakes this
> type of research, or are they viewed as outsiders by action researchers? Even
> when collaboration takes place, how deep does it go and how wide does it
> extend?...[D]emocratic validity views [PAR] as an ethical and social justice issue
> (p. 69).

There was a need to reorient my perspective and support Amy in her understanding of the
processes utilized in this study. She and I discussed what the possible outcomes would be
if this group continued with the repeating of a scene from the movie. Amy shared that
Mr. Carson "wouldn't like it and might take privileges away from the 8th graders in the
group" (personal conversation, March 18, 2016). It was the spring semester and there
were several end-of-the-year activities the students were looking forward to--field trips
and the 8th Grade Promotion ceremony. Amy and I wanted to find a way to honor the
group's idea and not to have to face consequences for choices they made.

Due to Spring Break and the school's testing schedule, the next session with all of
the students wasn't until three weeks after our last session. Groups were able to
somewhat pick up where they left off, using the brief written ideas from the previous
session

Researcher's Journal, April 8, 2016

> Haven't seen the students for 3 weeks—they seemed almost as happy as I was to
> see them! They had been testing all week and not everyone was there. They
> seemed tired. Amy and I thought it would be best to just have them meet in their
> groups and review their storylines. I was able to touch base with all the groups but
> one. Amy worked with them—not sure how far they got.

I met with each of these groups to help them refine their stories. Had to make sure not to give too much input because I am so worried about them feeling ownership—these aren't my stories to tell.

- Tony, Weird Potato, ----, and ----- are working around a group of girls their age planning a surprise or surprise party and ----- is a little brother who might tell the secret.
- Cowgirl, Native Wolf, Raven, Sweet Jelly, and Jackie were talking about girls hanging out at the mall. I asked them what is the point of drama— how would they make this scene something more than a slice of life. Raven and Sweet Jelly weren't there, so the discussion was limited. However, Raven and Sweet Jelly are two students who are quiet and tend to follow. I reminded the others that they needed to be respectful of the characters R and S would portray. I think this group still has the mall as a setting, but now they are considering how to frame their story as one where one of the girls can't/won't go into a store. That would make this a different day for the characters.
- Guy, Megan, Luna, and Bling Bling want to do Fight Club. They say it's a big secret so it fits. I was able to talk to all but Bling Bling (absent) and discuss how recreating something that already exists (the movie) will limit what they can do with their characters. The audience is going to expect certain behaviors from the characters and certain events to happen in the story.
- Helga, Angelica, Luna Purple, Pepe, Patrisha are going to do a playground event—jump rope. One girl wants to join but two others say no. An adult talks to the two girls and they let the other girl join. I encouraged them to think about why the 2 girls change their minds—other than the adult intervening. I suggested that they find a way for the girls to change and doing that, the group can demonstrate that young kids can be empowered to solve their problems on their own. This is a strong group.
- Alex, Lil Dicky, ---, Papi Chulo, Roses were with Amy and I'm not sure of their storyline. This is a group that will work well together, I just didn't have time to discuss with Amy (she had to meet with someone during her prep) what came out of their discussion. What I'd like to see—don't know how to push this because --- doesn't speak Spanish—but it would be cool to have the others do the scene in Spanish. Hummmmmm……..

The biggest problem I am running into is having all the students in class at the same time. We still need to find a group for Kash but she's in and out and I haven't seen her in a month.

After discussing the ideas with the groups, they seemed to be comfortable refining their scenes. Due to Amy's concern regarding appropriate topics, she and I felt having discussions with each group and listening to and offering details specific to that scene worked pretty well. There was a possible chance that the context and/or content of the

scenes would be met with consequences for the students from the school's administration. Amy and I needed to find the balance of what students wanted and what reactions might be. It was our role to not allow a false sense of approval in the scenes, yet we needed to hold the fragile classroom community together (hooks, 2010).

The most difficult group I had to approach was The Fight Club group. Because of my own stance on violence, I felt it was important for students not to glorify a movie they had seen that at a core level, promoted violence. However, it was my responsibility to honor their positions. When they accepted my concerns and eventually came up with the idea that the scene was an after-school club that would pillow fight, I found a 'teachable moment'. I was able to offer them that what they were going to do was a spoof--and some old pillows I had. The groups were ready to go and they met to discuss and improvise their scenes.

Figure 69: Concert Goers
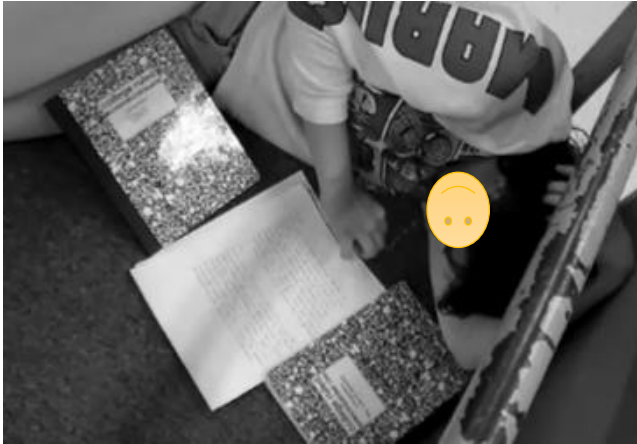
Figure 70: Planning a Surprise—"I'll write the story cuz I'm the only one" (Weird Potato, April 8, 2016)

Figure 71: At the Mall…

Figure 72: Jump Rope

In their journals, students were asked to summarize the plots for their scenes and,
if they wanted to, how they personally relate to the scene their group created. Absences,
for whatever reason prevented reflections by many of the students.

