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Competition and Success in Secondary School Drama Programs: A Comparative Study

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Competition and Success in Secondary School Drama Programs: A Comparative Study

Abstract

Among the participants in secondary school drama programs, indirect competition, with its emphasis on mastery and personal achievement, may promote the development of successful behaviors such as having the ability to perform tasks skillfully, revealing a commitment to setting and reaching high expectations, showing responsibility, possessing self-esteem and caring for others. Therefore the purpose of this study is to determine an answer to the following question: does indirect competition enhance the success of participants in a secondary school drama program? Because one of the two schools studied does not take part in large group or individual speech contests, this study does not include a look at students' participation in competitive speech contests. Instead, it focuses on individuals' involvement in staged theatrical productions only. This study will examine the theories of competition and success to determine the following three elements: indicators of successful preparations for and presentations of high school plays/musicals, the presence and nature of competition among students involved in high school theatrical productions, and the effects this competition has on the individuals and their theatrical productions.

COMPETITION AND SUCCESS IN
SECONDARY SCHOOL DRAMA PROGRAMS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

A Research Paper
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Lisa Lenstra-Norman
University of Northern Iowa
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This paper

COMPETITION AND SUCCESS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL DRAMA

PROGRAMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

LISA LENSTRA-NORMAN

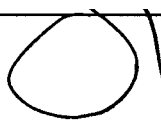
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The State of Competition in Our Society

“Competition is an inescapable fact of life” (Ruben ix). It is an element of American life so pervasive that virtually every individual is influenced by it. Since the late 1900’s, social scientists, sport psychologists, and anthropologists have argued over the benefits and dangers of competition. Morton Deutsch, Jules Henry, Alfie Kohn and others who argue against competition point to the devastating effects it has on one’s self esteem, interpersonal relationships, and performance quality. Norman L. Triplett, Tara Scanlan, and others who argue for competition point to its ability to improve one’s performance, heighten achievement, and engage participants in an activity more fully. Still others including Gary Wagner and Shane Murphy see both sides of the coin and suggest that an individual’s orientation to competition is determined by their coaches, parents, teachers, and activity directors.

Whether or not competition is purely negative or positive has not yet been determined, but the effects one’s competitive orientation has on that individual and others who compete with him has been determined. Shane Murphy proposes that an individual with an ego orientation toward competition (see Definition of Terms) can make competition unenjoyable and unpleasant for others, put herself at risk of damaging her self esteem, and engage in cheating in order to win against opponents. An ego orientation can be the result of direct competition; however indirect competition can result in a mastery orientation to competition (see Definition of Terms). When a person with a mastery orientation to competition engages in indirect competition, his focus is not on winning at all costs, but on bettering his performance and reaching his high expectations. Thus a focus on competition against oneself to meet a standard for excellence is the key to

overcoming mediocrity.

Elements of Success in School Drama Programs

Charles Horton Cooley, a former professor of sociology from 1899 to 1929 at the University of Michigan, wrote that steadiness, self-control, enterprise, perseverance, savoir-faire, and common-sense are qualities inherent in any type of success (188-93). Peter Benson *et al.* also explored keys to success and determined that there are not only six but twenty external assets and twenty internal assets that teens need to succeed. These assets are developed when teens are placed in supportive environments, are granted empowerment, set boundaries and expectations for themselves, use their time constructively, commit themselves to learning, and possess positive values, social competencies, and a positive identity. Places where teens can develop these assets include their homes, schools, communities, church congregations, and circles of friends. In school alone, students can hone these assets in their classrooms, on the athletic field/court, and in other extracurricular programs such as drama.

Many drama specialists and directors of drama programs for children have published articles and books which provide lists and descriptions of the standards for creating successful theatre experiences. One specialist, Maxine McSweeney, included the following list of six standards for presenting a successful play:

1. Players acting on stage can be seen and heard by the audience.
2. Players know their scripted lines and assigned movement /choreography.
3. Players' performances are sincere, confident, and enthusiastic.
4. Players enter onto stage at the appropriate time.
5. Technical crews execute their responsibilities properly and on time.

6. All players and crew members make an effort to remain unseen when backstage or behind the curtain (126).

Gavin M. Bolton, a British drama specialist, composed a list that set high expectations for any student studying theatre performance including and beyond those enrolled in British schools. This list is comprised of behaviors that participants of a drama program need to display in order for the program and the individual to be deemed successful.

These behaviors included

1. Displaying a mature attitude toward and expectation of drama.
2. Employing a high amount of effort, especially during an unrewarding phase.
3. Showing integrity of feeling.
4. Having an intellectual grasp of what is being created by the whole group.
5. Showing sensitivity to the needs of others in the group.
6. Selecting action and words that enhance the significance of the experience for oneself and for others, and, conversely, to receive from others.
7. Using time effectively both in and outside of rehearsal to achieve the group's goal.
8. Being aware of form, particularly in terms of selecting or retaining focus and injecting or sustaining tension.
9. Being open to symbolic meaning.
10. Identifying with an assigned role.
11. Being ready and able to evaluate and reflect on the work and one's own contribution to it.
12. Displaying willingness to take risks, to try new territory and new forms.
13. Showing trust in the teacher, and readiness to evaluate and criticize the teacher's contribution (136).

Echoing many of the behaviors on Bolton's list are the most recently published national standards of excellence for drama programs in American schools. These were presented in 1998 in the National Assessment of Educational Progress Theatre Field Test and Assessment which was sponsored by the National Assessment Governing Board. Students of a successful theatre program should possess a knowledge of the art of theatre including its historical, cultural, social, and personal contexts, as well as its form and structure--Bolton #4, #8, and #9. Student designers must be able to discover, develop, and organize an environment--Bolton #7 and #12. Last, student performers should be able to discover and develop emotions, create a series of actions for a character, respond to fellow performers and the audience, and adjust their performance according to others' responses--Bolton #3, #6, #7, #10, and #12--(NCES 2-3). One can see the correlation between the above standards for successful acting performances by students and those of Larry Silverberg, a professional actor, director, acting teacher, and author, when he stated that acting students must learn how to unmask and express their authentic emotional responses, how to really do what their character is doing, and how to really listen (15-16).

When analyzed, indicators of a successful school drama program can be placed into two categories. The first category would be those artistic skills displayed by student performers. The second category would be those aspects of a drama program that develop a participant's internal and external assets.

Need for Research in the Relationship between Competition and Success in School Drama Programs

There has been much written about competition in business, academics, athletics, and society, but very little written about competition in the arts. In my conversations with

Dorothy Gibbs and Frances Hedeman, two veteran directors of drama programs in secondary schools--each having more than twenty- five years experience, we spoke candidly about the issue of competition. Both shared with me that they are always faced with the problem of having more students interested in performing on stage than they can cast in a show. Another problem they face is when students who are cast in a show compete for the spotlight as well as attention from the director and popularity among their peers. If ignored, these competitive pursuits can lead to uncooperativeness among students as well as infractions of stage protocol. If understood and shaped into something positive, these competitive tendencies do not have to plague the directors and participants in school drama programs, but can be used to achieve standards of excellence and create successful drama programs.

In order to shape students' competitive tendencies, we need to understand how competition manifests itself in school drama programs, the ways in which directors and participants react to and foster it, and the effects it has on the success of the program. Once these insights are gained, the negative aspects of competition no longer have to be dreaded. Instead, its positive attributes can be employed to offer successful experiences to adolescents involved in school drama programs. "Far from always being a negative process, competition can bring out the best in us" (Murphy 176). Without competition, there would be no drive to become better.

Statement of the Problem

Among the participants in secondary school drama programs, indirect competition, with its emphasis on mastery and personal achievement, may promote the development of successful behaviors such as having the ability to perform tasks skillfully, revealing a

commitment to setting and reaching high expectations, showing responsibility, possessing self-esteem and caring for others. Therefore the purpose of this study is to determine an answer to the following question: does indirect competition enhance the success of participants in a secondary school drama program? Because one of the two schools studied does not take part in large group or individual speech contests, this study does not include a look at students' participation in competitive speech contests. Instead, it focuses on individuals' involvement in staged theatrical productions only. This study will examine the theories of competition and success to determine the following three elements: indicators of successful preparations for and presentations of high school plays/musicals, the presence and nature of competition among students involved in high school theatrical productions, and the effects this competition has on the individuals and their theatrical productions.

