

FORMER STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THEATRE IMPACTED LIFE
SKILLS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

by

Tia Shaffer Cowart

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate former high school theatre students' perceptions of how theatre education addressed their psychological needs and impacted life skills. Participants were graduates of a large metropolitan high school, located near Atlanta, GA. A focus group, individual semi-structured interviews and collection of artifacts were the data collection procedures utilized to discover students' perceptions. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants. The data analysis process included initial coding, axial coding and memo writing. Based on the information from the interviews, this case study showed the benefits of offering youth opportunities to engage in theatre education and supported research that indicates the positive outcomes of arts education. The findings of the study indicate that theatre education impacts students' life skills and psychological needs. Participants report gaining life skills, such as, hard-work, social skills, perseverance and career training. The data also revealed that participants experienced psychological benefits, such as, confidence, sense of belongingness, accomplishment and cognitive abilities.

Dedication/Acknowledgments

I am grateful to God for blessing me every day of my life and for leading me on an amazing journey of faith and scholarship. I am also thankful for the people that influenced the writing and completion of this dissertation—Evans and Nita Shaffer for their unwavering love and support, Eden Cowart, the little one who motivates me to be a better provider, Sharrell Lockett, the friend who was always in my corner and Watson’s 919 Group for their encouragement and camaraderie. I would like to acknowledge Freddie Hendricks, the visionary who introduced me to theatre and made me believe in endless possibilities. Special thanks is extended to the village of family, friends, educators, classmates and church members who sowed seeds in me. Last, but not least, I am grateful to my committee members, Dr. Cornwell, Dr. Milacci, and Mrs. Wheeler, for providing guidance, counsel and support in the completion of this dissertation.

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List of Abbreviations

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competencies in Education (DICE)

Drama Group Therapy (DGT)

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional Quotient (EQ)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Intellectual Quotient (IQ)

National Arts Education Partnership (NAEP)

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

National Governor's Association (NGA)

President's Committee on Arts and Humanities (PCAH)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Stanford Research Institute (SRI)

University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Education plays a pivotal role in young people's lives. Though approaches to education vary, there are some common goals: to give young people the knowledge and skills needed to survive in a global society and to help them grow and develop into healthy adults (President's Committee on Arts and Humanities [PCAH], 2011). Rocco Landesman, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts says, "Having the arts in young people's lives is essential." (Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012, p. 5). All students, regardless of their level of interest in the Arts, can benefit from opportunities to explore the arts (The Arts Education Partnership, 2012).

When it comes to educating children, there is no one-size-fits all model. For instance, different children respond to various academic subjects differently. Some children excel in math and science; some thrive in language arts and social studies. There are some children who enjoy sports and cheerleading, while others flourish in the arts. The PCAH (2011) argues that arts education is essential to competing in a global society; creativity and innovation are what made America great, the report claims. In addition to math and science, children need arts education to foster creative thinking (PCAH, 2011). Arts education administrators, Eric Oddleifson and Judith Simpson analyzed the effects of arts education on students and found overwhelming evidence that arts education increases students' creativity, problem-solving skills, tolerance for others, expressiveness and motivation for learning (Schalk, 2010). All the skills Oddleifson and Simpson mention help enhance the overall educational achievements of children.

The federal government also wishes to enhance the nation's educational system. President Obama has set an agenda to improve education (PCAH, 2011). His primary goal is to provide children with a well-rounded education (Beveridge, 2010). Based on Oddleifson and Simpson's research and other research outlined in this study, one could conclude that eliminating fine arts from schools not only does takes away the possibility of providing children with a well-rounded education, it also restricts certain students from reaching their maximum intellectual capability (Schalk, 2010). The revitalization of arts education, including theatre, is a part of President Obama's agenda (PCAH, 2011). The goal is to make arts education accessible in America's schools so that students, particularly underserved students, may experience the benefits of a comprehensive education (PCAH, 2011). Students who see school as a source of frustration and failure can have successful experiences in the arts, which motivates them to engage in the learning process (The Arts Education Partnership, 2012).

In *10 Lessons the Arts Teach*, Elliott Eisner (2002) says, "The art's position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults think is important" (p. 1). The true goal or purpose of education is to provide students with a wide range of subjects so they can reach their fullest academic and social potential (Schalk, 2010). The PCAH seeks to distinguish arts education as a comprehensive part of the K-12 educational system. Another goal is to strengthen the evidence or research base for high quality arts education (PCAH, 2011).

Sandra Ruppert, director of the Arts Education Partnership had this to say of arts education: "We must take seriously our commitment to close achievement gaps. Study of the arts in its many forms—whether as a stand-alone subject or integrated into the school

curriculum—is an essential part of achieving success in school, life and work” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 1). National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman Rocco Landesman says, “Arts education doesn’t take place in isolation. It has to take place as a part of an overall school and education reform strategy” (Gifford, 2012, p. 1).

Here is the problem: since the introduction of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, the number of arts programs, including theatre (which is the focus of this study), have steadily declined (Ruppert, 2006). NCLB (2008), a federal mandate started under the Bush Administration to strengthen education, requires schools to show accountability via reading and math standardized test scores (Ashford, 2004). When faced with financial difficulties, many American schools decrease funding for fine arts programs or completely cut them (Schalk, 2010). A report from the Council of Basic Education found that some schools are spending significantly less time and money on the arts since NCLB was enacted (Ashford, 2004). Schools in states across the nation report the amount of instructional time devoted to reading, writing, math and science has increased; time spent on arts courses has decreased (Von Zastrow & Janc, 2004). Many schools are taking already scarce resources from arts programs in order to increase student achievement on reading and math tests (Ashford, 2004). With fewer resources, principals are less likely to hire and retain arts teachers.

In 2008, President Obama, who was then campaigning for the presidency, released *The Platform in Support of the Arts* (PCAH, 2011). In this document, he argued that arts education is in need of revival and is worth reinvestment (PCAH, 2011). Since his election, President Obama began working with the PCAH. The Committee notes that

it is unfortunate that many school districts are cutting instructional time for arts education (PCAH, 2011).

An urgency to make America's students globally competitive in math and science has even caused President Obama to increase funding for these subjects. In 2010 it was reported that President Obama allocated \$250 million to science and math education (Paulson, 2010). The ultimate goal of the funding was to hire more qualified educators to improve U.S. students' math and science performance (Paulson, 2010). While funds for subjects such as math and science have been increased, funds for the arts have decreased. NEA Chairman Landesman speaks about the impact budget cuts have had on arts programs when he says:

But over the past four decades, budget pressures and an increasing focus on just reading and math have crowded the arts out of too many school days. What's lost? The chance for a child to express himself. The chance for the idiosyncratic child who has not yet succeeded elsewhere to shine. A sense of play, of fun, of discovery (Catterall et. al., 2012, p. 5)

Rod Paige, former U.S. Secretary of Education, disagreed with reports that NCLB endangers arts programs (Ashford, 2004). He said NCLB outlines arts programs as a core academic subject, and school districts can use Title I money to fund arts activities (Ashford, 2004). At the same time, schools are discouraged from utilizing arts programs unless they can prove that the arts enhance students' performance in math and reading (Ashford, 2004). According to Ruppert (2006) theatre programs do enhance students' academic performance in core subjects by raising math and reading test scores. The Arts Education Partnership (1999) released a report that shows a correlation between sustained

theatre instruction and success in math and reading (especially for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds).

Manning and Kirkland (2011) argue that the legitimacy of arts education should not have to be proven by an academic score. However, there is evidence that supports the value of arts education on the general curriculum (Manning & Kirkland, 2011). A 2002 report, *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Achievement and Social Development*, found a correlation between student achievement and arts education (Manning & Kirkland, 2011). This report highlighted six areas that were improved by arts education, including theatre: (1) literacy skills; (2) verbal skills, (3) spatial reasoning; (4) thinking skills; (5) social skills and (6) motivation to participate in learning and all arts (Manning & Kirkland, 2011).

NCLB (2002) funds only seven to 13% of state education budgets, yet it mandates that states drastically modify their educational programs (Chapman, 2007). Chapman said, “Without question, it [NCLB] is the most elaborate case of federal micromanagement of state policy, local schools and teachers in the entire history of American education” (Chapman, 2007, p. 25). Though NCLB outlines arts program as a part of the academic core subjects, President Bush suggested the cutting of 42 programs that were “proven ineffective.” Arts programs appeared on that list of ineffective programs (Chapman, 2007).

Furthermore, the American Diploma Project, an educational initiative that started in 2004 under the direction of governors and business leaders, calls for states to align their standards, requirements and tests to the ideals of colleges and high-paying employers (Chapman, 2007). According to Chapman, “The arts are not present, and

presumably because not many employers and personnel in college admissions think their studies are vital” (p. 29). With 29 states on board with the American Diploma Project, it is evident arts programs are in jeopardy (Chapman, 2007).

Recently, Chapman (2012) wrote a letter to the editor of *Education Week* in response to an article titled, *No Obituary Needed for the Arts*. In this article, it was suggested that arts education has not been harmed by high-stakes testing. However, Chapman challenged the article by stating that statistics reported by the National Center for Education Statistics, which were used to support the claim that arts education remained unharmed, were outdated. Additionally, Chapman (2012) argues that the new Common Core Standards and other initiatives such as Race to the Top continue to focus on Math, English, and other subjects.

Chapman (2012) infers that the National Center for Educational Statistics does not intend to address arts education. She also posits that high-poverty schools will receive even less support in the arts. According to Chapman (2012), a 2011 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher reported that 23% of teachers reported reductions or eliminations of arts programs during the last 12 months; cuts were even deeper in schools with high minority populations. Researchers, such as Manning and Kirkland (2011), argued that the arts are vital to the educational system. However, programs continue to be cut (Chapman, 2012).

Further research supports the benefits of arts education in society, business, government, and schools (Elder, Hovey, Jones & Swann, 2007). According to Elder et al. (2007), American businesses and industries now demand employees that are flexible and creative. A report released by Americans for the Arts (2007) indicated that

innovation and creativity are among the top five skills that employers will value the most within the next five years. Furthermore, children's grades, attitudes and attendance increase when the arts are a part of their educational experience (Milner, 2000). Milner (2000) also states that arts education results in student motivation and higher achievement in reading, writing and math.

Lehman (2008), a proponent of arts education, says the purpose of education should be to pursue truth and beauty, to develop human capacities, and to improve quality of life. According to Lehman (2008), young people should not be viewed as simply consumers and producers of money-making products, nor should they should not be the objects of international competition. He also argued that students are human beings who deserve to live purposeful, satisfying lives. Lehman (2008) feared that society values the need for consumer goods over the contributions of the arts and humanities. Some colleges and corporations are discounting the arts and humanities, as their emphasis is primarily on molding students into money-making commodities for the corporate world (Chapman, 2007).

Additional research supports the positive role of arts education in the overall curriculum. A salient research study performed by James Catterall at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) reveals further benefits of arts education. Catterall et al. (1999) studied 25,000 students in grades eight to ten. The researchers discovered that students involved in arts programs performed better in other subjects and are less likely to drop out of school or become unmotivated. Their study also showed that students from low-income families who participate in arts programs were more likely to do better

academically than those who did not (Catterall et al., 1999). This study implies that arts education supports the overall academic agenda.

The Center on Education Policy (2007) released a report which indicated that 44% of school districts cut time from subjects such as art and music to focus on math and reading. According to this report, a decrease in arts education appears to be a common trend in many states across the nation. In 2008 Spohn conducted a case study with arts teachers at a rural school in Ohio. The study found that arts funding and instructional time had been reduced since the introduction of NCLB. In spite of Title I funding allotted to certain schools, arts programs suffered. Though the extra money was present, administrators found themselves utilizing the resources to meet NCLB's requirements to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Spohn, 2008). Over the years, one major consequence of the NCLB's requirements was less funding for arts education resources (Beveridge, 2010). Schools used extra funding to support the subject areas being tested. The result is that programs, such as the arts, are not properly funded (Beveridge, 2010).

The Evanston-Skokie School District 65 (Evanston, IL) is proposing reducing the number of arts and physical education classes in an attempt to cut costs (Wolf, 2012). However, other faculty members will be required to increase their workload so instructional hours remain the same (Wolf, 2012). One teacher expressed her concerns about this proposed change:

My concern is that our students will be short-changed by the suggested schedule changes in the Fine Arts. The arts integration of classroom and Visual Arts Activities that are presently part of our students' experiences learning across the curriculum, would, by necessity, be curtailed I would be very sorry to see our

school arts and cultural learning be reduced by these schedule changes and I believe our parents would also feel that their children are being denied many wonderful learning opportunities (Wolf, 2012, p.1).

As a result of high-stakes testing, arts programs that were once electives were replaced by remedial math and reading classes (Beveridge, 2010). Sometimes students were even uprooted from their arts classes mid-year, which may have impacted their achievement and motivation for school all together (Beveridge, 2010).

In addition to the academic benefits of the arts noted above, the arts also have physiological benefits for students (Ruppert, 2006). For example, reports revealed several benefits for students who participated in the arts: Disengaged students became more engaged and motivated to attend school; students gained a deeper understanding of themselves and others; they were able to transfer skills learned in school to real life situations (Ashford, 2004). However, No Child Left Behind (2002) does not take such research into account when suggesting curriculum changes to states and local schools (Ruppert, 2006).

The issue at hand is that the arts, particularly theatre, which is the often the first art eliminated, is not viewed as a vital component of the core curriculum in America's schools. A study of the state of arts education in America found that in 2009-2010, 93% of elementary schools offered music, and 84% offered visuals arts (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2011). However, only 3% of elementary schools offered theatre. During the 2008-2009 school year, 91% of high schools offered music, 89% offered visual arts, while only 45% offered theatre (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2011). This survey provides a snapshot of scarcity of theatre education in America (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2011).

Likewise, Milner (2000) also found that the decline of arts education was not new in the United States. In fact, she posited that throughout history there have been movements to revive the arts. A longitudinal study over 30 years shows that there have been several cycles of thriving, crashing, empty promises and unmet expectations of projects and programs (Milner, 2000). According to Milner (2000), “This waxing and waning of arts in education reflects to some extent quality-of-life versus a man-as-commodity thinking” (p. 11). In other words, society has to decide whether students should have a quality of life that includes freedom of expression, esteem and intrinsic worth, or if students are viewed simply as a competitive, employable commodity (Milner, 2000).

This study seeks to add to the limited body of research that suggests the benefits of theatre education. It is important to note that the primary focus of this study is theatre and drama education. For the sake of clarity, it is necessary distinguish the difference between drama and theatre. Throughout this document, both terms will be utilized. Critics, playwrights and professionals in the field believe it is important to differentiate between these two closely related concepts, which are often used interchangeably (DICE Consortium, 2010).

Drama is a Greek word literally meaning to act or to do (Wilson & Goldfarb, 2009). On the other hand, *drama* is also defined as the printed text of a play (Optiz, n.d.). *Theatre* is defined as the performance of a dramatic work in which there is a performance space, actors, crew, and an audience (Wilson & Goldfarb, 2009). The DICE Consortium (2010), a cross-cultural group of researchers who investigated the impact of educational drama and theatre, also differentiate between *theatre* and *drama*.

The DICE Consortium (2010) posits that theatre involves the crafting of a piece that has the audience as its primary focus. In order to prepare for an audience, actors must learn skills such as the function of theatre and techniques to reach the audience (DICE Consortium, 2010). Theatre performance gives the audience access into the human experience—including the spiritual, physical, psychological, social and emotional realms of life (DICE Consortium, 2010).

According to the DICE Consortium (2010), drama is neither focused on theatre skills, nor performing for an audience. It is concerned with creating an imagined experience in which actors themselves explore a situation. Through the drama process, actors learn how situations came to be and how to solve problems related to those situations:

The focus is on process: it is a social activity that relies on many voices and perspectives, and on role-taking; that focuses on tasks rather than individual interests, and that enables participants to see with new eyes. This approach creates an opportunity to probe concepts, issues and problems central to the human condition, and builds space for reflection to gain new knowledge about the world” (DICE Consortium, 2010, p. 17).

Both terms are important because they indicate that students are either going through a process (drama) or they are working collectively toward a final product (theatre) (Dice Consortium, 2010). According to the DICE Consortium, “In drama, A (the actor/enactor) is simultaneously B (role) and C (audience), through participation and observation, in a process of percipience (a process of both observing and participating) (p.17). To sum up theatre, DICE (2010) paraphrases playwright Eric Bentley’s notion of

what theatre is in this way: “In theatre, A (the actor/enactor) plays B (the role/performance) to C (the audience) who is the beneficiary” (p. 16). Both process and product, as will be demonstrated in the literature, have their benefits. Though both terms are used throughout the manuscript, *theatre* is the primary focus of this study and will be used most prevalently.

Many studies and research on arts education fail to address theatre. Music (vocal and instrumental), as well as visual arts, are prevalent topics in arts education literature, while theatre is often excluded. For example, the 2008 National Arts Education Partnership (NAEP) administered an arts assessment to a national sample of 7,900 students in the area of music and visual arts (The Arts Education Partnership, 2012). Due to budget cuts, programs such as theatre and dance were not assessed.

Extending theatre research might catalyze the movement to revive theatre education in America. The research for this study investigated former theatre students’ perceptions of how theatre impacted their psychological needs and life skills as teens and as adults. A qualitative case study involving interviews and focus groups provided the information necessary to understand how theatre education affected the lives of the study participants.

Situation to Self

This particular study is important to me because I am a product of theatre education. From a very young age, it was evident that I had a great deal of academic and artistic potential. In both church and school, I was a singer, orator and writer. However, it was not until enrolling in a theatre program in high school that I truly began to evolve. I went from writing in my personal journal to writing and directing plays. I transitioned

from doing Easter speeches, to presenting monologues and performing plays before thousands of audience members. I moved from singing in the choir to boldly singing solos in large arenas. Theatre education forever changed my life because it gave me a new-found confidence and a deeper sense of purpose.

Theatre had such an impact on me that I decided to become a theatre instructor. In the midst of pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Christian Education at the Interdenominational Theological Center's Morehouse School of Religion (Atlanta, GA), I enrolled in a program at Columbus State University (Columbus, GA) to obtain theatre education certification for grades K-12. Being enrolled at two universities at once was truly a sacrifice, but I felt it was worth the time and energy. As soon as I began teaching around 2005, a number of theatre programs started to diminish due to budget cuts. It was difficult for me to stay employed as a theatre teacher. Every one or two years I had to move to another school because theatre programs were being eliminated. In 2008, it became evident that I would have to gain certification in other subject areas in order to stay employed in the public school system.

For three years, I was a middle school language arts teacher. Not only was my career as a theatre instructor deferred, but many students who enjoyed theatre also had no outlet to express themselves. In July of 2012, I found my way back into the theatre classroom when I obtained a position as a high school theatre instructor. Though I was fortunate to get this position, I realize theatre is largely unavailable in many schools. In fact, there are only eight theatre teachers within the entire school district in which I am employed. Due to a lack of theatre education classes, countless young people may never have the experience I had as a youth. My personal experience with theatre education has

influenced my interest in this study.

In order to conduct this case study, I returned to the place where I first experienced theatre education: a large metropolitan high school. It has been 12 years since I graduated. I am not currently involved with the school or any of its daily activities. Participants of the study were graduates who were formerly enrolled in the school's theatre program. The purpose of the study was to have the graduates share their perceptions of how theatre impacted their psychological needs and life skills as teens, and now as adults.

Due to my positive experience at the school, I come with both biases and assumptions. I believe theatre education teaches vital life skills and that it addresses psychological needs. However, I am aware that I must separate my personal experience from the study. The goal of this study is to comprehend the participants' individual perceptions. Whether or not their perceptions match my own is irrelevant to the study.

Problem Statement

The problem at hand is that theatre programs in the United States are scarce (Parsad & Speigelman, 2011). Educational funding is poured into reading, math and science, leaving minimal resources to sustain arts programs, particularly theatre (Beveridge, 2010). It is ironic that theatre programs are being cut, especially since prior studies show that theatre programs enhance students' academic performance in core subjects (Ruppert, 2006). Theatre arts have also been proven to enhance literacy skills (Ruppert, 2006). Not only do students' attitudes, attendance, abilities, and grades significantly improve when the arts become part of their school life, these students also

experience gains in motivation and achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics (Milner, 2000).

This chapter has already highlighted how arts education has suffered in the United States. However, it is important here to note that theatre education in particular often takes the brunt of the budget cuts. A recent study titled *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools 1999-2000 and 2009-2010* (2012) shows the decline of arts education since the introduction of NCLB (2008). The report reveals that theatre is far less accessible than music and visual art. According to Arne Duncan, U.S. Education Secretary, it is important to provide equal educational opportunities in the arts, but this report shows America has not been successful at equalizing arts education (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). Parsad and Spiegelman (2012) found that only three to four percent of the nation's elementary schools offer theatre, while 45% of secondary schools offer theatre. Unfortunately, the report also found that some of America's most impoverished schools are receiving the least amount of arts education.

According to this study, in 2009-2010, theatre was less commonly offered in elementary schools, at a rate of about 4% compared to 20% in 1999-2000 (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). For example, consider SRI (Stanford Research Institute) International's Study (2007), which took stock of California's arts education policies and procedures. According to this study, approximately 50% of elementary students receive music and visual arts instruction, while only 18% receive instruction in theatre and dance. The statistics worsen for secondary school as only 8% of California's middle and high school students participate in theatre, while an average of 20% of students participate in music and visual arts classes.

This same study also found that poverty impacts schools' ability to provide students with theatre instruction. For example, low poverty schools have 17% of students participating in theatre; meanwhile high poverty schools have a theatre participation rate of only eight percent. SRI International (2007) attributes these discrepancies to a reliance of outside funding for arts programs, such as that provided by parent groups, which are often lacking in high poverty schools.

Washington State's arts availability is similar to California's, as music is the most commonly taught arts discipline. The state's availability of arts education on the elementary level is as follows: 58% of students receive music instruction; 29% receive visual arts instruction, with 8% receiving theatre, and only 4% receiving dance (Washington State Arts Commission, 2009). A census of arts education in New Jersey reveals that access to theatre instruction is poor. Three percent of elementary students, 11% of middle school students, and 6% of high school students receive theatre instruction (New Jersey Arts Education Census Project, 2007).

The aforementioned information illustrates just how scarce theatre education is in the United States. This study sought to add to the body of research that supports the benefits of theatre education in order to support the need for increased access to arts education for all students. Former theatre students, who are now adults, shared their perceptions of how theatre education impacted their life skills and psychological needs as teens, and now as adults. The goal was to understand the meaning these former students attribute to their experience in theatre education.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand Metro High School

graduates' perceptions of theatre education and how it impacted their life skills and psychological needs as teens and as adults. The central concepts underlying the study are life skills and psychological needs.

Definitions

Again, the ultimate goal of this study was to investigate how theatre impacted life skills and psychological needs in participants as teens and as adults. For the purpose of this study, *life skills* are generally defined as the ability to cope with the challenges and stresses of life (dictionary.com, n.d.), for example: (a) work ethic; (b) etiquette; (c) listening skills; (d) creativity; (e) cooperation; (f) communication; (g) problem-solving; and (h) time management (dictionary.com, n.d.). Wurdinger and Rudolph (2009) studied a school that teaches life skills to students via project-based learning. According to these researchers, life skills are needed to help students become productive members of society. They separate life skills into four categories: a) Basic skills (i.e., reading, writing, math, verbal, listening; b) College/continuing preparation (i.e., study skills, note-taking skills, test-taking skills); c) Thinking skills (i.e., creativity, problem-solving, decision-making, time management and learning how to learn); d) Personal qualities (i.e., responsibility, self-esteem, social skills, being a team-player, self-directed and leadership) (Wurdinger & Rudolph, 2009). Glatt and Steinburg (2010), Clinical Associate argue that life skills and social skills are one in the same. They state that social/life skills include: making friends, understanding and expressing emotions (one's own and those of others), attention and listening, accepting responsibility, assertiveness and self-concept, problem-solving strategies, working cooperatively and overcoming adversity from others (Glatt & Steinburg, 2010).

Psychological is defined as relating to motivation, feelings, and factors affecting the mind (dictionary.com, n.d.). A *need* is generally defined as a mental or physical requirement for keeping a living thing in normal condition (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Mason (2012) discusses how motivation and satisfaction correlate with innate psychological needs, which are autonomy, competence and relatedness. Individuals with autonomy have a sense of self-determination in choosing their path and actions. Competence involves knowing how to reach goals and having the self-efficacy to perform in various contexts (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991). One with a sense of relatedness feels cared for and valued by others. Relatedness brings about intrinsic motivation and provides incentives for one to be a part of activities that are valued by others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For the sake of this case study, categories of needs were derived from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Gorman, 2010): (a) safety; (b) belongingness; (c) esteem; (d) cognitive; (e) aesthetic; (f) self-actualization; and (g) transcendence.

Significance of the Study

According to Ruppert (2006), previous studies suggested that theatre education impacted students' self-esteem, overall academic performance and motivation. NCLB stresses the importance of allocating federal resources to educational programs that are supported by scientific research (Ruppert, 2006). The ultimate goal is to make education a purely evidence-based institution (The Arts Education Partnership, 2005). Providing sound research to prove the benefits of arts education is one way of keeping the arts alive in America's schools (Ruppert, 2006).

This study adds to the body of research that highlights the benefits of theatre

education. It is unique in that it attempted to capture the perceptions of adults who were once theatre students. As fully grown citizens of the world, they are now able to reflect upon how theatre impacted their life skills and psychological needs. With so many theatre programs losing funding, it is important that researchers continue to pay special attention to the benefits of theatre education.

According to Ruppert (2006), research may not fully explain why the arts are important to people, but it affirms many people's fundamental belief that the arts can have a sizeable impact on students' success in school, and in work and life as they enter adulthood. This study sought to investigate former theatre students' perceptions of how theatre impacted them as youth and how theatre continues to impact them as adults. Furthermore, this study is the only one of its kind, as it investigates the impact of theatre education on an African-American male and female population in a southeastern city in the United States.

Former Secretary of Education, Richard Riley said, "The ultimate challenge for American education is to place all children on pathways toward success in school and in life. Through engagement in the arts, young people can better begin lifelong journeys of developing their capabilities and contributing to the world around them" (Fiske, 1999, p. 8). Arts education can set the foundation for lifelong achievement. According to Alan Greenspan, Federal Reserve Chairman, the goal of education is for children to contribute to "an economy of ideas" and arts education trains children to be flexible, imaginative and gives them substance to achieve this goal (Fiske, 1999).

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the graduates' perceptions of theatre education and how it impacted their life skills and psychological needs. Additionally, this study seeks to discover how theatre impacted them as teens and as adults. The following questions will guide this study:

Research Question 1: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' needs for belongingness?* Belongingness has to do with being affiliated with a group, or being accepted by a group. Participants reflected upon whether being a part of the theatre program impacted their sense of belonging.

Research Question 2: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' esteem needs?* Esteem needs involve self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy. These concepts embody the opinions and cognitions of one's self-image, weaknesses and status. Esteem also has to do with recognition and achievement. Participants were asked to reflect upon whether theatre impacted their esteem.

Research Question 3: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' cognitive and learning needs?* Cognitive needs include the ability to learn, acquire knowledge and make meaning. Participants shared perceptions of whether theatre impacted their ability to learn and make sense of the world.

Research Question 4: *How, if at all, did theatre address students' self-actualization and transcendence needs?* Self actualization has to do with reaching one's full potential. The former theatre students discussed how theatre impacted their ability to reach their fullest potential. Once individuals reach their full potential, they are able

to help others reach their full potential. Participants will be asked to determine whether they take a part in helping others to grow.

