TRUST THE PROCESS

Exploring Social Responsibility through

Playbuilding with Middle School Drama Club Students

By

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ABSTRACT

Playbuilding, also known as collective creation, or collaborative creativity, is an exciting and important topic in the field of educational drama. This reflective practice case study titled, *Exploring Social Responsibility through Playbuilding with Middle School Drama Club Students* involved a four-month long playbuilding process with grades 7, 8, and 9 students at a middle school on Vancouver Island, BC. The process and middle schools. An annotated script of the original play titled, *This is Our Life* is included in the project.

Several methods of data collection were employed; actor intake and exit interviews, elementary and middle school audience surveys, actor journals, a teacher's reflective journal, and five interviews with successful British Columbia playbuilders.

The findings suggest that playbuilding results in improved skill acquisition for participants manifested in the following constructs: ***self-improvement***: increased self-confidence, critical thinking, risk taking in a group situation, group decision making, social skills, direct experience in the creative process, and recognition of a parallel process with any creative endeavour; ***theatrical improvement***: increased level of theatrical skills such as voice, script-writing, improvisation, choreography, and improved audience communication through de-briefing sessions; ***knowledge base improvement***: increased knowledge of social responsibility issues and issues pertinent to the particular group of playbuilders. Moreover, the findings suggest that the act of playbuilding is, unto itself, an act of social responsibility as the actors became more positive contributors to their communities.

Recommendations include a list of practical suggestions for future playbuilders based on

lessons learned from the project and for more collaborative-interpretive research from within the drama teaching community. The study reaffirms the vital role educational drama plays in school curricula and calls for a review of the British Columbia Instructional Resource Packages, with an appeal to reflect a heightened academic approach to drama pedagogy, as found in the Australian and United Kingdom school curricula.

Finally the study supports similar research, which suggests playbuilding be considered a form of arts based research, as its process resembles the data collection stages of a qualitative study.

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Chapter One – Introduction

How I Came to the Question

Can playbuilding be used to explore issues of social responsibility with middle

school drama club students?

I have been teaching Drama in British Columbia (BC) public schools for twenty years. I

have also taught Choral Music and Musical Theatre, in addition to English and Socials Studies.

As an educator, I am constantly drawn to teaching methods and philosophies that can integrate

all of my teaching areas. One particular drama methodology that utilizes multi-teaching areas is

playbuilding, sometimes known as collective creation or collaborative creativity.

What is playbuilding? Errol Bray (1991) provides a definition in his book, *Playbuilding:*

A Guide for Group Creation of Plays for Young People:

> Playbuilding is an exciting theatre technique for creating plays and performances with
> groups. It is a dynamic and interactive process that draws out individual creativity very
> intensely while also developing strong group co-operation and commitment. It allows
> people, whatever their talent, to be immediately involved in a richly creative process. The
> process offers each participant the fullest and most satisfying involvement in drama that
> is possible. Playbuilding enables a participant to come to grips with the pleasures and
> problems of every aspect of drama and theatre; to be playwright, performer, director,
> composer, technician, designer, critic . It introduces participants to the creative discipline
> and co-operation required in theatre. It opens up exciting possibilities for learning, skills
> development, expression, personal enrichment and fun. (p. 1)

Simply put, the term playbuilding defines the creative process of building a dramatic

performance or presentation using techniques from drama and theatre, fusing together improvisation, discussion, and extensive rehearsals. Although playbuilding has traditionally been a genre within the realm of theatre and drama in education, recent trends point to the future use of playbuilding as a strategy used in the health (Jackson, 1993) and the justice system (Morrison, 2002).This project, however, stems from a purely theatrical stance, with intent to explore topics of social responsibility with middle school drama club students. Hence, my literature review includes research and resources from both social responsibility and playbuilding.

I was first introduced to process drama in 1981, at the University of Victoria. As a high school student, I had taken drama classes that were based on the drama philosophies of Brian Way (1967). In other words, I received a skills acquisition approach to drama. Brian Way's extensive influence on the teaching methodology of 1960s Canadian trained drama teachers is evident when you speak to the students of those teachers, many of whom have retired. Now it is fascinating to see students educated by drama teachers trained in process drama, entering the post-secondary phases of their lives. Their experiences with drama are markedly different from mine, and, in my opinion, much more meaningful. I am delighted to have shared my university undergraduate training with so many high school students, many of whom have very successful careers in the Performing Arts.

I recently read the text of Gavin Bolton's Lansdowne lecture (1983), delivered at the University of Victoria in March of that year. He questioned some assumptions on which he detected the BC drama guidelines had been based. Bolton stated: "[In the 1960s]…everyone became so carried away with personal development, drama got left out… The basic nature of drama is social. It is not primarily student centred; it is group centred" (p. 8). Bolton was referring to the work of pioneer Brian Way (1967) whose text *Development through Drama*

became "the drama teacher's classroom bible, and was essentially the basis for the British Columbia Drama curriculum guides" (p. 8).

Drama for understanding, known today as process drama, was barely given a mention in the early BC drama guidelines. Not much has changed—a skills-acquisitions approach continues to dominate the Drama 11 and 12 Integrated Resources Packages (IRPs) that were written as recently as 2002. It is interesting to note that the IRPs are referred to as the Drama 11 and 12 curriculum, but the actual curriculum guides are titled *Theatre Performance 11 and 12* and *Theatre Production 11 and 12.*

The United Kingdom (UK) and Australian Drama syllabuses demonstrate very different philosophical approaches: drama is considered an academic subject in these countries. *Devising,* as playbuilding is known in the UK and Australia, is an integral part of the Year 11 and 12 drama curricula and comprises a large part of the UK's General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and "A" level exams in Drama (Devised Thematic Performances). Australian and UK students in Year 11 and 12 are expected to devise their own productions with little or no help from their teachers. Usually cumulative devising skills are introduced beginning in the primary grades: the more attention drama is given in the primary grades, is further evidence of the vastly different levels of drama produced at the senior grades. As well, a number of British film directors utilize devising techniques in their practice. For example, British film director Mike Leigh used playbuilding techniques in some of the group sequences of *Secrets and Lies* (1996) an Academy Award nominated motion picture.

Cousins (2000) confirms that American drama students do not receive any national qualification or recognition when taking drama as a school subject; no national exam exists which documents American students' knowledge of drama. The same applies for British

Columbia students of drama.

Process drama courses opened up a new perspective to my teacher preparation; however, I had concerns that the performance aspect of theatre seemed to be tossed aside in the rush to embrace the educational benefits of process drama. Errol Bray (1991) echoed my initial concerns:

> Once upon a time some drama teachers believed that it was bad to end up with a product from drama workshops with young people. There was some nasty thing called 'theatre' and arguments were put that showing the work somehow harmed both the kids and the benefits of the drama process. It has always seemed to me that if kids create something they are proud of—a painting, a poem, and a play— they will want to show it to people and if you stop them you create an enormous confusion in their minds. Arguments about drama versus theatre, and process versus product, do not seem very useful to me. (p. 90)

I was willing to put performance aside in order to fully embrace this new paradigm of drama. Armed with an array of process drama strategies, I marched into my student teacher internship year only to find myself assigned to a sponsor teacher who worked exclusively with theatre games and musical theatre. His program was heavily performance based, and his daily lessons utilized Brian Way's list of isolated drama exercises. Clearly there was a mismatch between my university training and the expected style of teaching I was meant to deliver in a BC high school drama classroom of 1984. In retrospect, the mismatch was not surprising as my sponsor teacher's drama education merely reflected the times in which he studied. I clearly remember him staring at me blankly as I spoke to him about process drama strategies—I believe he thought I was quite mad! Luckily, I had an extensive background in musical theatre and was therefore able to bridge our differences by assisting in the musical theatre productions as a vocal director.

Although my student teaching lessons were very well received by the students, I could tell they were puzzled, since my methods differed from their regular teacher. Verifying this pedagogical difference between skills based (safe) drama approach versus a process drama

(risky) approach, Margaret Kelly (2000) reports in her Master's project :

> Gavin Bolton   calls this "safe" drama as opposed to "risky" drama. Safe drama is superficial, relying on isolated exercises in theatrical skills, and meaningless skits. "Risky" drama is process drama or educational drama, involving manipulating language in order to create meaning. Often messy, the teacher works both inside and outside of the drama, facilitating and guiding but always encouraging students to make their own decision to determine the outcome. The decision making process involves meaningful dialogue between students, but it remains "risky" and therefore educational drama is political by nature. (p. 10)

I met Carole Tarlington, who had worked with Errol Bray at Shopfront Theatre in Sydney, Australia at the University of Victoria in 1985. Working with Carole was my first introduction to the playbuilding process, though I do have a faint recollection of engaging in a collective creation during High school Remembrance Day preparations.

BC Drama educators Jackie MacDonald and Hugh Anderson confirm their first introduction to playbuilding also came from Carole Tarlington. By watching many of Carole's productions with Vancouver Youth Theatre, I came to realize that drama and theatre could co-exist, through the playbuilding process. During our interview, I asked Carole exactly from where the term playbuilding originated.

> It's not new. Collective creation is what it is, but we call it playbuilding. Errol Bray coined that because it's hard work and he didn't want the kids to think it was something airy-fairy. It was like rolling up your sleeves and building a play! And I think you know, between 1983 and now, I think a lot of people are playbuilding…and so people began to understand "Oh yes, this is a play—it really is a play!" (C. Tarlington, personal communication, March 31, 2004)

Thus my mourning the lack of performance opportunities when utilizing process drama strategies ceased when I discovered the opportunities that playbuilding could provide for drama programs. Again, Bray offers excellent advice when considering the balance between process and product in playbuilding:

> It is important to think about the comparative emphasis you will put on process and product in playbuilding. It is difficult to make an absolute separation of the two because you are creating product from the very first session and the eventual performances are an

essential part of the playbuilding process. But it may be useful to talk about the workshops and rehearsals as 'process' and the performances as 'product', because some directors *do* give inordinate time and effort to one or the other. A bad product can invalidate the most positive process by ruining the groups' confidence in their voice. A good product can never make amends for a bad process because the damage of a bad process is repetitive and very deep. That damage can stifle all creative confidence in a young person. Obviously a perfect balance between process and product would be our best aim. As this is rarely achievable, I would urge playbuilding directors to err on the side of process. If the process is positive enough, last minute energies can salvage a shaky production. If the ideas, experiences and voices of the group are respected then a positive product is always possible. (1991, p. 90)

Through playbuilding, I found I could honour both drama and theatre while exploring important educational topics that come under the heading of social responsibility.

My eventual realization as to the direction of my project came during my final graduate course in the summer of 2003. I was enrolled in Language Processes: Writing and Representing, taught by Dr. Kathy Sanford who was inspirational, primarily because of the freedom of expression she embedded in topics such as the dialectical journal, the introductory lessons in semiotics, and the portfolio work in progress exercises. This creative approach to writing led me to take a look into divergent areas for my project: areas that somehow connected my interests in drama, theatre, music, English, and socials studies. Luckily, I stumbled upon an article by Joe Norris (2000) where he stated:

According to McLeod (1988), there are five, not two, major ways of making meaning. She claims that in education *word* is used in the teaching of all subjects focused on language arts; *number* in mathematics, science and music; *image* with the visual arts; *gesture* in dance; and *sound* in music. Drama integrates all five. (p. 40)

Next, I completed a project on the writing and representing of dance, as an example of alternate forms of representing knowledge. I researched the complicated Laban system of notating dance, but I also discovered the easier "motif" system, which notates dance, almost in cuneiform–like symbols. That moment of "Aha!" provided the inspiration to recall a process I had utilized many times with students before, and experienced great success with: playbuilding.

Every year my students and I engaged in collective creativity by developing an original

Remembrance Day Assembly. We represented researched knowledge in an alternative format**.**

Why had I not made the connection before? Once I was attuned to exploring the paradigm of

something *other* than the written word to represent meaning, I knew I was on my way to

discovering a topic for my project.

Later in the course, a detailed study of semiotics affirmed my desire to seek alternate

forms of representing newfound knowledge. I made the connection that topics of deep

importance to students and to education in the 21st century could be represented using theatre-

drama strategies and strategies from the language arts field of research. The vehicle was in front

of me all along: it was playbuilding.

During my research phase, I read Jennifer Simons' 1994 article "Theatre and Learning:

How an Adolescent Audience Makes Meaning from T.I.E". The methodology is based upon

theatre semiotics, which seeks to describe how meaning is created and communicated through

systems of encodable and decidable signs. Upon reading this article, I felt a great sense of relief.

The brain connections I made between semiotics, theatre and playbuilding were not unique:

someone else was thinking these thoughts too! I was equally thrilled with Simon's connection in

her article (1994) to Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*. I remember Dr. Harvey Miller's lectures in

Theatre 200 at the University of Victoria, where he described this genre, one that resonated with

me for many years; thus I was able to recognize its relevance to playbuilding in Simons' article:

> [Artaud's] *Theatre of Cruelty* sought contagion between performers and audience. His
> theories postulated a shift from the primacy of words to the primacy of theatrical effect.
> The performances would be such that it tapped into the powers of the "shadow world"
> which Artaud believed underlies "reality". He sought to structure the performance so that
> it 'disturbs our peace of mind, releases the suppressed unconscious and drives us to a
> kind of potential rebellion…calling for a difficult heroic attitude…the audience response
> was brought about by "contagion" from the shaman-like actors and the results should be
> purgative… The effects of the theatre is as beneficial as the plague, impelling us to see

ourselves as we are, making the mask fall–divulging our worlds' lies. (Artaud, 1974, as cited in Simons,1994 p. 56)

Although this description is rather flamboyant, I believe the concepts resonate with many types of playbuilding, especially when exploring issues of social responsibility. The intensity of the above description reminded me of the audience intensity I felt at Dover Bay's playbuilt production *i have a name* (2004), and the emotional responses of the actors, as they described their process to me (personal communication, June 11, 2004). The above description of the *Theatre of Cruelty* also bears a strong resemblance to the agit-prop *Theatre for Living* work of Headlines Theatre in Vancouver. This work is documented further in the literature review. For readers unfamiliar with the term *agit-prop*, it is a contraction of the original words agitatsija and propaganda from the Russian Revolution of 1917. Theatre companies have adopted the term to reflect the social issues they explore while devising original works.

Studying Simon's research confirmed that I was on the right path: playbuilding danced with the language of semiotics, the soul of theatre -drama and the logic of language. But after reading countless quantitative and qualitative research studies I worried if such a project could be considered scholarly work. Almost immediately, like it was destined to unfold this way, I was introduced to the concept of arts-based research, (Eisner & Barone, 1997). Though I have not discovered exactly who thought of it first, I can suggest that an excellent introduction to arts-based research is Eisner and Barone's "Art-Based Educational Research" in R. M. Jaeger's *Complementary Methods for Research in Education* (1998).

As a performer who has pursued a life-long study of music and drama, I was immediately suspicious of non-artists using dance, drama or visual arts or music as a vessel to express qualitative research, but subsequently bestowing on the world "bad" art, or as I dubbed it, "qualitative karaoke"! I began to wonder if playbuilding itself could be a form of arts- based

research, and felt confident, as an experienced drama teacher that I could produce quality art—

but would it count as research?

Norris (2000) addressed my concerns:

Thus the initial playbuilding stage parallels focus group research. The cast, as informants, provide data from which a performance will emerge. The difference is that this data is analyzed and disseminated dramatically. We… have used [the] playbuilding process to collect, analyze and disseminate research on the topics of violence in schools, inclusion and exclusion, equality and respect in the workplace, prejudice, body image, human sexuality, addiction, risk taking and student teaching. As in qualitative research, data is collected, analyzed, and disseminated to others in a rigorous fashion. (pp. 46-47)

The next question that moved me toward the project was "should playbuilding scripts be

written down as texts, or does that contradict the fluid nature of a collective creation?" Besides

practical reasons, is there a deeper social purpose in recording, in written form, the content of a

playbuilt show? Alison Oddey (1994) writes that "it is important to record the work of devised

theatre as evidence of our ever-changing culture and society" (p. 3). But why is it important? We

have books to do that for us. True, but I believe something more desperate is as stake: we as a

people have lost touch with our artistic truths. As Diamond states:

Communities used to dialogue with each other through song, dance, drama, painting and other art forms, but now we have commodified our art. We buy movies and television and books and music and theatre and dance and in doing so, in relying on and paying others to tell us stories about others, we lose our ability to tell our own communal stories about ourselves. We lose our ability as communities to be in dialogue with the world around us. (Diamond, 2001, para. 7)

Commenting on the relationship between dramatic form and culture, Oddey (1994)

further states:

Devised theatre is a contemporary reflection of culture and society. It is continually addressing new theatrical forms, making original contributions out of the existing interests and considerations of the time. It is about the relationship of a group of people to their culture, the socio-political, artistic and economic climate, as well as issues or events surrounding them…choice, opportunity and infinite possibility set devised theatre apart from conventional play text production. (p. 23)

For all of these reasons, I began to see playbuilding as a viable form of scholarly research and was anxious to begin, in both practical and theoretical forms.

The project that follows is a reflective practice case study (Schon, 1983, 1987, 1991), that consisted of a four- month long playbuilding unit with volunteer middle school drama club students. The process led to a play titled, *This Is Our Life,* which toured local elementary and middle schools in School District #71, Comox Valley. This is our story.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to engage in a reflective practice case study (Schon, 1983, 1987) whereby a group of volunteer middle school drama students would come together under my direction, using the process of playbuilding, to create a show for educational touring. Specifically, I wished to explore topics of social responsibility such as bullying, racism, relationships, and school climate, along with middle school students' hopes, dreams, and fears. Linda L. Lang (2002) suggests in the findings from her own research project, that "collective creation teaching approaches might work effectively to serve social justice purposes in the drama classroom" (p. 61).

Although the resulting product was a successful piece of theatre, enjoyed by many local elementary and middle school audiences, the process was not an easy journey. In fact, I would have to say unequivocally, this was the most difficult group I have ever worked with in a drama or theatre capacity. Sadly, Errol Bray's (1991) following words of warning applied directly to my own early reflections of our process:

> A good product can never make amends for a bad process because the damage of a bad process is repetitive and very deep. That damage can stifle all creative confidence in a young person. (p. 90)

Thankfully, after four months of research and reflection, I realize our process work was

much better than I originally thought. In fact, it was out of the process that the social

responsibility arose. I now see playbuilding itself, with all its inherent structures and strategies as

a vital form of social responsibility, which directly benefits the participants.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Can the process of playbuilding be successful in exploring issues of social

   responsibility with middle school drama club students?

2. What are the major issues of social responsibility that emerge when engaging in a

   playbuilding process with middle school drama club students?

3. Of the two, which will be most fulfilling to middle school students: the process

   (creation of the play) or the product (the performance of the play)?

4. What specific skill acquisitions occur as a result of being a participant in a

   playbuilding process?

5. What strategies, approaches and instructional practices do successful practitioners of

   playbuilding employ with students as they work toward a performance piece? (based

   on Lang, 2002, p. 51)

Design of the Study

Reflective Practice Case Study Method

Reflective practice by Donald Schon is a critical process in refining one's artistry or

craft in a specific discipline (1983, 1987, 1991). Schon states "…reflective practice involves

thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while

being coached by professionals in the discipline" (Schon, 1987, as cited in Ferraro, 2000, p.

1).

Christine Krol (1997) from Kent State University, defines reflective practice this way:

> Schon believes there are some processes central to professional competence that cannot necessarily be taught or described through scientific theory or techniques. Instead, professionals think about what they are doing as they are doing it in a process Schon labels as **reflection-in-action.** Accordingly, when professionals are faced with a problematic situation, they delve into their repertoire of past experiences to frame the problem and look for new possibilities for action. Schon purports that reflective practitioners "conduct frame experiments in which they impose a kind of coherence on messy situations…that constitutes a reflective conversation with the materials of a situation—the design-like artistry of professional practice." (Schon, 1987, as cited in Krol, 1997, pp. 96-97)

This project was a four-month study of the process and product of playbuilding, using topics of social responsibility with volunteer middle school drama club students. It is immensely important to stress the volunteer status of the participants; these were not handpicked auditioned actors, in fact, many of the participants had never before been involved in a dramatic activity. The lack of actor discipline and experience became evident during the process and was a major hindrance to the rehearsal period. It would have been substantially easier to use auditioned actors for this project, however I certainly obtained an authentic sampling of the middle school population. Clearly, I did not handpick actors to guarantee a successful project and I remain amazed that we made it through the performance schedule. Recently, a colleague and I had dinner together, and I explained the entire project to her. As I bemoaned the reality that I was not able to audition the students, and thus guarantee a polished performance with experienced actors, she asked me to consider this question honestly:

"Would it *really* have been much different with experienced actors? After all, they are all middle school students!" As usual, my colleague was right. How different would it really have been with experienced middle school actors? Perhaps the actors that came to the process needed it more and deserved it more, simply because they bothered to come. Woody Allen said, "80% of

success is showing up!" How true. And yet, we survived. How is it possible? Drama's potential to reach students of all abilities continues to leave me in awe.

Data Collection

The following forms of data were collected over the four-month period from January 4 to April 30, 2004.

1. Student journals-20 creative writing prompts intended to fuel the playbuilding process

2. A written actor intake interview at the beginning of the playbuilding process

3. A reflective actor exit interview to illuminate the success/failure of the project

4. Post-playbuilding questionnaire for the actors

5. Post-performance questionnaire for elementary audiences

6. Post-performance questionnaire for middle school audiences

7. My own reflective Master's Journal, which covers the period of December 5, 2003, until June 30, 2004.

8. Five transcribed interviews of active British Columbia playbuilders: Hugh Anderson, David Beare, David Diamond, Jackie Macdonald, and Carole Tarlington

9. Context data: the background data that I accumulated simply from being in the situation for four months.

Credibility was attained during this project by fulfilling the following six criteria for determining the quality of the research: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, progressive subjectivity and member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). A comparison of my own playbuilding experiences was made between five of British Columbia's successful playbuilders, via lengthy transcribed interviews. I was able to confirm my own experiences with theirs to establish patterns that occurred during the playbuilding process. Furthermore, these patterns extended to the literature I read on playbuilding, collective creation and collaborative creativity.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this research project include the "possibility of researcher bias due in part to a being a participant observer" (Kelly, 2000, p. 7) The project was conducted after school twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays from 3:00 pm–4:30 pm. The students joined Drama Club on a volunteer basis. They were free to resign from the project at any time. Frequently the students were either exhausted from a full day of school and thus lethargic, or completely wound-up and ready to cause mayhem!

Limitations of the Drama Journal

Upon reflection of their Playbuilding journals, I wish I had asked the students to reflect upon the work at the end of the session rather than at the beginning.; this would have generated much more reflective written work. The drama journal was limited in that I did not capitalize on its potential for post-rehearsal written reflections. However, the journals were used to fuel ideas for the playbuilding process, and thus were well placed at the beginning of the sessions. Over the four months, 20 writing prompts were used to move our work through the devising process. These are described in a separate section of the project.

Finally, I was adamant that our process would result in an end product and I definitely pushed the students through the playbuilding process, interjecting too many of my own ideas, usually out of desperation. Some of their comments reflect their displeasure with my written work.

Perhaps the single most important limitation of the study was my decision to use volunteer students in this research project. For ethical reasons, I chose to use a random sample of students from our middle school population. For many of the actors, this was their very first theatrical experience. Their inexperience regarding actor discipline somewhat hindered our efforts to "get at" the message they wish to convey through the playbuilding process. In the future my playbuilding ventures will only be attempted with auditioned actors. And yet, as I re-read that last sentence, I realize that it was precisely because of the volunteer nature of the project that these youngsters were given an opportunity to participate whereas, in an auditioned capacity, they may not have been chosen. Just last night, I attended a highly polished theatrical production of *Into the Woods.* Two actors from our Drama Club were hired for roles. In the program guide both actors credited their first acting experience to our show, *This Is Our Life!* These were highly coveted roles and I felt proud to see two young actors from our playbuilding group achieving and earning community accolades. I had to ask myself: would it have been fair if only those actors who could pass through an audition process were allowed to participate in a playbuilding project? Perhaps that would deny the benefits of playbuilding from the students who might need it the most? I will continue to struggle with this issue, long after the project is typed and bound. Does playbuilding only belong to experienced actors, or can it also serve as confidence- building strategy for inexperienced actors?

Chapter Two – Literature Review

Exploring Social Responsibility Through Playbuilding

In reviewing the literature on social responsibility and playbuilding, and as a result of completing my study, five categories of research emerged:

1. social responsibility, with regard to publications from the BC Ministry of Education

2. drama in education and theatre in education

3. specific playbuilding projects,

4. *how to* books and articles on playbuilding, collective creation and collaborative creativity

5. adolescent development in the middle school years.

Within the context of the literature review my research questions will continue to surface. For example, can the process of playbuilding be utilized to explore issues of social responsibility? Is playbuilding *itself* a form of social responsibility? What are the major issues under the banner of social responsibility that should be explored with students? Furthermore, what are the artistic, affective and emotional benefits of playbuilding with middle school students? What specific skill acquisitions take place as a result of being part of a playbuilding group? What will be the most fulfilling to middle school students, the process or the product?

Finally, my research led me to conduct five intriguing interviews with some of British Columbia's most esteemed playbuilders, namely: Hugh Anderson (Dover Bay Secondary School, Nanaimo), David Beare (Handsworth Secondary School, North Vancouver), David Diamond (Headlines Theatre Vancouver), Jackie Macdonald (Victoria High School, Victoria), and Carole Tarlington (Tarlington Training, Vancouver). These interviews provided a colourful palette of playbuilding experiences, techniques and philosophical stances. Interweaving the

interviews, I have created a tapestry, which I believe captures the essence of a reflective-practice case study.

Social Responsibility

Researching the term social responsibility on the Internet brings up sites directed at corporate responsibility within a social context. My use of the term applied to educational issues. What are the main issues of concern with regard to this vast topic? In *Shaking the Tree,* a BCTF Educational Video (Tabata, 1995), Noam Chomsky outlines two different types of schools that are available for society to create:

> If you want a civilized society, with people who can work and act and think and have meaningful lives, of course you'll have one kind of school; if you want to train the people who can contribute to maximizing your profit, tomorrow or even ten years from now, you'll have a different kind of school.

Shaking the Tree: Social Responsibility in Education is a 60-minute documentary that examines social issues, including racism, gender, equity, poverty, violence, and the environment. This video assisted me in pinpointing the major issues under the banner of "social responsibility that might be explored with students" (my second research question). Viewing this video is beneficial for a playbuilding group about to embark upon a project that intends to represent issues of social responsibility. Many drama groups have been tackling these topics for years. Drama groups such as 841 KOZ and Choices have been formed to tour through Vancouver schools, dealing with issues of anger management and healthy peer communication. The video concludes with this final statement by Professor Chomsky:

> Interviewer: Is it with the domain of the teacher professional or the parent to allow discussion of social issues to take place within the school forum?

> Chomsky: I don't even understand the question. If you don't discuss social issues, what are you doing with your children or your classes? They're not talking about society; they're not talking about human beings. If that's what education is, let's throw it out! (Tabata, 1995)

The BC Ministry of Education has recently published *Social Responsibility: A Framework* (BC Ministry of Education [BCME], 2001a) These performance standards were developed for voluntary use in BC schools. Standards and expectations for social responsibility within public schools are documented and material is provided for teachers, students, and families to examine aspects of social responsibility in their schools. Categories are as follows:

1. contributing to the classroom and school community

2. solving problems in peaceful ways

3. valuing diversity and defending human rights

4. exercising democratic rights and responsibilities.

Four clusters of performance standards are offered: Grades K–3, Grades 4–5, Grades 6–8, and Grades 8–10. The standards illustrate four levels of student performance: not yet with expectations, meets expectations, fully meets expectations, and exceeds expectations. The levels are identical to the scale used in the Foundation Skills Assessment Tests (FSA tests). It is ironic that our government created a document that seeks to measure social issues with the same scale as academic measurement. Social responsibility is not something you can study for: it is a world-view that develops through meaningful dialogue among community members. Social responsibility requires aesthetic engagement to the process (Bundy, 2003a) much in the same way as Fine Arts courses. Therefore, I believe the venue for teaching and discussing such issues will be greatly enhanced by utilizing art forms such as drama, music, visual arts, and dance. Rather than attempting to measure social responsibility, why not ask students to reflect and represent these issues through aesthetic forms? Here is an area that Fine Arts teachers can prove their 'worthiness' in education, though I must admit, the thought of that is certainly wearisome.

Although I am critical of this Ministry document, I recommend that teachers and directors, who wish to playbuild using issues of social responsibility, read this document thoroughly, and share it with students. Perhaps some of the levels could be artistically represented using voiced scene work, abstract drama, tableau or other process drama strategies from the repertoire. The possibilities are there if the document is critically perused by professionals from a community of practitioners. In this case I am referring to trained drama teachers who continually engage in what Nelson Goodman (1978) calls "world making." Donald Schon defines worldmakers this way:

> Through countless acts of attention and inattention, naming, sense making, boundary setting and control, they make and maintain the worlds matched to their professional knowledge and know how. (1987, p. 36)

Worldmakers of drama education need to engage in collaborative-interpretive research (Errington, 1993). This requires teachers to have far more control over their own professional development funds, and I urge BC drama teachers to engage in collaborative research with their colleagues. Why not practice a little social responsibility within our area of expertise? I also call for another look at the British Columbia Drama Instructional Resource Packages to incorporate the work of drama colleagues in Australia and the United Kingdom, moving toward academic status for drama courses. Otherwise, we shall be forever designated a frills subject, representing no real academic importance to students. Worse still, drama can be easily disposed of at the whim of administrative policies, if it has no academic rigour associated with its curriculum content.

Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide is the latest BC Ministry of Education document (Standards Department) to be published within the realm of social responsibility (BCME, 2004). The guide contains three sections: Attributes of Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools, Codes of Conduct, Timely Information (record keeping), and the Appendices. It draws

upon information obtained from an earlier document, published by the BC Principals and Vice-principals' association, *Voice on Harassment: B.C. Student Voice* (BCME, 2001b) which synthesized students' advice to teachers, administrators, and other school staff on reducing the rate of bullying, intimidation, and harassment in BC schools. I recommend playbuilders consult this guide and navigate through the sections with student-actors working as researchers.

We do not require more written material on social responsibility: we need to transform the information already gathered into artistic formats so that the knowledge will be transmitted to the people that need it most. Communities will heal if they are permitted to tell their own stories to other communities, who in turn, hear the message and respond accordingly. That is the essence of collective creativity: stories told, stories heard, and community action implemented.

British Columbia playbuilders whom I interviewed certainly do not shy away from topics of social responsibility. Recently I asked Carole Tarlington what her latest playbuilding focus was, within the context of student censorship of controversial issues.

CT: It's really interesting about censorship because now I do script building, and the group creates a script so it's exactly the same except we film it, and we will have a finished film at the end of it.

CH: Are the script builders actors or dramaturgers?

CT: No they are kids, teenagers that I'm working with. They wanted to do something serious; they've only done this two years in a row. Last year it was pretty light hearted, teen-love stuff and all that and this year the group said

"We'd like to do something more serious"; they elected to do something centered around a party ; then they decided they wanted to do something about teen killers. (personal communication, March 31, 2004)

Later on in the interview, I asked Carole what issues she thought needed to be reflected in teen playbuilding. She responded:

CT: Violence full stop. We found that in the last play I did for the Youth Theatre. It was called *Minor Reality* (Hogan, Rogers, & Tarlington, 1995). Again we interviewed people who had been teenagers in the 1920s 1950s and the kids provided the modern view. Once

we got to the 90's it became very abstract and had a lot of violence. It was a wonderful show, but it made people very uncomfortable…because here we have the 1950s thing: kids in 50s clothes, doing the 50s dances and having love problems and suddenly it got to the 90s and we had this transition where the Emcee said:

"Well where are the kids now? He had a newspaper and he said, "Oh here they are: kid stabs other teen at party, boy kicked to death in playground", and he went through a lot of things, and that's what is worrisome. There isn't widespread violence, but I think through playbuilding you can get at what is eating at kids.

CH: Can you give one window of where you think the violence is coming from?

CT: The media!! That's where it comes from. You don't get a headline saying young people help old lady across road. But if it's headlines, the media loves youth violence. It would be very interesting to do research in that area but I would bet that there's not much more violence now than there ever was, except now it's heavily reported, and it's the thing that people are frightened of.

CH: And is the violence begetting the violence?

CT: Yeah and kids are worried about that. They hear things like Chinese Canadian kids being kicked to death; well you'd be worried too! (C. Tarlington personal communication, March 31, 2004)

Drama teacher Hugh Anderson from Dover Bay Secondary School spoke of a show he built with his students, titled *Code of Silence*:

CH: What was the premise of *Code of Silence* ?

HA: It was about the culture of, I don't want to say bullying, rather, oppression within the high school. It dealt with the issues of being the not-so innocent bystander; dealing with issues of violence, sexism, and the code of silence. Nobody was going to do anything about it, nobody was going to speak up about it

CH: Yes the Sicilian word OMERTA was talked about with the Squamish case a few years ago. (H. Anderson, personal communication, June 11, 2004)

Further along in the interview, I asked the cast and Mr. Anderson about their recent play, *i have a name*, (lower case intended), which focussed on the missing women of the downtown eastside of Vancouver. Addressing this issue with older teens seemed to me to be the height of social responsibility, though I would not have explored this topic with middle school students. I asked the cast how they chose this particular topic and what research was involved:

CH: Now Hugh, what did you as the facilitator to move the play forward?

Actor: We talked to Sam and Brenda. We talked to some former prostitutes.

CH: Where did you find them?

HA: Actually it was through an actor's   Mom. I put a lot of emphasis on the kids. I'm a director and a director does just that. It's a lot like herding. I use that image a lot but it's directing ;it's not leading, it's not pushing. I stand this way and deflect them this way and as much as possible give them their freedom to go in the direction they want to pursue, so they were doing Internet research. This was around the time of Gary Ridgeway's trial down in Seattle and there was still news coming up about the Picton farm: Maggie de Vries book had just come out. That was a really big source we used, and Whitney had gotten to the missing women's siteThen an actor said: "Well my Mom knows people down in Haven House and they have a transition house for women trying to get off the street. Do we want to try to interview some of them?"

CH: so that became a very big piece of your source material—primary source material…

HA: We do like to get live interviews and a lot of it the girls arranged. We have an awesome RCMP liaison officer, and he sat in on some of the initial ones.I gave him our opening scene, where we talked about our own attitudes and some of our own stuff came up about our own attitudes. (H. Anderson, personal communication, June 11, 2004)

Professional theatre companies such as Headlines Theatre, under the direction of David

Diamond, have been formed to explore topics of social responsibility in the context of creating

theatre w*ith* communities, and not merely *for* communities. He calls this approach *Theatre for*

Living, and this excerpt from his unpublished website article reflects the approach:

Artists have a central role to play globally today, because cultural work that originates in community expression is the very heart of dialogue-creation on local, regional and international levels. Any process that stimulates true dialogue helps to combat the negative impacts of globalization.

I have a belief that affects all of my work: that cultural work is central to health, both of individuals and of communities. Just as cells make up the living organism of our bodies, people make up the living organism of the community. The way communities used to express themselves and be in dialogue with each other, was through song, dance, drama, painting, sculpting, and other art forms. This was how a community expressed its hopes, fears, dreams, victories, and defeats.

It is only relatively recently in the evolution of humankind that these activities have been commodified, becoming things that we buy instead of things that we do. So now we buy movies and television and books and music and theatre and dance and in doing so - in relying on and paying others to tell us stories about others - we lose our

ability to tell our own communal stories about ourselves. We lose our ability as communities to be in dialogue with the world around us. (Diamond, 2001, para. 7-9)

After reviewing the literature on social responsibility, I feel confident that our project succeeded in reflecting current issues to the best of the groups' age capability and minimal dramatic experience. Through playbuilding, we transformed our knowledge of bullying, cyber-bullying, teen isolation and alienation, adult perception of teens, fears of beginning and leaving middle school and parent-teen relationships, into an artistic format. The actors shared their communal stories first with each other and then with audiences. By doing so, they entered into a dialogue with other communities such as elementary and rival middle schools and forged new, positive relationships with these groups. And so I ask you which is more effective: a new written document on social responsibility which sits very neatly in a black binder on a shelf, or a living, breathing entity such as a collective creation which represents that same knowledge to people through aesthetic engagement (Bundy, 2003a, 2003b)?

