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The impact of a theater service learning course for underserved children through a mixed methodology

Fanny Chouinard

THE IMPACT OF A THEATER SERVICE LEARNING COURSE
FOR UNDERSERVED CHILDREN THROUGH
A MIXED METHODOLOGY

by

Fanny Chouinard

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Pierre and Danièle Chouinard

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for all of those who supported and guided me in this rewarding journey. To name a few are Paul Muldoon, Erica Nagel, Lane Solomon, Tim Vasen, Stacy Wolf, Maria Sudeck, Herb Simmerman, and my family.

Abstract

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In general, the community partnerships found in service learning programs can be
conduits between underserved populations and populations that have greater access to
resources (Burbank & Hunter, 2008). A typical community partnership would be among
a local institution of learning, the parents of underserved children, and their children.
Although service learning programs cannot be expected to solve all problems of the
individuals, the community, and the University, they can have a positive impact on the
complex relationships between its stakeholders.

The intention of this action research project was to determine the effect of a
theater service learning course with children. Specifically, a devising method of theater
was used and the study examined the change in the interpersonal relationships and social
skills among the lecturer and University students who led the course, along with at-risk
and privileged children grades 6 through 9 (n=21). Additionally, the dissertation analyzed
the social responsibility awareness by the University students who participated in the
service learning course. The analysis of the findings used a mixed methodology, which
included qualitative and quantitative measures. The qualitative data at times confirmed
what was found in the quantitative portions of the research and vice versa. The at-risk
children demonstrated increased levels of confidence during the course. The University

students indicated through a survey that they listen more carefully to the perceptions of others around them. Implications for future service learning courses in the particular community are discussed.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (Continued)

List of Figures

Chapter I

Context of Study

This study was constructed to determine if a service learning course, with an art component, could enhance the social and interpersonal skills of underserved children. Although achieving the efforts of service learning in the present time during an economic downturn has become even more difficult than before (Goldbard, 2008), many authors in their studies have emphasized the importance of service learning's influence (Hedin, 1989; Lewis, 2004; Myers-Lipton, 1998; Putnam, 1995; Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011). In general, it can be stated that the process of service learning provides the opportunities for students to provide input in the decision-making process. Like other things, it exposes the students of middle or upper class to aspects that are not necessarily common to them such as poverty, and discrimination. The above aspects are more likely incurred by lower class students (Myers-Lipton, 1998). By this exposure, upper class students provide more attention towards the importance of reading on this subject matter and increase their awareness of social justice and democracy. Students in the end reflect on these topics and get the opportunities for hands-on experiences (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Gamwell, 2005; Goldbard, 2008; Kavanaugh, 2002).

Minority Achievement Gap. The main focus of this study was to address the minority achievement gap with the help of a service learning project including an element of art. The 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB) Legislation of 2001 by the U.S. Department of Education in 2011, which was set to reduce the gap, was indicative by Spohn (2008) in producing a negative impact on funding in arts education. Many requirements on schools

were imposed by NCLB, which impacted arts programs by decreasing financial support. Arts programs hold a great importance in student's learning. Like other subjects, they enhance the creativity skills in them, thus bringing another perspective on reality. By introducing arts programs for students, they can be more creative to solving problems, which is also the basis for Devising Theater; thus promoting more thinking skills in these children (Spohn, 2008).

According to the "Closing the Gaps, 2009" about 75% of African-American 4th grade children in the United States scored below the fundamental mathematic levels in the late 1990s. However, this situation improved by 30% by the year 2007, but it still required more improvement. The statistics for the middle school community that was studied, under the pseudonym of the University Borough, were 9% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 15% Asian/Pacific Islander students ("J. Witherspoon Middle," 2011).

The main goal of the Community Center, a non-profit community service organization, is the closing of the minority achievement gap, which is part of this project as the after-school program of interest. After the realization of the fact that African-Americans were living in inadequate housing and were less educated than other communities in America about some 40 years ago, the Community Center (CC) was created (Quinones, 2009). It was observed that, in this community, the African-Americans and Latinos, which are the major part of the population at Community Center, perform less efficiently than Asians and Caucasians in their classrooms and the standardized tests. Moreover, they also face more difficulties in obtaining their high school diplomas. Thus, to solve these issues, the Community Center provides tutoring and mentoring techniques to at-risk students in the community. These take place mostly

after-school and during summer programs which help in increasing literacy, basic academic skills, and creating awareness of post-secondary prospects. By improving the interaction between the teachers and learners, CC keeps on assessing the impact of its programs on students by asking them about what they have absorbed through that program. CC aims at improving this learning situation for its children who participate in its activities with mentoring students (M. Young, personal communication, 2008).