Dialogue Journals, April 11, 2016

PFC
Megan
I don't have a connection to our story. I just like the movie a lot and the rest of them
agreed with me so that's how we came up with it.

Guy
My connection to my story is fighting. I like fighting and I fight to protect people I
care for. I also kinda have anger issues so when people piss me off I explode and hurt
them.

Jump Rope
Patrisha
our play is about a new girl trying to make friend & 2 out of the 3 girls doesn't want
the girl to play with them & the other girl says to give her a chance I can't really
relate to this.
…I've been the new kid but it wasn't hard for me I made friend fast.

Luna Purple
Our group's story is about respect and friendship. It's not always easy being new or
making friends. It's important to treat them with respect.

Helga
My play is about a new girl coming to a school and the other girl's are rude to her

Pepe
Our scene is about a new girl coming to school and a group of girls not being nice or
welcoming. I have a connection with this scene because the person who is trying to
persuade the group of mean girls to be nice, is something I would do.

Erica
Our play is about a new girl coming to a new school and the 2 other girls don't want
to play with her. I could relate to this because when I was in elementary school.

Concert Goers
Lil Dicky
I like it cause it's of Mexicans.

Roses
I can work with the scene and I can also work with that I am the one not able to go to the concert.

At the Mall…
Jackie
I think the story in my group is good but we need more lines for people to say. Also I think Jackie is most likely because If someone is dragging me places I don't want to go (one of my family members) I get bored easily.

Native Wolf
I can relate to our story because it happen to me a lot. L.O.L.

Responses in the dialogue journals provided personal connections to the lives of the students. Boal (1979) offers that theatre needs to be able to communicate with an audience and if the stories that are told are unfamiliar, "theatrical groups are unable to communicate with a mass audience because they use symbols that are meaningless for that audience. A royal crown may symbolize power, but a symbol only functions as such if its meaning is shared" (p. 125). There were many 'I' statements reflecting the personal connections students made to their characters and situations. Patrisha offered "I've been the new kid but it wasn't hard for me I made friend fast" and Pepe states "I have a connection with this scene because the person who is trying to persuade the group of mean girls to be nice, is something I would do". Both these students were faithful to how they conducted themselves in class. What I did notice is that those behaviors were subtle and not often overtly recognized by adults or peers. They were in the same group creating the scene about friendship. The opportunity for them to share their stances may not have changed the dispositions of any of their peers at that moment, but perhaps it gave others something to consider. Many of these situations were universal for the group, so the

scenes would effectively tear down the 'fourth wall' of theatre and build a shared

experience for performers and audience.

The comments from Lil Dicky and Guy provided an extension of their

experiences. Lil Dicky and his family are from Mexico, as are several other students in

class. His observation of "I like it cause it's of Mexicans" provides a recognition of pride

and dignity for him. The indication of self-protection and protection of others Guy shared

is the acknowledgement of self and reactions to real or perceived injustices. Any of these

journal responses, shared with the group, would have other students finding some truth in

the reflections. What Lil Dicky and Guy were able to do in their scenes was to provide

subtle references to their positions.

Forum Theatre

Researcher's Journal, April 25, 2016
> Forum Theatre….trying it anyway. I'm concerned about the testing schedule and not having all the students at the same time. Feel like we've lost 2 weeks…. We even had 19 sixth graders for a session because their teacher had to proctor tests for seventh graders. AAARRRRRGGGG! This process of Forum Theatre is nowhere near the Boal was working toward. I had so many different scenarios in my head but these students took the process someplace else. I am sticking to honoring their work and not trying to push an agenda.

I reflected on a project of this magnitude and found that I approached this study ill

prepared for the daily temperaments of students this age. I've worked with seventh and

eighth graders before at Eastside, however not at this level. One day progresses as

planned, and the next I end up describing behaviors as silly and goofy. Students this age

have a multitude of influence on much of their time and look to school to provide some

consistency (APA Adolescent Development, 2002). Because of the work in which we

engaged was unique to this class and outside the expectations of the participants, full

commitment to the work waned. Forum Theatre was not going to happen.

CHAPTER 7: ACT 3 THE RESOLUTION

Theatre is the art of looking at ourselves. Augusto Boal (1979)
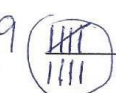
Students rehearsed. They rehearsed again. They rehearsed their 3 to 5 minutes scenes several times. They worked with the basic structures of the stories each group had devised and implemented improvisation to present them. The improv allowed for their language and their words in that moment to be used. Students were able to negotiate and collaborate on what their story would be. The expectation that all of the scenes were to be works in progress provided some relief to students. Weird Potato shared with me, "But Miss, my group is never here all at the same time. I don't know what to do" (Weird Potato, personal conversation, April, 2016). I offered to her the framework of improv allowed for adjustments to be made in the scenes. Other groups had the same issue, as students were out for illness, make-up testing, or other reasons. However, we had to move on.

We were at the point where the students' work was to be performed. Amy and I discussed how to wrap up the process. I reminded her that the group had the option to perform for an audience or just to be video recorded. Amy was concerned that without an audience, "the kids won't take this seriously. And Mr. Carson [the principal] will be expecting something" (Amy Smith, personal communication, April, 2016). I reiterated to Amy that the core of the work we had created was to highlight issues and reveal meaning primarily for the students. The participants created whatever they created and owned it--it was theirs to share as they saw fit. Amy confessed that allowing students to exercise that kind of power made her uncomfortable. I had to admit that I would have preferred students to perform for an audience; however, Amy and I had to honor the decision of the

group. We created a voting ballot for students to express their wishes and presented it to the class.

DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS PAPER!!