Research Question 5: *What, if any life skills did students gain from participating in theatre education?* Life skills are generally defined as the ability to cope with the challenges and responsibilities of life (dictionary.com, n.d.). Work ethic, etiquette, communication and problem-solving skills are some examples of life skills.

Research Plan

In order to investigate the theatre program graduates' perceptions of how theatre addressed their needs and taught life skills, the qualitative case study design is most appropriate. This case study was phenomenological in that participants were chosen based upon their common experience (Creswell, 2007). It is primarily a case study as it focused on individuals from one particular organization (Stake, 2000). Additionally, the research sought to comprehend the meaning that participants attributed to their experience as theatre students. Due to the fact that this research investigated the complexity of a phenomenon occurring in one single case, it was clearly a case study (Stake, 1995).

The qualitative case study method deals primarily with people's perceptions. The case study allows the researcher to conduct interviews to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Because the purpose of this study was to get participants' perceptions, the study utilized data collection methods that aligned with case study research: individual interviews, focus groups, collection of artifacts, and questionnaires (Yin, 2003).

Delimitations

Confining the case study to a central location is one effective boundary. Studying participants from one central location allowed me to capture the essence of the phenomenon (theatre), as the graduates of this school had a shared experience.

The second delimitation is the number of participants in the study. For this study, I conducted a focus group with six individuals, followed by individual interviews with nine participants. Qualitative studies are generally successful with small sample sizes (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Crouch and McKenzie (2006) argue that qualitative frameworks (such as the case study) rely upon interviews to penetrate the surface of issues. Likewise, a small sample size allows the researcher to become close to participants while going in depth (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

Setting criteria for participants is another way I defined the boundaries of this study. Participants were chosen based upon their potential ability to provide rich descriptions. They were also chosen according to diversity in gender, age, number of years out of high school (eight or more), their possession of artifacts, vocation and role in the program. For the sake of equity, I attempted to select an equal number of male and female participants for the individual interviews and focus group: four women and four men (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). They were also chosen based upon their role in the program. The chart below illustrates that the sample consisted of four subgroups of theatre students: (a) tech crew, (b) ensemble, (c) lead actor, and (d) performers and tech crew. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), the researcher can use multi-level sampling designs to facilitate comparable comparisons of subgroups that participated in different roles. The chart below provides a visual of the criteria.

Table 1

Participant Selection Criteria

Participant	Gender	Role
#1	Male	Tech
#2	Female	Tech
#3	Male	Ensemble
#4	Female	Ensemble
#5	Male	Lead actor
#6	Female	Lead actor
#7	Male	Performance and tech
#8	Female	Performance and tech

In addition to gender and roles in the program, possession of artifacts, age and vocation were considered when selecting participants. Yin (1993) adds that multiple cases within a study strengthens the results. However, this research did not investigate multiple cases, as it is a single case study.

The final and most challenging limitation deals with the process I utilized to collect data. The qualitative case study seeks to provide a rich, detailed description of the phenomenon (Stake, 1995). For the sake of collecting rich data, Yin (2003) suggests six methods for data collection: a) documents, b) archival records, c) interviews, d) direct observations, e) participant- observing, and f) physical artifacts.

Limited options for collecting data led to a potential triangulation issue. Stake (1995) defines triangulation as the protocols used to ensure alternative explanations and accuracy. As I began the research, I hoped participants had held on to artifacts, such as

journals, videotapes of performances, report cards, yearbooks, certificates or other documents or archival records that supported their testimonies. One participant was able to locate artifacts; therefore, the primary sources of data collection I utilized were the focus group and individual interviews.

Summary

As stated earlier in this chapter, the goal of education is to provide students with the skills needed to survive in a global society. In order to achieve this goal, education has to be well-rounded, providing avenues for all students to thrive. Due to budget cuts in education, it has been difficult for schools to provide arts education, particularly theatre, to students. In spite of the research that implies the benefits of theatre education, programs continue to decline. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how theatre impacted the life skills and psychological needs of graduates from a large metro high school and attempt to make the connection to the importance of theatre education to a well-rounded education. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. This study was unique in that it sought to discover how theatre education impacted participants' lives as teens and as adults.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The study at hand seeks to investigate former students' perceptions of how theatre impacted life skills and psychological needs when the participants were teens and now that they are adults. For the sake of investigating this phenomenon, the qualitative case study design was selected. This chapter contains an overview of the theoretical framework that undergirds this study. Additionally, this chapter sets forth an overview of the literature that provides a basis or argument for theatre education's value in the field of education.

Theoretical Framework

First, it is important to highlight the theoretical frameworks that inform this theatre education case study. The frameworks were briefly discussed in Chapter One, but will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two. There are three educational theories that inform this study: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995).

The arts are crucial to students' cognitive, emotional and social development. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs argues that all human beings have essential needs that must be met in order for them to reach their fullest potential (Gorman, 2010). Educators have the power to meet many of those needs, including the need to reach one's full potential. Maslow's hierarchy lists the needs respectively (Gorman, 2010): (a) biological and physical (food, sleep, water, air, drink; (b) safety (protection, security, order, stability); (c) belongingness (work, family, affection, relationships); (d) esteem (self-esteem, achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige); (e) cognitive

(knowledge, meaning); (f) aesthetic (appreciation of beauty, balance and form); and (g) self-actualization (realizing full potential); and (h) transcendence (helping others to achieve self-actualization, spirituality).

The objective of the hierarchy is for one to go beyond lower level needs (i.e., physical and safety) so that higher order needs, such as self-actualization and transcendence, can be met. Educators have a vested interest in helping to meet the needs of students (Levy, 2008). The literature highlighted in this chapter demonstrates how activities and pedagogy associated with theatre education are capable of meeting students' needs for belongingness, esteem, cognition, aesthetics and self-actualization. For example, students who are part of a theatre class or club often feel a sense of belonging because they have shared experiences with other participants (Brym, 2006). Theatre can also meet students' needs for stability. Some students who have troubles at home and school feel a sense of stability and consistency through their involvement in theatre (Craig, 2011).

Also in line with Maslow's (1943) theory, theatre has the ability to elevate a young person's self-esteem. As the student practices and becomes better, his or her esteem is boosted (Craig, 2011). When students perform for audiences, they are often praised for a job well done. Performing gives them a sense of achievement and even notoriety in the school and community (Brym, 2006). Cognitive abilities are nurtured as students read and analyze scripts, learn dance movements, and sing and act all at the same time. Ultimately, theatre can help a student to reach her or his full potential (Brym, 2006). Overall, theatre is effective at meeting students' psychological and social needs (Ruppert, 2006).

Next, Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (1983) suggests that intelligence can no longer be measured with the standard IQ test (Smith, 2002, 2008). Intelligence has many forms: (a) linguistic; (b) logical-mathematical; (c) musical; (d) bodily-kinesthetic; (e) spatial; (f) interpersonal; (g) intrapersonal; (h) existentialist and (i) naturalist (Smith, 2002, 2008; Snyder, 2010). Gardner's theory (1983) argues that people are smart in different ways. According to Smith (2002, 2008), all intelligences are needed to survive in life. For this reason, schools should implement curriculum that caters to all students' learning styles.

Smith (2002, 2008) adds that linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences are typically viewed as most vital in schools. Likewise, Schalk (2010) reports that most American schools tend to focus on academic subjects involving verbal and logical intelligence (e.g., science and English). On the other hand, musical, bodily-kinesthetic and spatial intelligences are typically associated with the arts (Bailey, 2009). Unfortunately, these intelligences are often overlooked. Artistic intelligences are valuable, and should be a part of each school's educational structure so all students can be successful (PCAH, 2011).

Theatre education embodies all intelligences (Bailey, 2009). Technical theatre students use their logical-mathematical intelligences to operate lights and sound equipment, as well as to design and build sets. Students who participate in musicals utilize their musical and kinesthetic talents through dancing and singing. Spatial intelligence is also needed as students become oriented to their performance spaces and move around the stage (Bailey, 2009). Additionally, actors use their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to better understand themselves and the characters they portray

(Brym, 2006).

Finally, Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is the third theory that undergirds this study. Emotional Intelligence emerged in the 1990s partly in response to the notion that IQ, which is a measure of performance and achievement on the grounds of general intelligence, is the most acceptable method to measure one's intellectual capacity (Kayaoglu, 2011). IQ is a test that measures a person's mental abilities in comparisons to persons of the same age. However, this assessment has had its share of controversy, as educators do not agree on what truly defines intelligence (Kayaoglu, 2011).

Paul Tough (2012), author of *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity and the Hidden Power of Character*, argues that educators should not measure a child's success by IQ tests and standardized tests. Various tests measure different facets of intelligence. Some definitions of intelligence include: approach to life challenges; originality in thought; ability to understand and reason; abstract thought processes; and adjustment to environment (Kayaoglu, 2011). Tough (2012) argues that building character is a vital form of intelligence that students will need now and in adulthood. Overall, IQ is problematic because it depends solely on cognitive capacities, reasoning, and problem solving while excluding social and personal factors such as perseverance, independence, managing emotions and interpersonal skills (Gardner, 1995).

In 1995, the notion of EQ went mainstream due to the works of Daniel Goleman. Educational, social and business institutions have now begun to pay attention to EQ (Goleman, 1995). Goleman (1995) places EQ into five domains: (a) self-awareness: awareness of your emotions, observing yourself, recognizing feelings on the spot and using them to make better decisions; (b) managing emotions: finding ways to handle

negative feelings, reacting appropriately in situations; (c) self-motivation: focusing on reaching goals in spite of challenges such as negative feelings and other distractions; (d) empathy: being sensitive to others' feelings even if different from your own; and (e) handling relationships: interpersonal interactions, social competence, conflict resolution, creating harmony with others (Goleman, 1995).

Students who gain a sharp EI are more likely to develop emotional maturity, to live up to their fullest potential and to become self-motivated (Kayaoglu, 2011). Skills related to EQ are vital during school age as well as adulthood as youth begin to participate in the work place and interact with others in society (Kayaoglu, 2011). Students with capacities for EQ can develop emotional maturity and realize their full potential, become motivated and accomplish more (Kayaoglu, 2011). These skills are significant not only in educational institutions, but in life and the job market (Kayaoglu, 2011). Eisner (2002) argues that the arts help children to make sound judgments regarding their relationships with others. Furthermore, arts education teaches children to consider and accept multiple points of view; they learn that there are a myriad of ways to view and interpret the world in which they live (Eisner, 2002).

Theatre is one of the most efficient ways to increase students' emotional intelligence (Kayaoglu, 2011). Theatre provides an outlet for students to interact with their physical environment, to interact with people, and to reach outside the confines of the traditional classroom setting (Kayaoglu, 2011). Incorporating theatre in to an educational program is effective because it helps students to grow socially and to become capable of controlling their thoughts. Students also gain an overall deeper understanding of themselves and others and are more likely to transfers these skills to their personal and

academic lives (Kayaoglu, 2011). Students who gain EQ via theatre are in a favorable position to work, learn and live with others in society (Kayaoglu, 2011). Kayaoglu (2011) implies that theatre education has a positive impact on young students and transfers into their adulthood.

Overall, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), Gardner's Multiple Intelligence (1983) and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (1995) theories are crucial to this study, as they remind us that education encompasses more than passing a reading and math test each year to make AYP. Education is about nurturing the whole child, meeting needs and making provisions for healthy growth and development. Education is also about adding pedagogical value to the various learning styles of a diverse student population so all children can be successful (PCAH, 2011).

Review of the Literature

Past research and studies on theatre, music, and visual arts have a common thread: they all fit into the theoretical framework that supports this study. However, the literature highlighted in this review illustrates specifically how theatre education is meeting students' needs. Below is a critical overview of the literature and how it fits into the theoretical framework.

Maslow's Esteem

The fourth level of Maslow's hierarchy is ego or esteem, which has to do with the need for recognition and respect from others (Greene & Burke, 2007). Developing a positive sense of self-identity is a major milestone of adolescence. In fact, it is a prerequisite to forming positive intimate relationships with others (Yee, Hamzah, Uli, & Suandi, 2005). Yee et al. (2005) identify theatre performance as a tool for developing

positive self-identity and self-esteem. Performing arts, particularly theatre, are the most commonly used programs in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia (Yee et al., 2005).

Yee et al. (2005) conducted a study to discover the extent to which a theatre performance project evoked self-esteem in youth participants. The study also looked at how specific components of theatre, such as role playing, script development, characterization, script analysis, improvisation and speech impacted self-esteem. Prior to the study, researchers conducted interviews with instructors and implemented a pilot study which allowed them to get constructive feedback related to the design of the questionnaire used to collect data on self-esteem (Yee et al., 2005).

Overall, the study found that theatre performance was effective at helping youth develop a strong sense of personal identity, which assists them with discovering who they are and how they fit into society (Yee et al., 2005). However, the researchers found that role-playing, improvisation and characterization are most effective at helping youth to develop self-esteem. Theatre itself is not real-life, but it allows youth to find their inner selves and to establish a sense of identity (Yee et al., 2005). Theatre performance was effective because it provided the youth with an outlet for safe expression of their thoughts and feelings. They gained a sense of competency that brought about positive affirmations, hope, confidence and satisfaction (Yee et al., 2005). Improvisation and role-playing allowed them to grow, to conquer weaknesses, to challenge limitations and to test out various roles (Yee et al., 2005). Experiences on stage made them feel good about themselves (Yee et al., 2005).

Brym (2006), now a sociologist, recalls the impact theatre had on his esteem as a

youngster. He enjoyed the attention and prestige associated with performing for his family and friends during holiday gatherings. He saw performing as an escape from the world. However, he recalls losing confidence (for two reasons), during elementary and middle school. First, he was not accepted in the community and school because he was Jewish. Secondly, he had no outlet to use his artistic talents. However, his life changed when he became a member of his high school's theatre program (Brym, 2006).

He auditioned and landed the role of Reverend Hale in *The Crucible*. The activities he recalled were performing in various places, building sets, singing, dancing and applying makeup. Brym (2006) has fond memories of performing eight different roles during three years of high school. The paramount moment of his life was when he got the lead role of Tony in *Westside Story*. For him, this meant social status, self-confidence, and self-discovery. After landing that role, he got his first girlfriend (Brym, 2006). Finally, he was popular; he was now gaining positive social status (Brym, 2006).

Maslow's Self-Actualization

There is a distinct connection between self-actualization (reaching one's full potential) and the creativity associated with arts (Green & Burke, 2007). Since Maslow formulated the Hierarchy of Needs theory in 1941, several scholars have revisited his works and discovered that it correlates to various disciplines. Greene and Burke (2007) entertain the idea that authentic creativity sets the foundation for self-actualization. According to Maslow, creativity has to do with "being lost in the present, timeless, selfless and being outside one's self" (Maslow, 1971, p. 121). He goes on to say creativity "consists of lightning striking you on the head in one great, glorious moment" (Maslow, 1971, p. 77).

Maslow poses the question of who is interested in creativity (Maslow, 1971). He then suggests that everyone should be interested in creativity. Maslow (1971) also argues that creativity is a critical component of human nature. He says, “There is an immediate necessity for a viable political, social, or economic system, and that is to turn out more creative people” (Maslow, 1971, p. 93). Maslow even suggests that organizations should find ways to allow people be individualistic [uniquely themselves] to foster creative expression (Greene & Burke, 2007).

Maslow’s argument is supported by Francis Heylighen (1992), who reconstructed Maslow’s theory of self-actualization. Heylighen (1992) said, “The word [self-actualization] derives from the idea that each individual has a lot of hidden potentialities she or he could develop, which have not yet come to the surface” (p. 41). Additionally, he argues that self-actualization means an individual’s potential has begun to unfold and is now being realized (Heylighen, 1992).

For some students, theatre education provides an outlet to realize who they are and to reach their full potential by way of creativity. One example is the Popular Theatre Project (conducted in Canada), which implemented participatory theatre. Through this form of theatre, students were given a platform to reflect upon their experiences as at-risk youth in a rural community (Conrad, 2004). The ultimate goal of the project was to help them reframe their perception of themselves and their context. The project also challenged students to envision ways to change their current conditions (Conrad, 2004).

At the beginning of this study, many students felt that they were simply products of their environments; they did not take responsibility for their own actions. In the end, they were able to redefine themselves in a positive light (Conrad, 2004). As a result, these

students were more prone to make wiser choices in the future (Conrad, 2004). Conrad's study (2004) shows that theatre, if used properly, can help children to redefine themselves and to envision a better future (Conrad, 2004).

The DICE Consortium (2010) identifies entrepreneurship as a key competency that is impacted by theatre education. One could argue that entrepreneurship is a manifestation of self-actualization. Entrepreneurship is a person's ability to act on ideas. It involves creativity, risk-taking and management skills (DICE Consortium, 2010).

The studies discussed in this section demonstrate how theatre education can meet students' needs for self-actualization or tapping into their hidden potential.

Multiple Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence: Self-Awareness, Motivation and Intrapersonal Intelligence

According to Morgan, Kornhaber, and Gardner (2006), "Intrapersonal intelligence involves knowing yourself—your talents, energy level, interests and so on" (p. 27). Students who gain intrapersonal skills discover those areas in which they can be successful and are better able to take ownership of their learning (Moran et al., 2006). Getting to know one's self is one of the best ways to obtain success in life (Moran et al., 2006). This literature implies that fostering an environment of self-discovery could potentially lead to success in adulthood.

Along those lines, Larson and Brown (2007) conducted an in-depth study of what can be learned in a high school theatre program. The study aimed to find out what emotional growth or competencies youth gained over the course of putting on a production. Data was collected by asking youth to give descriptions of their emotional learning. Data was analyzed to determine categories and subcategories. The research

findings reflected that students gained abstract emotional knowledge, and learned how to manage both positive and negative emotions (Larson & Brown, 2007). This study supports Moran's et al. (2006) claim that theatre fosters a deeper sense of getting to know one's self.

Intrapersonal skills are important, as human beings experience both positive and negative emotions (Larson & Brown, 2007). Goleman (2008) cited a study lead by researchers at Loyola University and the University of Illinois that analyzed over 200,000 students across the United States. The study found that emotional-social learning helps students in many ways. Those students who received lessons in social and emotional skills improved in the areas of behavior, discipline, attendance and motivation for school. The study also found that "at-risk" students benefited the most. Goleman (2008) also cited the research of Richard Davidson, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin, when he said, "Teaching students skills like empathy, self-awareness, and how to manage distressing emotions makes them better learners" (p.8)

Knowing how emotions impact them and those around them is vital. The youth in Larson and Brown's study (2007) learned to recognize their personal emotional patterns. For instance, one young lady found that she was more emotional when rehearsals were long and tedious (Larson & Brown, 2007). The young actors also realized their emotions impacted the whole group. As an example, one girl recalled being frustrated because the ensemble had been practicing the same 16 bars of music for hours. However, she realized that complaining would bring the show down. Therefore, she refrained from complaining (Larson & Brown, 2007).

On the other hand, another young man in this study learned how to express his

feelings to others instead of being passive (Larson & Brown, 2007). While preparing for the production, he recognized that he was not vocal when it came to expressing his feelings. Learning to express his true feelings to others was a breakthrough moment (Larson & Brown, 2007).

This study showed that theatre can help individuals to get in touch with themselves, which is a prerequisite to intrapersonal skills (Larson & Brown, 2007). In this study, the girl learned to not express her feelings. The boy learned that he actually needed to express his sentiments in order to be healthy and productive. Though the young people gained something different from the experience, all of their individual needs were met (Larson & Brown, 2007). In a sense, theatre education is differentiated instruction at work. Various theatrical activities cater to the needs of the individual learners (Bailey, 2009).

Brym's experience (2006) is another example of how theatre can enhance intrapersonal skills and emotional intelligence. He was deeply impacted by his involvement in high school theatre. Through theatre, he learned how to overcome stage fright. Fortunately, high school theatre taught him how to perform in the face of nervousness (Brym, 2006). It is evident that theatre education can teach children how to cope with stage fright and insecurities, which can help them in their adult lives (Heitger-Casbon, 2007).

Additionally, through playing the character Tony in *Westside Story*, Brym (2006) learned a lesson about being virtuous in the face of adversity. His determination to reach his goal as an actor supports Maslow's notion of self-motivation (Gorman, 2010). The young Brym extended himself by taking on traits of his stage character in his daily life.

Brym's (2006) primary issue was that he experienced discrimination because he was Jewish. In everyday life, he was a Jew in conflict with Gentiles, but in theatre class, that was not as important as his dependability and competence as an actor. Theatre also made him an individual who could stand in the face of adversity and unfavorable public opinion.

In the final analysis, theatre not only taught him art; it taught him life (Brym, 2006). Brym's (2006) experience was profound in a sense, because it implies that theatre does not exist merely for the sake of producing art. Though it is an artistic field of study, its most important function is that it teaches people how to function and cope with life by getting in touch with themselves and affirming who they are as individuals.

Rey E. De la Cruz (1995) of Illinois State University conducted a study to determine if creative drama impacted social skills in students with learning disabilities. With the help of 70 special education teachers, he identified the top social behavioral concerns. One concern was courtesy in which students apologize when their actions have hurt others. The second concern was being able to ignore distracting peers in order to focus on class work. Students ranged from five to 11-years-old, and came from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Twenty-one students were divided into a control group and experimental group. Students in the experimental group received weekly creative theatre activities that addressed the behavioral deficits previously mentioned—courtesy to others and ignoring distractions. Students in the control group continued to receive their normal weekly therapy. A pre and post-test as well as interviews were the methods used to collect data on the students. Specifically, the McConnell Scale of Social Competence was utilized to measure social skills. The results were that children who

engaged in the weekly dramatic activities increased their social skills unlike students who were in the control group. The study continued to test students over a two-month period, and found that students' social skills held up well after the study was done. The children in this study reported having better peer relations and learned to be more courteous. Lastly, they reported an ability to listen and to speak better (De la Cruz, 1995).

The studies discussed here fit securely into Goleman's (1995) domains of emotional intelligence as well as Gardner's (1983) intrapersonal intelligence. Students who participate in theatre become more self-aware as they are able to acknowledge and comprehend their feelings; this allows them to make wise decisions about how manage their emotions (Goleman, 2008). Students in the aforementioned studies were able to find ways to handle negative feelings and to react appropriately (Goleman, 2008). Finally, theatre assists with self-motivation as youth learn to overcome obstacles because they have a focus or a goal in mind (Goleman, 2008).

Another study conducted in India sought to find a relationship between involvement in theatre arts and an increase in emotional intelligence (particularly expressing, managing and perceiving emotions) (UK Essays, 2013). Researchers used a standard Emotional Intelligence scale consisting of thirty-four questions based on a Likert scale (UK Essays, 2013). The study contained two variables. The dependent variable was emotional intelligence and the independent variable was involvement in theatre arts. The control group consisted of 40 individuals who had never been exposed to theatre arts. The experimental group consisted of 40 people who were active members of theatre groups across the city (UK Essays, 2013). 20 of the 40 subjects were age 30-35 and had acted in a minimum of ten plays. The remaining 20 subjects were age 20-25 and

had performed in a minimum of five plays (UK Essays, 2013).

Researchers analyzed the data and deduced that young adults who had been involved in theatre arts typically have a higher level of EI than young adults who are not engaged in theatre arts (UK Essays, 2013). Results also imply that those involved in theatre have the potential to see continued growth in EI during their lifetime. The implication of this study is that theatre arts groups are likely to have more fulfilling and productive lives (UK Essays, 2013). The study's hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between engagement in theatre arts and EI was validated (UK Essays, 2013).

Emotional Intelligence, Multiple Intelligence and Maslow's Hierarchy:

Interpersonal Intelligence, Belongingness, Relationships and Empathy

By nature, humans are social beings and desire to have their lives enriched through significant relationships with others (Greene & Burke, 2007) Moran et al. (2006) define interpersonal intelligence as follows: "Interpersonal intelligence involves understanding others through interaction, emotional reactions, conversation and so on. An individual's interpersonal intelligence affects his or her ability to work in groups" (p. 27). Likewise, Goleman's (1995) fourth and fifth domains of emotional intelligence involve empathy and handling relationships.

Johnny Saldana of Arizona State University began working with students to create a theatre curriculum designed to foster emotional intelligence. Saldana (1998) defends the need for education that addresses emotional intelligence. He quotes Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* "...the present generation of children [is] more troubled emotionally than the last: more lonely and depressed, more angry and unruly, more nervous and prone to worry, more impulsive and aggressive" (Goleman, xii, 1995).

Saldana (1998) says students entering school with these types of minds are unable to learn effectively and impede the learning of others. Furthermore, their potential for success in adulthood is inhibited (Saldana, 1998). Again, the importance of developing emotional intelligence for the success in adulthood arises in the literature. For Goleman (1995), developing essential emotional habits as adolescents is a prerequisite for healthy emotional habits in adulthood.

Dorothy Heathcote, a well-known teacher in Britain, is an advocate of teachers and students taking on roles during lessons (Fiske, 1999). Her lessons require that people put people themselves in others' places. As a result, empathy is a likely outcome (Fiske, 1999). In another study, Brouillette (2010) sought to see how having teaching artists conduct lessons with students impacted their emotional intelligence. She then interviewed teachers to get their perceptions of students' growth. One teacher said, "I think [students] are able to look and analyze and evaluate, not only from their standpoint, but from that of others—to step into someone else's shoes and to look at things at different levels and in different ways" (Brouillette, 2010, p. 21).

Other teachers in the study found theatre to be especially valuable in helping children "to better understand other people's responses, emotional expressions, and actions" (Brouillette, 2010, p. 21). Brouillette quotes Thompson (2006): "...social cognitive understanding contributes to social competence, interpersonal sensitivity, and an awareness of how the self relates to other individuals and groups in a complex social world" (p.21).

Human beings, by nature, have a need for social interactions. Language is one way that humans communicate, making language the most important component of

existence (Sahin, 2007). Language allows them to express their emotions. Whether verbal or non-verbal, communication is at the center of human existence as people interact with individuals and society (Sahin, 2007). Language is an advanced, sophisticated system that allows people to convey emotions, thoughts and desires (Sahin, 2007).

Theatre is a method used to enhance language skills (Cevik, 2006). During the early twentieth century, Harriet F. Johnston, a village teacher, affixed every academic subject to dramatic teaching methods (Cevik, 2006). Her methods were vital, as theatre consists of one making sense of or portraying an experience, event, idea, concept or behavior (San, 1985). Theatre affords opportunities to share perspectives one sees or imagines using action, speaking and imitation. Furthermore, participating in theatre activities allows one to express emotions while portraying another person's situation or behavior (Sonmez, 2007). Theatre can be classified as creative drama, educative drama, psychodrama and socio-drama (Kaner, 1990; Gonen, 1992; Karadag, 2007). Theatre provides an avenue for people to interact and communicate.

Since communication is at the center of human existence, it is appropriate to discuss ways in which theatre enhances communication and social skills. Theatre has some positive effects on children's cognitive, language, social, physical and psychomotor effects (Karadag, 2007; Gonen and Dalkilic, 1998; Gonen, 1992). Koc and Dikici (2003) argue that theatre as an educational tool requires linguistic and social learning via role playing. McCaslin (1984) confirms that theatre is a tool that allows the creativity and fantasy that lives in every child to thrive; it develops and uplifts them. Theatre even changes the traditional student-teacher role. It provides a free-flowing atmosphere where

the students are not afraid to make mistakes. The teacher does not act as the authoritarian or judge; there are no right or wrong answers (Onder, 2004; Cevik, 2006; Susuzer, 2006).