Environmental Context. In this study, the underprivileged students of the community live in relatively wealthier school districts. That is, the student to computer ratio for the middle school in 2009-2010 was 4.4 as compared to the state average, which was 3.5. In the same year, the district budget for the classroom instruction was 25% more than the state average, while 77% of the school revenues were obtained locally, whereas the state average received just 51% in of the local revenues the same year. The salaries and benefits, purchased services, general supplies, and textbooks were all included in the budget ("J. Witherspoon Middle," 2011). Besides the fact that this district is relatively wealthy, there are still many students that represent a major portion of this population that are socio-economically disadvantaged. Approximately 14% of the inhabitants of this population have a per year income of less than $15,000 ("Simply," 2011).

Moreover, around 4% students of the school district, as of 2007, were observed to be English Language Learners and are improving their skills. Also in this study, about 20% of students in the district of interest are entitled to the Individualized Education Program, which is a customized plan for the special needs services ("J. Witherspoon Middle," 2011). Through this program, there are opportunities in this CC for the improvement of the needs for these underprivileged students.

The main aim of this project is to redistribute knowledge, social capital, and other resources, such as student and faculty time, from the university community to the children in need. As indicated by Nordstrum (2006), economic growth is a net benefit that can be obtained by the individuals in all socioeconomic ranks when resources are relocated to the needy from the wealthiest. The underprivileged children, as defined for the purposes of this study, are those who primarily attend an after-school program in the community. Usually, the parents enlist their children to participate in the program. Their families may or may not be below the poverty level as established by the U.S. Census Bureau. The primary reason for them to participate in an after-school program is because their performance in one or several academic fields is deficient. The terms underprivileged, underserved, and at-risk are used interchangeably. This underprivileged population is an indicator that there are opportunities to improve the community.

Self-efficacy, or the belief in one's own achievements, is an area of interest found in a pilot study conducted at the Community Center in the fall of 2009. Ten mentors who volunteered their time at CC were interviewed. The majority of them were students/mentors and some were teachers in the school district. Letters to the teachers written by the children were very revealing and indicated a lack of self-efficacy in some of the children. For example, study tasks can be enhanced through self-efficacy by the students (Neill, 2011). This, in turn, can increase the children's level of success in their career. The self-efficacy, interpersonal communications, pre and post assessments, and observations were focused on children in grades 6 to 9 who reside in a small community located in central New Jersey and some of whom attend an after-school program.

Conceptual Framework

The significance of the study can be understood through its conceptual frame (CF). The CF for the study provides a map of the intended research. It outlines, as suggested by Maxwell (as cited in Leshem & Trafford, 2007), "concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs [your] research" (p. 98).

The conceptual framework model developed from my synthesis of readings (see Appendix A), bringing concreteness to the dissertation plan. The conceptual framework model has color-coded components. The two top left areas represent the broader theoretical underpinnings in the literature. Each of these research areas provides essential information, which informs the gaps in the literature. The gaps in the literature are shown in the center of the model and the section on the far right represents the dissertation project, which bridges those gaps.

The gaps. As can be seen in Appendix A, I have identified three gaps on which this study has focused. The first gap found in the literature is that the majority of the research in the service learning arena does not focus on the benefits to the multiple target populations (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Hunter & Brisbin, 2000). For instance, in my study, a good portion of the inquiries and data collected and analyzed pertains to the underprivileged children of the community. This study presents data on dual targets: the children and the University students who participated in the theater service learning course.

The second gap is that service learning and the arts are rarely combined and, again, it is difficult to find information on the underprivileged populations of the community. Cho (2006) highlighted the effects of the study on the teachers, but not the

community. I hope that this study can contribute further to this area of the literature as it includes findings about community participants and University students.

The third gap is the main focus of this project. This gap was interesting and sparked further consideration. From Appendix A, the Community Learning Initiative (CLI) at the University offers over a dozen courses every year, but none of them, until the fall of 2011, included an art component. For instance, this spring, CLI offered a course taught by engineering faculty in which students worked in teams to resolve problems experienced by not-for-profit organizations with useful technologies (CXXLI Courses, n.d.).