Thus my initial research question, "Can the process of playbuilding be utilized to explore issue of social responsibility?" is answered with a yes, from reviewing the literature and organizing this project. The most important revelation I had during this project was that theatre, specifically playbuilding or collective creation, is *itself* a form of social responsibility. This was further clarified for me during my interview with David Beare, which I cover in more detail in the Tapestry section of this paper. A community's story can best be told using a symbolic language, the theatre. By participating in a playbuilding workshop, or by leading one, you are effectively being socially responsible, for out of social interaction and communication, may come solutions to the most pressing issues of social responsibility facing our schools and the greater communities in which we live.

Although this might be out of place within the literature review, I wanted to make my

readers aware of an interesting trajectory of playbuilding found within the practice of restorative justice**.**

While researching this topic, I have recently seen the art of collective creation or playbuilding utilized in most unusual circumstances. For example, the Youth Restorative Action Project (YRAP), Edmonton, Alberta, a justice committee sanctioned under Section 19 of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, recently ordered three youth charged with assaulting an older lady whom they suspected as being a prostitute, to participate in a *collective creation radio-drama* highlighting the complex issue of prostitution along Edmonton's 118th Avenue as part of their sentence, for the edification of the greater community (C. Cherrington, personal communication, 2004) This is an example of the collective creation process being utilized as a rehabilitation measure in the Youth Justice system. Although the key words "restorative justice" will produce a sample of articles found in University databases, I was unable to locate any North American studies which link drama to restorative justice. However, I did find a research study in *The Australian Institute of Criminology: Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, which utilizes role drama with a restorative justice project (Morrison, 2002). This does not surprise me, as so much innovation in drama comes from Australia.

It is my hope that someone else who might read this study, will consider implementing playbuilding in the capacity of restorative justice, as that trajectory, though out of my realm of expertise, most certainly fits under the category of social responsibility.

I end this section with an excerpt from my conversation with Marissa, an actress connected with Dover Bay Secondary's devised play *i have a name*. Marissa acknowledged an epiphany in her own life with regard to the role she sees theatre playing in society:

> Marissa: I've said this a couple times: Theatre for me is no longer a selfish hobby…that's what I've decided from this play.

CH: What a neat sentence. How did you come up with that sentence? Did you think a lot about that?

Marissa: No, I said it one day and I thought "Yeah, that's exactly what it is…

CH: So you see theatre as a vehicle for social change?

Marissa: It can be…

CH: But now you've taken theatre as a transformative vehicle for social change… Do you see yourself going into play building or directing?

Marissa: I don't know. I love to act and that's my passion, but also I'm looking at something else;like a counsellor; but that might pass as well.I don't know,but just for now, I think that what we did wasn't as selfish as I thought it was. (H. Anderson, personal communication, June 11, 2004)

Drama in Education and Theatre in Education: Process and Product

Many theses, masters' projects, and dissertations contain sections in their literature review that cite links to literature on drama in education and theatre in education. Gavin Bolton's 1993 paper on "Drama in Education and TIE: a Comparison" provides insight into the differences between the two genres (Bolton, 1993). Bolton asserts that *Theatre in Education* (TIE) shares with *Drama in Education* (DIE) an emphasis on change of understanding. "It is probably true to say that whereas in DIE it is possible that teacher and children together 'discover' or even 'stumble across' significance in the content of what they are creating, TIE actor-teachers can never leave this to chance" (Bolton1993, p. 40). DIE is then solely concerned with process whereas TIE is always moving from process to product. TIE teams are generally professional companies who devise work with young audiences in mind. TIE teams can be found working inside schools, or appearing at professional children's festivals or theatres.

Tony Jackson's (1993) seminal book, *Learning Through Theatre: New Perspectives on Theatre in Education,* provides a four-part overview of the past, present, and future of Theatre-in Education. Of particular interest to this project is the article, "Devising for TIE," by David

Pammenter (1980/1993).

     Pammenter, who explores the choice of content for playbuilt scripts, warns devisers that they "should not be afraid of the related challenge of presenting a bias in their work" (Pammenter,1980/1993)p.62). He refers to issues of social responsibility that once taken on, can face criticism by the "short-sighted or bigoted as being politically motivated" (p. 62). True enough, this was the experience of one of the five interviewees in the Tapestry section of this paper.

     Drama in education is usually conducted by trained drama teachers as part of their curriculum within the context of drama classes. Some of the more famous names associated within this field are as follows: Peter Slade, Gavin Bolton, Cecily O'Neill, Richard Courtney, Dorothy Heathcoate, Betty Jane Wagner, David Booth, Brian Way, Jonathan Neelands, Warwick Dobson, Juliana Saxton, and Carole Tarlington. For educators unfamiliar with the history of Drama in Education, *Acting in Classroom Drama* (Bolton, 1999) provides a thorough examination of the history of drama in education, using a biographical approach. Many labels have come and gone in this fluid field: creative drama, classroom drama, drama for understanding, informal drama, role drama and process drama are just some the terms that have evolved up to the present year of 2004.

     John O'Toole (1992) coined the term process drama. He noted that the word *process* with regard to drama "seem(ed) to denote anything that keeps on going on, and hasn't come to something called a 'product' which has somehow stopped" (p. 1). I do not believe that when one enters the realm of product, the process suddenly stopped. In a true collective creation, a cessation of creativity is impossible because of the very fluid, collective nature of the art form.

     Cecily O'Neill states that the phrase *process drama* "seems to have arisen almost

simultaneously in Australia and North America in the late 1980s as an attempt to distinguish this particular dramatic approach from less complex and ambitious improvised activities" (1995, p. xv).

What are These Things Called Process and Product?

Playbuilding seems to live at the crossroads between drama and theatre education. It relies heavily on the symbiotic interaction between process work and product work. My use of the term symbiotic is deliberate-it defines a biological relationship that benefits both parties. Drama researchers have traditionally separated the terms process and product, the latter being more associated with the theatre, the former, with education. According to Wilhelm and Edmiston (1998) drama is not about performance but about exploration. "It is the process, not the product that matters" (as cited in Kelly, 2000, p. 8). However, Bolton (1999) writes that, "it may be mistaken to leave the impression that 'process' is to be seen as an alternative to 'product' for they are interdependent, not polar concepts" (p. 261). Two recently published works on Drama emphasize the word process in their titles: Cecily O'Neill's *Drama Worlds: A Framework for Process Drama* (1995) and John O'Toole's *The Process of Drama* (1992). Bolton comments: "It is a pity, in some way that recent authors have, for reasons that are understandable, included 'process' on their book titles, isolating it once more from 'product'" (1999, p. 20). O'Neill (1995) states that both process and product have the disadvantage of being simple terms required to indicate intricate structures (p. xv). Bray (1991) states that arguments about drama versus theatre and process versus product, do not seem very useful. Specifically targeting playbuilding, he offers this advice:

> Obviously a perfect balance between process and product would be our best aim. As this is rarely achievable, I would urge playbuilding directors to err on the side of process. If the process is positive enough, last minute energies can salvage a shaky production. If the ideas, experiences and voices of the group are respected, then a positive product is always

possible. (p. 90)

In her article, "Drama and Complexity: Teaching at the Edge," Linda Laidlaw (2002) ties in science metaphors with collaborative and cooperative learning in drama education. She introduces the term autopoesis to describe the "self-producing organization of living systems" (p. 18). The following definition reminds me of the director's lived experience watching a show take on a "life" of its own:

> The most striking feature of an autopoietic system is that it pulls itself up by its bootstraps and becomes distinct from its environment through its own dynamics, in such a way that both things are inseparable. (Maturana & Varela, 1987, as cited in Laidlaw, 2002, p. 18)

The inter-connectedness of the process or product dynamic found in playbuilding is tied metaphorically to actual scientific constructs such as fractals and chaos theory (Laidlaw, 2002). Laidlaw states "of course drama educators have long recognized the power of the collective for learning and have worked at creating pedagogical structures which draw upon collective knowledge and actions" (p. 18).

David Beare, in his recent unpublished M.A. thesis, defines process and product this way:

> The product viewpoint usually sees theatre as an event and the human change process as a major turning point, while the process view usually sees theatre as people on a journey and the human change process as a subtle and complex continuum that has no beginning or end. (2002, p. 30)

Beare (2002) advocates that theatre arts should shift away from the development of theatre and move towards the development of people. His innovative thesis provides vital information for any director-educator interested in the juxtaposition between the playbuilding process and adolescent development.

Regarding the inter-connection of process and product, Alison Oddey (1994) writes:

> What identifies and defines devised theatre as a separate form worthy of consideration is

the uniqueness of process and product for every group concerned. The significance of this form of theatre is in the emphasis it places on an eclectic process requiring innovation, invention, imagination, risk and above all, an overall group commitment to the developing work…What makes devising so special is the potential freedom or opportunity to move in a number of different directions through a collaborative process, developing an original theatre product to be performed. It can produce more creative solution than other forms of theatre, although this is fundamentally determined by group dynamic and interaction. (p. 2)

Oddey's text is one of the finest I read during this study, and I would strongly recommend it to colleagues, especially her two chapters titled *"From Process to Product: Relationship and Practice"* and the "Participatory Theatre-in Education Programme*."*

The History of Playbuilding

Andy Kempe (2000) provides an intriguing glimpse into the early history of playbuilding. Sometimes called devising, collective creation, collaborative creativity, or just simply playbuilding, He states:

Given that devised drama almost certainly predates the production of scripted plays and has continued to re-emerge periodically alongside them over the centuries it seems curious that [devised works] are largely regarded as being on the avant-garde fringe of the professional theatre world. (p. 65)

Kempe outlines the history of the powerful Lord Chamberlain's Office, a long established censorious body, which controlled the content of theatre. Shakespeare himself was subject to its censorious powers. The Lord Chamberlain's office insisted on seeing every single word intended to be spoken on the professional stage in London. Therefore, the notion of a scripted play, or a 'well made play,' continued to dominate theatre. The Lord Chamberlain's powers were finally removed by the 1968 Theatre Act; this allowed innovative teachers and directors to "explore the artistic potential of devising new drama and performing this to live audiences" (2000, p.65).

In Courtenay's text *The School Play* (1966), he wrote that, "if our judgment is to be governed by the needs of the children, we must recognize that there are a number of educational

situations where improvisation may be necessary" (Courtenay as cited in Cousins, 2000, p. 90).

Courtney also suggests that, "the best productions are achieved when the children can improvise

well, can create their own dialogue and movement to a high standard" (p. 90).

Another British drama teacher, Peter Chilver, speaks of the importance of a collective

endeavour when creating a script for performance. His practical handbook *Staging the School

Play* (1967) has a section on the Theatre Workshop's production of *Oh What a Lovely War*,

which was entirely devised by the actors through improvisation. Chilver states that there was

probably much more of an educational experience for the actors who were involved in it than

most school productions; the cast assisted in the preparation of the scripts, the development of

ideas, the improvisation, and the conducting of research into possible pre-text material. "This, he

says, could well be used as a model for some school productions" (p. 90). Chilver also suggests

that devised productions should use only minimal scene and costumes. With regard to staging he

writes: "The solution is to bring the acting out among the audience, break away from the

limitations of the proscenium and create as much space for yourself as you feel the play needs"

(p. 90). Chilver also makes a reciprocal suggestion, placing the audience on the stage and the

actors off-stage.

In an older theatre textbook, *Acting: The Creative Process* (Albright & Albright, 1980),

the authors give quite a scolding to those who take up playwriting and improvisation. Although

they acknowledge the technique for creating plays through improvisation has a history in

commedia dell'arte and the mystery and morality plays, the authors do not consider these plays

texts, but rather, *assemblages*. Albright & Albright recognize plays like *A Hatful of Rain*, *A Taste

of Honey,* and *Oh! What a Lovely War* as playbuilt scripts. They acknowledge that the Open

Theatre led by Joseph Chaikin created playbuilt scripts using *The Book of Genesis* as source

material for the professional production titled, *The Serpent*. They mention Peter Brook's

productions of *US* and *Marat/Sade,* which incorporated a great deal of improvisation prior to the

actual script writing. Furthermore, they acknowledge *A Chorus Line* as a famous musical that

began slowly through improvisation. The authors give credit to a score of collectively created

works, but then reveal their contempt for the nature of devised productions by stating:

> There can be no doubt that today improvisations are the "in" thing. However, when
> improvisations are presented commercially as plays, there is the ever present danger that
> actors will become too enraptured with their own involvement, exposing a slip- shod
> amateurism and self-indulgence. To hire a hall, to pay for the printing of tickets, to
> furnish lights and scenery, all require playing to more than a single audience and.
> therefore, repeating something that has been rehearsed, set and completed. This is the
> exact opposite of improvisation. (Albright & Albright, 1980, p. 76)

It is evident that, in their rush to defend "legitimate" theatre and "professional

playwriting," Albright and Albright demonstrate that they do not really understand the process of

hard work that goes into a devised play. Usually playbuilt scripts repeat the same lines exactly

each time, with only a slight variance—this happens in scripted works as well. Playbuilding

requires directors to have the ability to relinquish control over thoughts, ideas, and voices, and to

allow a collective mindset to live. It sounds like Albright & Albright have concerns over loss of

control and power. It is ironic that they chose to call their text *Acting: The Creative Process*, yet

they seem to espouse rather a contempt for improvisation—one of the most creative skills in the

theatre.

On the Canadian frontier, Diane Bessai authored *Playwrights of Collective Creation*

(1992), a book for the series *The Canadian Dramatist,* in which a fascinating history of the

emergence of devised theatre is provided, with a special emphasis on Canadian theatre

companies. Some of the more famous Canadian companies and playwrights of collective

creation are Theatre Pass Murielle (Quebec), John Gray, Linda Griffiths, and Rick Saluting. This

book is a highly recommended source for anyone wising to understand the development of

collective creation within a Canadian context. An excellent article on the history of collective creation in Vancouver can be retrieved from the website of the University of British Columbia's archives on theatre(Kozak, 2004). There is also an informative website from Heritage Newfoundland that details that province's history of collective creation (Memorial University of Newfoundland). It is interesting to note that Canadian professional theatre groups have lately taken interest in archiving historical accounts of collective creations in their respective provinces. Perhaps this indicates a renewed interest in the form of collective creativity, further espoused by the increase in regional and national Fringe festivals.

Many of the research articles originate from Australia, yet I was unable to locate any reference material regarding their history with playbuilding. I can however, harbour a few educational guesses, based in part, on a comment made by Carole Tarlington in our recent interview. When I asked how the mandate of Vancouver Youth Theatre differed from professional issues based theatre companies such as Headlines Theatre, she offered:

> CT: I believe theatre should make you cry a bit laugh a bit and think a lot if possible. And so anything we did at the Youth Theatre always had lots of humour and singing dancing, which is kind of an Australian thing. Whereas David Diamond's thing is "Here's the issue, now deal with it." (C. Tarlington, personal communication, March 31, 2004)

I wonder, by being an isolated country, and having been settled by people who had very little access to live music and theatre, if the original white settlers of Australia were forced to create their own shows? That collective spirit still manifests itself in modern Australian film creations like *Moulin Rouge*. Australian films have a unique approach that deviates from the usual ingredients of Hollywood fare. They seem to come from another place and time and have an arcane quality about them. Of course, this is all speculation on my part, but I imagine a history of playbuilding in Australia would have to reflect geographic-isolationist and socio-cultural factors.

In the United States, a disenchantment with commercial theatre catapulted the notion of collective creation into being. Groups such as The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre, Grotowski's Polish Laboratory Theatre, and La Mama Experimental Theatre Club emerged to join the growing movement of counter-culture ensembles. I have not pursued the history of playbuilding in the United States, partly because of the smaller scope of this project, but I imagine we have a somewhat shared history with regard to Canadian- American experiences and historical documentation of playbuilding. Art often transcends man-made political borders.

As previously mentioned, Alison Oddey's (1994) research into the United Kingdom's history of playbuilding and politics touches on the frequent political nature of playbuilding:

> A central reason for the large number of companies devising theatre in the 1970s was the strong desire to work in an artistically democratic way. The 'collective' grew out of a socio-political climate that emphasized democracy so that many groups were interested in breaking down the patriarchal and hierarchical divisions of the traditional theatre company. (p. 8)

Canadian researcher and drama educator Linda Lang (2002) suggests that the biggest dilemma for teachers attempting to find research into playbuilding is the plethora of terms that drama educators and theatre specialists have used to describe essentially the same process, and is the main reason it appears so little research has been done in this area. Lang reports that the term collective creation came into use through Paul Thompson and Theatre Passé Muraille. Alberta and Saskatchewan educators lean towards this term, while drama educators from British Columbia, influenced by Carole Tarlington's work, most often use the term playbuilding.

British drama educators use the term *devising* to describe the playbuilding process. This term is heavily connected to physical theatre, which tends to rely on improvisation, mime, and movement(Kempe, 2000; Lamden, 2000; Oddey, 1994). Although playbuilding projects tend to be grouped under the fringe, avant garde banner, the methods have been with us long before scripted "legitimate" theatre became entrenched with its own canon and schools of philosophical

genre. Collective creation, by its nature of shared voices, tends to make certain people uncomfortable as the methods are ethereal, the content, fluid.

Playbuilding History in Vancouver Island Public Schools

For many years in Victoria's South Zone Festival, playbuilt scripts were very much frowned upon, in favour of scripted works from the canon. However, in the late 1980s one Drama teacher, Jackie Macdonald broke that barrier by presenting playbuilt works with the Victoria High School's Vic High Players. At first, the work was misunderstood by drama teachers and adjudicators who were unfamiliar or perhaps uncomfortable with the process. However, when an adjudicator from Saskatchewan saw the Vic High players' work in festival, he chose them to represent the zone in the Provincial Drama Festival. The Vic High players went on to win the Provincial Drama Festival twice, entering by this time, scripted plays and playbuilt plays.

The North Zone of Vancouver Island has been far more accepting of playbuilt scripts. Collectively-created works have often taken their place at this festival, winning alongside scripted works from the traditional festival repertoire. Dover Bay has playbuilt a number of shows including *Welfare of the Saints* (1998) and *Code of Silence* (2000). Unfortunately, at the recent North Island Zone Festival, their playbuilt script titled *i have a name* (2004) was panned by the adjudicator. During my interview with the director and cast, I learned that although the audience was overwhelmed with the production, giving it standing ovations and extensive praise, the adjudicator disagreed and admonished the cast for entering an inappropriate piece of theatre.

David Beare reports that many lower mainland teachers incorporate playbuilding into their regular curriculum; he has produced a number of original playbuilt scripts as *Stardumb* (2003), and adaptation of *The Little Prince* (1999), and *Murder in the Cathedral* (2000) set in a

modern rave setting, *Dance…Through* a *Glass Darkly* (2001), and *Eclipsed, Ben's story* (2002).

Recently a great deal of controversy erupted over Beare's latest playbuilt script, titled *Broken*

Theory (2004). Newspapers across the country picked up the story about a group of seven

parents who, upon seeing the show at North Vancouver's Centennial Theatre on April 1, 2004,

complained to the school about a brief lesbian kiss that was part of the show. The Fort Frances

Times online newspaper reported the incident this way:

> Drama teacher David Beare said the play was about finding the meaning of utopia. One
> character finds the girl of his dreams and kisses her. Two lesbian characters then kiss.

> "It was the most innocuous kiss," he said. "It was a peck like two sisters or a mother and
> daughter would do."

> That peck, though, spurred four parents and three teachers to complain about the kiss and
> some swearing, Beare said,

> "I was ordered to take it out," Beare said, noting the swearing was allowed back in (Fort
> Frances Times Online) (see Appendix D)

The history of playbuilding is multi-faceted in that its content often stems from a

dissatisfaction with the status quo. Its methods, often unconventional and unpredictable, tend to

make conservative populations uncomfortable. Frequently playbuilding takes on issues of social

controversy (Anderson, Beare, personal communication, 2004) holding these issues up to the

audience and, by means of reflection, imploring the audience to take action about issues of social

injustice. Conversely, the traditional high school musical canon tends to uphold mainstream

culture, reflecting themes of patriotism, citizenship, and white middle class values. In Heather

Cousins' (2000) article she criticizes the tendency of high school drama programmes to focus on

the production of musicals in favour of alternative dramatic experiences for students, including

collective creation (devising). Therefore, drama educators who embark upon playbuilding should

be cognizant of its historical underpinnings; often the stormy controversy that can surround a

collective creation will emerge from the choice of topic. Directors should be prepared, when

exploring controversial social issues, for consequences, and especially criticism, which will invariably arise from mainstream society.

Literature on Specific Playbuilding Projects

Lang's (2002) study concentrates on the best practices of nine drama teachers who had extensive playbuilding experiences. Phase Two of her study asks the question "Whose play is it anyhow?" and explores issues of student control and empowerment when trying to ascertain exactly who wrote the play. Tarlington also explores the issue of ownership in her keynote address to the IDEA conference in 1995. Kempe (2000) alludes to ownership in his article "So Whose Idea Was That, Then?–Devising for Drama*."* I found it interesting that the topic of ownership frequently manifested itself in playbuilding projects and asked my students who wrote their script . They all said: "We did, but you had to type it up because of your Masters!" (student comments during the process)

Alan Hancock (1995) links metaphors of chaos theory to the playbuilding process. He describes a playbuilt script, *Toad*, effectively tracing the collective creation process through the metaphors of chaos theory along the same lines as Linda Laidlaw's (2002) "Drama and Complexity: Teaching at the Edge".

Dr. Bridget Aitchison (2003) offers an excellent description of a group-devised, issues-based play, *Back from Nowhere,* about the effects of youth suicide. Debra Griffiths (1984) provides a thorough list, titled the *Elements of the Playbuilding Process* as part of a study of two playbuilding lessons. Jennifer Simons (1989) studied a specific playbuilding project based on the fate of the islands of Carteret, sinking beneath the ocean, the first victims of the greenhouse effect .

Julie Porteus (2002) documents her use of playbuilding as a process to explore the issue

of bullying. She provides excellent step-by-step instructions of her process and gives a comprehensive website for playbuilders wishing to develop work around the issue of bullying. *Different from Me* (Pye, 2002), a devised production in Queensland, has both a TIE and DIE flavour. Students view the production but, because of its Forum Theatre style, are invited to participate as a means of learning about oppressive forces within schools, particularly racism. Much of the material for the show was based on workshops conducted by the actors with Year Seven students in Queensland.

Drama on CD: The Playbuilding CD-Rom Project from Edith Cowan University is based on the creation of a playbuilding CD- Rom, which is available for student use when "devising" for GCSE exams (Hancock & Ramondt, 1996). Another unique study chronicles the development of new playwrighting workshops between a writer and a group of young people (Taylor, 2002).

Playbuilding projects are not always successful, as discovered by Penny Bundy (1999). She reflects on the group playmaking process, observing that increased peer group interactions and positive growth of social skills are not always the case. Bundy documents however, that the use of pre-texts was a helpful strategy in the playbuilding process. Other pre-texts such as personal narratives are sometimes used in the playbuilding process, as documented by Christine Hatton's (2002) study with adolescent girls. I also used pre-texts, through student generated creative writing prompts which greatly enriched the improvisational phase of our work.

While my playbuilding project was conducted outside of classroom time, some studies have been done within the classroom setting, such as Debra McLauchlan's (2001) study *Collaborative Creativity in a High School Drama Class.* She investigated the substance and conditions of playbuilding through the experiences of six high school classmates. She describes

some of her actor-participants as "dependent learners, competitive learners or intrinsic learners"

(p. 49). According to Mclaughlan, dependent learners "lacked time-management skills, formed

no strong peer relations, required disciplining, and displayed neither initiative nor persistence.

They successfully completed only those tasks that I directly monitored with step-by-step

procedures" (p. 49). Initially, I would have described half of our cast in exactly the same way!

But, as time went on, my students definitely shifted from being totally dependent learners toward

becoming intrinsic learners.

McLauchlan describes her intrinsic learners this way:

[They] seemed the least dependent on me or their peers, Invariably reliable, they were
excellent role models of accomplishment and initiative. Yet they were also the most
strong-willed and self-critical of students, frequently setting unrealistic expectations for
themselves and others. (2001, p. 49.)

I could verify similar patterns using the description of both dependent and intrinsic learners, but

saw no sign of competitive learners in our project. Conversely, and in a very humourous fashion,

Errol Bray (1991) describes different student- playbuilding participants as "The Quiet, the Loud

and the Ugly" (p.18). His words of wisdom and uncanny ability to put a positive spin on the

somewhat negative traits of certain students, is a joy to read, and will remain a   source of

inspiration for me to draw upon.

Morrison and Stinson's study (1995) questioned whether it is responsible to exclusively

reflect youth culture in playbuilt scripts. They suggest that texts from various artistic genres be

considered springboards for youth theatre. The writers maintain that, in collective creation, it is

wise to maintain the integrity of the youth voice, but then extend to external paradigms. I was

unable to move the students out of their own experience, although they were able to share

laterally their unique experiences and in that way, develop peer empathy. Morrison and Stinson's

study draws upon the work of Peter Abbs (1994) where he posits a withholding of the child's

external culture is to confine children to one social class: this is to unwittingly commit an act of social injustice of the first order. "To leave children where they naturally are, is educationally to betray them" (Abbs 1994, as cited in Morrison & Stinson, 1995, p. 38). This idea is reflected in Vygotsky's notion (1978, 1986) of the zone of proximal development, but it also resonates in the work of Gordon Neufeld (2004), a psychologist who outlines the folly of a peer dominated culture. My study became "stuck" in youth culture issues and I struggled to pull the narrative outside of the students' personal experience. I did not want the show to become a pity party of the groups' collective woes, and this created a fair amount of rehearsal tension. Overall, Morrison and Stinson's article was a fascinating study of the juxtaposition between youth culture and the larger, post-modern cultural arena.

Applied Theatre is the latest development to come out of the playbuilding genre. Thompson describes:

> Applied theatre is powered by a desire to transform human activity through the theatrical medium. For the most part, those who experience applied theatre, those who come to the work as spectators or as participants, have no specific background or necessary interest in theatre form (Thompson, 2000, as cited in Taylor, 2002, p. 92)

Applied theatre takes place in non-theatrical areas such as prisons, health and therapy situations, community arts centres, museums, art galleries, educational institutions, housing and industrial sites and buildings which house social support services. Taylor's article focuses on the evolution of a specific applied theatre project, which targeted issues of domestic violence. As a pre-study for their project, the Centre for Applied Theatre Research at Griffith University, Australia, studied the collective creation work of Moises Kaufman's play, *The Laramie Project*. It was presented to audience members who, in accordance with Forum Theatre style, were encouraged to participate. The audience members were mainly victims, or potential victims of domestic violence. The recorded dialogue between audience participants and the facilitator-joker

is particularly compelling.

The Applied Theatre movement is growing, with undergraduate and post graduate degree programs established at the Universities of Exeter and Manchester (UK), Griffith (AU), New York (USA), and soon to be at the University of Victoria. A new journal, *Applied Theatre Researcher* has recently been established.

As the literature review documents, the dendritic paths that have been formed from play source are quite impressive. It is, however not enough to read about other peoples' projects; it is in the "doing" that real understanding is achieved. The next section provides a wealth of sources related to the repertoire section of playbuilding.

Playbuilding

In every field there are seminal works. Tarlington and Michael's (1995) *Building Plays* is one. For the novice or seasoned play builder, this book is a must-read before attempting any type of collective creation with students.

Playbuilding by Errol Bray (1991) is another seminal work. I especially enjoy his categorization of the types of plays that can be built. I have quoted Bray extensively in this project. His genius in the field of playbuilding is unmistakable.

Strategies for Playbuilding by Will Weigler (2001) is a recent step-by-step manual designed for anyone wanting to help young people translate their ideas into effective theatre. Moreover, it is a practical program that shows how to use theatre to engage young people in community life. I used this book extensively in my recent playbuilding project, but now realize I needed to read it much more carefully to fully benefit from its programme. It truly is an exceptional work.

The video titled *Playbuilding: The Creative Process* (Blagg, 1997) is available for

purchase for classrooms (see website section). It is 28 minutes in duration and follows the Year 11 Drama students at Katoomba High School in Australia, through the playbuilding process. The video is in three parts: warm-ups, playbuilding processes, and finally performance, where the product is tested before an audience The teacher notes state:

> The video does not reflect a realistic time frame nor the natural dynamics of a class. What it does show is (sic) the personalities, enthusiasm and talent of a group of teenagers engaged in one, student-centered model of learning which, not surprisingly, involves all eight Key Learning competencies. (p. 4)

Devising: A Handbook for Drama and Theatre Students by Gil Lamden (2000), along with Oddey's (1994) book *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, were written in response to the Advanced (A) level for Drama, in the United Kingdom, introduced in the 1980's. According to Kempe (2000), "one of the requirements of this examination (taken by students at 18 years of age) was that the group devised their own piece of theatre" (p. 66).

The paper, "Learning through Group-Devised Presentations" (Youlden, 1994) provides a fascinating look at the relationships developed between Year 12 female drama students as they moved through a playbuilding unit. This article focuses less on "how to" play build, but more importantly, paints a picture of the pattern of relationships that form through the different roles play builders take on, when devising a piece of theatre. Interestingly, I found a very old curriculum guide from the Calgary Board of Education titled *Playbuilding* (Koppel, 1979) I was very impressed with the breadth of the guide, considering the year was 1979.

Joe Norris (1989), in his dissertation *Some Authorities as Co-Authors in a Collective Creation Production* examined the emancipatory nature of a collective creation as it was demonstrated in a high school drama program. Norris concentrates on the hierarchical nature of teacher and student and concludes that if one is to "teach with authority as an expert in a discipline, without violating the integrity of students, then factors of time, interpersonal relations,

and frame need to be recognized as authorities and potentially oppressive forces" (p.100). In his article titled "Drama as Research: Realizing the Potential of Drama as a Research Methodology" (2000), Norris walks the reader through the initial stages of a playbuilding workshop, from first commission to first performance. He explains a record keeping system he has developed with his actor-playwrights that could easily be adopted by a similar playbuilding company. His theatre company Mirror Theatre has adopted this motto: "Do not preach." Instead, the company presents "a sense of thesis and antithesis, creating space for the audience to find synthesis." (p. 47). Some of the themes explored by Mirror Theatre include "violence in schools, inclusion/exclusion, equality/respect in work environments, prejudice, body image, human sexuality, abortion, risk taking, and student teaching" (p. 52). Throughout his dissertation, Norris asserts that the actual process of playbuilding is in itself a form of art based educational research. Plays are performed, re-worked and re-done in subsequent performances. "In this sense the process becomes recursive as research dissemination also becomes a means of data collection. It is a form of participatory research where the text ceases to be a declarative authorial one but one in which consumers can become producers and vice versa" (p. 48).

Another piece in the "how to" category is from Norris, McCammon, and Miller's book (2000) *Learning to Teach Drama: A Case Narrative Approach*. In Chapter Three, "Classroom Climate: Working With Groups: Finding a Focus Through Playbuilding," a student teacher describes her unsuccessful attempts to engage an unruly Grade 9 Drama class. Finally, she attempts playbuilding with the group and finds, to her surprise that the group agrees to cooperate and complete the process. The focus for the play was a tour through a museum of teen problems, with the tableau strategy being the consistent element throughout the play. The editors comment that our school regulations enforce students to become self-centered. Constructs such as the

honour roll, athletic competition, individualized computer instruction, the posting of individual

grades on teacher doors, and the overt focus on job skills rather than an eclectic education,

consistently valourize the "self" in opposition to the "collective."

Bateman and Simons (2000) explore the creativity collective and the implications for

their work with pre-service teachers. By quoting the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1998) among

others, they suggest that creativity could be seen as part of a social system rather than the result

of individual genius. I particularly enjoyed their point that "many creations of unimportant

people have gone unnoticed because those people have not had access to the relevant authorities"

(p. 94). These researchers point out that is vital to consider the relevance of collaboration, in

light of the information explosion and the rapid pace of societal change. Reference is made to

Bruner's (1996) notion of distributed intelligence: that is, an individual person's sense of

"knowing" is preserved in their social habits, computers, books, and other people's memories

.Furthermore, retrieval and development of this knowledge will require greater interpersonal

skills and these skills are certainly well developed and documented through dramatic processes.

Overall, this wonderful article succinctly articulates the history and methods behind the creative

process while identifying how collaborative creativity can be used to foster good teaching and

learning practice.

The Gifts of Playbuilding

Although it has become a tiresome exercise, fine arts teachers have had to justify their

existence by demonstrating "what else" their art form can offer students. Apparently the art itself

is not good enough, or just not understood by those who hold the purse strings. Sometimes

however, it is helpful to reflect upon our art, whether it be in a visual, musical, kinestetic, or

theatrical form and honestly ask ourselves: what do students gain from participation in a

collective creation? Lamden (2000) addresses this question:

> What people largely don't understand are the skills students learn as a result of devising. The very act of working together, the unity of purpose through which you move towards a performance, is so rare. If I ask "What have you valued most?" they'll say, "I've learnt diplomacy, compromise, getting my own way, to be sensitive, to be generous, to deal with people, to organize, to manage to work to a real deadline." The skills developed by devisers are those valued by management trainers. (p. 8.)

Lang (2002), in her descriptive research project with teachers using the collective creation model analyzed the data from interview transcripts and coded four notions of the effect of playbuilding on students.:

1. **Self:** Collective creation supports students' emotional and cognitive learning and growth at an individual level: self-confidence, decision making, improved critical thinking, and risk-taking

2. **Community:** Collective creation provides a vehicle for students to develop social skills and to develop an appreciation of the importance of cooperation and caring in the classroom community: heightened sense of trust, of leadership, and skills that support community and group cohesion.

3. **Art:** Collective creation introduces students to the art form of theatre and allows them to practice and refine theatre arts skills: script writing, acting, self-censoring out of respect for family members who may be in the audience.
   Students also experienced the creative process and could now identify it as such: the early excitement and enthusiasm of creating anything will often turn into frustration, anger and fear before artists can savour the success and exhilaration of their product.

4. **Knowledge:** collective creation allows students to learn about social issues and curriculum content in such a way that their knowledge base is extended through meaningful learning opportunities.

Lang noted from her data analyses that teachers saw collective creation as an opportunity for students to explore social and cultural issues relevant to their lives and to society: Here is one comment from her interviewees:

> And so, all of those things that we want; all of those objectives that we want in terms of humanity is what comes out of this (playbuilding). It's 'humanity finding', I would say more than anything I have ever taught. (Alice, interview transcript, as cited in Lang, p. 16)

As I re-read Lang's article, I found many of the same comments resonating in my tapestry of five interviews, and from the Exit interviews of my own students. My students demonstrated that they too had received many gifts from the playbuilding project, exactly as the research confirms.

Adolescent Development in the Middle School Years

So much information has been written under this banner, that a project of this size cannot even begin to document the volumes of research available. However, I can report the information/research that I have read that helped to illuminate the stages of growth that the actors were at in terms of their contributions to the playbuilding unit.

"Where Are They Coming From?" (McConnell, 2003) provides a scholarly, yet accessible study on the stages of adolescence, focusing particularly on the relationship needs of middle school learners. He refers to the work of Elkind (1967), a pioneer in early adolescent development. McConnell documents the egocentricity of early adolescents and many of his topics resonated with my experiences in implementing a playbuilding project. I gave this article to the parents of my homeroom students this year; many of those parents expressed how accurate the article was, in relation to their experiences with their middle school child. Eccles, Midgley, Wingfield, Buchanan, Reuman, and Flanagan (1993) advanced a hypothesis that some of the negative psychological changes associated with adolescent development stem from a disconnect

between teens and the opportunities that come from their social environment. They call this phenomena "stage-environment fit." Baer (1999) criticizes the current middle school model as a mismatch between it and the emotional needs of early adolescents. A recent study cites the benefits of hierarchical environments (Neufeld, 2004) where mentors are readily available for emergent teens, such as in the 8-12 school systems, or systems that capitalize on community involvement such as teen-senior citizen pairings. Forcing emergent adolescents into a peer-oriented culture such as the middle school environment often has negative consequences and should be re-considered in light of new evidence (Baer, 1999).

Walsh-Bowers and Basso's (1999) article "Improving Early Adolescents' Peer Relations Through Classroom Creative Drama: An Integrated Approach," focused on the use of process drama with behavioural disordered youth. The authors' acknowledge the professional demands of implementing a successful drama program, but assert that drama can be an effective model for interpersonal learning in the classroom.