Definitions of Terms

For consistency of interpretation the following terms are defined:

Competitive Orientation: a set of attitudes toward competition that explain what individuals focus on in competition, how they will behave in different competitive situations, and what sorts of goals they are likely to set in competition (Murphy 138).

Competitive Situation: a combination of circumstances that stimulates the individual to strive against others for a goal object, which he hopes will become his sole possession (Cratty 64). A competitive situation causes an individual to perform an action better or faster than it was performed by others or by the individual himself at a previous time. (Maller 9).

Developmental Assets: internal and external tools for living and learning that give

adolescents the support, skills, and resources they need to achieve their goals and avoid dangerous situations (Benson et al. 1).

Direct Competition: actions involving another person(s) in a clearly personal contest (Cratty 64). Direct competition occurs when a group or individual attempts to thwart the achievement of others by directly interfering with it. The extent of one's defeat is the measure of the achievement of the other (Ross and Van Den Haag 76).

Ego Orientation: a set of attitudes toward competition that compels the competitor to protect his ego by always appearing to be successful and to avoid losing at all costs. This type of competitor lacks confidence, takes no risks, and sees causes for success as external (Murphy 138-41).

Indirect Competition: actions an individual takes to better an impersonal mark, a record or perhaps climb a mountain (Cratty 64). Competition is indirect when people striving for the same goal achieve it independently but rank and measure their achievement relative to each other by using the goal as a common standard (Ross and Van Den Haag 76).

Mastery Orientation: a set of attitudes toward competition that compels the competitor to strive to be as good as they can possibly be. This type of competitor is a self-motivated, persistent learner that has consistent confidence, takes risks, and sees causes for success as internal (Murphy 139-41).

Success: "conquering absolute standards [. . .]" (Cratty 64), and developing the internal and external assets teens need to accomplish something planned or attempted including support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, a commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and a positive identity (Benson et al. v-vi).

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by the following factors:

1. The sample size that results from the use of volunteer subjects will restrict the generalizations that can be made.
2. The honesty of the subjects when answering interview questions may be inhibited by their concern about offending their classmates or showing disrespect to their directors even though their directors were not present.
3. The researcher's interpretation of the directors' and participants' behaviors will be subjective.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made for this study:

1. The subjects responded truthfully to the questionnaires and interview questions.
2. The subjects followed the directions to the questionnaires in the same manner.

Methods

The purpose of this study is to determine if and how indirect competition enhances the success of participants of a secondary school drama program. Following are descriptions of the methodology, the data and its treatment, and the predicted outcomes of this study.

Research Design

The design is a comparative case study with an interpretive approach to inquiry (LeCompte and Preissle 9, 24-5). The research requires examination of two cases. This assumption is based on the idea that certain generalizations can be made about a phenomenon and these generalizations applied to similar cases (Stake 1-12). The reliability of this study lies within the interpretations of the researcher's observations and

the participants' honest self-examination when answering questionnaire and interview questions.

Subject Selection

The subjects for this study consist of students from drama programs within two senior high schools in Iowa. One will be referred to as High School A, the other High School B. These two programs were chosen because of their contrasts. After studying the playbill for the spring play at High School B, it was apparent that this is a large program with approximately 100 students involved, three directors, and numerous parents and other faculty members all working together to design, build, create, and rehearse theatrical productions. In contrast, High School A is a small theatre program with approximately thirty-five students involved and two directors to train and guide students in the designing, building, creating and rehearsing of plays. In a personal interview with the lead director, he explained that the theatre program he directs does not rely on parents to design and build costumes, hand props, or set pieces, nor do parents run any technical equipment or apply theatrical make up on student actors during rehearsals or performances. The members of High School A's theatre program consider their productions student-run. In an interview with the theatre students of High School B, they expressed that even though they also help build costumes, hand props, and sets, as well as implement sound effects, perform lighting cues, and apply theatrical makeup for rehearsals and shows, they do not feel this same sense of single ownership and independence.

Description of Data and Its Analysis

Success-centered data was collected from Iowa high school drama directors to

determine what elements of success they perceive as most important and strive to obtain with students in their programs. Data focused on competition was collected from the students' responses to interview questions and a questionnaire. The responses to the interview questions and questionnaire were used to ascertain the presence of negative and positive competition within these high school theatre programs and the role these forms of competition play in the success of each. Responses to these interview questions and questionnaire are presented later in this paper.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholarship about competition is copious. It reflects the omnipresence of competition in our society. "From birth to the grave, we compete for the things we want and need in life" (Murphy 175). Therefore one can find literature written about competition in business, international trade, politics, militaries, the work place, the home, relationships, children's play activities, sports, entertainment, and school. Because competition is so pervasive, those who have learned the skills to compete successfully have an advantage over those who have not (Murphy 175). This review discusses literature that exposes the positive as well as the negative aspects of competition.

Polar Viewpoints on Competition

In his 1940 publication, Harbin explained that a considerable number of educators believed undesirable competition thwarted the development of proper social attitudes (517-47). This notion was later supported by another opponent of undesirable competition, Jack Simos, who argued that competitive activities produce a loser for every winner. Learning to deal with loss is a valuable life skill; however, it is only when one has experienced success that he is capable of coping with failure. Successive losing of

competitions that involve direct competition “robs one of confidence and self-respect, leads to further failures, further inhibits the capacity to grow and to gain satisfactions, and develops further inferiority feelings” (156). He further suggested that unlike sporting competitions, “everybody who participates in a dramatic production can win” (156), and winning depends on how well all participants are contributing to the total project.

Six years later, Henry wrote about the devastating attributes of competition in America. He depicted how it adversely affected adults in our society as well as children in their classrooms. Twenty-one years later it was believed that children were still being troubled by competition. Stautberg and Hinds in their separate 1984 articles for *The New York Times* exposed the increase of intense competition in the academic lives of children as young as four and five years old. Each revealed the indiscriminate quality of our society’s race toward prestige and wealth which is fueled by direct competition.

Most recently, Kohn argued that competition hinders the quality of one’s performance, and deprives participants of experiencing enjoyment and satisfaction when they engage in a competitive situation. Supporting Kohn are numerous other psychologists and authors such as Morton Deutsch, David Riesman, Elliott Aronson, and Richard Hofstadter. However, as early as 1898, psychologist Norman Triplett published a study supporting the advantages of competition which is in opposition to Kohn’s first argument against competition.

In his experiment, Triplett compared the times of cyclists who performed alone to those who raced against other cyclists. He found that the latter group was faster and performance was enhanced when competition was introduced. Rebutting Kohn’s second argument against competition was the work of Tara Scanlan, a sport psychology

researcher at the University of California at Los Angeles. In a 1989 study, Scanlan and her colleagues discovered that children involved in youth sports claimed they found enjoyment in working hard, concentrating deeply, and striving to win (qtd in Murphy 167).

Viewpoints Encompassing the Dual Nature of Competition

In his book, *Competition*, Gary Warner describes the two sides of competition through numerous quotes made by professional sports figures as well as anecdotes of his personal experiences as a staff member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. The dangers of competition, Warner explains, include pride that leads to arrogance, lifelong adolescence or immaturity, hero worship and idolatry, greed that leads to exploitation, violence, and militarism caused by mindless obedience to authoritarian coaches. Warner also concedes that “competition--given the proper environment, emphasis, and perspective--can help build beneficial character traits” (54). These traits include responsibility, self-control, and endurance. The final beneficial factor of competition is its capacity to help one find her identity and self-worth through accomplishment. Warner admitted that there are those whose self-worth and identity have been threatened by bad experiences with competitive sport, but for the person who has ability, the competitive sport arena offers great healing power and the opportunity to test skills (Warner 107).

In close relation to this sense of competition is a theory proposed in one of the papers written by Cooley. In “Personal Competition,” Cooley stated that competition urged and aided individuals in selecting a career for which their natural capacities make them most fit.