Next, theatre education has the potential to bring people together and assist them in acquiring stronger interpersonal skills. For example, Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) found that performance segues into communion among its participants. Larson and Brown (2007) conducted a study utilizing Boal's (1979) methods. Participants in this form of theatre had open dialogue and shared perspectives and experiences as a part of the creative process (Conrad, 2004). *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) is a reminder that theatre is not just defined by the performance. Theatre is also defined by the relationships that are built along the way. Through participatory theatre, students appeared to learn empathy and compassion as they heard other people's stories and experiences (Larson & Brown, 2007).

Additionally, Larson and Brown's (2007) study posited that students had different personalities that resulted in different emotional responses. Living peacefully with others required that students understand one another's feelings, thoughts and even peculiarities. Furthermore, Larson and Brown (2007) found that portraying roles allowed youth to understand other people's thoughts and feelings. Their study implied that students benefited from portraying characters. Playing a role required deep character analysis into the life experiences, thoughts and perceptions of characters (Larson & Brown, 2007).

In this sense, role playing enhances students' interpersonal skills as they are able to engage in dual perspectives. Consider this definition of dual perspectives: "Dual perspective involves recognizing another person's point of view and taking that point of view into account when you communicate" (Comcast, n.d., p. 3). Taking on a dual

perspective means individuals may hold on to their personal beliefs while seeking to understand others' point of view (Comcast, n.d.). The same analytical skill that helps actors to understand characters can help youth to better understand those around them (Lehman, 2008). In addition, studies of arts education have concluded that it fosters understanding of human experiences of the present and the past (Lehman, 2008): "Participation in the Arts helped students to develop both individual and social skills, including tolerance and the ability to grapple with moral dilemmas. The Arts helped students to avoid or change negative perceptions of other groups or individuals" (The Arts Education Partnership, 2012, p. 2).

This next study illustrates why intellectual quotient (IQ) alone is insufficient, and why emotional intelligence (EI), such as handling relationships and empathy is of the utmost importance. Although a student may have a high IQ, she or he could also possess challenges with interpersonal skills and managing his/her emotions (Kayaoglu, 2011). These emotional deficits can result in stunted intellectual growth, which can impact career and life success (Kayaoglu, 2011). Kayaoglu once again discusses the importance of nurturing emotions for the sake of helping students to become successful in their life and career. Nurturing emotional intelligence can assist students in regulating their thoughts, actions and relationships with other human beings (Kayaoglu, 2011).

Kayaoglu's (2011) research aimed to investigate whether theatre could be utilized to foster student's emotional intelligence, one of which involves maintaining relationships. The study included 53 English majors at the Karadeniz Technical University. The treatment group prepared and performed plays. The study included a questionnaire, which was developed based upon the domains of emotional intelligence

with 49 items from a five-point likert scale (Kayaoglu, 2011). The findings were that incorporating theatre into the curriculum allows students to develop their personal, social and emotional intelligence (Kayaoglu, 2011).

These findings were significant because though the students had been in the same program for four years, they had limited social interactions with one another (Kayaoglu, 2011). Students tended to stay within close-knit circles or homogeneous groups. When they were put into pairs for project work, they insisted on working with their close friends (Kayaoglu, 2011). They did not appreciate the differences among their peers and failed to appropriately handle their feelings (Kayaoglu, 2011).

The theatre course, which was worth four credits, was added to the curriculum (Kayaoglu, 2011). In order to receive credit, students had to participate in at least two plays during the school year. They were randomly placed into groups of 4-6 and given three months to prepare for their performance. They were given creative freedom to add their own interpretation to the works (Kayaoglu, 2011).

Researchers found that students not only worked together in class, but also outside of class to prepare for the final performance. As a result of rehearsing, discussing ideas, making decisions and encouraging each other, students developed interpersonal skills (Kayaoglu, 2011). The professor simply acted as a resource and refrained from administering assessments related to the course. As an alternative to assessments, involvement in the play production was the measure of success. The ultimate goal was for students to work cooperatively to produce a work they could be proud of in the end (Kayaoglu, 2011).

After producing group plays, students reflected upon their entire experience from the first day of class to the final performance. They also completed a 49-item questionnaire, which was analyzed via content analysis. The following themes emerged in participants' responses: individual development, social development, social relationships, self-confidence, awareness of feelings, controlling feelings, overcoming apprehensions, acceptance of others, valuing self, valuing others, motivation and linguistic development (Kayaoglu, 2011).

Overall, the study found that incorporating theatre into the curriculum fostered growth in personal, social and emotional intelligence. A large number of subjects reported improvements in their interpersonal interactions and ability to handle difficult situations in their groups (Kayaoglu, 2011). A significant number of students also reported overcoming fears and learning to manage their emotions for positive changes. The overall analysis found that theatre positively impacted emotional intelligence and enabled students to: (a) become self-aware as it relates to emotions; (b) manage their personal emotions; (c) motivate themselves and maintain self-control to be more productive; (d) empathize with others' emotions; and (e) demonstrate social competence in interpersonal relationships (Kayaoglu, 2011). Emotional intelligence is not secondary to the learning process, it is a life skill that must be nurtured in schools (Kayaoglu, 2011). Kayaoglu's study implies that theatre education provides many benefits for even young adult learners.

Next, effective interpersonal skills are needed so that people can live peacefully in society. This next study brings forth the issue of violence in schools (Graves, Frabutt & Vigliano, 2007). One reason for violence is a lack of interpersonal skills in settling

conflict (Graves et al., 2007). Consequently, a theatre program was developed in response to goal seven of the National Education Goal Panel to reduce violence in schools (Graves et al., 2007). It investigated how schools could use role-playing and interactive theatre to help middle school and high school students develop conflict resolution skills. A pre-post survey found that the program made a positive difference.

Overall, middle school and high school students reported a decrease in aggression toward others. The high school students had a decrease in physical aggression and an increase in effective communication. The study also found that students learned how to express their feelings and how to think before acting (Graves et al., 2007). It implied that theatre education has the potential to bring people together and to help them relate to one another in a healthy manner. Theatre implements trust-building and collaborative pedagogy. It encourages students to think and operate communally (Seidel, 1996). Further research supports the claim that theatre education enhances interpersonal skills. A 2010 study titled *Early Intervention for At-Risk Children: 3-year Follow-Up* discusses how school-based drama group therapy (DGT) was used to rehabilitate children with behavioral, social and emotional problems (McArdle et al., 2011). Participants were chosen based upon teacher recommendations.

Students chosen fit the following criteria: poor academic performance, known family problems, challenges with peer relationships, poor appearance and emotional/behavioral difficulties (McArdle et al., 2011).

Students engaged in reflective discussion and role-play facilitated by a trained drama therapist. Activities also involved mini plays around themes chosen by the students themselves. After role playing, the group would critically reflect upon the truths

that emerged (McArdle et al., 2011). Finally, students would re-enact the scenarios to establish alternative outcomes. DGT has an emphasis on social interactions, problem solving and role playing, which resulted in positive outcomes in participants. The study found that DGT was effective in reducing students' symptoms (McArdle et al., 2011). More importantly, DGT gave students coping mechanisms and skills needed to interact with others in society in a positive manner (McArdle et al., 2011).

Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competencies in Education (DICE) Consortium (2010) is probably one of the most impactful arts education studies, as it is recent and includes researchers from 12 countries all around the world. These scholars came together to measure the impact of drama and theatre education on what is called the Key Competencies. Competency number three involves interpersonal, intercultural and social skills (DICE Consortium, 2010). Researchers believe these competencies equip students to be socially competent within diverse societies. Additionally, these competencies equip students with conflict resolution skills (DICE Consortium, 2010).

After a two-year study of over 4,000 student participants, and 111 types of theatre education programs, the researchers concluded that a difference was made in students' competencies. Here are some of the results: (a) students are more tolerant toward foreigners and minorities, (b) students became more empathetic and caring for others, (c) student are able to change their perspectives, and (d) students are more willing to participate in various genres of arts and culture. Participants of the study tend to agree with the following statements substantially more than students who were not exposed to theatre education: "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than

me. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them” (DICE Consortium, 2010, p. 42).

Results from the study show that theatre students (DICE Consortium, 2010):

1. Read and understand text 4.21% more than non-theatre students.
2. Have confidence in speaking 4.86% more than non-theatre students.
3. Feel great at school 6% more than non-theatre students.
4. See themselves as creative 6.9% more than non-theatre students.
5. Socially accept others 13.63% more than non-theatre students.
6. Are likely to campaign, express opinions and become activists 11.5% more than non-theatre students.
7. Have empathetic concern at 4.15% more than non-theatre students.
8. Exhibit cultural tolerance and awareness 7.3% more than non-theatre students.

One final study demonstrates how theatre can assist with interpersonal skills via dramatic activities that focus on conflict resolution. Students from Haci Zekiye Arslan High School in the city of Nigde, Turkey during the 2008-2009 school year participated in a theatre education study (Karatas, 2011). This study aimed to examine the short term and long term effects of group psychodrama sessions on students’ ability to utilize conflict resolution. The students selected had high levels of aggression and had challenges with problem-solving (Karatas, 2011). The study comprised of three groups: experimental, placebo and control groups. The findings revealed that aggression levels significantly decreased and problem solving skills increased in students in the experimental group (Karatas, 2011).

The positive outcomes in problem solving were still evident twelve weeks after the treatment (Karatas, 2011). The researchers concluded that psychodrama was highly effective in helping youth develop conflict resolution skills. The participants were able to express themselves because they were in a comfortable environment in which they felt free (Karatas, 2011). They participated in warm-up games and experienced being protagonists in role-playing activities. Students reported that their aggression decreased, which helped them to keep their anger under control, which assisted them in expressing themselves in a healthy way. Negative behaviors in the classroom were replaced with more positive behaviors (Karatas, 2011).

Overall, the studies discussed show how theatre education fits into Goleman (1995), Maslow's (1943) and Gardner's (1983) theoretical frameworks. Theatre students learned empathy, which involves being sensitive to others' feelings. Students also learned how to manage relationships. For example, students learned social skills and conflict resolution techniques (Goleman, 1995). Finally, Lehman (2008), an advocate of arts education, asserted that the Arts teach students how to adapt to and respect others' ways of thinking, expressing themselves and working. In the final analysis, interpersonal skills are invaluable life skills that students will need in a variety of contexts such as, home, school, work, personal relationships, etc.

Maslow and Emotional Intelligence: Cognitive Needs and Life Skills

A critical need on Maslow's Hierarchy is the cognitive need, which involves gaining knowledge and finding meaning (Gorman, 2010). Research indicates that theatre education helps meet cognitive needs (Akdag & Tutkun, 2010). In this section of the literature review, it will become evident that theatre education impacts students' ability to

conceptualize meaning in a variety of contexts. The DICE Consortium (2010) found that theatre education impacts competence of “communication in the mother tongue,” which they define in this way: “Communication in the mother tongue is the ability to express and interpret thoughts, feelings and facts in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to interact linguistically in an appropriate way in the full range of societal and cultural contexts—education and training, work, home, leisure, according to their specific needs and circumstances” (p. 37).

The notion of “communication in the mother tongue” is essentially a major life skill that will allow students to thrive in a variety of contexts. The DICE (2010) study found that students who participate in theatre often feel more competent in communicating, understanding tasks, reading, and using humor. For example, students in the study agreed with the following statements (p. 37):

- (1) “I easily understand school textbooks.”
- (2) “I like reading.”
- (3) “I understand metaphors, symbols.”
- (4) “I dare to express my opinion.”
- (5) “I have a sense of humor”

Another competence impacted by the DICE (2010) experiment is “learning to learn,” which falls under the umbrella of cognition. Learning to learn means gaining processes, knowledge and skills. Learning to learn also includes seeking and making use of resources and calling upon past experiences and prior knowledge to acquire new knowledge (DICE Consortium, 2010).

One participant recalled that whenever students asked questions, the teacher would simply repeat the question back. This forced the student to think independently and to come to their own conclusions (DICE Consortium, 2010). Other students remember being allowed to bring their own ideas, which gave them more freedom to express their views. Students in this study report greater cognition as it relates to imagination, creating and experimenting. As a result, students report more enjoyment in school. These cognitive skills can be used in the home, the workplace and in educational settings. (DICE Consortium, 2010). Here, it is implied that through theatre education, students might be able to transfer cognitive skills into the workplace as adults.

Tony Jackson from the University of Manchester believes theatre brings about changes of understanding. Students learn about the form and content of theatre as well as personal and social development (Fiske, 1999). Consider this next study, which aimed to investigate how theatre as a teaching method impacted 4th grade English students' achievement level. Participants in both the control group and the experimental group were of the same gender, socio-economic status and previous academic achievement (Akdag & Tutkun, 2010). The experimental group received theatre education. The control group was taught via traditional pedagogy (Akdag & Tutkun, 2010). A pre-test/post-test was utilized to measure the effectiveness of the pedagogies. The results indicated that the theatre teaching method was more effective than traditional teaching methods (Akdag & Tutkun, 2010).

There is a relationship between theatre and the development of literacy skills. Theatre can aid students in understanding stories, comprehending what they read and in writing on various topics. For example, reading teachers can read stories to students in a

dramatic fashion. A recent study found that allowing pre-kindergarteners to act out their favorite stories helped them to find greater meaning in the stories, and motivated them to learn (Arts Education Partnership, 2012a).

The Arts Education Partnership (2012a) cites a study conducted by Sherry DuPont in 1992. Her study sought to discover if a creative drama program in combination with children's literature could enhance students' reading comprehension. DuPont utilized the term creative drama to describe the practice of reading non-illustrated stories (Arts Education Partnership, 2012a). It involves children acting out the stories verbally and non-verbally (pantomime). The study analyzed three groups of fifth graders, who were all enrolled in remedial reading classes. Groups one and two received a six-week remedial reading program using selected texts. However, group one utilized creative drama to aid in reading comprehension; group two did not utilize theatre. Group three received the traditional remedial program—with no theatrics and no selected text. Pre- and post-tests were used to measure students' progress (Arts Education Partnership, 2012a).

The study had some positive results. Children involved in acting out what they read had a better understanding of the literature. Students were also better able to understand literature that they did not act out (Arts Education Partnership, 2012a). For example, they comprehended written scenarios on standardized tests. This finding is significant and is worthy of further research because dramatic activities gave students the ability to connect with texts with and without the aid of dramatic activities—a vital life skill (Arts Education Partnership, 2012a).

Fink (1976) researched the role of imaginative play in cognitive development. The findings showed that children who engage in teacher-directed imaginative play developed strong skills in conversation and perspective, which allow children to make sense of the world around them.

In her research, Page (2002) found that first graders reading below grade level were better able to understand stories when allowed to participate in dramatic reenactment as opposed to listening to adults read. Children who participated in the study experienced greater comprehension of main ideas, character motivation and identifying characters.

Other research supports the claim that theatre impacts cognition and life skills. Tasli (2003), Cevik (2006) and Susuzer (2006) found that theatre pedagogy techniques positively impact motivation, students' attention span/focus, creativity and cuts back on psychological stress. In theatre-based classrooms, students have positive perception at the beginning, middle and end of the learning process (Akdag & Tutkum, 2010). When students learn via theatre, they are able to retain the knowledge because they learn in a manner that is meaningful to them (Akdag & Tutkum, 2010).

Likewise, in order to address cognitive needs and life skills, Augusto Boal developed *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), which is a set of theatrical techniques used to help oppressed people change their social realities (Conrad, 2004). The process engaged participants in theatre that explored (a) rituals; (b) storytelling; (c) social roles; (d) gender; (e) race; (f) age; and (g) status (Conrad, 2004). Theatre has the ability to go into the depths of the human experience so solutions to life's dilemmas can be addressed (Elder et al., 2007). Through character analysis, students learn to identify with the

perspective of other humans (Elder et al., 2007). Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* allowed youth to find meaning by taking them into the depths of the human experience (Conrad, 2004).

For example, the theatre teacher in Conrad's study (2004) (based upon Boal's techniques) explored real-life social issues with his students (Conrad, 2004). From there, groups of students created pieces on themes such as family violence, alcoholism, AIDS, and suicide prevention. The instructor engaged students in activities, such as group building, trust building, skill development, brainstorming and creation of scenes (Conrad, 2004). *Life in the Sticks* was one project that emerged from Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979). In addition to addressing critical issues, students learned to undermine unjust social structures (Conrad, 2004).

Essentially, Conrad's (2004) study illustrated how theatre propelled students into reflection (by discussing issues), and then into action (by writing plays that addressed the issues). Writing and participating in plays evoked awareness and consciousness of themselves and their environments. Conrad (2004) argues that young people who are exposed to social ills are more likely to be activists and problem-solvers in society. It seems that one goal of education should be to produce citizens who are able to recognize, analyze and solve problems creatively (PCAH, 2011).

Leadership and communication skills are other life-skills that emerged in the literature. A former theatre study (Seidel, 1996) asked this question: How are leadership and communication skills developed through work with a high school theatre education program? The theatre program taught both leadership and communication skills; adult

support and appropriate models for behavior were a part of the pedagogical process (Seidel, 1996).

For this project, students had to work with an eclectic group on intricate theatrical tasks; through this process they gained community-building skills and communication skills (Seidel, 1996). These are key skills needed for leadership (Seidel, 1996). Also important for leadership, students learned how to assess themselves and others for the sake of improvement. Finally, students learned that having a vision is vital for leading a group (Seidel, 1996). In a few years, the students of today will be the leaders of tomorrow. Theatre education can create a platform for students to exercise and develop leadership and communication skills (Seidel, 1996).

The arts in general develop students' cognitive abilities. For example, in 1994, Erin Gruwell, a young teacher who worked at an urban, at-risk school, was able to make an impact on her students by exposing them to literature and by encouraging them to write reflective journals (Freedom Writers Foundation, 2006). The students' works and stories were compiled into a book titled *The Freedom Writers Diary* (Freedom Writers Foundation, 2006). This example illustrates the effectiveness of allowing students to reflect upon and write about their experiences, which supports the premise that arts education impacts students' cognitive abilities.

Next, it is important to note that theatre education fosters skills students need to survive in their everyday lives; one important skill is cognition. Lehman (2008), an arts education advocate, asserted that learning artistic modes of problem solving evokes expressive, analytical, creative, and developmental tools humans need to deal with real-life situations. He also argued that arts education sharpens the mind so that youth can

make decisions where there is no definite “right” or “wrong” answer. Additionally, Lehman (2008) asserted that the arts have the power to both create and mirror society. Therefore, he concluded that the arts can lead us into ideas and actions that impact the world (Lehman, 2008).

Everything Lehman (2008) has discussed: problem-solving, analysis, creativity and synthesis, all fall under the umbrella of life skills theatre can foster. Core subjects, such as reading and math, are vital, but life-skills offered by theatre education are equally as vital (Lehman, 2008). Lehman (2008) also argues that the arts have always been instrumental in the building of civilizations. American society should want to educate students that are capable of building and sustaining civilization. He also asserts that the arts are multi-purpose. They can be used to present ideas, teach, persuade, entertain, design, plan and beautify (Lehman, 2008). Most of all, the arts provide invaluable skills and perspectives that are necessary to make contributions (Lehman, 2008).

In addition, Maslow believed that utilizing artistic outlets that evoke creativity and introspective expression turns out better people (Greene & Burke, 2007). Green and Burke (2007) explain how some healthcare organization leaders use arts to foster change, nurture employees and to improve the emotional energy of those within the organization. For example, one organization addressed apprehensions about change by breaking employees into small groups to artistically express their feelings (Greene & Burke, 2007). This is just one example of how artistic exercises can assist managers and employees in the work place. The point here is that arts education and theatre education, in particular, is a tool that can be utilized to improve real-life situations. Previous literature shows how young students benefit specifically from theatre education. However, Green and Burke

(2007) imply that adults (managers, employees and employers) can also benefit from theatre education.

Educators are now starting to see the value in using theatre as a tool to train students for the real world: “[Theatre] is especially suited to experiential education. It is a powerful mode that can draw students into an experience; it is a tool to help move the learning experience from the lecture platform into interactive, participative, doing phases” (Mockler, 2002, p. 575). Arts-based learning such as theatre have been used to teach topics such as business ethics (Brown, 1994), decision-making (Holtom, Mickel & Boggs, 2003), negotiations (Weiss, 2003) and emotional intelligence (Morris, Urbanski, & Fuller, 2005). For example, management educators use improvisational theatre to explore management issues (Huffaker & West, 2005; Moshavi, 2001).

Songunro (2004) found theatre to be effective in providing leaders with knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to be successful. Knowles, Kinchington, Erwin and Peters (2001) found that medical students who had engaged in theatrical role-play as doctors interviewing patients with embarrassing health conditions (e.g., sexually transmitted diseases) had higher levels of communication skills and knowledge than the control group that did not receive training.

According to Boggs, Mickel, & Holtom (2007), interactive drama is a form of theatre that has been highly successful in teaching life skills (e.g., conflict resolution, motivating others, and decision-making) to adult learners. Through interactive drama, trained actors simulate tough real-life situations and stop mid-scene to engage the audience in conversations about the scenarios:

An excellent way to enhance learning experiences for students in most management courses (undergraduate, graduate, executive), interactive drama effectively illustrates the complexities of traditional management concepts (e.g. conflict and negotiation, power and politics, motivation, leadership, strategic decision-making, entrepreneurship) as well as current challenges in the work place (e.g. work-life issues, diversity issues, ethical dilemmas, environmental awareness). In addition, interactive drama is a memorable format that will encourage students to improve their managerial and interpersonal skills (e.g. motivating employees, interviewing techniques, resolving conflict) [Boggs et al., p. 836].

Next, some studies have shown that arts education can impact the course or direction of young people's lives. According to James Catterall's et al. NEA arts study (2012), there is a marked difference between the career goals of young people with and without arts education backgrounds. First, 30% of arts students of low socioeconomic students (SES) chose careers such as accounting, education, nursing and social sciences compared to 14% of their peers who did not have access to arts education (Catterall et al., 2012). Nearly 50% of all low SES adults with arts backgrounds aspire to work careers such as medicine, law, education or management, compared to 21% of low SES adults with little arts involvement (Catterall et al., 2012).

There is a plethora of ways that arts education impacts cognitive and life skills (PCAH, 2011). Arts education helps students attain cognitive habits such as problem solving, creative thinking, dealing with complex situations, integration of multiple skills, and working with others—all critical life skills that transcend beyond school age (PCAH,

2011). Here is another instance in which the literature points out the importance of arts education in providing students with skills needed to function as adults.

Students involved in arts education also develop social competencies that include collaboration and team work, social tolerance and self-confidence. Arts education enhances attention and focus, heightens educational aspirations and intellectual risk-taking (PCAH, 2011). Likewise, theatre is an art form that not only has the ability to foster life skills, but to change the course of student's lives, helping them to be more prosperous and productive adults in society.

Maslow Transcendence

According to Maslow (1971), the top of the pyramid is no longer self-actualization [as scholars once thought], it is transcendence or selfless-actualization. The most gratifying experience one can have is to move from self to focusing on others via social justice, transformative thinking and transformative action (Maslow, 1971). He describes transcendence as being involved in a cause outside of one's self, such as a calling or a vocation; spirituality is also reached (Maslow, 1971).

Just as Maslow added a new category to his theory, the DICE Consortium (2010) believes there is one final universal competence called "all this and more" (p. 49): "The No. 6 on our DICE incorporates the first five but adds a new dimension because educational theatre is fundamentally concerned with the universal competence of what it is to be human" (p. 49). They believe this last competence is important for building a democratic society in which people possess a moral compass by which values are re-evaluated and re-created when necessary. This competence also involves people

envisioning and creating a society worth living in, one in which people have deep-rooted beliefs as to what kind of individuals they want to be (DICE Consortium, 2010).

In line with Maslow's notion of spirituality, Filip Hadzic, a 15-year-old Siberian student, had this to say: "Spirituality, universality means to be smarter and better educated in every sense" (DICE Consortium, 2010, p. 45). Also, along Maslow's discussion of helping others to reach their full potential, the mother of one participant (in Palestine) said, "I noticed a lot of changes in her. She's quieter now, she loves studying, discusses things with me, wakes up early, and helps her sisters with their homework and explains to them what to do" (DICE Consortium, 2010, p. 44).

Maslow's transcendence, which also involves taking on a calling or vocation outside of one's self is evident in the DICE participants. Ramez Nassar of Palestine said, "I want to work in theatre later on...to perform about freedom, life, stopping the occupation. I want theatre to make us love each other" (DICE Consortium, 2010, p. 49). A 14-year-old from the United Kingdom says the theatre experience caused him to think about others and their situations. He now feels an obligation to help people instead of distancing himself from their problems. He reports being more charitable (DICE Consortium, 2010).

Young adults who had intensive arts experiences as youth are more likely to participate in civic activities such as voting, volunteering and engagement in politics (Catterall & Dumais, 2012). The study showed that 14% more high-arts, low SES (socioeconomic status) young adults voted in the 2004 election than low-arts, low SES young adults. Additionally, young adults with high exposure to the arts volunteer 21% more low SES adults with low-arts exposure (Catterall & Dumais, 2012).

According to the DICE Consortium (2010) involvement in theatre education promotes civic competence. The consortium indicates that civic competence is based on students' knowledge of social and political structures as well a sense of duty to actively participate in a democratic society (DICE Consortium, 2010). Students who received theatre instruction are eight percent more likely to participate in civic duties. When asked questions regarding voting, students reported that they would go and vote in their schools, local government and general elections. These same students are 12% more likely to campaign for issues and to express their opinions on the radio or TV (DICE Consortium, 2010).

In her research titled, *Democracy and the Arts: The Role of Participation*, Cornwell (1990) explores the relationship between the arts and humanities and democracy. She posits that democracy can serve as a catalyst for excellent artistic work, and that democracy can foster an audience for such artistic works. Her study set forth a model for how artistic communities can propel large numbers of people into participating in the political system.

Summary

What is known is that arts education has benefits for students. The literature reveals that arts education has both academic and personal benefits. One issue with the literature is that it focuses primarily on music and visual arts, paying limited attention to theatre education. Again, consider a study that analyzed how California fared in providing elementary students with arts education, which found that only 18% of them were receiving instruction in theatre, while over 50% received instruction in music and visual arts (SRI, 2007). Likewise, reports on theatre education in Arizona revealed that a

study of arts education excluded theatre all together because the percentages of schools with theatre programs were significantly small (SRI, 2007).

Palmarini (2012) reiterates the importance of producing reliable data on arts education so it can stand a chance of surviving. However, he notes that finding data for theatre education is a challenge. He argues that there is some useful data, but there is not enough from public agencies such as the U.S. Department of Education and other arts advocacy organizations (Palmarini, 2012). Because the current research on theatre education is scarce, this study sought to add to the body of research that implies the benefits theatre education. More specifically, this study is unique because it requires former theatre students to examine how theatre education has impacted their life skills and psychological needs. This case study showed the benefits theatre education offers to participants as teens and how it might continue to benefit them into adulthood.

CHAPER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand former high school theatre graduates' perceptions of how theatre education impacted life skills and addressed psychological needs. This study is vital because scholarly research on the benefits of theatre education is limited. This chapter addresses the following: (1) the research design for the study; (2) research questions, (3) participants; (4) setting; (5) procedures; (6) researcher's role, (7) data collection (8) data analysis procedures; (9) trustworthiness; and (10) ethical considerations.