"Assessing the Transitions to Middle and High School" (Barber, 2004) documents growing evidence that the increased inadequacy of school environments are partially responsible for declining student functioning at middle school. The researchers contend this is not simply a factor in poor academic performance but more importantly in several areas of teen's psychological and interpersonal competency levels. Not surprisingly, the study confirmed that the prime element of a school environment for optimal student functioning was the quality of the student-teacher relationship. According to the researchers, "it is clear that the degree to which students felt supported by their teachers was most consistently predictive of their reported functioning inside and outside of school. This finding is consistent with some of the earliest writing on adolescents that emphasized the critical important of adult teachers in the

development of youth." (Hall, 1916, as cited in Barber, 2004, p. 27). The relationships that I

have built with students through educational drama and choral music have been profound. I

know this to be true, because I spent one year as a pure English and Socials Studies teacher, with

no fine arts contact with students. Consequently, I was unable to connect with the students at the

level I was used to: this was a very lonely year for me. Although teaching academic subjects

exclusively, meant my free time was my own, in that I had no extra-curricular responsibilities, I

felt like I was unable to express who I really was in that capacity. I felt silenced, a stranger

walking around in my own body.

During the following school year, when I was asked to teach the Choral program and

then, the next year, when I began re-teaching Drama, I re-experienced the aesthetic connection to

my students through the performing arts. For me, the way in to helping students discover their

inner potential will always be, through music and drama.

Probably the most widely quoted research on adolescent development is from the

Carnegie Council of Adolescent Development: *Turning Points* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) and

Great Transitions (Carnegie Council, 1996). I was especially drawn to their comments on

adolescents and the media:

> The world of adolescent cannot be understood without considering the profound
> influence of the mass media, especially television, but also movies and popular music.
> Knowledge of media production, and especially of the ways commercial messages are
> shaped and used to manipulate audiences, may help protect young adolescents against
> strong advertising pressures to smoke, drink, have sex, or eat unhealthy foods.Training in
> media literacy deserves widespread consideration in schools and community
> organizations as an essential part of becoming a well-educated citizen. (p. 1)

Just one glance at the above list will point to the relevance of playbuilding with young

people. All of the above topics provide excellent material for collective creation. *Exploring*

Media Advertising through Drama with Inner City Students (Conrad, 2001) details the work of

students and her performance text ,written from the process work of the students, was included in

her thesis.

From its inception, the building of communities has been the core of drama in education, and connections to caring communities is frequently quoted as an elixir for optimal growth and development in adolescent behaviour (Eccles et al., 1993; Simmons & Blyth, 1987).

Betty J. Wagner's 1999 book, *Building Moral Communities Through Educational Drama,* confirms this notion and provides many pages of educational wisdom.

> The aim of drama teaching is to help students understand themselves and the world in which they live. The teacher tries to set up situations upon which students can discover why people behave as they do, so that they can be helped to reflect on their own behaviour. All too often in their real lives, young people act without even imagining the consequences, and the results can be disastrous—not only for them but for their communities as well. (p. 20)

> Moral communities are grounded in a climate of openness and mutual respect. Nothing creates this <u>faster</u> than educational drama. (p. 21)

Chris Pye (2002) summarizes his drama experiences on his devised show *Different from Me* by saying, "Perhaps in the future, drama could help to create whole school environments where everyone can feel safe all of the time" (p. 68).

"Staging the Transitions to Maturity: Youth Theatre and the Rites of Passage Through Adolescence" (Burton, 2002) reports on a research project that concluded, "youth theatre has the capacity to provide essential rites of passage for young people in a contemporary society that fails to identify or celebrate crucial developmental stages in [teens] growth to maturity."(p. 63). The two studies, one at Melbourne Youth Theatre, the other at Brisbane Youth Theatre, provided "significant experimental confirmation of drama's potential as a creator of consciousness during adolescence and in the transition to adulthood" (p. 69).

In this literature review, I have covered five basic sub-sections that connect the playbuilding process to my research questions. Both the literature review process and the subsequent research that I found assisted me in framing my findings from the project and

provided some comparative examples that I could draw upon when searching for patterns of

behaviour during the process phase of the study.

Chapter Three – Methodology

Introduction

In this project, I explored adolescent issues of social responsibility and the skills acquired

by volunteer Drama students as a result of participating in a playbuilding unit, from process to

production. I also reflected upon my own teaching practice in two ways: keeping a cumulative

journal during the process phase of the project and interviewing five of British Columbia's

successful play builders, known to be experts in their field.

For the most part, a child's experience of education is a one-sided conversation, where

the student's voice is silenced as educators impart their wisdom through a "one-sided

conversation," that begins in Kindergarten (Innes, Moss, & Smigiel, 2001). Can playbuilding

provide an outlet for the student voice in a school? I believe it can. Student voice is a frequently

discussed topic among educators today (Mitra, 2004). School boards are adding student

representatives to their power structure, in an attempt to explore what Hans Bernard called "The

power of an untapped resource: Exploring youth representation on your board or committee" (as

cited in Joiner, 2003, p. 13)

On the subject of student voice, Dana Mitra writes:

In the past few years, the term "student voice" increasingly has been discussed in the
school reform literature as a potential avenue for improving both student outcomes and
school restructuring. When placed into practice "student voice" can consist on the most
basic level of youth sharing their opinions of problems and potential solutions. It could
also entail young people collaborating with adults to actually address the problems in
their schools. (2004, p. 651)

For the student voice movement to be truly successful, I suggest playbuilding could

become an integral part of the movement. I believe it is the single most powerful vehicle for

students to express their concerns, especially when dealing with controversial issues; the

audience, by viewing the students' voices can be compelled to seek solutions to the issues raised

by the students.

The following questions were addressed in this project:

1. Can the process of playbuilding be successful in exploring issues of social responsibility with middle school drama club students?

2. What are the major issues of social responsibility that emerge when engaging in a playbuilding process with middle school drama club students?

3. Of the two, which will be most fulfilling to middle school students: the process (creation of the play) or the product (the performance of the play)?

4. What specific skill acquisitions occur as a result of being a participant in a playbuilding process?

5. What strategies, approaches and instructional practices do successful practitioners of playbuilding employ in their work with their students as they work toward a performance piece? (Lang, 2002, p. 51)

The data collection for this project occurred over a four-month period, January 2004, to April 30, 2004. The Drama Club met every Monday and Thursday from 3 pm to 4:30 pm. The process, or the building of the play, took approximately 40 rehearsal hours. The running time of the show was approximately 40 minutes. That meant, for every minute on stage, one hour was used to devise the work. The one-minute to one-hour ratio is often used in the theatre to measure rehearsal time and performance time. The production toured to three elementary schools and two middle schools. In addition, the show was performed for two CAPP classes (daytime performances), one Drama 9 class (daytime performance) and two evening performances. The

final evening performance was part of the Fine Arts Evening, April 29, 2004. In total, the actors performed their show eight times, a good run for any show, in that it gives the actors different experiences and opportunities to refine their personal performances. The various types of data collected are listed in the section titled "Design of the Study."

Location and Setting

The middle school, built in April 2001, is located in Comox, British Columbia. The Comox Valley consists of three main areas: Courtenay, Cumberland and Comox. The school is in a bedroom community made up primarily of students of professionals in the Valley and thus has a population with a higher socio-economic status than the other two areas. The school population also consists of students from the Canadian Forces military base, Air force, CFB Comox 19 Wing.

To date, the school has among the lowest number of district suspensions and is generally perceived as a safe, caring, and orderly school. However, amongst the staff, there is concern that the students are not participating fully in extra-curricular offerings. During the school year of 2003-2004, student commitment rate had been poor, especially with the Grade 7 sports teams, and particularly among the girls. Many of these students are given private lessons (drama, dance, and music) or belong to private sports organizations that are funded by parents, and thus, have neither the time nor the drive to fully commit to extra curricular life at the school. Many students at this school do not have the level of commitment required to see a project from beginning to end. This is not true of the Drama Club. These students were very committed to the project. In fact, it was rare for any one of them to miss a rehearsal. The administration was amazed at the dedication shown by these students, and I was very grateful that they understood how important it was to finish the project. They respected the fact that this was a University research project.

The Drama Room is actually called the multipurpose room and can be frustrating to teach in because of its multi-usage. The lunch program is run from this room; it is not uncommon for me to be teaching Drama or Chorus, whilst stepping on old pizza crusts or sliding on a banana peel! Still, it is a very nice facility for teaching Drama.

I graduated from the University of Victoria in 1985 with a Bachelor of Education, Secondary, specializing in Drama and Socials Studies. I took extra courses in Choral Music and Musical Theatre to obtain a minor in Choral Music, a subject I really wanted to teach. Furthermore, I completed a formal minor in English at the University of Victoria in order to qualify as an English teacher in School District 71. I am pleased that the content of this project allowed me to tap into all of my teaching areas: Drama, Choral Music, and English and Socials Studies.

Participants

On October 4, 2003, I held the first Drama Club meeting at 3 pm in the school multipurpose room. Nearly 40 students attended. We began our Drama Club, meeting every Monday and Thursday from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm. Games and exercises meant to build a community of trust and openness were presented; initial playbuilding did not begin until late November. By then we had settled down to 30 regular participants.

One day, as we sat in circle, I noticed a huge rift. One side of the circle contained the so-called "popular" girls of Grade 7. The other side contained the 16 students who would eventually be the ones involved in the project. I realized that I could never really build a community of trust with this group; the exercises and strategies we had done on bullying were merely a mirror of the reality in front of me. They had divided themselves into oppressors and oppressed and I had not noticed it until that moment. Therein began the emergence of what I describe later as the parallel

process (Beare, 2002).

Finally, the "popular girls" approached me, as a group, and told me that they were quitting Drama Club. "It wasn't what we expected," said the chorus of girls. "We were hoping to do a play."

"But we **are** doing a play," I protested! "We're creating a play with your words, and we are representing your voices!"

"No," they insisted. "We wanted to do a **real** play!" And so off they went!

I looked over the sea of the 16 faces that were left. I sat down, feeling entirely dejected.

"Well, do you want to quit?" I moaned. I was preparing myself for a failed project that had not even gotten off the ground.

"No way," they smiled, enthusiastically. "We don't want to quit! We're just glad **they** quit!" pointing to the newly departed gaggle of girls. And so, Drama Club was truly on its way to creating a show. The group was composed of the following students who each chose their own pseudonym.

Abagail was a Grade 9 student who participated in the chorus and continues to take private voice lessons. Following her success with the playbuilding project, this originally quiet, shy, young lady successfully passed an audition into the Comox Valley's premier Chamber Choir, Cantiamo. Although I do not have irrefutable data to prove her association with the project gave her the confidence to audition for Cantiamo, her parents confirm their belief that the project had a positive effect on her.

Bobzilla (she chose it!) was a Grade 9student, shy but spirited, and part of the friendship circle with Abigail, Inge, Michelle, Sarai, and Charlotte. I saw tremendous growth in her performance ability. When we began improvising the scenes, via the writing prompts, I doubted

her ability to engage the audience. In time though, her performances grew stronger and became an outstanding learning opportunity for her. Bobzilla was pleasant to work with, but she remained a very quiet contributor to the process work.

Charlotte was a quiet young lady in Grade 9. She was one of five friends who stuck together during the process. Her presence gave a calming effect to the process, though she often missed rehearsals in the beginning; her family was moving and she was called upon to do a lot of babysitting for younger siblings. She had probably the least acting experience of the 16, yet her contributions were wonderful. I saw the most growth from this young lady. From a shy, reluctant participant, she grew into a confident, comedic young actress.

Dung Beetle was a Grade 7 young man. He recently moved to Comox from Newfoundland. Dung Beetle was a delight to work with. His ideas were insightful and he infused a gentleness and grace into both the process and the performance.

Inge was one of the more successful academic students at the middle school. She complained incessantly about having to perform the show in front of her peers, Grade 9s. I had to dance around her complaints, rather too frequently, and I found this tiresome. I created her "Professor" character based on her behaviour in my English 9 class. If anyone was going to argue academic business with me, it would be Inge. Surprisingly, she became a positive negotiator when two of the actors engaged in rather an intense philosophical battle. Inge demonstrated talent as a highly skilled arbitrator .

I hope that she will come to see that, rather than functioning as a person who argues constantly with authority, and often with futile results (McConnell, 2003), she could instead arbitrate between different groups in a classroom debate or discussion.

Julie, a Grade 8 student, admits to being very shy but her on-stage presence was

remarkable. She was a sheer delight to work with: always positive and kind to everyone around her. Clearly Julie enjoyed the process from start to finish. Julie is a pianist, and I gave her a piece to learn as part of the performance: *That's What Friends Are For*. Though the piece was a challenge, she diligently took the chart home and practiced it. For the first two performances, I played it for her, but she decided she was going to learn it . As she improved, it was thrilling to watch her confidence grow day by day.

Michelle, a Grade 9 student, is a prolific reader and writer and has the capacity to be a rigorous academic student, but she often chooses to under-perform. Michelle was, at times, a negative contributor to the group, though her negativity played a very important part in the process. Michelle negated the scenes that I imposed on the actors. I do not blame her for that behaviour. My scenes were stilted and did not come from their experiences. Ironically, the new ending came out of conflict between Michelle and me. It evolved into a comedic scene and I am grateful for her contributions. Sometimes a little devil's advocate was exactly what we needed to move the process along.

Mikael Josephinski, a Grade 8 male student, was a positive contributor to the process, though his participation was not without conflict. He was an   optimistic, albeit naïve young man, who had a great deal of difficulty infusing realistic drama into the process. He became increasingly critical over the serious components of the play.

"It's getting to be way too depressing!" became his mantra. He threatened to quit at one point, because according to him life was a bowl of cherries; scenes such as the dysfunctional family, the bully montage, or the school bully scenes were both unrealistic and unnecessary. His attitude reminded me of the description of the adjudicator for Hugh Anderson's playbuilt show, explained in the tapestry section. According to Mikael, his world was a place of eternal bliss and

the rest of the actors were completely wrong in their thinking! Looking back on this, I asked

Mikael in September 2004, if he remembered his feelings about the play being too depressing.

He laughed at himself, saying that he certainly does not feel that way at all now. He recognized

how much he had matured since the playbuilding project days. However, thinking back to

moments inside the project, the next student challenged Mikael's view of the world and their

argument nearly ended our project.

Noel is a complex young man. Diagnosed with a number of health issues, he often misses

school because of them. Luckily, he loves the theatre and has performed in shows, some

playbuilt. He is a member of a local teen talent agency that performs regularly in the Comox

Valley and Los Angeles. Mikael and Noel had a fierce argument during one of the playbuilding

sessions. Mikael complained that the play was too depressing, and threatened to quit if we kept

adding serious scenes. Noel challenged him stating, "Maybe you just haven't experienced any

pain in your life to really understand what this is all about!" That one statement began to change

Mikael's outlook on the play and the parallel process of his own life. Inge then took over and

mediated the conflict into a workable solution. It was a memorable moment to watch these

youngsters negotiate both a play and the reality of their own lived experiences. Sometimes they

were forced to confront issues that ended their innocence. As a Mother and a teacher, these

epiphanies were bittersweet to witness as the students grappled with new paradigms, sometimes

having to let go of what they thought was the truth, in favour of a new set of truths.

Molly-Lee, a Grade 8 student, is a petite young lady, but to quote Shakespeare: "though

she is but little, she is fierce!" Molly Lee was a driving force in the production. She is a gifted

Highland dancer who is used to competition and intense discipline in the arts. I relied on her

professionalism during the process. Molly-Lee's optimism kept many of the actors focused on

the work. She believed in the reality of the performance whereas others simply did not believe the process would eventually become a play. Her Highland dance scene was a highlight for me.

Nathan, a Grade 7 student, revealed early into the process personal information regarding bullying experiences. Often tearful while recounting his stories, the group rallied around him. I was grateful for his honesty because it paved the way for others to take the risks required for a collective creation. Nathan was a positive force within the group who grew tremendously in his performance.

Ron Crush, a Grade 8 student, struggles with emotional issues ,missing a few rehearsals due to lack of commitment. When he was there, his ideas and post-analysis work of the scenes were valuable. He had a keen directorial eye and I listened to his opinion when discussing aspects of the show's content. He had some personality clashes with a few of the cast members, but by performance time he had solved them. He stopped sharing his ideas with the group though, and only whispered his suggestions to me. Perhaps he was tired of trying to get his voice heard over the screaming masses.

Sarai, a female Grade 9 student, is a very difficult person to get to know. (I chose this spelling of her pseudonym, because Sarah was the name of our sound technician.) She is guarded with adults and often displayed emotional outbursts, if her schoolwork was piling up. She would try to miss rehearsal, giving me a myriad of excuses. I would implore her to stay and then she would be simply miserable. Luckily, after ½ hour, she would re-focus and usually end up offering valuable contributions to the process. I believe the process and product helped with her self- confidence, but she would most likely deny it. Sarai was the most critical student of me as a teacher/director.

Seth, a Grade 9 student, complained of having no friends and engaged in fierce mood

swings. One minute he was deliriously happy, running full throttle through the Drama room, the next minute, he was sitting in the corner, depressed, or so angry he could have ripped nails out of stage- flats with his bare teeth! My interactions with Seth were often punitive. I spent at least 1/3 of the rehearsal time trying to calm him down without completely losing my cool and sending him out the door. Furthermore, he would spend inordinate amounts of time whipping the other young boys into frenzy, until I had three little Grade 7 boys terrorizing up and down the hallways with Seth encouraging them all the way. He volunteered to fix the stage- flats and, because of his solitary determination, refusing any help, ended up accidentally breaking the hinges. When the girls threatened to quit, because of his behaviour, I laid out strict behavioural expectations for him, and for the entire cast. If he could not meet them, then he would have to leave the show. Thank goodness he agreed to comply. Once we switched over into performance mode, his behavioural improved and we were able to complete our project.

Ironically, his contributions to the show were among the finest. He was the first to memorize his lines, and the one person who came up with the most original blocking of scenes. He willingly stayed behind to paint sets, break flats (oops), and help repair them.

Skyler Soles, a male Grade 9 student, was so enthusiastic, so innovative and optimistic, that I believe we would have not have reached performance level without him. His ideas were fresh, daring and full of unique imagery. If there was an award for best cast member, Skyler would be everyone's choice. He contributed immensely to the project; he brought everyone up to his level of performance. He recently landed a principal role in the Comox Valley's production of *Into the Woods*. I believe playbuilding contributed to Skyler's negotiation skills, but I also believe he would have developed them without this project. I am   grateful he chose to participate. Without Skyler, the play may not have reached its goal.

Wesley, a male Grade 9 student of large stature, has long thick curly black hair usually shielding his eyes, making it difficult to connect with him physically and emotionally. Wesley is a highly skilled actor and writer. Without him and Skyler, this production would not have made it to the final stages. Wesley has an impressive work ethic; he never missed a single rehearsal, even when he was ill. Yet Wesley reported to me that he did not like the process and felt that it was mostly my fault. I did not discipline the actors enough, according to him. I explained to him that I was not able to audition students; I had to work with whoever volunteered. He was used to working with auditioned groups and had not made that connection. I was reticent to be too hard on some students because I was concerned they would quit. I could not risk this, thus I employed a far softer approach to actor discipline than I normally would. Wesley was highly critical of my directorial skills, but kept his opinions to himself until long after the show. He confided that he did not enjoy the playbuilding process at all.

Sixteen actors participated in the playbuilding process. All students gave permission for their data to be published in this study, but only nine parents signed consent forms. The consent forms were mailed to our school librarian, Ms. Tami Jerome. Ms. Jerome kept these documents in a locked cabinet until June 30, 2004, whereby she turned them over to me. All data were kept in a locked filing cabinet and were read on June 30, 2004. The Journals were kept in a locked filing cabinet. The nine participants with parental consent forms signed were as follows: Julie, Michelle, MollyLee, Nathan, Noel, Ron Crush, Sarai, Seth, and Skyler. I can only report on the data obtained from these students. The data for remaining seven students cannot be used from this point onwards.

Data Sources and Procedure for Data collection

In order to triangulate as much of the data as possible, I chose seven different methods of

data collection: intake interviews, exit interviews, actor exit questionnaires, elementary and

middle school audience questionnaires, my own reflective journal, students creative writing

prompt journals, and five transcribed interviews of successful playbuilders in British Columbia.

Guba and Lincoln's (1989) model for judging the qualitative research was employed to validate

my data sources and collection:

> Prolonged Engagement.
> …is substantial involvement at the site of the inquiry, in order to overcome the effects of misinformation, distortion, or present "fronts" to establish the rapport and build the trust necessary to uncover constructions, and to facilitate immersing oneself in and understanding the context's culture. pp. 303-304)

> The project officially began January 1, 2004; however, I had met with the Drama Club

students from October 4, 2003 until April 30, 2004. Officially, the 16 participants were with me,

under my guidance in terms of playbuilding, from January to April 30, 2004.

> Persistent Observation. |
> …is sufficient observation to enable the evaluator to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and (to focus) on them in detail (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 304).

> As part of my reflection, I kept a detailed Master's Journal, highlighting the positive and

negative outcomes of each rehearsal. Journal excerpts appear in the text of the project.

> Peer Debriefing.
> … is the process of engaging, with a disinterested peer in extended and extensive discussions of one's findings, conclusions, tentative analyses and occasionally field stresses, the purpose of which is both "testing out" the findings with someone who has no contractual interest in the situation and also helping to make propositional that tacit and implicit information that the evaluator might possess. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237)

> Though I engaged in frequent conversations about the process to my fellow staff

members, my husband served as the consistent peer de-briefer. Dave is also a public school

teacher; he teaches severe behaviour students in an alternate setting as part of School District 71,

Comox Valley, and has a keen understanding of developing adolescents. He was a constant

source of help and inspiration during the entire process.

Negative Case Analysis.

...is the process of revising working hypotheses in the light of hindsight, with an eye toward developing and refining a given hypothesis (or set of them) until it accounts for all known cases….probably the qualitative data analyst ought not to expect that all cases would fit into appropriate categories. But when some reasonable number do, then negative case analysis provides confidence that the evaluator has tried and rejected all rival hypotheses, save the appropriate one. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 238)

I began this project with the intention of   exploring social responsibility through playbuilding . While I attempted to engage in topics of social responsibility such as bullying, peer pressure, drugs, moral intelligence, character education and social justice, I found that the "play for the teacher" was quite different than the "play for the students" (Bolton, 1979). Although we began by exploring social responsibility we ended up exploring self-absorption. Should I have been surprised by this, in light of the fact that the students were from middle school? According to Dave McConnell, the end result was all too familiar:

A major task, if not "the task" of the middle school age group is to determine where they fit in, and the question that longs for an answer is, "Who am I?" The ability to reason hypothetically also creates David Elkind's imaginary audience that middle school student's play to which is a false belief that they are the focus of all others. It is *egocentrism* at the early adolescent stage. (Elkind, 1967, as cited in McConnell, 2003, p.10)

Yet, according to the audience surveys, topics of social responsibility *were* transmitted to the school audiences and evidence of this exploration was documented. However, the major theme of the play (unanimously titled *This Is Our Life* by the cast) was about the egocentrism that is at the heart of the middle school students' experience. I was unable to pull the students outside of their own experiences to explore external social pressures. The narrative kept coming back home to them and I eventually accepted the inevitable. However, I believe as teacher-researcher that I engaged in social responsibility by providing a venue whereby middle school students could work through the turbulent issues of early adolescence in a safe and caring environment. Betty Jane Wagner (1979) believes the following:

> Educational drama performs a valuable service in helping a child overcome immature egocentricity. A child adapts communication to influence another person; in order to be successful he or she must take into account the point of view of the other. (p. 270)

Thus, the very act of providing a venue such as a playbuilding project for middle school students is, unto itself, being socially responsible, for what better methods exist for representing student voice, student concerns, student input, than a collective creation intended for a target audience? Bray, (1991) re-iterates the notion of student voice:

> Remember that the play belongs to the kids, not to you. The more it appears that you had nothing to do with the play, the better you did your job. That can be a bit of a letdown, but it is a necessary part of a really good playbuilding process. (p. 21)

> Progressive Subjectivity.
> Prior to engaging in any activity at the site or in the context in which the investigation is to proceed, the inquirer records his or her a priori construction-what he or she expects to find once the study is under way, and archives that record…at regular intervals throughout the study, the inquirer again records his or her developing construction. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237)

> From December 5 until June 30, I kept a reflective teacher journal, documenting the

progress of the playbuilding project. References to this journal can be found in the annotated script of *This Is Our Life.*

> Member Checks
> This is the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility. This is the process of testing hypotheses, data, preliminary categories and interpretations with members of the stake holding groups from whom the original constructions were collected. For instance, as portions of the case study are written, members of stake holding groups are asked to react to what has been presented as representing their construction. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989 p. 238)

> The official script was dramaturged by me, a process whereby a writer, often the director

of a playbuilding group, records the improvisations of the group and converts them into a working script. Often I would supply the actors with a newer, improved version of their script, and, often they would reject what I had written, supplying me with additional information, hoping I would "get it right" next time!

The script was finalized by March 2004, but playbuilding, by its nature, is a very fluid process. Versions of the script would come and go, but by March we had a reasonable working script, which captured the essence of their work. However, the script had a limiting effect on some of the actors. Here is an excerpt from my *Masters Journal,* which highlights the limitations of a playbuilt script:

1   *Sarai said: I like the process way better than the product.*

2   *Kids can't remember their lines either.*

3   *Sarai said writing down the lines actually made it more difficult.*

(from my reflective journal, March 29, 2004, rehearsal on a Pro-D Day

Jackie Macdonald adds her experiences on the limitations of writing down a script:

CH: Did anyone ever dramaturge the play or was it all improvised and memorized?

JM: No, no writing down occurred. They   knew what their scene was because they made it up! It was their own.

CH: And was it fluid in the sense that in performance would it change slightly?

JM: Yes

CH: To me that's like Living Theatre. It's like an organism feeding on the audience's responses; it's not stifled and packaged.

JM: Absolutely

CH: It's living, breathing theatre

JM: It was never written down. The only thing that was written down was the order of the scenes. (personal communication, January 17, 2004)

Recruitment of Participants

The student body of the middle school was informed of the formation of a new Drama Club, through newsletters and morning announcements. There were no auditions and initially, 40 students showed up on a regular basis, Mondays and Thursdays, from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm. But

by November, only 16 participants remained. Students were free to quit the project at any time. All 16 students signed the consent form, though only nine parents mailed their consent forms to the librarian at the middle school.

I did not know which students had parental consent forms signed until June 30th, 2004 so this did not affect the production in any way. I do not think parents deliberately refused to send in the forms; I believe it was just a fact of busy parental life; some forms were sent in and some were not.

Procedures for Data Collection

A written intake interview was conducted with each student. In addition, each participant was asked to keep a drama journal; it contained personal responses to twenty creative writing prompts, written by me, used to stimulate the playbuilding process (see Chapter Four of this project). A written exit interview was handed out to all participants, but unfortunately only four of the actors who had parental consent returned it to me. Finally an actor questionnaire was administered to all 16 participants on the last day of performance, April 30, 2004.

As teacher-researcher, I kept a reflective journal from December 5, 2003, until June 30, 2004. Audience questionnaires were administered to the elementary and middle school audiences: 67 elementary students from two elementary feeder schools in Comox responded to the questionnaire, and 59 middle school students responded from two middle schools, one in Courtenay and one in Comox.

As part of my reflective-practice, I interviewed five of British Columbia's successful playbuilders. A tapestry of the issues I addressed in the interviews is provided as part of this project.

Procedures for Data Analysis

The intake and exit interview responses were word processed and summarized under major themes. Actor survey questionnaires, along with elementary and middle school audience survey questionnaires , were tabulated and converted into percentage scores. Student journals based on the writing prompts were analysed and used to annotate the script of *This Is Our Life.*

Finally, the five interviews of BC's successful playbuilders were summarized under major themes, used in the literature review and as a separate tapestry.

Data Analysis

Actor Intake Interviews

At the beginning of a playbuilding process, an actor intake survey is often conducted to determine the previous theatrical experience of the group and where the groups' interests lie, with regard to searching for a topic. Seven themes emerged from the questions.

Question #1: Have you ever seen a polished performance of a play or musical? Is so, what was the name of the production and what was your opinion of its worth?

Major Theme #1. Most of the performances these students saw were local amateur shows. I was the principal actress in two of them. The majority of the performances were from Courtenay's Rainbow Youth Theatre Company (even *Les Miserables—*children's edition). No one mentioned attending a professional musical in a big city.

Here is a sampling of responses:

Julie: Yes I saw The Music Man. I thought it was very well done.

Michelle: One play I saw was Oliver (Oliver Twist) and I really enjoyed it. It thought it was very well done.

Skyler Soles: Les Miserables It was very well done. I think it was the best play I've ever seen.

Question #2: How do you define creativity? Do you consider yourself creative? Why or why not? If not you, who do you know that is creative, according to your definition?

Major theme #2. The students identified creativity as coming up with unique constructs, through a variety of media: writing, drawing, dance and acting. All of the nine participants were willing to define themselves as creative.

Here is a sampling of responses:

Julie: I think creativity is the colours and impressions you get from life. I think I am creative because I love to imagine things.

Nathan: I define creativity as not using an idea or anything else the regular was it should. Like instead of a cookie jar lid, use it as a Frisbee.

Sarai: Creativity: the ability to think outside of the box and to see situations in many perspectives.

Skyler Soles: Creativity is doing or saying something that no one ever comes up with before. I consider myself creative because I sometimes have pretty original ideas.

Question #3. What specific performing experiences have you had to date? What specific "team-oriented" experiences have you had to date?

Major theme #3. The students had very little performing experience. The one show they had been in was our own Drama Club Christmas show, *The Little Match Girl*.

Here is a sampling of responses:

Julie: I perform in piano concerts.

Michelle: Just lately, I was in a school Christmas play called "The Little Match Girl."

Molly Lee: I dance

Nathan: I have been in a play called "The Little Match Girl"

Ron Crush: I have participated in Breath, Crossing Lines and Crossing Lines 2

Sarai: I have had eight band performances, two in festivals and six in front of the school. I have performed in The Little Match Girl (a Christmas play), in front of the school and

parents.

Seth: Drama Club

Skyler Soles: Many school/church skits or plays. Beside school team events, not much.

Question #4: If you could choose any topics for a play, what topics would you choose?

Major theme #4. The life of a teenager became the dominant choice, and as a separate topic, war. I imagine the topic of war was mentioned because the drama classes had recently performed their own collective creation for Remembrance Day, 2003.

Here is a sampling of responses:

Julie: I would chose "the life of a teen" to try to tell people what it's really like.

Michelle: Maybe something funny or laid-back

MollyLee: I would pick "the life of a teen" and what they go through

Nathan: I would choose the husbands of the wives in Vietnam that went to war and everybody was debating for peace

Ron Crush: Suicide, teen problems in general drugs, abuse, rape

Sarai: Topics for a play that I would choose would be: a fantasy play, including a protagonist, antagonist, a battle and a friendship scene
-life through teenager's eyes
-a perfect world.

Seth: Drugs/peer pressure

Skyler Soles: Ethics, war, or possibly, human nature

Question #5. Why do you consider these topics important for students?

Major theme #5. To assist teens in coping with everyday situations.

Here is a sampling of responses:

Molly Lee: To know what it is like to be a teen and to know about the choices you have to make

Sarai: These topics are important because fantasy uses your imagination
-life through teenager's eyes allows us to express our views of the world
-a perfect world would allow us to express our opinions

Skyler Soles: I think they're important for everyone, not just students, as they affect us on an everyday basis

Question #6: What do you think a workshop in Playbuilding will be about? What do you expect to happen over the next 8 weeks?

Major theme #6. The students thought the workshop would be about creating a play. This was their prime objective.

Here is a sampling of responses:

Julie: I think we will try to build a play and perform it

Michelle: The play we're doing is going to be about life as a teenager

Molly Lee: I think it would be fun and you would learn cool things-the next eight weeks will be fun and enjoyable

Nathan: I think a "workshop" will be with groups given topics to perform plays. In 8 weeks I think we will be doing lots of workshop activities

Sarai: I think that through a series of exercises we will continue to put together scenes that will make up a play

Skyler Soles: That we will create a play that's not necessarily good, but at least it's our opinions

Question #7. Why are you considering volunteering for the Playbuilding workshop? What do you hope to get out of this experience?

Major theme #7. The students hoped to obtain more dramatic experience and to meet people.

Here is a sampling of responses:

Julie: I hope to learn more about acting

Molly Lee: I love speaking and acting and I want to become a better actor

Ron Crush: the acting experience and to meet new people

Sarai: I hope to get more dramatic experience

Seth: I hope to be more involved with people

Skyler Soles: For experience in drama, for my voice to be heard and because it's fun to become used to the drama environment

Actor Exit Interviews

The following is a report on answers to the exit interview obtained from Julie, Sarai, Seth, and Skyler Soles. I was only able to retrieve four exit interviews from the nine students who had parental consent forms signed. Other exit forms were retrieved but these students did not have parental consent forms signed.

Part A: The Process

Playbuilding has two components: the process and the product. Therefore the first section of the Actor Exit interview focussed on the process aspects of the experience, while Part B emphasized aspects of the production (the product).

Question #1. What was the highlight moment of this playbuilding experience?

Major theme #1. The first real performance was a highlight, and simply working through the process was also mentioned in a positive light.

Julie: When we all got along and the play fell into place.

Sarai: Probably our very first performance because this whole play thing became a reality. I came to realize that we did it, and what had taken us 2-3 hours to perform only a week ago, was now a 1 hour long production telling our thoughts, views and experiences on life as a whole.

Seth: We weren't afraid to be ourselves a.k.a. "Me!"

Skyler Soles: Our first real performance in front of an elementary school.

Question #2: Why do you consider this moment or event a "highlight"?

Major theme #2. The actors' words correlate with Lang's (2002) findings on the "gifts of collective creation" (p.56). Their comments come from a sense of self-improvement, a heightened development of social skills and community awareness.

Julie: It was great to see all of us working together and actually accomplishing something worthwhile.

Sarai: Now, after 6 months of hard work, lots of acting, an emotional rollercoaster ride, a script written by us was now turning into a performance, soon to be taken around the Comox Valley.

Skyler: We got to see the look on the kids' faces and hear them laugh at all the jokes. It's nice to know that your hard work is appreciated.

Question #3. Do you think you have developed any **new skills** as a result of participating in a playbuilding workshop?

Major theme #3. Comments from Lang's (2002) categories are evident; self and group cooperation skills dominate this category.

Julie: Yes, I gained way, way more confidence and I found that I could talk to people (especially guys) more!

Sarai: Yes, while working in a Drama Team, you need artistic as well as, creative skills, something, which I was lacking. As this play progressed, I have developed these skills further.

Seth: I have developed a skill of speaking more in public and have less fear of being myself I public.

Skyler Soles: Probably better at acting in general, and co-operation in large groups.

Question #4. What was it like being part of a socially constructed play?

Major theme #4. Lang's (2002) second category of cooperation and caring in the

classroom community and her fourth category titled "Knowledge" resonate with these

comments.

> Julie: It was a lot like teenage life because it was very emotional. Lots of people quit and it was hard for everyone to agree, but we did accomplish our goal in the end.

> Sarai: Some days were so tough that you just wanted to scream and you were ready to explode. However, there was a lot of humour displayed by every individual, thus creating all around, hysterical laughter. This was more of a learning experience, because when you are forced to complete such a huge project, with so many people you tend to discover things about people you never knew before, and these discoveries can seriously affect the way you look at someone. This may have been a hard, tough experience; however, it has been one of the best of my life.

> Seth: It was fun. We had fun just playing around with different ideas and peoples' thoughts.

> Skyler Soles: It can get frustrating, but is really enjoyable, especially seeing the finished product.

Furthermore I am fascinated with how Julie touched upon the notion of a parallel process

at work when answering this question.

She answered: "It was a lot like teenage life…" and thus made contact with the parallel

process at work in our creative endeavour. I do not think anyone else articulated that.

Question #5. Were there any positive or negative components to co-creating a work of

art?

Major theme #5. Lang's (2002) third notion of "art" resonates here. Students really

obtained a hands-on experience with the creative process through playbuilding.

> Julie: Well there were times when everyone was frustrated, and not listening to each other, so yeah, some days were better than others. Also some people got very bossy and negative to everyone else so they were hard to work with. Also some days no one paid attention, so nothing was accomplished.

> Sarai: Probably the best aspect of co-creating a work of art is that everyone is able to come up with ideas, thus creating many different levels of humour and intensity. The most negative aspect of this whole process was that when you have so many people with

so many ideas, some very heated discussions/arguments can break out.

Seth: I think more negative (laugh) just because people cut down ideas that other people shared…thus making the playbuilding difficult

Skyler: I wouldn't exactly call it a work of art, but it definitely let me get to know people a lot better.

Question #6. If you could think of three words that you think your fellow actors would use to describe you and your participation in this project, what would they be?