The competitive process is thus conceived in its highest form, as an amicable testing

and comparison of powers, with a view to securing the happiness of all, by helping each to find his own peculiar and appropriate work (182).

He pointed out that competition, on the whole, is neither malevolent or beneficent; it can be either depending on the conditions controlling the competitive situation. Competition can be a bribe to partake in immorality or encouragement to protect one's reputation for integrity. Competition can develop the individual and challenge the status quo of the social order, or cause the disintegration of both (167). The most rational pursuit, Cooley asserted, is the interlacing of co-operation and competition. Cooley even propounded that "to compete vigorously and combine promptly is to be expected of men who are at once aggressive, sympathetic, and intelligent" (176).

Most recently, Murphy proposed that one's orientation to competition determines its undermining or motivating qualities, and parents' and coaches' attitudes toward winning play a major role in fostering athletes' competitive orientation. Murphy claimed that through supportive encouragement from coaches and the use of coping skills the stresses of competition can be minimized. If these stresses are not minimized, an individual will develop an ego orientation toward competition (Murphy 182-83) and undesirable competition between participants in a competitive activity will result. However, competition should not be suppressed, because it provides a means for measuring one's progress in any given area. The development of expertise begins with the performer's urge to become as good as or even better than other skilled performers. Without competition, how could excellence develop? (Murphy 181). Without competition, even competition with one's previous achievements, there is no means of determining success.

From 1898 to the present, literature discussing and theorizing about competition has

exposed the dangers and the benefits of competition. Today we know that competition is neither good nor bad. It can be desirable or undesirable. One can choose to develop an orientation to competition that will reap positive or negative effects. However, without competition quality suffers.

Attributes of Success

Just as competition is omnipresent in our society, so is success which is often referred to as achievement or winning. Success has many definitions depending on the nature of the competitor's objective. In regard to adolescents, success involves the fulfillment of needs, or the "conquering of absolute standards, or [. . .] self-expansion through meeting the stresses of competition itself (Cratty 64). In this review of literature, the effects of success as well as the needs of participants in a school drama programs and the standards set by those programs will be explored.

Both Scanlan, "An In-Depth Study of Former Elite Figure Skaters II: Sources of Enjoyment" (qtd in Murphy 167), and Cratty, *Social Psychology in Athletics*, attested that success breeds competition. The child that continuously receives positive evaluations for his/her competitive efforts will seek out these evaluations and display competitive behaviors (Cratty 62-69). Not only does success breed competition, but in athletic groups, Cratty suggested, winning games fosters a caring for one another among team members. As the needs for social affiliation and interpersonal attraction heighten, the group's need to win may diminish (Cratty 110). Thus the success of the individuals in a group takes on a different meaning.

As early as 1899, Cooley conceded that each social group has its own idiosyncratic conditions for determining success; however, there are certain qualities to

any type of success. These qualities include steadiness, self-control, enterprise (an exploratory disposition), perseverance, savoir-faire, and common-sense (188-93). Three of these qualities, self-control, enterprise, and perseverance, are indicators of success in drama programs. Maxine McSweeney, a drama specialist for the Los Angeles City Department of Recreation and Parks at the time her book *Creative Children's Theatre for Home, School, Church, and Playground* was published, suggested that to provide maximum benefit, leaders of theatre activities should help participants develop "skills useful in daily living. These skills include the ability to think creatively [enterprise], speak clearly, and move with good coordination [self-control]" (27). Perseverance is encouraged in theatre which requires exact preparation which is executed through numerous rehearsals (McSweeney 123). McSweeney defines a successful play as one worthy of an audience and presents thirteen standards for producing a successful production. Six of the thirteen standards pertained to the achievements of the players and technical crew members. If these criteria are met, then a performance can be labeled a success, and become a high point in a child's life (124).

Another view of what creates a successful theatre experience was proposed by Jed H. Davis and Mary Jane Larson Watkins several years earlier than McSweeney's standards. Their criteria also focused on the audience's reaction as an indicator of a production's success. They propounded that a theatre experience which arouses the audience's empathic involvement falls into the category of good theatre. For a child actor to obtain this goal, severe discipline is required. Without it, she will not be able to consistently portray a character which is crucial to keeping an audience engaged. The reward for this discipline is the "satisfaction that comes as the child actor begins to see himself as a living

link between the playwright's script and the audience [. . .].” This satisfaction is a feeling that is remembered for a long time (20-21).

In an article for *Teaching Theatre*, Larry Silverberg, a professional actor, director, acting teacher, author, and founding artistic director of the Belltown Theatre Center in Seattle, explains four essential skills any actor needs to create “the kind of theatre that reaches people where they live, in their hearts and guts. So that when an audience member leaves the theatre, he or she is not the same person that walked in two hours before.” This is the kind of theatre experience Davis and Watkins were alluding to. In order to create this successful form of theatre, Silverberg propounds that actors must really listen to others on stage, unmask and express their authentic and emotional responses, really do what their character is doing, and connect to their character's point of view.

In 1979, a proponent for drama in education, Gavin M. Bolton, published a list of items for assessing a pupil's competence in dramatic activity. These items were behavioral changes that indicated progress over a period of time. Progress implies a move toward a more mature display of these behaviors. Therefore, ability in drama is tied to personal maturity which has an effect on one's achievement level and the program's level of success.

In 1981, a different list of constituents which comprise a successful drama program was offered by John Hodgson and included in the second edition of *Children and Drama*. He explained that there are ten tools for learning and living that every person should possess upon graduation from school. These tools are the following abilities:

1. Moving physically with confidence.

2. Showing coordination and a sense of rhythm.
3. Conversing easily with others on a range of topics.
4. Giving clear instructions.
5. Describing a situation vividly.
6. Expressing feelings adequately both physically and verbally.
7. Speaking to and holding the attention of a small group.
8. Understanding different feelings and behaviors in themselves and others.
9. Arguing effectively.
10. Seeing faults in others' arguments and correcting these in their own (239).

Hodgson attests that drama offers great opportunities to the student, because of its capacity to support the development of the ten tools needed for achievement beyond school (242). Benson *et al.* labeled these tools developmental assets that teens need to succeed; however, they propounded that there are twenty external assets and twenty internal assets teens must possess to be successful individuals.

With regard to the player's relationship to the text and his/her audience the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) set standards for creating and performing dramatic material. The NAEP's arts assessment was conducted in 1997 to provide a means for measuring students' progress in creating, performing, and responding to art in public and nonpublic schools. The specifications for determining progress in the creation and performance of theatrical literature included the students' abilities to combine dialogue, action, and expression to communicate meaning to an audience. The focus was expanded beyond the quality of the individual's relationship with herself and others in the performing group to one's understanding and feeling toward the playwright's message and

ability to share that with an audience.

Success or achievement has many definitions depending on the objective of the person seeking it. Social psychologists agree that success must be experienced so an individual can develop a healthy outlook on his abilities and worth and become mature and self-sufficient. Those scholars and theatre arts enthusiasts who have directed drama programs and led theatrical activities offer varied viewpoints on the attributes of success in theatre arts. Some focus on the growth of the individual, others focus on the impact a player's performance has on the audience. Others integrate the two.

Determining Signs of Success

To determine how many drama directors concur with the standards for successful drama programs and theatrical productions set forth in the literature by Maxine McSweeney, Jed H. Davis and Mary Jane Larson Watkins, Larry Silverberg, Gavin M. Bolton, John Hodgson, and the NAEP's arts assessment, a questionnaire was devised and e-mailed to 145 drama/speech instructors teaching in Iowa (Appendix A and B). Twenty-one attributes were listed on the questionnaire, and directors were asked to choose the ten most important to the success of their theatre programs and stage productions. Following is the list these individuals were presented with:

1. Students employ a high amount of effort and cooperation during rehearsals and performances even during unrewarding phases.
2. Students possess an exploratory and creative disposition in making acting, technical, and management choices.
3. Students are open to and follow the suggestions of the director(s).
4. Students use their time effectively outside of rehearsal to achieve the group's goal.

