Knocking on Shakespeare's Door: Drama with Teens for Personal and Social Development

A Qualitative Research Study
by
Tom Pilutik, MA
2010

"…no form of human communication has such concentrated power to move the heart and stir the mind as the drama."

- Alan Reynolds Thompson, *The Anatomy of Drama (1942)*

Adolescence is a life-altering stage of development for a young person. It is a time of exploration, discovery and expansion of one's world. However, this significant period can be impeded by external factors including environmental issues, peer pressures and internal conflicts. In this paper, the author uses a case-study approach to suggest that drama is a powerful tool in assisting the youth's growth and development. Through observation, interviews and focus groups over a five-month period, the participating youth in Big Brothers Big Sisters' Broadway Bound Fund drama program were evaluated. To expand on the findings, this assessment applies qualitative methods, including theories of drama and drama therapy as well as theories of personal and social development. Testimony from the students further reinforces the outcome of their collective experience in the program. This study argues that drama is germane for the adolescent's personal and social development in that it can help the adolescent gain a sense of self-confidence, take on leadership roles with poise, increase capacity for empathy and gain comfort with their bodies. This qualitative analysis shows that drama can enhance the student's ability to collaborate with others while also gaining further insight into oneself. And finally, it is suggested that drama can bridge gaps between adult authority and the rebellious teen by redefining the exchange among teacher and student.

Rationale

Initially, I was not shocked by what I saw.

The techniques were all very familiar. Exercises from classical and contemporary drama theorists such as Linklater (1976), Johnstone (1979), Spolin (1963) and Bogart & Landau (2005) were all represented honorably. These reputable methods and techniques of vocalization, physicalization (Spolin, 1963) and "presence" in the moment are studied and practiced by serious actors.

What did stand out to me were the students in the class. The large group comprised of approximately 25 teenagers and pre-teens, male and female, ranging in age from 11 to 17, coming from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, were all very invested in the class and the teacher. It was obvious that there was more going on in this workshop than just lectures and rehearsals.

My role was to be a fly on the wall as much as possible: to participate with focus and respect for the work without ever being the focal point or distraction. I was there to observe the students without tampering with the environment. Being a new presence and being the only male adult in the room made this a challenge. Playing the role of the good student, I purposely averted direct eye contact with any of the students and kept my gaze locked on the teacher, Mary Rose Synek, following her guidance.

At a steady pace, we glided through each exercise with purpose. Each skill complemented the former as we continued to move forward, warming up our minds and bodies for the eventual "real work."

As we completed each exercise (warming up our voices, sound-and-movement games, and improvisation skills), I was struck by how much this impacted, and dare I say, attacked, the very notion of body image and self-image that I so cautiously attempted to protect the students from upon my arrival.

The next exercise we embarked on was a mirroring exercise, which required us to pair off. Certain that I was to sit this one out, I moved to the side of the room so as to be out of the way. The ratio of girls to boys on this particular day was approximately 5 to 1, and the last thing I expected was to be paired with a female.

I was incorrect in my assumption! Not only was I participating in the exercise at Mary Rose's authoritative behest, but I was paired with a young woman. As I was immediately thrown back to the awkwardness of my teenage years in the span of a second, the discomfort in my own body took over. The girl and I stood about six or eight inches apart from one another, eyes locked. The smiles and giggles immediately assumed control, and we had yet to begin the exercise.

Once we began, I had the lead. With each gesture I made, my fellow student was meant to follow along with her own movement. We were, in fact, "mirroring" each other as if we were each other's reflection. Our tasks were to leave judgment and preconceived ideas behind and find presence in the moment.

My gestures began to speed up, and my partner kept up confidently. I found comfort in making jokes with my movements; opening fictitious cupboards, miming opening a jar of peanut butter and spreading it on an imaginary slice of bread until I heard the firm reminder of our guide, Mary Rose: "Don't try to make each other laugh! This isn't a competition!" Was she referring to me? Feeling robbed of my good student role, I surveyed the room. The dedication

and focus was apparent. To the students, the task was clear. And there I stood: an actor with a master's degree who had worked in Off-Broadway theater, film and television for almost 15 years and I had a lot to learn from these kids.

After a morning full of warm ups, drama games and exercises, the eager students were asked to bring out the texts they had been working on. Curiously, I asked some of the students to show me their monologues. With no preconceived notion of what it might be, I was stunned to see the title *Spoon River Anthology*. "Last year we did *Our Town*," the student offered.

Our Town? *Spoon River Anthology*? These were complex pieces of material. *Spoon River Anthology,* a series of dense monologues written in verse, is known in the drama world to be an introduction to Shakespeare and is frequently used to teach the Meisner (1987) approach to acting. How can teens be competently mastering such difficult work? How can they surpass that which so many others their age are struggling with? Were these kids special in some way? Were these the "privileged" ones? Were they exposed to art and culture their entire life?

To the contrary, these teens are considered "at risk." The teenagers from this acting class that I refer to are the youth of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program in New York City. They are in a special program created for participants interested in drama. It is called The Broadway Bound Fund.

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) is a nationwide organization dedicated to helping youth navigate through troubling circumstances, most commonly divorce and single parent households, (as well as foster care) with the guidance of an adult mentor. BBBS of New York City has been instrumental in the implementation of The Broadway Bound Fund (BBF), originally founded by John A. Jenkins in 2007. BBF provides acting lessons and theater experiences to youth, culminating in a stage performance each year. The Broadway Bound Fund drama instructors seek to foster creativity and self-expression, enhance personal and social development, and bolster self esteem and discipline, while strengthening collaborative abilities both in and out of the classroom. With increased emphasis from the work force on emotional intelligence, or an ability to manage moods in oneself and others (Goleman, 1998), teens require more than a high school diploma. The Broadway Bound Fund's mission is to provide the fundamentals of drama to participating youth to help reinforce such capacities.

