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Theatre as a Change Agent: An Analysis of High School Theatre Education and Its Benefits in Communication and Problem Solving

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Abstract

Theatre education in the high school has an interesting past. Theatre has a long presence in schools as entertainment, but its benefits to educational outcomes has been largely overlooked. In the United States around the turn of the last century, this schema began to be questioned. In 1936, Columbia University published a book discussing the use of theatre in the United States and its possible uses in education: "The Production of Later 19th Century American Drama" by Garrett Leverton. This book was the first to discuss the beginning of the changing role of theatre in education. Columbia University was not the only place interested in the use of theatre in education. Other books were written that dealt directly with the uses of theatre in education: "Drama in Education" by Grace Sloan Overton was published in 1926, and Samuel J. Hume and Lois M. Foster published the quintessential book "Theatre and School" in 1932. Both of these books, along with scores of journal articles, discussed the vital role that theatre should play in education. The authors asserted that theatre education taught communication skills and problem solving skills, among other lessons. The problem was they did not have any proof. No quantitative data had been collected, nor had any qualitative research been cited in the previously mentioned books. The authors published what they had seen in their own work, expecting their findings to be self-evident. These books went as far as giving teachers instructions on how to implement theatre into their curriculum and lesson planning.

THEATRE AS A CHANGE AGENT:

AN ANALYSIS OF HIGH SCHOOL THEATRE EDUCATION AND ITS BENEFITS IN COMMUNICATION AND PROBLEM SOLVING

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Theatre education in the high school has an interesting past. Theatre has a long presence in schools as entertainment, but its benefits to educational outcomes has been largely overlooked. In the United States around the turn of the last century, this schema began to be questioned. In 1936, Columbia University published a book discussing the use of theatre in the United States and its possible uses in education: The Production of Later 19th Century American Drama by Garrett Leverton. This book was the first to discuss the beginning of the changing role of theatre in education. Columbia University was not the only place interested in the use of theatre in education. Other books were written that dealt directly with the uses of theatre in education: Drama in Education by Grace Sloan Overton was published in 1926, and Samuel J. Hume and Lois M. Foster published the quintessential book Theatre and School in 1932. Both of these books, along with scores of journal articles, discussed the vital role that theatre should play in education. The authors asserted that theatre education taught communication skills and problem solving skills, among other lessons. The problem was they did not have any proof. No quantitative data had been collected, nor had any qualitative research been cited in the previously mentioned books. The authors published what they had seen in their own work, expecting their findings to be self-evident. These books went as far as giving teachers instructions on how to implement theatre into their curriculum and lesson planning.

In the 1920's, high schools began to employ the teaching of theatre as a tool in the formation of understanding. East High School in Waterloo, Iowa, for instance, had a German play and a French play both performed by students during the 1920's. These were presumably

used to give students a better understanding of the language they were studying, while allowing students to demonstrate this knowledge through a medium other than a paper-pencil[1] test. This process created pedagogical parallelism to the desired outcome of learning the language in a performance based assessment, basically using the language, which would be the goal of the class. Theatre was being used to create another assessment that fit closer to the desired goal of applying, not just identifying. Therefore, theatre demonstrated benefits in the learning of other subjects. This brought to the forefront the question: does theatre in its own right have educational merit? Are there inherent educational benefits learned through the activity of theatre itself beyond its use as a tool to learn other subjects?

This question rang true at that time, but it sounds even more so in today's educational climate. Schools try to contend with shrinking budgets, proliferation of norm referenced testing (NRT)[2], standardized testing, criterion reference testing (CRT)[3], and with teacher and district accountability. With this muddied landscape of high stakes testing, where is theatre education going to fit in? For some school districts, it has meant the elimination of or reduction of theatre programs in their schools. East High, for one, did not have a theatre program from the late 1980's through the 1990's despite having a strong program previously. In 1997, I was hired as a teacher by East High with the directive to restart the theatre program. Unfortunately, after theatre's return to East, I have noticed that few resources, compared to other schools in the district and surrounding areas, have been dedicated to the program or its desired outcomes. Recently, in many United States high school educational plans, theatre education has not been acknowledged as an important part of the curriculum (Berube 151). For instance, the State of Iowa finds theatre education to be of such little importance that a teacher needs no certification in this subject area to teach it (ie: an English teacher can teach theatre arts classes but a certified