5. Students have an intellectual grasp of what is being created by the whole group and their contribution to it.
6. Students demonstrate an understanding of dramatic form and structure.
7. Students are able to demonstrate a knowledge of the historical, cultural, social, and personal contexts of a theatrical production.
8. Students show sensitivity to the needs of others in the group.
9. Students show trust in the teacher/director.
10. Students are willing to make suggestions for changes.
11. Theatre students possess confidence in their abilities.
12. Theatre students possess a stable and positive self concept.
13. Theatre students are able to think critically and solve problems.
14. Theatre students demonstrate effective communication skills among peers and adults.
15. Students set boundaries and expectations for themselves.
16. Student performers display vocal strength and variety.
17. Student performers execute stage movement adeptly.
18. Players' stage performances are sincere, authentic, confident, and enthusiastic.
19. Players adjust their performances according to the responses of audience members and other actors.
20. Technical crews consistently execute their responsibilities properly and on time.
21. Student designers can discover, develop, and organize an environment.

Of the 145 teachers who were sent the survey, forty-four responded. The table below communicates which of the stated behaviors were chosen as the ten most important to the success of a theatre program.

Table 4.1: Behaviors Chosen as the Top Ten for Success

Behaviors	# and % of Directors Who Chose Behavior
# 1	37/44 = 84%
# 2	18/44 = 41%
# 3	27/44 = 61%
# 4	12/44 = 27%
# 5	29/44 = 66%
# 6	8/44 = 18%
# 7	7/44 = 16%
# 8	30/44 = 68%
# 9	24/44 = 55%
# 10	23/44 = 52%
# 11	32/44 = 73%
#12	29/44 = 66%
#13	27/44 = 61%
#14	28/44 = 64%
#15	17/44 = 39%
#16	22/44 = 50%
#17	14/44 = 32%
#18	32/44 = 73%
#19	11/44 = 25%
#20	12/44 = 27%
#21	7/44 = 16%

Survey Summary

Of the twenty-one behaviors cited in the survey as indicators of success, directors of high school drama departments throughout Iowa that responded to the survey chose the following as the ten most important for achieving success in a drama program.

- Students employ a high amount of effort and cooperation during rehearsals and performances even during unrewarding phases.
- Players' stage performances are sincere, authentic, confident, and enthusiastic.
- Theatre students possess confidence in their abilities.
- Students show sensitivity to the needs of others in the group.
- Students have an intellectual grasp of what is being created by the whole group and their contribution to it.
- Theatre students possess a stable and positive self concept.
- Theatre students demonstrate effective communication skills among peers and adults.
- Theatre students are able to think critically and solve problems.
- Students are open to and follow the suggestions of the director(s).
- Students show trust in the teacher/director.

In addition to choosing the ten student behaviors that lead to the success of a theatre program, directors were also given a chance on the survey to make additional comments regarding other components that lead to the success of their programs or successful teaching of theatre. Seven of the forty-four respondents took advantage of this opportunity. Following are the comments they forwarded anonymously along with their survey selections:

Students get “hands on” technical training.

Student participants (cast and crew) have fun! Ours is a relatively small school and the number of students who ‘try out’ is few. Those who participate do try hard, but the element of enjoyment is probably most important to them.

I teach a Play Productions class that usually has over half of the students that have no idea what putting on a play entails. They have never been involved in any form of drama. My major objective is for them to enjoy the class and build some self confidence. We perform for our elementary grade school so the audiences love whatever they do. Over the last couple of years I have seen an increase in special education students taking the class. My goal for them to begin with is simply to find a niche they feel comfortable with and eventually become part of a production. So far I have seen a lot of success in the class; most of my students would like to see a Play Productions II class.

Gain experience in a forum that they may not otherwise get to experience. In other words, football players (to use a stereotype) are welcome on the stage and develop an appreciation for the art form and the experience itself.

Students follow through on commitments made to the cast and director by attending all rehearsals and being on time. Students do what is needed for the good of the group.

Students feel that they are responsible for the performances, that they have been well prepared to perform, and that they take ownership of the project.

Students are a team working together to achieve a common goal [. . .] not competing against each other for better roles or more stage time.

What seems to be most important to these directors is that students harbor the traits of positive competition, competing with one’s self to hone one’s skill as a cast or crew member for the sake of the whole group. Effort, cooperation and students’ confidence in their own abilities are among the top three priorities. And as one director commented, negative competition in which students compete for better roles and more stage time is not desirable.

Competition, Egos and Mastery

In May of 2002, twelve students from High School A completed a questionnaire that served as a survey of the presence of direct and indirect competition, and ego and mastery orientation within their theatre program specifically during the preparation for and performance of a production staged for the public. Likewise, in June of 2002, a group of twelve students from High School B completed the same questionnaire. The questions (Appendix C) and the results of the survey are presented below. For the sake of anonymity which was promised to the students and their directors, none of the students' or directors' names will be mentioned. When referring to either of the schools' directors, the combined pronoun s/he will be used to further ensure anonymity.

Questionnaire Questions and Responses

What grade are you currently in? Of the twelve students from High School A, three were freshmen, five were sophomores, three were juniors, and one was a senior. Representing High School B were two sophomores, six juniors, and four seniors.

How many theatrical productions have you been involved in at your high school? All of the freshmen who completed the questionnaire had been in two shows each. The predominant number of shows the sophomores from both high schools had been in was three; however, those students from High School A were in one to two more shows than those from High School B. Juniors from High School A had been involved in an average of five shows, and those from High School B averaged a total of three shows in three years. The only senior from High School A who participated in the survey had been involved in eight shows throughout her high school career. Those four from High School B were quite diverse. Two had been in a total of five productions, one in nine

productions, and one counted twelve productions he had participated in.

Were you a cast or crew member for these shows? Fifteen of the twenty-four students surveyed had been involved in shows as cast and crew members. Six had only been members of a cast, and those who only participated on a crew totaled three. More students from High School A participated as both cast and crew members than those at High School B who participated in one or the other. This is probably due to the difference in the number of students involved in each program. For example, a total of thirty-two students were involved in the spring 2002 production at High School A, while sixty-five students produced a show at High School B in March of 2002. The fewer students involved in a program, the greater the amount of opportunity/responsibility for the students' involvement in both the performing and technical aspects of a play or musical.

Do you think that your classmates involved in the theatrical productions at your school possess positive competition? Positive competition was defined for the students as actions an individual takes to better an impersonal mark, to be the best he can be with regard for the success of the ensemble rehearsing and presenting the play or musical. A unanimous reply of yes was recorded by those students from High School A, while two of the survey participants from High School B added the statement that a majority of their classmates do possess a sense of positive competition, but some do not. One respondent from this same school answered no to the question above, but nine recorded a definite yes.

Do you think that negative competition exists among your classmates involved in the theatrical productions at your school? Interestingly, half of the twelve individuals

from High School A answered yes to this question, while the other six answered no. But all of those from High School B answered yes. These results support the previously mentioned idea that individuals practice both indirect and direct competition in any group activity they perform.

Have you ever been involved in a conflict with another student because you were cast in a role that he/she wanted to be cast in, and/or have you ever been involved in a conflict with another student because he/she was cast in a role that you wanted to be cast in?

These were included as two separate questions on the questionnaire, but the responses to both are considered concurrently due to the similarity in their nature. Again a unanimous response was given by High School A students. The response was no. High School B students replied more diversely. Nine chose no and three chose yes for the first question. The latter question received eight no's and four yes's. The next question has a direct correlation to these responses.

Are students required to audition for acting roles for every theatrical production? At each of the high schools, students are required to audition if they wish to be a member of the cast for a production. One exception would be the cameo appearance made by some of the cheerleaders and players on the High School B football team in the spring production. Because students at High School B are allowed to borrow and read the manuscript of the play to be produced and are asked to read from the text for auditions, they go to auditions prepared to read for a specific role. Thus many students may be competing for one role instead of vying for the opportunity to be a part of the ensemble like those students at High School A do at auditions. Because the cast director of High School A does not announce the title of the play until after students have attended

auditions and been cast, students can only prepare themselves to reveal their acting strengths in auditions instead of focusing on being better at portraying a character than a fellow classmate. In my interviews with students from High School A, they expressed their trust in their director to choose the part that is best for each student actor depending on that person's abilities and skills.