Method

Drama has long been used to guide children and teens through the stages of early development. Founded in 2007, The Broadway Bound Fund aims to bring that experience to boys and girls, ages 12 to 17, through dramatic exercise, technique and performance.

The observations of this study were made with students in the Fall of 2009 through the Spring of 2010 class. The assessment began in February of 2010 and concluded with the students' final performance in June. The drama class met every other week on a Saturday morning from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m. The class attendance fluctuated between 15 and 20 students for each of the sessions. The students' presence in the class was purely voluntary and based on their desire to participate in the acting program.

Students were assessed for:

- Their desire and ability to express themselves creatively
- Their ability to take on leadership roles

- Their desire and ability to be part of a community, and to collaborate with peers, teaching assistants and drama instructor Mary Rose Synek
- Their ability to cope with internal and external conflicts and make personal discoveries that contribute to their growth
- Their level of initiative, commitment and discipline to the work
- Their exploration of intense thoughts and feelings through the metaphor of a character.

The results of this assessment were evaluated based on my observations as researcher, as well as discussions with the students, which included one-on-one conversations and organized focus groups. The focus groups were comprised of five to seven teens, male and female. With parental permission and student consent, the teens were invited to discuss their experience in the class. The topics that were explored included understanding of drama and its applications, self esteem and self efficacy, peer relations, body image, relationships with peers and adults and emotional intelligence. Supplementary to the experiential, literature from experts in drama, drama therapy and personal and social development were explored to deepen the understanding of the students' experience of how drama can enhance their growth.

This qualitative inquiry strives for a *naturalistic* assessment, in that the examination of the class does not interfere with the already established framework. The research plan was focused on highlighting the impressive strides the participating youth have made as a result of the class, and on gaining a deeper understanding of how the class has enhanced their lives beyond the world of acting. Due to the nature of the study, a qualitative evaluation was determined to be the appropriate methodology. According to research expert Michael Quinn Patton, "Qualitative methods are often used in evaluations because they tell the program's story by capturing and communicating the participant's stories." (2002)

Adolescence

When I reflect on adolescence, I am immediately reminded of British comedian Eddie Izzard's observations of the young teen's initial attraction to the opposite sex. The youth is faced with newfound feelings of sexual desires, and therefore, wanting to look his best.

And then, "Mother Nature says, 'No! I will make you look the worst you have ever looked in your entire life!'"

The ironic humor is obvious to adults, having suffered through the difficulties of the awkward teenage years and the often painful contradictions that result. That humor is often coupled with relief that we never need suffer through the tumult of adolescence again. It is difficult to reflect on what it was like to be an adolescent, but I sometimes wonder: is it distance that interferes with our hindsight, or avoidance?

Nevertheless, it raises many questions. What is occurring for the adolescent that makes them so temperamental, moody and unpredictable? Why do they have such hostility toward adults? Why do they become so rebellious? Why do they seem to be suffering so much? Why do they feel so misunderstood? How can they work through their personal problems? What can they do to find some relief?

As budding adults, adolescents are making new discoveries about life and their own identity in this formative stage of development. While they are still novice adults and lack life experience, teens often shy away from these new feelings and suppress what is occurring inside them. While the developing body and mind of the teenaged youth is exciting and fresh, it is also

frightening and confronting. Intellectually and physically, teens are capable of extraordinary feats. Their intellectual capacities have blossomed far beyond latency. They are capable of physical and athletic achievements of a new magnitude. They have newfound abilities to comprehend and create abstruse concepts. A conception of their future and the consequences of their actions emerge. However, these capacities are countered by a new sense of shame, confusion and self doubt that can interfere with, and potentially bury, the healthy development of the teen, and when crises such as trauma, loss and abandonment are injected into these already difficult matters, the results can be quite distressing.

And the need is greater than ever. With pressures from the workplace on high E.Q., or emotional intelligence, adolescents must have a forum that allows them to hone this skill. According to E.Q. expert Daniel Goleman (1998), "The rules for work are changing. We're being judged by a new yardstick: not just by how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other. These rules have little to do with what we were told was important in school; it focuses instead on personal qualities, such as initiative and empathy, adaptability and persuasiveness."

The arts have become increasingly popular modalities for promoting self expression, building self image and enhancing the qualities of emotional intelligence. Without judgment, the arts - music, fine art, drama, dance and poetry - have been helping children, teens and adults express themselves for centuries. Within the last 40 years, our awareness and recognition of the healing power of the arts in helping children figure out who they are as people, and ultimately, who they want to be as adults, have grown exponentially.

This article examines the theoretical concepts of drama and drama therapy and their role in nourishing healthy development. It also describes the findings of the impact that drama instruction can have on "at-risk" youth participating in Big Brothers Big Sisters' (BBBS) Broadway Bound Fund (BBF) acting program. The study explores the relevance of teens' personal and social development and how they are enhanced through participation in this program. This assessment will examine how drama can be the guiding agent to help youth navigate through life's circumstances and gain an opportunity to create, grow and flourish.

Curriculum

A drama curriculum (as characterized by BBF) is often determined by the contributions of the students. That is to say, an acting class is a delicate balance due to availability, willingness and drive of the students. Therefore, it is an ever-fluctuating operation. Not every student is at the same level physically, emotionally and academically, and a competent instructor must be sensitive to such disparities. Acting work requires the student to stretch their capacities further than they thought they could, and utilize intelligences they weren't aware they possessed (Gardner, 2006). However, a class that considers drama a process rather than purely a product (final performance) is nurturing in its approach and will counteract such variations.