Major theme #6. The word "fun" came up three times. I remember when, as beginning teachers, we were not allowed to use the word fun to describe our work. It was not a serious enough word, but for the students, fun is where they want to be. Much of their day-to-day school experience is not considered fun; therefore, playbuilding was a gift to them. As teachers, we endeavour to make their educational experiences "fun," but they are not always perceived as such. Here is a sampling of responses:

Julie: Shy, different, fun (I hope)

Sarai: Stressful, crazy, fun. I chose stressful because there is always a lot of pressure put on you when you are performing I chose crazy, because backstage was always crazy, trying to find props, not missing your cues and just because it was so crowded. Finally I chose fun, because a lot of friendships were built during this very intense process and these friendships will remain lifelong.

Seth: Funny, different, weird

Skyler Soles: Spontaneous, loud and laid-back.

Question #7. Ten years from now, what do you think you will remember about this experience?

Major theme #7. Good memories of self and group successes.

Julie: Well I will probably remember all of it because so many good things happened all the way. But things that I will remember the most is how we could all relate to each other

when we got along

Sarai: I don't know, I'll have to tell you in 10 years, because in 10 years I will have had different experiences, changing me, so what I remember most clearly today may not be what I remember in 10 years. I will never forget Mrs. Harvey.

Seth: That I was a part of it and I think as long as we remember, we will never forget!

Skyler Soles: Oh yeah, I'm already making jokes and such about the play.

Question #8. Would you recommend participation in a similar playbuilding workshop to your friends or fellow students? Why or why not?

Major theme #8. While most of the actors stated they would recommend playbuilding to their friends, I was most intrigued by Julie's response. She acknowledged the stress involved in the creative process and also recognized that some of the friends she has chosen are perhaps not as strong as her.

Julie: No I would not because I think this experience is too stressful for them and a lot of my peers would drop out because they think its boring or because they can't work well with other people in that type of environment.

Sarai: Yes, and I would suggest they do it with people they don't know too well, as well as your close friends, because when you actually start building a play and relating your experiences to the play you learn and realize so many things that you were too oblivious to notice.

Seth: It is a very fun idea. I would like to tell my friends about this playbuilding workshop.

Skyler Soles: Yes, because it's a fun rewarding experience and *ahem* it looks good on a resume.

Part B: The Product

The questions from Part B were directly aimed at aspects of the touring production *This is Our Life*. I separated process from product, but noted one actor, Julie, made the link between the two. From this section, themes continued to emerge around each question.

Question #1. *Once we moved from process to product, did you notice any changes amongst the Drama Team?*

Major theme #9. The actors became much more focussed when a performance was on the line.

Julie: Yes, we could all get along more because the writing was over and we got down to performing. The amazing part is no one got really stressed about the performances.

Sarai: Yes, there were many changes, some not so subtle. Our director went from crazy stressed to psycho stressed and then that stress was relayed onto the cast, as we became more intense and less focused when performing.

Seth: Yes, people became more serious than when we started

Skyler Soles: People became a little more serious and it was way more hectic

Question #2. Complete these sentences: (only the ones that apply to you*). I really enjoyed the "process" of creating the play because:*

Major theme #10. The process was unique and exciting for these students. They felt their voice counted, and they experienced the power- potential of their own ideas.

Julie: We could all pool ideas from our lives and it made it sort of a connecting experience, with yourself and others

Sarai: You have such creative license and the possibilities are endless. I remember being told a topic and then creating a scene around it.

Seth: It was something new that I wanted to try.

Skyler Soles: We got to use creativity and involve our own personal ideas and experiences.

Question #3. What I especially liked about the "product" work, the performing aspect was:

Major theme #11. The playbuilding process fostered a sense of well-being among the

participants. They speak from a place of confidence, and reveal their inner epiphanies; and most importantly, they were able to articulate and measure their own emotional growth after the project.

Here is a sampling of responses:

Sarai: As we continued to perform our skills as actors dramatically improved and scenes that were funny before emerged into something really funny; on the intense scenes, some of them slowly emerged into a level of intensity that no one ever saw coming

Skyler Soles: When we were asked questions at the end.

Julie: Since completing the play, I am more confident in myself because I have told people things I have never told anyone before. Now I feel like it is all in the past and when I told everything, I was not shunned or hated. I also made new relationships with people.

Sarai: You begin to realize others have had similar experiences to you so you are not as alone as you thought.

Skyler Soles: I discovered I could perform in front of a large audience

Question #4. Since completing the play, I have some new skills such as:

Major theme #12. Their voices were heard and will continue to be heard, as a result of their newly developed skills.

Julie: Acting, talking to people, not being stuck in my shell

Sarai: Well definitely confidence and courage to speak up for what I believe in. My interpersonal skills have improved as well as my artistic skills

Seth: Speaking in public, being myself, keeping quiet

Skyler Soles: Highland dancing and Scottish accents

Question #6. If I had to choose between the two, I would say I enjoyed the (Process or Product) more.

Major theme #13. Both process and product were balanced. For Julie and Seth the end

result was the pay-off. For Sarai and Skyler Soles the process allowed more creative freedom and

fun. Traditional scripted theatre appeared stifling to both Sarai and Skyler Soles.

Here is a sampling of responses:

Julie: PRODUCT. I loved performing our ideas in front of people and I bonded with people during that time. That is also when I became way more confident.

Sarai: PROCESS. You have more creative freedom in the process. However, I found it easier performing someone else's' words as opposed to my own. It is easier to perform without a script because you become dependant on the script.

Seth: PRODUCT: The product is the best part of the playbuilding. In the end, it all comes down to teens and teens' communication. But the best part was you got to see all your hard work.

Skyler Soles: PROCESS. It was less serious and more just plain fun, unlike the hectic "change things last minute," performance mode. Also constant performances can get rather repetitive and annoying.

The Transition from Process to Product

The most fundamental requirement for devising theatre is a passion or a desire to say something; a need to question or make sense of a starting point that encourages you to investigate further through a variety of processes and close enquiry. (Oddey, 1994, p. 42)

The move to product was a comforting one for me, as there was much less "unknown"

territory. Publicity had to be undertaken, as did set design, construction, painting; touring

schedules and production schedules with precise rehearsal times had to be drawn up; school

maintenance had to be contacted for transporting the set, and on and on it went. This should have

been a smooth experience for our group, but the actors had very little, if any, theatrical

experience. This was a vertical learning scale.

I assigned the actors technical tasks, but it took enormous amounts of nagging to get any

of them to follow through. Eventually some cast members did things like make the ties for the

tie-day sequence, but these were often found stepped on, or uncared for, in the bottom of the

costume boxes. I had to buy bananas, pop and chips for every scene, and the garbage was often not picked up. I refused to give up however; student accountability was one of the most important skills for them to acquire and the majority of them eventually took responsibility for their tasks.

I had to train the sound technician, the lighting board operator, and the video technician about their personal task and about theatre protocol in general. I had to train a backstage stage manager, who received very little respect from the actors. Students often made journal comments about the hectic nature of backstage; next time I will avoid having any backstage area whatsoever.

Our set consisted of 10 multi-coloured blocks (approx $2' \times 2' \times 2'$) made of ½ inch plywood. They were built by the construction class at the senior high school. The blocks each had one word of the play's title: This. Is. Our. Life, painted in very fancy lettering, with thanks to the art teacher and his classes. The art teacher was extremely helpful in that he had participated in collective creations before; he had written a number of scripts with and for young people and had a very thorough knowledge of what would work in terms of a set. We were able to utilize our District maintenance department for transportation of the set, from school to school.

Imparting knowledge of theatre protocol was also difficult. Very few of them knew how to behave in a professional capacity; it was frustrating for the ones who **did** have performance experience. Those students were used to a high standard of behaviour and certain members of the cast would not comply. My Journal entries reflect the mounting frustrations that I had to deal with. Most of the technical duties fell to me: I knew, to get through this play, I had to harness every theatre technique I had ever acquired, plus a huge amount of group psychology to move this process into a theatrical event. It wasn't just a case of Mohammed coming to the mountain;

this was Mohammed actually pushing the mountain with brute strength! Once we were fully in performance mode, I should have been able to relax and enjoy the fruits of our collective labour, but very little relaxing occurred! There were still jobs to be done, actors to be herded, a technical crew to be supervised, and the entire experience continued to drain me physically and emotionally. At one point, I developed severe chest pains and reduced capacity to inhale. I recognized these symptoms as anxiety attacks, but I also knew I had to complete this project. I often wondered if my physical health was worth jeopardizing, but I kept pressing on, hoping and praying for a miracle. We eventually made it through the eight performances and I lived to tell the tale. However, I will never put myself through that amount of stress again, or will I? Such is the life in the theatre.

The actors' lack of experience was evident in both process and product capacities. However, the magic of playbuilding is that it affords the opportunity to develop communication or group dynamic skills, and technical theatrical skills that can be transferred to other productions. Based on real gains in the arts -based community, my actors did obtain the confidence to move from a school-based experience to auditioned community ventures, and they were successful.

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Audience Survey Results

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The elementary and middle school surveys were given to staff members prior to the performances. I received 67 out of 67 completed elementary surveys, and 59 out of 59 completed middle school surveys. I was mindful to give the surveys to staff members who had previously completed their Masters, thus capitalizing on their previous experience. These colleagues were very careful with the distribution and return of the documents. I thoroughly appreciated their cooperation and diligence in this regard. The Elementary and Middle School Survey results, plus

the sampling of written audience responses can be found in Appendix E.

Major themes from both the elementary and middle school audiences are summarized here:

Major Theme #1: Elementary Audiences

The play was well received by the elementary aged students. Topics of social responsibility were articulated by the actors and positively received, for the most part, by the audiences. With any show there will be critics and every show has room for improvement. *This Is Our Life* was playbuilt especially for Grade 6 students entering middle school. The purpose of the play was to explore, through comedy and drama, aspects of middle school life while operating within the realm of social responsibility topics. It is interesting to note in the percentage scores, that 64% of the students surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that if "they" were playbuilding a script "different "teen issues would be represented. Research on adolescent development constantly points to egocentrism as the main feature of the early adolescent. Many teens think that what they are going through is a completely unique situation, never before experienced by another human being on the planet. I tried desperately to steer the actors away from making this play an internal representation of themselves, in favour of more externalized issues of social responsibility but their voice won out. They gave a textbook middle school representation of themselves. I would posit that in any playbuilding project with middle school students, the same issues will appear again and again: friendships, relationships, bullying, aloneness, fears of beginning middle schools, and self-deprecating laughter when looking back. Carole Tarlington confirms this in our interview:

> CT: So by working from real peoples' stories, I think it's up to the playbuilder
> to say "hmm, what source can we work from that will push these kids away from the
> typical issues? Because if you just say "What do you want to do a play about?", they will
> answer "drugs, relationships, the usual stuff."

And...

CH: So in terms of the issues that teens are willing to take on now, how has this changed over your career? Or are kids any more closer to looking at things outside of themselves, in terms of community issues?

CT: Not really, I don't think so. Teenagers are always terribly self-absorbed. (personal communication, March 31, 2004)

My recommendation for future playbuilders working with middle school students, is try and steer the students away from the stereotypical issues and use real stories about issues other than life at middle school. Then your cast will be less likely to slip into a play about their lives and focus more on external societal issues of importance. Yet our goal was to represent life at middle school, both positively and negatively, and according to the elementary audiences, we fulfilled our task. However, the middle school audiences were far more critical of our choices. The survey statistics and the middle school comments can be found in Appendix E.

Major Theme #2: Middle School Audiences

Judging from the numbers, the middle school students were not as engaged as the elementary students. They were certainly more critical of the play but this play was primarily intended for a Grade 6 audience.

39% of the middle school students strongly agreed or agreed that "they didn't relate to this play at all," while 37% strongly disagreed/agreed. Because the statement was a negative one ("I didn't relate to this play at all"), this may have caused some confusion.

I was impressed that 61% of middle school students strongly agreed or agreed that "this play acted out bullying issues that were based on reality". Only 8% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 56% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that, "the play was about real issues that these actors wanted to talk about," while only 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the same statement. 53% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement: "I was

able to understand the actors most of the time" while only 19% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

42% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the actors' experiences were **totally**

different from their own personal experiences, while 24% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Again, the statement was framed in a negative voice and that often causes confusion with

surveys. Finally, 45% of the middle school respondents strongly agreed or agreed that "this idea

of playbuilding is a good way for students' to get their ideas and their thoughts out in public,"

while only 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed. I was pleased with these statistics and not

concerned with the somewhat negative response to questions.

It was the actors' decision to try the play at two very divergent middle schools. Their

toughest audience, due to its large size, was the middle school in Courtenay. Those students were

very positive; it broke a lot of barriers for my middle school students to play to an audience

across town. The actors came away from that experience with a new respect for students from

divergent school areas. Playing to a Comox middle school was another break through in

attitudes among cast members. Comox middle schools have a somewhat rival relationship, yet

meeting with and performing for that population was a wonderful learning experience for the

participants. Here lay another act of social responsibility and it unfolded as a domino effect of

social change: by promoting understanding and empathy between different middle school

populations through the process of playbuilding, this fostered understanding, compassion, and

empathy between different local teen groups; this led to the creation of a more healthy,

productive, and tolerant group of teens in our community. It is not solely the content of a

playbuilt script that captures aspects of social responsibility within schools. It is in the "doing" of

the play that we find deeper links to socially responsible behaviour. When students from rival

schools meet each other, performer to audience member, they meet in an unusual circumstance:

the performer has something to share with the audience; the audience receives a gift from the performer and by being an attentive audience, it offers a gift to the performers. It is a cycle of selflessness, a cycle of gift giving. Performing for a strange peer group is a great act of courage; gracefully receiving a performance from a stranger peer group is a great gift of empathy and compassion. Are these values we wish to promote in our young people? Absolutely.

Andy Kempe, when breaking down the word *devise* (the British word for playbuilding) etymologically, ponders on one particular definition, *to bequeath.* He states:

> And that last synonym, bequeath: what a splendid word to link to drama with its resonance of gift. Drama though temporal and transient, should leave both participants and audience with something of value to be taken away. (2000, p. 64*)*

Of course, one could also study the emotional growth that occurs with actors as playbuilders when their work is positively received by audiences, especially peer audiences. David Beare, in his University of British Columbia thesis, explores the emotional stages of development that adolescents travel when engaging in collective creation. My interview with Beare is used in the Tapestry section of this Chapter.

The final survey conducted was with the actors themselves, after their final performance, April 30, 2004. These results can be found in Appendix E.

Major Theme #3: Actors

Of the 16 actors, 13 responded to the questionnaire. 69% of the actors felt strongly that people would gain confidence after being in a playbuilding group. 54% of the actors said they strongly agreed that the process part of playbuilding was enjoyable. Only 31% strongly agreed that they enjoyed the performance aspect, while 38% simply agreed. No actor disagreed with statement three. (*I really enjoyed the performance aspect of the playbuilding project).*

61% of the actors strongly agreed or agreed they felt safe to express their personal

information to the Drama Club. 69% strongly agreed or agreed that they would like to part of a future playbuilding group. 77% strongly agreed or agreed that a lot of people would gain confidence after being in a playbuilding group.

Overall the responses to this questionnaire confirmed that the project, for all of the ups and downs, was a success for the actors. The "play for the student" may have turned out quite differently than the "play for the teacher," but that was irrelevant. As I watched them laugh together during the final celebration at the Pizza Hut, with my husband, my children and our librarian, I felt confident that the entire project was very worthwhile. For that alone, I am grateful.

Chapter Four – Out of the Frying Pan and Into the Fire

Writing Prompts to Feed the Process

The final success of a performance of a play built show depends not on the quality of the performances, which is so important, but almost entirely on the quality of the thinking that has gone into the devising of the play. If the quality of thought and analysis and questioning is high enough, then all else will follow and many other shortcomings can be overlooked. (Bray, 1991, p. 21)

As this project encompasses two domains, English language arts and Drama, it was necessary to experiment with creative writing strategies within the process of playbuilding. To that end, I developed 20 writing prompts, which were used for three purposes:

1. to settle the class down with a ritual activity (discipline)

2. to stimulate the day's playbuilding work with a prompt that resonated from their previous days' collective ideas

3. to assist the students in representing their knowledge in a familiar format, creative writing, and then move that knowledge to an unfamiliar form (acting, playbuilding)

Background to the Creative Writing Prompts: Dialectical Journals

Many of the volunteer actors had me as their English 9 teacher, thus they were comfortable with the creative writing prompt activity. During my final master's course with Dr. Kathy Sanford, I was introduced to Dialectical Journals. (Beers & Samuels, 1998; Ediger, 2003; Edwards, 1991). *Dialectical journals*, sometimes called double-entry journals, foster meta-cognition or thinking about one's thinking. Entries are made on the left side and an analysis of ones own writing occurs directly opposite, on the right hand side of the page. Sometimes the left side contains rules of form (poetry, literary terms) quotes from books, creative writing prompts, or unit-specific vocabulary. I also used the left side of the page for recording student presentations. Students record, on the left -hand side, the "content" of a particular peer presentation, (such as a novel study or a speech), the name of the speaker, three key points from his or her speech, and three possible questions to ask the speaker. Later, on the right hand side,

the student write more information about the same presentation, answering questions, commenting further on the particular subject, adding a meta-conversation to the right -hand side of the page. Students also record information generated from discussions after the presentations. For some students, this method was puzzling. How dare I ask them to think about their own thoughts? And yet, once students were comfortable , they wanted to write everything in their dialectical journal. For many students, this was the most handwriting or printing they had done in nine years of schooling. Students were constantly dreaming up new things to write in their journal, or finding new ways of using the process. It was exciting to watch students transform the skill being taught.

Part Two of the journal was a section titled "Portfolio work in progress". This is where creative writing prompts were composed; from this journal, students could revise and then word process their final version of compositions.

From Creative Writing Prompts to Playbuilding

Since writing prompts were used in many English classes, the strategy provided inexperienced actors with a technique to bridge the gap between academic learning and this new idea, "playbuilding," which would eventually lead to **"**acting" Getting to that stage however, was quite another journey.

The 20 writing prompts were:

1. Why did you Join Drama Club at this school?

2. What does the word astonishing mean to you?

3. What is the significance of a glass of water?

4. What would you like to do a play about?

5. List five things you would do to help the students of your school if you were the Principal.

6. What is the most unfair thing at your school?

7. What is "unsafe" at your school?

8. Describe your morning to me.

9. Create a two-person scene that involves a critical incident.

10. End your scene with a line that leaves the audience hanging… (A cliff-hanger line)

11. Describe three negative things that might happen to you: mildly inconvenient, bad, and very bad: re-word the incidents so that they happened to fictitious people

11(a) Choose one of the fictitious incidents and create a critical incident from this: distance yourself from it—then employ empathy toward this person by writing:

If I were in _____shoes, I would want_____.

I would need_____, but, most of all, I would appreciate_____.

12. Respond to this sentence: Adults rarely listen to teens…

13. Respond to this prompt: "When I first started middle school…

14. Writing in Role: a Christmas Letter: an encounter with a homeless person. After reading a pre-text (in this case, a short story) choose one of the characters in the story

and write about what you have just experienced.

15. After reading the play *The Little Match Girl*, write a letter describing the morning events of the New Year, as depicted in the original story.

16. What is a dysfunctional family?

17. What is a perfect family?

18. Why did we do rainy day envelopes?

19. Why did we do a gratitude circle?

20. Describe the day you found out about the death of one of your fellow students. What do you remember of that day? Include imagery such as sounds, sights and smells. Describe the day like an omniscient observer from the beginning of the morning onwards.

Parents of nine participants returned permission forms for their child's work to be used in this study. I coded their writing prompts into themes and prepared summary responses for each prompt. The pre-texts and prompts were an excellent strategy for playbuilding, however I should have required the students to reflect more after the rehearsals and not simply before we started. The students were usually too tired from rehearsing to engage in post-reflective writing, but I will attempt that in a future playbuilding unit, especially if I am able to work with older students.

The first question: Why did you join Drama Club elicited two coded categories: personal improvement and skills acquisition. Fifty percent of the students wrote they hoped to overcome shyness as a result of the project while 50 percent wanted to gain, or improve theatrical skills.

The second question based on the word astonishing, came from Will Weigler's text titled

Strategies for Playbuilding (2001). Weigler describes the purpose of this strategy:

> The first step toward deliberately designing evocative, compelling material for the stage is to conceptualize what is evocative and compelling…as the actors consider the question "What is astonishing" over the course of the workshops, they will gradually improve their ability to pick out what specifically it is about something that they believe makes it astonishing. (p. 22)

Two codes emerged from reading the student journals: facets of nature and personal

experiences of awe. An example of a nature comment was "when a caterpillar goes through

metamorphosis," while a personal comment was "that Charlotte, Michelle and I are friends." In

Weigler's text, he suggests introducing the actors to the concept of using objects to express

meaning. He asks students to look at a clear plastic cup of water and state if it communicates any

meaning to them. My responses were coded into two categories: either abstract metaphors or

simply concrete answers. The age of the students played a huge factor here. Grade 7 students

answered with concrete statements like "it makes me thirsty, or it looks like rain got into it".

Abstract metaphors for the glass included loneliness, solitary confinement or a metaphor for life

because all living things need water to live. Weigler suggests pressing students further by placing

the glass of water in the middle and then at the edge of a table—the "edge" should heighten the

tension. Again, the responses were either abstract or concrete and usually age representative:

> Concrete response: "It's about to fall;"

> Abstract response: "It signifies danger, pride, death, or injury."

> At the end of this session I followed Weigler's suggestion, and instructed each participant

to bring in a personal item, which revealed something about their personality and explain the

significance of the item to the rest of the group (2001, p. 22).

> Nearly every student brought something in; it was a successful step towards building a

community of players.

Question four is the age-old drama question, usually associated with Dorothy Heathcote. I just had to ask this, in exactly those words, if only to see what responses were in their minds from the beginning. Predictably, the answers were the universal repertoire of emerging adolescents: drugs, relationships, peer pressure, friends. I think I will avoid this question altogether next time and attempt to investigate a topic that is external to the typical teenage angst. The words of wisdom put forward by Morrison and Stinson (1995) resonated with me; sticking exclusively to teen issues is not educationally sound. Teens will improve academically if they are introduced to ideas outside of their experiences but still within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

Question five was introduced as the pre-text for a scene idea called "The Nightmare Before Grade 7." The students devised a fantasy scene whereby a young lad had two dreams: one depicting the "perfect" first day of school and the other, the complete opposite: a nightmarish day! The scenes were mirror images of each other and contained some brilliant comedic devices. In particular, the Principal was played as everyone's "pal" in scene one and then a Dracula-like character in scene two, complete with a student containment chamber built into his office. I asked the actors   what they would do for the students of their school if they were Principal. Typical answers included: more "non-sports" clubs, more creative homework, fun educational games and no special students. Grade seven actors said they would "have teachers stay in class and eat their lunches with the students and continue to help them with their homework." This comment is consistent with research which states Grade 6 students bemoan the loss of elementary-type practices such as having just one teacher, rather than the rotating block system (Baer, 1999; Barber, 2004).

In question six I asked the actors to list what is most unfair at their school. Answers

included "shut up is a swear word" (Grade 7), "teachers who blow their tops" (Grade 7), and "the way teachers make such a huge deal about sports"(Grade 9).

In question seven I pressed further, asking them what was unsafe at their school. I did not specify with adverbs such as emotionally or physically unsafe. Grade 7 answers tended toward lack of physical safety, such as jammed up hallways or crowded parking lots, while Grade 9 actors wrote about "big groups of popular guys and girls roaming around," bullies, drugs, and "teachers who call you names." The adolescent research points out how important relationships are to this age group, especially the student to teacher relationship (Barber, 2004).

Question eight was simply an imagery prompt, asking actors to pay attention to every little detail of their morning. We used these self-generated pre-texts as spring boards for the "Nightmare" scene, incorporating many of the ideas the actors wrote. Looking back on this scene, I would say it became the most polished performance. We had done a great deal of creative writing prior to the actual devising of this scene; I believe the creative writing preparation greatly assisted in the professional polish of the actors' creation. It was the scene that I most looked forward to because the actors had invested so much time into it.

Question nine had the actors create a two- person scene involving a critical incident. Once it was devised, I asked them to script it as simply as possible. Then I asked them, after the first run- through, to re-work the scene, adding a critical one-liner to end the scene (Prompt # 10). This one-liner had to have a "twist" in it, something to make the audience sit up in their chairs and say "Ah Ha!" The initial idea came from S*tructuring Drama Work* (Neelands & Goode, 1990/2000). "Critical Events" is a strategy used to push narrative action forward. Neelands and Goode (1990/2000) write:

> On the basis of their developing understandings of a character group members identify
> critical events in the life of that character which lead the character to either a moment of

effective surprise…or a life's turning point…(p. 31)

The other part of this strategy came from Will Weigler's book (2001). Weigler's Chapter Two is called "Identifying and Investigating the Topic." He suggests "unpacking" a story and provides many intriguing ways of doing so. Weigler asks actors to concentrate on just "one thing" that stands out in a story while it is being unpacked by a fellow actor. Sometimes it is just one line that is spoken. "For example, in a story about friends, the one sentence of phrase that stands out could be 'The best times I ever had were with those guys.' That one line sums up the whole story" (p. 38).

Since I am able to report on only the work of nine participants (consent forms), I cannot provide details of all of the scenes, but I can report that these scenes were among their best work. The topics were, naturally, the stuff of "high drama": betrayal, sexual identity, social status, but the strategy proved one thing to these inexperienced actors: they could act and could play build a story worth watching by others. They needed to be convinced of this before we could move on. This writing prompt was the ticket to success. From this strategy, the character of Julie emerged, the young lady from the "dysfunctional family" scene. We first met her in a critical events scene. She re-appeared using the strategy of "A Day in the Life" (Neelands & Goode, 1990/2000), where we built up a character wheel of Julie. The results were powerful. Julie emerged as a young lady who recently lost her Mother. Mom walked out on the family and Dad and little brother were depending on her, a 14-year old girl, to pick up the pieces. Dad was falling apart, turning to drinking and depression. Julie's little brother was too young to help her. The critical one-liner was "Dad, I can't be home here 24/7 to fetch you a beer or change the channel. I'm 14 years old, Dad; I need a life!" I remember it stopped us cold—we really felt the anguish of this young girl who was too young to be a woman, but too old to be a child. Many of the actors were moved to tears. The strategy worked and the play took another step forward. The creative writing

prompts, along with process drama strategies were moving the play closer to reality.

Prompts 11 and 11a were another method to unpack the actors' stories. I used this method, based on the book *Building Moral Intelligence* (Borba, 2001). A strategy posted on Borba's website was designed to foster the virtue of empathy. It was called "If I were in your shoes" and involved tracing shoes on construction paper, writing stories about our own worst fears, then transferring those fears to fictitious people. The next step was to apply empathy to the situations by filling in the blanks:

If I were in _____shoes, I would want_____, I would

need_____, but most of all, I would appreciate_____.

All of the actors participated in this strategy, however, upon analyzing our playscript, I could not find any direct reference from their empathy stories. Yet I believe the strategy stood as a metaphor for them: their own lived experiences could be transferred into another form and be "lived" as it were, by another person.

Soon afterwards, the actors wrote what we called the bully montage. These were monologues based on actual experiences and it appears in the annotated script. Three of the monologues were worked into the show. I gave the option of "not" performing their own monologues, but they chose otherwise. Actors working with Carole Tarlington's playbuilding methods usually perform other actors' personal monologues, a much safer route to go. I was worried about actors exposing their experiences to peer audience members and advised them to give away their stories. One student's father removed her from the playbuilding group altogether because he felt re-visiting past bullying experiences was harmful to his daughter. It was unfortunate because her work was among the best writing in the play. However, I respected his wishes and removed all of her words. Initially I was concerned that the entire process would

unravel at this point, but the actors had a great deal invested in the project and wanted to

continue. Here is a sample journal entry from that tumultuous time:

Feb 22/04
Just called Mr. *******, to ask if **** could sub in as part of the play. ***** is sick right now, and I was wondering if **** would mind subbing in for ***** That was the reason for my phone call.

Mr. ******* informed me, in a very vague way, that ***** would no longer be participating. I asked him why and he said it was a "behavioural issue" to which he was not at liberty to discuss with me.

He also asked me to consider the process, because, according to him, perhaps the process is the problem.

I suggested he discuss the process with my Project supervisor, but he declined.

I apologized and said that I have tried hard to keep this play legitimate. When issues arose that were psychotherapeutic, I was hyper-aware that I'm NOT a psychotherapist, and so have steered well away from those topics...

The only controversial scene is the Bully montage. ***** wrote an excellent piece; I did not include all of her monologue, as some parts were too personal.

He has asked me to NOT speak with ***** at all about this—and I will respect his wishes.

The play will continue but we'll have to find a substitute actor for *****. Perhaps it would be respectful also, to remove her words from the play – too bad—they were so good!!

Feb 23/04
***** spoke to me—I did not solicit information from her. ***** told me she has to quit the play—Well, I just don't know what to think.

Another actor, ***** just came home from the hospital. He'll be at school tomorrow. Looks like he's still going to be in the play.

Feb 23rd 04
I gave the class news on *****'s departure. **** said he couldn't hug anyone but *****- I thought he was going to quit. He's a great kid!!

It was now February 23, and we had only processed 20 minutes of performance time. One actress had quit and another actor had been pulled temporarily due to a medical condition. I was worried but I kept repeating Carole Miller's mantra *trust the process*. That mantra helped me through some dark days.

The Emergence of the Parallel Process in Playbuilding

Playbuilding can be very chaotic and can bring up difficult issues for students. When parents pull their children from a project, or when students quit halfway through, they may not realize the devastating effect their departure can have on the other actors. While our play came very close to falling apart, we were able to salvage it and move forward. Errol Bray's words were comforting as he spoke about protecting the group, protecting yourself, and thinking positively:

> As director you have to provide a lot of protection for your group all through the process and presentation. The need to protect begins early. In the rush and excitement of creating a play, some people find themselves revealing more about their lives, families and dreams than they normally would. This can sometimes be embarrassing or even painful.[However]…the director must protect the group from amateur psychologising by dealing with each incident as material for creating theatre. (1991, pp. 19-23)

Furthermore, Bray clearly spells out the director's responsibility during the playbuilding process:

> Your observation or theories about emotional development should be kept to yourself in workshops and shared in confidence with colleagues who understand the processes of creative work. It is always gratifying to see emotional development, especially when parents notice as well and thank you for bringing about positive transformations in their kids. They will also blame you, of course, if the kids become 'too independent'. Just remember that the effects arise naturally, from creative work and that you do your part best by providing a safe, working environment. (1991, p. 20)

Oftentimes, a crisis emerges from the parallel process, which skirts alongside a creative endeavour. It takes the form of real life incidents, which frequently mirror the topic being explored. G. Belliveau, formerly Assistant Professor at the University of Prince Edward Island,

echoes this exactly in a recent article for the *Canadian Theatre Review*. When comparing the

play construction, and the real-life parallel process where a cast member actually became a bully,

he writes:

> In many ways, our working process reflected many elements of the final product. This is not unusual in a collective drama; however, what fascinates me is how a group of well-intentioned future teachers, wanting to address bullying, experienced it directly themselves through their well meaning initiative! (2004, p. 15)

David Beare (2004) stated young adolescents often do not have the ego- strength to

separate fantasy (the play) from reality (their real life). If something within the process causes

uncomfortable feelings for the director or the actors, address this issue immediately. Speak with

a colleague, your principal, or someone who has direct experience in the creative process.

Ignoring it will not work because it will reappear and possibly damage the collective creation.

Looking back on the creative writing prompts, it appears 11 and 11a nurtured the sharing of

personal information intended for theatrical work, but the empathic intent of the prompts also

ignited the emergence of the parallel process.

Prompt 12, "Adults rarely listen to teens," provided script ideas for the opening of the

show. We settled on a quick sequence of senior citizens attacking a group of teens with their

umbrellas. The actors then acknowledged that "that was a bit of a stereotype," and moved the

ensemble sequence into the nightmare scene. This prompt elicited the usual responses such as

"you can't tell adults anything because when you do they are completely unable to see things

from your perspective; they tell you to do one thing but then they do another!" (Sarai). However,

Skyler Soles' response illuminated a uniqueness of his personal experience:

> As far as I've noticed, this is not true. Maybe I'm just lucky, but I've never met an adult who didn't listen. Well I suppose I have met a few but that's probably because of their personality and not their adult-ness. In fact, I've probably met more teens who didn't listen to teens than adults.

Prompt 13, "When I first started middle school," was also used to fuel the nightmare

scene. I wanted to focus the actors' memories of fears and apprehensions they had prior to beginning middle school. The fears needed to emerge from an authentic place, and not be just a few cliché moments strung together. Of the nine journals I read, every student mentioned a fear of homework. Meeting new friends was also a very common theme; four actors wrote about lockers and then the disappointment that their lockers were only half-size, and three students mentioned the sadness of losing old friends. True to the writing prompts, everything mentioned at least twice made it into the "nightmare before Grade 7" scene. In this way, the prompt, which served as a pre-text for the acting, brought forth authentic concerns from a sample group of students, long before they knew they would be turning these concerns into a piece of theatre. The actors loved doing this scene because the content came from a very real place: it represented a collection of ideas that came from their own experience.

Again Skyler Soles had a unique "take" on the prompt. He wrote:

When I first started middle school I was nervous about the fact that my life was going by so freaking fast, and still is.

It is interesting that he had the ability to get beyond himself and look at his life objectively. No one else made a comment that came close to this.

Prompts 14 and 15 actually occurred at Christmas time and were not "officially" part of this project. I realized that the Drama Club actors had no concept of acting with minimal props, costumes, or had any understanding of story theatre constructs (Gruhn, 1993) such as becoming a chair, creating an imaginary machine or creating a soundscape with their voices. The move to abstract thought is a vertical climb, but can most definitely be experienced through process drama strategies.

Our Drama Club did a mini-unit at Christmas on the homeless, which resulted in a story theatre piece titled "The Little Match Girl," based on Hans Christian Anderson's text. We

performed this piece at the Christmas Assembly and I believe this was a breakthrough moment for the students; they found they could actually communicate "theatre" to audiences without an elaborate set and realistic props. Once they experienced success in this form, they were able to think in more abstract concepts and rely on their acting skills, and not on an elaborate technical setup to get them through. From that point on, there were no complaints about relying on their acting skills to communicate meaning-they had shifted their perspective from concrete to abstract thinking, because of first-hand experience with performance in story- theatre style.

However, I remember one of the school audience members, a Grade 9 student, who said, upon seeing *This Is Our life...* "Well, it was a good show, but too bad you didn't have a real set" (audience member, Spring, 2004). I wanted to ask him, "So what exactly is a real set?" From our perspective the set was wonderful.

Prompts 16 and 17 were used as an exploration of binary opposites, a perfect family versus a dysfunctional family. We did webbing assignments, large paper brainstorming and turned this written work into short scenes. We viewed each scene carefully and opened the floor to discussion. We tried to find authentic characters from the dysfunctional scene and found we met up again with a character called "Julie". She had appeared earlier in a critical incident scene. Purely by accident, the actress playing Julie also ended up in the perfect family scene, which tied both scenes together and made sense to the audiences. Sometimes the "Dad" in the perfect family scene ended up also being the Dad in the dysfunctional scene; it depended on whether Noel was available for performances as he was dealing with a medical condition.

The music for the perfect family scene set the mood: it was the theme song from the 1950s family TV show, *Leave it to Beaver*. The characters in this scene were stock, but amusing; the Father character, created by Noel, had almost a sinister nature about him. His movements

were mechanical , bird-like when he ate, and he maintained a rather phoney pasted-on smile throughout the scene. It had a "dark" quality about it. This family was perfect, or was it? I thought everyone's over-the top acting was superb.

The dysfunctional family scene was very well presented. I began the process by placing large pieces of paper on the wall in the drama room, and asked, "What is a dysfunctional family?" The students wrote compelling scene ideas and I kept them up on the wall for at least three weeks. This made the actors constantly think about what they were about to portray; the resulting scene was very heartfelt, as described earlier in Prompt 9.