Contrary to this attitude, High School B theatre participants expressed dissatisfaction with some of the casting choices made by their director, because they believed that some individuals were given preferential treatment and cast in a desired role despite someone else's better audition and more perfect match for that role. Unfortunately, directors must sometimes suffer this shortsighted wisdom that does not consider different artistic interpretations of a work of literature. So when a disappointed student thinks she should have been cast in a particular role, especially one she diligently prepared to flawlessly present at an audition, naturally frustration will arise and lead to conflicts.

Does every student who wishes to act in a play/musical get cast? Because all students auditioning for a role in a play or musical do not get cast, at both high schools, the stage is set for a competitive situation, a situation that stimulates the individual to strive against others for a goal object, which he hopes will become his sole possession (J. B. Maller qtd in Cratty 64). Whether or not students develop stronger tendencies toward ego orientation or mastery orientation depends on parents' and directors' attitudes. As noted earlier, Murphy claimed that through supportive encouragement from coaches/directors and the use of coping skills, the stresses of competition can be minimized. If these stresses are not minimized, an individual will develop an ego orientation toward competition (Murphy 182-83) and undesirable competition between participants in a

competitive activity will result. If students know that they can still be a part of a theatrical production and make a meaningful contribution even if they are not members of the cast, or that auditioning at the present time will help them to prepare for future auditions, then the stresses of competition will be diminished, and auditions do not have to reap undesirable reactions. Directors at High School B allow anyone who wishes to work behind the scenes to do so. Therefore students who audition for a role but are not cast can be involved in a crew and possibly act as a crew head. At High School A, it is not the same. Not everyone who wishes to be assigned to a crew is. Like the actors, there are criteria to meet and references are required.

Are students who wish to work backstage and behind the scenes required to audition? Auditioning is not a requirement for those interested in technical positions at either high school.

Does every student who wishes to work backstage or behind the scenes get chosen to do so? Students at High School B do, but those at High School A do not.

Have you ever witnessed a student performer deliberately do something on stage during a performance to get the attention of the audience even though his/her action was inappropriate for the moment on stage? Nine out of twelve (75 %) of the students from High School A responded “no” to this question while all twelve (100 %) of the High School B students chose “yes” as their answer. It is possible that students from High School B are all recalling the same single incident or are referring to several different incidents. The survey does not allow the responders to clarify. In either case, whoever was seeking such attention was exercising direct competition in upstaging his fellow actors and displaying an ego orientation.

Have you ever witnessed a student performer do something onstage or backstage during a performance to win the approval of or impress his/her classmates? Antics done to impress or win the approval of classmates at High School A included making humorous quips to make others laugh, horsing around, flirting, and gossiping backstage or during rehearsals, and trying to “do things by themselves that have to be done in a group.” At High School B, performers changed dialogue by adding lines to the script; exhibited flamboyant gestures and vocal expressions while acting on stage; purposely tripped, fell, and blundered lines during rehearsals; talked or played instruments loudly back stage during rehearsals; and one student, while standing in the wings, exposed his unclothed body to the actors who were on stage during a performance. From the expressions some survey participants used to describe these incidents, frustration was evident. Two student performers from High School A expressed their concern about these attention-seeking behaviors hurting the overall focus and performance of the show. Two from High School B used the terms “too many” indicating their disapproval of the frequency with which these actions occurred. These individuals seemed to deem the success of their productions more important than the popularity or notoriety that comes from capturing the attention of, amusing, or impressing one’s peers. Because one’s success as an actor or technician depends on the actions and reactions of others on stage and backstage, these four students’ frustration could be directly related to the threat they feel to their own success and the goal of producing a play of the highest quality.

It can be concluded then that individuals in these two theatre programs possess both a mastery orientation and an ego orientation. Some seek the excellence required to present a successful play, while others seek attention and approval with disregard to excellence and

a play's success.

Have you ever been compared to another student performer by another cast member or the director of a show, and if you have been compared, did the comparison help or hinder your performance? Fifteen of the twenty-four teenagers answered no to the first part of the question which made the second part not applicable to them. Those nine that replied yes to the first half of the question supplied written responses to the latter half that deserve the attention of any high school drama director.

Those students who were part of the smaller drama program showed a mastery orientation through their responses. Being compared to another student performer boosted one's self-confidence, made another try to better her work, and a third respondent stated, "It helped me to improve my character." Only one student mentioned a feeling of resentment initially, but "in the end, it was quite beneficial."

Those from the larger drama program presented the following contrary statements: "A director sets another actor on a pedestal and it breeds resentment." "It did not help (being compared) as I was being asked to do something differently and was already unsure. I didn't need another performer to attempt to show me how to do it right." "It (being compared) got me upset instead of helping me focus on the acting skill being suggested." "It made me feel as if I wasn't doing a good enough job." "It makes me work harder, but I resent the fact that I'm being compared, and my attitude gets a little sour." All of these quotes suggest an ego orientation; students seem most protective of their egos instead of striving to become better.

Why is there this difference between the former and the latter groups of students? Is it due to the size of the different programs, the number of directors involved in each --the

smaller program has one drama director and an assistant director; the larger program has two drama directors and one technical director-- or the attitudes towards one another and the program the directors and students portray? The following questions take a look at students' reflections on their classmates' and directors' actions which shed some light on the reasons for the differences between the two drama programs.

Have you ever witnessed a student performer treating another student performer disrespectfully? Have you ever witnessed a student performer treating a student technician disrespectfully? Have you ever witnessed a student technician treating a student performer disrespectfully? These three questions were separate on the questionnaire, and a majority of the students answered yes to all three. What this points to is evidence that these teens have witnessed conflict which may be prevalent in all high school activities that involve diverse individuals. Determining whether these disrespectful acts were evoked by direct or indirect competition or individuals with ego or mastery orientation would require further probing of the situations students recalled when answering the survey question. The survey did not allow for that.

Has the director of the shows you've been involved in used rehearsal activities or warm ups that help students develop a sense of ensemble? Students of High School A answered yes to this inquiry. Students of High School B answered no, and one respondent added the written comment that warm-ups that helped students develop a sense of ensemble were led by students. Perhaps the presence of ensemble-building activities led by directors aids students in developing tendencies toward indirect competition and mastery orientation such as those revealed by students from High School A in their earlier responses.

Has the director of the shows you've been involved in made an effort to make each student actor and technician know that he/she is a valuable part of the production? All of High School A students, those who engaged in director-led ensemble-building activities, felt valued. Eight teenagers from the other program also confirmed their feeling of importance, but four did not witness their directors making an effort to make them or others aware of their worth as members of a production's team.

High School A Student Responses to Interview Questions

On May 17, 2002, four theatre students, two males and two females, from High School A were interviewed. On May 20, 2002 two female students were interviewed, and four more students, three girls and one boy, were interviewed on May 21, 2002. All of these interviews were held in the same classroom at High School A outside of the drama directors' and other faculty members' presence and after the students had completed the preceding questionnaire. Students were asked to respond candidly to the questions but to avoid using the names of specific individuals involved in the program. It was requested by the interviewer that the students simply tell about their experiences and focus on their personal reactions and behavior. Respondents were given a brief overview of the interview process -the interviewer would ask one question at a time and allow any student who wished to respond in turn. Occasionally the interviewer would ask questions related to the students' responses in order to gain clarification on those particular responses. Then the definitions of positive and negative competition were repeated. Below are the interview questions followed by the students' responses.

Responses to Question # 1: In what ways does positive competition exist?

"Among the students? Well, in the green room, while we're warming up [. . .] if

someone is goofing off or talking a lot, a lot of times people will tell them ‘shut up (and) get to your part, because you should, so you can be better.’ So we’re encouraging people to be better.”

“I think it does because we all strive to better ourselves, and not just for us but for the whole group. And we want to be the best that we can be and to show people that High School A is not just the stereotype. That we really do have smart people that are better than what most people think about us.”