Upon the students' arrival, the beginning rituals require all participants to form a circle within the room. Classes often commence with deep breathing or meditation in order to bring attention and focus to one another, the class and its surroundings. Yoga postures and stretches are often introduced in order to help the students connect with their bodies and find inner balance. The instructor, Mary Rose Synek, encourages eye contact and connection with peers as well. This promotes a sense of unity within the group and helps the students overcome self

doubts regarding body image. The warm ups continue with some linguistic exercises which help loosen any tension in the jaw and "free" the voice (Linklater, 1976). Always encouraging proper breathing from the student's center of gravity, sound and movement gestures are introduced. These exercises continue to help the student connect mind and body, but it also reinforces the group cohesion. Students create sound and movement gestures which are emulated by their peers and continue to be passed around the circle. These warm up exercises prepare the students for more intimate work. *Mirroring* exercises, introduced by Viola Spolin (1963), permit the students to recreate the gestures of their partner. The students stand in close proximity and face each other while one student leads the movements. The partner is required to "mirror" their peer's movements. In theory, this exercise further strengthens self-image as each student is faced with their partner's "humanness," and thus able to see him/herself. Another exercise coined by Spolin is an exercise in being observed. The class is separated into two sub groups, and one sub group is required to sit and observe, while the other group is on stage. Initially, the sub group on stage is only given a focal point on the wall. The focal point grows to an event, like a concert or a baseball game, and the student is creating imagery and expanding their ability to create. The challenge for the students is not only to create imagery, but to view their imaginary world while they are being watched by an audience.

After morning warm ups and exercises, the students begin working on their individual monologues. Each monologue is selected specifically for each student. During the class, the students are encouraged to perform their monologue in front of the class. The performance is interspersed with discussions about the circumstances of the character's life: who this person is, what he/she wants, what he/she has done and how he/she feels about the people in his/her life. This deepening of the character further stresses empathy, allowing the students to step outside of themselves and experience the life of another. The students are encouraged to connect with the written word via techniques such as *repetition* (Meisner, 1987) along with improvisation skills, and are continuously pushed to explore the emotional life of their character. This process allows the representational world to grow, and for the relationships of the characters (actors) to amplify. Concentration is constantly given to the student's voice, focus, physical life of their character and *emotional memory* (Adler, 1988, Stanislavski, 1938). While they are directly engaged in the acting work, they are also allowed to feel validation and understanding when the embodiment of their character is received by an audience. This acceptance of such strong emotions is believed to contribute greatly to the teens' emotional intelligence. As drama therapist Craig Haen states, "As most actors will attest, the process of creating a character is one that demands empathy, and being a good actor is equivalent to being in a partnership with another, requiring listening, focus, control and trust." (2004)

The individual work is then expanded by including the other actors in the class in supporting roles. Deepening the world of the characters still, these fragmented pieces come together to form a complete play. The students then perform the piece before family and friends at a theater in New York City.

Personal and Social Development

> "[Personal and Social Development] are the skills, qualities, capacities, and resources that help young people make successful transitions into adulthood, that is, lead healthy, confident and independent lives wherein they can fulfill their potential."

-Hughes and Wilson, 2004

Personal and social development are concepts based on the work of Erik Erikson (1950, 1968), the renowned psychologist whose work focused on psychosocial development. Erikson believed that the core *self* requires healthy personal and social development in order to garner a firm and positive identity. The process involves assuming different ways of being, particularly during adolescence, and is a normal part of a healthy development. The teen's exploration in our current times is evident and often results in trends and fads in fashion: Punk, Goth, Hip-Hop, Preppy, and Jock are all popular titles describing the persona, or the manifestation of how individuals perceive themselves and their (sometimes unconscious) desire to be received by others. Adolescence is a time when individuals will assume many different identities, and "try them on," almost as if they were costumes or masks. It is through this process that they are able to make future determinations of who they want to be.

Personal development is largely developed through individual experiences and describes a person's understanding of his/her own physical, social, and academic potential, but it is also affected by parents, adults and peer influences. Parents, teachers and role models can positively influence development by providing a structured environment that is both demanding and responsive to children's individual needs. Peers stir development by providing opportunities for social skill growth and by contributing to the individual's formation of values and attitudes.

Social development influences children and teens' ability to make and interact with friends and their ability to learn cooperatively in school. Perspective taking allows students to consider problems and issues from others' points of view. Social problem solving includes the ability to read social cues, generate strategies, and implement and evaluate these strategies. (Attempts to improve students' self-concepts by direct intervention have been largely unsuccessful. In contrast, attempts to improve self-concept as an outcome of increased success and achievement by that student have been quite successful.) (Eggen & Kauchak, 1998)

Erikson's psychosocial theory, an effort to integrate personal and social development, is based on the assumption that development of self is a response to intrinsic needs. Development occurs in stages, each marked by a psychosocial challenge called a *crisis*. As people develop, the challenges change.