theatre teacher can not teach English). Furthermore, no certification, of any kind, is needed to be the director of an extracurricular theatre program; however, a coaching certification is required for all sporting activities (Collins). In fact, many high schools all over the nation do not have theatre as a part of their curricular programming. Berube also points out that "another problem in the delivery of arts education is that so many demands are made on schools in poor areas that the arts are often the first to go" (152). Theatre as an educational course has been relegated to the category of "elective" for schools that have it as part of their programming. Recently, this view of theatre as nonessential or as an elective has come into question.

What value does theatre education have for high school curricula? In response to this question, I will examine articles and books which consider the benefits that theatre course work can offer to high school students. Problem solving and communication skills are the benefits which will be the focus of my work. Next, I will delve into these findings to see if the benefits have actual life applications by using anecdotal evidence from my own experience. In short, I will use qualitative data and some quantitative data to support the assertion that theatre education enhances problem solving and communication skills.

Viewing the research through the lens of the thesis proposed in this paper leads to many words that need to be defined. Norris in "Drama as Research" defines *theatre education* as an active, social process which utilizes all five forms of making meaning (word, number, image, gesture, and sound) (40). According to Interpersonal Communication by Sarah Trenholm and Arthur Jensen, *problem solving* is defined as "a creative solution that will increase the rewards and decrease the costs to both parties" (358). Furthermore, Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution by the National Association of Secondary School Principals states that *problem solving* is "developing a mindset that orients students toward analyzing material and

reaching conclusions about it," (24) and *communication* is "the transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, etc. by the use of symbols . . ." (7). Stringing the definitions together the thesis regarding the benefits of theatre education that I will show is: theatre education is an active, social process of forming meanings which heightens peoples' ability to create solutions that benefit more than hurt and expand their abilities to transmit varied ideas and thoughts.

How does one provide proof of the benefits of a theatre program? People in general, but specifically administrators, want to see data that can be measured against another piece of data. This requires numerical data for the most part, because such data is easily compared. If a student scores numerically higher on a test using different learning methods, the one with the higher score is seen to be the best by administrators. If a student or teacher states that the same method was helpful in the learning of new material, many people would ask for proof. Today, schools want quantitative data (numbers), not qualitative (anecdotal) to use as proof. The proliferation of standardized test taking by students is a consequence of this method of measuring outcomes.

Is Qualitative Data Good Enough?

One of the major obstacles to showing how theatre education benefits students is the type of data that is found in studies dealing with this topic. Most of it is qualitative. However, some of the information is quantitative. According to Norris, most of the proof dealing with the benefits of arts in education or theatre in education is often qualitative or anecdotal. Qualitative data is stories or life accounts using words to reflect an experience (42). There are often numbers attached to specific information or stories, but the data itself is not in the form of numbers. The fact that the information is not readily numeric creates problems. This is due to the public's perception of numbers themselves; numbers seem to many to be more accessible and reliable. The administrators of schools and the general public often look for data that is quantitative in

nature. Quantitative data shows causality with numbers and their relationships to each other. Robert Taylor outlines some of the hurdles found when dealing with qualitative data:

> The real benefits of educational theatre, though we think we understand them fully, are somewhat hard to communicate to our peers in other fields. We borrow their methodologies in the hope that the recognizable might be acceptable. We argue amongst ourselves in the comparative merits of qualitative analysis versus the justification of quantitative results. (84)

Lack of numerical data has created a situation where people outside the field of theatre education can not be persuaded that this field of study has merit as an important part of a student's education. Lack of interest has created other problems according to Zayda Sierra. "Adults' lack of understanding and social acceptance of dramatic play and their social prejudices and misapprehensions of play as mere entertainment rather than as serious learning may inhibit older children's desires to play dramatically" (2). This lack of quantitative data is having a negative effect on theatre education in the high school and its seeming benefits; therefore, other forms of data must be used.