Performance Choice

For our Playbuilt play, I would like to

13 〜 ~~LHT III~~ do only a video for our class to watch. ▮▮▮▮▮ may watch it too.
~~LHT~~

1 _____ perform for 2 or 3 classes in the orchestra room. There will also be a video.

_____ perform in a bigger space for all the classes that want to come. Also be video recorded.

9 〜 ~~LHT~~ do whatever the rest of the class wants to do. I'm good with any of these.
~~IIII~~

Figure 73: Tally of ballot results

The results of the vote were for the groups to hold on to their performance and share it only with one another and Mr. Carson. Amy and I explained to them that, as the principal, he was in a position to enter the space and observe what we were doing. Herr and Anderson (2015) and their work with action research stipulate that as practitioners, we need to recognize the "micropolitics" of the workplace that includes "the behind-the-scenes negotiations over material resources, vested interests, and ideological commitments" (p. 78). The administrator at a school site has final say (and responsibility) for what happens with curriculum in classrooms, and students recognize this. It was important for Amy and I to remind them of that in the decision of what form the final presentation would take.

Researcher's Journal, April 29, 2016

> We actually had a chance to work in the bigger space today. Amy and I gave the
> groups 20 minutes to work on their scenes. Comments such as "Again?" "Why do

we have to do it again?" "When are we gonna be done?" "But Miss, we worked on it already" were echoed throughout the group—not just one student but several. We still had one group to present their scene for feedback. They sat and didn't seem to be working on the scene. Weird Potato, the oldest student in the group, hung her head and didn't engage. Amy was quietly talking to the group. I approached and Amy asked if I would mind watching the class. She wanted to take Weird Potato to a private space to talk. Weird Potato has some things going on at home and was preoccupied with the situation with her family. I ended up working the scene with the other three girls, offering suggestions about what their characters could do by taking Weird Potato' place. We improvised dialogue and I'm hoping it helped.

This process is really not what I expected. I am thinking that the conversations we have as a group after the scenes have been presented are the beneficial focus of the work. It is so not Boal in the sense of addressing issues, but I think the process is offering opportunities to discuss things like friendship, respect, equality and the rest in a non-threatening place. I'm eager to see what the responses will be on the Post Survey. In their dialogue journals, some of the students are expressing their views more candidly. I just can't escape the idea that they are still reflecting the way a 'student' should with a 'teacher'. I need to realize that disrupting that stance of adolescent/adult interaction and look for real perceptions of the students is so ingrained, it's a challenge that won't be met through this study. This class is the only space where they have the opportunity to open up, but there is still that 'participation grade' they earn.

I had developed the awareness that although the Boal (1979) work ended up way beyond our reach, it did inform me how to approach working with these students. The flexibility of Practitioner Action Research (PAR) allowed me to modify and adapt to the needs of the participants and the circumstances. As students were engaged (or not) in the work of the study, I learned how to adjust to the realities of the situation. PAR provided a framework that allowed for a more appropriate approach to the core of the study-- participant experiences (Herr & Anderson, 2015). I was a participant. Boal's work informed my practice, which in turn provided students the deeper opportunity not just to perform a play but to devise theatre. I had to honor that.

Playbuilt Performance

The school year was winding down, the eighth graders were getting ready to move on, and we were out of time. Another aspect of PAR that was beneficial was that Amy and I were able to work parts of the study around the spring schedule at Eastside. Plans were modified. Students were absent the day of the performance. Mr. Carson missed the first part of the performance due to an issue at school. All of this could have derailed the final presentation, yet, as a group, we were able to present something.

Act 3

Friendship, Equality, Respect

Time: Mid afternoon, second week of May, 2016

Place: Eastside Middle School, orchestra room.

At Rise: White board and teacher's desk are covered in dark sheets of fabric; students are dressed in matching black tee shirts with a Shakespeare quote on the front; they are standing in corners around the room. Seven empty chairs are in the performance space, small props under the chairs. Students slowly enter from the corners and take places on the chairs, standing, or seated on the floor.
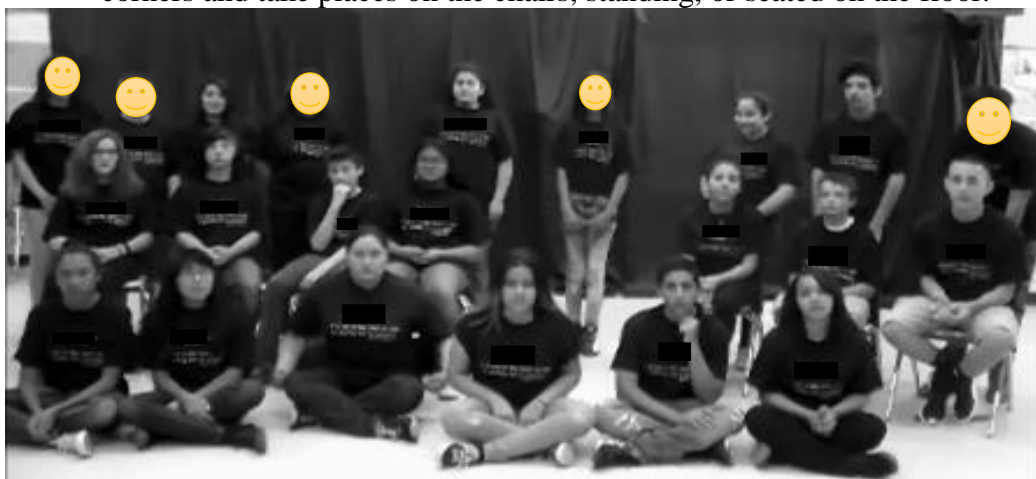
Figure 74: Performance One Liners

ALEX: Respect is a formal way of life

ALL: Life

THE WEIRD POTATO: Moving on in our life is normal

ALL: Wow

LUNA PURPLE: Equality is something everyone should receive

ALL: Everyone

BLING BLING: Losing someone I consider a friend scares me because it doesn't, it's just life

MEGAN: Life

ALL: Ooooooo

JACKIE: A big secret I don't mind sharing is it's not a big secret if you don't mind sharing it.