Predictions from the conceptual framework cannot forecast my research results (Jabareen, 2009). It is a useful tool to guide my understanding, and that of others interested in my project, and a guide for my research. The project evolved over time based on the information that I uncovered. The aspiration for this study was derived from a paradigm of success. That is, I wanted to collaborate with others and find a way to assist the underprivileged children population of the community. For instance, I aspired to enhance their self-confidence so that they can be more successful themselves.

Segments of Conceptual Frame. Five main areas constitute the conceptual frame. In Appendix A, the first area on the top left (blue) represents research on service learning (Burbank & Hunter, 2008; Goldbard, 2008; Kavanaugh, 2002). Much research was done on this. The literature shows that service learning has always been important for students who opt for it. Their personal abilities are enhanced through this learning, but few have described the benefits and impacts on the community being served. In 1994, Shumer, for example, indicated that the community that supports learning can have effective

6

outcomes on students involved in service learning. It can improve school grades, attendance, reflective skills, awareness of their's and society's needs, duties as citizens, critical thinking, and attitudes. All in all, it has positive effects on the learning environment. Social and political change can be influenced by students who take service learning courses (Shumer, 1994).

The Arts constitutes one other important area of studies and literature and is discussed in the second area, the red section of Appendix A. This section situated below the service learning, shows how arts can help in improving and enhancing academic skills. The literature indicates the view that it is very useful to make the arts a part of the curriculum. It builds confidence and enhances the student's focus (Hartland et al., 2000; Ross, 2000). A good portion of this segment of the literature is from a compendium assembled in 2002, which was sponsored by the Department of Education and by the National Endowment for the Arts.

This collection includes 62 studies on the areas of dance, drama, multi-arts, and music and their benefits when these areas are part of and integrated in the set of courses for children of various ages and backgrounds. Important authors in this section are Gamwell (2005), and Hutzel, Russell, and Ross (2010). Advancement of essential academic skills, such as literacy and mathematics, and social skills, such as self-confidence, can be improved through the arts. For example, a student's literacy skills can be enhanced by his participation in a dramatic play (Goodman, 1990).

The third area (white) of the CF represents the general articles and books for this research such as *Leading in a Culture of Change* (Fullan, 2001). The purple area shows how my dissertation is informed from service learning, the arts in education, general

related documentation, and how it bridges the gaps detailed below and brings new information to the field. The relationships between the service learning and arts variables are all very strong. They inform each other and provide the support needed to close various gaps.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if a service learning course with an art component could enhance the social and interpersonal skills of underserved children. This is one of the target populations for this project, who reside in a small town located in central New Jersey. They are mostly middle school students in grades 6 through 8, and some attend an after-school program in a community surrounding a private University.

Data collected from the parents of African American children who participated in the after-school program indicated that the housing qualities were poor. Further, the families lacked abilities to communicate and were less educated. As in many areas of United States, Blacks did not have the same opportunities that privileged families had (Quinones, 2009). To provide an update of the education-levels that exist today, per the US Census Bureau (2011), 71.4% of all female or Hispanic single parent householders have less than a high school education.

Few studies focus on the benefits of dual target populations of a service learning course, which, in this study, are the underprivileged children in the community, and the University students who facilitated the course. Jerry Kagan (Strauss, 2009), a pioneer of developmental psychology describes the reasons students drop out of high school. He states that the uncertainty of students towards their academic progress leads them to pull out of high school because they do not believe it is something for them. He further says

that 95% of the students who withdraw feel this way. The arts is an avenue for students to remain in high school as they would progress, and be more apt to take actions, which would have a positive impact on them and their environment.