“We’ve just learned together over the years that we need to push ourselves individually as well as a group to come together and really make the show come off easily.”

“Since we were supposed to have [. . .] a serious play, and (for) a lot of us it’s kind of hard for us to be serious, (one of the actors) would tell us a story that would make you really think [. . .] and it would calm you down and make you do better on your part.

“The stories also dealt with life and death circumstances a lot, so it really helped you get into character for the play and think about the whole thing which made your acting come out as more convincing.”

“A lot of us have already been in shows (at High School A) since (our) freshman year. We get new people every year, but the majority of us have worked together before. So we pretty much know each other enough that we don’t have arguments. (We) know who to go to for what and how much work we can depend on them (to accomplish).”

Students expressed that the success of the play depends on both the cast and crew members doing their job. They recalled an incident that occurred during one production at High School A in which a telephone was supposed to ring on stage, but the sound crew

missed their cue. This forced the actors to improvise dialogue until the phone rang.

Students mentioned that if a cast or crew member creates a blunder due to carelessness, and causes others to have to cover for their mistake, they “really hear about it,” from the others. “Everybody counts on one another and everybody makes sure somebody else is on task [. . .].”

A student director is included in the coaching of the cast. S/he reminds the cast and crew members of their responsibilities and corrects them if they are not following the protocol for rehearsals and performances. S/he gives the actors rehearsal notes in addition to the director. Student performers indicated that they appreciated receiving feedback from a peer, because it was less intimidating, but did compel them to want to do better, thus reinforcing positive competition. Of course, this person is someone who is an upperclassman and has been involved in several theatrical productions at the high school. This is why the other students in the program respect the student director’s input.

Students are constantly encouraged by the student director and one another to learn their lines and develop their characters. Hearing from their peers has more impact than hearing from an adult.

Responses to Question #2: In what ways does negative competition exist?

- “There was an incident when [. . .] another actor [. . .] kept interrupting my line . . . (by) repeating my line while I was saying it. So I talked to the person aside and they stopped. That person probably just wanted attention from the other cast members, or crew members, or the director [. . .], but it was ended with polite conversation.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever really seen that happen. We all [. . .] have been in at least one

play, and we pretty much know that no matter what we do, we have to do it well.

Otherwise our part won't make the play as well (good) as it could be. And [. . .] even the tiniest part is part of the big picture. So I don't think I've ever really seen that."

"There's no [. . .] hatreds or rivalries, and no one's an absolute jerk about anything. And onstage there's very little attention hogging with anything. I mean one time, some actor might do something more dynamic to add to the scene, but it's never really, 'Oh look at me. I'm better. I have attention.' It's just something to help the play."

"Even if it's somebody you don't exactly get along with during school and other times, you're nice to each other and you get along to make everything work out. Otherwise it's like, 'Oh my gosh, it's my fault that the play went bad, because we were fighting and arguing and not paying attention.'"

"As far as competition for attention goes, the only time that really happens is maybe in the green room before the play. Someone starts joking around or [. . .] making an ass of themselves to get some attention and be funny. That can contribute to the demise of the play [. . .]. But it usually never really gets in the way. A lot of the time people focus even though there are some trying to be funny, (seeking) attention and getting off task. But (the attention-seeking, off-task behavior is) never an overwhelming force."

Another student explained that one male student, who had been in previous productions and was notorious for not learning his lines on time, was not chosen for the cast, but was placed on the costume crew. He was upset by this and did get teased for being on the costume crew.

Responses to Question #3: What types of conflicts have you experienced?

"Sometimes there are some fights [. . .]. A couple falls ago an actor and a technician

got into a fight about [. . .] something really stupid and small. They had this big fight and they stayed away from each other the entire time (during tech week). But everybody did their work, so I don't really remember it ruining anything."

"During the fall play last year there was (a) person who started rumors about me [. . .]. I wasn't too happy with that person [. . .] but just so everybody got along, I didn't say anything to her about it until after the play [. . .]. I ignored it until (the play) was done, and then I said something to her, because we all want to succeed, and if we're fighting, we're not going to succeed [. . .]. I was on make up (crew) and she was a backstage person."

"I've had personal conflicts with other people in the cast and (on) crew(s) not because of things directly related to theatre, but because (of) gossiping [. . .] outside of the theatre program and they bring them into rehearsal and have to start stuff there about it, and then that usually breaks focus. That's when (our director) gets aggravated and tells us to settle down."

The initial script for the spring production was abandoned because of a conflict with the administration which did not want to make space available for the construction of a necessary set piece for the play. Therefore, the director chose a one-act drama that he knew the theatre students would be able to prepare for well in the remaining time left before the spring production. During the interview, one female student explained that because the show was a drama instead of a comedy some of the students had a hard time identifying with the characters and the story. She added that these same students also entered into the rehearsal process assuming that they would not have to work as hard on this one act play. This led to a lot more misuse of rehearsal time by the students until the

final weeks of rehearsal.

A male student being interviewed commented that some individuals have an ego and have a difficult time getting along with others, but the director addresses those problems at rehearsals, and demands that students focus on the success of the show.

Responses to Question #4: What are some things your director(s) do(es) to avoid negative competition?

The students being interviewed explained how their director does not have the students audition for a particular role in the play. Instead, all students interested in auditioning for the cast present a short monologue provided by the director a week in advance of the auditions, and pair up with another student at auditions and do a cold reading of a scene from a different play. They like this because “students aren’t competing for specific roles (rather for the opportunity) to perform on stage.” Then they pointed out that those who do not get chosen for the cast are encouraged to be involved on a crew and take leadership roles.

On the nights of dress rehearsals and performances, the director has cast and crew members stand in a circle for warm ups and tells them that “the chain is only as good as its weakest link [. . .]. Realize that your job is dependent (upon) everyone else’s job in the circle. Realize they are here to help you do your job to the best of your ability.”

- In response to the fourth question, many students offered the following reflections which have been summarized. The director of High school A will address problems or conflicts between members of the ensemble and encourage students to resolve their problems and focus on the show. Students are also led through warm ups before performances to calm down and get into character. Crew and cast members are made to

feel equal and both groups are led through warm ups together before a performance to help them focus on the show.

Students also recalled how their director tells those auditioning that students who have been in previous shows do not have an advantage over those who have not. S/He does not choose cast members based on the number of shows they've been in, but because of which student is best for a particular part and is willing to work hard for the success of the show.

Responses to Question #5: What are some things your director(s) do(es) to increase positive competition?

“(Our director) is certainly a motivator in that case, because s/he’s always telling us to focus and (that) we can do our parts better, and being perfectly honest with us, because s/he [. . .] wants us to be good at what we do.”

“(During rehearsals for the spring play, our director) always did [. . .] warm ups . . . Then to get us serious s/he would put some fake mines (symbolized by notebooks) out on the floor. (Then) we’d [. . .] close our eyes and try to walk over it (the mine field) with the help of our partner across the way. That really helped motivate some of us, because it’s either like you get across and live, or you step on a land mine and die.”

“Also (the director) would berate the people who would try to guide them across. S/He would (say) like, ‘You just caused a person to die!’ One time s/he even had us (lie) down and imagine (what it would be like to be forced to take part in) killing a person we loved.” (The cast had performed a play in which a community is forced by adherence to a tradition to choose one member each year to be put to death. The students were asked to put themselves in the shoes of these community members through the

imagination exercise described above.)

“This is a very student-run production. With that and with encouragement from (the director), we get a real sense of responsibility. We realize that if we let something get in the way of that, we won’t be the best we can be and put on as good a show as we could. Our director is [. . .] good at imbuing a sense of responsibility (within us). (S/He tells us,) ‘This is your task. You can do it and do it well.’” When asked why they consider theirs a student-run production, the students at High School A said they are responsible for building the set, designing and creating costumes and props, designing and running lights and sound, and calling the shows. The director and adult supervisors are there to teach, direct, guide, and assist students, but they step back and let the students take over.

“(The director), after every practice, sits down and talks with us and says, ‘You know you could improve on this.’ So there’s always something to improve on. And you’re like, ‘Wow, I didn’t do as well as I thought.’ After you start to think about it, you say, ‘I could do better than that. I could do better than that, a whole lot better.’”