Design

The selected research design is a qualitative case study (Creswell, 2007). Because this study sought to investigate participants' perceptions, the qualitative case study design is most appropriate (Creswell, 2007). Specifically, this is a single instrumental case study that focuses on a phenomenon, and one context was used to shed light on the issue (Creswell, 2007). Yin (2003) would describe this case study as descriptive because it is used to gather rich description on a phenomenon and the real-life context in which it took place. This study sought to examine how theatre education met the needs of students within one school (Stake, 2000). Specifically, this case study utilizes a within-case analysis as it involves analyzing and interpreting data that explain phenomena that is bound to a single context (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Research Questions

The case study design, which utilizes interviews and questionnaires, was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' needs for belongingness?* Belongingness has to do with being affiliated with a group, or being accepted by a group. Participants reflected upon whether being a part of the theatre program impacted their sense of belonging.

Research Question 2: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' esteem needs?* Esteem needs involve self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy. These concepts embody the opinions and cognitions of one's self-image, weaknesses and status. Esteem also has to do with recognition and achievement. Participants were asked to reflect upon whether theatre impacted their esteem.

Research Question 3: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' cognitive and learning needs?* Cognitive needs include the ability to learn, acquire knowledge and make meaning. Participants shared perceptions of whether theatre impacted their ability to learn and make sense of the world.

Research Question 4: *How, if at all, did theatre address students' self-actualization and transcendence needs?* Self actualization has to do with reaching one's full potential. The former theatre students will discuss how theatre impacted their ability to reach their fullest potential. Once individuals reach their full potential, they are able to help others reach their full potential. Participants were asked to determine whether they take a part in helping others to grow.

Research Question 5: *What, if any, life skills did students gain from participating in theatre education?* Life skills are generally defined as the ability to cope with the challenges and responsibilities of life (dictionary.com, n.d.). Work ethic, etiquette, communication and problem-solving skills are some examples.

Participants were asked what they learned as a result of being in the theatre program.

Participants

Participants were chosen via a purposive sampling procedure (Gall, Gall, and borg, 2007). According to Gall et al. (2007), purposive sampling allows the researcher to select participants that suit the purpose of the study. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007):

If the goal is not to generalize to a population but to obtain insights into a phenomenon, individuals, or events, as is most often the case in interpretive studies, then the qualitative researcher purposefully selects individuals, groups, and settings for this phase that increases understanding of the phenomena. (p. 242)

Yin (2004) argues that a researcher may find that there are many candidates qualified to participate in a study. Therefore, he recommends conducting a formal case study screening in order to select the best candidates (Yin, 2004). Yin (2004) suggests basing the criteria on willingness to participate and ability to provide rich data.

Participants were former theatre students who graduated from the large metropolitan high school at least eight years ago. It was important that participants were eight or more years removed from high school because it is likely that they have more life experiences with higher education, work and all the responsibilities that accompany adulthood. The majority of graduates from this program are African-American, though a small percentage of graduates were of other ethnicities. Most of the students came from mid-to low-income households.

The sample size was comprised of six individuals for the focus group. Next, I selected nine participants for the individual interviews: five women and four men (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Gender is a factor that can impact the participants' perceptions (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The role that participants carried out in the program can also impact perceptions. For the sake of diversity among participants, lead actors, ensemble members, tech crew members and performers/technical crew members were interviewed (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). I also considered factors such as age, vocation, level of education, possession of artifacts, years in the program and roles in the program when selecting participants. The sample size was small due to the nature of the study, which called for in-depth conversations with participants. According to Yin (2009), the case study is ideal in that it poses how and why questions. Having a small number of participants allows the investigator to gain holistic and meaningful data regarding people and their real-life experiences (Yin, 2009).

To recruit participants, I contacted former instructors and asked them to recommend participants who met the criteria of being theatre students at least eight years ago. Those participants were recruited via Facebook, a social media website. First, I posted a general announcement of the study on my Facebook page, which requested that interested participants to email me. Next, I emailed all participants whom the instructors suggested. After individuals expressed an interest in participating, I emailed the participant screening and consent forms to them. After reviewing the forms and discovering whether they would be available to participate, I chose participants who best fit the criterion for the study.

Setting

The setting for this study was Metro High School, a performing arts institution located in a small town two miles east of the Atlanta City Limit. The school is a part of one of the largest public school districts in Georgia. Metro High is one of few performing arts schools within this particular school district. The program consists of choral music, band, orchestra, visual arts, culinary arts, video broadcasting, dance, and theatre. The Metro High School Performing Arts Program was founded in 1990 and was designed for students with an interest in various art forms. Historically, the theatre program has brought a lot of notoriety to the school. It is well-known across Metro Atlanta as a school of excellence.

The performing arts program is supervised by a lead director. Each individual department has an instructor. For example, theatre has a head instructor as well as an assistant. The theatre director collaborates with the dance and choral directors to produce the yearly spring musicals. Here, it is important to note that Mr. Jones was the primary theatre teacher that all participants experienced during their time at Metro High School. The influence of this teacher was so strong that his role in the program is a consideration for future research. The implications of his influence on students is explored further in the epilogue.

This setting was chosen for the study because of its easy accessibility. According to Gall et al. (2007), finding the “gatekeepers” to obtain permission is vital. Because I was familiar with the “gatekeepers,” I had easy access to administrators and decision-makers within the school. Gall et al. (2007) also suggest determining the people with whom to make the initial contact. Initially, I contacted the principal to obtain permission

to conduct the study. After obtaining his permission, I contacted former instructors for participant recommendations.

Procedures

First, I gained consent from the principal in order to conduct this research on former students. Additionally, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to collecting data. The process of obtaining IRB approval ensured that the research plan was ethical and non-threatening to participants (Gall et al., 2007).

Participants were solicited via Facebook, word of mouth and recommendations from Metro High School faculty and staff. Lastly, I secured participants' signed consent to be a part of the study.

After selecting participants and obtaining their consent, data was gathered via a focus group and individual interviews. The interview questions sought to get to the heart of participants' perceptions of how theatre education impacted life skills and psychological needs as teens and as adults. All interviews were recorded via a digital recorder and transcribed by a professional company. The last step was to analyze the data via initial coding and axial coding and to report the findings (Saldana, 2009).

Researcher's Role

I am a theatre educator as well as a former theatre education student. I was first exposed to theatre as a freshman in high school. Though I was already a well-rounded student, theatre changed the dynamics of my life. Through theatre, I became more confident; I gained a deeper appreciation for the arts, and I began to perform better in my academic classes. I feel as though the skills gained as a theatre student continue to assist me in my professional and personal life.

After graduating from high school, I was deeply immersed in theatre. I was part of a professional theatre company, and I was a member of a theatre organization at my college. In spite of my passion for theatre, I chose to major in journalism and minor in film. My rationale for choosing journalism was that I did not want to rely upon constant auditions in order to support myself. I wanted to obtain an education that would not limit me to a life of performance. As a young actor, I realized that whether or not I got the part depended upon my color, weight, height and other factors that were beyond my control. I feared entering a profession where my livelihood depended upon such shallow factors.

After graduating from college, I did not find a lucrative career as a journalist. Ironically, I returned to theatre, my first love. In the midst of pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Christian Education from the Interdenominational Theological Center (Morehouse School of Religion), I also enrolled at Columbus State University (Columbus, GA) to obtain a theatre education teaching certificate. However, after becoming a theatre teacher, I was deeply disappointed by the realization that theatre jobs were scarce. During my fourth year of teaching, I had to give up my theatre teacher title to become a language arts teacher. Unfortunately, teaching a core academic subject was the only way I could survive in the public school system.

My experience as a former theatre student and teacher influenced my perception of theatre education. One assumption I bring to this study is that theatre impacts students' self-esteem and life skills. I view theatre education as a life-changing or transformative experience. In my opinion, theatre classes throughout the nation and the world need to be revived. I believe that theatre is the link that brings together many facets, such as

academic achievement, literacy, dance, music, technology, self-esteem, life-skills and etcetera.

My role in this study also included designing the research, collecting data and analyzing data. My ultimate goal was to provide a description of the participants' experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2007). During the course of the study, it was important that I attempted to set aside my personal experiences so I may apply a new lens while investigating the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). To ensure that the data and data analysis did not become a mere reflection of my own experience, I utilized bracketing (Mariano, 1995).

Qualitative literature suggests that the researcher must become aware of his or her own beliefs, which can be achieved through bracketing (Bowers, 1988; Hutchinson, 1993). Next, the researcher has to surrender his or her own beliefs in order to gain insight into the participants' perceptions (Bowers, 1988; Hutchinson, 1993). With this in mind, I consistently acknowledged and documented the assumptions I brought to the study (Swanson-Kaufman & Schonwald, 1988). Creswell (2007) says, "I see researchers who embrace this idea when they begin a project by describing their own experiences with the phenomenon and bracketing out their views before proceeding with the experiences of others" (p. 60).

Data Collection

As with any case study, rich, descriptive data was gathered for the sake of investigating the phenomenon at hand, which is participants' perceptions of life skills and psychological needs (Creswell, 2007). I had four different methods for collecting data. They were: 1) preliminary screening questionnaire; 2) focus group; 3) individual semi-

structured interviews; and 4) analysis of artifacts (as they became available) (Stake, 2000).

Questionnaire

I gave prospective participants a screening questionnaire at the beginning of the study. The questionnaire asked for basic information, such as age, years in the theatre program, vocation, and educational background. The purpose of the questionnaire was to allow me to choose the best participants who might give the richest descriptions of their experiences. In addition, the screening questionnaire allowed me to choose among a diverse pool of participants. For example, I sought diversity in age, gender, vocation, role(s) in the theatre program, etc. Another important criterion in choosing participants was whether they have held on to artifacts, such as pictures, trophies, certificates, letters, etc. that show evidence that the theatre program has impacted their lives. The questionnaire used for screening participants can be found in Appendix A.

Interviews

Interview questions for this study derived from the literature, particularly the theoretical framework of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. As discussed in Chapter Two, research argues that theatre education meets psychological needs, such as belonging, esteem and self-actualization. Additionally, the research discussed in Chapter Two supports the premise that theatre education causes students to gain important life skills connected to emotional intelligences, such as awareness of emotions, managing emotions and understanding others.

Focus Group. This study started with a focus group of Metro High School graduates. The principal and director of the program gave their consent for me to conduct

the interview. After the public announcement of the study was made (via Facebook) and sending individual emails to potential participants, I used the Participant Screening Questionnaire to select the focus group. I consulted with those selected to determine the best date and time for an interview. I then emailed and called each person, inviting them to the Focus Group. The focus group was held at Metro High School in what is known as the “Black Box Theatre.”

Since one criterion for selecting candidates was that they had to be at least eight years removed from high school, it was likely they may have forgotten some aspects of their experience. Putting the participants together and facilitating a shared conversation was designed to help trigger their memories. During this interview, participants sat in a circle and answered questions about their experience as theatre students. Furthermore, they were asked to reflect upon how, if at all, their experience at Metro has impacted them as adults. Lastly, they were asked to share any artifacts (pictures, t-shirts, trophies, playbills, etc.) related to their high school theatre experience. See Appendix B for specific interview questions.

Individual Interviews. After the focus group, I used snowball sampling to find an additional eight to ten participants to interview. These individual interviews allowed me the opportunity to delve more deeply into participants’ experiences. Specifically, I utilized the semi-structured interview approach (Zorn, n.d.). According to Zorn (n.d.), the semi-structured interview is the most useful approach for conducting interviews. I asked a series of structured questions, but also had the space to ask more probing questions (Gall et al., 2007). Specifically, questions inquired about how, if at all they believe theatre impacted their lives as teens and as adults (see Appendix C).

The individual interviews were advantageous because the questions probed into participants' attitudes and experiences (Gall et al., 2007). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants who live in the Atlanta area, while participants who live out of state were interviewed via Skype or telephone. All interviews were audio recorded with a digital recorder and transcribed by a professional transcription company.

For the sake of accessing multiple methods of collecting data, also known as triangulation, I asked participants to share and discuss any documents, archival records or physical artifacts tied to their experience as a theatre student (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). For example, letters, newspaper articles, videos, photographs, yearbooks, old scripts, etc. can be utilized to corroborate with the interview data (Creswell, 2007; Tellis, 1997). According to Creswell (2007), "In recent years, new forms of data have emerged . . . using text from email messages, and observing through examining videotapes and photographs . . . I encourage individuals designing qualitative research projects to include new and creative data collection methods" (p. 129).

Table 2

Timeline and location for data collection

Data Collection Method	Timeline for Completion	Location
Preliminary Questionnaire/Screening (via email)	February 1–7, 2013	Email
Focus Group	February 9, 2013	Metro High School
Individual Interview	February 12–22, 2013	Metro High School /Skype/Telephone

Data Analysis

The primary goal of data analysis was to arrive at a holistic description of the participants’ perceptions of how high school theatre impacted their life skills psychological needs as teens and as adults. Analysis involved searching for common themes in the participants’ responses. The themes, issues and implications are discussed in Chapters Four and Chapter Five. I utilized various forms of data collection to reach this goal. As previously mentioned, I engaged participants in a screening questionnaire, focus group and, finally, an individual interview. Data collection and analysis happened simultaneously. Below is an explanation of the chosen data analysis procedures:

1. After the initial screening questionnaire, participants were chosen based upon these criteria: role in the theatre program, age, gender, vocation, years in the program and ultimately availability to participate.
2. Following the focus group and in-depth face-to-face or Skype semi-structured interview, I hired a professional transcriber to transcribe the interviews.

According to Saldana (2009), coding can be completed in two phases: first cycle coding and second cycle coding. At first I engaged in Initial Coding, which

Saldana (2009) explains in this fashion, “They are not specific types of codes, they are ‘first impression’ phrases derived from an open-ended process called Initial Coding” (p. 4). After reading a passage of the transcribed interviews, I wrote a phrase that captured the essence of what the participant conveyed in the response.

3. Next, I utilized Axial Coding to locate prevalent themes in participants’ responses. Axial coding involves organizing the data into abstract categories (Stake, 2000). More specifically, it reassembles the data that was disaggregated during the initial coding; it ties together categories and subcategories (Saldana, 2009). Axial coding is ideal for a variety of data, such as documents, artifacts, videos, journals and interview transcripts (Saldana, 2009). A major goal of Axial Coding is to reach data saturation, when no new information emerges during the coding process (Saldana, 2009). During the Axial Coding process, I utilized memo writing for the sake of bringing form to emergent themes (Saldana, 2009). Memo writing also allows the researcher to attach rich descriptions to the categories (Gall et al., 2007).

Throughout the coding process, I continued to utilize bracketing to stay in touch with my perceptions. With bracketing, I set aside my own experience with theatre education in order to see the study through the lens of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Before interviewing participants and while analyzing data, I reflected on the interview questions, openly and honestly writing notes based on my perceptions. Ultimately, the goal was to acknowledge my personal thoughts while seeing the viewpoint of others from a fresh perspective (Creswell, 2007).

When the data analysis and collection were completed, I had a list of major themes related to how high school theatre impacted life skills and psychological needs. After reviewing the interview transcripts and listening to the focus group interview, I was able to provide rich narrative and thick descriptions to accompany those themes (Stake, 2000).

Trustworthiness

Several measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness. First, triangulation of data sources was used to cross-verify the validity of the data (Creswell, 2007). The screening questionnaire, focus group, individual interviews and analysis of documents or artifacts were the methods of data collection that served as checks and balances as a means of ensuring the trustworthiness of the data collected. Using these methods allowed me to locate my own inconsistencies as the researcher (Gall et al., 2007). According to Creswell (1998), triangulation highlights the common themes found with different data collection methods. Furthermore, each interview or encounter with participants allowed me to gain in-depth insight and clarification.

Furthermore, member checking after the focus group and individual interview allowed participants to review statements in the report for accuracy (Gall et al., 2007). During those checks, participants were allowed to communicate misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and erroneous information. Next, I had peers examine drafts of the case study report and share their insights on the findings (Gall et al., 2007). Additionally, I engaged in researcher reflection, which allowed me to evaluate my own position toward the study. This method allowed me to stay in touch with my own biases and feelings (Gall et al., 2007).

Carefully mapping out the research design and keeping accurate records of data collection allowed for reliability. In other words, other researchers can follow the same procedures to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions of how theatre education addressed their needs and life skills (Merriam, 1998). Trochim (2006) argues that dependability refers to whether the results can be substantiated by others.

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, my intent was to investigate the phenomenon of theatre education without harming participants' mentally, physically or socially. The identity of participants was protected through the use of pseudonyms. Pseudonyms are also used for the high school where the participants attended. All data, including questionnaires, email interviews and online chat scripts is stored and secured in a safe place.

Participants were told that information shared with me would be kept confidential. However, due to the nature of the study, which included a focus group, participants' confidentiality was a concern. Though group members were asked to keep each other's information in confidence, confidentiality is not guaranteed. Participants were made aware of their right to not answer particular questions or to opt out of the study at any time.

Furthermore, as a Christian researcher, I pledged to act ethically with data collection, analysis and interpretation. I set aside personal bias to preserve the integrity of the study. Not at any time did I impose my own views upon participants nor lead them to answer questions to my liking.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study was to investigate former high school theatre students' perceptions of how theatre education impacted their psychological needs and life skills. Participants are graduates of the Metro High School, which is located in a small town two miles outside of the Atlanta City Limit. A focus group and semi-structured individual interviews were the methods utilized to discover their perceptions. My attempt to collect archival data was a challenge because most participants are in their late 20s and 30s and have been long gone from their parents' homes where most of their artifacts are located. This chapter provides a discussion of the findings of the study. The reader can expect an overview of the research questions, profiles of participants and an in-depth discussion of the themes that emerged in the research.

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' needs for belongingness?* Belongingness has to do with being affiliated with a group, or being accepted by a group. Participants reflected upon whether being a part of the theatre program impacted their sense of belonging.

Research Question 2: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' esteem needs?* Esteem needs involve self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy. These concepts embody the opinions and cognitions of one's self-image, weaknesses and status. Esteem also has to do with recognition and achievement. Participants were asked to reflect upon whether theatre impacted their esteem.

Research Question 3: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' cognitive and learning needs?* Cognitive needs include the ability to learn, acquire knowledge and make meaning. Participants shared perceptions of whether theatre impacted their ability to learn and make sense of the world.

Research Question 4: *How, if at all, did theatre address students' self-actualization and transcendence needs?* Self actualization has to do with reaching one's full potential. The former theatre students discussed how theatre impacted their ability to reach their fullest potential. Once individuals reach their full potential, they are able to help others reach their full potential. Participants were asked to determine whether they take a part in helping others to grow.

Research Question 5: *What, if any life skills did students gain from participating in theatre education?* Life skills are generally defined as the ability to cope with the challenges and responsibilities of life (dictionary.com, n.d.). Work ethic, etiquette, communication and problem-solving skills are some examples. Participants were asked to reflect upon what they learned as a result of being in theatre.

Table 3

Participant Profile and Demographics—Individual Interview

Name	Gender/Age	Yrs. in Program	Role in Program	Education	Occupation	Current SES	Family SES	Family Structure
Kenny	Male/33	1996–1997	Actor & Tech	Unknown	Actor	\$50,000–59,999	\$20,000–29,999	Single mom; Single dad
Bria	Female/30	1996–2000	Ensemble Actor	Bachelors	Actor; Dancer	\$30,000–39,999	n/a	n/a
Alana	Female/33	1995–1997	Ensemble & Tech	Masters	Actor	\$70,000–79,000	\$30,000–39,999	Single mom
Clinton	Male/34	1994–1996	Actor & Tech	High School Diploma	Musician	n/a	\$40,000–49,999	2-Parent Home
Georgia	Female/35	1992–1996	Lead & Principle Actor	Some College	Actress; Singer	\$50,000–59,000	\$40,000–49,999	Single mom
Dana	Female/31	1997–1999	Actor & Tech	Bachelors	Costume Designer	\$30,000–39,999	\$90,000–100,000+	Single mom
Angela	Female/31	1995–1999	Actor & Tech	Doctorate	Lead Teacher	n/a	n/a	Single mom
Lloyd	Male/32	1995–1998	Tech	High School Diploma	Retail; Sales	n/a	\$30,000–39,999	Single mom
John	Male/27	2000–2004	Lead & Principle Actor	Bachelors	Actor; Artist	n/a	\$80,000–89,999	2-Parent Home

Key: Current SES = Participants' current annual income; Family SES = Participants family annual income during high school; Family Structure = Participants' family composition during high school

Participant Profiles

Kenny

Kenny, now 33-years-old, entered Metro High School as a choral student. In 1996 he joined the theatre program and performed acting and technical duties in a total of four productions. Since high school he has worked in the restaurant and hospitality industry while living his dream of being an actor. He has been able to find consistent acting work in various contexts, such as a Shakespearean acting company, local commercials and local theatres. He feels good about his experience at Metro and said, “It gave me the opportunity to discover my talents and abilities as an actor. I gained an understanding and respect for productions and the time and energy it takes to put them on. Without the theatre department, I would not be the person I am today.”

Bria

Thirty-year-old Bria was in the Metro High School Drama Department from 1996-2000. She did mostly ensemble acting and also flourished as a dancer. She participated in three productions that include *Once on This Island*, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Pippin*. After high school, Bria was accepted to the University of the Arts, where she obtained a Bachelors of Arts degree in Musical Theatre. She later became a resident of New York and pursued a career in musical theatre and has performed in Off-Broadway plays such as *Rent* and a Pulitzer-prize winning play, *Ruined*.

Bria spoke highly of her experience at Metro when she said, “[Metro High School] gave me the onstage and offstage experience needed to succeed in the theater world. Through rigorous training, I developed a great sense of self-confidence, skill and work ethic that has made my career thrive. The instructors not only served as channels to

the professional world, but also as model examples of what is needed to make an impact in my community through the arts.”

Alana

Thirty-two-year-old Alana came to Metro High School during her sophomore year in 1995, and she later graduated in 1997. Alana was an ensemble actor in *Dreamgirls* and worked tech for *A Raisin in the Sun*. Following high school, Alana went to Clark Atlanta where she graduated with a Bachelors of Arts degree in Theatre Arts. She then enrolled at the University of Alabama’s Shakespeare Festival where she received a Master of Fine Arts in Classical Theatre. After graduate school, Alana boldly journeyed to New York to begin an acting career. She has held steady acting jobs in local theatre, regional commercials and print modeling. Alana says this about her experience:

I started as a theatre student in my junior year, so my experience wasn’t as thorough as many of my peers. I learned a lot about how to produce a full-length play and received invaluable instruction from [theatre teachers] mostly I met many people who would become friends for life, and the network of [Metro High] students reaches far and wide. It was the perfect platform and honing ground to explore and launch my career.

Clinton

Clinton, who is now 34-years-old, entered Metro High School as a band student in 1992. Two years later, he joined the theatre department and remained there until he graduated in 1996. As a student, he participated in three major productions mostly in the capacity of principle actor and did some tech work. Clinton is now a professional musician—trumpeter. He has also worked as an actor, songwriter, producer and musical

director for productions. As a musician, he has traveled the world and often performs at jazz festivals and other venues.

This is what Clinton says about his overall experience at Metro High School:

“The theatre program was a major stepping stone in my life. My experiences as a student there were priceless, immeasurable, and infinitely influential in my life path. Because of my time there honing my talents and realizing my gifts, I’ve been able to travel around the globe, meeting the most awesome people and delve into some of the most wonderful journeys that I could imagine.”

Georgia

Georgia was already a well-rounded young lady when she entered Metro High School in 1992. During her time there, she took on mostly lead and principle roles in a total of four productions. Following high school graduation in 1996, Georgia attended college where she majored in Spanish and minored in theatre. During her junior year, she relocated to New York, where she began an acting career. She has worked as an actress and singer in various contexts such as local theatres in Atlanta, GA. She has done national tours, starring in productions such as *Rent*. Georgia has also had a successful career on Broadway, performing in *Aida*, *Wicked*, *Color Purple*, *Hair*, *Fela* and *Motown the Musical*.

While reflecting on the overall experience as a theatre student, Georgia said, “I feel that my time attending [Metro High School] was amazing. My high school environment was so complimentary to my growth as an African American child. I was surrounded by like-minded individuals with a passion for acting, music and dance.”

Dana

Before attending Metro High School, Dana was in limbo, trying to decide what type of school environment would be best for her. She came to Metro during her sophomore year in 1997 and graduated with the class of 1999. She did some acting, but did mostly technical work for several productions. After high school, she began college as a Public Relations major at the University of Central Florida and Florida International. While attending college, she also toured with boy-band, N-Sync, working as a merchandiser and quick-change costumer. After a few years of juggling education and the entertainment business, she completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in 2006.

Dana now works as a costume designer and has worked on shows that include *Single Ladies* and *Vampire Diaries*. Her latest accomplishment was working as the Assistant Costume Designer for a Lionsgate film entitled *Addicted*. Dana says, “Theatre saved my life. I was heading in the wrong direction before I got to [Metro High School]. Not because of behavior but because I had no clue who I was. Theater helped me be me.”

Angela

Thirty-one-year-old Angela first entered Metro High School as a freshman in 1995 and was a theatre student for four years. During high school, she participated in various plays and performed some technical work. Productions she took part in include *The Crucible*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Wiz* and *Juvie*. After high school graduation, she enrolled at Georgia State University (Atlanta, GA) where she obtained a Bachelors of Arts degree in English. While at Georgia State, she participated in a couple of productions. In 2004 she received a master’s degree in Education from Central Michigan University, and in 2009 she obtained a Ph.D. in Leadership in Educational

Administration from Capella University. She speaks fondly of her time at Metro High School:

My experience as a Metro High School theatre student was truly fulfilling. I developed my talents in multiple areas, to include acting and speaking. I also developed social skills and leadership skills that have helped me in my adulthood. Overall, my experience as a Metro High School theatre student contributed to my sense of self.

Lloyd

Lloyd was in the theatre program from 1995-1998. He did mostly technical work and also enjoyed acting in his daytime theatre classes. Since high school, Lloyd has been working in the retail and sales industry. He says, “My experience as a theatre student is one of the best times I’ve ever had in my life. I had a father in [my theatre teacher], and a lot of brothers and sisters. And growing up as an only child, it got kinda lonely, but when I got to [Metro], it was a little intimidating, but I got used to it. It was one hell of a ride.”

John

John, the youngest of the participants, attended Metro High School from 2000-2004. During high school, he primarily took on lead and principle roles in a number of productions. After graduating in 2006, he attended the renowned Julliard in New York. He stayed in New York for a number of years, working the theater circuit. One of the highlights of his theatre career was working side by side with playwright Suzan Lori-Parks. Most recently he moved to Los Angeles, CA to pursue a film career. He has starred in *Law and Order*, *Newlyweds*, *Django Unchained* and *Night Catches*. During our

conversation about the theatre program, John said, "...the Theatre Department definitely brought a lot of balance and I think it brought sanity to that school and to those kids."