ALL: Sssshhhhhh

Scene 1

Figure 75: Concert Goers Performance

This is a scene where three friends are at a restaurant. A fourth friend comes in and tells the group that another friend was able to get tickets to a concert the group wanted to attend, however, they need 5 tickets but could only get 4. They have to tell the friend newest to the group that she can't have one of the tickets. The reasons for this are that she is new to the group, that there wasn't enough money, and that there were only 4 tickets left anyway. She seems okay with this and leaves.

RAVEN: Respect is being nice even if you don't agree

ALL: Agreed

PEPE: Equality is very important

ALL: Really

DRAMA MAMA (for PAPI CHULO): When I think of friendship, I think of Shrek and Donkey

ALL: Hahahahaha

MEGAN: A big secret I don't mind sharing is nothing

ALL: Nada

Scene 2

Figure 76: Planning a Surprise Performance

This scene is about a teenager at home, babysitting her younger sister. Two friends come over to plan a surprise party for another friend who lives across the street. The younger sister eavesdrops on the planning of the party and threatens to tell the friend they want to surprise about the party. She does this, she says, because she is bored. The little sister reveals that she has a secret—she flushed her mother's new shoe down the toilet. The sisters agree not to tell their secrets.

KASH: Respectful is something we all say we should be but we aren't

ALL: For real

DRAMA MAMA (for SWEET JELLY): I consider social equality super important

ALL: Super

GUY: Losing someone I consider a friend scares me because I've lost their friendship

ALL: Awe, man!

PATRISHA: Moving on to great adventures is life

ALL: Life

HELGA: Something I find horrific is myself

ALL: Yourself?

Scene 3

Figure 77: At the Mall…….Performance

Jackie and Native Wolf were the leaders of this group and offered direction for the others. Their scene was about a group of high school friends who were spending a day at the mall. At one point, one of the friends suggests the group goes to a store where someone they know works to say hello. Jackie's character doesn't want to because she has a secret. She previously shoplifted a necklace from the store, but tells her friends she doesn't like the merchandise and refuses to go. The friends ask her why not and she finally confesses. Her friends help support her in doing the 'right thing' and go to the store to return the necklace.

FOREST: A big secret I don't mind sharing is I scream like a girl when I'm scared.

ALL: Aaaahhhhhh!

LUNA: Moving on is sad

ALL: It doesn't have to be

S: Equality is also important

ALL: Can't say it enough

ROSES: Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because you've become very close to them and it's hard to move on.

ALL: Agreed

Scene 4

Figure 79: Jump Rope Performance

Friendship is the essence of this scene. The members of this group all had strong opinions about friendship, respect, and equality. They felt these themes should be addressed early on in school, so their scene takes place on a playground at recess. The group chose names for their characters. The story was this--there was a group of fourth graders who were playing jump rope. Twilight, a girl new to the school, wanted to join in. One of the girls, Erika, in the original group said no, her friend asked why not. Erika said 'We already have a game going'. Alan, a teacher on duty, approaches the girls and helps them solve the problem by asking them questions and encouraging them to consider the feelings of others.

S: A big secret I don't mind sharing is I would not share a big secret because then it would no longer be a secret.

ALL: True

COWGIRL: Equality is everyone is treated the same way.

ALL: Awesome!

S: Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares me because maybe after they leave, they will talk to others and that scares me.

ALL: We're here for you

ERICA: When I think of friendship, I think of my best friend.

ALL: Aawwww

LIL DICKY: Moving on from someone I consider a friend scares be because I don't want to lose any friends.

ALL: Same!

Scene 5

Figure 78: PFC (Pillow Fight Club) Performance

This final scene was about trust and secrets. Megan's wanted to base this scene on his favorite movie and it ended up as a spoof of that movie. The scene was students belonging to a secret after school club where they pillow fight. The rules of the PFC were that they couldn't talk about it beyond the club. The new members were seated in chairs as the leader explained the rules.

NATIVE WOLF: Respect is being nice to each other.

ALL: True

THE WEIRD POTATO: Moving on is forgetting the past and moving on with your life.

ALL: Profound

EVERYONE: Let's move on!

(exit with a partner/small group)

(*Scene*)

Researcher's Journal May 17, 2016

May 17, 2016

Things went well today! The students had their drama tee-shirts, the scenes went well, and students seemed to feel good about it.

Two different scenes each had a "character" missing and both groups figured out a solution. One group rephrased their dialogue to explain the missing character. With the other group, Raven, who has been very quiet all year, said she would step into the role of the missing character. She didn't seem to hesitate. Comments from members of both groups included 'I see why improv works' and 'It was a good thing we didn't have to rely on a script'. Both groups knew their scenes and owned them—it was all about telling the story with the people they had. It didn't seem to distract and the impression I got was that both groups—all groups—found success.

The principal missed the first two scenes but he said he was impressed with the work the students created and actually asked if the video could be posted to the school's website. I had to tell him it was study data and not available for public display. He understood, but really wanted to 'advertise' what drama at his school could be.