The stages, as outlined by Erikson (1950) are:

1. Hope - Basic Trust vs. Mistrust - Infant stage. In this stage the child questions the reliability and consistency of his/her parent or caregiver;
2. Will - Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt - Toddler stage. Child needs to learn to explore the world. Ideally, parent is neither too smothering nor neglectful;
3. Purpose - Initiative vs. Guilt - Kindergarten – Child needs to plan or do things on his/her own, such as dress him/herself. If the child feels guilt about making his/her own choices, he/she will not function well;
4. Competence - Industry vs. Inferiority - Around age 6 to puberty. Child comparing self worth to others (social development). Child can recognize major disparities in personal abilities relative to other children;
5. Fidelity - Identity vs. Role Confusion - Teenager. Questioning of self. Who am I? How do I fit in? Where am I going in life? Erikson believes that if the parents allow the child

to explore, they will conclude their own identity. However, if the parents continually push him/her to conform to their views, the teen will face identity confusion;

6. Love - Intimacy vs. Isolation - Young adult begins to question who he/she wants to be within a relationship, his/her values, priorities and future;
7. Caring - Generativity vs. Stagnation - The mid-life crisis. Measure accomplishments/failures. The adult questions personal satisfaction with his/her life. Stagnation refers to the feeling of not having done anything to help the next generation;
8. Wisdom - Ego Integrity vs. Despair - Old age. Some handle death well. Some can be bitter, unhappy, and/or dissatisfied with what they have accomplished or failed to accomplish within their lifetime. They reflect on the past, and their perspective results in satisfaction or despair.

These developmental stages are not rites of passage. The individual must resolve each conflict with the guidance of parents, peers and other influences. According to Erikson, positive resolution of the crisis in each stage results in an inclination to be trusting, autonomous, willing to take initiative, and industrious, from the period of birth through approximately the elementary school years. Continued resolution of crises leaves people with a clear sense of oneself, the ability to achieve intimacy, desire for productivity, and a sense of integrity. Failure to resolve personal crises can result in delinquency, estrangement from society and its norms and restrictions from achieving one's fullest potential. These result from the absence of integrated social norms and properly nurtured psychosocial development.

James Marcia (1966) expanded Erikson's Fidelity stage and suggested a more literal interpretation. He suggests that this stage consists neither of *identity resolution* nor *identity confusion,* as Erikson claimed. In Marcia's view, *Identity Achievement* defines the extent to which both has been explored and committed to an identity in a variety of life domains including politics, occupation, religion, intimate relationships, friendships, and gender roles. His theory states that there are two distinct parts that form adolescent identity: a *time of choosing* or *crisis,* and a *commitment*. He defined a crisis as a time of upheaval where old values or choices are being reexamined. The outcome of a decision making process leads to a commitment to a certain value or role.

Marcia (1966) proposed four stages of Identity Development (paired with characters from the theater that highlight these milestones):

- **Identity Diffusion** is the status of individuals who have not yet experienced a crisis or made any commitments. Not only are they undecided about occupational and ideological choices, they are also likely to show little interest in such matters (Laura Wingfield, *The Glass Menagerie*);
- **Identity Foreclosure** is the status of individuals who have made a commitment but not experienced a crisis. This occurs most often when parents hand down commitments to their adolescents, usually in an authoritarian way, before adolescents have had a chance to explore different approaches, ideologies, and vocations on their own (Tom Wingfield, *The Glass Menagerie*);
- **Identity Moratorium** is the status of individuals who are in the midst of a crisis but whose commitments are either absent or are only vaguely defined (Hamlet, *Hamlet*);

- **Identity Achievement** is the status of individuals who have undergone a crisis and made a commitment (Romeo and Juliet, *Romeo & Juliet*).

The growing teen is not only facing challenges in terms of identity, but also physical, sexual, cognitive, social and psychological changes. Due to sexual maturation, the adolescent is going through spurts of rapid growth due to evolving hormones. The teen becomes aware of bodily changes and is more concerned with his/her appearance than ever. Adolescents begin comparing themselves to their peers and are acutely aware of the inevitable comparisons by the peers themselves. They begin to question their future, develop an increased capacity for consequential thinking, contemplate hypothetical scenarios, explore hopes and aspirations, think more abstractly and gain perspective on their future (Piaget, 1952). Adolescents are continuing to develop at a rapid rate, and in these formative years are going through one of the greatest developmental stages since infancy. Teens' bodies go through rapid growth as hormones develop and fluctuate. Sometimes facing unresolved internal conflicts from their previous stages of development, teens are unable to establish a clear sense of identity and are plagued with a poor sense of self. Rebelliousness is often a result of the teen's quest for independence and autonomy. As the adolescent begins to experiment with adulthood, he/she is often plagued with conflicting feelings. These feelings are quite burdensome to the teenager, battling between the desires for individuation countered with fear of losing the parent. The teen often compensates with substitute attachments, and the peer influence becomes top priority. (Emunah, 1995)

Margaret Mahler's (1975) theory of *Rapprochement* suggests that during early formative years, the child feels a sense of ambivalence toward the parent, craving independence, but still fearful of detachment and abandonment. The child fears a "regressive engulfment" by the parent, and resists this closeness. Peter Blos (1962) suggests a "second individuation" during adolescence as youth come face to face with adulthood. Adolescents essentially have the same ambivalence toward the responsibilities and consequences of adulthood. This dilemma results in loneliness and isolation, as well as seeking substitute attachment objects (peers). The adolescent need for peer approval increases at a rapid rate as they begin to prioritize their peers over adult authority. This need for approval leads to an increase in moodiness when teen's needs are not met, and subsequently, an increase in isolation. The prioritization of peers and rebellion against authority also places adolescents at a greater risk as maladaptive behaviors may increase.

The Drama

With this sporadic physical and sexual development, teens are also developing an increased capacity for thinking and reasoning. They are becoming more introspective and recognizing their personal significance. They are also more aware of abstract thinking and concepts, and are enhancing different intelligences. (Gardner, 1982, Roper and Davis, 2000) Teens are beginning to think about their future in a new light and are recognizing personal responsibilities along with the consequences of their actions.