Professionals in the field of education are starting to see the value of qualitative data in other academic areas. Joe Norris observes, "as the educational research community accepted the tools of the anthropologist and ethnography in the past quarter century, its members have expanded their research repertoire to include both quantitative research that primarily uses 'number' to collect and analyze data and qualitative research that primarily uses 'word' to convey meaning" (40). This more recent way of looking at information gives qualitative data more validity than it had in the past. Philip Taylor's explanation of the differences of qualitative and quantitative data reveals why some individuals consider qualitative data even more important

than quantitative:

> Quantitative research differs substantially in that it reduces what the investigators see in classrooms to discrete events and behaviors that can be recognized, counted, and aggregated in order to generalize across settings and individuals. This contrasts with interpretive scholars who view classrooms as particular socially and culturally organized communities. . . . The method of interpretive, sociolinguistic, or ethnographic researchers is to look closely at what teachers and students do both during and after drama. They observe over longer periods of time, write field notes, record on videos and audiotapes, and interview teachers and students . . . (233)

Qualitative researchers look closer at the raw data and spend a great deal of time dealing with it more intimately. The data is not a number, it's a moment in time. If numbers were of the utmost importance, then people would not watch sports, they would just find out the score. Students are not all the same. They learn in a variety of ways and have different talents and problem areas. Qualitative information is fundamental to living. For instance, if you want to see a movie, knowing that it is rated an eight on a ten point scale tells you only that it is considered better than average. Knowing this, however, does not tell you why the movie is considered good. You may not enjoy the same things the reviewer does, and would rate it quite differently. Instead, you seek out other resources. You ask your friends and you watch trailers. All of this is qualitative data. At the very least, many forms of research should be brought together. According to FranCina Conrad, "the pooling of many research findings provides a better base for detecting relationships and building theories in an area" (199). Therefore, true relationships can not be decided upon any more by quantitative data than qualitative. They both must be looked at to

create a conclusion of benefit. Ultimately, the most important thing is to do what helps kids even if there is not mounds of data.

The largest question about quantitative research is whether it can really measure the things we want it to as Taylor notes:

> The first problem is that the standardized tests [consistent with quantitative research] typically used do not measure the deep, internal transformative construction of knowledge that drama teachers aim for. Instead, such tests tend to measure mastery of low-level facts and information. If the goal of instruction is mastery of low-level facts, then student achievement is more economically reached through other modes of instruction, such as drill, conscious memorizing, or direct instruction. In other words, all too often tests for the effect of drama are those designed to measure an entirely different level or kind of understanding, chiefly one with a lower cognitive demand and no demand at all for social interaction. (232-33)

Therefore, quantitative data often looks at lower level cognitive skills, while qualitative data plumbs a deeper breadth of knowledge. The significance here is that higher level thinking skills are truly the ones that are important in life, whether the student is going to college or heading to the work force. Theatre takes a student beyond just facts or comprehension, knowledge level, low skill level thinking; it allows a student to move higher in cognitive skill to see what is beyond the immediate.

> Educational drama is profoundly effective in helping students create meaning and deepen their understanding of any subject. It provides a way for them to

> project themselves into the adult activities of their culture and rehearse their future roles and values. . . . In the process of drama at its best, children construct their own meaning as they are launched on a voyage toward a truth beyond mere facts. (Wagner 33)

According to Fenwick W. English et al, the higher level cognitive skills are not adequately measured by the standardized tests used today including the American College Test (ACT), Standardized Aptitude Test (SAT), and Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED). "Current trends in [standardized test] item development [are]: tests are getting more difficult, [there is a] movement away from knowledge and comprehension questions, [and there has been an] increase in [the] percentage of application and analysis questions" (6a-1). But nowhere is there a mention of synthesis and evaluation, the two highest levels in Bloom's Taxonomy[4]. These are not included in the standardized tests, because it takes more explanation to measure the higher level thinking and reasoning skills. It takes a paper, an essay, a speech, etc. to demonstrate these higher levels. Quantitative data often does not deal with the higher level skills; therefore, one must use qualitative data to measure the benefits of theatre in education.