The work of the students was complete. They processed and created scenes

around several issues that had some meaning for them. They collaborated with their peers

and experienced devising theater meant to support their reality and their world. As a

teacher, Amy had the opportunity to explore options for her drama program and to know

her students in a different way. As a practitioner researcher, I had the chance to explore

my own stance and positionality as a teacher and adult. My thoughts and ideas were to

configure an experience where participants organically create and devise methods for finding their voices and making sure they are heard. As I collected and analyzed the data, I discovered my own status. My actions were something different. I found I reverted to my own discourse of oppression through the lens of a teacher. I recognize that I am of the privileged, dominate culture and had a very difficult time setting that aside. Reflecting on the original questions for this study, I understand what Herr and Anderson (2015) meant when they stated that

> solid action research leads to a deepening understand of the question posed as well as to more sophisticated questions…As the researcher is immersed in the analysis of the data, he or she simultaneously wants to be asking what is the most effective means of representing what has been found (p. 107).

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of middle school students enrolled in a drama program, using techniques inspired by Augusto Boal's (1979) Theatre of the Oppressed. Looking at the students' responses on the post survey, there is a lingering query of how much of the data addressed the primary issue.

Student Post Surveys

The school year was ending, yet there was still time for students to complete the post survey of their experiences. Many of the responses were succinct and basic. Amy offered "they're tired. This was a very different way for them to work. Most of these kids are moving on to high school and are nervous" (Amy Smith, personal conversation, May, 2016). Students whose responses were more detailed actually had been the least vocal during most of the sessions. Privately writing their thoughts seemed to be a way for them to express their thoughts without fear of public disclosure.

Figure 79: Cowgirl Post Survey

Cowgirl was more comfortable expressing her thoughts through her writing. She was a good student and her responses reflect a discourse of student to teacher and compliance. Her personality was obedient and she tends to observe rather than engage.

Figure 80: Jackie Post Survey

Jackie felt she could speak honestly and even made the comment that she "got a little mature".

Figure 81: Kash Post Survey

A student who joined the class at the beginning of the second semester, Kash had some difficulty assimilating to the group and the expectations of trust and respect. Her attendance was an obstacle to Kash being accept as part of the group. She overtly tried, yet her behaviors were off-putting to her peers.

Figure 82: Lil Dicky Post Survey

Second-language learning was supported through the work and Lil Dicky expressed that when he wrote that he "got more comfortable talking more". The language he used was that of peers in order to create scenes.

Figure 83: Native Wolf Post Survey

Native Wolf was not only new to the class, but also new to Eastside. She found space to begin to build friendships. Native Wolf felt the work was "awesome because we got to do our own scenes...let us get creative and go with the flow".

Figure 84: Pepe Post Survey

For Pepe, the content of the work was important. "I'm glad that we got to use those topics as a scene, some students didn't even know what social equality was, but I hope now they understand what it means'. Pepe also reiterated her frustration with the behaviors of some of her peers and that she "would've been more excited for this class if it wasn't for the students who didn't listen…".

Figure 85: Raven Post Survey

Another student who preferred to observe was Raven. She was also a second language learner and benefited from the oral language used in the work of the group. She mentioned that she liked "all drama games because it make me happy and forget what happen in the back". There was no time for follow up on her comment about what happened in 'back'.

Figure 86: Roses Post Survey

      Roses was a student who offered very clear, yet succinct answers to inquiries,

whether written or spoken. Her body language supported her stance when she spoke.

Roses enjoyed work with the members of her self-chosen group.

Figure 87: Tony Post Survey

      There were students who were ambivalent with the work of drama and being

asked to participate with content in a different manner. Tony was one of them. She did

see a benefit in that "everything has a solution" and despite the still images being a

"pain", Tony did state that the "rest were good".

Figure 88: The Weird Potato Post Survey

From my perspective, Weird Potato was the student whose experience was the most profound. When she wrote "I am more less sad and I am not as quiet as I used to be" offered insight for me. I saw her begin to trust more and not be so withdrawn. This survey and our previous dialogues helped me appreciate that the work we had created was profound. Even if the steps for Weird Potato and her peers were small, they offer forward progression.

- *Tell me about yourself. Is there anything different for you than when this drama class started?*

Students' responses championed advantages from being in the class. Some students originally did not want to be in a drama class, yet found the class was "fun." Other students mentioned benefits of oral dialogue and being "comfortable talking more." Native Wolf mentioned that she had become a little more comfortable with her stage fright and that "I have gotten to know more people." Students' experiences regarding themselves expressed changes in abilities and peer interactions. Cowgirl recognized that "a lot has happened in this class and that is from being friends with a lot of people to

almost getting in a fight to being normal and sad sometimes." Not being "shy and…feel more happy" was an observation from Tony. She found space to be accepted by her friends who supported her when she doubted her work. Pepe, who advocated for the theme of equality, felt "this class helped me with talking more. Other people probably don't think so, but personally I think it helped me." Writing this answer provided Pepe a place to express what she felt. She was silent for many sessions, yet when she did speak, it was with a mature grace that comes with maturity. Jackie actually used the word "mature" in her description of how she changed. She was playful in many sessions, but understood the need to work with her group and assist in making the scene successful.

The transformation students experienced was due to the latitude given them to express their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. Drama was a class unlike many of the other academic pursuits students had encountered. Initially, there was a hesitation on the part of the students to share their ideas honestly. While some students still acquiesced to the structure of the educational institution, enough trust developed for me to glimpse into the positive circumstances drama experiences provided. For adolescents, the evolution of friendships and peer alliances are significant to their overall development. Drama gave them that space and permission to engage with others without judgment.