Table 4

Focus Group Participants Profile and Demographics

Name	Gender /Age	Yrs. in Program	Role in Program	Education	Occupation	Current SES	Family SES	Family Structure
China	Female/31	1995–1999	Mostly Tech	Doctorate	Attorney	\$50,000–59,999	\$50,000–59,999	Single mom
Kris	Female/32	1995–1999	Ensemble & Principle Actor	High School Diploma; Some college	Animal Lab Technician	\$30,000–39,999	\$80,000–89,999	2-Parent Home
Herbe	Female/31	1995–1999	Performance & Tech	Masters	Homemaker	\$70,000–79,000	\$50,000–59,999	2-Parent Home
Chef	Male/32	1995–1999	Mostly Tech	Associates	Chef/Business Owner/School Nutritionist	n/a	n/a	2-Parent Home
Akil	Male/32	1995–1999	Ensemble & Principle Actor	High School Diploma; Some college	Actor; Dancer; Dance Teacher	\$50,000–59,000	\$60,000–69,999	2-Parent Home
Liz	Female/31	1996–2000	Tech & Ensemble	Bachelors	Grad Student & Executive Assistant	\$30,000–39,999	n/a	2-Parent Home; Single Mom

Key: Current SES = Participants' current annual income; Family SES = Participants family annual income during high school; Family Structure = Participants' family composition during high school

China

China is now 31-years-old and still resides in her hometown near Metro High School. She attended Metro High school from 1995-1999. During that time, she worked mostly tech and was given the major responsibility of leading the tech crew at times when there was no technical director. She worked tech for all of the major productions during her four years in high school. In 1999 China went to college and majored in Justice Studies with a minor in Pre-Law at Georgia Southern University. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2004. She then went on to obtain a doctorate in law from the Barry University School of Law in 2010. To date, China is an attorney and a mother.

She says of her experience, "I was very impressed with the level of authenticity, talent and freedom. The program really was geared toward preparing students for a career or growth in the performing arts."

Kris

Kris, who is a native of Atlanta, attended Metro from 1995-1999. She performed in all the school's spring productions and acted in the ensemble. Additionally, she played a principle character in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. After high school, Kris took courses at Georgia State University and Georgia Military College. To date, she is a youth leader in her church, where she leads the way in the arts and worship. She also works full time as an animal lab technician.

Herbe

Herbe is a 31-year-old homemaker who attended Metro High School from 1995-1999. She took on several roles in acting and tech while in high school. After graduating, she pursued a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology at Georgia State University. She later

obtained a master's degree. In addition to being a homemaker, Herbe produces her own web series, a comedic show about motherhood and family life. She also spoke fondly of her experience in high school: "It was the best learning experience ever. The arts made me trust myself and the creative world."

Chef

At age 32, Chef vividly remembers his experiences at Metro High School. He was enrolled there from 1995-1999 and did both acting and tech. Though he was a theatre student, Chef also had a passion for the culinary arts. After high school, he obtained an Associate's degree from the Art Institute of Atlanta where he studied Culinary Arts. He is now the owner of his own catering business. Chef also works full time as a School Nutritionist.

Akil

Akil, who is now 32-years-old, attended Metro High School. As a student, he participated in plays such as *The Wiz*, *Dreamgirls*, *Raisin in the Sun*, *Once on This Island*, *Don't Bother Me*, *I Can't Cope*, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Dark of the Moon*. His roles included mostly ensemble acting and some principle roles. After high school graduation, Akil took ballet and theatre courses at the University of Cincinnati, and later studied ballet at Kennesaw State University. He currently works as an actor, dancer and dance teacher. In his personal life, Akil is a husband and father of two children. Akil said:

My overall experience as a Metro High School theatre student is one of true discovery. Discovery of self, art, confidence, and most importantly, my place in the world. I had somewhat of a Matrix experience because I was given a choice to create art that means something and be an artist that learns to care for the greater

good of humanity. I had an abundance of life-changing moments while I was a student which have continued to be the backbone of my success as an artist, teacher and as a performer.

Liz

Thirty-one-year-old Liz was a theatre student 1996-2000. She worked as a technician, but also did some acting for a total of five productions. The experience at Metro High School instilled in her a love for the business side of theatre. Upon high school graduation, Liz studied Integrative Studies with a concentration on Arts Administration. She completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in 2005, and is currently in graduate school. She works as an Executive Assistant at a college for the arts. While reflecting on Metro High School theatre, Liz said, “This experience was invaluable. It helped my communication and self-confidence.”

Findings

Research Question One

The first research question set out to determine how, if at all, theatre addressed students’ need for belongingness. Belongingness has to do with being affiliated with a group, or being accepted by a group. Participants reflected upon whether being a part of the theatre program impacted their sense of belonging. The two themes that emerged were: (1) feeling like outsiders and (2) sense of family.

The Outsiders

Before joining the theatre department, most participants recall being outsiders or loners. Dana remembers being one of the few African-American girls in a predominantly white school and community. She recollects “sticking out like a sore thumb.” As an

outspoken African-American child, she often found herself in trouble with teachers and administration. To neighbors, she was seen an outsider because her mother was a lesbian, and in the early 1990s gay and lesbian lifestyles were not widely accepted in that community. As a result of all these differences, she felt she did not have a place in her school and community. Eventually, the tension was too much to handle. Dana's mother sent her off to a boarding school out of town, where she was to make a fresh start. However, Dana was not content with this set-up, so she came back home and enrolled in Metro High School.

Just like Dana, China went to a predominantly white middle school. She lived on the south side of Atlanta, but was bussed to the north side for a "better education." China felt resentment about being sent away for school, and her experiences at the school were not pleasant. She felt like an outsider because her perception was that people did not want her there.

Dana admits that fitting in at Metro High School was a challenge at first. Prior to age 15, she had been in an all-White school and community, and now she found herself in the midst of a predominantly African-American school. She was not sure how to fit in, so she tried to be cool. However, during her junior year, she found a group of friends. Today Dana says, "I felt like I found a home." She feels closer to Metro High School students than she feels to the people she has known since elementary school. She is delighted to support them, their shows, their children, etc. She feels Metro High School built a family. There are some people she speaks to on a regular basis. Dana recently met with a former classmate who she had not seen in seven or eight years. Some other old friends came to her last birthday party. She sums it up by saying, "It's a feeling that you're not alone

because you shared something with people for four years, or for me two-and-a-half years.”

Georgia also has memories of not being a part of the in-crowd. She described herself as being a private person who spent most of her time at home. She said, “Um, before I- I joined the [theatre] program I definitely was more of a kind of private home body in terms of my creativity. You know, kind of by myself at home writing songs or coming up with dance moves.” Though being bullied was not a prevalent part of her journey as a youth, she does recall being bullied because of her cultural background, as her father was an African native.

John described himself as “a bit of an outsider.” He had friends, but never felt he was truly a part of any group. As a kid, he played little league sports, but never clicked with teammates. Specifically he said, “We were cool, but I never felt like, oh man, we get each other.” Even when he became a theatre student in high school, he felt like he lived in two different worlds, often floating back and forth between experiences. At Metro High School, a select few students were in the performing arts program, while many of the students were considered general population because they were not in the performing arts program. Performing arts students had to take core classes (English, Math, Science, Social Studies) with the general population students, but also took classes on a special wing where chorus, orchestra, theatre and art were housed. John remembered how he often stayed to himself when he was with the general population.

Bria says her insecurities caused her to be quiet and introverted. She described herself as a shy child. Lloyd was also a loner. He says, “I pretty much was like the loner...every place I went. I mean, even in school with friends, I was always alone. So I

pretty much played alone, I stayed alone, I pretty much was—I was just pretty much a private person.”

Alana moved around a lot as a kid. In her own words, she was “unstable as a child.” As a result, she did not have a consistent set of friends. She says, “I didn’t have a reliable, settled and dependable life.” When describing herself, she said, “I was very shy. I was really introverted and pretty much a loner.”

Before coming to the theatre department, Clinton was a member of Metro High School’s band department, which was also a component of the performing arts program. He says he enjoyed band, but found himself not being able to click with a lot of his peers. “So there wasn’t really a lot of camaraderie when I was, you know, in the marching band...thinking back all those times, I could just remember those days where it was just like, you know, feeling out of place sometimes.” He recalls not being one of the “cool kids.” Even as a teen, he saw himself as “different” or “iconoclastic.” Clinton had his own way of doing things that were different from his peers.

Sense of Family

It was just revealed that the participants once felt like outsiders. However, they unanimously agreed that the program provided them with a sense of family, friends or camaraderie that they had never experienced in the past. Each interviewee mentioned that the theatre program made them feel comfortable or at home. In this section, I will discuss participant’s insight on how theatre education impacted their sense of belonging.

Once Georgia became a theatre student, she found a group of people who celebrated blackness and African heritage, which is an area for which she was ridiculed. Because many of the students were like her and looked like her, she felt very much at

home. As an adult, she says the experience provided a network of friends that support each other. Even when they go for long periods of time without speaking, they are still close. Georgia moved to New York to pursue an acting career and enjoys embracing high school friends as they visit or relocate to The Big Apple. She said, “It just kind of set up a nice family, sort of a family away from family, um, when I was at high school and that continues today.” She describes herself and other graduates as a “family of artists.” She says many of them stay in touch via social media and many have come to New York to see her in shows. Additionally, students from Metro High School network and operate almost like a fraternity or sorority.

John felt like an outsider with the general population and said, “But luckily, for me there was a place for me to not feel like an outsider in that school.” At first, Bria found herself trying to figure out where she belonged: the general population v. theatre. She participated in both worlds, but struggled to decide which she could identify with the most. Bria used to say, “These theatre kids are crazy.” But eventually, she found herself being one of the “crazy theatre kids.” Today Bria says, “...it’s very hard to find a group of people that have the same passion as you.”

Chef, like Bria also felt conflicted about which group he belonged to. He fit in with both the general population and the theatre kids. Chef often found himself having to defend the “theatre kids” when people called them weird or crazy. In the final analysis, he feels that the theatre program provided a sense of family.

Bria remembers sharing in what she called “blood, sweat and tears.” Bria describes New York as a rough city, but her first roommate was a former Metro High School student who had already settled in New York. She then went to name others from

Metro High School whom she reconnected with in New York. There are some peers who reside in Atlanta that she stays close to as well. She says, “I feel like we all stay connected in a sense just ‘cause there’s always that...unspoken rapport we have.”

Angela says that upon entry into Metro High School, she was trying to identify with a certain group she could find similarities with. Lloyd also struggled to figure out where he fit. However, he says, he was drifting towards the wrong crowd. When it comes to the theatre program he says, “If it wasn’t for that, I would probably be doing something else that’s probably not legal.” Prior to coming to Metro High School, he was thinking about joining a gang, was skipping school and always running around with the wrong people.

The negative course changed when he came to Metro High School. He discovered that there were people who were like him in some ways. He described it as a “welcoming experience” that broke down all his defenses. During the interview, Clinton also described the theatre program as “welcoming.” Kenny sees the experiences as “just blessed down from the heavens. It was—it was a family to me. Everything that has culminated, all the people that I’ve met, all the people I’ve worked with, all of them started from that moment at [Metro High School].”

Alana felt a sense of belongingness when she entered Metro High School. She describes it as an enriching experience. She says, “I made friends that I felt like got me and I got them...I was able to maintain friendships which proved really, really fundamental for my growth and development, just finding a group of like-minded people who were kind of a little bit off just like me.” She speaks fondly of the friends she made at Metro High School. She does not speak to them on a daily basis, but always feels like a

member of the family when they come back together: “And there’s just this connection I just can’t explain. Mainly, that does something for you. It gives you a sense of home and a sense of belonging. And I think everybody needs that in the world.”

Alana notes how people who graduated from the same colleges (such as New York University or Yale) often stick together in New York. In the midst of the competition and hustle lifestyle in New York, Alana is thankful for her Metro High School clique. She sees them as “building a family in strange land.” She says, “It’s a sense of belonging, which is—is worth a whole heck of a lot.” They look out for each other in terms of finding auditions and job opportunities. She continues, “Like my other friends don’t do that really, like people I don’t know from home don’t do that.”

Therefore, she is grateful for the camaraderie—the sisterhood: “So it’s just—it informs my life in that I feel like I have family even though my biological family is in Atlanta.”

Alana spoke of how an old friend from Metro High School called and said she was thinking of coming to New York for auditions. Immediately, Alana opened her home to this friend.

Clinton became a theatre student during his tenth grade year at Metro High School. His transition into theatre was both gradual and sudden. He remembers hanging out with a few people from theatre, then taking a class or two, then just being put in a play one day. After doing the play, he knew theatre was for him. He says, “I felt welcomed...like it was true companionship and friendship amongst them.”

Clinton reflected back on his experience and said, “...people that I met there, you know, people that were part of my life in high school, um, a lot of them are still a part of

my life.” Even when at a distance, he knows they are still part of his life. He describes them as family.

Kris was happy to be around people “with the same drive.” She says the theatre program was “like a family” as it felt “like a second home.” She then went on to mention the “camaraderie.” Kris also felt that the students at Metro High School had remarkable teachers who loved the Arts. Akil made special mention of the educators who nurtured the students. They had a positive effect on the students; they encouraged them and built them up. Akil uses their nurturing spirits as a model for how he relates to his own students. Bria also mentioned how the instructors encouraged her and built her up. China had an unpleasant experience in middle school, but says she immediately felt loved and supported as a Metro High School theatre student.

Herbe remembers the moment she realized theatre was like a family to many of her peers. She had just gotten her hair freshly “permed” and styled, and the director wanted her to do something that would cause her to mess up her new hairdo. She argued back and forth with him; he insisted she do it, and she insisted the opposite. In a moment of rage, she said, “You’re not my father!” It was at that moment that she realized that, for many of the students, he was very much a father figure, and their peers were like a family of brothers and sisters. That realization made Herbe count her blessings—that she had a strong family unit. However, it also made her thankful that theatre provided a family structure to the students who came from unstable homes.

Akil is grateful for finding a core group of thespians. He believes the relationships formed kept him from seeking acceptance with the wrong crowd. Akil still maintains relationships with people from the theatre program. They are people he can call on today

if needs assistance. They network and stay connected for business and personal purposes. Akil was also one who blended well with the theatre kids and the general population. However, today, as an adult, he says his theatre peers are still a part of his life. He feels that they truly have his back and are always available when he needs assistance.

The participants' perceptions are that the theatre program impacted their need for belongingness. Key words such as sisterhood, father-figure and family, communicate that the program provided a family away from home. Additionally, words such as companionship and camaraderie illustrate that participants found a sense of belonging through friendships. Participants also communicated that the friendships transcend time and space. There is an inexplicable connection they all share. Participants also experienced acceptance as teens because they met people who were "like them" or understood them.

Research Question Two

The second research question dealt with how, if at all, theatre addressed students' esteem needs. Esteem needs involve self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy. These concepts embody the opinions and cognitions of one's self-image, weaknesses and status. Esteem also has to do with recognition and achievement. Participants were asked to reflect upon whether theatre impacted their esteem. The three themes that emerged are: (1) Gains in Confidence, Self-Concept and Accomplishments; (2) Finding Niches; (3) Limitless and Fearless.

Gains in Confidence, Self-Concept and Accomplishments

John, who is now a theatre and film actor, reports not having a strong sense of self when he was younger. He was just a kid in middle school trying to get good grades.

Therefore, he described himself as a regular kid trying to make sense of his middle school situation. When it was time for high school, he did not have much of a plan besides going to school.

Georgia recalls having a decent sense of self-esteem and confidence before coming to Metro High School. She was a good student and she enjoyed school. She admits having some hang-ups about her dark skin-tone, but it never hindered her or ruined her self-esteem.

Bria was very direct in saying, “I didn’t really have much self-awareness...I didn’t have very high confidence. I guess because I was, you know, the little dark-skinned girl. And I would get teased about it even by people in my family.” Even after coming to Metro High School, Bria said it took a while for her to find her identity. She found herself still trying to fit in with the general population by participating in mainstream activities such as drill team. Eventually she was able to establish an identity.

Dana outright says, “I really didn’t like myself.” She did not know how to find herself without taking in others’ opinions of her. She allowed people on the outside to influence how she saw herself. When she first came to Metro High School, she was still trying to figure out who she was. For most of her life, she had lived in a White community and attended White schools. Now all of a sudden she was in a predominantly African American school. She continued her quest for positive self-identity.

Angela, who has now attained a Ph.D. in education, looks back on her younger years and admits she lacked focus as a teen. She had no outlook on the future and was trying to find herself. She said, “I really didn’t have a good idea of who I was.” Before becoming a theatre student, Lloyd saw himself as “messed up.” Again, he was headed in

the wrong direction and needed a new path. He was lost in a sense and was looking to gangs for affirmation.

Kenny did not have a sense of self before becoming a theatre student. He said, “I didn’t really see myself in any kind of way. I was . . . I guess I would say lost.” He had no sense of direction and was just going through the motions of life. Before becoming a theatre student, Alana saw herself as shy. She adds, “[I was] very sensitive and not necessarily confident in myself or my abilities”

In hindsight, Clinton realizes how important it was to find himself: “It’s crucial times when you’re trying to find yourself and your individuality—who you are as a person . . . what you like—what you don’t like—what you like to do, what you don’t like” Clinton lacked clear direction and did not really know who he was as a person. Likewise, John remembered being a young kid going through the motions, just trying to keep his grades up. He did not have a sense of who he was.

John remembers feeling accomplished after his very first lead role. It was a lot of pressure. He even remembers how people did not expect him to do the part because he was a freshman and small in stature. Though there was doubt in the air, he believed he could do it. This sense of confidence was instilled in him by his theatre instructor, who entrusted him with the role. The performances went well, and he received kudos for a job well done. Overall, he says he gained confidence as a performer during his time at Metro High School. Being put out front made him take ownership of his status as a performer. This is the place where he first realized he was good at acting. John says the experience at Metro High School gave him stored up confidence that carried him through high school, college, and now into his late 20s.

Georgia already had a decent sense of esteem and confidence, but says, “Well, during the time I was a theatre student, I feel my confidence grew larger, and larger and larger.” She says that her time in high school gave her courage and a voice. One of the shows that made the largest impact on her was *Soweto, Soweto, Soweto, A Township is Calling*. This play addressed apartheid in South Africa. Through that show she began to develop an intense love for herself; she appreciated her own beauty and skin-tone. Because the show affirmed African people, it affirmed her in a sense because her father was African.

As it relates to her self-esteem today, Georgia says, “When I think about my own—my self-esteem at this point I kind of—sometimes I need to hearken back to those days when I was in school in a program that nurtured me in that way to kind of help me sustain my feelings of positivity about myself.” She says the way she was coached in high school has inspired her to hire a life coach. She attributes a lot of her confidence and success to the teachers who coached her on how she presented herself, how she performed and how to be respectful. By getting a life coach, she hopes to simulate the support she had at Metro High School.

Today she feels more confident than ever. In fact, she believes confidence is the key to being successful. She even writes about the importance of confidence in her blog. She says sometimes artists get caught up on trying to make a perfect product before introducing it to the public, while someone with zero talent and a lot of confidence just makes it happen. She has learned that everything is about how you sell it. She had learned to carry herself in a confident way by not coming across as self-conscious.

Bria shared that she initially lacked self-pride and confidence. The people in the theatre program affirmed her. She received the message that she is beautiful because she is who she is. Her outer and inner beauty was celebrated. Other people's confidence also inspired her to be more confident. She said, "There were these people around me who were so confident and not afraid to be themselves, regardless of if they were big, small, had a perm, if they had natural hair, if they were loud, if they were quiet." The people around her were happy to be themselves. Through them, she learned to be confident because of what she does with whom she is, and because she is exactly how God made her. The Metro High School theatre program helped her to come out of her shell, making her more confident in speaking.

Today, Bria is more proud of herself than ever. She credits the foundation set at Metro High School for this ever-increasing sense of pride. She has overcome challenges and accomplished so much in her career, family and personal life. Bria, similar to Georgia, emphasizes the importance of confidence. She feels that when people do not have confidence, it translates to a lack of confidence in their work, and transfers to their relationships. Therefore, she is proud of the level of confidence she has gained. Right now she is more self-aware than ever.

Dana found herself and her confidence during her junior year at Metro High School. She no longer tried to fit in because she had found a core group of friends. She says, "Like I was in a place where it was okay to be weird and wear green eye lashes and—because I wasn't afraid, because I was around a group of people who weren't afraid to be themselves." The experience helped her to figure out who she was as well as her likes and dislikes. She gained the confidence to do things, not because it was cool, but

because she actually liked it. She says, “Metro High School really helped me to get to know who I was and pretty much like myself.”

Dana felt accomplished many times as a Metro High School student. One instant was after she finished performing in a one act play titled *Dark of the Moon*. People told her she did a good job, so she remembers how accomplished it made her feel.

When speaking of her confidence today, Dana says, “I love me. I do. I’m pretty much almost—I want to say that’s pretty much a reflection of everything I learned in my formative years...I’m just always going to be that person that’s not going to try to be different but that I am just different.” As an adult, she feels that she is older and wiser and making better choices.

She has made remarkable accomplishments, all of which she is proud. She says the confidence she gained at Metro High School landed her a job touring with N-Sync, which was the biggest boy band in America during the late 1990s. At the young age of 17, she saw the boy band’s choreographer, Darren, approached him and began a conversation. This conversation led to her touring with the band for three years. She enrolled in a college close to N-Sync so she could be ready to go on tour at any time.

Had it not been for Metro High School, Dana reports she would have never had the confidence to approach a celebrity and talk him into giving her a job. For the first two years she did merchandising and quick changes (helping performers get in and out of costumes quickly) during the third year. After the tour, she completed her bachelor’s degree in Public Relations. Dana also became a choreographer for a famous R&B singer; she did features in films and has done other television work. Her most recent job is doing costumes for the series *Single Ladies*.

Angela says of her experience, “During that time, as time progressed in the program, I believe it helped me to develop socially, emotionally, mentally, gain more focus, and more confidence. Today “Dr. Angela” sees herself as a visionary and she has many goals. She says, “I am focused, confident. I have an extreme—how should I word this? There’s a great difference in my level of confidence . . . I feel awesome. I feel competent, I feel I have arrived.”

Reflecting back on high school, Angela feels that theatre gave her an edge over the students who were not in the performing arts program. She feels it benefited her and put her at a level above other students in terms of skills. Speaking of accomplishments, she recalls eventually playing a major role in a class play. She said, “I felt like I had accomplished something because I was able to have a star role.” When reflecting upon what the program did for her she says, “Everyday of my life, everyday that I’m interacting with other individuals, in every aspect of my career, it gives me confidence to be who I am, to do all that I’m called to do.”

Angela still has two trophies from high school that remind her of how accomplished she felt. One was for Metro High School Highest GPA in Theatre. The other was for Best Assistant Director for 1997-1998. To these memories she says, “I just felt like, oh my goodness, I did something, I did something big. I got this award. I worked for this. You know like this is my time to shine.” Angela felt a sense of accomplishment because she was finally being acknowledged, appreciated and honored for her work.

As a result of the theatre program, Lloyd’s self-image improved during his teen years. He said, “Well, I saw myself as a lot more together, a lot more self-aware.” Even now he is more self-aware. He is more in touch with his feelings and is better able to deal

with emotions. One time when he felt accomplished was during the school's spring production, *Dreamgirls*. His job was to take a set piece out at a particular time, and he still remembers the rush he felt: "It was a rush, it was kind of a rush when I did that, so I actually enjoyed that too." Because the production was successful, he felt good about being a part of it.

Currently, Lloyd enjoys visiting karaoke bars. To his surprise, people say he was a good singer. It makes him wish he had done more in high school. He came out his shell every now and then, and whenever he did, people noticed.

Kenny says that once he got into theatre, "being there was a direction There was a purpose in my life at that point. It was something that I could see and grasp and hold on to." He feels as if the experience gave him a stronger sense of self and helped him to discover aspects of himself he never knew. As of today, Kenny sees himself as an artist. He has the gift of being able to look at a script and see the people in it. For him, a script is not just words on a piece of paper. It is a story about humans with experiences. He is then able to decide how to approach the character. Kenny's accomplishments as an adult include being a professional actor with various theatre companies. He has also done a series of Georgia Lottery commercials and films such as *Drumline*.

Alana says, "Something about being involved in theatre gave me courage . . . and grew me up in a lot of ways." She feels she was able to be herself. Today she says, "I'm very, very comfortable, extremely confident in myself and issues with insecurity just don't apply anymore . . . Like I'm really comfortable in my skin, with the life I've built."

Alana remembers how she felt after doing her first role in a school production. At that time she felt like, "Oh my God. I'm a character . . . and I got to wear this fancy long

dress. And it was the first time I kind of saw myself as like, Wow.” The director put her in the role because she was attractive. Alana says, “And I felt beautiful and I felt part of something that was amazing and great.”

One of Alana’s biggest accomplishment as a teen was when a group of Metro High School theatre students skipped school to go on a commercial audition. She remembers getting there, auditioning and then being chosen for the commercial. She says, “I went up in that room. I was in the zone and nervous...I mean, but it was just such a moment of like I took a risk. I skipped school to go on this audition with my peers and I booked it.” The crowning moment was when “I got a check for it...I got paid, with my name on it. I mean I just felt like I had found it. Like that was easy, you know?”

That experience gave her confidence, direction and a sense of purpose as a teenager.

Now, as an artist/actor, Alana feels accomplished every time she gets a job: “Every job is something I—I’ve given myself permission to pat myself on the back about lately, like every little thing. If I get a callback, I want to sing it to the high heavens.” Since high school, she obtained a master’s degree in theatre, did some off-Broadway shows, commercials and print modeling work.

Currently, Clinton sees himself as “accomplished in a lot of ways.” He does not have many regrets, and feels good about his life choices. Since high school, he has accomplished tasks in which he feels proud. He has performed at major jazz festivals with various legends. Clinton has had the opportunity to travel to countries, such as Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, South Africa, Australia, Gambia, Netherlands, England, Germany, Italy, Dominican Republic and more. He credits Metro High school theatre with his life

path: “Without that experience at Metro High School...in the theatre program, I definitely don’t believe that I’d be doing the things I’m doing now.” He believes the experience took him to another level as a performer, musician and human being. Akil says being in theatre made him feel like a cool kid. He was always had some show, gig or performance that made him stand out among his peers at church and school.

Niches Found

During the interview process, participants reminisced on their middle school days or the days before they came to Metro High School. They had two things in common. First, they did not have a strong awareness of their talents and abilities. Second, they feel the training they received at Metro High School ultimately helped them find their niche, or special talent.

John says, “I had no idea what I was doing.” He had not yet tapped into his artistic side. While in elementary school, he would often recite a poem his dad taught him; he would perform the poem at school functions. Public speaking was the only art form he had been introduced to as a kid. By middle school he stopped performing speeches. His parents kept him involved in little league sports, but he was just an average player. He was also in the middle school chorus, but did not discover a profound singing ability. Once he entered the theatre program, he still did not know how he would do, but found himself being impressed by the talent his peers possessed. His admiration of others’ talent compelled him to be more active.

Prior to attending Metro High School, Georgia gained experience performing in her middle school’s mixed chorus and also performed in her first play. She always felt

she had some type of creative abilities, but did not fully explore or discover them until high school.

Likewise, Bria, who is now a Broadway actor, says she always felt she had something within, but did not know what it was. She said, “My older sister, she would choreograph, you know, little routines for me and my cousin to do. We would always just dance...but I never knew that I had a talent for anything.” Bria was too shy to even sing in the mirror. She felt like she could probably sing or dance, but did not have the confidence to explore it.

Before coming to Metro High School, Dana thought she could sing and dance, and felt confident she could act. However, after seeing the level of talent at Metro High School, Dana started to second-guess her talent. In spite of second-guessing her talent, she was positive about others’ abilities and remained in awe of their accomplishments.

Before becoming a theatre student, Angela nurtured her speaking, acting and singing abilities in church. She was accustomed to sharing those talents in church, but never thought she would share them elsewhere. Lloyd, on the other hand, had no awareness of his talents and abilities. He felt he had something, but was not sure what it was. In high school; he felt intimidated by the amount of talent the students possessed.