Arts in Education Literature

The beginnings of exploration into the effects of arts in education started with John Dewey's book Art and Education in 1929[5]. Dewey's book was based on the premise that experience is better than theory for true learning to occur. By doing (experiencing) the information, it is learned with more depth and clarity than it would have been as a theory. As Dewey in Art and Education stated:

> I have thought and taught that experience is an interaction between the self and some aspect of its environment. Purposeful, intelligent action is

> the means by which this interaction is rendered significant. In the course of such action, objects acquire meaning and the self becomes aware of its own powers, since, by intelligent control of the environment, it directs and consolidates its own capacities. Purposeful action is the goal of all that is truly educative, and it is the means by which the goal is reached and its content remade. Such activity is of necessity a growth and a growing. (3-4)

In essence, by experiencing a piece of information, true learning is brought about in a significant way. If one were to listen to a lecture, do a worksheet, or read a book, it is fragmented in the memory and complete recall is difficult at best. Experiential learning[6] is expressed in the same way it is learned. It is demonstrated in an active experience. In so doing, according to Dewey, the student becomes more aware of their own involvement in learning, therefore, creating more opportunities for greater learning. I can explain to a student multiple times how to apply given circumstances[7] to a play. I can go over a play in class with them, but they still won't learn. The only way that a student truly learns about given circumstances is by they themselves applying the given circumstances and performing those given circumstances within the play. By doing this, they have the ability to create better given circumstances because they now understand where the holes were in their performances. Without having done the performance, students often will tell me that one sentence is plenty to describe any part of given circumstances. It is after the performance that they understand how important it is to flesh out the given circumstances. This is exactly what Dewey was talking about when he advocated experiential learning over rote or memorization. Art and Education was followed up with other books by Dewey about experiential learning and the arts[8]. These resources offer great examples

of ways to use experiential learning in a classroom. For many years these new ideas of education were implemented in schools throughout the nation with very little change. "But in 1957, with the launching of the Soviet missile Sputnik at the height of the cold war, a counterrevolution against progressive education took place: the public called for a return to "basics" in the schoolroom. [As a result,] the arts were the first part of the curriculum to be eliminated from many public schools" (Berube 151). Therefore, there are few resources discussing anything new in arts or theatre education during that time.

In the late 1970's, art in education reemerged as a focal point of educational reform. Articles and books were published during this time dealing with art as a part of education, a separate part[9]. Most of the writing was based on the premise that arts education benefited children for the simple reason that it made them well rounded and it boosted their self-esteem. This view of arts in education lasted for some twenty years until articles looking at the uses of theatre in the classroom and its more measurable benefits started to surface. These articles looked at the cognitive effect drama had on students. Arts articles were soon to follow. A major contribution was a 1999 article by Elliot Eisner entitled "Does Experience in the Arts Boost Academic Achievement?" This article synthesized the findings of studies based on its title over a ten year period and created conclusions based on those observations. It reviewed findings from numerous professional journals that report research relevant to the topic[10]. It was found that education in the arts helped in many areas. Eisner's article "list[s] 12 areas in which the arts are purported to make a contribution. These areas include contributions to creative thinking, development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills, cultural literacy, individual choice making, as well as group decision-making, increase in self-esteem and so forth" (144). These were the items that arts educators believed were being developed within the student through

anecdotal evidence. The listed items fall into two major categories: communication skills and problem solving. This furthers the contention that both communication skills and problem solving are the essence of what is learned in arts education.

At the core of all educational pursuits is the nucleus of life skills. When a student leaves any program of study, the student should have a better ability to function in the real world. According to Dewey, "In its widest sense, education involves all forms of them [morality, science, art]; but only if education is conceived, not in the conventional sense, as preparation for life, but as living itself" (12). In so living, it is necessary for one to communicate to others and to self, and to solve problems. Eisner looked at detailed examples to tie specific lessons from arts education to other learning:

> Ancillary Outcomes of Arts Education are those outcomes like the effects of arts education on student performance in reading, math, or other academic subjects. Ancillary Outcomes of Arts Education pertain to outcomes that transfer skills employed in the perception, creation, and comprehension of the arts to non-arts tasks. For example the kind of qualitative judgment made in the absence of formula or rule: one must judge rightness of fit [problem solving]. What one typically seeks is coherence among relationships within a complex form. . . . such outcomes can be counted among the Ancillary Outcomes of Arts Education. (147)

Thus, a correlation between skills learned in arts education has a payoff in other subjects not dealing with art, specifically problem solving in this example. It is not important that a student is able to solve a problem on a worksheet in a classroom during sixth hour on Tuesday, March 7. What is important is that the student can take that learning and solve a problem in their life

outside of the confines of the classroom. For example, a student in my theatre arts class once told me that he was able to understand how his girlfriend felt by merely putting himself in the same circumstances as she was in, as if he were in a play. He used this knowledge to resolve personal conflict instead of exacerbating it. The acting unit of my theatre arts class taught him lessons he wouldn't be able to demonstrate on the ACT.