- *Describe what it was like to use drama lessons to explore friendship, equality, respect, secrets, and moving on. Tell me about what you've learned.*

While some students experienced nothing new as Lil Dicky offered, "I didn't really learn anything to be honest", others provided different perceptions. Tony noted that "everything has a situation. It was a great thing to do" and Weird Potato noticed "reality" was represented in the work. Pepe was even optimistic that her peers who seemed unclear

on social equality, "I hope they now understand what it means." Insights similar to these were presented by others and the overall perceptions of the participants were positive.

The discourse of the students on this final survey supported much of what they expressed during the study. Their language was composed and felt guarded. It continued to be the language of 'student'. There were instances where participants offered honest thoughts regarding their experiences, yet stopped short of providing details and direct criticism of my role or the process (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This hesitation to criticize from students was directly related to my inability to step away from my teacher discourse. The dilemma of a school setting with adults in the analytical role of teachers became a barrier too entrenched to cross. I repeatedly asserted my hierarchical position through my word choice or my inattention to requests and responses from participants. In many instances, Amy deferred to me and I overextended my part as a specialist.

Exit Interview

The school year had ended. Half the students were off to high school and the other half were pre-registered for other electives in the fall. My plan to follow up on interviews with student participants evaporated. I did, however, have the opportunity to speak with Amy and glean information regarding her perceptions and experiences.

The Interview

Time: Early June, 2016, 10:00 in the morning

Place: Local coffee shop, about a 20 minute drive from both Erin's and Amy's houses.

At Rise: Erin and Amy are seated next to one another at a corner table. On the table are paper cups of coffee and a small recording devise.

(*Lights up*)

ERIN: I will be recording this interview so I can document your actual words as you answer questions. There are some questions I have planned; however, I may ask other questions I didn't plan on. So think about this as a conversation. (*pause*)
This is an interview with Amy Smith (pseudonym) Tell me about yourself—your teaching, students, subject/content—anything you want me to know about you.

AMY: This is my 35th year in education! I have taught in high school, elementary and middle school. After teaching high school for 2 years and 1st and 3rd grade for 12 years I finally found my home in middle school. I have taught special education and general education so I am experienced in working with both student populations. What I was not prepared for was the poverty that exists with many of my students at Eastside Middle School (pseudonym). About half of my students participate in Eastside's Food Pantry and Clothing Bank. We are a Title One school so my students receive free breakfast and lunch each day. Eight years ago when Eastside was planning to add an elective, I asked that they consider a drama class. I had taken drama in high school, acted in church plays, taken on small parts in college sorority plays and been a part of the community theatre in Texas. So I volunteered to team-teach a semester drama class. It was fun and definitely a learning experience. Since Mr. Carson (pseudonym) became the principal at Eastside five years ago, he has supported a drama program. First allowing one semester class, then two semester classes and this year a 6th grade wheel and a yearlong class of 7th and 8th graders. Although I was teaching English Language Arts and Social Studies for most of my career in middle school, I have enjoyed teaching drama the most. Drama has opened my mind and my heart by allowing me to see the light in my kids.

ERIN: Describe what it's like to lead this drama class.

AMY: As my personal comfort level has grown in teaching this class, I have learned that my students became more trusting of each other and more "safe". The most important lesson that I tried to convey in drama is that this class is the place where they can be themselves. When the students drive the learning in the class, they "owned" the class.

ERIN: Tell me about doing the drama games.

AMY: The drama games helped my students learn and build skills that they would use to interact with each other and skills necessary to perform. Drama games made learning fun. Students were not even aware at times that they were actually learning skills to help them focus, to give and receive clues from their peers and to work as a team. This is definitely the beauty of drama!

ERIN: This group created a performance piece/play about equality, secrets, moving on. What was that like for you?

AMY: At first, I was apprehensive about the students having control over the topics. It was actually difficult for me to let them choose without my input. However, in the end, when the students selected their topics they became responsible for their part of the performance. It was a part of them. As they developed their scenes around their topics, I began to see the value of this process.

ERIN: Describe what it was like to use drama lessons to explore Theatre of the Oppressed and Playbuilding. Tell me about what you may have learned.

AMY: This was something new to me. I compared it to learning to make a cake from scratch instead of using a cake mix. Everything in play building had to be developed from scratch. Students collaborated and talked about their scenes/topics and for the first time I saw them become active or passionate about the editing of their scene. They stood up for what they believed in and made sure that their ideas were heard. It was an amazing process to observe.

ERIN: What about TO? Tell me about that.

AMY: Well, the idea of Theatre of the Oppressed is really powerful, but I don't think some of the kids were ready for it. It might be because they lack maturity or it could be that they have home lives that keep them from thinking about things like equality and respect. Those are important, but some of these kids need to know where they'll sleep and what they'll eat

when they get home. Look at Forest. He knows what's expected of him, but he acts out—I think because his home life is crazy. (*pause*) But I'm so glad you brought this to me. I saw kids take ownership over their work and they were empowered to have a say. These kids don't get that a lot. It's important.

ERIN: How will you use TO or Playbuilding in the future?

AMY: Goodness! I really like the one-liners. Those were powerful and they gave students a place to say what was on their mind. Students coming up with their topic was also important, so I'd like to do that in the future, too. I'm still fuzzy on some of the TO stuff, but I did like the still images. And the tapping out and changing places with actors. The kids made it kinda silly, so I'd have to look out for that.