Before joining the theatre program, Kenny was in the school choir. He was even a member of Metro High School’s choral department for a year. At that time, Kenny did not see himself as having any particular abilities that would be of use to himself or others. Though a part of the chorus, he would sing backup just well enough to help the lead singer.

Alana says her gifts and talents got lost in the shuffle in her large family. As the oldest of all her siblings, Alana believed that her talents and abilities “weren’t glorified or praised because there was not enough time, room, energy in a big family with a single mother to do all of that for everybody.” As a result, she always had skills and abilities she wanted to explore. Whenever her mom asked her what she wanted for Christmas, she would always ask for something artistic, like a theatre class, a guitar or a camera. The desire to discover talents was deep within, but there was no outlet to explore them.

Clinton, like many of the other participants, had a love for the arts in general: “I knew I that I loved to perform in some way or express myself in some way. And the—the avenue just wasn’t necessarily there or there weren’t people around me as far as peers were concerned. There were not many people around me that encouraged that side of me.” Therefore, Clinton’s abilities were suppressed. He feels as though he simply needed someone to hone what was already within. Kris, one of the focus group participants, never participated in the fine arts in elementary or middle school. She grew up singing in the church, but that was the extent of her performing experience.

Upon entering theatre, John only knew he had a gift for public speaking. However, he later discovered that he was good at certain aspects of theatre, but not others. Once he discovered that acting was his niche, he took full advantage of it and developed it even more.

Georgia feels that the theatre program really nurtured her talents and instilled in her that she can try anything because there is nothing wrong with trying. For her, there was a feeling that there was nothing to lose. The worst that can happen is that someone

might not like your work. Once she became a theatre student, she found her niche as a singer and actor—and the ability to carry lead roles.

Bria did not want to attend the neighborhood high school she was zoned to attend, so she followed the lead of a friend who auditioned for the Metro High School Performing Arts Program. Bria had no idea what talents she had. She did not see herself as a dancer, had no vocal training and could not play an instrument. As a result, she auditioned for theatre because it seemed easy for her to memorize a poem and recite it. Bria remembers going to the library to find a poem, which she performed at the theatre audition. She was accepted into the program and began a journey of talent-discovery.

Ironically, as a theatre student, Bria found that she was a natural dancer. As a kid, she liked to dance, but had no idea she could thrive at technical dance. The musical theatre/dance instructor was the first to tell her, “You have a talent in this.” The teacher’s encouragement made Bria want to explore various styles of dance. During her senior year, she attained a principle role in *Pippin*, which was when she realized she was actually a “triple threat.” That means she could act, sing and dance. For the first time she was in a role that required her to execute all three skills. This role gave her the confidence she needed for her career. Her first acting job was a lead Role in *Rent*.

Dana was given opportunities to explore various talents. She got a chance to act in *The Crucible*, but only got one line. Dana even got the opportunity to perform a major role in a play called *Schoolhouse Rocks*. She also did costume design and tech for various other shows. During these productions, she experienced successes and some challenges.

Dana said, “So I had to come to grips with where my talents lie.” For the longest time, Dana wanted to be out front acting and singing, while not truly embracing the

talents she had for working behind the scenes. Though she had some talent in acting and singing, she found a true niche in costume designing. Whenever she did not get the part, she ended up doing costumes. During her senior year, she designed costumes for *Little Shop of Horrors* and realized she had a talent for costuming. Today she is a costume designer and has costumed for films and major TV shows.

For a show titled *Our Town*, the theatre teacher gave her the task of readapting or rewriting the play to fit modern times. In writing for *Our Town*, she also found a niche for writing. When teachers saw her work they said, “You can actually write. You should write.” Even still she resisted. In the final analysis she says, “But it took me not getting in the shows to realize where a lot of my talents lie.”

Lloyd found his niche in acting. He says, “But I just pretty much learned that I was really multi-faceted. I could pretty much show different emotions.” With that training, he could show anger, happiness, depression, etc. He believes his abilities were amplified. Once Kenny became a theatre student, he discovered that he was a natural actor. He says, “I had a great understanding about acting from the gate.” However, he gained a deeper understanding of plays and scripts. He came to understand that the class clown side of him was really just an actor wanting to come out. Therefore, he discovered an innate ability to carry a punch line in comedy or improvisation. Overall, he got a better understanding of how the actor inside could connect to the human side of the character.

Alana gives her theatre teacher credit for helping students to find their niche. She says, “He encouraged people to explore everything. And you got to put your hand into so many parts of the pie that is creativity and therefore, finding a person’s niche, their specific thing, was made that much easier.” She notes that some people spend years

trying to explore and find what makes them special and what makes them amazing. The theatre students at Metro High School were given opportunities to write, to sing, to play instruments and so much more: “Whatever you could imagine was pretty much available and encouraged in those environments.”

Theatre education offered a variety of opportunities that allowed participants to explore their true talents. John found that he excelled as an actor. On the other hand, Dana entered the program desiring to be a performer, but later realized her true talents lie in costume designing. Ironically, Bria entered the theatre program, but discovered she was a natural dancer. Everyone’s experience differed in some way, but the common theme is that they all found their niche.

Limitless and Fearless

Being an actor in L.A., John often feels pressured to follow the same routine as all the other actors. However, he says, “Uh, there’s something in me that’s kinda rebelling against that right now and just wanting to be a full artist and develop all the parts of my artistry.” Though John thrived as an actor throughout high school and college, he now feels that his talents are wide-ranging. He is now transitioning from being an actor to being an artist and a creator. He says this creative impulse was implanted in him at Metro High School because the instructors often encouraged them to create their own works. Additionally, he says the experience instilled a sense of fearlessness in him—fearlessness that carries him through his career as an actor.

Georgia says her high school experience gave her a sense of daring that makes her try things that others would be reluctant about trying. She is not afraid of messing up or

embarrassing herself. In her opinion, you have to make mistakes sometimes before doing something great. She feels messing up is the way we learn.

As Bria summed up her experience at Metro High School she said, “It kinda gave me a bit of an air in way that, you know, no one could tell me that I couldn’t do anything.” She had that belief in school and still carries it with her today. When she is in auditions, she can still hear the voices of her teachers saying, “You can do it, you sing it, you sing the song.”

Angela noted that her confidence is greater than ever. Likewise, she says, “I’ve developed a great amount of social skills—just a well-rounded, feel more balanced in my life—I feel like I could tackle anything I put my hands to.” Now she says she is no longer afraid to share her gifts with other people. She feels completely “uninhibited.”

According to Alana, Metro High School students were always encouraged to try new crafts; therefore, they are not afraid to try anything: “It’s crazy how life imitates art in—in that regard...like I’m not afraid to—to try to express myself as freely as possible...So with those things the sky is the limit. Like I’ll go to the sky and I will paint it, you know. Why not? You know? Why not?”

Whereas Clinton was once unsure of his talents, theatre opened him to a whole new world of possibilities: “I felt there was so much out there at that point—I felt there was so much I wanted to learn and grow into.” There was a lot he did not know, but the “beauty of the possibility” stayed with him. For him, it was “limitless.” Clinton felt inspired to let his creative abilities open up and go different places. He compared himself to a sponge as he was able to absorb knowledge. Looking back, Clinton sees that he had limitations, but the mere “possibilities” were limitless.

As an adult, Clinton thrives on being “limitless.” He says, “I’ve been able to do so much over the years. And I feel like I’m always practicing and working on my craft and just keeping my tools sharp, I feel like anything can be accomplished.” During the focus group, Chef discussed how being a theatre student made him fearless to do new things. He is not afraid to see the world, nor is he afraid to fail.

Overall, the theatre program had a positive impact on the participants’ esteem. Prior to attending Metro High School, they reported having a lack of self-confidence and self-concept. The degree to which they lacked esteem varied. For example, Georgia had a healthy amount of confidence. Yet, Dana recalls not liking herself. Others, such as John and Bria had no self-concept at all. Participants also report having low to no awareness of their talents and abilities prior to becoming theatre students. However, after being involved in theatre, they found their niches, whether acting, singing, dancing, costume designing or writing.

Participants also reported gains in accomplishments and confidence as a result of being theatre students. Performing in plays and working tech made them feel good about their talents. As teens, they felt proud of their accomplishments, and as adults, they continue to have pride in the lives they have built. Each participant expressed that their formative years at Metro High School set them on a successful path. Lastly, participants expressed feeling limitless and fearless. According to participants, the instructors at Metro High School encouraged them to try various art forms, such as, acting, singing, dancing, tech and etcetera. For this reason, they are not afraid to try new things. Students were also given an outlet to create, which made them feel like there are no limits to what they can birth creatively.

Research Question 3

The third research question sought to find out how, if at all, theatre education addressed students' cognitive needs. Cognitive needs include the ability to learn, acquire knowledge and make meaning. Participants shared perceptions of whether theatre impacted their ability to learn and make sense of the world. A couple of prevalent themes emerged from this research question regarding cognitive needs. The two common themes are that theatre kept participants in school and on task and theatre helped them to gain focus and discipline.

Staying in School and On Task

Kris spoke of the way she felt after eighth grade when it was time to attend her neighborhood high school. She became uneasy and felt as if she would just die if she had to go to the regular high school. She was on the verge of becoming apathetic to the point of not caring about school. Needless to say, she ended up auditioning at Metro High School and was accepted. Being in the program made her excited about education. She has vivid memories of how quickly she would run to the after school rehearsals. Kris and friends would run to the Dairy Queen restaurant for a snack and hurry back to be on time for rehearsal.

China says that while attending middle school on the north side of town, she was often suspended for her behavior. She firmly believes that coming to Metro High School saved her from being expelled from school. Had she continued to be in a predominantly White school with no outlet, she would have been on the road to trouble.

Chef does not necessarily feel that he was on the road to dropping out of school before becoming a theatre student. However, his perception is that theatre shielded a lot

of the students from doing “bad things.” Personally, he feels that being a theatre student enhanced his experience. He recalls how certain theatre students in his same class became the leaders of the school. They were not average students just getting by. A cluster of theatre students became SGA President, Vice-President, Secretary and other offices. He describes himself and some other theatre peers as “top students” in the school.

Akil came from a good family with a mom, dad, sister and brother. He was the oldest child, and his family had set a firm foundation, but Akil had some “black sheep” tendencies. There was a rebel deep within that wanted to do something out of the ordinary. He strongly believes that becoming a theatre student saved him from exploring illegal activities such as selling drugs. He felt a sense of rebellion arising and being a theatre student refocused his energies into being a part of something positive.

Again, theatre was the key to keeping some of the participants in school and on task. Kenny did not feel passionate about school, and he says, “But once I got into theatre—it just made me want to be there so much more. It made want to go to school. It made me want to learn. It made me want to work hard and get better.”

Theatre kept John motivated to do well in school. He said:

I kind of was there to get the grades and get on, you know, go on with my day.

Um, but then, you know, I go to the theatre at the end of the school day, and that’s what my work was . . . I feel like school—I had to go to school so I could do theatre.

Lloyd spoke of being on the wrong path before coming to Metro High School. He said:

The theatre program and everything, it was like—it was a blessing in disguise, because if it wasn’t for that, if it wasn’t for that, I would probably be doing

something else that's probably not legal . . . before I sent to [Metro High School], I was involved in a lot of—I was thinking about joining a gang. I was—I was skipping school. I was always running around with the wrong people and this that and the other. But then when I actually got to [Metro] . . . it's time to say, "Hey, this is different now, you've got to change this up, you've got to change the game." And then once I realized that, I just said, "You know what? Maybe I'll give this a shot. It's better than what I was doing before." So I just said, "You know what take and run with it."

Focus and Discipline

The words "focus" and "discipline" permeated the discussion during the interviews with participants. Herbe, the homemaker, feels that "focus" was one of themes of her high school experience. It was a shared word. Everyone knew what it looked like, sounded like and felt like. Focus was ingrained into the minds of each student, so much so that it became a habit. Likewise, what Liz remembers most is learning discipline.

Akil remembers being an energetic kid. He had a hard time staying still and focusing. He later learned that he had been diagnosed with ADHD—something his parents did not reveal to him during his childhood. He credits Metro High School theatre with helping him to channel his excessive energy. Theatre funneled his energies and redirected him so he could be productive.

China sees the theatre program as "professional." It was not an average program; the students were mature, and most of all, they possessed "focus." Herbe also spoke of the focus they had as youth. No matter what the task, they could always see it through

until the end. Herbe feels that she and many others who came through the program still possess a high level of focus.

During her time at Metro High School, Alana built a strong level of discipline and focus. She used it to help her reach her goals of becoming a better performer. Alana spoke of using discipline and focus as an aid during her first professional audition:

They were like, “Listen. When you go on this audition, you need to focus. You don’t talk to nobody. They’re going to try to talk to you to distract you. You don’t be talking to nobody. You go in there and focus.” Honey, we walked up into this building and there was a lot of people there, you know. And somebody started a conversation with one of the actors and he just kind of cut him short and you know, everybody was quiet, in the zone.

Kenny summed up his experience at Metro High School by saying, “It was energy, it was ah focus, it was—it was discipline, it was—it was talent, it was—it was amazing, it was um—it was a memory that- that stays with me.” Again, during the interview, he put emphasis on what he learned when he said:

We also learned like how to be focused and disciplined That’s something that when- when you learn that, you learn how important it is and you learn how if you understand and grasp that, then all of it opens up to you and then it becomes so much more easier. And if you’re distracted by everyday life and by other things that are happening, if you come in with a focus and a discipline to do your best and to give your best to the performance, then it’s ah- then it makes everything ah so much brighter, it makes everything shine so much better. And I always look back um—I like going back because I—I know how important that is

for people to know and understand what it does and how far you can get once you grasp those things.

During the interview, Angela also spoke frequently about discipline and focus:

Um, I think upon my entrance into high school though mainly I lacked focus; a lot of focus. During that time, um, as time progressed in the program, I believe it helped me . . . gain more focus.

She says focus helped her to stay the course during long and tedious rehearsals.

Theatre education had a positive impact on the students' cognitive needs. Participants, such as Kris, China and Dana felt that the school's theatre program restored their faith in school. It gave them something to look forward to each day. Likewise, John feels that theatre kept him on task; he knew he had to do well in school to remain in the theatre program. In Akil's case, theatre helped him to succeed in spite of having ADHD. Theatre ultimately motivated students and helped them to thrive in school. Participants who spoke of focus and discipline feel strongly it helped to be productive as teens and adults. They attribute much of their past and present successes to learning how to start and finish a task with rigor and grit.

Research Question 4

Research question four inquired about how, if at all, theatre addressed students self-actualization and transcendence needs. Self actualization has to do with reaching one's full potential. The former theatre students discussed how theatre impacted their ability to reach their fullest potential. Once individuals reach their full potential, they are able to help others reach their full potential. Participants were asked to determine whether they took a part in helping others to grow.

Continued Growth and Evolution

The graduates of Metro High School have accomplished a lot in their lives. They have discovered their talents and are thriving in many areas of their lives. However, there is another factor they have in common. None of them are satisfied with the status quo. Each of them feels they have room to continue growing to their fullest potential.

During high school, John found his niche as an actor, but he feels there is more for him to do. Artistry is important to him at this moment—he does a lot of different things. He said, “So I’m kind of at a place where I’m trying not to be defined by one aspect of my artistry.” To date, John is redefining himself an artist because there is a new plateau he aims to reach.

Georgia’s resume’ includes continuous gigs on stage and in film. However, she sees herself as still having large opportunities ahead. She says that by age 35 (her age), many people have settled into one particular job; Georgia feels she has a lot more to accomplish. Right now her creativity is booming and she is beginning to focus on various new projects. Her next goal is to transition from theatre to film and to record an album.

Bria is proud of her accomplishments, but feels there is always room to be better. She always wants to strive for more: to be able to sing a higher note, or to be able to kick her legs a little higher. Essentially, she does not allow herself to get comfortable. As a performer, she recognizes that once she gets comfortable, someone who’s working harder will end up taking her place.

Angela says, “I feel I have like I have incorporated all that I have learned over the years into becoming that woman that I am today. I even feel like my experience in the theatre program pushed me to reach my fullest potential and my highest education level

that I attained in 2009, which is a Ph.D. in Education.” Even with that accomplishment, Angela still has goals for the future.

Lloyd feels that his abilities could be better. He says, “I just like to improve in any way, shape or form. I just like to challenge myself, you know?” However, he does feel his abilities are a lot stronger than they were back in high school. He says he was very shy back then and did not step up as much as he could have. As an adult, he uses what he learned in high school to be better when he performs.

Lloyd is also ever-evolving. He has now started to play guitar. He has a few videos posted on social media and gets a lot of positive responses. He has an online business.

Kenny has done a lot of work in theatre and film, yet he says of his abilities, “I feel like they are continually growing even now.” Even with all his credentials, he says, “And I know, like it just keeps getting higher and higher and higher and getting farther.” Alana, also a professional actor feels her life and career is a work in progress: “It’s not a— a completion, not an end. It’s a continuation.”

Clinton, a well-traveled musician feels theatre and the arts largely contributed to molding him into a person who loves to explore and learn and do things to his fullest capabilities. He says, “I see myself as ever—ever growing, ever evolving.” Though he feels accomplished, research revealed that he sees himself as a “work in progress.”

Clinton asserts that some things may take longer than others, but it can be accomplished.

Social Awareness and Responsibility

In six interviews it was mentioned that the plays and topics the theatre teacher chose helped students gain social awareness. Whereas they were once young people with

a limited scope on the world, the program made them aware of other people's cultures, plights and social issues. As a result of becoming more socially aware, many participants also felt a sense of social responsibility, which moved them into the transcendence phase. Transcendence is Maslow's final phase that involves spirituality and helping others to reach their potential.

Georgia asserts that the theatre teacher helped students to gain social awareness and to learn about the world through the topics he chose to address. She said, "We dealt with topics that dealt with international racism, violence and abuse of children. We dealt with some really social issues and it helped us, you know, have an outlook and an opinion on things and know what's going on in the world."

Clinton was at Metro High School in the 1990s when the theatre teacher decided to write a play about child abuse. He says the play deeply impacted his social awareness. It was titled *Rhymes and Reasons*, and it addressed the issue of child abuse. Through this show he learned how people take advantage of children and act tyrannical towards them. It also brought awareness to how teens were abused, which impacted their fortitude and mind. Clinton never forgot the repercussions abuse could have on youth.

Angela says the theatre program exposed her to a different side of African-American culture via the study of Lorraine Hansberry, a Black female playwright. Through analyzing the play and watching the show being produced, she learned about what African-Americans were experiencing the time period of the play. Likewise, Chef and Akil believe that theatre gave students a sense of consciousness as African-Americans. During the focus group, China expressed that theatre made her more cultured. It exposed students to different ways of life.

According to Georgia, many of the youth at Metro High School had a concern for what was going on in the world. The shows they did instilled a sense of social responsibility. It gave them a strong desire to help others. Even as adults, she feels that urge to help others is at work as many of them are doing the type of work that helps people. Georgia feels that one particular play enlightened her and gave her a sense of passion in terms of having concern for issues going on in African countries. The play, titled, *Soweto, Soweto, Soweto, A Township is Calling*, dealt with the issue of apartheid in South Africa. She portrayed a South African girl who has been beaten and abused by the police for no other reason than being Black.

Angela is a first-generation college graduate. Due to her experience at Metro, she aims to be a trend-setter and a leader among her peers and her family. Now that she has acquired higher education, she feels responsible for uplifting those around her.

Lloyd's liberating experience after listening to a song in class changed his outlook on life. He says, "Hey, no matter how bad you're hurting right now, there's somebody out there that's hurting a lot worse." Because of that learning experience, he lives day to day to encourage others. He even uses his skills as an actor to make them laugh or take their minds off their hurt. Lloyd is also vocal about telling his friends when they are taking themselves through unnecessary changes.

Though Kenny graduated high school about 15 years ago, he continues to go back and assist with productions. He says, "I love giving back and helping. I love going back to help teach what I've learned—teach my experiences and things of that nature to younger actors." Kenny believes reaching back is important. He remembers people taking time to share with him. He says, "I mean, that's engrained in most of us African-

Americans. That how we—how we remembered our ancestors and how we remembered our elders, our grandparents. They would tell us stories about how it was back in the days...and it helps keep the legacy of the program.”

Clinton attributes his sense of social responsibility to Metro High school’s theatre program. He desires to be a positive influence to others, to help others become independent, free and creative thinkers. Today he sees himself as a person who now has the ability to influence many people.

Chef notes that some of the theatre program graduates come back to support the school. They come back and share their experiences with the young people. He himself has come back to share several times over the years. He believes coming back to share makes the program stronger. Akil also regularly goes back to assist with productions, and periodically works with the dance department on projects. Akil says he enjoys pushing kids beyond their comfort zone. Metro High School implanted a norm of excellence in him, and he seeks to instill the value of excellence in the students who now attend the school.

Theatre impacted the former Metro High School theatre students’ self-actualization and transcendence needs. Data revealed that the overarching theme is that they are ever-growing and evolving. During the interviews, they spoke of wanting to reach higher heights in their careers and personal lives. No matter how many goals they accomplish, they always feel there is room to grow. Additionally, participants report feeling responsible for helping others. For example, Akil, Chef and Kenny often go back to Metro High School to work with the students.

Research Question 5

The fifth, and final research question set out to discover how, if at all, theatre addressed life skills. Life skills are generally defined as the ability to cope with the challenges and responsibilities of life (dictionary.com, n.d.). Work ethic, etiquette, communication and problem-solving skills are some examples. Five major themes emerged from this research question: (1) hard work; (2) social skills; (3) persevering and overcoming; (4) career training and (5) doing what you love.

Hard Work

Georgia, like the other participants, recognized that there were a lot of talented kids at Metro High School. Seeing that talent reminded her that she is good, but there is always someone just as good or better. For this reason, she came to value hard work.

Bria feels that hard work is what makes one great. She believes hard work is the key to being a successful artist. Bria firmly asserts that once she stops working hard, someone will surpass her. She learned the value of hard work as a Metro High School student.

When Dana entered Metro High School as a sophomore, she noticed how hard everyone worked on productions. She quickly learned that even high school productions take a lot of work. She said, “My mom had to learn to deal with the, you know, rehearsals till one o’clock in the morning.” She recalls rehearsals all throughout the week, and even on Saturdays.

The show that truly taught her the value of hard work was *Dark of the Moon*. When the show first started, she had one line, but as time progressed, she ended up with about 13 lines. She says, “That showed me that if you really just work your butt off and

actually show them that you are there for a reason, things can happen.” She also learned the value of hard work while playing a lead character in *Schoolhouse Rocks*. She remembers messing up and feeling like she had to work hard to correct her mistakes. She says, “After that first show where I messed up, I practiced my butt of everyday and I didn’t lose my note again.” Additionally, she says, “So I learned to believe in myself and that even if I messed up, I got to dust myself off and just go back out there.”

The data revealed that one common trend among Metro High School students is that they recognized each other’s talent. Alana learned the value of hard work very early on as a theatre student. She and some other students were in a play production class in which they had to perform Shakespearean monologues. Alana remembers doing horribly with the monologue while her classmates excelled at it. One classmate encouraged her by saying, “You’ll get better. Just give it time.” Alana says her heart soared and fell at the same time, but she said to herself, “I got to get better. I got to do this.” As a result of this experience, Alana worked hard and acquired a sense of discipline and focus. The hard work eventually paid off because she ended up working for a Shakespearean theatre company.

Previously, it was revealed that most of the participants feel limitless. Clinton’s sense of limitless stems from a firm belief that work ethic makes it possible for one to achieve anything. He does not associate hard work with theatre only; hard work is the key to any task: household work, working on cars, etc. Clinton was a cast member of *Godspell*, one of the school plays Metro High School put on in the 1990s. It was a ten-person cast, and the actors had to work hard on stage. Everyone was on stage for the

entire production; they had to constantly act and stay in character. He learned how to be “on.” “You have to be on your game,” Clinton adds.

A crowning moment for Akil as well as the other focus group participants was building the set for *A Raisin in the Sun*, which was performed at a one-act play competition. Alana also spoke fondly of this same task. There were only about eight actors in the show, but a large group of students were responsible for putting up a house in a matter of 42 seconds. At the end of the play the set had to be taken down in 30 seconds. Everyone had a responsibility and fully executed it. To this day, participants describe the experiences as “amazing.” Akil saw it as a moment of everyone working toward one great goal.

According to Akil, the instructors encouraged students to do everything to the max. Actors had to give “200%” in rehearsal and performances. They had to have a certain level of respect for the craft, and that respect was shown by doing one’s best. There was no such thing as half-doing anything; everything had to be done “full out.” The notion of hard work has transferred into his adult life, as he does everything “full out.” He is “full out” as a husband, father and teacher.

Social Skills

Georgia learned in high school that talent is not everything. Having a likeable personality and traits that attract people is important. She feels that talent alone is not enough; one should have the type of personality that encourages others to want to work with you.

Angela, the educator, spoke frequently about how the program developed her social skills. Doing shows helped her to bond with other students, but also taught her to

be tolerant of others. While spending long hours rehearsing with people, she learned patience and tolerance. Of course, she uses social skills in order to be a successful educator.

Lloyd, who was once very closed off to people, learned social skills as a theatre student. For most of his life, he was alone as he did not have brothers or sisters. Cousins and other relatives lived out of town. Through theatre, he learned how to read people. When he met individuals, he could pick on what kind of people they were. From there, Lloyd learned how to interact with them.

Kenny's first time on stage was when he did *Dreamgirls*, the school's spring production. That show taught him a lot about working with others in order to create a great production. *Dreamgirls* required a high level of teamwork, as it consisted of many musical acts, costume changes, set changes, lighting cues, etc. Everyone had to work cooperatively to make the show a success. In life, Kenny has observed that there are some people in the world who feel entitled to success as if they are the only ones who deserve it. However, he says, "And I learned that in order for anything to function, it functions with people, with a village, community." He feels that the work is so much more fulfilling when you can sit and laugh and talk with the people you work with. He says, "If we're in here and we're enjoying each other and we're having a good time, the show will be amazing no matter what it is."

Initially, Alana described her teen self as "socially stilted and handicapped." She attributes her social growth to the encouragement and acceptance from her peers. Alana saw the value of social skills and teamwork firsthand when she worked tech for a one-act play competition. Everyone had their responsibilities, whether playing a lead role,

playing a supporting role, hanging a picture or moving a set piece. According to Alana, “But it was just like that kind of accountability and responsibility towards teamwork...So having those opportunities to be a part of something, even when you’re not the star, there’s a lesson in that too.”

Persevering and Overcoming

During his sophomore year, John faced the challenge of going out for a role people felt he could not do. The directors tried very hard to cast him as the character Daniel, the love interest of the main character. However, John had his sights on a different character, Papa Ge, the god of Hate. Whoever landed this role had to be wild, daring and have the ability to hit high notes. He said this was the first time he had to overcome people’s perceptions of him as a performer. He was perceived as an actor who would not be able to deliver strong vocals; he was up against a young man from the chorus. In spite of the doubts, John insisted that they give him a chance. One day in chorus class, a teacher decided to give him a shot. To everyone’s dismay (including his own), John was able to hit what he called “all kinds of crazy high notes.” John says getting into character helped him to hit the notes. That was the day he learned that characterization goes a long way.

He ended up getting the role. However, getting the role did not end his worries about people’s perceptions of him. He says he would go to the sides of the stage to practice his role, and he would hear people laughing and whispering because of the weird things he was doing. It made him feel insecure, but he continued working. He said, “And then—but I remember constantly telling myself, “They’ll see . . . Just wait until they see.” And of course, they did see. That experience helped him to overcome adversity.