Prompts 18 and 19 came out of two fabulous exercises I learned from Jackie Macdonald. Here is an excerpt from our interview where Jackie explains how to use gratitude circles and rainy day envelopes:

> JM: We would usually do some sort of warm-up that I based on an idea from Oprah Winfrey. She talks about being kind to each other and being grateful for what we have so I would start the Mondays with a gratitude moment. In fact, it became so popular, that if I wasn't there, and there was a TOC, the kids would ask for it.
>
> CH: Can you just tell me what that is? Is it like giving a compliment to someone?
>
> JM: Yes it is. Teenagers need this because they get so much negativity; they had to think of one thing they were grateful for, and if you couldn't think of anything, at least…maybe breathing, or not having to go to school on the weekends; one thing they were grateful for. I've done this for years. But it became a really strong point for the group. You see it's a way of getting to know each other.
>
> Jackie then described to me the process of rainy-day envelopes:
>
> JM: I would do this with my classes, about a month in, once they got to know each other. I would get an envelope for each student and put their name on the envelope. Then I would give each student 25 pieces of paper. They had to write something nice about each person. So you see they would get to know each other and then they would be able to do that. You couldn't do it right away. But, then, they would go around and put these in each envelope.
>
> JM: We always started in a circle, so I just put the envelopes on the chairs, and they would be off writing somewhere…because it's very private. But, the best part was, it gave me a barometer. The idea is, if you're having a bad day, a rainy day, you come and

you read one of the things from your rainy day envelope and it makes you feel better. All of this was the base that we operated on when we started our playbuilding. (J. Macdonald, personal communication, January 17, 2004)

I followed Jackie's advice on every strategy she employed: gratitude circles, compliment circles, rainy day envelopes and potluck dinners. Here are some of the written comments to Prompts 18 and 19: "Why did we do rainy day envelopes and a gratitude circle?"

Molly Lee: I think that today has been one of my favourite drama days I have ever had 'cause I found out a lot of good things that people think about me and I had a grand time reading the rainy envelope!

Sarai: I think these are an awesome idea because they bring up your spirits on a really bad day and some days you need this more than others. A lot of what I got was impersonal but one that I got from another classmate that was so kind and caring that I started to cry. (excerpts from journals, January 19, 2004)

These strategies were aimed at building community and I believed they pushed us closer to completing the process and moving toward the product.

Prompt 20 was, "The death of a student." Normally I would have never encouraged a writing prompt like this but the coincidence was uncanny. From Prompt 11, the students had written about the death of friends or family as potential occurrences, classified as devastating. In our original script frame, we had a sequence that took place in a hospital waiting room, based on a suggestion in the *Performance 11 BC Drama Curriculum Guide* (BCME, 1983). Gavin Bolton also used this idea in 1983 and turned it into a piece of process drama, which was far better than the original Performance 11 suggestion. Based upon this history and the students' self generated creative writing, I asked them if they wanted to include a scene inside a hospital waiting room, which might ultimately lead to exploring the death of a teen. The students were confident that they could handle this fictitious scene…and then the unthinkable happened. On the third day back from Christmas holidays, which incidentally turned into a "snow day"(no school), students and teachers were informed of the death of a Grade 9 student. The entire school community went

into shock. Our school held a memorial service, admirably led by the Principal, the Parent's

Advisory council, and the Grade 9 students.

After one full month had passed, we sat in the drama circle and discussed the "hospital"

scene: were we able to work with this idea in light of the very real tragedy at our own school? I

asked the students to do the following:

Describe the day you found out about the death of one of your fellow students-what do

you remember of that day? Use imagery such as sounds, sights, smells, -describe the day like an

omniscient observer from the beginning of the morning onwards...

This was by far the most compelling writing the students produced. Although, out of

respect for the family, we decided to drop the idea of a hospital scene, I would like to share some

of the most poignant writing produced by the actors:

February 2, 2004

Grade 7 response

It wasn't much of a tragedy to me until I saw signs, a table with a picture, flowers, and then at that point I knew this was a special kid. I wrote a thing to the parents in that box. I even saw a picture in my neighbourhood…

Grade 8 responses

When I walked in the door from our Christmas holiday I was sad to see all the people crying and it made me scared because that could have been my sister… I could smell the flowers…

I didn't know [the student] but I couldn't help but think "what are the parents thinking, doing, and feeling?"

We all miss you and wish you were here, but though you're not here, you will always be near our hearts at Cape Lazo.

Grade 9 responses

Many people were crying and I felt bad for not crying because I didn't really know [the student] well. The whole day of school just didn't seem real, like I was in a book or movie. The whole event taught everyone to get to know people better and maybe treat them nicer because you never know if they'll be gone the next day. It made me mad that it took such a big sacrifice for people to learn that lesson. On that day it seemed that everyone was afraid to laugh or smile.

I dreaded going to school the next day. I knew everyone would be in a bad way. And they were. It was horribly depressing to be in the hallways; girls were crying piteously, even the boys who considered themselves 'tough' were sobbing and crying, at one point or another.

I wanted to cry, and hug every single one of them. The worst thing was when me and a few girls went out to get a drink of water in P.E. class and we walked past the memorial, seeing a man and a woman standing there crying. We gathered 'round, some of us beginning to cry ourselves. After a silent moment the woman turned to leave with the man, but before she did she turned her tear-filled eyes to us and said **"**Never stop talking about him. Never, ever, forget him." The two left. Only then, did I realize who the two grief stricken people were. They were his parents.

This was a moment for all of us as playbuilders to reflect on an issue of extreme importance. Should we, or should we not include a similar story in our script? Out of respect for the family and for the school community, the group decided to cut the original scene we worked on before the real tragedy occurred. The school did not need a scene from a script to reflect upon the loss of a student. We had reality instead.

Future directors of playbuilt scripts will also have to come to grips with material that may be too close to home to represent in a show. Errol Bray offers wise words on this subject:

The process of playbuilding can enable kids to decide for themselves what they want to say about their world and what questions they want to ask. Learning how to think with precision and clarity and how to ask good questions can be a very useful weapon and/or shield in this modern world. (Bray, 1991, p. 21)

As I look back on the creative writing prompts, I am pleased I used them as they served as a catalyst for moving the process. However, I realized, through hindsight, I missed some key strategies of which I will be mindful next time. These are listed in the findings section.

Take Five: A Tapestry of Five Interviews

Interviews conducted by Charlotte Harvey with some of British Columbia's successful directors of playbuilt productions: Hugh Anderson, David Beare, David Diamond, Jackie Macdonald, Carole Tarlington.

The Expert Interview

> Meuser and Nagel (1991) discuss expert interviews as a specific form of applying semi-structured interviews. In contrast to biographical interviews, there the interviewee is of less interest as a (whole) person, than in his or her capacity of being an expert for a certain field of activity. He or she is integrated into the study not as a single case but as representing a group of specific experts. (Flick, 2002, p. 89)

> Just as we should inquire into the manifestations of professional artistry, so we should also examine the various ways in which people actually acquire it. (Schon 1987, p. 14)

From January 17, 2004, until August 14, 2004, I conducted five interviews of successful British Columbia playbuilders. One interviewee was a retired drama teacher, two are currently active drama teachers, one runs a highly successful youth actor-training institute, and one is the artistic director of a successful Vancouver-based theatre company. In this project, I include those conversations that are specifically applicable to this work.

The full transcripts of the interviews are available for perusal by contacting me personally. Because of the large volume of pages, I chose to not place these transcripts in the appendices.

When I began the research, I had an average knowledge of playbuilding. I had devised two shows with students strictly from their own experiences and had produced many story theatre shows, usually drawing on children's books. These shows were taken to pre-schools and local elementary schools in District 61 from 1985 through to 1991. Our shows were well received by audiences, but I instinctively knew something was missing. The shows did not capture the "voice" of the students. So much of the content was my agenda.

I have an extensive background in musical theatre and traditional theatre, both as a director, a musical director and a principal actress. But I was forever in awe of drama teachers who were playbuilders. What was it that they did? How did they work their magic? I knew that if my current project was to be successful I had to learn at the feet of masters, or at least have the opportunity to interview them. I first asked myself, "What did these five playbuilders have in common? Why did they dare to teach outside of the box?" Donald Schon (1987) explains it this way:

> As we consider the artistry of extraordinary practitioners and explore the ways they actually acquire it, we are led inevitably to certain deviant traditions of education for practice—traditions that stand outside or alongside the normative curricula of the schools. (p. 15)

This quote reminded me of the tension between playbuilt scripts and traditional plays from the canon, which would often be performed at the same festivals. Specifically, at Victoria High School, two teachers were involved in 'deviant traditions of education': Jackie Macdonald was the only drama teacher in Victoria that had established a strong playbuilding program which, at times, puzzled traditional theatre teachers, who regarded playbuilding as somehow inferior to "legitimate" theatre. Eric Emde, the current Music teacher at Victoria High School, also pursues a 'deviant tradition' of education with his Rhythm and Blues Career Preparation Program. Even though Emde's Rhythm and Blues Program has garnered local, regional and national accolades for its professional, skills based approach and subsequent career opportunities for Victoria High school students, the work is still considered unsuitable for the traditional Jazz Band festivals in British Columbia. And yet both of these teachers are artists in their field, producing award-winning works of art. Does superior work often come from outside of the box?

Schon (1987) continues by stating:

> It is no accident that professionals often refer to an "art" of teaching or management and use the term artist to refer to practitioners unusually adept at handling situations of

uncertainty, uniqueness and conflict. (p.16)

I am naturally drawn to teachers who dance to their own drummer, rather than to those who teach the same thing, year after year, always sticking to what is safe, what is simple, and what is risk-free. The five interviewees selected are all risk-takers. Jackie Macdonald describes the type of teacher who would not be attracted to playbuilding:

CH: It's a messy process…

JM: Yes! And it's not for somebody…I can't emphasize this enough…it is not for a teacher that needs to have control. A few people have gone into teaching because:
(a) they have nothing else to do, or because
(b) they like to have control. A lot of teachers could not use this process because it gives up their control.

CH: To me, it's flying by the seat of your pants, standing on the edge of a cliff and going, "Ok, I'm going to jump now, and away I go!"

JM: That's exactly what it is, and it has to be that way because you have to hand it over to the students. You have to trust that you have a process, which you are using that works. And Carole Miller, every single time…every single year…I'd say "Carole it's not working!" And Carole would say "Trust the process!" Trust the process!" until it became a mantra, and it has become a mantra. (personal communication, January 17, 2004)

Out of the five interviews, themes emerged such as personal background to playbuilding, specific working processes, censorship, and changing topics of interest with youth. Following each interview I reflected on what I had learned (Schon, 1987) and commented on the most important lesson I learned from each playbuilder.

Beginnings and Beyond

I asked each playbuilder to remember from whom or   where they were first introduced to the process. Jackie, Hugh, and myself were introduced to playbuilding by Carole Tarlington. David Beare worked extensively with Brian Way at the University of Windsor in Ontario and cited Way as a mentor with regard to collective creation. David Diamond stated his style of creating theatre changed when he met, and became a colleague and friend of Augusto Boal.

Carole Tarlington was introduced to playbuilding through Errol Bray's Shopfront Theatre:

> CT: I had done similar work before with kids but I hadn't called it playbuilding, and as a drama teacher you know your big problem always is trying to find a script and then trying to fit the kids into it. Yes, so it wasn't playbuilding that really jumped out at me, rather it was his[Bray's] whole concept of sharing the whole space. The whole space was owned by the kids and the adults together. They all had a share in it like they all had a $10.00 share or whatever. But whether they put $10.00 or $10,000 into the theatre, they all had a say, you know, and a vote.

> CH: What was the age range at Shopfront Theatre?

> CT: The kids, at the beginning were mostly teens. Later on they went to younger ones as well, but mostly teens.

> CH: And when you say the adults, were those the directors?

> CT: Parents were involved as well; anybody could become a member of Shopfront Theatre, adults or children.

> CH: When you came back to Canada in 1983, and first got into playbuilding, did you immediately see any pitfalls or were you ready to just jump right in a try it?

> CT: I guess I just jumped right in and tried it! (personal communication, March 31, 2004)

It is amazing how one person can learn something extraordinary, halfway around the world and then teach that skill to students; some of those original students then continued the teaching to *their* students, as Jackie Macdonald explained:

> JM: Danno Underwood is a young First Nations boy. And he was at another high school and he found a lot of discrimination, and so he came to Vic High. And for some unknown reason he got in my Drama class, and became a Vic High Player. And that was a huge benefit. He's just so talented and he's since gone on to the Indigenous Theatre School, toured with the Attorney General's Group…

> JM: Then he went to Vancouver with the Attorney Generals; in fact they had asked him to audition. They had come to the school and had seen him work. Anyhow, he's come back to Victoria, working as a First Nations aide and he wanted to do a playbuilt piece. He auditioned kids on his own.

> CH: He remembered the process

> JM: And he had his first show 16th December, and I thought it was so neat…because I really miss the kids and I miss the teaching of Drama. "There's my legacy…" That group, through Danno, did a play built piece. It was so exciting! (personal communication, January 17, 2004)

Beginnings are important to every artist, and often very intriguing for interviewers. David Diamond, the artistic director of Headlines Theatre, explains how, by chance, he was introduced to the work of Augusto Boal. Previously, he had been involved in theatrical renderings of *agit-prop*, a genre of political theatre, which is often labelled Guerrilla Theatre. Agit-prop Theatre is described as…

> Theatre used to make a political point, to stimulate debate or protest; performed in non-theatre spaces, without warning, engaging the audience in a political dialogue. Theatre has always had a dangerous side; drama encourages the expression of dissenting voice. (McNeill, 2004, para. 1)

> Here David Diamond describes his chance encounter with Boal's work:

> DD: Boal became a good friend over the years, first a mentor, now a colleague. Headlines already existed in 1981. I had the chance in 1984 to go to Europe to visit different political theatre companies and before leaving I went looking for something to read along the way and I walked into a bookstore and picked up a book by a guy I had never heard of named Paulo Friere called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

> CH: So did your work take the form of street theatre?

> DD: It was pretty classic agit-prop at that time. We all had housing problems, that's the reason we chose that topic; we didn't know we were starting a Theatre company ,we were just a group of actors and directors who were frustrated with the kind of theatre that was happening in town, which was pretty mainstream. It just didn't have any currency.

> CH: When you came upon Boal did you have a gut reaction to his work?

> DD: Boal isn't a saviour for me. Headlines existed before the encounter with Boal. The encounter with Friere is actually in a way more profound. I was looking for a missing brick. We were good at doing agit -prop and making theatre *for* people.

> CH: for communities

> DD: I wanted to know how to make theatre *with* people, and Friere really answered that question

> CH: How so?

> DD: Because *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is all about how to work with the community on a peer basis. So you know I then went to Europe and traveling around, reading this *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and came across a demonstration of Forum Theatre, Boal's Forum Theatre and I said "Holy Shit!" That's what I'm reading about! I asked some questions and I discovered, Boal was involved. (personal communication, March 31,

2004)

Since that meeting, Headlines Theatre has moved away from oppressor and oppressed

language, noting that the power of theatre of the oppressed lies within its ability to transform.

David explains how his views got him into some trouble at a conference:

> DD: You know I think Friere's and Boal's work is seminal. It also comes out of a very particular place and time-Brazil in the 60s. They were in the middle of a revolution. About 10 years ago I woke up and went, "Gee I'm not in Brazil! I don't live in Brazil!"

> CH: So it was culture specific?

> DD: Well, the power of what Boal has done with Theatre of the Oppressed is that it is in constant transformation. I was at a Pedagogy of the Oppressed conference years ago--- and I pissed people off, because they were there and they were saying "In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, on page 32 it says this and therefore we should do this!" And I got up and said, "You know folks, what are you doing?"

> CH: They were litanizing…

> DD: Freire would roll over in his grave if he knew this; it's not the Bible! And the ideas he expressed in the 60s in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* aren't the ideas he died with. He was more evolved than that; and his ideas changed as the world changed.

> If we're really serious about ending cycles of oppression for instance and not just repeating them over and over and over again, then we have to understand that the oppressor is always part of a community, never isn't. A community is a living thing and if what we do is separate the issue into oppressor and oppressed, if we make theatre that is about the good guys and the bad guys, what we are doing is polarizing the community: it's an old model.

> CH: What's the new model?

> DD: It is Systems Theory. [see Appendix D]. At how everything is in fact, connected to everything else. It's the reason I call Headlines Theatre for Living. And not Theatre of the Oppressed…Theatre for Living…… (personal communication, March 31, 2004)

Hugh Anderson's first introduction to playbuilding came from a workshop in Ontario,

given by Carole Tarlington. He described his first collective creation as a university project,

based on Elton John's song *Funeral for a Friend.* It was not an issues based piece, merely a

collaborative creation using a music pre-text as a stimulus.

I asked Hugh about his early beginning with playbuilding and the strengths that he brings

to the art form:

> HA: I think you learn the technique first. In my own evolution, talking about it, technique comes first, what you want to say with it comes later. With any art form you learn style, technique, and the rules of the game before you start.

> CH: Definitely, or else you just end up in chaos. Concerning building plays and actually turning them into product-what was the first one you did?

> HA: That would be *Welfare of the Saints* 1988; no that's not true; before that at my previous high school, we did one called *Talk about Sex* : that was a classroom piece : the students looked at issues involving sex and themselves. (personal communication, June 11, 2004)

> Since then, Hugh Anderson's Bay Theatrix has produced seven original playbuilt shows.

Their current show *i have a name* played at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre during a

conference on women's issues.

David Beare's introduction to playbuilding.

As a young Drama student, I often wondered: just exactly ***who*** was Brian Way and why

was his work so influential in Canada? Amazingly, I had the opportunity to interview David

Beare, the Drama teacher at Handsworth Secondary who accredits Brian Way as introducing him

to playbuilding! David completed his degree in Drama in Education at the University of

Windsor, Ontario where, by chance, his main Professor was a very close associate and friend of

Way's. David comments on his own personal history of playbuilding.

> DB: I just know that Brian Way is the person who influenced me. I have my undergrad in Drama in education from the University of Windsor   and   had the pleasure of spending four years there: it's a profound program, viewing it as an educational, developmental model. Brian Way is all about people, people need to be first and theatre is about people, not about the stage. He came in and taught us at the University of Windsor but he wasn't my Professor My Professor knew him very well, and brought him in. I learned a lot from the drama in education program, in developing that process (collective creation) …(personal communication, August 14, 2004)

> David informed me that the first collective creation process he participated in was based

on Brian Way's methodology. He   explained the undergraduate project that all drama in

education students worked on that year:

> DB: I took a course called Theatre for Children and Theatre for Youth and then we worked with the playbuilding process: every university student in the class was assigned to a high school or an elementary school; we sat with the kids and our University instructors took us through the process. We dialogued with the children and then we left and wrote the play.

> CH: Like T.I.E. (Theatre in Education- see literature review)

> DB: Yes, and then we created a play together. And so that was my first exposure to the process. And then I did something on my own where I worked with other students in the undergrad program.I was a TA then so I was working with people who were younger than me. I was in my third-fourth year and they were in their 1st-2nd year. I went through a play process with them and we looked at "What is art?" and we explored what is art, the power of art

> CH: And did all those devisers become the actors?

> DB: Yeah, they became the actors. Then we went to all the different high schools in our community, and we showed it to them, got their feedback and that feedback was really important to me: what worked for them and what didn't work for them. I was more interested in the technical aspect of the script building process: what was successful and not so successful, what was entertaining and not so entertaining. I was looking more at the theatrical part at that point.

> CH: In that first devised play that you did, was there a movement piece, was there verbal/non-verbal, a tableau, singing?

> DB: It was a little bit of everything...it was a mixture...the premise was a Professor talking to six students…

> CH: That was the holding frame…

> DB: Yes, because at the time I was helping the drama students to answer the question: "What is drama- in- education?" That's probably where the parallel process came from. I was playing the Professor, and the six people were the students, and it's ironic that I was the T.A. (teaching assistant) and they were the students but I didn't think of that then.

> DB: I was moaning on about art in a very dry way and the six people were rebelling against it and they ended up changing costumes, revealing colourful ones instead. So we took different stories about art and pieced it all together and the Professor was liberated at the end. It was just a 45-minute piece, and so from there I have gone through 15 or 16 playbuilding processes with kids. (personal communication, August 14, 2004)

Methods in the Magic or Magic in the Methods?

I asked each interviewee how they proceeded from process to product. Jackie Macdonald

gave a very detailed description of her process. While her techniques are similar to the ones described in "how to" books, she implemented more visual, written stimulus before delving into the improvisational phase. Because of her background as an English language arts teacher, Jackie made use of graphic organizers such as webs, concept maps, mind maps, which come out of extensive brainstorming sessions. Her approach started with a single person generating ideas, moving to partners, and then finally larger group situations. Jackie made use of coloured markers and coloured paper to differentiate ideas, before consensus was reached. Once the ideas had been graphically organized, the actors were given improvisational tasks. Errol Bray (1991) mentions "taking notes" (p. 36) but his method is not as formal as Jackie Macdonald's .

Joe Norris has developed an elaborate system of filing and note taking to document the work in progress (2000). Weigler (2001) also has a detailed documenting system, though his is embedded in the   playbuilding strategies.

Jackie stressed her work was student-centered, and she constantly infused community-building moments into the process. Activities such as the potluck dinner, the gratitude circles, the rainy-day envelopes, the weekend rehearsals, were all part of creating a strongly bonded community.

> CH: It might make you blush for me to say this, but those kids had a real feeling of love for you . I mean you weren't Mrs. Macdonald, you were Jackie…

> JM: Oh, I know. But I think this is part of it, because I was giving them a sense of self. The other thing that we did, actually I have two other things we did: we would sit as a players group; this would take maybe two rehearsals: say there was a circle, and there was Barb here, and Larry there, and we would each say one thing we liked about you-say it was your turn, and someone would say "Oh I really love your energy, and you make me laugh all the time. I love how you are always there to listen to what I have to say".

> CH: And so one person was singled out at a time, as the person to receive the compliments?

> JM: We did one person at a time, and the whole circle had to do it.

CH: That was a protocol?

JM: I never had to tell them! They knew!

CH: Kids are amazing.

JM: Yeah. And they knew to say good things. So all of this was the base that we operated on when we started our playbuilding

CH: And it's no wonder your plays were so connected because the people themselves were connected and supportive of each other. (personal communication, January 17, 2004)

From Jackie Macdonald I learned that it is imperative to establish a trusting community of learners long before the actual playbuilding begins. The degree to which you have succeeded in this will be manifested   through the authenticity of the resulting product, the play itself. In every show I saw of Jackie's, the unity of the cast was evident. The Vic High Players were masters of the ensemble process because their respect toward each other was prominent . That is the invisible hand of the director , rendering Jackie Macdonald a master playbuilder.

Carole Tarlington's approach is well documented in her book titled *Building Plays* (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995):

> Actors involved in a playbuilt play take ownership in a special way. Since the final play reflects the views and voices of all group members, there is enormous individual and collective satisfaction and a sense of having created an artistic piece. The playbuilt play reinforces the idea that we are all creative beings, that everyone has ideas, and that collectively we are strong. (p. 8)

Much of Carole Tarlington's approach is through interviews and research conducted by the cast. For example, her 1980s show *Time Peace* consisted of interviews conducted by the cast, of people, young and old who had lived in Vancouver all their life, particularly during their teen years. *Minor Reality* (Hogan, Rogers, & Tarlington, 1995), a continuation of *Time Peace*, was created from research done for the Vancouver Museum in preparation for an exhibit on teenagers in Vancouver. *Minor Reality* represented Canada at the International Drama in

Education World Congress, in July 1995, Brisbane, Australia (Hogan, Rogers, & Tarlington, 1995).

During our interview, Carole provided a recipe sheet that can be used the first time through a playbuilding unit. Once a director has used this quick method, other ideas from a wealth of sources may be employed.

Quick Playbuilding - A Recipe
(Or: *What To Do when The Principal wants Christmas Entertainment and It Is Late November Already!)*
Carole Tarlington, 1992
Vancouver Youth Theatre

1. Choose topic or present topic to the group.
   - Brainstorm.
   - Vote on two/three or one (depending on time available).
   - Have kids "sell" their ideas to the group.
   - Final vote.

2. Discuss to see what group's ideas are on the topic.

3. In groups, create STILL IMAGE/TABLEAUX that express an idea on the topic.
   Remember WHO, WHERE.WHY, WHAT.

4. Each group shows a still image, and the rest of the group "read" it and give it a name.

5. STILL IMAGES are brought to life.
   - Suggestions from the group to make scenes work better.

6. ONE LINERS are completed by the group.

7. ONE LINER SHEETS handed out to group to choose which line each actor wants in the play.

8. Rehearsal of ONE- LINERS.

9. Rehearsal of scenes.

10. Finding ways to LINK the scenes. Possibilities include:
   - chants
   - music
   - chorus
   - singing

- movement/dance

11. SCRIPT the play.

12. REHEARSE and PERFORM. (C. Tarlington, personal correspondence provided March 31, 2004)

Unique to Carole Tarlington's work is her approach to scripting. My experience of playbuilding had always been that the actor, who was part of an originally improvised scene, would end up also being in that scene during the final product. This is not the case with Carole's method. She explains during our interview:

> CT: Toward the end, when we had the script itself, finished we would say, "Write on a piece of paper your first second and third choices for roles."

> CH: So the original improvisers were not necessarily the actors who ended up doing the role in the product. Why do you insist on writing the play down?

> CT: Well first of all you've got it down, if someone is away sick you've got a physical script ; if it was improvised, it's just been in their heads; and also to give them the idea that, up until now, we have been writers and directors and now we are moving into the realm of being an actor.

> CH: Is that made clear to them at the outset: the process is the devising and the writing phase, and the next phase you have to audition for? You could be playing something you had nothing to do with in the devising process?

> CT: Yes. In the teen killer play, of course everyone wanted to play the killer at first, so we actually held movie-type audition for the nine kids in the group. They had to come in and do a piece and we put in on tape, but the interesting thing with this group was 7 out of 9 would have chosen their own character that they developed. But at the Vancouver Youth Theatre, they found it more challenging to be somebody else rather than the person they had developed. (personal communication, March 31, 2004)

I have found through my studies of different playbuilders, projects, and research on the process, that Carole's way of working is very different. I like the option of auditioning originally devised work with other actors from within the group. Had I insisted on this technique, I would have had less interpersonal trouble with my actors. Reflecting back on rehearsals, I see a great deal of the angst was simply nervousness and insecurity about telling their stories to audiences who might end up ridiculing them afterwards. I also discovered some of the actors embellished

bullying situations that had happened to them; they were very concerned about performing their experiences in front of their oppressors, especially since the content of the stories was only partially true, and, in some cases, entirely fictional. I had to deliver a prologue to audiences each time, stating that most of the stories were based on creative writing/improvisations, and not necessarily based on real life.

Considering the tumultuous stages of emotional development that early adolescents face, Carole's scripting methods make far more sense in protecting students' mental health, not to mention the health of the director. Sadly, one of my actors was pulled from the show by her father precisely because the dwelling on her own personal experiences, via monologues, interfered with her day to day school existence. I attempted to employ catharsis, by giving her words away to another actor (similar to a sociogram) but unfortunately it was too late to intervene. Her father was determined to remove her from the show, and encouraged me to 're-consider the process ' in light of his daughter's experience. Although initially upsetting, this interaction with a parent turned out to be significant as it invited me into the realm of reflection-in action. I appreciated the parents' insight to nudge me toward reflective practice.

Donald Schon writes:

Reflection-in action has a critical function, questioning the assumptional structure of knowing in –action. We think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity; and we may, in the process, restructure strategies of action, understandings of phenomena, or ways of framing problems. (1987, p. 28)

I asked Carole if any similar situations had happened to her in all of her years at Vancouver Youth Theatre to which she replied:

CT: That's never happened to us. But I remember a girl created a monologue called *The Perfect Family*. Her mother and father had just split and they really were the perfect family, like nobody in their wildest dreams. Anyway so they split up, 2.2 children, a dog, in a beautiful Kitsilano home; she wrote this lovely monologue about the perfect family and she did not want to do that for the show; someone else did it; it was always very interesting to see the other girl interpret this. (personal communication, March 31, 2004)

Immediately following the young lady's departure from our show, I informed all of the actors that they could have other people perform their personal monologues. Most of them considered this option but, in the end, chose to perform their own words. Perhaps they saw this as a form of weakness and chose to do their own work instead. Still, I could tell it returned some power to the actors, particularly the ones who were emotionally fragile. I realize that I should have informed them of this strategy from the outset. From my discussion with Carole, I was able to reflect upon my own practice and modify the approach I was taking within this project.

The learning was not over yet, as I was about to receive yet another gift from my interview with David Beare. I re-told the story of the young lady who had to quit the show and David immediately recognized what had happened. He stated:

DB: That's a very interesting thing that you're bringing up because I'm a trained counsellor and so I understand what's going on there and I try to avoid those kinds of things. I got myself in trouble about four years ago. I understand that process because fantasy and reality start getting too close and in my work, you need to separate it as far as you can. That's what drama therapy is based on: the further and further fantasy and reality stay apart, the safer it is for the kids: the closer you get it together, then you're dealing with psychodrama. Psychodrama is a therapeutic technique.

CH: And I'm not a trained therapist.

DB: And drama therapy is more appropriate for the education system- because you are distancing. However, what I've learned is that there is always a parallel process, no matter what you create. You cannot separate it: trained actors say there is the character on stage and then there is the actor themselves on stage too

CH: The voice in the head.

DB: Yes they (the students) have to figure that out. A person needs to be mature enough to be able to separate and say: "Ok this is me, and *this* is fantasy," and yet they need the ego strength to be able to balance the two together…(personal communication, August 14, 2004)

Once again, by reflecting on my own practice with a highly skilled colleague, I was able to recognize my own mistakes, and refine my playbuilding techniques . The opportunity to interview colleagues has been one of the greatest opportunities for improving my own teaching

skills and should be a requirement for all teacher-practitioners: we need time to talk with each other.

By experiencing this setback, and, more importantly, surviving it, I was ready to face the next problem, which was the on-going medical condition of another actor. Further information about this episode is documented in the findings section.

David Beare employs a distancing approach to the script building process, although his work is more writing focussed than process drama focussed.

The drama program at Beare's school consists of one drama teacher, and a drama-dance specialist. Grade 8, 9, and 10 courses are developmentally based while the collaborative- play creating process dominates the senior drama program. Courses in Acting 11 and 12 are offered but the speciality course is Directing and Script-writing 12. In addition to the Writing 12 class, an extra-curricular Writing Team has also been formed. Script ideas flow back and forth from the Writing 12 'timetabled' class to the extra- curricular Writing Team. Any grade level of student can participate on the writing team. These writers are so dedicated to the process that a core group of them meet periodically in the summer to edit the script for the upcoming year. David also meets with his writing team three times over the summer to see how the work is progressing. It is imperative that the script is ready by November of the following year, in order to meet theatrical deadlines (auditions, dance routines, band, and vocal rehearsals). What emerges by April is a 100 + students, full-length show, complete with singing, acting, dancing and band arrangements. A live band plays on stage with the performers and the show usually runs four nights at the Centennial Theatre in North Vancouver. Show titles include adaptations of St. Exupery's *The Little Prince* (1999) and T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (2000), original creations such as *Eclipsed, Ben's Story* (2002), *Stardumb* (2003), and *Broken Theory* (2004).

Beare's work is explained in his recent master's thesis (2002) titled *Therapeutic Theatre: The Weaving of Self and Theatre.* He coined the term the collaborative-play-creating process to explain his methods, but he is now trying to work in the building of community into his term:

> DB: If I were to re-title it, I would add the word community in there, because I realize that what I'm really doing is building a community. I'm at a stage where it really is about building community and I believe that is the only way to tackle violence or prejudice. (personal communication, August 14, 2004)

Playbuilding, Schools, and Censorship

Hugh Anderson, Bay Theatrix, Nanaimo, BC.

Teachers, in the course of their careers, have been faced with increasing amounts of restraint and censorship. They must subscribe to a rigorous code of behaviour that follows them throughout their entire career, whether they are on duty or their free time. Since playbuilding relies heavily on the *vox populi*, the voices of the student-actors, controversial topics will invariably arise. Secondary drama teacher Hugh Anderson knew early in 2003 that the next playbuilt show he wanted to pursue would come from the voices of women, but he did not know as yet, what the content would be.

My interview with Hugh Anderson was unique in that I interviewed four members of the cast of *i have a name*, a show conceived by the ensemble, which explored the fate of the missing women of the downtown Vancouver Eastside. Gillian, one of the actors, in speaking about the show's origins, explained that the ensemble had met as usual for rehearsal. The second drama teacher had an educational broadsheet of sexual exploitation on her desk. One of the actors put it in the middle of the circle and proposed: "Well, what about this?" The agreement was unanimous and the play began to unfold. (personal communication, June 11, 2004)

i have a name, is a character play, as opposed to a thematic play, the usual methodology for playbuilders.

The genuine character play [is one] in which the group attempts thoughtful portrayals of characters: real people known to them or composite characters—can provide a rewarding project. It is very useful for groups who have developed their playbuilding skills and are looking for a challenge…the character play requires precision and careful construction in creating its characters. Character plays are very useful projects for any group that intends to progress towards major theatre creation and production. Any group that has created its own character play is in an excellent position to understand and to perform good, complex scripted plays. (Bray 1991, p. 9)

Hugh Anderson's Bay Theatrix Company previously produced six playbuilt scripts. The choice to frame this one as a character play came from Maggie Devries' (2003) book about her adopted sister, *Missing Sarah*. It is based on the journal of downtown eastside prostitute Sarah Devries and is currently a best-seller. The young actresses explained how they researched their topic, and how they contacted community groups to assist them with their project. Much of our interview was spent discussing the controversial nature of the topic: the girls stated the adjudicator at the North Island Zone Festival did not approve of their show. The language was shocking at the opening of the show, and yet it fit entirely with the show's premise. This show reflects the fate of missing British Columbia women, and how very few people really cared about their demise. Because of the content, all performances at the school were held in the evening; audience members had chosen to be there The school administration was supportive but, in order to avoid confrontation, the decision was made to perform only evening shows.

I questioned Hugh Anderson as to what he does to protect himself and the creative process, when exploring a controversial topic:

CH: So who helped you, externally with this project?

HA: You've got to have your allies lined up in advance. We have an excellent RCMP liaison officer: if anyone ever complained we would have had the entire RCMP detachment on their case. Our liaison officer had emailed everyone in the detachment; half the detachment of the RCMP was at that show; they were incredible supportive ; you must develop your support people. I involved the administration early. I said: "This is what we're working on. Here's the letter I'm sending home to the parents." Then the administration team was behind me. I had ADAPT (Drug Abuse and Prevention) people as resources and as allies. When you're dealing with a controversial subject you need

people in positions of authority and responsibility who believe in your project.

Actor: And when we had the adjudicator who said, "This doesn't happen"; the RCMP liaison officer said "Yes it does!!" (personal communication, March 31, 2004)

Next, I asked the cast how they felt about performing in a festival and having their show panned by an adjudicator:

Actor: She said "People don't throw pennies at hookers…they don't call them names!"

CH: Didn't she understand that it was metaphorical?

HA: It's not metaphorical, it actually happens!!

CH: But also highly symbolic.

HA: Like I said, she just didn't get it.

Actor #2: The feeling we had after that show was one of complete tears

CH: Was it the only play built show in that festival?

HA: Yes

CH: Do you think it was misplaced in this festival?

HA: No, she [the adjudicator] just hated that topic. If we had done a play built show about bullying she would have been fine with it because bullying is a hot topic.

Actor: And the language…

HA: Yes, but the language was in other shows and she didn't have an issue with it.

Actor: Didn't the play that won have language in it?

HA: Yes (personal communication, March 31, 2004)

The lessons were not over for the ensemble, as they performed their final show at the Vancouver East Cultural Center in mid-June, 2004. A panel of experts was assembled and, after the girls' final performance, de-briefing commenced. Unfortunately the actors were not part of this process, which was detrimental to their post-performance needs. I asked the girls how they responded to the expert panel:

HA: We were supposed to be on stage but (name withheld) and the rape crises person sort of took over.

CH: Did anyone in the audience say, "Well I want to talk to the girls?"

Girls: Some people directed questions to us and Katie got to say something but as soon as we were finished, the panel would jump right back in.

CH: How did that make you feel, when you were kind of, negated?

Actor: It was really crazy. There was this one lady in the audience who was a former prostitute, and she had something to say and the ladies in the panel just shut her down…they wouldn't let her talk about it.

CH: It seems this experience proved was how important the de-briefing process is to the playbuilding experience because you were denied that…

Actor: You know I never usually get to talk but I really wanted to say something

CH: You were shut down.

Actor: There was a lot of yelling…I was just sitting there going "What's going on?"

CH: But I bet it was an education! Now that the play is officially over, are you able to put it aside?

Actor: I think that's one of the things that helps me, the ability to put it aside. I don't really like talking about it, outside of it, I'll think about it, but if I talk about it too much I get too emotional about it. (personal communication, June 11, 2004)

The reality is playbuilding projects can take teachers and their students into areas of

controversy. However, the most compelling thing I will take away from this interview was

comment made by one of the principal actors:

Marissa: I've said this a couple times: Theatre for me is no longer a selfish hobby…that's what I've decided from this play

CH: So you see theatre as a vehicle for social change?