(*Lights down*)

With analysis of Amy's responses, I recognize her 'teacher stance' in her language. Phrases such as "allowing me to see the light in my kids", "Drama games made learning fun", and "I began to see the value of this process" metaphorically put Amy in the role of learner. I have used phrases such as these in my own teaching experience. Teachers express their goals to remain learners and current, yet when the opportunity develops to learn from their own practices, challenges emerge. Amy disclosed, "[at] first, I was apprehensive about the students having control over the topics. It was actually difficult for me to let them choose without my input". That willingness, as teachers, to set our egos aside and provide guidance rather than imposition is a difficult position to negate. However, Amy was ready to examine her own position and expressed a benefit "when the students selected their topics [and] they became responsible for their part of the performance. It was a part of them". Amy had informed me that there were elements of the work we did she would use in the future, and I see that as a step forward. I hesitate to point out both our positionalities and how they may have restricted what students

produced. The institution of a public school may not be ready to push certain boundaries and teachers remaining in control of students and curriculum is still a priority.

Discussion

The journey of this study has been interesting and informative. Students and participants found new phenomena that drama brought to them and revealed details that alter perceptions. Positions on topics revealed peer stances on certain matters. The work clarified definitions of issues whose understanding may have been vague. Amy saw her students through a lens, which was new to her. Several times after sessions, Amy shared "I didn't expect that from Megan. He's growing up" or "I rarely see Helga and Papi Chulo agree on things". Side comments from students ranged from "I can't do it. Miss" to "That's what they mean when they say 'don't diss me'. I never hear that". This drama class became more than just working on a script and presenting a play. It became an occasion for all involved.

For me, working with these adolescents confirmed what I had experienced before this study. These students had knowledge and insight into relevant matters and offering them an outlet to express their positions was the focus of this work. What I had not expected was my entrenched behaviors as a teacher and my hierarchical status. Finding the line between chaperon and autocrat was a challenge. The work of Boal and TO is meant to free the marginalized voices of participants so they can work for social change. These students were restricted by my teacher stance, the institution of Eastside and the school district, and their own expectations of what is allowed from them. Early on in this PAR work, I realized that this study became about developing rapport between teachers and students and students and their peers. It was about learning small details of one

another's lives or stepping in and becoming a sounding board for the turmoil felt at that moment. It was about finding friendship, equality, and respect.

My Own Place--Self-reflection

After analyzing the data, it is so easy for me to acknowledge all the things I missed. All the 'I didn't do' or 'why didn't I ask' or even the 'sshhs' and silencing behaviors I engaged in left me feeling hollow. In his work with critical literacy, Ira Shor (1999) identifies what frustrates me most about public school education.

Administrative rule-making and top-down curricula mean that authority is unilateral not democratic, featuring standardized tests, commercial textbooks, mandated syllabi, one-way teacher-talk and fill-in-the-blank exams. As teachers well know, silenced students find ways to make lots of noise, in the unofficial spaces of the halls, toilets, lunchrooms, yards, and streets as well as during class when teachers attempt their lesson plans (para. 11).

I look back on what I've done as a teacher and see that I'm in the same place as these students. I am 'school-broke'. To trust in my own voice and stance as I implemented this study was a trust I did not hold.

In her work on critical thinking bell hooks (2010) acknowledges what the current educational system perpetuates. Classrooms and education in general is the work of "colonization that serves to teach students allegiance to the status quo [and] has been so much the accepted norm that no blame can be attributed to the huge body of educators who simply taught as they were taught" (p. 29). Recognizing this arrangement, I found it difficult to balance my expectations with what I wanted to provide for students. hooks seems to offer a forgiveness of sorts--almost a 'we don't know what we don't know'

situation. I wanted to offer a space where these students could express their own voices about their perceptions and experiences; however, I had difficulty in honoring that stance. I am a White female of privilege and my background and adherence to the status quo has equated to my social and educational success. Yet, I speak of disrupting the narrative of dominator culture educational practices. A suggestion from hooks (2010) is that "trust must be cultivated in the classroom if there is to be open dialectical exchange and positive dissent" (p. 87). I unwillingly propagated the status quo by not trusting in myself. The skepticism of 'self' manifested when I engaged in my hierarchal teacher stance.

The other side of this awareness is that on a certain level, I concede that I was the guide. There were instances when it was my responsibility to "make the classroom and interesting learning place" (hooks, 2010, p. 118). Once that standard was set, it was also the responsibility of the students to contribute to a positive learning environment. The work of the study did offer that space. Students had opportunities for private conversations with an adult through their dialogue journals. Students were encouraged to explore topics that meant something to them. Students not only had the choice of how they would interpret their views, they also had the choice of who would be the audience of their work. hooks also offers that "calling attention to strengths a student may possess and encouraging her of him to work from that foundation can provide the necessary confidence [moving forward]" (p.125). I hope I can take from this work a sense of strength of my own being. Will I continue to doubt? Sure. Will I fall back into the dominate educational discourse that I know so well? No doubt there. Will I continue to

move forward and work toward that balance of guide and ally? With new information about myself and my interest working with adolescents and drama, I hope to.

Contributions to the Field

What this study offers to the field of education, drama, theatre, and working with adolescents is beyond measuring progress and growth with the abstract tool of a standardized test. Typically, middle school students are enumerated and labeled based on their academic progress. Rarely are they allowed to demonstrate the deeper layers of what makes them who they are or asks them what they believe. With the dramatic work created in class, a space developed where students had some latitude with expectations to beliefs and considered issues pertaining to them. Participants also experienced respect, disagreements, collaboration, compromise, individual expression and fostering of self-confidence. These experiences can only benefit students' educational endeavors.