Just as John overcame being young and small as a teen, he overcame that same obstacle when he auditioned for Quentin Tarrantino's *Django Unchained*. This film highlighted the life of an African American slave (portrayed by Jamie Foxx) who went on a quest to find his wife (portrayed by Kerry Washington), who had been sold away to another plantation. John says he did not necessarily fit the profile of what Tarrantino was looking for. Most of the men cast in the movie were over six-feet tall with a muscular build, as they had to portray robust slaves who worked in the fields and fought to the death. Parallel to his high school experience, John was able to earn a role in the film. His talent and perseverance compelled Tarrantino to create a role especially for him.

Lloyd's role in Metro High School was primarily behind the scenes. Therefore, he does not speak a lot about having to overcome people's doubts of him as a performer. His situation was unique in that the tragic loss of a close friend pervaded his whole life. He had built up a wall and was hurting on the inside because he had not found a way to deal with the hurt. He says one day in theatre class, the teacher played a song. He says:

It just completely broke me down. Because a year before I had lost my best friend in a car accident. And I never really dealt with it. So for years, for years, I blamed myself for this death because I wasn't there at least just—just to be there, you know, to get him out of the way of that car. So. It—it really broke me down.

Lloyd does not remember the name of the song, but he remembers the impact it had on him. He says, "And it just spoke to me in such a way that—let it go. Been holding this in for too long, let it go." He says he tried hard to not let it go. He wanted to keep it inside, but the song spoke to him. From that moment forth, he says he has been free. It still hurts to think about his friend's death, but it no longer controls his life. Letting it go

to a certain extent felt liberating. Lloyd believes that if he had not let go that day, he would still be angry, depressed and closed off to everyone.

Again, Alana's life was not as stable during her high school years, so she had to persevere and overcome in many ways. For her, life was hard, but "after enrolling in theatre, it compelled me to make hard choices, like riding the bus or train to get to rehearsals or to stay after school late because I wasn't going to get a ride. It grew me up in a lot of ways that I felt like I had some control over." Alana came from a large family that often moved from place to place. When Alana started attending Metro High School, she thought she had found a sense of stability, and then one day her mother informed her that the family was moving out west.

Alana reluctantly went with her family, but after a short time, she told her mom she had to go back to Metro High School. As a result, she left her mother and moved back to live with her aunt in Riverdale, GA. She did not have the luxury of a car or having someone to drive her around. Therefore, each morning Alana would get dropped off at the train station, ride the train, catch a bus and then walk the rest of the way to school. She would then stay at school for late rehearsals and take the long journey back home by herself, sometimes as late as 11:30 at night. Alana felt like theatre was worth it. She found something she loved, and was willing to sacrifice to keep it in her life. When looking back on her experience, Alana said:

I just think that if kids now had something that they were willing to fight that hard for, to work that hard for, they should, you know? . . . And the beauty of living, you know you can tough it out. You can handle life if you can—if you can make

tough decisions as a kid—and—and make it happen. Like you're—you're more prepared for the world.

Clinton learned about perseverance and overcoming through themes in plays. About *The Wiz* (an African-American adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz*), he said, “. . . the play kind of became like a part of my life in a lot of ways. . . you learn how to dream and imagine . . . so you learn how to—how to go after something that you want.” He also notes that the protagonists (Dorothy, Tin Man, Scarecrow and the Lion) dealt with adversaries or what he calls “negative energies.” However, a group of people got together, and although they had different agendas, they decided to work together. They decided, “Hey, if we go down—if we go down this road together, then we could make it a lot easier on ourselves.”

China believes Metro High School helped her to develop a thick skin. There were times when students had to come to the realization that they wouldn't get every role in the plays. They had to learn to keep going in spite of rejection. Chef learned that you will not always be liked. There were times when he was disliked because of his talent. There were also times when the students faced racism. When Chef spoke about the racism experiences, it brought up memories of facing discrimination at one act competitions. Every year the theatre department would go to Perry, GA for competitions, and no matter how good the plays were, Metro could never take first place. Many of the focus group participants remembered how hurtful those experiences were, but each year they went to competition determined to persevere in spite of the racism.

Career Training

Each participant believes the theatre program was instrumental in preparing them for their careers. Even those who did not become actors maintain that the skills they learned in theatre transfer to their jobs.

John remembers performing in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as a high school senior. That year he developed an appreciation for Shakespeare's language and began learning Shakespearean monologues. Once John was accepted into Julliard, he was delighted that the very first project he did was a Shakespeare piece. Because he had prior knowledge of Shakespeare's work and language, he earned a great deal of respect from the school.

John's training at Metro High School not only made him a candidate for Julliard, but a great candidate for an acting career. His acting career entails performing with local theatre companies, Off-Broadway plays, television movies such as *Newlyweds*, *Night Catchers* and *Django Unchained*, working closely with playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, and TV series such as *Law and Order*. He credits Metro High School for setting the foundation for his career.

Georgia's career as a performer is very demanding. Every day for her is eventful. She calls her busiest days "Beyonce' days" because she has a lot of places to be, and each place requires a different look. On "Beyonce' days" she packs a "diva" bag, which consists of clothing, shoes, sheet music, hair pieces, make up and a magazine to read on the subway. Calmer days consist of being in an all-day rehearsal for a performance. Either way, Georgia was already accustomed to these types of days because of her high school years. Students would get to school at 8:40; the school day ended at 3:40. Then,

after school theatre would last from 4:00-5:30, and from there she would go to rehearsals for a professional theatre group she performed with outside of school. Those rehearsals would last from 6:00 until 9:00 or later.

As a youth, Georgia reports paying very close attention to the way the theatre teachers handled business and directed shows. Her fascination with the entertainment industry started as a teen. Metro High School decided to perform *The Wiz* for a one-act play competition, and Georgia remembers being intrigued by how the director made cuts to shorten the show while still making an impact on the audience. It was then that the producer in her was awakened. During shows, she also paid attention to how the tech crew, cleaning people, actors, directors, etc. worked together to make a production work. To date, she is author of a blog that features articles about the industry.

Overall, Georgia believes her experience in high school was influential on the quality of life she lives today. While performing in *The Wiz* in high school, she learned there are no small parts. Although she was not the lead, she learned that her part was important. The character she played only spent a little time on stage, so this prepared her for being on stand-by in Broadway shows. Initially, she was understudy, but with patience and a positive attitude, she ended up having her own role in *Wicked* on Broadway.

Bria feels that her time at Metro High School prepared her for her current acting career. As a teen, she developed a drive, humility and competitiveness because all of her peers were so talented and determined to be the best. They pushed her to ask how she can stay at the top of her craft or what can make her stand out in a room of people who are

auditioning for the same role. She feels that she now has an edge because of her training in high school.

Bria says the experience at Metro High School was humbling and is currently helping her as a professional actor. As a teen, she was not the star of any shows, but it made her work harder. She realized that in order to become the star, she would have to figure out what makes her unique and capitalize on it. For her, there is still a long way to go, and others things she seeks to accomplish. She says, "I'm constantly pushing for something bigger and better." Similar to John and Georgia, she sees herself as an artist and wants to explore her artistry. She also credits the theatre teacher with introducing her to a different side of theatre she had never experienced. Learning about technical theatre and Andrew Lloyd Webber helped her in college.

Dana, who now works primarily as a costume designer, believes Metro High School is where her talent for costuming began. During her senior year, she made costumes from scratch for the spring production. She remembered saying, "I want to actually do costumes. I don't want to just like go to the closet and assign stuff, I want to actually learn how to design." As a result, there were teachers who took her under their wing and provided guidance.

As an educator, Angela uses the skills she learned in theatre. She says you will lose the children's attention if there is ever a dull moment. Her teaching style incorporates theatre and entertainment in a sense. She says, "...and you have to have great speaking skills and be able to wear different hats and play different roles." Angela wears these different hats when communicating with parents, students and administrators. Wearing different hats is a skill she learned in school through studying characters,

studying lines, focusing and working on speeches. With these skills, she is able to effectively deliver instruction and presentations to students or colleagues.

Kenny gives the instructors at Metro High School credit for teaching focus and discipline. The same focus and discipline he acquired as a teen benefits his acting career: “And if you’re distracted by everyday life and by other things that are happening, if you come in with a focus and a discipline to do your best and to give your best to the performance, then it makes everything so much brighter.”

Alana has had a fruitful acting career, but it has been full of ups and downs and disappointments. However, experiences at Metro High School taught her how to deal with let-downs. This is what she says about her encounter:

I really wanted to be Beneatha. I worked on the auditions. I worked my butt off and um did not get it. Cindy got it instead...I was assigned stagehand responsibilities...which I took seriously as well. But my little heart was broken and I went home and cried about it.

Looking back on this situation, Alana calls it a learning experience: “You don’t win them all. You might not win a lot of them. But the way you handle it is what makes a class act or not.” It inspired her to improve and keep moving. The life-lessons acquired at Metro High School helped her to deal with the disappointments that sometimes come along with being a professional actor. She recalls getting a lot of work when she first moved to New York, and then going through a “drought” in which it became hard to get work. Lessons from high school help her to cope with everyday life as an actor.

As a high school senior, Clinton was casted in *Dreamgirls*, the school’s spring production, which taught him about show business. As a working musician, he can now

see the characters in people he encounters on a daily basis: slick-talking dudes, control freaks, those trying to make it. Clinton believes *Dreamgirls* “flashes reality in your face.” One of the largest lessons he learned is, “You can be that magnanimous star [superstar]...but there’s a price to be paid from it.” For example, he speaks of meeting people who will stab you in the back to get what they want.

While many of the study’s participants became actors, dancers, singers and performers, Kris works as an animal lab technician. However, she is a ministry leader in her church. She oversees the praise team and directs the choir. Chris uses skills gained from Metro High School to enhance the church’s youth ministry. She is instrumental in helping to write and direct the Easter plays. She also encourages those in the ministries to write their own plays and music.

China uses the skills attained at Metro High School in her career as a family law attorney. Theatre helps her to be spontaneous instead of trying to follow a script. She can make changes in the moment to be more effective in communicating.

Chef, who is a chef and school nutritionist, uses dramatic skills when he is creating culinary masterpieces. He sees his creations just like characters. He equates the main dish to the main character and the side items as supporting characters; the sauce represents the special touches the director puts on the play. He has done various auditions for cooking shows, and uses his skills for wowing judges. Chef also caters events and is often in contact with clients. When preparing for meetings with clients, he often draws upon the old days in high school when students engaged in articulation exercise to get ready for performances. He finds himself doing those exercises to work on pronunciation before meeting clients.

Herbe is an outgoing, highly skilled and educated woman who has for now, chosen to be a homemaker. Her job now consists of taking care of her two children and managing her home. Without theatre, she believes she would not be as happy a homemaker as she is now. She uses her theatre background to produce her web series, which is a fictitious comedy about the life of a wife/homemaker with two children. As producer, she writes and creates the storyline for each episode. The everyday events of being a homemaker become a part of her script. For example, children having tantrums and crying in the grocery store becomes a part of the narrative. Being a former theatre student gives creative license to make real-life a part of the act.

Liz was not necessarily drawn to acting on stage, but she fell in love with the business side. Today she works as an Executive Assistant at a college for the arts. Exposure to theatre has allowed her to become a chameleon. She is able to relate to the various students and their art, whether design, fashion, music or theatre.

Doing What You Love

Georgia draws upon her experience at Metro High School as a reminder to work for the love of it. She has also learned to value her own opinion and to find joy in creating art she likes. For her, other people's reaction is not what brings joy.

Bria says, "You know, it's a lot of heartache, but there also is a lot of joy; even in my darkest moments in this business, I don't think I would be happy doing anything else." She is confident she made the right career choice. Even when she is not performing, she stays connected to theatre by teaching classes or taking small gigs here and there. Bria says if she did not stay close to theatre, "I would be a very unhappy person."

Dana is happy with her life as it is today. She has enjoyed every experience. Had it not been for the experience at Metro High School, she says, “I would not be me at all. I have no idea who I would be if I didn’t go to Metro High School. I’d be some boring housewife somewhere.”

Alana now feels like a whole person and feels good to know she has built a life doing what she loves to do. She admits it is easy to get side-tracked by making a living and getting the role. However, she is now remembering why she became an actor—for the love of it: “You forget why you started it... You forget those moments of fun. You forget the joy you once found in it. And it becomes like a task—and nerve-racking... And I think I’m getting to a place in the last year or two... I’m embracing the joy again.”

Alana’s mind flashed back to third grade when she saw her very first play, *The Wiz*. As a small child, she thought she could only dream of being a performer. However, coming to Metro High School showed her that dreams can become reality. The theatre program made her realize that even young teenagers can live out their dreams of being actors. The dream of being an actor was fulfilled for her a teen, and continues to be carried out in her adult life.

When Alana graduated from Metro High School, she was clear about what she wanted to do with her life—be an actor. However, her aunt, who had been her guardian, wanted her to major in Early Childhood Education. In hindsight, she realizes her aunt wanted her to get a good education and be able to support herself. Instead, Alana majored in theatre—for two years her aunt thought she had majored in education. When reflecting on this experience, Alana said, “Do I want to live an amazing life or do I want to live,

you know, somebody else's vision in my life?" Alana chose to do what she loves and has no regrets about her decision.

Clinton has learned how to strike a balance between his "day job" and doing what he loves. For the past few years, he has worked a job that allows him the flexibility of doing his work as a musician. He says, "As far as my career that I love—I'm largely, primarily a trumpet player." Clinton plays music genres, such as jazz, folk, funk, soul, hip-hop." Clinton is doing all the things he grew up learning as a performer. Since high school, he has taken on roles such as actor and musical director: "It's all just a combination of everything that I love to do."

As a former corporate worker, and currently as a homemaker, Herbe had forgotten about the joys of being creative. She now has a realization that she can return to doing what she loves. After being so caught up in work, she had lost a sense of herself and what she loved so much about life—being creative. Akil spoke of having a sense of peace or an ease in his spirit because he uses the gifts the creator gave him. He's found his place as a dancer/performer/teacher and he loves it.

One purpose of this study was to discover whether theatre education impacted participants' life skills. Data revealed that participants obtained five common life skills: (a) hard work; (b) social skills; (c) perseverance; (d) career training and (e) doing what you love. As theatre students, participants had to balance academics and performances. They often spent long days and nights rehearsing, which taught them the value of hard work. The nature of theatre is that students had to work with others in order to put together successful productions. Another life skill they gained was perseverance in the face of adversity. As teens, they sometimes faced the disappointment of not getting the

part in a play, or having others to doubt their abilities. Each of the participants gained career training from Metro High School. John, Kenny, Georgia, Akil, Bria, Dana, Clinton and Alana work in theatre and/or film. Others, such as China, Chef, Kris and Angela use theatre to benefit them in the workplace. These life skills benefited participants as youth and as adults.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate former students' perceptions of how theatre education impacted their life skills and psychological needs as teens and as adults. Participants were graduates of Metro High School, a performing arts school near Atlanta, GA. Participants chosen were at least eight years removed from high school, as they have now experienced life, but are still able to reflect back on their high school theatre experience. This chapter provides a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings and implications in light of literature and theory, limitations, practical implications and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Five research questions that derived from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence undergirded this study. The specific interview questions can be found in the appendices (See Appendix A, B and C). Participants revealed their perceptions via a focus group and a series of individual semi-structured interviews. This section provides an overview of the findings.

Below is an overview of the research questions and the themes that emerged in the data:

Research Question 1: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' needs for belongingness?* Themes that emerged from this research questions are:

- 1) *Outsiders.* Many participants felt like loners before becoming theatre students.

- 2) *Sense of Family*. After becoming theatre students, participants felt a sense of camaraderie and came to see the program as a second home. Though years have passed, many of them keep in touch and view each other as a support system.

Research Question 2: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' esteem needs?* Esteem needs involve self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Themes that emerged from this research question are:

- 1) *Gains in confidence, self-concept and accomplishments*. Many participants reported feeling lost or a having lack of direction before becoming theatre students. Furthermore, they did not have a strong level of self-awareness; many were trying to find themselves. The data revealed that participants gained a large amount of confidence as a result of participating in plays and receiving accolades from peers and teachers. Currently, all report feeling more confident than ever and feeling they have accomplished many goals.
- 2) *Finding Niches*. Some had no idea what their talents were. Others had talents, but no outlet to explore them. Theatre provided an avenue to discover talents and niches.
- 3) *Limitless and fearless*. As a result of having theatre teachers who made them believe they could do anything; they feel as if anything can be accomplished. As adults, the participants report having no limits or boundaries around the activities of their lives.

Research Question 3: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' cognitive and learning needs?*

Themes that emerged from this research question are:

- 1) *Staying in school and on task.* A few participants feel that theatre helped them to stay in school as opposed to getting into trouble or giving up on school.
- 2) *Discipline and Focus.* The program's instructor constantly taught the value of focus and discipline. Consequently, they learned that focus and discipline yielded greatness on and off stage.

Research Question 4: *How, if at all, did theatre education address students' self-actualization and transcendence needs?* Themes that emerged from this research question are:

- 1) *Ever-Growing and Evolving.* Participants feel they have accomplished many goals, but desire more growth. They see themselves going to the next level until they go as far as possible.
- 2) *Social Awareness and Responsibility.* As a result of performing plays centered on social issues, many participants now feel responsible for those in their community and the world.

Research Question 5: *What, if any life skills did students gain from participating in theatre education?* Themes that emerged from this research question are:

- 1) *Hard Work.* The data revealed that hard work was one of the core values of the theatre department. Participants recall working long days and nights preparing for productions.
- 2) *Social Skills.* Working with large and small groups of actors, dancers, singers, directors and choreographers developed their social skills. They had to learn to work cooperatively with various people in order to achieve the collective goal of having successful productions.

- 3) *Persevering and Overcoming*. Most participants spoke of facing some form of adversity, whether it was with themselves or with others. They had to figure out how to persevere through tough circumstances. That sense of perseverance helps them in their adult lives.
- 4) *Career Training*. Most of the participants work in some aspect of theatre such as teaching, musical theatre, dancing, producing, etc. Therefore, the program gave them training that is now helping them to be successful in their field. Those who did not pursue careers in the arts still use speaking, expression and creativity to benefit them on their jobs.
- 5) *Doing What You Love*. The final lesson learned and shared among most participants is that it is important to choose a career you love. Making the right career choice brings them joy and contentment.

Discussion of Findings

For the sake of investigating participants' perceptions, I conducted nine individual semi-structured interviews and one focus group consisting of six participants. Five research questions related to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Gardner's Multiple Intelligence and Goleman's Emotional Intelligences guided this study. Specific interview questions were derived from the research questions (See Appendix A, B and C). This section discusses the findings of this study in light of the literature and theoretical framework.

Belongingness

As it relates to belongingness, most participants recall feeling different, out of place, weird or like loners before becoming theatre students. Brym (2006) also noted

feeling out of place in his community due to his ethnicity. Theatre helped him to find a sense of belonging. Though Brym (2006) was different from his peers in theatre, they bonded because of a shared experience. Likewise, the welcoming experience at Metro High School caused many participants to feel a part of a group of people who understood them. Some of them mentioned how the presence of nurturing teachers and the camaraderie amongst peers made the program feel like a family or a second home. The former students were not only provided with a sense of belonging as teens, they formed friendships that continue on today. Not even distance, time, adulthood or life changes can eradicate the bond they formed so many years ago. Many of them still keep in touch and support each other's life endeavors.

Esteem

Prior to becoming theatre students, most participants had no sense of self or direction. They were simply kids going with the flow of life, with a low sense of self-awareness; they had no clear life path. A couple of participants noted having bad self-concept to the point of disliking themselves. Goleman (1995) argues that self-awareness is an important type of intelligence. Data from this study revealed that the theatre program at Metro High School developed Emotional Intelligence in students. Yee et al. (2005) argue that theatre evokes positive self-identity, helping students to figure out who they are how they fit into the world. Some participants in this study mentioned gaining positive self-identity as a result of being around like-minded people who celebrated their heritage and beauty.

Overall, participants possessed a low sense of their talents and abilities before going to Metro. For most, there was some hint of talent or longing to discover talent, but

the outlet was not available. Even those who had an outlet to use their talents report those outlets were not sufficient. As a result of the theatre program, participants gained opportunities to explore their talents and to find niches. Fiske (1999) affirms that the arts help young people to discover their talents. Additionally, the arts foster a lifelong journey of developing capabilities (Fiske, 1999).

Deci and Ryan (2000) posited that individuals who are involved in activities that are valued by others have positive esteem. Ruppert (2006) argues that theatre impacts self-esteem and motivation. This study affirms Ruppert's research, which is that theatre increased self-confidence and self-esteem in participants.

Additionally, data revealed that theatre caused them to feel confident and accomplished. Participating in productions, working tech, and being a part of a successful program gave them the esteem they once lacked. Brym (2006) reflected upon how being in theatre gave him a sense of notoriety. As a result of performing in plays, people came to know him for something positive. During the focus group, Akil mentioned how "cool" he felt as a teen due to his involvement in theatre. He recalls people at church being impressed by the work he was doing in the theatre. Akil's experience is similar to Brym's (2006) as he also felt theatre boosted his social status.

As adults, the participants feel even more accomplished, and accredit their current success to the foundation set at Metro High School. Theatre instilled in them the belief that anything can be accomplished with effort and hard work. Many of them feel limitless, uninhibited and fearless in life. This study affirms Ruppert's (2006) findings in her argument that arts education's benefits transfer into adulthood.

Cognitive Development

From a cognitive standpoint, data revealed that theatre education encouraged them to learn and helped them to make sense of the world. Similar to Boal (1979), Metro High School students were engaged in activities that challenged them to explore social realities. According to Conrad's (2004) study based on Boal's (1979) model, students explored topics such as AIDS, suicide, violence, injustice and alcoholism. Along those same lines, Metro High School students explored issues such as racism, classism, apartheid and child abuse. As a result, they became socially conscious and eventually felt a sense of social responsibility. The DICE Consortium (2010) reports that students exposed to theatre felt more obligated to help others. Catterall and Dumais (2012) found that students involved in the arts tend to volunteer and take on civic duties. During this study, about half of the participants discussed how they volunteer at Metro High School or how take time to give back to the community.

A few participants felt strongly that theatre motivated them to stay on task and in school. They knew that making satisfactory grades and attending school is what kept them in the program. Catterall et al. (1999) found that students involved in the arts are less likely to drop out of school and they performed better in other subjects. Ashford (2004) conducted a study that discovered that the arts motivated disengaged students to attend school.

Furthermore, Moran et al. (2006) argue that theatre fosters intrapersonal skills that allow students to discover areas in which they are skilled and to take ownership of it for the sake of becoming successful. Many of the subjects from Metro High School discussed

the journey of discovering their talents and using them to their advantage. In this sense, students learned to take ownership of their learning.

Additionally, the program helped them to make sense of the world and imparted a certain level of social consciousness. The director's choice of topics made them privy to issues going on in the world and gave them the desire to be agents for social change. According to the DICE Consortium (2010), theatre fosters a sense of social responsibility in students.

Focus and discipline emerged as a major theme in this research. Participants reported that those two words (focus and discipline) resonated during high school and carried over into their adult lives. Michael Posner (2009) argues that when youth participate in an art form that captures their interest, their brains' ability to pay attention strengthens. As a result, overall cognition strengthens (Posner & Patoine, 2009). According to Posner (2009), the brain has a system of pathway allotted for attention. Training those parts of the brain improves intelligence. Therefore, researchers have concluded that if children train in their preferred art frequently and authentically their cognition improves (Posner, 2009). This neurological study explains how Akil, one of the participants, who has ADHD, was able to focus in theatre education.

It can be implied that one will be successful at an art he or she enjoys. Posner (2009) asserts that those who find an art that "works" for them—experiences an igniting of passion that wholeheartedly engages them. When they stick to the art, there are noticeable improvements in learning and memory (Posner, 2009). As adults, the participants report having a high level of satisfaction and success because they chose a career path they love. The implication here is that kids do well in school when they

engage in activities they like. Likewise, adults may also thrive by choosing a career that fulfills them.

Self-Actualization and Transcendence

In terms of self-actualization and transcendence, participants were impacted by the theatre program. The data confirmed that being in theatre puts the students on a path to self-actualization; they have a strong yearning to reach their fullest potential. No matter how much they accomplish in their career and personal life, there is a desire to do more, and more. Their innate desire to do more is explained by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). Human beings have a need to reach their fullest potential (Gorman, 2010). Kayaoglu (2011) argues that theatre motivates students to reach their fullest.

Additionally, some participants spoke of feeling a sense of duty and responsibility to others, whether it be giving back to Metro High School or tackling racism in the world. According to the DICE Consortium (2010), theatre students have moral competence and are socially responsible—having the ability to tap into the human experience and having concern for others. Maslow describes this condition as transcendence, in which one takes on a calling or vocation outside of one's self (Gorman, 2010).

Life Skills

Participants took many life skills away from Metro High School. The life skills they acquired fall under the umbrella of Emotional Intelligence (i.e. social competence, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills) and Multiple Intelligences (i.e. independence and managing emotions).

The value of hard work is a theme that emerged. Long days in school taking classes and practicing late into the night gave them a strong work ethic and sense of

responsibility that carried over into their adult lives. Herbe, one of the focus group participants, discussed how the theatre program caused students to gain a high level of maturity. China agreed and reflected on how she was given many duties to perform at home, at school and in the theatre program. Alana also felt that theatre forced her to grow up in a sense, as she had to fend for herself in order to stay in the program. Along that line, Kayaoglu (2011) asserts that theatre education develops maturity in young participants. Likewise, China felt that theatre education made the students more mature.

Persevering and overcoming is a life lesson many learned through the disappointments and challenges they faced while enrolled in the theatre program. Some faced criticism and rejection, while others had to overcome family issues. Either way, they learned to persevere and overcome. Gardner (1995) asserts that perseverance is a vital form of intelligence. Brym (2006) learned how to deal with adversity through a school play. Not only did he personally face adversity, but the character he portrayed also faced some challenges. Likewise, Clinton, one of the interviewees in this study, spoke discussed how he took a valuable lesson about overcoming from *The Wiz*, and adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Most of the participants are now actors, singers, dancers and performers. The pedagogy at Metro High School gave them hands-on training that makes them fierce competitors in show business. Because they went to school with some of the most talented kids in the city, they learned early on how to stand out and be competitive. Those who did not take on acting careers report that speaking, communication and acting skills benefit them in the work place as well. The DICE Consortium (2010) reports that theatre

education provides skills in the areas of speaking and creativity, which is vital in the work place.

The NGA Center for Best Practices (2002) released an article titled *The Impact of Arts Education on Workforce Preparation*. Similar to my study, the NGA study found that arts education provides immediate benefits to youth, such as better academic performance, higher attendance and acquisition of skills. It also found that disadvantaged populations benefit the most as they are found to have lower relapse into crime, increased self-esteem, attainment of job skills, creative thinking skills, problem-solving and communication skills (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2002). The NGA study revealed that the arts provide an outlet for youth to gain competencies needed to be successful as teens and adults as they become self-supporting, rather than being a financial liability to their communities (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2002).

Social skills also emerged during the research phase. Participants learned how to work well with others in order to achieve success and balance. The students at Metro High School often had to collaborate in order to put together productions, and so it taught them that everyone's part is important, and everyone's cooperation is essential. Larson and Brown (2007) conducted a study, which found that students developed social skills by working with others in theatrical productions. Students had to learn how to communicate and collaborate with fellow cast members.