It has become evident in the United States and abroad (Hughes and Wilson, 2004) that the arts, and particularly drama, are powerful guiding tools for teens in discovering who they are as developing adults. Drama is universal in its language as it echoes and often duplicates real life: what is happening in one's immediate environment as well as the world at large. As teens are

struggling to find their place in a world of often mixed messages and contradictory values, drama provides a place to not only escape but to explore. With the safety net of "make-believe" always present, consequences are alleviated and discoveries are made.

The foundation of drama in its history offers relief in the complexities of self discovery and identity. According to Aristotle, drama's function is to induce an emotional catharsis and release deep feelings. Aristotle referred to the combination of vicarious participation and the suspension of disbelief (which is the actor's enactment in role) as *mimesis*. He considered it important that there be a certain distance between the drama on the one hand and life on the other. Without this distance, tragedy could not give rise to catharsis. (Aristotle & Butcher, 1961)

More pure in thought, Evreinov (1927) echoes these theories of needs in development and offers drama as the resource. He states that "theater is infinitely wider than the stage" and that drama is "something as essentially necessary to man as air, food and sexual intercourse." Evreinov believed that since drama is essentially *change*, the work offers opportunities to reframe and alter areas of one's life, personally, politically and socially, and exists in accordance with the progressive nature of the human being. Evreinov highlights the key elements to the healing power of drama:

- Theater as therapy for actor and audience
- Theater as instinct
- Theater and play as necessary to the development of intelligence
- The stage management of life (violation of norms/the elements of life in the world of the theater).

Phil Jones (2007) continues the work of Evreinov through his work as a drama therapist. Jones suggests that participation in drama is cathartic for the actor as much as the audience. He states that theater allows the actor to get in touch with emotional processes buried in the unconscious. As humans, we have the intrinsic drive to play and create, and drama satisfies these needs throughout life. Drama provides access to a representation of different developmental stages to assist in determining ways of relating to self and others. Drama unifies people into a community for a purpose that is meaningful to those participating. Because drama is the mimesis of life (as stated by Aristotle), it allows the actors and audience to reflect upon reality, but is still set apart from that which is real.

What fundamental elements of drama can aid teens in their development? Performing in front of an audience requires a sense of self confidence, but can this confidence also be gained as a result of dramatic work? The very notion of successful acting relies heavily upon the ability to take on external ways of being, or roles, and integrate them with one's own. Modern theorist and a pioneer in the field of drama therapy, Robert Landy (1993) suggests that *role integration* is not limited to the actor. In actuality, we are all actors because we take on roles in our lives, and these roles contribute to our identity. If we are to maintain a sense of personal balance in a world that can be complex, confusing and often contradictory, then we must embrace this ever evolving process. This balance and integration greatly contributes to personal and social development. Landy (1993) defines role as: "the container of all the thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves and others in our social and imaginary worlds. Role as a concept applies to the full range of human experiences through body and sensorium, mood and emotion, intuition and spirit."

Landy states that people take on roles, not only on the stage, but in life. He suggests that role and actor are merged; simultaneously "me and not me." This theory implies that the actor, while in role, can both act and reflect concurringly. For example, if a student assumes, and is fully engaged in the role of Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, he must grapple with his own ambivalence between autonomy and loneliness. The role of Emily in *Our Town* allows the actress to examine her thoughts and feelings of love, marriage, growing up and even death. The audience observes it, but the actor lives it. The actor can flesh out these different roles and examine them as if they were three-dimensional shapes. The actor must look at all sides of the role, both desirable and undesirable, and understand all of its parts. They are then given the challenging task of integrating the role. Once integrated, the actor again will be challenged to examine himself. He will ask himself:

- How is this role like me?
- How is this role unlike me?
- What parts of this role do I like?
- What parts of this role do I despise?
- Do I feel close to this role?
- Do I feel distant from this role?
- What personal discoveries have I made while playing this role?
- How does this role impact my family? My community? The world?

Subsequent to examining the role, the actor's task is to embody the role. *Embodiment* is the notion that brings drama to a higher level of self discovery. The body is the tool by which the actor communicates to the other actors on stage, as well as the audience. The body is that which takes the internal process to the immediate. The embodiment of a role creates an urgency that allows the actor to actually feel the sensation of the idea rather than simply contemplate it. It increases the intensity level of the catharsis and offers the actor to simultaneous explore the idea while "physicalizing" it.

Jones (2007) highlights the power of embodiment in his book *Drama as Therapy*. He explains three key areas that contribute to development. First, clients are able to discover their own physical potential. This helps the actor communicate more effectively and express him or herself via the body. Secondly, Jones addresses the therapeutic potentials of trying on a different embodied identity. This transformation can result in a new perspective and release. And finally, embodiment allows the actor to explore their own feelings about their body, body image, and how their body is viewed by others.

Spolin (1963) states, "Our first concern with the students is to encourage freedom of physical expression, because the physical and sensory relationship with the art form opens the door for insight."

The idea that an actor can act and reflect simultaneously is a profound one. Because they are given the container, they are free to explore consequential scenarios without the actual consequences, but still speculate on the potential repercussions in life. The actor can engage in problem solving scenarios that may mirror his or her own life through the metaphor of the character, but still internalize the experience and gain insight. By integrating these intellectual components with embodiment through the safety of the hypothetical situation, young actors enhance their sense of control over these elements, resulting in increased self confidence. The embodiment of the action also enhances and personalizes the experience. It brings conceptual

thinking into the immediate, and amplifies its subjective meaning. The observation and acceptance of the actor performing on stage is the intended validation, and sets in motion a sense of belonging among the participants. As a result, actors are gaining a sense of trust from their peers and a community begins to surface. The actor begins to feel as though he/she is part of something important and meaningful.