Drama in Education Literature

Historically, theatre has been enjoyed for the texts it presents and for the event itself, but its educational benefits are apparently a somewhat recent discovery. As Sandra Richards points out, "Given the evanescence of theatre, and its insistence upon subjectivity as part of its methodological approach, academics from other disciplines all too often view the scholarly validity of drama departments with varying degrees of skepticism" (Dolan 5). This subjectivity causes a shudder to run up the spines of administrators with their business-model, rubric laden, extremely objective desires of education. But is there proof to support their claims that art education and theatre education have few measurable outcomes? On the contrary, these areas of education do have some quantitative results along with many qualitative, which will be analyzed throughout this section.

As education reform continued, the old view of theatre as just a part of arts education became inadequate. This caused a split of theatre education away from the classification of art education to become a separate field. Therefore, the benefits of theatre education itself needed to be examined. According to Hardy, of all the arts, theatre employs the active use of most of the senses (53). When one looks at a painting, the viewer does not need hearing to appreciate it; the viewer needs only the eyes. Listening to music incorporates only hearing and nothing is lost in shutting the eyes and creating a blindness. Not so in theatre. Each sense is stimulated and

necessary for the full understanding and enjoyment of the art of theatre. "Drama in education has altered greatly during the last twenty-five years, and it is still changing. . . . Drama is no longer considered simply as another branch of art education, but as a unique teaching tool, vital for language development and invaluable as a method in the exploration of other subject areas" (Heathcote 42). This separation has created many measurements to be taken of theatre specifically, not just of arts generally.

Elliot Eisner quotes a study by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, "In 1995, SAT scores for students who studied the arts more than four years scored 59 points higher on the verbal and 44 points higher on the math portion than students with no course work or experience in the arts" (144). Recently, the Iowa Alliance for Arts Education looked at the mean scores of students taking the SAT and in what types of activities the students were involved. The study found that students involved in theatrical productions had the highest mean score (1). This quantitative data begs the question, "Do more of the best students sign up for theatre?" That may be, but other research points to another element.

The answer is well stated by Conrad in "Self-Concept and Self-Esteem Through Drama: A Meta-Analysis." Many researchers have noted a relationship between self-concept[11] and academic achievement (79). Two students, equally prepared for a test, and all other things being equal except their self concept, will always yield the student with the more positive outlook having a higher score. Thus self concept has a role to play in how well a student does in school, as a whole. If the student has a poor self-concept, they perform at a lower level than a student that has a positive self-concept (Eccles and Barber 12). Bjorn Rasmussen and Shereen Khachik went further with their article in Youth Theatre Journal, "sociological and educational research have shown that many of these themes (self-concept, self-esteem) are connected to learning and

achievement" (60). At the beginning of every new semester of theatre, I have the students do an assignment called "Intro to Me." Essentially, it is a half page of writing with the student describing who they are, what their goals are, and so forth, but specifically the question is asked, "Why are you taking this class and what do you hope to gain?" One of the most prolific responses is, "I am scared to get up in front of people and this class will help me with that." As this answer demonstrates, theatre education has the ability to create a more positive self concept for a student. One of the biggest hurdles in communicating is the fear of communication. With a better self concept, a student has the tools to become a better communicator. Illustrating this point is an article by Rey de la Cruz in Youth Theatre Journal in which he states, "consistent with past studies, the present study demonstrates quantitatively that children with LD (learning disabilities) can improve and maintain social and oral expressive language skills through drama" (93). Theatre helped the students to become better communicators. This benefit is seen in a small part of a student body (learning disabled students). The question then is: Will that increase in communication skills be noticed in the regular education students? The article by Nancy Kindelan in Theatre Topics ties theatre to specific academic skills and addresses the previous question:

> Administrators liked that we are teaching "the student the skill of speaking well and working well with others." Several mentioned the articulate and self-possessed nature of theatre students. The purpose and goals of general education are implicit in and necessary to the study of theatre. . . . When administrators speak about [education] reform, they focus on initiatives that develop "critical thinking skills," "inquiry skills," literacy skills. . . Associated with "inquiry skills" is the ability to think

> critically and abstractly. Critical and abstract thinking relates to problem solving activities found in real and hypothetical situations. . . "Literacy skills" refer to a student's ability to read, write, listen, and speak effectively in English. (74)

My teaching career is rife with examples of students who had to solve a problem and had no idea how to do it, but eventually learned problem-solving skills. For example, the East High theatre program has a budget of $500 a year. When students do their designs, they want to create vast technical elements. One of my students wanted to create a different look with the same set used for every show. Her budget was $40. She was able to fool the vast majority of our audience with the meagerest of budgets by using creativity. That is solving a problem. Taking this as a whole, it is easy to see that drama enhances students' abilities in many areas, especially in the areas of problem solving and communication. And not only are there gains, but these gains are lasting according to David Booth, "longterm studies . . . showed that gains in IQ brought about by training in dramatic play are lasting" (84).

Current Climate of Theatre Education

The educational model has been moving toward a business model. At a recent seminar on education and curriculum called "Curriculum Leadership Academy," the presenter, Jennifer Williams, referred to students as clients to reflect this shift in focus. She used many analogies describing how education is a business with very rigid aims. This flies in the face of the recent literature, as previously shown, and of governmental recommendations: "The Clinton administration has budgeted 700 million dollars for its national standards program. Some of this money would be directed by the states to arts curricula. The hope is that the states and localities

will realize, according to a federal arts official, that the arts are indispensable to education reform" (Berube 151).

The reason the Clinton administration saw arts, particularly theatre, as an important part of educational reform is its ability to include the learning of many skills through one subject area. Theatre uses all of the following components: movement, voice, memorization, delegation, leadership, set building and design, lighting design and operation, sound design and operation, costume design and construction, makeup design and application, directorial choices, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication skills, negotiations, political will, publicity, financial budgeting, and effective script choice. All of this comes together to create a production. Therefore, theatre takes a variety of educational outcomes and synthesizes them into one course. According to John Hersee, "Drama and theatre call upon the whole person as no other subject does and we should take every opportunity to express this" (77). Theatre benefits the student on multiple levels and this benefit is seen by others, as well. "Administrators mentioned the "uniqueness" of theatre as a program that has the ability "to touch the lives of students," to promote "self confidence" and "self-motivation," and to demonstrate that effective teaching occurs because there is both "an inner disciplinary approach and a close association between the student and the instructor" (Kindelan 74).

According to most educational theorists, one of the major aims of education is to create out of the student a better citizen. This is a rudimentary ideal in education classes at college. Thus, one of the goals of educators is to teach the skills that will make the student a better member of society. Two of these skills would have to be problem solving and communication. Kindelan discusses the learned proficiencies that lead into those skills. "The task now is to advocate how theatre studies is an instructional tool that can synthesize and personalize ideas

across the humanities, explore the history of ethical and moral dilemmas, discover the complexities of moral decision making, and develop a more sensitive, personal, and comprehensive look at human psychology" (78). Fundamentally, taking the above items to create a whole yields a better person, a person who has the tools to problem solve and the ability to be a good communicator. In order to model the ability to problem solve and communicate, I "lead by example." This was the mantra that directed my entire career in the military. This particular lesson from the Army has strongly influenced my work as a high school drama teacher. When a problem arises in the production, the students are aware of it. I am the director; therefore, it is my job to solve it. The students are able to witness, on the front lines, my thought process, my critical thinking skills, as I attempt to solve the problem. By seeing me solve problems, they are better able to problem solve. For example, a student told me after the last production that she finds it easier to deal with life (problem solve) because she has seen me deal with all of the challenges of the theatre program.