Emotional Intelligence is now seen as a foundation for developing an individual's potential in all areas. Social skills are closely linked to EI. Here again one can see the link to EI in this definition:

“it’s a set of skills that enables us to make our way in a complex world—the personal, social and survival aspects of overall intelligence...it has to do with the ability to read the political and social environment, and landscape them; to intuitively gasp what others want and need, what their strengths and weaknesses are; to remain unruffled by stress; and to be engaging, the kind of person that others want to be around. (Vanderpool, 2001, p. 6)

Vanderpool (2001) asserts that theatre is an effective tool for building individuals’ Emotional Intelligence. This above quote is significant because it reflects back to the Georgia’s strong belief that one can only be successful if she or he can work well with others and be someone that others want to work with. She attributes her current success to learning the value of working with people, from the director, to the cleaning lady, to her fellow actors. This quote also validates Lloyd’s claim that theatre education helped him to become more attuned to himself and others. He is now able to “read” people and tell how he should relate to them.

According the DICE Consortium (2010), theatre education develops social competence. The Arts Education Partnership (2012) posited that Arts education fosters tolerance and social skills and eliminates negative perceptions of others. Likewise, the participants in this study spoke of gaining tolerance of others.

Larson and Brown’s study (2007) revealed that students learned how to manage their emotions over the course of putting on a production. Lloyd, one of the participants in my study spoke a great deal about how theatre taught him how to manage his emotions. As has already been discussed, he was on the wrong path before attending

Metro High School. Goleman (2008) argues that at-risk students experience the highest growth in EI as a result of being in theatre education programs.

The final life lesson participants took away from Metro High School is to do what you love. As high school students, they performed for the sheer love of it. The program allowed them to be creative, and to be creators of their own art. Though grueling and uncomfortable at times, their experience was fun. As adults, many of them have honed back to their high school days as a reminder to live life doing what brings them joy.

This study sought to understand whether theatre had an impact on participants' psychological needs and life skills. Throughout the literature review, many studies focused on how theatre education benefited young students. On the other hand, Kayaoglu (2011) focused on how theatre benefited young adult students. However, this study is significant because it bridges the gap between youth and adulthood. Through the findings of this study, I discovered the positive impact theatre had on participants as teens and as adults. This study implies that theatre's benefits reach far beyond childhood and transcends into adulthood.

Limitations

This study provides evidence that theatre education has a positive impact on students' life skills and psychological needs. Additionally, this study implies that the impact continues on into adulthood and causes them to live more productive lives. However, this study has its limitations. One limitation is the fact that the study focuses on one group of people with somewhat similar backgrounds and demographics. Participants were all students between 1991 and 2004; therefore, most of them experienced Mr. Jones,

the theatre instructor. The similarities limit the range of perspectives that could have been captured had the study utilized more diverse participants.

It could also be argued that the participants of the study are those who are most passionate about theatre; therefore, one could conclude that the participants would naturally have positive perceptions about the program. One lingering question is: “Could it be that there are more perspectives I did not capture? Could those perspectives have changed the results of this study?” However, as a researcher I can only collect data from those willing to participate.

Participants were eight or more years removed from high school, making it difficult for them to gain access to the artifacts. For those who lived out of town, getting artifacts was not feasible. Even those who reside in Atlanta had challenges locating artifacts from their parents’ attics, basement and storage. This method of the data collection would have offered invaluable information. Unfortunately, it did not manifest as I had hoped it would.

Another limitation is that the study did not ask participants about their socio-economic status (SES). Some of the literature highlighted in this study addressed the notion that low-income and/or at-risk students benefited from theatre education. The omission of SES in this study brought forth a missed opportunity to explore the implications of how theatre impacted students’ with high versus low SES.

Implications

Theatre Education has a Positive Impact on Minority Children

One implication of this study is that theatre education is highly beneficial for minority children, particularly African-Americans who take an interest in it. Some of the

participants report that theatre kept them in school, on task and out of trouble. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, only 46% of African American high school students in Georgia graduate within four years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

Research shows that students who graduate from high school will make \$10,000 more annually than those who do not graduate. Dropouts from the class of 2008 alone will cost the state of Georgia an estimated \$15.5 billion in lost wages over their collective lifetime (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). If theatre education has the power to motivate certain students to stay in school and to graduate, it is worth the investment in our school systems. If we do not invest in our children now, society pays for it later.

In *No Child Left Behind and Arts Classes*, Tina Beveridge (2010) argues that marginalizing non-tested subjects creates a society in which economically disadvantaged individuals miss opportunities for a well-rounded education. With such a system, only the affluent members of society have access to the arts. She argues that it widens the achievement gap as opposed to closing it.

More Theatre Programs are Needed in Schools

While researching relevant literature on theatre, I found that children in underserved communities often do not receive access to arts education, including theatre. The participants in this study were underserved children who would not have had access to theatre education had it not been for Metro High School, which is classified as a Magnet Performing Arts School. A magnet school is one that accepts any and all students who audition and are accepted into its program regardless of if they live in the school's zone. Therefore, Metro High School was like a "diamond in the rough" that provided services to a small amount of underserved students. The students who are accepted are

fortunate. But what happens to the students who are not accepted or do not know about the program and end up at their neighborhood schools?

For example, Kris, one of the focus group participants indicated she would have given up on school if she had to go her neighborhood school. She would have had no outlet to explore her talents, and feels she would not be the person she is today without Metro High School. Akil felt strongly that he would have ended up selling “dope” had it not been for theatre. Again, what happens to the countless others who had untapped potential, and just needed an outlet?

Metro High School is one of few performing arts schools in the district. For this reason, students who are not accepted into such programs have limited to no access to theatre education. Schools, even those that are not performing arts centered should have a well-rounded Fine Arts department that offers not only music, but also theatre programs. For example, the middle school that feeds into Metro High School has a band, an orchestra and a chorus, but no theatre class. As a result, students who go to audition for theatre at Metro High School or other performing arts high schools have no training. On the other hand, children who take music classes begin gaining experience and finding their niche early in life.

Even if one assumes theatre is not important to a lot of people, it could mean the world to a few people. Those few people deserve opportunities to participate in activities that help them flourish. According to Posner (2009) “No single art form is interesting to all people, and some people may never warm up to any type of art” (p. 1). There is a scientific explanation for this phenomenon. A person’s appreciation of and ability in a particular art is to an extent influenced by genetics (Posner & Patoine, 2009). An

individual who can naturally discriminate tones and has a motor system that allows for finger control is more apt to play an instrument. Those who have agility and are able to imitate movement tend to latch on to sports and dance (Posner, 2009).

It is also important to note that it is not sufficient to only provide theatre as an extracurricular activity. Mike Huckabee, former Governor of Arkansas, said, “We need to make sure that people realize that an arts education is not extracurricular, it’s essential. It is an essential part of the complete education of every child” (Theatre Communications Group, 2005). Deputy Director of the Ford Corporation, Cyrus Driver affirmed that arts need be viewed as a standard component of high quality of education (Theatre Communications Group, 2005).

Theatre Education Develops Life Skills

Each participant in this study felt that theatre education prepared them for the real-world to an extent. In *How the Arts Help Children Create Healthy Social Scripts*, Liane Brouillette (2010) of the University of California argues that children need to learn more than reading, writing and multiplying to be successful adults. She argues that fundamentals such as social skills and building healthy relationships are essential. For her, the arts frequently require group-based tasks, such as dramatic play that teach children how to collaborate and cooperate with others.

According to Brouillette (2010), theatre education assists with cognition. Brouillette (2010) also found in her research that children exposed to theatre education found deeper meaning in reading materials. Acting out scenes invited them to explore the meanings of words, therefore leading to deeper comprehension. Kenny, one of the

participants, spoke about how theatre helped him to connect with scripts in such a way that he got in touch with the characters and their stories (Brouillette, 2010).

Brouillette (2010) says teachers noticed that acting exercises allowed students to discuss emotions and sensitive topics without feeling defensive or embarrassed.

Likewise, Lloyd, one of the participants, discussed how an exercise in theatre class caused him to experience a breakthrough moment that changed his life. He had been harboring depression and anger after the death of a close friend. He noted that his defenses were up, but the activity broke down his defense mechanisms, helping him to get in touch with his emotions.

Recommendations

Future Research

According to the Arts Education Partnership (2005) the goal is to make education purely evidence-based. Ruppert (2006) argues that research is critical to keeping the arts alive. Future research should examine the effectiveness of theatre programs from a variety of perspectives: current students that are both rich, poor and middle-class; adults who once took theatre; new theatre programs; old theatre programs; theatre educators, etc. Providing a well-rounded scope of theatre education is critical to its validity and survival.

There is a need for more studies conducted in the 21st century that address the benefits of theatre education. Such studies should provide a balance of qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data satisfies decision-makers who are driven by numbers, and qualitative data provides a name, a face and a story so people are not identified simply as numbers. One study that took on this massive undertaking was *Champions of*

Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning in 1999 (Arts Education Partnership, 1999). However, that was over 14 years ago. The DICE Consortium (2010), which I discuss in Chapter Two, is a comprehensive 2010 study. However, there should be other studies like it that can be used to confirm its findings.

As it pertains to this study, there are opportunities for further exploration. The data revealed that theatre education had an overall positive impact on students. However, the interview data implied that Mr. Jones, the theatre instructor enhanced their experience. Throughout the interview process, participants referenced Mr. Jones, so much so that one must pay special attention to the impact he had on students. Therefore, future research should investigate this question: Was the impact on students due to theatre itself, the theatre teacher, or a combination of both?

Next, this study focused on a group of African American students near a large metropolitan city. Future studies should execute the same research with diverse ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses and geographic locations. Such studies could determine whether theatre has the same impact on students in other contexts. Lastly, Akil's testament of how theatre assisted him in coping with ADHD lends itself to future research of how theatre education impacts students with special needs, from ADHD to behavior disorders, to autism.

Schools

This study only "scratches the surface" when it comes to investigating the impact theatre education has on students. Advocates of theatre education and people who have experienced it know its benefits. However, those who are not so convinced of its effectiveness in America's schools must be provided with large amounts of credible data

in order to buy into the notion that providing children with theatre education takes the nation one step closer to giving all children the well-rounded education need to be successful in school and in life.

According to Brown (2013):

The perception with most decision-makers is that the arts are just another area of studies like civics, foreign language and math. Instead, we need to help superintendents, principals and school board members and other elected officials understand that the arts engage children in learning in ways that can be used by other disciplines as well as giving students a self-expressive voice. And they can be used by other curriculum areas because the arts are actually a means by which people learn. (p.1)

Additionally, America's educational system is constantly shifting, so up-to-date studies are needed to show that theatre was useful in the 19th and 20th century, and is still relevant in the 21st century. John Wilson, former Executive Director for the National Education Association, says, "And I think what the arts do, is they actually parallel twenty-first century schools. And twenty-first century skills" (Theatre Communications Group, 2005, p. 1). American education is in flux. Fiske (1999) says, "In simplest terms, the reason is because America is in transition. We are a more diverse society facing daunting demands from global, social and technological innovation." (p.1)

Educators and schools who know the value of theatre education for children have to become advocates. Though the educational field is ever-changing, one fact remains: children benefit from the arts and humanities. No matter how many new theories emerge, schools have to hold on to that truth. I shared earlier in this study that I have always

struggled to stay employed as a theatre teacher. Fortunately, in August of 2012, I was offered a high school theatre teacher position. In May of 2013, I signed a contract to teach theatre for the 2013-2014 school year. However, my principal informed me that he and other administrators had to fight to keep my position full-time. The district tried to cut my position to half-time status due to a budget deficit. My principal argued that the program has been highly beneficial for students and that cutting the position would not be a wise decision. The voices of administrators, teachers, students, parents and community members can make a difference.

Epilogue

My lifelong passion for theatre ignited the quest to conduct this research. During my tenth grade year in high school, I became a member of the Metro High School theatre program. The experience transformed my life and gave me a deeper sense of purpose. In my personal bias, I believe the experience was phenomenal and unique. As a researcher, I wondered what value other former students perceived in the experience. Two years ago, I began the study of how theatre impacted former students' life skills and psychological needs. Though this qualitative case study did not require a hypothesis, the findings confirmed what I already knew: theatre has a positive impact on students' sense of belonging, confidence and life skills.

Reflecting back on the study, there are some aspects I would change. The original research design included three methods of data collection: individual interviews, a focus group and artifacts, such as pictures and yearbooks. The interviews and focus group provided rich data. However, participants were unable to produce artifacts, which resulted in lost opportunities for additional data. In hindsight, I should have overemphasized to participants the importance of finding artifacts. However, since participants were unable to access those artifacts, I could have arranged for the school's video production department to lend me copies of past productions as a source of data. Showing participants play footage during the interviews could have potentially sparked rich conversation about their experience in high school theatre.

What I learned from this study is that theatre education imparted life skills such as hard work, persevering and overcoming, career training and social skills. Theatre education also impacted students' confidence, sense of belonging and helped them to find

their niches. Furthermore, the data revealed that the impact of theatre education reached far beyond participants' high school years as it now transcends every aspect of their adult lives, from work, to family to how they relate to others. However, this study also implied that the theatre experience was enhanced by the teacher, Mr. Jones, with all of his unique sayings, values and teaching practices. Though Mr. Jones was not the focus of this study, his influence on students emerged during the interview process, so it must be acknowledged. In fact, the implication that he impacted students so deeply is worthy of further research.

Sharrell Luckett, who earned a doctorate in Performance Studies and was a former student of Mr. Jones, is currently researching his processes and methods as a theatre instructor. After training under his tutelage during high school and beyond, Luckett became interested in exploring his methods via scholarly research and publications. I have the honor of assisting her with this endeavor in writing a chapter that explores how spirituality converges with theatre to transform the whole student.

As a follow-up to the focus group and individual interview, I had the opportunity to delve a little deeper into participants' perspectives on Mr. Jones's influence. According to Akil:

He unlocked my greatness. At first I was a piece of coal, and he allowed me to know I was a diamond. I felt unique, weird. He helped me to be okay with being an artist, being comfortable in my own skin. He helped me love everything about me.

Georgia said, “I love [Mr. Jones]. His influence on my artistry and work ethic compares to none. I will forever be indebted to him and how he truly inspired my career in entertainment. I aim to be like him.” Angela said, “Working in the arts with [Mr. Jones] was a memorable and life-changing experience. It taught me discipline, increased my self-esteem and gave me freedom of expression. Herbe said, “The drama teacher had a huge effect on my love for the arts. He showed me that creativity is ever-flowing and able to change and empower the world.”

Liz, one of the quietest members in the focus group, had many words to speak about Mr. Jones:

[Mr. Jones] made a tremendous impact on my life. He taught me to believe in myself and not to compare myself to others. I think the biggest lesson that I learned from him was how to be more disciplined. I am forever grateful that our paths crossed and I know that I’m a better person because of the wisdom he shared with us as youth.

When thinking of Mr. Jones, John said:

[Mr. Jones] exposed me to the passion that drives an artist committed to the story he/she is telling. [Mr. Jones] also was the first teacher to demand a lot from me character wise. Through his use of ensemble, each individual actor was charged with telling their part of the story by being invested in and curious about the life that the actor was portraying no matter how “big” the role. This was my predecessor to formal script analysis which I learned in college.

Kenny credited Mr. Jones with his career path when he said:

I wouldn't be an actor if it weren't for him. He taught me to make acting real, to not put on airs. When it came to acting, he taught me to make it plain, simple and to give it everything you got. His technique was that you have to live the character to get it out there to the people. Mr. Jones was a teacher, mentor and father figure. He told us he loved us, not because he wanted to get something out of us, but because he meant it; he cared about us, our growth as a person. His impact is felt everywhere. People who have been touched by him are performing all over the world. People who never met him know his name because we talk about him so much.

Clinton spoke about the way Mr. Jones impacted the lives of students:

I don't have enough words to say about [Mr. Jones] and the way he and his vision impacted and continues to impact the lives of myself and thousands. He helped give direction-less children and young adults an outlet to express themselves in an artistic manner which allowed them to blossom into eclectic, freethinking, world-changing souls who not only seek to better themselves, the world around them. He teaches us compassion, dignity, tolerance, love and universal harmony through his vision. For Freddie, art isn't just about being seen by thousands of people for fame and wealth. It's about using your ability to make a positive difference in people's lives. I'm a far better person because I've known [Mr. Jones]. And I'm sure that all of my peers who know him can say the same thing.

There is value in researching Mr. Jones's methods, as the data could imply what makes an effective theatre teacher. Mr. Jones, with the help of other arts professionals,

reared hundreds of young African American students (some at-risk), most of whom, were successful in school and life. He has trained competent actors, singers, dancers, producers, musicians, Broadway stars, film actors, educators, etc., who are productive citizens in the world. Of course, future studies on Mr. Jones should specify the graduation rates, career paths and life paths of the students he taught as a means to measure the extent of his influence.

Most of the input from participants was overwhelmingly positive. However, there were four participants who felt there were some opportunities for growth. As it relates to social skills, one participant felt that he/she lacked social development due to being so immersed in the theatre. This participant wishes he/she had been encouraged to socialize more with students outside of theatre. Even as an adult, he/she reports having difficulties making personal connections with people.

Two participants communicated the idea that students who were not the top singers, dancers and actors did not receive equal treatment from Mr. Jones. Most participants felt a deep connection with him, but not all. One participant expressed that he/she wanted to have a deeper connection with him, but never felt that Mr. Jones embraced him/her on the level he/she desired. Though there was not a strong connection, he/she still admired the passion Mr. Jones brought to the program. The other subject felt that Mr. Jones often spent more time grooming and prepping those whose talents stood out from others. He/she wished Mr. Jones had spent more time nurturing all students as opposed to certain students. Lastly, one participant wished that Mr. Jones had exposed students to more classic works (such as Shakespeare) that are well-known in most theatre circles.

In spite of how participants personally felt about Mr. Jones, they still recognized the effectiveness of theatre education. These participants also acknowledged the value Mr. Jones brought to the program. One participant said:

Though I had a great experience at [Metro High School], I think the experience of being in theatre was most helpful insofar as how I connected with my peers. I saw them inspired and nurtured by [Mr. Jones], and that was valuable. But personally, I don't remember really having a real connection to him as a person. I wanted to, but I always felt like he was more connected to the breakout stars of the group. I love him because of how he manifested his vision and how I got to be a part of that, however minutely. I admired how he connected to and inspired others, and vicariously through them, how he inspired me. I cannot deny that I grew under the umbrella of his influence, but the direct influence wasn't from him, but from the youth, my peer group...if that makes any sense.

As a researcher, it was vital that I pay attention to those findings that do not necessarily glorify my study. Honestly reporting participants' true perceptions leaves space for reflection and even implies some ways that educators can improve the quality of theatre education. The overall take away from this study is that theatre education fused with passionate teaching impacted the lives of these participants. These young people felt loved and accepted as youth and have lasting relationships with people they met over a decade ago. They became confident in their abilities; the sense of confidence they gained as youth continues to fuel them as adults. Many participants feel that the experience helped them to find themselves; even more, they learned to love their true selves. Those who were at-risk or apathetic towards education became motivated to excel in school and

in life. A group of young people who lacked focus learned the value of starting and finishing a task with rigor. Hard work is a core value that has stuck with them through the years. As a result of being exposed to theatre education, there is a group of adults who are limitless, fearless and ready to take on the world with their gifts and talents. Once again, it is important to note that participants attribute their success, progress and accomplishments to their experience as theatre students. Their experience was shared, intimate and unique.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Participant Questionnaire/Screening Form

FORMER STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THEATRE IMPACTED LIFE
SKILLS AND ADDRESSED PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS.

Case Study Research for Completion of Doctoral Program

(Tia Shaffer Cowart)

Liberty University
(Department of Education)

PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE/SCREENING FORM

Basic Information

Name _____

Age _____

Contact Information

Telephone Numbers

Home _____

Cell _____

Work _____

Other _____

Email Address (most consistently checked) _____

Alternate Email Address _____

Eligibility

1. Were you ever enrolled in Metro High School's Theatre Department? (underline)

Yes or No

2. During what years were you enrolled in the theatre program? _____ to _____?

3. What instructor(s) taught you? (Include theatre, dance and music teachers you

worked with). _____

4. In what capacities/roles did you serve as a theatre student? (Circle the one that best fits your involvement):

- a. Tech
- b. Ensemble/Supporting Role
- c. Lead Actor/Principle Role
- d. Performance and Tech

5. List shows or projects you worked on during your time in the program:

Availability/Accessibility

- 1. Do you have access to a computer with Microsoft word software? Yes or No
- 2. Do you have an email account? (underline) Yes or No
- 3. Do you have internet access? (underline) Yes or No
- 4. Are you able or willing to commit to answering questions regarding your experience as a theatre student? (underline) Yes or No
- 5. The researcher will request that you participate in a face-to-face or Skype interview. A brief follow-up interview will be conducted via email if necessary. Will you have time to participate in this manner? (Underline)Yes or No
- 6. Do you have keepsakes such as photos, yearbooks, certificates, trophies, scripts, awards, programs, t-shirts, videos, letters, journals, etc. that relate to your experience as a high school theatre student? (Underline) Yes, No or Maybe

7. Do you live outside of the Atlanta area? (underline) Yes or No. If “ No”, skip #8 and move to the next section.

8. Would you be able to interview via telephone or Skype? (underline) Yes or No

Educational Background

Underline your highest level of education:

Some high school education

High School Diploma

Associates Degree

Bachelors Degree

Masters Degree

Doctorate

Other _____

Did you attend College (4-year, Technical or Vocational)? (underline) Yes or No

If “No” skip to the next section.

College _____

Major _____

Minor _____

Did you finish? Yes or No (circle one) If yes, when? _____

College _____

Major _____

Minor _____

Did you finish? Yes or No (circle one) If yes, when? _____

College _____

Major _____

Minor _____

Did you finish? Yes or No (circle one) If yes, when? _____

Occupation

Please fill in the information regarding your work experience during and after high school.

Employer

Type of Work/Industry

Job Title

Example: Macy's

Retail

Salesperson

Example: Fulton County Schools

Education

Teacher

In four sentences or less, briefly explain your overall impressions or thoughts about your experience as a Metro High School Theatre Student.

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

FORMER STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THEATRE IMPACTED LIFE SKILLS AND ADDRESSED PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS.

Case Study Research for Completion of Doctoral Program

(Tia Shaffer Cowart)

Liberty University

(Department of Education)

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Introductions: Name Game (say your name and do a movement that represents you. Other participants will imitate the movement).
2. Questions Circle: The facilitator poses a question and each person in the focus group answers the question.
 - a. What year did you graduate from Metro High School?
 - b. Who was your teacher?
 - c. Who was your principal?
 - d. What shows/projects did you participate in?
 - e. What was your favorite show/project?
 - f. What is one your fondest memories of being in theatre?
3. Free conversation: The facilitator poses a question, and participants may randomly answer if/when they want to.
 - a. Describe a day in your life as a theatre student.
 - b. How do you think your high school years would have been without theatre?
 - c. How do you think you life would be today if you had not been a theatre student?
 - d. What did you learn from the Metro High School Theatre Department?

- e. What did the Metro High School theatre program do for you as a teenager?
 - f. What is one thing about Metro High School you will never forget?
4. Please share any artifacts: letters, journals, trophies, awards, cards, programs, scripts, photos, videos, etc. that illustrate how theatre impacted your life as a teen or as an adult.

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview

FORMER STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THEATRE IMPACTED LIFE SKILLS AND ADDRESSED PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS.

Case Study Research for Completion of Doctoral Program

(Tia Shaffer Cowart)

Liberty University

(Department of Education)

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Self-Perception

1. How did you see yourself before becoming a theatre student?
2. How did you see yourself when you were in theatre?
3. How do you feel about yourself now?
4. How did you feel about your abilities before becoming a theatre student?
5. How did you feel about your abilities when you were a theatre student?
6. How do you feel about your abilities now?

Needs and Life Skills

1. Tell me about your life today (work/career family, hobbies, etc).
2. What productions did you participate in at Metro High School, and what did you learn from them?
3. Tell me about your overall experience as a Metro High School theatre student?
4. What did the experience at Metro High School do for you as a teenager and as an adult?

Artifacts

Please share any documents, emails, letters, journals, photos, videos, programs, scripts, yearbooks, t-shirts, awards, certificates, trophies, etc. that relate to your experience as a theatre student.

Appendix D: Consent Form

FORMER STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THEATRE IMPACTED LIFE SKILLS AND ADDRESSED PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS.

Case Study Research for Completion of Doctoral Program

(Tia Shaffer Cowart)

Liberty University

(Department of Education)

CONSENT FORM

You are invited participate in a research study that seeks to understand your perception of how, if at all theatre education made an impact on your life skills and psychological needs. You were selected because you are a product of theatre education and have experienced it firsthand as a theatre student at the Metro High School. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Tia Shaffer Cowart, Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University's Department of Education.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to: 1) understand your perception of how, if at all theatre education met your psychological needs (i.e. sense of belonging, self-esteem, self-actualization, accomplishment, etc.) and to 2) find out what (if any) life skills you gained by being a part of the theatre program.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to share your insights in one or both of the following ways:

1. *Focus Group*. This will consist of a small group of 4-6 individuals coming together to share stories and experiences related to high school theatre. The focus group will last for approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours on a day and time that is convenient for all participants. During this time you will also be asked to show and discuss any artifacts related to your theatrical experiences (e.g. photos, videos, scripts, journals, letters, awards, etc).

2. *Individual Interview*. This face-to-face, telephone or Skype interview will take 45 minutes to 1 hour. I will ask questions about your experience as a theatre student. During this time you will also be asked to show and discuss any artifacts related to your theatrical experiences (e.g. photos, videos, scripts, journals, letters, awards, etc).

*Each step will take place once. The timeline from the focus group to the individual interview will be approximately 2-3 weeks. Within this time frame, you should anticipate donating approximately 3-4 hours of time during a focus group and/or face-to-face or Skype interview.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has minimal risks:

During the course of the research you will be asked to share your perceptions of the theatre program, your self-esteem and your life skills via a focus group and/or face-to-face or Skype interview. The focus group and interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed for data analysis purposes. However, all data collected will be securely stored in the researcher's office. For the sake of confidentiality, a pseudonym will be used in place of your real name when reporting results, and when discussing the study with my dissertation committee. Please note that any information you share with me will not be discussed with friends, family or colleagues. During the process, you have a right to decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Please note that you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

The benefits to participation:

Your contributions will help to revive or improve theatre education for future generations. The findings of this research will be published and added to a body of literature that advocates for effective theatre programs in your community.

Compensation:

There is no monetary or financial compensation for participation in this study. For your convenience, refreshments will be provided during the focus group and interview.

Confidentiality:

The information retrieved from this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.

Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and the research committee members will have access to the records.

Questionnaires, email correspondence, and any other documents will be locked and housed at the researcher's office. No one except the researcher can gain access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, the researcher or with Metro High School of Performing Arts. If you decide to participate, you have the right to not answer particular questions and/ or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. Simply contact Tia Shaffer Cowart via email or telephone (see contact information below) requesting withdrawal from the study. As soon as you have withdrawn, any data that has been collected on you will be discarded (papers shredded, electronic files deleted, etc.).

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Tia Shaffer Cowart. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions at any other time, **you are encouraged** to contact me at 678-790-3210 or tcowart@liberty.edu , or you may contact the advisor, Dr. Terri Cornwell at tcornwell@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the advisor.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____