Literacy and language are the obvious scholastic areas addressed in this study. Writing became a means for expression. While, in the academic sense, students utilized the literacy skill of written expression, the content of their writing offered authentic, unique perspectives. Second language learners experienced a reason to write and benefited from personal opportunities to communicate ideas through the language new to them. Oral language develops through usage. Even when the language is our native language, we continue to expand our abilities and skills when we dialogue with others. Another crucial component of oral discourse is listening, and participants in this study had to listen, not just hear, what others said. Amy noticed the value in listening to students and shared "listening to the kids talk to each other, I learned things about them I didn't know. Like I didn't know Tony was so worried about being in front of others"

(Amy Smith, personal communication, May, 2016). Students grew through interactions with peers and adults expanded understanding and appreciation for what adolescents offer. Amy and I grew in different ways. She found that she could relinquish some control over the content in her drama curriculum. I found that although I want to transcend my teacher persona and accept all that the adolescents have to offer, I am still trying to find that path.

Implications

Including a drama class for students in a middle school is more than offering a place for adolescents to put on a play. An elective for a drama class provides students to develop skills and discover gifts they present to society. Drama not about performance, but about experience. It requires the creating of a situation to allow space for students to explore who they are or who they want to be without judgment. The work of drama must set expectations for all individuals, including the guiding adults. Teachers must set aside egos and trust that adolescents have a voice in their reality.

One concern teachers of middle school students express is that many adolescents seem disengaged from the curriculum. What a drama class establishes is a place where engagement is crucial to the work of the group. Beginning with developing rapport with members, students share in the sometimes messy work of creating a performance to communicate ideas. They must think critically, solve problems as a group, and contribute their parts to the whole. The nature of the work of drama is counterintuitive to what is expected from traditional academic work in a middle school, yet the basic skills needed to engage in the work are skills that are necessary in other classes.

When all participants share the work of drama, each member of the group develops skills to take away and apply to other aspects of life. The work of drama has no wrong answers, just different ways of communicating an idea or message. The work of drama provides successes for participants, no matter how small or insignificant those successes may seem. The work of drama, especially for adolescents, expands and allows for exploration of boundaries set by others. The work of drama is more than creating leading roles; it is about fostering community and ensemble. The work of drama includes diversity. The work of drama provides honest reflection of self, circumstances, and ways to be in the world. In the transitional moments of adolescence, the work of drama is essential.

Where Next/Curtain

I am left with more questions than I feel I have answered. This study opens the door for more research to be conducted with adolescents and honoring their voices on a deeper level. Students responded positively to Image Theatre, yet we all struggled with Forum Theatre. The work of creating something new and unscripted provided challenges for the group because the end product was vague. Amy and I were both unsure of what the outcome would be. However, what students did devise brought a sense of closure and success. To do the work of drama, some expectations need to be reexamined. The results of this study have lead me a desire to explore what else can be done. Questions include:

- How does Theatre of the Oppressed inform adolescents of the power they have to make positive changes at their school?

- What is the impact of Theatre of the Oppressed on decisions made by adults in the education of adolescents?

- What effect does creative drama, student empowerment, and Theatre of the Oppressed on language and literacy learning of adolescents?

- How do teachers, experiencing Theatre of the Oppressed methods, perceive the learning of their students?

Drama and theatre are not for everyone. Theatre of the Oppressed is not a set of techniques that empower others to solve all their problems. Drama and TO can provide a beginning to conversations that inform others and teach us about the perceptions of those in our lives. It can make us more human and more humane.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Pre Survey Middle School Drama Students

Pseudonym⎽⎽

Please respond to the following comments with what you are comfortable sharing. If you are not sure of an answer, give me your best guess.
Tell me about yourself—things you would like people to know about you.
       I like to
                   ⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽ hang with my friends
                   ⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽ find quiet time and be alone

Describe what you expect from being in this drama class and working with the other students.

Tell me about doing drama games.

If this group were to create a play, what would you like it to be about? Why?

Tell me what you know about Image Theatre (still images/tableaux) and Forum Theatre (improvisation of scenes).

The group will have a choice to perform what the group creates for an audience. Describe for me what you think about that.

Tell me anything else about you that you would like me to know about you.

Appendix B

Post Survey Middle School Drama Students

Pseudonym_____

Please respond to the following comments with what you are comfortable sharing. If you are not sure of an answer, give me your best guess.

Tell me about yourself. Is there anything different for you than when this drama class started?

Describe what it's been like to be in this drama class and what it's been like working with the other students.

Tell me about doing drama games.

Describe what it was like to use drama lessons to explore friendship, equality, respect, secrets, and moving on. Tell me about what you have learned.

The group did some work with Image Theatre (still images/tableaux) and Forum Theatre (improvisation of scenes). Tell me about how that went for you.

The group decided not to perform the Playbuilt play for an audience. Describe for me what you thought about that.

Appendix C

Qualitative Research Final Teacher Interview

Interview conducted by:_____

Interview conducted with (pseudonym):_____

Date:_____Time:_____Duration:_____

Setting:_____

_____

Unexpected occurrences:_____

_____

I will be recording this interview so I can document your actual words as you answer questions. There are some questions I have planned; however, I may ask other questions I didn't plan on. So think about this as a conversation.

This is an interview with _____

Tell me about yourself—your teaching, students, subject/content—anything you want me to know about you.

Describe what it's like to lead this drama class.

Tell me about doing the drama games.

This group created a performance piece/play about ____. What was that like for you?

Describe what it was like to use drama lessons to explore ____. Tell me about what you may have learned.

The group did some work with Image Theatre (still images/tableaux) and Forum Theatre (improvisation of scenes). Tell me about how that went for you.

The group decided   to   not to   perform the Playbuilt play for an audience.
                         (circle one)
Describe for me what you thought about that.

Tell me how might what students did in this class shape what they do in their other classes.