The pedagogical importance of theatre as a spoken language activity is noted by McGregor, Tate, and Robinson, "Spoken language develops through social interaction and is one of the prime media of dramatic expression" (153). They continue:

> Presenting statements to others can be an effective means of communication, either by sharing ideas with a class or by performing to a wider audience. Children may be encouraged to improve their physical and verbal skills as a more effective means of communication. (51)

This improved understanding of communication has been demonstrated many times through my theatre program. The perfect example is the story of a student from the Ukraine. Her understanding of the English language was greatly increased during the course of the fall play.

These same advancements were hard for her to come by before her involvement in the theatre program.

The tenet that involvement in theatre enhances problem solving skills is further substantiated by Betty Jane Wagner. "Cognitive development means not only learning information about the world, but also learning *how* to think, *how* to communicate, and *how* to get things done in the world. It depends on growing and an understanding of connections . . . " (28). In essence, cognitive development is learning how best to solve a problem, and thinking through that problem is taught in theatre. "Problem solving is the basis of improvisational drama work. Students are challenged to look at what is taking place for clues to the resolution of the conflict" (Booth 72).

Not only are these gains of problem solving and communication skills enhanced for the student, but theatre gives the teacher a window to understand the students' abilities in these areas according to Zayda Sierra:

> To enhance critical thinking skills, teachers can also use dramatic play to expand creative problem solving processes as rehearsals for coping with unexpected problems. . . . In conclusion, dramatic play offers . . . teachers a unique opportunity to learn more about their student's cognitive, social, and creative abilities as well as their differing assumptions and perceptions of their social worlds. (10)

The most basic of examples of the information learned from theatre education for the teacher comes from the students' choices during improvisational activities. Through this, I am able to see how they perceive the world and how they fit into it. Another example would be how students in charge treat others with whom they are working. Observing how students in these positions

act towards those in subordinate roles has shown me that many of the students lack positive leaders as role models, at first. During the process of a production, we are able to work together to resolve many issues; therefore, they become better leaders in the process. By doing this, they become positive role models for their student colleagues.

Conclusion

School administrators are trying to make hard choices about budgets. The schools are getting less and less from state and federal governments, thus reduction in some area is the only answer. What do they always seem to cut first? The arts programs are always on the chopping block in times of financial crisis. This paper is an attempt to convince the skeptics that theatre education is not just a fun activity, but a vital part of a high school curriculum. It has demonstrated the significant outcomes that students can achieve in problem solving and communication skills through drama activity. As Richard Courtney observes, "where it [theatre education] is used today, it infuses all other aspects of the school curriculum [with success]" (164). Theatre helps students to communicate better and develops their problem solving skills. These are talents that are needed in every facet of a student's education and more importantly their life. After seeing this proof detailed throughout this study, it is evident that theatre education is not an expendable part of a school's curriculum. In fact, theatre education is a vital and necessary part of a high school liberal arts education.

Notes

[1] A common term used in educational circles to describe a more traditional testing, using paper and a writing utensil as opposed to performance based assessments.

[2] A test that compares a student's performance to that of students in a like age or grade grouping.

[3] A tool that assesses skill mastery and compares the student's performance to curricular standards.

[4] Bloom was an educational theorist that broke information into six levels (from lowest to highest: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation). Lower level content is easier to learn, therefore, it is used exclusively in early elementary. Higher level content is added on as the student advances through school. By high school, higher level information should be taught more than lower level. Bloom's work is a staple in educational training and is taught in basic education classes.

[5] According to "Self-Concept and Self-Esteem Through Drama: A Meta-Analysis" by FranCina Conard.

[6] Learning that is acquired through the experiencing of knowledge as opposed to lecture or worksheets, etc.

[7] Questions to answer about a script in order to perform, direct, or design the play.

[8] Books authored by Dewey dealing with experiential learning and the arts: How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process (1933), Art As Experience (1934), Experience and Nature (1935), Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education (1944), The School and Society (1945), and Moral Principles in Education (1959).

[9] There were no items that furthered an analysis or item of inquiry beyond others at that time. Examples of some of these books are Drama and Theatre in Education, Exploring Theatre and Education, and Dorothy Heathcote.

[10] Art Education, American Educational Research Journal, Bulletin of the Council of Research in Music Education, Child Development, Journal of Aesthetic Education, Journal of Art and Design Education, and a host of ad hoc publications.

[11] The way one thinks and feels about him/herself.

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