“S/He has us try to imagine something going wrong in the play and [. . .] being able to stay calm and fix it[. . .] S/He tries to have (us) envision what (we) would do in case there is a problem.”

Responses to Question #6: What do you think makes a play or musical a success?

- “Responsibility and teamwork. Students realize that if they falter themselves, they will (make the team) falter.”

“They (student actors and technicians) have to have a willingness to work with others and overcome differences to make everything come together.”

Students have “good acting skills or are able to concentrate (well) to do their (theatre)

technician's job(s)."

"You have to have support from everybody [. . .] crew (members), actors, directors, (and) parents.

The actors focus. "They put a lot into it, and they take it seriously."

"They (actors and technicians) can suspend your disbelief."

"If something wrong happens, you (the audience member) can't tell at all.

The production "comes together as a whole realistically."

"Students earn the director's respect and trust."

The students feel "a sense that they did their job and they did it well."

"Everybody working together as a whole, (each individual involved) knowing that everybody else is just as important as them."

"Everybody's head (is) in the play and not somewhere else."

Students being interviewed concluded that performers have to have a positive attitude and behave like professionals before, during, and after the show.

They also said their theatre program needs support from the administration and teachers in the high school, as well as adequate space for storage and construction of sets, costumes, and props. They complained that their program needed a good budget, so the program could have better quality costumes and more elaborate sets.

Responses to Question #7: Do you think the plays you have been involved in have been a success?

At the time of the interview, May 2002, students believed that their most recent spring show was a success because it sold out. The first night about 175 tickets were sold. The second night approximately 125 tickets were sold. On opening night, audience

members stayed to watch the show even though they had to stand. They explained that the performance was not done in the school's auditorium because that space was being used by the music department. Instead it was rehearsed and performed in the high school's student center. This is the reason for the limited space.

One student declared that patrons had sent fifteen letters to the drama department praising the spring production. Other students recalled how they have been told by the director that people stopped and asked when the next play performance would be and commented on the theatre program's level of professionalism.

One student who had been in eight plays, felt some of the shows were successful and some were not. Those she didn't remember or those she felt were "cheesy" and full of lowbrow humor she considered not successful.

High School B

On June 9, 2002, eleven students from High School B responded to the same interview questions posed to the students of High School A. The interview took place in the home of one of the students since the school building was not open at the time when all of the students were available to gather for the interview. The same interview procedures as those used for students from High School A were followed. Below are the responses of High School B students.

Responses to Question # 1: In what ways does positive competition exist?

"I think one of the best things [. . .] if somebody could work on a role, (is) if you find something good that you like, and you can compliment them on that. That will encourage them to keep going, and [. . .] that will help them connect with you and work better on stage. I've seen this happen on stage before."

“I think the people who really try and really get involved in what they’re doing encourage the others who either aren’t trying as hard or just don’t know how to insert themselves into the production. So those people that really work hard really encourage those people who are kind of afraid. (They set) good examples (for others.)”

“Just the protocol of how you look at the more experienced actors on stage. This is from personal experience (of) coming in as a freshman into a drama department [. . .]. You realize [. . .] the effort they (experienced student actors) put into going over their script again and again and developing their character and working with everybody else. You realize that they’re not the top because they can get along with everybody and can laugh and goof around.

“Not because they are popular.”

“Yeah, but everybody respects them because of how hard they put (themselves) into it (their work) and that makes you want to put more into it. And you don’t even feel like they have to tell you to put more into it, you just want to.”

Responses to Question #2: In what ways does negative competition exist?

“Sometimes during rehearsals someone will do something really stupid to get laughs out of people and you can see that they just want the attention [. . .]. Then someone else . . . will be like, ‘Stop, it’s getting annoying.’ [. . .] Sometimes people will get into fights because someone keeps doing something over and over just to get laughs, and it gets really old, and so then people start to do negative things because they’re getting so annoyed with each other.”

When asked to give an example, the student relayed a story of how one particular student kept laughing in the middle of his line at a rehearsal. The line was not to be

interpreted as comical, so the group had to rehearse that portion of the scene over and over again. After several times of rehearsing the boy's line, the other student actors felt as if their time was being wasted because the boy saying the line was not changing his interpretation of the line, and continued to lose his focus in the middle of it. The students at the interview agreed that this was a display of negative competition for his peers' and the director's attention, and to take the focus off of others in the scene and place it on himself.

When asked what the director's response to this situation was, one student volunteered this insight. "I found that the level of negative competition increases with the (lack of) respect of the director. The less they (student actors) respect (a director), the more problems you end up having." The group being interviewed went on to discuss a deterioration of respect for a director and what the cause of this was. All agreed that the director did not set boundaries for all of the student actors and crew members to follow, and people would "forget that they're at play rehearsal instead of snack time." By separating the cast into core cast members and extras, by giving more direction and attention to the core cast members, and by holding members of these two groups to different standards of rehearsal behavior, by starting rehearsals later than the scheduled start time, the students of High School B felt that the director projected an air of disrespect for certain cast members, which in turn fed their sense of disrespect for one another and the director, thus deteriorating their sense of acting as an ensemble and their pursuit of positive competition (striving for one's best for the sake of the whole theatrical production and all involved).

Responses to Question #3: What types of conflicts have you experienced?

One conflict described occurred when cast members started to direct other cast members by distributing notes listing what other cast members needed to work on improving at rehearsals. They felt the director was not taking the initiative to make the performance successful, so they decided to take matters into their own hands. These notes created a rift between cast members and weakened the ensemble. Some students felt as if they were being told to perform a certain way on stage in order to make the senior drama students who were distributing these notes look good. As one student put it, “How many times did we hear, ‘It’s my senior year. Don’t mess it up.’”

Responses to Question #4: What are some things your director(s) do(es) to lessen negative competition?

One student spoke of a former drama director he had who squelched negative competition by being very stern and equally demanding of all students involved in the program. Students were made to feel important to the production and commanded to give their best. S/he made the students feel like they “were in a real production” and that their “role was important [. . .]. Everybody was treated [. . .] like they deserved to be on stage. Students knew what they were supposed to do and did it, even if it meant staying at a rehearsal (beyond the scheduled quitting time) to finish rehearsing a scene.” This student experienced a lot less negative competition under this teacher’s direction because even though the cast could share a laugh with the director, the director commanded respect for the jobs all cast and crew members were doing, thus everyone strived to do their best for the sake of that drama program.

Responses to Question #5: What are some things your director(s) do(es) to increase positive competition?

In response to this question, students from High School B offered the following reflections which have been summarized. When the director asked the students for their input in choosing a script for a theatrical production, students were motivated to care more about the production and push themselves to try their best. When students felt the script was insulting to their intelligence or skill level, or contained characters they could not relate to, they were less likely to want to improve as theatre technicians or performers. Students said they preferred to know the title of the play before they auditioned so that they could better prepare themselves for their auditions and know before they auditioned and were cast whether or not they wanted to commit themselves to that particular production. Students also mentioned that fair casting and rotating the lead roles among students in the department instead of always choosing the same individuals to play the leads helped to improve positive competition. When the director put in the time to help a student become a better actor and encouraged students to work together and learn from one another it gave the actors inspiration and a better attitude which inspired a friendlier environment. One student pointed out that a director's "attention to detail really (brought) out the hard work of a lot of people and it (made me) feel special if the director (was) giving (me) attention."

Responses to Question #6: What do you think makes a play a success?

Following are the responses given by the students of High School B. For the sake of clarity some have been quoted, others have been paraphrased. The first answer was "hard work. If you put in the hours you get something back," pride in the finished product. The second response was "actors and the script are believable, so you can get lost in the story." And the play has energy, because "actors stay in character" and are

consistently committed to making the story come alive. Another student focused on the technical elements and felt that these must come off as polished and not detract from the story being told by the actors. For example, costumes must be “quality-made [. . .] (and) fit the style and period (of the production).”