The work of Landy, Jones and Evereinov, among others, speaks boldly on the internal experience that actors can encounter through dramatic play. And the resulting wisdom often dictates our externalized reactions to the world around us. Not only will drama allow us to view ourselves differently, but the world may have the same reaction. Based on these new found tools and discoveries, our artistic capacities can exacerbate how we engage with our communities.

Outcomes & Case Examples

For the purposes of this study, eight specific traits that are vital to personal and social development for the teen are identified. As stated earlier, the events include: *leadership, discipline, creativity, intensity, conflict, community, authority* and *discovery*. While these categories are not simply measured, my observations over the five month period suggest that the students are making significant strides in each of these areas. Among these months of dramatic study, the students were able to assemble their individual pieces of *The Spoon River Anthology* into a cohesive and well constructed play. Through dedication and hard work, the monologues grew stronger and deeper, the students' articulation and annunciation became clearer, physicality become more pronounced, characters became more defined and confidence levels were built. The students' faith in the guidance of drama instructor Mary Rose Synek was apparent, as was their trust in each other. As a result of their labor, the students gave a strong final performance.

However, this study is not purely validated by observations. What is paramount is the experience of the students. Therefore, focus groups were conducted over two classes prior to the final performance, each lasting forty-five minutes. The groups were composed of five to seven students interested in discussing their experiences in the drama class. In the following section, testimonies from the students about their experiences with BBF are offered, preceded by brief descriptions of the areas of focus examined in this study.

- **Leadership:** Teens, many for the first time, will find leadership qualities that they didn't know they possessed. Through dramatic work, they are impelled to think on their feet, work under pressure and make powerful choices in the moment. As a result, students can experience an increase is self confidence and be able to express themselves.

"If you can overcome being shy, like most people here are shy, then maybe when you get older, you might be doing stuff bigger than this, like -- just like standing up in front of 1,000 people instead of like ten or fifteen people. It teaches you to be yourself and don't act like -- don't act like you are just in a box and you can't talk. If you be yourself, it makes people think better or worse about you. [This class] teaches you how to act…it teaches you new skills, teaches you new skills about what you can do when you grow up."

"[We do warm ups] to feel more comfortable with ourselves…people that are just here for attention, they are not going to do it because they don't want to appear stupid, but if you are

doing it you are gaining self confidence because you are not caring if people are looking at you. You are just doing it to get loose. I think it is self confidence…I have gained from this class."

"I never had, like, low confidence, but I am able to speak out more and stand up for myself when it comes to people doubting me. In this class, you have to express your voice, you have to talk a lot to people in this class. So, I use that in the real world. Before, I was really quiet."

- **Discipline:** A successful production requires significant amounts of hard work, dedication and discipline that may be quite foreign to the teen student. Hours of long rehearsals, fine tuning the production, understanding and committing to the character and the play and learning the text and cues are some of the technical aspects that are required for a smooth stage production. Balancing these aspects along with deepening the performance and being "in the moment" while in front of an audience requires great maturity and self awareness.

"Oh, yes. I am going to be prepared. I am going to have it down pat. Come day of the play, when you don't memorize it, you are going to feel mad stupid because everybody else did a good job…I am not going to be unprepared ever again. That was my first time, and that's not happening again."

"You're supposed to memorize what you are doing, so if like – if I was to go onstage and mess up, I would feel disappointed… I wouldn't feel right. Because you know, I was supposed to be working hard on the monologue to memorize it."

- **Creativity:** Teenagers creativity has reached new levels, particularly due to the new scope of the world, and themselves. Their ability to think abstractly enhances their ability to work within an art form, such as drama, and subsequently taps into a new form of intelligence. Their increased sense of the world around them will result in new found opinions and altered perspectives.

"When I am in theater class in school, we just read books, and you know, every now and then, we get to act it out. But here, you actually get to have fun. And we have a big show at the end of the year, and stuff like that."

- **Intensity:** Dramatic performance can match the intensity level of what teens are going through that is often misunderstood and unsettling to parents and other authority figures. Similarly, drama can also soften the raw emotion that teens experience by giving them distance (Landy, 1993) through the metaphor of a character.

"Like…sometimes I can be really loud and outspoken. I can express that in one character. Or, I can be shy and quiet and don't want to say anything. I can express that in another character. Or I can be spontaneous. I don't know. I can always express my personality in some form of character."

"I've always had like…different characteristics about myself, even when I was young. It's just…I am not one mood."

- **Conflict:** External conflicts often arise from internal conflicts, and these personal struggles are ripe for expression. Teens crave to explore their thoughts and fears in a "contained" and safe environment, free of judgment and criticism. Drama provides just that. Through the metaphor of a character, teens are able to externalize the internal, examine their issues with support and safety, reflect, and make subsequent choices.

"If somebody wants to say something, like, crazy to me, I would speak back, and be confident in what I say back because of this class."

- **Community:** Collaboration in dramatic exercises can help a teen feel like they belong to a community, and are part of something, rather than feelings of isolation and solitude. At their most vulnerable, adolescents will be accepted, and are even celebrated with praise and recognition.

"If I see a person over there by himself…I am not going to let that person sit there by themself while we are over here chatting...you are not going to make friends that way and then the person is going to stop coming."

- **Authority:** Drama can assist in building healthier relationships with authority figures as a result of the work with acting teacher/director. Remarkably similar to the BBBS mentor, the acting teacher/director's role is not to lecture or command, but to guide and inspire the student through the dramatic arts by use of creative knowledge, life experience and empathy. This healthy relationship can be encouraging in helping the student take risks and try on alternative ways of being. The acting teacher/director is more of a partner and advocate to the teen than disciplinarian. This can help teens alter their view of adults in their everyday life.