Marissa: It can be…

CH: Do you see yourself going into, playbuilding or, directing?

Marissa: I don't know. I love to act and that's my passion, but also I'm looking at something else like a counsellor, but that might pass as well. I don't know, but just for now, I decided that what we did wasn't as selfish as I thought it was. (personal

communication, June 11, 2004)

For a young lady of 16 to realize that theatre can be a vehicle for social change, seems to me to be the height of social responsibility. It was an honour to interview Hugh Anderson and the ensemble of *i have a name*, June 11, 2004.

When a Kiss is Not Just a Kiss

In April 2004 the media (Hainsworth ,2004) broke a story about a high school drama teacher who was ordered to remove a controversial scene from Handsworth Secondary school's collective creation, titled *Broken Theory.* The title of the show proved to be ironic, in that many of the Handsworth participants' personal theories of trust were also broken. This parallel process, of art mirroring life is, according to Beare (2002), an integral part of the creative process.

The premise of the show was every character had a theory about life, and each theory was somehow broken in the context of the storyline. One scene, titled "Utopia" featured a quick kiss between two 17-year old girls. The play also had elements of coarse language, violence and included an averted rape scene. Seven adults, including a School Board trustee, complained to the school Principal about the same-sex kiss; the show was then censored and the same-sex kiss was removed. In spite of Beare's praise for the manner in which all school members, staff and students, conducted themselves as they moved through this crisis, the subsequent media circus was devastating for him and his cast members. He was unaware that members of the greater community who saw the production would ever have an issue with this "innocuous" peck(Hainsworth, 2004, B1) . For the complainants however, the kiss was anything but innocuous and represented an assault on their core values system.

Luckily, I was able to reflect back on my interview with Hugh Anderson and impart Hugh's excellent advice to take preventative measures, such as lining up allies in advance, before

tackling controversial issues in a collective creation. Of course, one person's controversy is another person's non-issue, and that became very clear to David as he struggled through the whirlwind of emotion that followed the complaint. Furthermore, he became aware through the parallel process that some of his colleagues agreed with the complainants. This too served as a broken theory for David.

Coupled with this was yet another reaction to the complaint. One student who was involved in the writing process of the controversial scene, upon being told that her work was censored, reacted by demanding the entire scene be removed as she now claimed sole authorship of the work. The group responded with a resounding no! An analogy of the birth of a baby was used to dissuade the student; Beare and his students equated her actions with cutting off an arm of a baby. This would surely result in the death of the child and, in comparison, effectively kill the play. Although the student contributed greatly to the specific scene, she had also freely participated in a collective collaboration, and therefore relinquished individual ownership. To her surprise, there *was* no individual ownership, from the beginning of the process.

David Beare attributes the collaborative play-creating process and its inherent communication strategies, as the device that assisted everyone in working through the crisis. It took four hours of dialoguing with the principal, the performing arts staff and the students to process the censorship issue. As David stated:

> DB: It was the most powerful day. The kids learned so much from that process, because in the end, I think it comes down to, when you're in conflict, how to do it in a non - violent way. It was a lesson about how to communicate, because I could have been really bitter or angry, or rebellious.

> CH: Did the kids say they noticed you modelled what you taught them?

> DB: I think everybody modelled, the Principal modelled, the music teacher was outstanding…he was like a UN ambassador who came in and he tried to be neutral and got everyone to talk.

CH: So he was like the arbitrator?

David: Yes, it was incredible. The only problem was that we probably needed another four hours of talking after the play was over and because we didn't continue talking, the media got a hold of it and they just went crazy. (personal communication, August 14, 2004)

When is Theatre an Offensive Art?

My Shakespeare Professor Dr. Thomas Apple, asked us to write an essay titled "When is theatre an offensive art?" I often think back to this essay topic and have since wondered if playbuilding has an offensive component to it, or perhaps a subversive element? Although *Broken Theory* was, according to the standing ovation crowds, an excellent playbuilt show (personal communication, August 14, 2004) it did contain controversial topics, which resulted in the show being censored. Beare acknowledges there is a need to correctly gauge the greater community's barometer with regard to controversial topics and to perhaps supply warnings on subsequent play posters, should the need arise again. I would further suggest having colleagues view the work in progress, employing them as peer debriefers.

It is vital to acknowledge our role as public school teachers as, ultimately, we are accountable to the greater public, and that includes those who do not agree with our views. We ended the interview by agreeing playbuilding itself is a form of social responsibility and that implementing the process was where the real social responsibility lay.

Specific Skills Acquisitions from Playbuilding

One question I asked every playbuilder was "What specific skills acquisitions occur as a result of being part of a playbuilding group?"

During our interview, Carole Tarlington enlightened me as to the specific skills she saw emerging from her playbuilders over the years.

CT: See, some kids think [devising] is easier and then there are kids who did five years at the Youth Theatre and they'd want to do *Fiddler on the Roof* because it's "harder". I'd

say "No, it isn't"! It's easy for you guys; you've got the skills now, it's harder to devise the work! Another thing kids talk about is examining others' point of view, being tolerant of others' points of view and finding creative ways of working with opposing points of view…I mean two of the kids that I talk about in the article went to Stanford. Stanford doesn't just take you just on your marks; you have to be able to impress them with what you've done. Their parents attribute their years of the Youth Theatre at getting them into Stanford .Although the kids are very bright and wonderful anyway, I can see why they think that. The parents are both educators and they said what these kids have learned from working this way has been fantastic. Of course we toured so it was a work experience as well. (personal communication, March 31, 2004)

Here is a more succinct quote from the *Facilitator's Guide of Minor Reality:*

By working in small groups to transform their ideas into plays Vancouver Youth Theatre's actors acquire valuable life skills-including co-operation, articulation and confidence-as well as creating thought-provoking and interesting theatre pieces. (Hogan, Rogers, & Tarlington, 1995, p. 5)

I asked Jackie MacDonald how she saw English (as an academic subject) and

playbuilding fusing together. She answered:

JM: They are one and the same because you are working in the language, whether you are interpreting someone else's words, or you're creating your own words, you're using the nuances, the vocabulary; those kids are putting all of this together. They have an understanding of how to put together a theatre piece—so what's needed? A beginning, a middle, and end, and that's not just in theatre, it's in novels and in character study-that's really important. What's this character about ? So if they had a character in a scene they didn't just have to slot him in. We did a lot of character building exercises. (personal communication, January 17, 2004)

Later we discussed what specific skills Jackie had seen emerge from her students:

JM: Self-esteem; an understanding of a topic or theme, beyond anything, a confidence to speak to large groups, team-building skills beyond belief. And often these kids are totally direct opposites and they come together and work as one. And the number one thing that most companies in Canada want is an employee who can work with other people. (personal communication, January 17, 2004)

With regard to the actors at Bay Theatrix, they reported their entire outlook on life had

changed. While most of them said they had to the ability to stop dwelling on the show, they

confided that participating in the show   changed their way of thinking:

Actor: My perspective on life has changed in the way I see things and think about things. I'm not the same person I was and that separates me from some of my other friends. I

realize they don't understand enough about it, so it's not something I can generally talk to them about it unless they're from the play. Even some of my friends who have seen the play, they don't really want me talking about it. They might not be comfortable with it; it's not an open issue, and it is a bit of a problem. (personal communication, June 11, 2004)

I posed the same question to David Beare and extracted this response:

DB: They [his students] understand what process means, and they understand that you cannot separate relationships from process and so they have a higher sensitivity around what it means to engage in relationships, and what it means to include people, and what happens when you include people versus exclude people. They understand things like "inside group/outside group"; they learn the difference between being a friend and being supportive of another human being; and so they learn about empathy, compassion. I can't say they are all successful at it but they know the language of it. I am hoping those concepts will actually affect their lives as they grow up. Vision is not just artistic vision, it's community vision and when the two go together, I think they transform as human beings.

DB: I have this one boy who probably has developed the most in this area: he could easily work with a group of kids and take over. I asked him "Would you have gotten to this way of being without going through this process?" He was able to articulate that in Grade 10 he became very competitive, rigid, controlling. I had to really help him work through that process, and he got to a point where he let that ego stuff go. I feel that that is a major breakthrough for helping people become leaders.

CH: To move beyond competition and more into sharing…

DB: And the thing is, what they need to figure out is, its about loving competition; because there is always competition in theatre; everybody wants that spotlight, but you're not competing with another human being, you are competing with yourself. That's the hardest thing they have to learn, because in the end, it is themselves they are competing with. They want to grow and stretch as a human being, stretch themselves! (personal communication, August 14, 2004)

Headlines Theatre has been commissioned many times by high schools to implement

specific projects, usually under the banner of violence or racism. Their mandate is to transform

lives of disenfranchised community members and to enlighten all stakeholders in a community

about issues of social importance.

Theatre for Living is about empowerment: about people being the experts in their own lives and being able to use theatre as a means of creating change .Theatre for Living gives a community the opportunity to use the language of the theatre to investigate alternative approaches to hard-to-talk-about issues. This is a first step towards dealing

with difficult topics: moving towards open communication and realities that communities want in an active and entertaining way on an individual and community level. (Diamond, 2001, para. 5-7)

While playbuilders in schools are working toward changing their students' lives by developing in them a myriad of skills, Headlines Theatre works at the community level, empowering people to take control of their own lives, utilizing theatre as a formidable instrument of change. Although the participating groups may be different, the mandate is similar. Theatre is a powerful medium that will transform lives positively at many levels, so long as the participants are open to the transformation.

Youth Topics in Playbuilding

Hugh Anderson, David Beare, Jackie Macdonald, and Carole Tarlington have all explored countless topics with youth through playbuilding. Often the topics are drugs, relationships, and peer pressure. But the pedagogical trick with playbuilding is to pull teens away from these topics and allow them the opportunity to explore other issues, Morrison and Stinson(1995) are adamant about this in their article titled "Playbuilding in the post-modern era." Carole Tarlington achieved this through externally imposing the topic on her playbuilders, primarily because Vancouver Youth Theatre was commissioned to devise particular shows for sponsors. Hugh Anderson knew he wanted to do a show from a woman's perspective and he carefully chose his cast, but let them choose the specific topic; Jackie Macdonald's first shows were often prescribed shows for the Community Organization for Drug Education Society Conferences (CODES) but later on, she implemented the devising process with unique topics in mind, not prescribed by an external group.

I wondered how teen topics changed over the years, and what the hot button issue was for youth today. Carole Tarlington answered:

CT: Violence

CH: Violence in the schools?

CT: Violence full stop. We found that in the last play I did for the Youth Theatre; it was called *Minor Reality*. We interviewed people who had been teenagers in the 1920's 1950's and the kids provided the modern view; once we got to the 90's it became very abstract and tied up with violence. It was a wonderful show actually, but it made people very uncomfortable…because here we have the 1950s thing—kids in 50s clothes, doing the 50s dances and having love problems and suddenly it got to the 90s and we had this transition where a kid who was the Emcee-and he said "well where are the kids now?"And he had a paper and he said, "Oh here they are: kid stabs other teen at party, boy kicked to death in playground and he went through a lot of things. That's what is worrisome. There isn't widespread violence, but I think through playbuilding you can get at what is eating at kids…

CH: Can you give one window of where you think it's coming from?

CT: It's coming from the media. I mean you don't get a headline saying young people help old lady across road. But if it's headlines, the media loves youth violence and if you talk to the police… It would be very interesting to do research in that area but I would bet that there's not much more violence now than there ever was, except now it's really reported and it's the thing that people are frightened of.

CH: And is the violence begetting the violence?

CT: Yeah, and kids are worried about that. They hear things like Chinese Canadian kids being kicked to death. Well, you'd be worried too! (personal communication, March 31, 2004)

Lessons Learned

From each playbuilder, I engaged in reflective practice, applying what I had learned to this project. Jackie taught me about the importance of community building prior and during playbuilding. Carole taught me about alternate methods of handling scripting and how important it is to engage the students in topics other than their own personal angst.

My playbuilding crises paled in comparison to David Beare's experience. From him I saw first-hand how important it is to have allies lined up well in advance before tackling controversial issues. However, I first learned that fact from interviewing Drama teacher Hugh Anderson. Here is a direct example of teachers helping teachers simply by having the time to dialogue. I concede, however, that one has to have the ability to predict if controversy will

arise from certain topics, and that comes from knowing the boundaries of your community.

David Diamond reaffirmed to me that theatre is much more than entertainment:

it can transform the lives of community members when there is a shift away from

oppressor -oppressed language and a move toward the mindset of theatre for living.

These five playbuilders confirmed theatre's ability to transform lives in ways that can

only be imagined, and sometimes in ways one would never expect.

> It is vital that young people have many opportunities to touch, feel, use and appreciate theatre for themselves, both as participants and audience, so that they discover that there is no theatre that is really beyond their reach, so that they discover that all the richness, drama and poetry of all theatre is accessible to them. (Bray, 1991, p. 123)

Chapter Five – Findings

To clarify the findings I re-visited the research questions and answered them based on the body of analyzed data presented in this project.

Question #1 from the Actor Exit Interview, Part A. Can the process of playbuilding be successful in exploring issues of social responsibility with middle school drama club students?

Firstly, it was important to clarify exactly what I meant by social responsibility, and I am still not sure if there is an absolute definition to that term. The literature review helped focus this broad topic, but I now think the banner of social responsibility is a fluid construct, one that modifies in response to socio-political and cultural changes in history. Still, I believe there are universal concepts that will always appeal to middle school students such as relationships, friendships, peer pressure, drugs, as well as 'hot' drama topics such as betrayal, revenge, unrequited love, and loneliness. However, I wonder whether it is educationally responsible to exclusively focus on adolescent topics: perhaps to leave students where they naturally are and not move them beyond their own internal culture is "educationally to betray them… and to commit an act of social injustice of the first order" (Morrison & Stinson, 1995, p.38).

Moving beyond typical teen issues is a major goal for me in the next playbuilding attempt, and could be titled *Getting Beyond the Angst*!

Reflecting on the entire project, considering all data sources, especially my own experience, I now see that I was chasing after something that was already inherent in the process: the topic did not really matter because the process itself was a form of social responsibility. This then led me to consider, what did my students get out of being in the process?

Sixty-two percent of the students (actors) said they strongly agreed/agreed to the statement 'I really enjoyed the process part of the playbuilding workshop, while 38% only

"somewhat agreed". Immediately I noticed there was dissention among the actors, which accounts for the great difficulty we had in developing the play. Only 8% of the students felt their ideas were accepted a lot of the time. This was manifested through two students who tended to be the intrinsic learners, the leaders of the group, whose ideas were most often listened to. Without these two students, the process would have taken much longer. Their ideas were creative and workable; the group usually followed their lead without question. However 46% of the students "agreed" with the statement, while 54% "somewhat agreed". The rift between the actors persisted right up to the cast party, when this survey was conducted.

Sixty-one percent strongly agreed/agreed with the following statement: "I felt safe to express my personal information to the Drama Club." Research tells us that, "the degree to which an adolescent is able to make friends and be part of an accepting peer group is a major indicator of how well the adolescent will adjust in other areas of social and psychological development" (Potter, Schlisky, Stevenson, & Drawdy, 2001, p. 54.). I clearly remember one rehearsal where Michelle said to me:

> "Mrs. Harvey, in case you haven't noticed, we're not exactly the 'popular' people!" I coyly said, "Well you're popular with me!" To which she responded, "Oh that so doesn't count!"

Of course I knew my actors were not exactly the popular people,   but exactly who the popular people were, remained a mystery. The degree to which an adolescent is considered popular can change from moment to moment. If playbuilding can assist students in feeling safe to express their personal information to a group of peers, then the process itself is providing a socially responsible service to those adolescents. Recently I spoke with Michelle's Mother who emphasized the extent that the drama club experience had allowed her daughter to become more socially confident. Michelle has now moved on to the senior high school and has joined the newly formed drama club there. Her parents are thrilled and could not thank me enough for

implementing this playbuilding project.

Sixty-nine percent of the actors strongly agreed/agreed with this statement: "I am a more confident person after being part of a playbuilding group." Recent research states that

> Children making the transition to junior high school have more negative change than children remaining in the same school setting. The junior high school students had lower self-esteem, more problem behaviour and poorer school performance than their kindergarten through eighth-grade counterparts. (Simmons & Blyth, 1987, p. 21)

My research indicated that the playbuilding process itself contributed to the students gaining more social confidence at a time in their lives when they needed confidence the most: for many middle school students, increased social confidence could literally be a lifesaver and surely that counts as social responsibility.

Reflecting on the exit interview survey of elementary students provided further evidence for question one. Fifty-eight percent of the elementary audience strongly agreed/agreed with the statement "the play taught me some new information about starting middle school." Sixty-five percent of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that the play encouraged students to be positive about middle school life. Fifty-six percent of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that "this play did a good job in dealing with bullying issues." Keeping in mind our target audience was Grades 5-6, the statistics confirm issues of social responsibility were conveyed to the audiences. We explored the topic, processed it and created a product that, in turn, transformed into a socially responsible vehicle of information for students entering middle school. Furthermore, the concept of middle school students, with their teacher, visiting the elementary feeder schools, performing a humorous and informative show, is itself an act of social responsibility. All summer long I have had smiles and recognition from students about to enter Grade 7 at our school. Many of them will look to both myself and my actors when they are in need of assistance because we connected with them, through a very positive medium; that is an

example of drama-in-education in action.

The middle school audiences were not as positively affected by our show but they were not our target audience. We expected the audience to be critical of the work, but surprisingly, the comments were quite generous. It was the actors' wish to take our play to their middle school peers: I thought this was courageous. The playbuilding process afforded them the opportunity to face stranger-peers, engage in a huge risk (performing original work) and come away from the experience, enlightened and very positive about two schools they previously viewed with both contempt and trepidation. I think it is very healthy for middle school students across a District to meet each other on non-competitive grounds, sharing original work as actors and audience. However, I do not for a minute wish to assert that theatre is strictly non-competitive and I acknowledge that competition can be very healthy for adolescents, especially when they are competing as David Beare states it "with themselves." Consider this part of my interview with David Beare:

> DB: What they need to figure out is its about loving competition, its because there is always competition in theatre:everybody wants that spotlight, but is all about…you're not competing with another human being, you are competing with yourself…and that's the hardest thing they have to learn, because in the end, its themselves they are competing with, they want to grow and stretch as a human being, stretch themselves. (personal communication, August 14, 2004)

Although the middle school audience was not our target group, our performances contributed to the exploration of social responsibility; the actors took a risk and came away from it more confident in themselves and perhaps more empathic toward former adversaries.

My findings suggest social responsibility can very easily be explored through playbuilding, primarily because the process itself is actually a form of social responsibility.

Question #2 from the Actor Exit Interview, Part A. What do the findings tells us with regard to Question Two: "What are the major issues of social responsibility that emerge when

engaging in a playbuilding process with middle school drama club students?"

The intake interview asked the actors what topics they would choose for an original play. Answers included the life of teen, suicide, teen problems in general, drugs, abuse, and rape. Sarai suggested a fantasy play, including a protagonist, antagonist, a battle and a friendship scene and life through teenager's eyes. Although the topics that emerged were fairly predictable, peripheral issues began to appear, as a parallel process to the project. Students were forced to confront their own deficiencies such as cooperating and building trust with peers, collectively sharing and celebrating each others' creative strengths, and discovering that adversaries such as rival schools were in fact allies, in the form of receptive audience members. The interview with David Beare confirms this notion of a parallel process:

> DB: There is always a parallel process, no matter what you create, you cannot separate it: liked trained actors say there is the character on stage and then there is the actor themselves on stage too. (personal communication, August 14, 2004)

Here is an exit interview comment from one of the actors, which reveals the presence of a parallel process in response to the question: "What was it like being part of a socially constructed play?"

> Julie: it was a lot like teenage life because it was very emotional. Lots of people quit and it was hard for everyone to agree, but we did accomplish our goal in the end.

While I was chasing and searching for elusive issues of social responsibility, the parallel process of the students' transformation into young actors was evolving before my eyes. Embedded within the parallel process was the true topic of social responsibility, that is, the actors' positive transformation, manifested in the acquisition of new skills and attitudes. For example, it was fascinating to watch the actors navigate through the audience de-briefing sessions.

Following their first performance, they were so excited to actually experience being

'asked' a question by an audience member that they all spoke at once; subsequently no discernible answers came through! We laughed about it later, saying that the flurry of babbling resembled how they used to behave at the beginning of the project, before speaking restraints (talking sticks) were introduced (imposed by the actors, not me).   Following that first de-briefing session, Sarai organized the process by assigning particular questions to certain actors: she made a list of predictable questions such as "How did you write the play together?" or "Who came up with the nightmare scene?" or "Were those bully montage scenes based on true stories?" She assigned each actor a responsibility. In essence, Sarai was synthesizing the entire project before my eyes. Using critical thinking skills to predict potential questions, she allocated specific tasks to the other actors. First however, she led a group discussion to determine who would be "best" to answer a particular question based on their collective recollections of the dramatic process. Interestingly, I was not asked to participate in this. Sarai said something like "Mrs. Harvey has done enough work. It is our responsibility to sort this out!" By their last performance, they had developed a sophisticated, efficient system for leading de-briefing sessions, with no assistance from teachers. That was impressive.

The process exit interview findings confirm their development:

Question #3 from the Actor Exit Interview, Part A. Do you think you have developed any new skills as a result of participating in a playbuilding workshop?

Julie: Yes I gained way, way more confidence and I found that I could talk to people (especially guys) more!!!

Sarai: Yes, while working in a Drama Team, you need artistic as well as, creative skills, something which I was lacking. As this play has progressed, I have developed these skills further.

Seth: I have developed a skill of speaking more in public and have less of a fear of being myself I public

Skyler Soles: Probably better at acting in general and co-operation in large groups.

Another phenomenal skill that developed within the actors was the ability to re-cast the show on a minute-by-minute basis. I would not recommend this level of stress to most adults, but the students seemed to cope with this situation far better than me. When our show was officially on tour, we never knew from day to day whether a particular actor, a Grade 7 boy, would be performing with us, as his parents had to secure a day pass for him from the hospital. There were many times that he simply did not show up. The other actors had to be ready to perform his parts, and, if he finally did show up, re-configure the show to fit him *back* into the script. Can you imagine asking a group of adults to take on *this* amount of stress at a moment's notice? But something had changed, and I think that something was initially my attitude. I finally surrendered control and let the actors figure it out. The results were stunning. Here were these young, inexperienced, difficult teens, sorting out from moment to moment *who* would perform *what* part, and I did not have to say a word. Because I had learned to not over-react when a crisis presented itself, and because we as a group, had already survived the loss of one important actress, (and we had experienced the tragic death of a student in the school) suddenly, we were all gifted with the ability to cope with critical situations. These events caused me to reflect back on Jackie Macdonald's question: Are you as a teacher comfortable giving artistic control over to your actors? If not, playbuilding is not for you.

Further findings under the topic of skill acquisitions come from the written Actor Exit Interviews, Part B:

> Julie: Since completing the play, I am more confident in myself because I have told people things I have never told anyone before and now I feel like it is all in the past ; when I told everything I was not shunned or hated. I also made new relationships with people.

> Sarai: you begin to realize others have had similar experiences to you so you are not as alone as you thought.

> Seth: it showed me that no matter what people will laugh at me (laugh)

Skyler Soles: I know I can perform in front of a large audience

Later in the Written Actor Exit Interview, the actors confirmed their personal skill

acquisitions, in unique ways:

Julie: I'm more confident with acting, talking to people, and I'm not so stuck in my shell

Sarai: Definitely I have confidence and courage to speak up for what I believe in; my interpersonal skills have improved as well as my artistic skills

Seth: I'm better at speaking in public, being myself, and keeping quiet

Skyler Soles: I'm better at Highland dancing and Scottish accents

A question from the Actor Exit Survey (Appendix E, Table 3) focused directly on the

process/production work: the following are statistics from that survey:

Sixty-two percent of the actors strongly agreed/agreed with the statement: "I really

enjoyed the process part of the playbuilding workshop", while 70% strongly agreed/agreed with

this statement: "I really enjoyed the performance aspect of the playbuilding process."

Sixty percent of the actors strongly agreed/agreed with this statement… "I noticed a huge

difference in our attitudes from the process to the product"

From the written Actor Exit Interviews: Part B, these comments emerged:

Question #6. If I had to choose between the two, I would say I enjoyed the

(PROCESS/PRODUCT) more…

Julie: PRODUCT. I loved performing in front of people our ideas and I bonded with people during that time. That is also when I became way more confident.

Sarai: PROCESS. You have more creative freedom in the process, where the product is a written script. However, I found it easier performing other peoples' work as opposed to your own, and it is easier to perform without a script because you become dependant on the script.

Seth: PRODUCT: the product is the best part of the playbuilding. In the end, it all comes down to teens and teens' communication—ha. But it was the best part you get to see all your hard work!

Skyler Soles: PROCESS. It was less serious and more just plain fun. Unlike the hectic

"change things last minute," product, performance. Also constant performance can get rather repetitive and annoying.

The findings suggest that the group was evenly divided on which they enjoyed most, process or product. The performance was the initial pay-off for the students, but I imagine that the benefits of the process will continue to evolve as the students move through their school years.

Lessons Learned, Lessons Lived

As a teacher, I must recognize that I, too, am a learner and through dialogue with my students, I, along with them, will be transformed and changed, as I, too am not merely a creator but also a creation of those I meet. (Norris, 1989, p. 25)

The students were not the only winners in this process: I gained knowledge through experience. I learned how important it is to distance students from their own personal stories especially when working with middle school actors. Their personal stories often revealed an insecurity that manifested itself in overt reactions to events adults would normally perceive as 'non-issues'. My research had led me to a new appreciation of the risk the student-actors took in exposing their personal stories. In the future, I will insist some stories be performed by actors other than themselves.

I became aware of a parallel process that seems to run alongside creative work and will acknowledge that process far sooner in future playbuilding projects (Belliveau, 2004) and (Beare, personal communication, August 14th, 2004). At times the parallel process got in the way of the push toward performance, and this created a somewhat bumpy ride during the building of the play. Making students aware of the parallel process at an early stage might be a recommendation for the future.

Finally, I learned if a playbuilding group wishes to explore controversial issues, such as the ones described in the Anderson and Beare interviews, it is imperative to have allies identified

in advance. Do not leave yourself wide open to criticism and even further repercussions especially when students are involved. Any activity that occurs as part of the public school system has to be, by definition, accountable to its public, and that sometimes includes those who find fault with our work. Artistic integrity is important, and justification of our work is sometimes necessary, but so is our responsibility to the students we serve and the greater community in which we co-exist. We must be mindful of that balance when choosing content for collective creations, and be pro-active, rather than re-active.

Regarding my final research question, "What strategies, approaches and instructional practices do successful practitioners of playbuilding employ in their work with students as they work toward a performance piece?", I discovered, after completing the interviews of BC playbuilders, that my own instructional practices were similar to my five colleagues. There is a great sense of accomplishment in knowing your teaching practices are part of a collective body of knowledge that has evolved from a body of professionals. Errington (1993) supports this practice as a valid method of research. On the subject of alternative research methods with regard to drama praxis, he writes:

> One alternative involves the use of a collaborative-interpretive approach, in which teacher colleagues may compare and reflect on shared observations of practice, revealing a deeper understanding of the dialectical relationship between drama events and their social, cultural, and historical contexts. Teacher-observers provide one another with critical ears and eyes within an interpretive framework. (p.32)

After completing the interview cycle, the next step would be to apply for professional development funding to observe teacher's classroom work, focusing on a collegial rather than supervisory model (Errington, 1993, p.32). I intend to follow this up by locating funds that allow teachers to visit other schools. In my experience very few teachers make use of this funding, due to time restraints and the perceived "hoop-jumping" required to access the money.

Linda Lang (2002) completed an extensive Masters project by interviewing nine

successful teacher practitioners of collective creation; my findings match with hers on many levels, as detailed in the Literature review.

While the playbuilders employ similar strategies in the collective creativity process, each has unique qualities that set their praxis apart. For example, Jackie MacDonald infused her process with community building activities such as gratitude circles, rainy day envelopes, and compliment circles. Not surprisingly, the Vic High Players' work remains an excellent example of true ensemble acting.

Carole Tarlington utilized her students as actor-writers, while moving through process drama strategies. She then dramaturged the script and had the students audition for their play. This is a wise practice especially when working with middle school actors as it keeps them closer to a drama-theatre-performance model and away from drama as a psychotherapeutic model.

David Beare's collaborative-play-creating process, incorporates three different groups: the Directing Scriptwriting 12 class, the extra-curricular Writing Team, and finally the 100+ performing arts students who participate in the show. His process, though not a classic playbuilding one as described by Bray (1991) and Weigler (2001), also focuses on community-building. For him…

> DB: It's the same concept. If we, the teachers, cannot communicate effectively with one other (the dance and music and drama teacher) then the kids who are the leaders at the Grade 12 level have no models. It ripples down. To me it comes down to the quality of how people communicate with one another; talking in a respectful, open way, even in the moment of conflict, so that eventually everybody has a win/win situation, even though it might be a painful conflict. (D. Beare, personal communication, August 14, 2004)

Hugh Anderson's work with Bay Theatrix Company is known for its excellence in form. What I took away from my interview with Hugh is his immense strength, confidence and conviction in his work. His dedication to his practice is further reflected by his students' personal dedication; he expects a great deal of accountability from his actors, and thus is in a position to

tackle controversial issues such as the missing women of the downtown eastside of Vancouver. Hugh has a mission and he sets his students to task. I believe it is his business-like approach that affords him the opportunity to tackle controversial social issues.

From David Diamond I obtained a snapshot of Headline Theatre's mandate to utilize theatre as a vehicle for social change. Drawing upon the philosophy of Paulo Friere and Augusto Boal, Headlines Theatre transformed in the 1980s from making theatre *for* communities and towards making theatre *with* communities. It was exciting to hear about a professional company implementing Boal's theatrical work into community issues-based productions; from these productions came written recommendations derived from audience interventions, (recorded by a trained professional) that were delivered to the Vancouver City Municipal Council for political consideration.

Other Findings

Looking back on my teacher journal I saw that, most of the time, I was in reactive mode rather than pro-active mode. Some of my journal comments were simply rants of frustration and not really reflective comments at all. Still, they documented the feelings of despair I had when desperately trying to push the students through the process. I was pleased that when I attempted to insert my voice into the play (out of a dearth of workable scenarios), some of the actors fought back, insisting that this process was meant to capitalize on their voice and not mine! This tension forced the actors to embrace student-accountability and do a little devising of their own. In the future, if the process does not appear to be working, I will encourage much more dialogue from the actors and consult colleagues for assistance. Simply put, I needed to trust the process.

The creative writing prompts were helpful in moving the devising process through to performance. The annotated script, which appears in the appendices, shows which prompts

influenced the subsequent scene creations. I will continue to explore the use of creative writing prompts in drama when implementing playbuilding units. Here is a list of findings I reached with regard to the process of creative writing prompts that were recorded in the student drama journals:

Limitations of the Journals

1. Most of the creative writing prompts occurred at the beginning of the Drama lessons as a focusing tool. I could have varied it by having them write in the middle and near the end of the session.

2. It is difficult when you are in the creative mode to ask students to stop or drop and write: we did it a few times, but not enough. I would implement that during subsequent playbuilding units.

The final student journal entry was February 5, 2004, and we began performing April 5, 2004. This was too long a break, although the initial purpose of the journal was to fuel the process with creative writing prompts. Once   we were in performance mode I should have kept the process going right through the performances.

3. Spring Break and Easter halted our creative flow. Next time, I will endeavour to have a playbuilt script ready by January 1, 2004.

Recommendations for Journal Usage in Data Collections

1. Vary the timing of the writing prompt

2. Have the students record their playbuilding progress even if they complain about it.

4. Use the emotional climate surrounding you to generate writing prompts.

This project has been a highlight of my professional experience. I am grateful to my family who encourage me to continue pursuing academic studies. I hope other drama colleagues will follow with much needed research in drama education. The conversation will continue.

Chapter Six – Conclusion and Recommendations

This reflective practice case study began on October 4, 2003, when I posted a sign

outside of the drama room, inviting volunteers to participate in a playbuilding unit, as part of   a

middle school   Drama Club. Forty students became 30 and then settled down to 16 actors. The

official project began on January 4, 2004, and ended on April 30, 2004, for the students. My

research-writing phase lasted from July 1 until August 30, 2004.

I began with the question: "Can issues of social responsibility be explored and then

represented through playbuilding with middle school drama cub students?"

Frequently the process was challenging and the journey took me to places that were

unexpected. My data analysis provided answers to the original research questions but allowed me

to be recursive in my teaching praxis. Borrowing from Conrad's work (2001) I will separate my

concluding remarks into three categories: pedagogical issues, methodological issues and

theoretical issues. Finally I will make recommendations for future playbuilders, and others who

wish to explore related research in drama education.

Pedagogical Issues

Initially I was concerned about using volunteers for a playbuilding unit. I had always

presented theatrical performances to the public that were of top quality because I adhere to a very

thorough auditioning method, utilizing at least three colleagues in the process. The thought of

presenting something inferior rendered a few sleepless nights.

Carole Tarlington addresses this issue head-on:

The quality of the performance is the director's main responsibility. I have been to
playbuilt performances where the actors cannot be heard, no apparent blocking exists,
there is no form to the play and the young actors are not committed to what they are
doing. Directors typically excuse this work by saying 'but the process was what was the
most valuable thing.' Great. It probably was. So show the process and don't put the
audience and actors through the agony of an incomplete and shoddy performance. It is

unfair, unprofessional and damaging to drama, theatre and young actors. If it is going before an audience, make sure it is worth watching. (1996, p. 20)

Reading this made firm my resolve to create something worth watching. Pedagogically then, if a process cannot be turned into product, the work should stop there. I pushed and pushed the actors through to performance level, and at times we were almost there. I do not like hearing people make excuses for students saying

"Oh well, what you expect? They are, after all, only middle school students." Rubbish. Actors are actors, and standards are there to be met. We were able to deliver somewhat of a quality performance to receptive audiences. The final product did not rise to what I had hoped for, but there were some memorable moments.

My next playbuilt play will utilize auditioned actors who are committed to the creative process, and who possess a rigorous amount of self-control. Playbuilding requires disciplined actors and there is no room for those who exhibit lack of self-control. The group process cannot sustain this.

I have also given consideration to playbuilding in and out of the timetable. My experience has been that if a class is willing to work together, without too many negative contributors, the process can be implemented, but it is best done outside of the timetable with a group of auditioned actors. I recommend trying various process drama strategies with a drama class whilst moving toward a potential performance, but forcing students to present something of inferior quality is a futile exercise, and a great disservice to the community.

My findings from both the audience and actor surveys confirmed that, from their perspectives, the project was successful. The process worked, the performance was acceptable and the audience members wrote many positive statements. The actors indicated in their written exit interviews that they gained new skills and a different world-view after moving through the

process and performing the product. This answered my fourth research question regarding skill acquisition. Yes, there were successes, but there were many things that could have been improved upon.

Most frustrating to me was my own perceived inability to run a really tight ship. With auditioned high – school actors, during plays and musicals, I have actors and their parents sign a formal contract that deals with commitment and student discipline. Weigler (2001) provides a template for such a contract in his appendices. There are penalties for breaking the contract and that penalty may result in removal from the production. When an actor is removed from a show, the process is extraordinarily damaging to cast morale. I am aghast at the selfishness of some actors who sign up for a production and then do everything possible to let the show down. However, I did not wish to impose the contract on this project. I was afraid that if I became too strict with the actors, they would walk away from the project. . There were a few students who consistently displayed inappropriate behaviour during the process and very nearly pushed me into quitting. We survived, but the quality of the final product was certainly lessened because of poor discipline in the process.