Other replies to this question emphasized theatre students’ relationships to one another. In order to achieve success, one student felt that it was necessary for the players to bond and develop meaningful friendships with one another while helping one another to do their best. A different responder added that communication should be kept open, and theatre students should be honest and respectful of one another. Two more students supported this notion by stating that technicians and actors should work cooperatively together and both recognize and appreciate what the other is doing for the show so that it can be successful. When backstage, technicians and actors must respect one another’s space and remind one another to stay focused on the show. A few others agreed that students should have a sense of responsibility for the success of the show and pass on their skills and knowledge to underclassmen for the sake of the future success of the program. Finally, several students were in favor of technicians and performers warming up or getting physically and mentally prepared together to do a show.

One last insight a student offered on this topic was that parent involvement is a necessity for success. More parents involved equals more community support and more publicity for the program.

Responses to Question #7: Do you think the productions you have been involved in have been a success?

One student told about a high school production in which the cast was not large, there

weren't a lot of chorus numbers for extras, so extras were not cast. The director worked very hard and encouraged all of the students. This led to a feeling of unity between the cast and the director and the cast and the crew members. Others spoke of a different production in which the students were dedicated, worked hard, and every actor had a specific part and a goal in mind. One responder felt that success was achieved when students developed meaningful friendships outside of rehearsals and carried those over onto stage and helped each other out. The success came when these individuals became so close that they didn't play for the audience and strive to get laughs, but worked hard to make each other and the production as a whole look good .

Conclusion

Students participating in this study engaged in both indirect and direct competition on and off the stage. Those students of High School A felt that they possessed a strong sense of camaraderie and worked together well. They found their director to be approachable and someone who gave and received respect. Students felt that they were safe going to him/her with their problems and talking to him/her. They did not feel judged, instead they felt as if their director was there for them. One student stated, "Everyone knows they have to be the best they can be." They believed their director encouraged this idea by casting students in the roles that were best for them. Students expressed that this did not cause them to have a sense of animosity toward one another if one did not get the role he/she wanted. Students were assured that they were needed and could achieve a sense of accomplishment in a different role. Because of the consistency with which they repeated the importance of working together to achieve everyone's best for the success of the program, students of High School A appeared to possess a greater

mastery orientation to competition than an ego orientation and attained more satisfaction with their dramatic performances or technical responsibilities for productions. They emphasized creating a supportive environment which places the needs of the performing ensemble first.

Those students of High School B experienced positive competition as well, but many more incidents of negative competition fueled by students with an ego orientation to competition were witnessed. For example, the student who repeatedly chose to break out into laughter while saying his serious line was trying to win the attention of the director and his peers at the expense of the group's rehearsal time and progress. In negative competition, a competitor seeks to win at any cost; whereas in positive competition, the performer or athlete seeks to improve his/her abilities for the sake of the cast, crew, or team. High School B students also mentioned other occurrences when students put the ensemble's success at risk during a rehearsal or performance for the sake of their own egos.

A correlation between the occurrences of positive and negative competition among students participating in a theatre production and the directors' responses to them can be seen in the students responses to the questionnaire and interview questions. The director who values all members of a production team the same, sets high standards for him/herself and the students, and holds him/herself and each student to achieving that standard has a more successful program. Supposing that the responses of High School A students were honest and their memories of events were accurate, this director worked collaboratively with students, divided responsibilities and opportunities among them, and thus promoted indirect competition and high mastery orientations.

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APPENDIX A

E-mail Letter Sent to Iowa High School Drama Directors

Dear Iowa high school drama director,

This winter and spring of 2002, a research project will be launched to determine the role competition plays in the success of school drama programs and theatrical productions. This project is unique in that no current and available research exists that examines the positive or negative effects of competitive behavior among students on the success of high school drama programs. It is exciting because it can establish a means for drama directors to deal with the constructive and destructive aspects of competition among theatre students.

This research will be presented in a research paper I will be composing as part of my master's degree program in Theatre Arts at the University of Northern Iowa. I am hoping that you will agree to be a part of this research by offering your professional opinion about what makes secondary school drama programs successful through responding to an online survey. The survey is simple to access; just click on the following hyperlink to respond to it: <http://www.uni.edu/theatre/departments/students/grad/index.html>

. Thank you for giving your time to this project. Your responses will be kept anonymous and I am happy to e-mail you the results if you wish.

With gratitude,

Lisa Lenstra-Norman,

graduate student of UNI

APPENDIX B

Text for the Website Created to Gather Survey Responses

Please choose the top ten student behaviors you think demonstrate the attributes of a successful secondary school drama program and production, and e-mail me your responses by clicking on the submit button at the bottom of the website page. You can make your selections by clicking on the button next to each description you wish to select.

- Students employ a high amount of effort and cooperation during rehearsals and performances even during unrewarding phases.
- Students possess an exploratory and creative disposition in making acting, technical, and management choices.
- Students are open to and follow the suggestions of the director(s).
- Students use their time effectively outside of rehearsal to achieve the group's goal.
- Students have an intellectual grasp of what is being created by the whole group and their contribution to it.
- Students demonstrate an understanding of dramatic form and structure.
- Students are able to demonstrate a knowledge of the historical, cultural, social, and personal contexts of a theatrical production.
- Students show sensitivity to the needs of others in the group.
- Students show trust in the teacher/director.
- Students are willing to make suggestions for changes.
- Theatre students possess confidence in their abilities.
- Theatre students possess a stable and positive self concept.

- Theatre students are able to think critically and solve problems.
- Theatre students demonstrate effective communication skills among peers and adults.
- Students set boundaries and expectations for themselves.
- Student performers display vocal strength and variety.
- Student performers execute stage movement adeptly.
- Players' stage performances are sincere, authentic, confident, and enthusiastic.
- Players adjust their performances according to the responses of audience members and other actors.
- Technical crews consistently execute their responsibilities properly and on time.
- Student designers can discover, develop, and organize an environment.

If there are other components that you feel should be included on the list, please list them below.

✶ SUBMIT

APPENDIX C

Student Questionnaire

Directions: In the right column, please circle your response to the question. Please provide a brief written explanation for #'s 13 and 15.

- | | | | | |
|---|-------------|------|----|----|
| 1. What grade are you currently in? | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 2. How many theatrical productions have you been involved in at your high school? | _____ SHOWS | | | |
| 3. Were you a cast or crew member for these shows? If both, circle both answers. | CREW | CAST | | |
| 4. Do you think that your classmates involved in the theatrical productions at your school possess positive competition? | YES | NO | | |
| 5. Do you think that negative competition exists among your classmates involved in the theatrical productions at your school? | YES | NO | | |
| 6. Have you ever been involved in a conflict with another student because you were cast in a role that he/she wanted to be cast in? | YES | NO | | |
| 7. Have you ever been involved in a conflict with another student because he/she was cast in a role that you wanted to be cast in? | YES | NO | | |

8. Are students required to audition for acting roles for every theatrical production?	YES	NO
9. Does every student who wishes to act in a play/musical get cast?	YES	NO
10. Are students who wish to work backstage and behind the scenes required to audition?	YES	NO
11. Does every student who wishes to work backstage or behind the scenes get chosen to do so?	YES	NO
12. Have you ever witnessed a student performer deliberately do something on stage during a performance to get the attention of the audience even though his/her action was inappropriate for the moment on stage?	YES	NO
13. Have you ever witnessed a student performer do something onstage or backstage during a performance to win the approval of or impress his/her classmates?	YES	NO
Briefly explain what that was?		
14. Have you ever been compared to another student performer by another cast member or the director of a show?	YES	NO
15. If you have been compared, did the comparison help or hinder your performance?	HELP	HINDER

Briefly explain why?

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 16. Have you ever witnessed a student performer treating another student performer disrespectfully? | YES | NO |
| 17. Have you ever witnessed a student performer treating a student technician disrespectfully? | YES | NO |
| 18. Have you ever witnessed a student technician treating a student performer disrespectfully? | YES | NO |
| 19. Has the director of the shows you've been involved in used rehearsal activities or warm ups that help students develop a sense of ensemble? | YES | NO |
| 20. Has the director of the shows you've been involved in made an effort to make each student actor and technician know that he/she is a valuable part of the production? | YES | NO |