"***Mary Rose asks us to do embarrassing stuff sometimes and some kids don't do it because they'll be like, 'this is stupid'…like, let's say she tells us to do something stupid, and like half the kids aren't doing it because they feel stupid, then yeah, but if all the kids are doing it, then that one person is going to go, 'okay, might as well join in.'"***

" If we go outside in a public place, it would be scary, because people might turn around and think something is wrong. Because like some people are still shy and we – sometimes we want to do acting outside, and people might look at you and people might get shy. [Mary Rose] tells us to do it to make you not shy anymore, to build you up."

- **Discovery:** Through character work and exploration, drama gives the opportunity to try on new roles that may not be socially acceptable in the home, school or society. These discoveries, in the safety of a classroom, can give an adolescent a greater sense of control in their own personal choices by allowing them to examine those curious places, but

without the consequences. Character work can also enhance the students' capacity for empathy of others who may have similar person struggles or issues.

"One time I had to do an emotion where I was all deep and depressed and embarrassed and stuff like that, and I am not usually – usually that way. So, it takes double the time to work on – like trying to change who you originally are into that person."

"My character…is proud that she stood up for herself because she's like this prostitute and the prince comes to her house or whatever, every night, or something like that…and he hit her, and she killed him…they tried to hide up the scandal by saying that he killed himself by cleaning a hunting gun, which wasn't true. I killed him. But they don't want him to seem as if he's bad, going to a prostitute's house. She just couldn't stand to hear all of this, 'Oh, he's such a great person. He just shot himself accidentally by cleaning a hunting gun.' Which wasn't true. He was coming to see me. And that's what she wanted to put across to people. That he wasn't as great as he sounded. So, I believe the emotion with that is she is proud. I mean, she's not ashamed. She doesn't care. She's very outspoken and bold and proud. She's willing to take the consequences."

Conclusion

What I observed in the class was not a phenomenon. It is the result of consistent support and creativity introduced by an experienced, caring and talented instructor to a group of eager teenagers who are willing to take risks and excited about what awaits them. The sophistication of the work, figuratively speaking, is on Shakespeare's doorstep. Yet, what I came to learn was that the mastery of such complex work was not necessarily the goal. Rather, such complicated work was essential to match the complexity of the developing teen.

The results of my observations and the testimony of the teens suggest that drama is a constructive and useful guide in helping adolescents grow and develop into confident and secure young adults. Through a sensitive and nurturing approach, the teens' normal, yet confusing thoughts and feelings are given an artistic outlet. These impulses that are otherwise considered "taboo" are given a structure for exploration and discussion that is both safe and productive. Thus, the students of The Broadway Bound Fund are gaining more than acting skills. They are gaining personal life skills and an understanding of who they are as individuals. They are gaining a sense of self awareness and self esteem that many adolescents struggle with. They are given a venue for self expression that exists without judgment or preconception. They are learning that their rebellious instincts aren't wrong, but are actually healthy and appropriate. They are welcomed into a community that includes them purely based on their desire to be part of something meaningful.

Further research on this area could expand on this assessment. Observing the class for an entire year, from first exposure to the program to the final performance would offer some deeper insights. Also, a quantitative study with students in The Broadway Bound Fund or a similar program compared to a control group absent from such a program could be explored. Examining school performance, socialization with peers outside The Broadway Bound Fund, job interview skills, and future success rates could be examined. Follow up with alumni of The Broadway Bound Fund could expose developments that occur later in life.

Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences is ripe for connection to drama. His concepts of linguistic, musical, logical, spatial and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences along with the personal intelligences are all addressed in, and directly correlated to dramatic work. Gardner attests that intelligence quotient (I.Q.) is a limited view of the capacities of human beings, and that intelligence can be measured by multiple means. Roper and Davis (2000) discuss and compare Gardner's theory with the work of developmental theorists and arts experts. This could be further developed with a study solely dedicated to applying the foundations of Gardner's theory to the work of The Broadway Bound Fund.

Contributors

Tom Pilutik is a research associate for Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City's Broadway Bound Found. He has worked in the dramatic arts for 12 years as an actor, teacher, producer, director and clinician. Tom was awarded outstanding service to the C.W. Post Theater Company upon his departure in 1998. He is currently an active board member of the established theater company, *Proto-type*, which is based in Lancaster, England and an actor/producer of *Kings and Desperate Men Productions* (www.kadm.com) in New York City. Tom earned a Master of Arts in the field of drama therapy from New York University in 2003, and immediately began working in acute care psychiatric with children and teens struggling with severe emotional disturbance, as well as trauma and loss issues. Tom continues to perform on stage and screen, and is currently teaching drama and movement to young children in an arts based pre-school program called Studio Creative Play (www.studiocreativeplay.org) in Brooklyn, New York.

Mary Rose Synek Education includes Master of Fine Arts in Theater, City University of New York at Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, New York as well as Bachelor of Arts in English Communication Arts, St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas. *Suma Cum Laude.* As a stage actor in Manhattan, she has had leading roles in over 40 plays Off-Broadway, and originated 10 roles. As an instructor of theater in project LEAP, Mary Rose has devised and directed projects to motivate low achieving students grades 1-12 to improve reading and writing skills through drama. Students achieved a 30% increase in Project Read reading test scores. As resident professional theater associate (Dramatic Artist in Residence), Mary Rose taught the Introduction to Acting course, and presented workshops with leading roles in two major productions, *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Way of the World*. She participated at the drama program of Cornell University and also taught at the Lee Strasberg Theater Institute for six years. As an independent drama teacher and coach, she has provided guidance in writing original material, and coaching in choice, interpretation and presentation of monologues used in auditions. Mary Rose has also worked as a substitute teacher for the New York Public Schools, an instructor of Acting Technique, 78th Street Theatre Lab, Manhattan and a Teaching assistant in undergraduate acting, City University New York at Brooklyn College.