Regarding collective creation techniques, I learned to recognize the parallel process when it emerged . This gave me new insight into my second research question regarding issues that can materialize while playbuilding with middle school students. The answers I received were certainly not the ones I was expecting. Why? Lang (2002) documents:

> One teacher mentioned that is was important for students to understand that the early excitement and enthusiasm of creating a play usually gives way to frustration, anger and fear before participants can feel the success and exhilaration of the performance. Understanding the predictable rhythms of play production is probably as important for the teachers of collective creation as it is for the students who participate. (p. 59)

I had never playbuilt with students of this age before (Grades 7-9). Even though some of my earlier playbuilders were as young as 14, they seem to behave in a more mature fashion, by

virtue of being in a Grade 8–12 school. Discipline problems, lack of self-control and some of the students' egocentric behaviour greatly impeded our show from rising to a superior level of performance. The potential was there, but behaviour problems impeded our progress. I have uncovered research that asserts the junior high or middle school model is essentially a mismatch, (stage-environment fit) between the school's external and internal functioning and the adolescent's emotional needs (Eccles et al., 1993). Moreover, the Carnegie Council on adolescent development, in their report *Turning Points: A Decade Later* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) criticizes the present climate of many middle schools, while making sound suggestions for improvement. The council recommends more community building activities taking place at the micro and macro level of a school environment. I believe drama education programs can address some deficiencies within the middle school system documented by the Carnegie Council. Miller and Saxton (2003) describe their own research with Grade 8 Drama students and compare their findings with that of the Carnegie Institute's 1996 report:

> In a grade 8 drama classroom…students were asked to develop a still image (tableau) that would depict the most difficult aspect of their transition from an elementary school to a Junior Secondary School. Four out of the five groups represented either abstractly or literally, a sense of isolation, of 'being out of place'. Working with the ideas of these 13 year olds validate the findings of the Carnegie Institutes' 1996 research on adolescence that highlighted how critical it is for students to be able to establish their sense of belonging in a valued group and to build a sense of their own self-worth. (p. 29)

The playbuilding process, embedded in an educational drama setting as described in this project, can fulfill many of the recommendations made by the Carnegie Council ((Jackson and Davis 2000). Further proof of this can be found in Betty-Jane Wagner's (1999), *Building Moral Communities through Educational Drama*, a collection of research studies that attests drama enhances student learning on many levels: content, skills, understanding and personal growth (Miller & Saxton, 2003).

The questions that keep tugging at me involves the very structure of middle schools. Is it

wise to segregate young adolescents together in a large mass when they are at their most

awkward stage of development? Does this encourage the rise of a peer-oriented culture, which

according to Dr. Gordon Neufeld's (2004) research, is an unhealthy environment? Furthermore,

why at middle school, do we begin a process of individual academic competition? We pit one

student against another by posting grades up on the wall, and largely abandon cooperative

learning strategies in favour of more teacher centered learning. Strangely, we do this during the

time when adolescents are the most emotionally vulnerable and sensitive to peer comparison. Is

the present middle school model a stage-environment mismatch? (Eccles et al., 1993).

 If we are stuck with the middle-school model, can drama education assist in addressing

the stage-environment fit on young adolescents' experiences in schools? Miller and Saxton

(2003) confirm this:

> Drama strategies are especially appropriate for middle school classroom because they are
> collaborative and social; we all do all the work together at the same time. We (meaning
> teachers and students) make it happen together. And what we make happen in that "as if"
> world is the creation of meaning. Together we discover why things are the way they are
> and explore the possibilities for change. (p. 3)

 Specifically, dealing with the pedagogy of playbuilding with middle school students, I

will make students aware of the parallel process at the beginning of the process, so as to avoid

the difficulties I encountered. We are about theatre first, and not therapy. If however, a

therapeutic process comes out of the theatrical work then that is a bonus. I learned the hard way

how vital it is to distance adolescents from their own experiences, especially when they wish to

represent personal stories on the stage. Tarlington and Beare both use distancing techniques in

their scripting processes: once personal stories are added into a collective mix, care must be

taken to treat these stories delicately. It is wise to assign such stories to other actors, because

most adolescents do not have the ego strength to balance the two constructs: their real life versus

the role they are playing on the stage.

When playbuilding becomes controversial, it is time to consider one's praxis. It is imperative, when tackling potentially controversial subjects such as Anderson's topic of teen prostitution or Beare's same-sex kiss scene, to have attained support networks, from inside the school and from the community, well in advance of the project. Since we are funded by the public school system, I believe we must be accountable to the greater public. True, the voice of the students is the main reason we do playbuilding, but I believe we owe our public an invitation into the conversation, should controversy arise out of the work.

Moreover, Jackie MacDonald's notion of continual community building (personal communication, January 17, 2004) seems to me to be some of the best advice I received. It may be tiring but it is well worth putting the time in, as the fruits of the labour will be realized in a polished and cohesive performance.

Specifically dealing with teaching and playbuilding techniques, I am thrilled that the creative writing prompts were so successful. Using dialectical journals and creative writing prompts in my English classroom led me to experiment with creative writing prompts in the playbuilding process and the results were very encouraging. More than anything, the prompts gave the students a sense of security as a number of them were in my English classes and already skilled with the technique. It helped for lateral transference of curriculum as my English/drama club students   were able to experience the link between two subjects, English and Drama. A list of recommendations regarding the creative writing prompts can be found in the findings section of this project.

I   enjoyed dramaturging the students' work and then creating an annotated script. Though I think it is wise to prepare a script for any devised production, many playbuilding directors disagree. For purposes of posterity and for emergency situations when an actor does not

show up for a performance, a script is a lifeline that I would prefer to have, even though some of the interviewed directors reported it stifled their creativity.

I felt inspired sharing drama pedagogy with five BC playbuilders, through the interview process. We need to find more time to do this, to be the 'worldmakers' of our art form. Errington (1993) is one researcher who calls for more collaborative-interpretive work implemented by teachers. In Canada successful collaborative practices have already been implemented by communities of teachers (Booth, 1998).

Researching pedagogical articles and books on playbuilding became a bit of a magical mystery tour; I had to acquaint myself with many terms such as collaborative creativity, collective creation, devising, and the collaborative play-creating process, which, according to Lang (2002) is the biggest hindrance to this topic of research: there are too many terms that explain essentially the same thing. Still it was a lesson in geography as certain terms are geographically associated with certain areas.

This project, although authentic in sampling, was not perfect. I am not so naïve as to think it was a flawless journey. Anything worth pursuing is bound to have strife along the way but pedagogically I have grown as a drama teacher. More importantly, the students gained documented life-skills, which will enhance their future years in school and perhaps beyond.

I thank all of the actors for teaching me, just as much as I taught them.

Methodological Issues

Although I have modeled this project as a reflective practice case study, the essence of the project stems from the field of arts-based research.

When I first began this project, I had no information of what constituted art-based educational research. In fact, I distinctly remember the moment I first heard of it, and I was

immediately cynical. However, Norris (2000) confirmed for me that playbuilding is a form of research and I now see many possibilities for future projects. In my coursework for EDCI 582: Writing as Research, I discovered the works of Eisner (1997a), van Manen (1994), and Langer (1942), to name a few of the researchers exploring alternate forms of data representation.

What is Arts-Based Education Research (ABER)? It is a form of qualitative research that utilizes alternative forms of data representations from art-based textual forms: stories, drawings, maps, diagrams, mind and concept maps, films, drama structures, theatre productions, dance and poetry are just some of the forms available for use in ABER. Why did this come about? Perhaps the big insight, at least for Eisner (Eisner, 1997a), was the notion that research did not belong exclusively to science and that qualitative research, when applied to education, could expand to include forms that diversified from the traditional canon of the social sciences. Of course, with any new paradigm shift, there will be both positive and negative aspects. Traditional researchers, both quantitative and qualitative "prefer their knowledge solid and like their data hard" (Eisner, 1997a p.7). Research seeks verification, truth and claims, in order to make assertions. Assertions, Eisner says, require propositions and propositions return us back to hard data- texts. ABER forms are non-propositional: they open the door to many truths and they encourage ambiguity (Eisner, 1997b). Those against ABER would say the results of allowing it to proliferate will result in a crisis of validity for qualitative research.

Another contentious component is the notion of artist and art. Who decides whether the representation is art or merely art-like (Piirto, 2002)? This brings me back to the notion of a quality process versus a quality product. When I engage in future playbuilding, it will most likely NOT be connected to any research but I will not lower my standards of performance expectations. I believe that we, as artists , have a responsibility to the public to produce quality

work, and that includes theatre with any age level.

I will continue exploring playbuilding as a form of arts based research and hope to discover more reflective practice research from other drama teachers. Arts- based research, while still considered the new frontier, will continue evolving and may someday include extensive collaborations between scholarly researchers and teacher practitioners. We both have a great deal to share with each other, and need the means to do so. Eisner defines this as "authentic collaboration," stating it will "…require a re-definition of the teacher's role so that teachers have significant opportunities- especially time to engage in collaboration. If the school is to be a center of inquiry for students, it will need to be a center for inquiry for the professional staff as well" (Eisner, 1997b, p. 265).

Theoretical Issues

By researching and actually living many aspects of playbuilding with middle school drama students, I have been drawn to different theories of research. I have thoroughly enjoyed re-visiting research on drama education, this time as a graduate student. I first had to situate my research within the structure of a methodology. Through Conrad's award-winning Master's thesis (2001), I came across the term *reflective practice case study*, which is the work of Donald Schon (1983, 1987, 1991).

Reading the work of Norris (2000) enlightened me to the potential of drama in education as a research methodology, and linked up my previous knowledge of the emergence of alternate modes of data representation through arts -based research.

Cousins' (2000) article on the tradition of the American high school play forced me to consider the different theoretical viewpoints of devising versus text theatre. My introduction to the British term devising brought me into a completely different world, that of the UK Drama

curriculum standards. This led me to compare the theoretical stances between the UK and Australia's choice to situate drama as an academic subject, versus the BC Ministry of Education's choice to maintain drama as an elective, denying it academic merit. While researching post-secondary theatre schools, I came across the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD). I was thrilled to discover they offer a Fine Arts degree in contemporary theatre practice (devising). Their website is provided at the end of this project. This practical performance degree course is "for people who are keen to innovate and for aspiring theatre makers who wish to work collaboratively to make performances which have something to say about the world in which we live" (RSAMD, 2004, paragraph 3). Here is yet another example of the United Kingdom acknowledging the academic status of drama in education.

I have had the opportunity to consider the theories behind a plethora of bully and violence prevention programs and to witness the emergence of further guidelines on social responsibility (BCME, 2001a) and safe, caring schools (BCME, 2004). We have the binders, the kits, the guidelines, the programs, but we are still experiencing a rise in violence of all sorts in our public schools. Why? The media? The breakdown of the family? The breakdown of society values? Who else can we blame? Is anyone willing to take responsibility, and demonstrate social responsibility in action?

I had the opportunity to investigate the theories behind playbuilding and social issues, reading the work of Appleby (2002), Balin (1998), and Beare (2002) and have read research that links drama to current post-modern theories, namely, the research of Hancock (1995), Laidlaw (2002), and Morrison and Stinson (1995). I have ventured into the field of psychology, having struggled with adolescent behavioural issues during our playbuilding sessions, researching the work of Baer (1999), Barber (2004), McConnell (2003), and of course, the ongoing, seminal

work of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (Carnegie Council, 1996).

My interview with David Diamond brought me closer to the theories behind Theatre for Living (Friere, 1982; Boal, 1985). Here I was able to discover how professional theatre companies use playbuilding to build theatre 'with' communities and not just 'for' communities. This ongoing conversation brought me into the field of anthropology where I had to wrestle with the notion of people losing their cultural ability to tell their own stories; we now pay people to tell us stories about others, rather than sharing our own stories. Art, whether in the form of song, dance, visual art or drama has become something we buy instead of something we do. Perhaps that is why playbuilding is so powerful: it provides the opportunity for a group to tell its own story through song, dance, art, and drama. Playbuilt plays resonate with audiences because they derive from a forgotten place in our collective unconscious; the place where our connection to each other lies through sharing our communal stories about ourselves and in our shared dialogue with the world around us (Diamond, 2001).

Recommendations

This project has afforded me the opportunity to consider, not only the practical aspects of playbuilding with middle school students, but playbuilding from a pedagogical, methodological and theoretical stance. Like Joseph Campbell's *Hero on a Quest* (1949), I answered the call, nearly refused it a few times, gathered some agents on the quest, experienced a road of trials, and then ended the journey with the students. Next I set out on a solo mission to try to make meaning out of our experience; I engaged five more agents on the quest, in the form of playbuilding colleagues, plus uncovered scores of research articles and practical playbuilding texts, to assist in the research phase of this project. My recommendations are as follows:

1. Use auditioned actors for playbuilding projects. Have talent be only part of the

criteria; you need to be looking for actors committed to the creative process.

2. Make the actors and yourself aware of the parallel process that invariably accompanies any creative endeavours. Take time to recognize it for what it is, and engage in plenty of thoughtful discussion.

3. Use preventative strategies to avoid playbuilding crises. Consider distancing techniques in script work when utilizing personal stories. Read and re-read Carole Tarlington (Tarlington & Michaels, 1995) Errol Bray (1991) and Will Weigler's (2001) books for on the spot coaching.

4. Line up allies and support networks in advance. Do not be afraid to tackle controversial issues with students, but invite your entire community to be part of the process, before it becomes product.

5. Be cognizant of the emotional and physical stages of development that adolescents are in and mindful that school organizations might not be the best stage-fit environment.

6. Keep community-building activities going with your group. The healthier the process, the more successful the product will be, and the easier it will be to fix problems if and when they arise.

7. Become a reflective practitioner of your work as a drama teacher. Join with other teachers and keep the conversation going. You and your students will be richer for it.

8. Be aware of new research in drama education and promote the benefits of drama for its own sake. Of course drama is helpful in music, English, socials, science, mathematics, but most of all, drama is art and we need to celebrate that! We need to quit apologizing for who we are and what we do. What we do is immensely important

for our students. Never forget that.

9. "When we cast our bread upon the waters, we can presume that someone downstream whose face we may never see will benefit from our action" (Angelou, 1993, p. 10). That was the message given to me on the cast party card, signed by all of the actors. I cherish the card, and the message behind it.

10. When you're weary and feeling downhearted, do not despair, simply take a deep breath and …trust the process.

The End

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Appendix A: Exit Interview Survey – Elementary School Audience

	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I thought most of the play was funny.					
2	I thought most of the play was too serious.					
3	I really enjoyed the performance.					
4	Most of the play made sense to me.					
5	I was able to understand the actors most of the time.					
6	The play taught me some new information about middle school life.					
7	I'm nervous about starting middle school.					
8	The play was about real issues that these actors wanted to talk about.					
9	This play did a good job in dealing with bullying issues.					
10	This play encouraged students to be positive about middle school life.					
11	The actors were honest with their answers during the question period.					
12	The question period at the end was a good idea.					
13	I think doing playbuilding as a middle school student will bring up different teen issues than the ones we saw.					
14	I would really like to be part of a playbuilding group in the future.					

Appendix B: Exit Interview Survey – Middle School Audience

	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Some what Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I thought most of the play was funny					
2	I thought most of the play was too serious					
3	I really enjoyed the performance					
4	This play reminded me that I was once nervous about starting Middle School					
5	I didn't relate to this play at all					
6	This play acted out bullying issues that were based on reality					
7	The play was about real issues that these actors wanted to talk about.					
8	I was able to understand the actors most of the time					
9	Most of the play made sense to me.					
10	This play encouraged students to be positive about middle school life					
11	I would really like to be part of a playbuilding group in the future.					
12	I think doing playbuilding as a Middle School student will bring up different teen issues than the ones we saw.					
13	The actors were honest with their answers during the question period.					
14	The question period at the end was a good idea.					
15	These actors' experiences are totally different from my own personal experiences.					
16	I think this idea of playbuilding is a good way for students' to get their ideas and their thoughts out in public.					
17	Some adults seem to care about teenagers' perspectives on issues					

Appendix C: Exit Interview Survey – Actor

	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I really enjoyed the process part of the playbuilding workshop					
2	I felt that my ideas were accepted a lot of the time.					
3	I really enjoyed the performance aspect of the playbuilding project.					
4	I noticed a huge difference in our attitudes from the process to the product.					
5	I felt that the group listened to my ideas most of the time.					
6	I loved it when unexpected things happened in the performances					
7	I think the play process time was too long.					
8	I think the time doing trust exercises and group work in the beginning was worth it.					
9	I felt safe to express my personal information to the Drama Club.					
10	Performing the Little Match Girl at Christmas gave us a preview of the performance task ahead of us.					
11	I would really like to be part of a playbuilding group in the future.					
12	I think doing playbuilding as a senior student will bring up different teen issues.					
13	I am a more confident person after being part of a playbuilding group					
14	I have gained new skills as a result of being in a playbuilding group.					
15.	I think a lot of people would gain confidence after being in a playbuilding group.					
16.	Being part of a playbuilding group gives students an opportunity to have their "voice" count in school issues.					

PART A: THE PROCESS

Interview conducted verbally. Transcriptions included in final project.

1. What was the highlight moment of this playbuilding experience?

2. Why do you consider this moment or event a "highlight"?

3. Do you think you have developed any **new skills** as a result of participating in a playbuilding workshop?

4. What was it like being part of a **socially constructed play?**

5. Were there any positive or negative components to **co-creating a work of art?**

6. **If you could think of three words** that you think your fellow actors would use to describe you and your participation in this project, what would they be?

7. **Ten years** from now, what do you think you will remember about this experience?

8. Would you recommend participation in a similar playbuilding workshop to your friends or fellow students? Why or why not?

PART B: The Product

1. Once we moved from Process to product, did you notice any changes amongst the Drama Team?

Complete these sentences: (only the ones that apply to you)

2. I really enjoyed the "process" of creating the play because:

3. What I especially liked about the "product" work, the performing aspect was:

4. Since completing the play, I am more confident in myself because:

5. Since completing the play, I have some new skills such as:

6. If I had to choose between the two, I would say I enjoyed the (PROCESS/PRODUCT) (circle one) more because:

Appendix D:

Additional Website References

1. The following is a website address for Headlines Theatre, Vancouver, BC. Artistic director: David Diamond. His unpublished article *Creating community based dialogue* (2001)can be retrieved from this website: http://www.headlinestheatre.com/pd/how/#1

2. The following is the website address for the University of British Columbia's Theatre Department: http://www.theatre.ubc.ca/gvpta/history.htm#collectives

3. The following is the website address for Heritage Newfoundland's Theatre archives: http://www.heritage.nf.ca/arts/playwrights.html

4. The following is a website address for YOUTH BC, a non-profit organization which assists at risk youth in British Columbia. www.youthbc.com

5. The following are British Columbia Ministry of Education website addresses which contain links to texts written under the category of social responsibility: http:/www.safeschools.gov.bc.ca/resourcecatalogue/rc_crime_page23.html and http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/resources.htm

6. The following is the website address where the video *Playbuilding: the creative process* may be purchased: sales@clasroomvideo.com or orders@classroomvideo.com. Their land address is: Classroom Videos, #107-1500 Hartley Avenue, , Coquitlam, BC V3K 7A1

7. The following is a website address which provides, among other topics, a definition and history of Agit Prop Theatre: theatre which immerses itself in topics of perceived social injustice: http://www.hotwells.freeserve.co.uk/guerilla.html

8. The following is a website address for the Alberta Teacher's Association Safe and Caring Schools Project: http://www.teachers.ab.ca/safe/Resources.htm

9. For information on the history of the General Certificate of Secondary Education Exams (GCSE's) consult this website address:

http://www.qca.org.uk/qualifications/types/609_6405.html

10. Information about the origins of agit-prop can be found at the following website address:http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/russian/agit.htm

11. Information about the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama can be found at the following website address: http://www.rsamd.ac.uk/index.htm

12. A superb explanation of yet another parallel process emerging from a collective creation can be found at the following website of the University of Prince Edward Island. It is definitely worth reading as it describes real-life bullying that emerged from a collective creation based on bullying: George Belliveau, the author of the article is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island, where he teaches Integrated Arts and Drama Education. His article can be found at this website:

http://www.utpjournals.com/product/ctr/117/117_Belliveau.html

13. Information on Systems Theory, as mentioned by David Diamond in the Tapestry section can be retrieved from the following website:

http://www.css.edu/users/dswenson/web/System.htm

14. The following is a website which details the story on Handsworth Secondary School's censored play *Broken Theory,* retrieved April 15th, 2004

http://www.fftimes.com/index.php/7/2004-04-19/14072

15. The following is the website of The Globe and Mail newspaper: www.theglobeandmail.com. The original article regarding David Beare and Handsworth Secondary School appeared on page A5 of Thursday April 15th's edition.

Appendix E:

Interview Response Analysis

Table 1

Elementary School Exit Interview Survey Results

	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I thought most of the play was funny.	10%	31%	44%	12%	3%
2	I thought most of the play was too serious.	3%	10%	39%	39%	9%
3	I really enjoyed the performance.	40%	36%	22%	9%	1%
4	Most of the play made sense to me.	33%	49%	14%	3%	1%
5	I was able to understand the actors most of the time.	31%	43%	17%	5%	4%
6	The play taught me some new information about middle school life.	27%	31%	25%	10%	7%
7	I'm nervous about starting middle school.	9%	12%	27%	21%	31%
8	The play was about real issues that these actors wanted to talk about.	12%	51%	28%	9%	0
9	This play did a good job in dealing with bullying issues.	22%	34%	32%	9%	3%
10	This play encouraged students to be positive about middle school life.	16%	49%	26%	6%	3%
11	The actors were honest with their answers during the question period.	24%	43%	29%	3%	1%
12	The question period at the end was a good idea.	27%	46%	21%	6%	0
13	I think doing playbuilding as a middle school student will bring up different teen issues than the ones we saw.	12%	51%	27%	7%	3%
14	I would really like to be part of a playbuilding group in the future.	27%	19%	26%	19%	9%

A Sample of Elementary School Audience Comments

Question: Provide the wording of this question to remain consistent with the other

samples

"First of all, thank-you very much for a wonderful play. I liked how the students wrote the script, not Mrs. Harvey. I like how they got to speak their minds, in the play. Thank-you again!

"I like how you said the names of people who died of bullying. I think it gave people a strong impact. It was great"

"I didn't understand the play because our teachers said middle school isn't that bad."

"I really liked how the actors worked out problems and it was very enjoyable."

"I thought your play was excellent. It has given me confidence about middle school."

"I thought the play was great for the kids who are nervous about middle school, like me. I thought it would help them in acting when they are older."

"I thought that this play was an exciting and educational experience for all of us. Great work. I really REALLY hope Mrs. Harvey decides to do another playbuilding group next year. I enjoyed the best and worst case scenario scene and the "all worship the banana day" scene.

I thought it was neat how the students wrote the script all by themselves."

"I thought the play wasn't as good as it could have been-it was good though; the kids put a lot of hard work and energy into it but I think that it could have been better. At some points it was interesting but at others it was really boaring (sic). I did enjoy it."

"I really liked the combination of serious and funny."

Table 2

Middle School Exit Interview Survey Results

	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Some what Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I thought most of the play was funny	15%	36%	36%	7%	3%
2	I thought most of the play was too serious	15%	10%	27%	36%	10%
3	I really enjoyed the performance	24%	25%	31%	12%	17%
4	This play reminded me that I was once nervous about starting Middle School	19%	22%	19%	20%	22%
5	I didn't relate to this play at all	20%	19%	22%	15%	22%
6	This play acted out bullying issues that were based on reality	25%	36%	27%	5%	3%
7	The play was about real issues that these actors wanted to talk about.	20%	36%	31%	8%	5%
8	I was able to understand the actors most of the time	17%	32%	34%	12%	7%
9	Most of the play made sense to me.	14%	39%	31%	.5%	8%
10	This play encouraged students to be positive about middle school life	10%	34%	36%	12%	8%
11	I would really like to be part of a playbuilding group in the future.	10%	14%	34%	14%	27%
12	I think doing playbuilding as a Middle School student will bring up different teen issues than the ones we saw.	7%	41%	31%	5%	17%
13	The actors were honest with their answers during the question period.	14%	25%	27%	8%	12%
14	The question period at the end was a good idea.	12%	27%	31%	3%	12%
15	These actors' experiences are totally different from my own personal experiences.	17%	25%	34%	10%	14%
16	I think this idea of playbuilding is a good way for students' to get their ideas and their thoughts out in public.	20%	25%	41%	3%	12%
17	Some adults seem to care about teenagers' perspectives on issues	8%	29%	37%	10%	14%

A Sample of Middle School Audience Comments

Question: *If I were in a playbuilding group, the issue I would most like to talk bout, explore and perhaps turn into a performance piece would be…*

Bullying and kids being pushed into lockers, and people being hostile

The problems with drugs and alcohol

Harassment; harassment is horrible: verbal, physical, sexual, mental. I would want to help people to learn what to do I they were getting harassed.

It would be life at home and school

Bullying, friends, drugs, alcohol

Moving and getting new friends

What causes bullying in the first place

Adjusting to middle school

nothing

Doing drugs and abuse and how bad it is and what it does to you. I would like to talk about how much bullying can hurt peoples' feelings because there has been kids who have committed suicide.

Kids and the parents in sports

To find out why adults always have t know what teenagers are doing all the time

About smoking because lots of people start at a very young age and I think if we pointed it out it would be helpful

Any additional comments:

You guys did a great job. I wish to see it again!

It made a good message and I noticed everyone after school were friendlier

I really liked how Nathan and ___ were acting in the play. I knw them-they went to Village Park with me for 7 years but Tyler only went for 5 of those years

The play was funny especially Skyler

Not like real life

Very successful play!

I really liked the play but the part I liked the most was the gangster guy

Thank-you for getting me out of class

I thought the play need to by (sic) better

I think the play was a great way for kids to think about bullying

Table 3

Actor Responses to Exit Interview Survey

	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I really enjoyed the process part of the playbuilding workshop	54%	8%	38%		
2	I felt that my ideas were accepted a lot of the time.	8%	38%	54%		
3	I really enjoyed the performance aspect of the playbuilding project.	31%	39%	30%		
4	I noticed a huge difference in our attitudes from the process to the product.	23%	46%	23%	8%	
5	I felt that the group listened to my ideas most of the time.	8%	46%	31%	15%	
6	I loved it when unexpected things happened in the performances	38%	15%	23%	23%	
7	I think the play process time was too long.	38%	8%	16%	23%	
8	I think the time doing trust exercises and group work in the beginning was worth it.	31%	31%	30%	8%	
9	I felt safe to express my personal information to the drama club.	46%	15%	15%	23%	
10	Performing the Little Match Girl at Christmas gave us a preview of the performance task ahead of us.	15%	31%	47%	8%	
11	I would really like to be part of a playbuilding group in the future.	38%	31%	23%	8%	
12	I think doing playbuilding as a senior student will bring up different teen issues.	31%	31%	30%	8%	
13	I am a more confident person after being part of a playbuilding group	46%	23%	8%	23%	
14	I have gained new skills as a result of being in a playbuilding group.	38%	23%	31%	8%	
15.	I think a lot of people would gain confidence after being in a playbuilding group.	69%	8%	23%		
16.	Being part of a playbuilding group gives students an opportunity to have	23%	31%	38%	8%	

their "voice" count in school issues.

Appendix F:

Annotated Script of *This Is Our Life*!

Script	Annotation
Page 1 *Lights to black- music cue "Jupiter" from Holst: The Planets....* *to fade* MIKE : comes out to a single pin spot: Hey I'm not a punk, or a Macdonald's employee I don't shoplift, or vandalize, or drag race And I don't know Bobby, Ricky, or Sarah from Cape Lazo, though they're probably very nice I have friends, not homies I speak English, not gangsta And I call it a necklace, not bling I can proudly think for myself I believe in getting to know people, not judging them by their looks And that drugs are not the answer! A deck is a skateboard! "And 1" is a brand of shoe! And it's pronounced "what's up!" not "WHAT UP, DAWG?" Teens are the drivers of our culture! The hope of our future! And the leaders of tomorrow!! MY NAME IS MIKE!! AND I AM A TEENAGER!!!! *(leaves)* ENSEMBLE *out-positioned on the blocks-T-shirts and black pants of jeans(everyone is full-back)* HEIDI steps *out- dressed as a very serious business woman- she has a suit and serious glasses, hair up in a bun: taps the mike—is this on? Tap tap....* *(clears throat)* HEIDI: Good morning. My name is Professor Appleby and I am here to speak to you about those unique, ubiquitous	A Grade 8 actor devised this beginning for us. I had instructed each actor to write a monologue based on some aspect of teenage life. This actor chose to model his monologue on the famous I am Canadian commercials. The results were a roaring success. The choice of music was based on the song "I vow to thee my country", a text set to Holst's Jupiter. I believe it captures the majesty of the moment as the young teen expresses his unique place in the universe. Initially I provided the "frame" for this show, out of sheer frustration. Based on Schoen's description of reflective-practice (1983), I problem solved by going back to an earlier play-built show from 1991 and gave each student a photocopy of that script. In that way, I was able to prove to them that this process would eventually **end** with a script too, but they had to trust me and they had to "trust the process". We decided to use parts of the 1991 to frame our 2004 show, however, we quickly discovered that the 1991 show was parochial—stuck in another time and we would have to bring the show into 2004.The 1991 frame did its job though-it became a security blanket for the actors, proof, that a real show

phenomena known as "the teenager". *(Laughs)*

Of course, I have A PHD in Adolescent Psychology and thus am fully qualified to speak about this topic. I, uh, don't have any children of my own, I haven't really been around teenagers for many years, in fact, and I rather detest them, even when I WAS a teenager.
Wait a minute; I don't even remember being a teenager. Oh well, no matter. I'm the expert now…. Ahem….
There are many different kinds of teenagers

(Kids start to turn around one by one and strike a pose)

Some are very popular ……. *(Karissa, Jessa and Mike strikes a pose)*

While some are just so….little. and so quiet…..you barely notice them at all (Tyler and Joel)
Some are very studious and academically minded *…..(Rebecca, Alyssa, Cody, and Caitlin strike a pose with glasses and books)*
Some are rather shy and nervous about being at school...Andrea and Kayla turn around very nervously….and say hi and "hi" to each other and turn away….

Some are rather menacing and brooding *(Drew turns around, very scary) (scares Andrea)*

Now some definitely dance to their own drummer…. *(Zander turns around playing a set of bongos and, well, just being Zander)*

And some, well, some of them are just plain odd…..Adam turns around and makes that funny clown noise… *(Rob points and laughs at him)*

ADAM says to Heidi:
"Hey, that wasn't very nice". Have you ever actually interviewed a teenager to find out what they are really like?
HEIDI: well no, of course not. Why would I waste my time doing that?
ADAM: cuz' maybe you'd find out a lot of stuff you really didn't know, stuff that just might surprise even you!
HEIDI: I highly doubt that young man…. and please move away from me. I need my personal space.
ADAM: oh, but it's ok to just come here and insult us
(everybody else gets up and says yeah, who do you think you are, etc)

HEIDI: well, if you think you can do a better job than me in providing these people relevant, up to date ground breaking

would eventually arise from our chaos! Up until then, I don't think **any** of them actually believed that a real show would come to be!

The character of the Professor came through observation of this actress in and out of school time; we co-created this character .

The Actors were in role as images in the Professor's PowerPoint presentation:

PowerPoint was all the rage in school for the past two years, and I had just attended a Master's lecture titled "power-point-less-ness; it litanized the folly of relying on PowerPoint presentations too much. I decided that the kids should be part of a living PowerPoint presentation since this media was such a strong aspect of their daily life. Many teachers assign PowerPoint presentations as part of their curriculum at our school: why not "become one" in Drama?

The character of ADAM burst out of the PowerPoint and challenged the Professor. I thought this attitude also suited the young actor portraying this part.

information on the psycho, physio/psycho dynamics of the millennium adolescent, well then, be my guest.

ADAM: It would be my pleasure…oh.. and pay attention—you just might learn something

HEIDI: We'll see about that *(stomps off)*

Student One: You know, a lot of people just plain hate teenagers. (JESSA)

Ensemble agrees

Student Two says: Yeah like who?

Student One—well for instance—old people are really afraid of us (JESSA)

In come 4 old folks talking and complaining…….

Old Folk # 1-I'm telling you they're all bad.. yup…(ETHAN) everyone of them…they're, they're wicked
Oldie # 2-they're nasty!(Alysha)
Oldie # 3-they're ugly (Joel)
Oldie # 4-horrible (Rebecca)
Oldie #1-they'll rob 'ya blind!(Ethan)
Oldie # 2-they're lippy-oh jiminy they're a lippy, lippy bunch (Alysha)

(stops---looks toward a menacing gang of teens just standing in a pose)—MUSIC (GANGSTA'S PARADISE)

Oldie # 1:Oh Gosh Ethel, there's a bunch of them now!(Ethan)
Oldie #2: quick grab your purses and umbrellas----charge!!!(Alysha)
(they go up and start bashing the teens—they leave the scene)

Ensemble takes block places again……

Student 3: Okay, that's a bit of a stereotype, but seriously, teenagers happen to care about a lot of things!! Karissa

Ensemble: *Like what?*

Student 4: Friendships!! (JESSA)
Everybody strikes the friendship pose
Student 5: Relationships!

everybody makes different poses

Writing Prompt 12: Adults Rarely listen to teens: Various responses and improvisations led to this scene about the rift between senior citizens and teens. It was brief but very effective.

I loved this binary opposite: one male actor said "I Love you Andrea!" while another girl said "I hate you Zander!" Such are the love-hate relationships of middle school!

The phrase peer pressure came up so much, we decided to turn it

JOEL: I love you Andrea!
JESSA says "I hate you Zander!"

Student 6: Their families are very important to them
(CAITLIN)
(everyone strikes a family pose)

Student 7: and they do think a lot about Peer Pressure *(this student is in the middle)* (KODY)

Ensemble says: *"Peer pressure, peer pressure" chant—until the person in the middle can't take it anymore.....*
Person # 8: They come into contact with drugs, even when they don't really want to (ANDREA)

Druggie #1: *(speaks to person 8)* ADAM
"C'mon don't be such a loser-just take one hit (crack pipe)

Druggie #2: yeah, don't you wanna get high? MIKE

Druggie #3: everybody else does it-what's your problem? KAYLEY

Student 8 is tempted but……says "No, get lost. Leave me alone! ANDREA

Druggies walk away saying: "Yeah, we knew you were a loser, and you think you're too good for it eh? Don't worry, we'll be back……

Student 8: (ANDREA)
--There are still so many labels out there…..kids call each other some pretty mean names….

Ensemble surrounds her—they previously had their back to Student 8 and they say….
Gay. Geek, twit, loser…etc : --scream lots of mean names……

(GET ALL THE NAMES AND TIMING STRAIGHT PLEASE)

Student 8 is left alone on the stage—the "name callers turn their back on her"
Student 9-(rescues Student 8) ETHAN
Student 9: and sometimes, teenagers just need some one to be there for them, when they're feeling down…ETHAN

(Student 9 takes Student 8 off the stage)

Heidi the Professor comes out again

into a chant. The audience really responded to this mindless chanting of a catch phrase.

The inevitable drug reference had to be made. Here we have a brief scene where a vulnerable teen is pressured by three others to use drugs. The teen refuses, but feels very fragile afterwards.

How often does name calling occur in middle school? Constantly. We called out every name we could until the names became meaningless. The students self-censored in that they chose the "right" names for the correct audience—they toned it down for elementary schools and turned it up for middle school!

We needed a light moment in the show and chose a tried and true device—the fantasy/nightmare

And Adam comes out too

ADAM: So, have you learned anything yet?
Heidi- well not anything I didn't know....well, except I really didn't think teens could actually be that mean to each other—it seems so….uneducated…so unnecessary
ADAM: It's not all so bad being a teenager—some things that happen to us are just plain hilarious………watch and learn teacher……..

KODY: "Do you ever remember your first day of middle school? It seemed like …such a …nightmare:

ENSEMBLE-----boris laugh: Wha-ha-ha!!!!

KODY—Argghh! It WAS a nightmare
(Ensemble CLAPS really loudly to signal a complete change)
Music cue_____dream sequence……

THE NIGHT BEFORE GRADE 7
NIGHTMARE…..*Zander's Scene with Mike as the "star"(scanned pages at the end of the annotated script)*

Page 5
After the scenes: Mike speaks to the audience:

MIKE: Okay, I'll definitely admit that was a bit exaggerated!!
Middle School is actually a lot of fun, like.. tie day, or school dances or, "Let's worship the banana day…believe me, don't ask...*(could work in quick montages here with three songs: "popcorn", "Can't touch this..." and "Gregorian chant"— everybody walks off eating their banana...TYLER, ETHAN, AND JOEL—get ready—grab the blocks...*

TYLER: (bring out Alyssa's block) It's hard at first to get used to the freedom you're going to have, especially when you leave Grade 6 and move on to Grade 7.Some kids cope really well with the new experiences at Middle School …. While others….well…..it's not so easy for everybody
ETHAN: If there is one thing I would like to see totally gone from Middle School it's this…picking on other people. Why can't people just let other people be who they are?
JOEL: brings out Kaylee's block) what's so important about pushing other people around? Just to make yourself feel good?
I don't get it..... *(All three guys walk off stage shrugging their shoulders)*

Move to Bully Montage…..all actors out…ready to do the sociograms...-3rd block is the middle block and that is

scene. The results were wonderful!