Lindsey Carroll (teaching assistant) graduated with a BFA in Drama at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where she also double-minored in Sociology and Irish Studies. She has had numerous theater and film credits during her nine years in New York. Most recently, Lindsey was in *A Christmas Carol* with The 13th Street Repertory Company, and a two year educational theater tour with Arts Echo. She also worked with the Children's Theater of New Jersey in the one woman show *Arithmetickles.* Currently, she teaches pre-schoolers through Redeemer Presbyterian Church, and also teaches acting with Four Courners Creative.

Nicole (Nicki) Balsam (teaching assistant) has a B.F.A. in Drama from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. She has also trained with Playwright's Horizons Theater School and Stone Street Studios film and television acting workshop. Theater credits include *Icarus' Mother*, *The Tempest* and *Into the Woods*. She has been a teaching assistant with The Broadway Bound Fund since 2008.

Rachel Calloway (research assistant) received her B.A. in Theater from Vanderbilt University in 2004. She has volunteered with several youth programs such as Oasis in Nashville, TN, Nashville Children's Theater in Nashville, TN, City Lights Youth Theater in Manhattan, NY and All-Stars Project in Manhattan, NY to name a few. Her passion for the theater arts and working with youth led her to New York University where she is currently working on her Master's in Drama Therapy in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development.

John A. Jenkins is the founder of The Broadway Bound Fund. He currently serves as the President and Publisher of Washington based CQ Press, the leading publisher of text books and reference books about government politics. Prior to joining CQ at the start of 1998, he served as a subsidiary president of high-tech magazine publisher Ziff-Davis, a subsidiary president of France Telecom and as an executive and member of the board of director of The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. John has also worked as a journalist and author, with his work appearing in major magazines in the U.S. and abroad, including *The New York Times Magazine*, *GQ* (American and British editions), *The Washington Monthly* and *The American Lawyer*. John is also the author of two popular books about lawyers, *The Litigators* (Doubleday) and *Ladies' Man: The Life and Trials of Marvin Mitchelson* (St. Martin's). He is currently working on a biography of Chief Justice William Renquist. For many years, John was a close friend of fellow journalist, editor and patron of the arts, Michael VerMeulen, whose death was the impetus for forming The Broadway Bound Fund. Michael was a dedicated Big Brother in the New York City program. Through The Broadway Bound Fund, John hopes to share Michael's love of creativity and expression with youngsters. John's vision is to offer a learning environment that fosters self-confidence and discipline, and strengthens collaborative abilities both in and out of the classroom.

**Special thanks to Sara McMullian, MA, RDT, LCAT for her contributions to this study.*

References

Adler, S. (1988) *The Technique of Acting.* New York: Bantam Books

Aristotle & Butcher, S.H. (1961). *Poetics,* trans. S.H. Butcher. New York: Hill and Wang.

Blos, P. (1962). *On adolescence.* New York: Free Press.

Bogart, A. and T, Landau (2005). *The viewpoints book: A practical guide to viewpoints and composition.* New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Eggen P. & Kauchak, D. (1998). *Educational Psychology: Windows on Classrooms* (6th Ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Emunah, Renee (1995). From adolescent trauma to adolescent drama. In S. Jennings (Ed.), *Dramatherapy with children and adolescents* (pp. 150-168). London: Routledge.

Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.

Erikson, E.H. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.

Evreinov, N. (1927). *The theatre in life.* New York: Harrap.

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind.* New York: Basic Books.

Gardner, H. (2006). *The development and education of the mind.* New York: Routledge.

George, J.M. (2000). Emotions and leadership: the role of emotional intelligence. *Human Relations*, 53(8), 1027-1055.

Goleman, D. (1998) *Working with emotional intelligence.* New York: Bantam Books.

Haen, C. (2005). Group drama therapy in a children's inpatient psychiatric setting. In C. Haen and A.M. Weber (Ed.), *Clinicial applications of drama therapy in child and adolescent treatment* (pp. 189-204). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Hughes, J. & Wilson, K. (2004). Playing a part: the impact of youth theatre on young people's personal and social development. *Research in Drama Education, 9*(1), 57-72.

Johnstone, K. (1979). *Impro: Improvisation and the theatre.* New York: Routledge.

Jones, P. (2007). *Drama as therapy: Theory, practice and research.* New York: Routledge.

Landy, R. (1993). *Persona and performance.* New York: Guilford Press.

Linklater, K. (1976). *Freeing the natural voice.* New York: Drama Book Publishers.

Mahler, M. S., Pine F. & Bergman, A. (1975). *The psychological birth of the human infant.* New York: Basic Books.

Marcia, J. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3,* 551-558.

Masters, Edgar Lee (1915). *Spoon river anthology*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

Meisner, S. (1987). *Sanford Meisner on acting.* New York: Vintage Books.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research & evaluation methods. California: Sage Publications.

Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children.* New York: International Universities Press.

Roper, B. & Davis, D. (2000). Howard Gardner: knowledge, learning and development in drama and arts education. *Research in Drama Education, 5*(2), 217-233.

Dutton, R. Howard, J. (2003). *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Histories*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Spolin, V. (1963). *Improvisation for the theater.* Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Thompson, A. R. (1942). *The anatomy of drama.* California: University of California Press.

Wilder, T. (1938). *Our Town.* New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Williams, Tennessee (1944). *The Glass Menagerie.* New York: Chelsea House Publishers.