This scene was among the most professional, polished scenes-it was TV sit-com, over the top humour but it made for some great moments! The chosen music was the theme song from "I Dream of Jeannie!"

The "nightmare music" was Toccata in D minor by Bach.

The writing prompt "What is the most unfair thing at school and "List 5 things you would do to help the students of our school if you were the Principal", worked as springboards into this scene.

In summary prompts 5, 6, 7, 8, were used for the nightmare scene. Since we invested so much pre-text into this section, it is not surprising that it was their most professional work.

We segued into what became known as the Bully montage. Each actor who was willing, wrote a monologue based on their personal experiences of bullying. Not every actor was

reserved for DREW.

KAYLEE: It all started when I was living in Yellowknife, NWT and I was in grade four. I started sticking up for this kid. He had some problems, like, his family wasn't the greatest and his brother ate light bulbs—whoa…that was scary—so, kids liked to tease him. Only this kid, he would fight back, physically, and then…he would get into trouble. I don't know why but……

ALYSHA: It affected me in many ways- in the beginning of grade 6 I got involved with a BAD group of kids who did drugs, and drank. I got what I thought I wanted so badly, a good group of friends who honestly and truly liked me and accepted me for who I was. I guess when you're desperate for friendship; you will overlook signs of a bad friendship that's headed like a full speed train towards disaster.

KAYLEE: So I decided that this kid was actually nice, and that he deserved to have some friends. So I started hanging out with him. The "clique" I was also hanging with, dumped me right away. They were led, and I mean "led" by a very mean girl. She turned all of them against me. Every time I turned a corner, there they were, reminding me "You have no friends, and everyone thinks you're weird…"
white door shouting torments at me. I was crying, but I would not let them see my silent, painful teardrops, which were trickling down my cold scared face….

ALYSHA: I was scared over the things these kids were getting up to, like making prank calls, cheating on tests and stealing money from anyone they could. I couldn't stand hanging around them anymore so just after Christmas, I decided to stay away from them. It was a good decision, and I finished off the Grade 6 year doing really positive things, like helping with the school service program…I finally got one friend, but soon, the "bullies" of the school decided to make me their target. This carried on right through to Grade 7. I was put into a homeroom with absolutely no friends, and the bully's remarks were becoming more and more painful…….

KAYLEE: I left Yellowknife on a rather painful note… but, when we finally moved away from Yellowknife, I thought "great, a chance to start life all over again in Comox". But I found myself falling into the exact same pattern. At my new school, I saw that kids were bugging this one girl, and I made a decision to stick up for her. Wham, just like that, all the new friends, I thought I had, just dumped me. And then my so-called friends started making up all sorts of stories about me—then put me down whenever they got the chance... and here I was, in Comox, with the exact same situation as

willing to do this. Originally there were three monologue which were woven together into a montage. When one of the three girls had to quit, we were left with two monologues. The girls traded back and forth, while actors created movement pieces which illuminated their words. The combination of realistic narrative and surreal movement was spellbinding.

Prompts 11/11a

These are the words of the actresses who performed them. I gave them the choice of giving away their written parts, thus watching another actress play their scene, but they insisted on doing their own monologues. I thought this was very courageous.

The intensity increased, much like a Jazz improvisation between two soloists. In Jazz we trade 8's, 4's and then 2's (bars of music). I dramaturged this just like an improvised Jazz duet.

This monologue was never actually written down; it just came out of the actor's daily experience. One day, he just started speaking these lines. My

Yellowknife. Was it me? Was it my fault that I decided to stick up for two people? What was wrong with me? Why couldn't I be popular?

ALYSHA: Everywhere I walked, the torments were shouted at me

KAYLEE: and all the "made- up "stories about me got back to my only friend, and even she believed them…

ALYSHA: I wanted to live happily!

KAYLEE: I just wanted to be myself
All- I wanted a life….to live….to be myself….

(fade to black)

DREW: *takes centre block:* That's right—by myself. That's where I always sit.
By myself. When I walk into a classroom, or anywhere, and I see someone sitting down, and there's an empty seat beside them, I'm not going to sit beside them. Because if I go up and say "oh, is this seat taken, or can I sit here"—without a doubt, someone will say: "no I'm saving this seat, or "get lost, you're not allowed to sit here." We don't want you to sit with us…"
So, instead of setting myself up for failure, I beat them at their own game. No way, they're not going to hurt me anymore. I've solved it. I just sit…by myself….

(JOEL TYLER AND ETHAN COME OUT)

ETHAN: You know a lot of bullying is mainly over some really insignificant, dumb thing. It can be as insignificant as…a hat

TYLER: or a jacket

JOEL: or even a can of pop

(they take the blocks off-----run around to the back of the gym—join everyone else)

PART TWO—THE HAT, THE JACKET AND THE POP CAN—everybody spread out around the gym—behind the student audience…..(this part of the play is accredited to another Drama teacher-I believe, in Surrey, BC)

From the audience Bully 1 takes Victim 1's hat and runs up onto the stage

daughter had seen this young man exemplify the same behaviour in another capacity and this confirmed the truth of these words to me. It was very, very powerful. The music came from a group called "The Art of Noise".

These scenes, known as The Hat, the Pop can and The Jacket were devised by another Drama group in the province of BC. I was unable to locate the original writers but I hope someday one of them will read this scenario and claim their devised work!

It was amazing to me how the students loved this scene. We did not write it but they somehow enjoyed having written dialogue. From this pre-text, they added their own lines and so continued to engage in a collective-creativity mode.

TYLER: *(in pursuit)* Hey, give me back my hat you creep!
ZANDER: Aww…what's the matter loser? You gonna cry?
Tyler: get lost….give me my hat back *(BULLY teases Victim with hat…)*
ZANDER: Or what? *(pushes Victim1)* What are you gonna do, shrimp? *(Gets very intimidating)* I oughta kick the crap outta you, just for being stupid! *(Grabs victim, physically threatening move)*

ALL in audience yell STOP!!!
BULLY AND VICTIM freeze onstage and the cast runs up and surround them in a very tight circle

TYLER: *-emerges from the circle of bodies, steps to front of stage*
90% of all bullying episodes involve just one victim and one perpetrator….

BLACKOUT—MUSIC IN LOUD—WE MOVE TO….

THE JACKET—Ethan as V2, Bully 2= DREW: his "gang", Mike, Tyler and Alysha

-4 kids hanging around DSR—from DSL 3 kids enter: one of them VICTIM 2 is wearing a very cool jacket. Victim 2 and 2 friends are having a discussion as they cross towards DSR oblivious of the other group. .As they near the other group, BULLY 2 speaks
(Drew is Bully 2 with his posse:_____)

(DREW) Bully 2: Hey look…a flock of retards….watch this…. *(Bully 2 put himself in the way of VICTIM 2 so that VICTIM 2 bumps into Bully 2. VICTIM 2 does NOT see the collision coming)*

Victim 2: Ohh….whoops…. *(Victim 2 attempts to keep going)* (Ethan)

(DREW) BULLY 2: *(grabbing Victim 2)* Hey goof…ain't ya gonna apologize for bumping into me?

(Silence)

BULLY 2: That don't sound like an apology u to me idiot…maybe I'll just take your jacket instead (DREW) *(shaking Victim 2)*
Ethan: (V2—What?! No way! I didn't do anything! You can't take my jacket!
BULLY 2: *(all the time holding V2)* Well I guess you got two

This scene came out of group discussions as to the changing nature of bullying at middle school. Material in Prompts 11/11a assisted here. The girls mentioned, "cyber bullying" and I asked them to demonstrate what it might look like. The resulting scene was a combination of all of the girls' work. None of the boys were involved in the cyber bullying scene. I am not sure if that is accurate in real life.

The student told me, via their improvisation, that if a student

choices loser…either give me the jacket or me and my friends will have to rip it right off you….(DREW)

VICTIM 2: (hands B2 the jacket and walks away… humiliated…(ETHAN)

VICTIM 3 walks out—(girl) Jessa
DSR
Have you ever heard of cyber bullying? To most adults, they think their kid is just doing a project on the computer, or maybe playing games. Sometimes, there's a lot more happening …. on your kid's computer than you may be aware of….

VICTIM 3: sits down at a chair-miming being on the computer----MSN—talking---laughing—saying "sup"—etc……JESSA

ENTER DSL—two girls at someone's house–REBECCA HEIDI AND ANDREA
….

Girl (*who owns the house is sitting typing):* Hey let's see who's on M.S.N. tonight:(Microsoft Network: Instant Messenger)
Hey it's that weird chick at school, you know the one always drinking her Pepsi everyday at lunch….Hey, let's talk to her….types "Sup"
V3 at desk—surprised to hear from this girl—(type and say it out loud)
"Hi, how'd you get my MSN?"(JESSA)
BULLY 3 (girl who owns the house): what should I say?
BULLY 4 (boots her out of the way): here let me answer her, you're way too nice!
Writes something really mean…
REBECCA, , HEIDI, , ANDREA—laugh………………..

An exchange goes on that gets pretty mean…….make fun of her Pepsi, …skin, etc…..it definitely turns into cyber bullying…

V3: If I block them, they'll totally think I'm a coward (from distance….Mom yells….Chelsea…come down for dinner……
V3: fine… I'll just block them….(JESSA).

blocks the person…. Is crying…..

V3: "coming Mom…."

attempted to "block" a group of cyber bulliers, it would be even worse for that person the next day at school.

(JESSA) V3: so I blocked them from my MSN, but the next day, that made it even worse……

Next morning—DSL: three girls (REBECCA, , HEIDI ANDREA)

enter laughing…who do they see but…

(JESSA) V3: who enters with her Pepsi---from USR—they lock eyes…..

Bully 4: still drinking that Pepsi crap? It isn't doing anything for your zits now is it?

V3: moves backwards toward bench (DSL on an angle) - just leave me alone you witch…

BULLY 3: oh, tough words now eh, but you were too chicken last night on MSN so you blocked us….they push her down on the bench….

BULLY 4: yeah and that bag of chips in your hand, that's really good diet food….

(take the chips from her…. .and open it…start eating them.…you can have your stupid Pepsi---they throw it at her…. And throw back the half-eaten bag of chips…

(Bullies laugh their heads off saying mean things, etc)

V3: just leaves the unopened pop can on a bench and the chips…and then just walks away humiliated… *(crossing USL)*

BULLIES look at one another: "what a weird chick"! *(they continue to eat the chips)*

BULLY 3: what about her pop?

BULLY 4: naww, just leave it, she might come back for it later….

…and then they just run off laughing….

THE POP CAN

V4 (JOEL) —take his place on the bench---walks up to the bench…sees a pop there…sits down…opens it up…drinks it.…*(the bullies are Alysha, Adam and Caitlin)*

BULLY 5 (CAITLIN) Here we find the rare Dorkus Alonus hangin' out with all his friends *(bullies 6 and 7 laugh)...*
(Bully 5 and other 2 circle V4)

BULLY 5: Boy…I sure am thirsty…are you guys thirsty?

BULLY 6: I could really use a cool, refreshing beverage…

B7: Me too…it's really too bad that the pop machine is way over by the gym…..

B5: Ya, but I think our little buddy here will give us a sip of

his Pepsi, don't you?

B7: Oh ya, I definitely think that will happen

B7: Now, now, people *(sarcastically),* what if he was to say he didn't want to share his beverage?

B5: Well I really don't think a smart guy like this would do a real stupid thing like that

B6: But…let's…just pretend he does say no, then what?

B5: Well, being an easy going girl, I would probably kick the "crap" out of the little puke…

(waits, patronizingly). Do you think I could have a sip of your Pepsi, buddy?

(victim gives pop to B5)

B5: Thanks pal *(slaps victim on back—has sip of his pop)* Hey, pardon me for being so rude, would you like a sip? *(Indicating B6)*

B6: I most certainly would (takes a sip and says to B7) And you sir?

B7: Most definitely (takes a sip gives pop back to B5)

V4 (JOEL) *stands:* "Can I have my pop back now"

B5: sure buddy *(spits in pop can--)* "Here you go" *(Gives pop back to V4)*

B5 "Now, drink up!"

V4 What? *(Disbelief)*

B5 *(closes in)* "I said "drink it".

V4 "No"

B5 You're going to drink it (threatens him physically, grabs pop can, the other two grab V4 who is trying to run. The struggle takes a bit of time while the bullies laugh and say "drink, drink, drink"

Accompanied by "pleas" from V4

Finally, the bullies push V4 to his knees—hold his head up and B5 stands over V4 about to pour the pop into V4's mouth.

All: *cast steps on from both wings—*STOP!!!

All freeze V4 rises up and steps to CS

V4: 1 in 10 kids from Gr 4 to 8 are bullied daily or weekly

B7 *(stepping forward to DSR)* 1 in 7 students admitted to bullying once or twice in a school term

B6 *(stepping forward to DSL)* Between 1994 and 2004, episodes of bullying have increased dramatically. And the episodes are getting more and more violent.

Ensemble speaks the names of

Reena Virk, 1997.
Hamed Nastoh, March 2000

We switch now to expository prose. Information is given, based on statistics from the BC Ministry of Education.(see Literature Review: Social responsibility: a framework)

Chanting these names of real students was very powerful. The audience responded in the

Dawn Marie Wesley, November 2000

B5: *(stepping forward, hands behind, as if in cuffs, with a cast member on either side of him like cops)*
"And one in 4 youths identified as bullies within school had a criminal record by the age of 30… *(Is led away)*

BLACKOUT…..music…….

WHY DO THEY DO IT
(Lights come up slowly on CS area where all four VICTIMS stand in)

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A line, abreast facing the audience. All other cast members stand in a semi-circle around them----but facing away.
As VICTIMS ask questions one of the cast turns and answers to the audience
V1: Why me?
ANSWER: I got picked on when I was in Grade 7—HEIDI
V4: Why do they do it? (JOEL)
ANSWER: My old man gives me way worse for leaving the lights on… a little bullying will toughen them up!!(ZANDER)
V3: Why me?(JESSA)
ANSWER: Those braniacs think they are so much better than me…(ADAM)
V2: Why do they do it?(ETHAN)
ANSWER: I gotta look tough in front of my buddies.
(all through from now 'til the end of the scene the volume and speed of the scene should increase.…)(DREW)

V4: Why me? (JOEL)
ANSWER: Everyone gets picked on; besides, it will toughen up the loser!(ANDREA)
V1: Why?
ANSWER: Boredom! (CAITLIN)
V3: Why? (JESSA)
ANSWER: Popularity (ADAM)
V2: Why? (ETHAN)
ANSWER: Revenge! (ZANDER)
V1: Why?
ANSWER: Racism(CAITLIN)
V4: Why?(JOEL)
ANSWER: Jealousy(MIKE)
V3: Why?(JESSA)
ANSWER: Power (HEIDI)
V2: Why?(ETHAN)
ANSWER: Anger (DREW)

surveys, saying they really noticed this part.

The students changed some of the lines here to update the text. They didn't really "get the delivery of these lines to the "punchy", over the top level required, but they came close.

In the end, the students "chose" to remove this scene from the performance. I was disappointed, but I respected their decision and did not press my view. It was unfortunate because it was the most avant-garde scene-it had that winning combination of chant, surrealism and choreography, but it was just too much for the actors. They knew they did not have the skill level to pull this off. And yet I believed they could do it.

(by now all Victims are repeating Why?, non-stop and the others are repeating one of the one-word responses non-stop...LOUDER....FASTER.....until it is simply a cacophony of sound at the top of everyone's vocal register...BLACKOUT...and all sound ceases for a split second...then...in the blackness....or in a FREEZE?

ALL: STOP!!
Or: alternate---my ending……

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Why, why, why, why, why,….keeps going….until it turns into whispers……everyone walks off stage whispering…why….why….why…..

ACT TWO BEGINS HERE

KODY COMES OUT AND SAYS;

"ACT TWO AND NOW A LIGHTER LOOK AT TEENS AND FAMILY LIFE….."

ACT TWO BEGINS

CODY: writing a letter: DEAR ABBEY:
My family life is really crappy. My Mom and Dad are always on my back
They're always picking at me:
Parents surround KODY
1. Why don't you act your age? (CAITLIN AND ZANDER on either side of KODY)
2. Work before play, son!
3. You're way too old to be acting that way!
4. Son, you're far too young to be doing that!
(Turn it into a machine until KODY yells—Get lost!!! They all leave……)
KODY returns to the letter…..

These scenes came out of writing prompts titled "Dear Abbey". We had a mini-lesson on what problems teens write about in magazines, papers, etc.

We thought that a real life Abbey could be answering a teen-and then the scene could be played out in the teen's mind.

They make me do all sorts of chores and I don't see the point. Why can't they just hire a maid and let me just do whatever I want? And schoolwork—they keep asking me about my homework and telling me "If I don't get a good education I'm gonna end up with a useless job." I'm so sick of them bugging me! What, like are all parents handed some sort of secret script written by psychologists at the hospital that the doctors give to them after they take their babies home? Please help me, Signed, sick of my family and searching for a better one

This mini-scene turned into a machine. We practiced the age-old machine game, with concrete and abstract machines. Once they broke through the barrier and showed they understood what a "metaphoric" machine might look like, we were on our way.

This was a great device to keep the storyline moving.

ABBEY REPLIES (REBECCA)
Dear Sick:

Look, it can't be that bad. Your parents sound really concerned about your future. They're just trying to do the best they can. What about your friends? Have you ever talked to them about their families? Maybe if you compared your family life with your friends, your life might not seem so bad. Good luck and hang in there
Signed, ABBEY

KODY: DEAR ABBEY:
Good luck? Good luck? Is that all you can say? Ok, so I asked my friends, and guess what? Their parents say the exact same thing to them!

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Is THIS some sort of deviant conspiracy to brainwash us into being "good kids"? I am so sick of this- I just want my parents to …to….arrghh….—I don't know…… God, I know somewhere, out there is the "perfect" family…I know it exists…and I wish I were in it……
Signed, thanks for nothing.

REBECCA(ABBEY) DEAR "nothing"---
(And now she's really mad.…)
Ok, so you just want me to wave a magic wand and give you the perfect family eh? Well your wish is my command! Have fun you little twerp!!

(DREAM MUSIC)

DREAM SEQUENCE: The "over the top" Perfect Family.....
Actors bring table out—use bocks for chairs.…do the scene.

FREEZE THE SCENE…Kody steps out of it and says:

KODY: Ok, ok, I promise not to complain about my family ever again—that was way too brutal…..looks at them in the "perfect freeze"—I think I'm gonna be sick……. Runs off….

ANDREA: The reality is, there is no perfect family. Every family goes through bad times. Sometimes your friends hide it from you; they don't want you to know what's going on. Like my friend JULIE. When you look at her, you see a great student, a really good kid. But the teachers at our school started to see something. Her grades were slipping and she didn't have time for her friends anymore…it started to fall apart for her when her Mom left……

The Family in crisis:
The scene begins with little Cody and Carl (Drew)… take it from there!!

I wrote a lot of these lines based on dialogue I had heard the students say in rehearsal. I had the students respond, via "webbing" assignments, to these two questions: What is a dysfunctional family?
What is a perfect family?
Carole Tarlington also describes a perfect family scene in our interview
(see the tapestry section)
The resulting Perfect family scene was hysterical! The lead actor, a grade 7 student named Noel, stole this scene and made it his own. It was magical!

The musical choice was "Leave it to Beaver"

The perfect family froze while the character Kody gazed upon them, horrifically!

The character Andrea speaks

Kayley freezes on: Dad, I'm only 14! I need a life!......

ADAM steps in: Heidi takes her place back at the podium:
ADAM (to Heidi) ---So what suggestions would you make for this teenage girl? can't you see how much pain she's in?
HEIDI: Well, perhaps she needs professional counseling---you know, adults to ask her all sort of questions so we could get to the bottom of her problems:
REPORTERS come in—Julie is still frozen—One reporter brings in a chair—slams it down-forces Julie into the chair

So..what's your name----and the questions begin…….

8 different people come in and start asking her questions but don't really give her time to answer……finally they all talk at once with paper,pens, etcH: ---Kayley is distressed and

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DREW (as the DAD) stands up and says: Leave her alone*!*
(The reporters look at him, shocked and refusing to go)
Carl: I said, "Leave her alone".
Reporters leave, a bit angry and giving the attitude like, "Who does he think he is?"

CARL: I'm sorry honey. I'll try to be a better Dad. It's just been really hard since your Mom left and….
JULIE: it's ok Dad. Nobody's perfect, right?
(Tyler, the little brother comes up and JULIE hugs him)
Cody: *(who is really Tyler)*: yeah, whoever said there was a perfect family anyway? We're gonna be okay Dad. You've got Julie and me and we're gonna stick with you Dad.
DREW: Thanks kids. You're right, *(picks up a beer—hesitates—gives it to Tyler to put down—he refused to drink it)* ….. I think we ARE gonna be okay….
(Lights fade on this family)…….

ADAM: comes out and faces Heidi on the podium
So, in the end, it all comes down to parents and kids communicating. All the so called "professional" advice in the world doesn't matter a bit, unless you and your kids take the time to talk to each other—and be honest…with each other….
Adam: So for instance, have you (to Heidi) been really honest with us? *Adam walks away.*
Heidi attempts to keep her lecture going…..

A Parent: *it's actually Heidi*
Now Sometimes you're so busy being parents, trying to pay for your children's lives and then you come up against huge brick walls with your teen... You don't know which way to

directly to the audience in an expository manner. In this way, she sets up the next scene, which was very serious. I loved this next scene. Drew played the father to perfection.

The character known as Tyler was truly heartbreaking. And Julie was very believable to our young audiences. Her key line was "Dad, I'm only 14. I need a life!" When I first heard her speak that line in rehearsal, it rang so true for all of us. We knew it had to be in the show.

The reporter was a clever device. Repetition and machine like behaviour made this addition powerful. It reminded me of the reporters in Jesus Christ Superstar: "Tell me Christ how you feel tonight, do you plan to put up a fight, etc." Some of the questions were very serious, others were just plain silly: Does your Father beat you? Do you like cheese sandwiches? Bizarre!

The character known as Adam

turn. Well, that's where I can help because I've got some really fool proof methods that will help you to really get through to your troubled teen….. *(Starts to break down a bit)* I mean, I spend my professional life lecturing parents all over the country about adolescent behaviour….and …..Then I stand here and lie to you, telling you I don't have any kids…the truth is… I can barely control my own teenage daughter….

SCENE*: parents waiting up frantically – it's 3am*
Kid comes home----big scene with the Mother (Heidi) and Dad
Heidi: sitting on couch …waiting.…
Husband comes down….. Tells her to come upstairs and quit waiting for her daughter to return
Heidi—refused to come upstairs
Husband says I'm sick of this. Why don't you just quit babying her and kick her out of this house. She's just using us….
Heidi-No! *(Refuses to kick daughter out)*

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Husband says: I'm going to bed. I can't take much more of this.
Daughter comes home: It's three a.m.—*confrontation*…..

SCENARIO*: daughter has been staying out 'til 3am most nights. Mom has been away lecturing for days on end and Dad can't control her any longer.*
Dad has been warning Mom that their daughter is getting way out of control but both parents have been away too much to do any real effective parenting.
Mom's big excuse is: "I have to work so that I can buy you all the things you say you need like…..list brand-names…etc. You're always yelling at us that you can't show up at school without the latest fashion designs etc.…

KARISSA: Mom, I don't want to listen to this!

HEIDI: And what about your singing? You stopped going to lessons, you didn't enter the Festival this year. Why? Because your new group of friends don't approve? What a waste of money, all those years we paid for lessons. Are you just going to throw it all away?

KARISSA: I stopped singing because you stopped caring about it. You're never here to hear me

HEIDI: That's not true, I come to nearly every concert, I've

returns to speak directly to Professor Appleby. He challenged the Professor to be truly honest with the audience. This breaking of the 4th wall did not seem to bother the actors. Based on their inexperience, they knew very little about theatrical conventions, and so they were not in a position to question or criticize! I was amazed how they accepted the strategies I threw at them. I believe though, that working on the story theatre piece "The Little Match Girl" prepared them for this multi-strategy approach to theatre.

This scene was originally meant to be a Forum Theatre Scene. The Mother was clearly the oppressed, the daughter the oppressor—or was it the other way around?

But if never worked up to this stage. It was a weak scene right up until the end.

This scene was stilted. The actress resented my devised work here. She never believed in

just been really busy lately.

KARISSA: Mom. If you really want to know….
I'm sick of trying to be someone I'm not. I'm so sick of all the head- games that the so called "popular people" play at school, always trying to be perfect, with the perfect clothes, the perfect makeup, and the perfect hair—I can't do it anymore. I really miss you when you're gone. And Dad does too. I need you to be here Mom, so that I can talk to you and so that you can listen to me. I guess I stopped singing because these new friends I'm hanging out with think it's stupid. I want to keep singing but I don't want people to make fun of me. (could end with an embrace- Mom and daughter)

STOP—Heidi and daughter FREEZE----Heidi leaves the freeze and returns to the podium……..

Heidi is poised at waiting at the Podium—looking rather nervously at her lecture notes….

ADAM: *(crosses over to Heidi)*
(Says this very softly)
Why did you say you didn't have any kids?

HEIDI: I don't know, I guess I didn't want to admit that I wasn't coping with my own family problems.

HEIDI: But listen, (shakes Adam's hand)

HEIDI: Thank-you for giving me the chance to be part of your life today. I really did learn a lot from you, from "all "of you…..
I learned that I've got to quit talking so much, and maybe I should start listening to my own kid— she's a singer you know, and I should encourage her to keep doing that….it used to be really important to her.

ADAM: You've got a good point there…. Hey, I think it's time we looked at some things that teens have to offer: take a look at this………..

Everyone leave stage except for ZANDER sitting DSR doing something like, making a bracelet—something to occupy him----

JESSA enters USL—sees Zander…hesitates….feels badly for slapping him earlier
JESSA: uh, Zander?
ZANDER: (doesn't look up) uhmmm
JESS- Zander…..
ZANDER—uhmmmm

the scene and so it died.

We kept it in though, but my gut instinct told me to cut it.

The actress known as Misha tried to play this for truth and at times it worked, but the actress she was playing with did not like this scene at all. If an acting partner does not build belief in the scene, you cannot expect the audience to buy it.

The character known as Seth confronts the Professor. She admits that her life is not so perfect. But hope arrives the next morning at school.

JESSA—Zander!!!(yells it)

ZANDER—Whoah! What? Oh, hi, Jessa ((is a little bit surprised to see her)

JESSA—I'm uh, I'm sorry.. that I slapped you …and..I didn't mean to say I hate you…I'm sorry.

ZANDER: Huh? Oh, that, yeah, well…why did you do that anyway?

JESSA: Somebody said you were making fun of me for being in Highland dancing, and then I found out you didn't say anything at all, they just made it up to bug me.

ZANDER: well, yeah….. I didn't even know you were in Highland dancing, and why would I make fun of you anyway? Hey, is that why you're wearing that costume?

JESSA: yeah, I just came back from the Festival and I didn't do so well. I probably should quit. I'm not really that good anyway and besides, some girls by my locker, were totally laughing at my costume.

ZANDER: hey, you could pull out one of those swords and say (in a Scottish accent)

"So missie, d'ya fancy a duel with me and my swords?" Think yer pretty tough eh?" (something like that!!)—

ZANDER laughs….plays with the swords….

JESSA (*laughs*) Put those down Zander- don't be ridiculous!(takes the sword away)

ZANDER: ok- so show me what you did this morning at the Festival

JESSA: what, right here in the hall?

ZANDER: yeah, got any of the Scottish music you dance to?

JESSA*: hands him a CD from her case*—Yeah, right here…

ZANDER: (*happens to have a stereo sitting right there*)- Hmmm… how convenient, there's a stereo sitting right here in the hall!!(ha ha)

ZANDER: puts on the CD

JESSA: does a bit of her Highland routine…bows…..

ZANDER: Jessa, that's really cool. Why would you even think of quitting?

JESSA: because now that I'm in middle school, it's just not cool to be "good" at anything. People think its babyish or something, I don't know.

ZANDER: well I think you should keep doing whatever you're good at and DON"T listen to people who diss you---

(*ENTER MIKE)—he sits down at the piano… starts playing---piano is DSL—keys facing RIGHT*

Zander and Jessa listen for a bit

ZANDER: Hey Mike, I didn't know you played piano

Mike: yeah I play a bit but I probably don't take it seriously enough, I don't know. It's not exactly cool to be a guy playing piano at Middle School

(*Enter KAYLEE*)

This scene divided the cast. I tried to take Will Weigler's advice and capitalize on the strong talents of the students. I devised a scene based upon lines they had said during rehearsal, and a skills inventory I conducted near the beginning of the process. I used Highland dancing, singing, piano playing, comedy, virtually every bit of "extra" talent we had as a company.

We were even going to put juggling into the act! But a few cast members resented this scene and were very vocal about it. Subsequently, it too almost died. Luckily the character known as Zander kept the action moving and infused his own magic into the scene. It was saved by his voice, not mine!

KAYLEE: Oh yes it is! Why would you say that? Playing an instrument is very cool; who knows you could even make money doing it, if you were good enough
(KAYLEE sits down): Hey, does Mrs. Harvey have any good music here?
Mike: There's lots of choir music here….hey here's one…
(pulls out a piece of sheet music)

KAYLEE and Mike both try to play it…..
KARISSA walks in…………….
Jessa and Zander: Hey Karissa, what's up?
KARISSA: I had a big fight with my Mom Saturday night. I came in really late and it's probably just as much my fault as it is hers.I said a lot of mean things to her and I feel pretty bad.
Zander: Hey cheer up Karissa, don't worry about it—your friends might not always forgive you, but your Mom and Dad always will. It's gonna be okay!(said

tongue in cheek!)

(gives her a hug—ZANDER, JESSA, KARISSA hug)
Jessa: Hey Karissa, how come you didn't sing at the Festival this year?
Karissa: Aw I'm not into singing anymore—the friends I've been hanging out with recently don't exactly think singing is "cool". So I just gave up.
Jessa: You mean, after all that work you put into it, you're just gonna quit doing what you love, for a bunch of people who don't care?
KAYLEE and MIKE interrupt……
KAYLEE: Whoah, hey Karissa, you sing right? Well this is actually a really cool song. I think I can play it, how about you sing it with me at the Talent Show next month?
KARISSA: No way! I am NOT singing in front of this school
ZANDER: Why? Are you afraid your "new" friends won't approve?
JESSA: Yeah, Karissa, I'm going to do Highland dancing, and…I don't care if people bug me- that's their problem!
MIKE: Okay, enough whining, quit being so depressing! Just get over here and try this.
KARISSA *(sings):* And I, never thought I'd feel this way.. and as far as I'm concerned, I'm glad I got the chance to say..that I do believe I love you….and then….

Everyone slowly comes wandering out singing….
"Keep Smiling, keep shining, knowing you can always count on me, for sure, that's what friends are for……

CD---overdubs in…..while the company pushes the piano off

to the side, swords are put away, blocks are slowly put back in the exact spot as the beginning…everyone hums along…and takes their place just like at the beginning.

MUSIC FADES………………………..

THE ENDING:
The blocks come out and are placed in a row—4 on four
They will say THIS IS OUR LIFE

As each person comes out—it will take two people to place a block

BLOCK ONE

TYLER and ETHAN come out and place the first block:

TYLER: So we've come to the end of our play, thanks for watching, and I'm sorry, we've got no parting gifts for ya—naaw, I'm just joking…
—all I can say is, Put a smile on and whatever you are….be a good one

ETHAN: Some people are lucky in their life-they've never really experienced pain—but if you have---I know where you're coming from...and maybe that's a good thing…. (they place their block and sit down

BLOCK TWO
(ALYSHA and CAITLIN comes in with a block and choose to place it at the other end)

ALYSHA *says this to the audience*:
Me? Give you advice? Well, all I can say is "just be yourself and no one else"

CAITLIN: Normal people scare me! (looks at Alysha)
ALYSHA: oh thanks a lot Caitlin! *(quite ticked off at Cait's remark!)*
CAITLIN: hey, did I say you were normal?
ALYSHA—oh…yeah..okay…I think…..? (they sit down)

BLOCK THREE

KODY and JESS
Kody- life's too short to get all wound up about stuff
Jessa- yeah, don't let people bug you—stand up for yourself!

KARISSA and KAYLEE—**BLOCK FOUR**

KARISSA: and….don't let people tell you who you are,

Right about this point, the actress known as Michelle came in and busted up this cozy scene. Based on a real life conflict, she demanded that the cast abandon this hoaky scene that Mrs. Harvey created and produce a credible ending. This device worked very well. I was happy to include a "negative case analysis" response into the body of the show. By validating Michelle's feelings, the scene rang true and everyone was happy to create their own ending.

One liners seem to be a clean way of bringing this thematic

because they don't know and, most importantly, it doesn't matter what they think!

Kaylee—oh yeah and you could say: "you all laugh at me, because I'm different, but I laugh at you because you're all the same"
Karissa agrees—they place their block and sit down

BLOCK FIVE

ADAM and MIKE: (bring in a block)

MIKE: If I have any thoughts about "teenage life", I'd have to say:
Sure, it's not easy, but we deal with it."

ADAM: and don't forget, a little nonsense now and then is relished by the wisest men…"

MIKE *(laughs)*: Hey Adam, do you know any other sayings like that?

ADAM: yeah, a friend of mine always says: "those who fight fire with fire, usually end up in ashes…."

(JOEL WALKS OUT WITH **BLOCK SIX**)

ADAM and MIKE: Hey Joel,

JOEL: Hi guys…takes a seat…._____(DO YOU WANT TO WRITE A LINE?)

MIKE: Yeah, remember what Mr. Dickson used to say..something like….

"People are like towers. It takes a whole lot to build them up but only one gust of wind to blow them down….

Adam: true and I think this play is revealing to the heart of every person, no matter what age you are, some of the themes we've explored will affect you.

BLOCK SEVEN

HEIDI and ANDREA and REBECCA
—walk out carrying a block—they need to write something!!

BLOCK EIGHT

And finally—the last word goes to……………..
DREW and ZANDER walk out

play to a close.

Their ending consisted of a technique employed by Carole Tarlington. One-liners were written. Each student brought out a coloured cube with a partner—their lines were said and one by one, the puzzle pieces were put into place. The coloured blocks spelled out the words: "This is our life". It was very effective.

All of these lines were written by the actors. I did not alter them in any way. I merely chose the order. It is a lot like weaving a tapestry. I choose to treat it like jazz solos. That metaphor works very well for me, as I am very comfortable in Jazz settings.

Re: Mr. Dickson…

The students chose to acknowledge a teacher they loved very much, who had left

(they need to write something here!!)

ZANDER: something like—
The bottom line is, this is not your life, or yours or yours,(points to audience members)

But… THIS IS OUR LIFE, RIGHT?

The Ensemble: (YELL IT!!) This is our life!
ZANDER---
PEACE OUT Y'ALL! (SOMETHING LIKE THAT!!)
FREEZE—lights fade---music cues…the end………..

our school that year. Luckily, he is back this year. I thought that was a very kind act of the students to show their affection for one of their favourite teachers.

The characters known as Drew and Zander gave us a brilliant ending. Zander stalled while Drew ran out with his closing lines. He slipped and, from his deathbed, he handed his lines to Zander, imploring him to speak his last words as his dying wish.

Zander delivered the last line brilliantly!

Our closing music was…
That's What Friends are For, followed by a reprise of I Dream of Jeannie.

Bows and wonderful applause

What followed next was an actor de-briefing session- q & a with the audience. The actors LIVED for this!!

VITA

Surname: Harvey Given: Charlotte Elizabeth Mary-Ann

Place of Birth: North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria   1980-1985

University of Victoria (Summer Studies)   2000-2005

Degrees Awarded:

Bachelor of Education (Secondary), University of Victoria   1985

Professional Accomplishments

Drama,Choral Music and Socials Studies teacher
Lambrick Park Secondary School
Victoria, BC   1985-1991

Drama, Choral Music, Socials Studies teacher
Central Jr. Secondary School
Victoria, BC   1991-1995

Choral Music teacher
Victoria High School
Victoria, BC   1991-1995

Drama, Choral Music, Socials Studies
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Cumberland Jr. Secondary School
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Drama, Choral Music, Socials Studies
English teacher
Cape Lazo Middle School, Comox, BC   2001-presently

Title of Project: TRUST THE PROCESS

Exploring social responsibility through playbuilding with Middle school Drama Club students.

Author _____

Charlotte Elizabeth Mary-Ann Harvey

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