As of last fall 2011, the University did not offer a service learning course with an art component for the community. One possible explanation for this is that the art field is not always as respected as other academic fields such as engineering or molecular biology. At a directors' meeting of the University Art Center during the last week of March 2011, a faculty member indicated that the perception of many University administrators and faculty is that the arts is a sideline and does not fulfill an important academic base. This may explain why the Community Learning Initiative (CLI) offers service learning courses in collaboration with engineering and sociology, but few with the arts. On the other hand, a course was taught through the Art Center at the University that involved service learning and the arts during the spring 2012. However, this course was not part of the Community Learning Initiative (CLI). For unknown and probably political reasons, the Art Center and CLI did not cross-list the course in both programs. The course was an existing partnership project at the University led by faculty and local guest artists as part of the Arts Center, which collaborates with University students, the City of Trenton, and many other organizations. The goal was to create the first mural in Trenton and to potentially initiate a map for more projects in this depressed area. This project utilized many University and community resources and a visual art component to enhance a wall in the city. The mural depicts stories of its inhabitants ("Trenton Mural," 2011). A similarity between the mural and the devising theater courses was that both created something new based on the input of the community. These additional courses to

the University Community Base Initiative correspond to general indicators of service learning at large. That is, service learning at this time is receiving the highest level of resources than ever before (Saltmarsh, 2011).

More recently, a service learning course was offered in the spring of 2012 and the fall of 2012. Both, related to theater, are the University's latest efforts to include service learning courses with a form of art integrated. The course offered during the spring 2012 was entitled *Community Based Performances.* It studied the literature and invited various guests who described the multitude of ways community based performance is achieved. Further, the students undertook projects in which they were a part of a community based project.

The second course, and most recent, was the basis for this project. Known as *Theater #307: Devising Theater with Youth*, this new offering was a significant partnership during the fall 2012. Many shareholders exchanged information concerning devising a new play among the teachers, children of the local middle school, the children attending a local after-school program, the University faculty, the University students, and myself. Each entity had its own goal for joining in and some overlapped one another. For instance, the positive public relations and an attempt to bring together the disparate constituencies in one group over time was an overarching goal.

There are challenges in creating partnership between the community and the university. For example, a new course learning initiative needs to be synchronized. Mutual goals need to be established between the University and the partners (Marullo 1998; McLean & Behringer, 2008; Russell & Hutzel 2007; Shumer 1994). A report by Mclean and Behringer in 2008 shows that faculty may be concerned about the outcome of

10

the curriculum before any results could be seen. This can have positive and negative effects on the curriculum. The positive aspect shows the importance of the faculty in questioning the outcome and in assisting to produce substantial results. On the other hand, the constant interference by the faculty and their insecurities can bring the curriculum to a halt and affect the development process adversely.

The scope of this study was to bring a theater service learning course to a small private University in a Mid-Atlantic state. It focused on the underprivileged children and the University students and demonstrates positive effects on various skills. The goal of this project is to combine, not only the benefits of service learning, but also the arts in a single curriculum for at-risk children. Another important goal is to increase social responsibility awareness by the University students. The University students also transmitted devising skills in creating theater with the children. Several students from the Theater Program of the University also conveyed pertinent knowledge such as playwriting, acting, set design, and construction with the community children.

Many studies have shown that integrating arts to the curriculum can add value (Baum & Owen, 1997; Butzlaff, 2000; Caterall, 1998). Art education adds significant benefits. It promotes imagination, holistic views, awareness and ingenuity (Freyermuth, 2006). The addition of arts to the course enhances social skills and communicating power. All these factors prove to be useful aspects to the competitive environment we live in.

Service learning partnerships, in which the distribution of resources is transferred between underserved and privilege populations, can be effective for all involved (Burbank & Hunter, 2008). At the University, the existing service learning program can

be a catalyst for identifying community needs, such as special education for a minority, and locating the collaborative partnerships to address those community needs. The service learning program at this institution could provide resources, such as knowledge, faculty, and University students to enhance the skills of the minority and University students. This is an opportunity for me, who has worked for the University for almost 20 years, and for the University to give back to our community.

Finally, the purpose of this project is not to reduce a colonialist approach in which White people are trying to improve the situation of the underprivileged on a short-term basis. Neither is the purpose to invade the culture of the community, as might be interpreted by some in the community (Kuftinec, 2003). The goal is to give the community members tools to assist them throughout their lives to alleviate some of their struggles on a long-term basis and on their own. If nothing can be done regarding the awareness of how to handle the struggles by non-professional actors, who are the children in this study, at least the public view can show the efforts by the children (Kuftinec, 2003) and others, which may initiate other possible changes.

Purpose Through Theater

I decided to select theater as the tool of choice to bring about positive change for the after-school children. As we will see in the literature, all the arts positively contribute in various ways to enhancing social and academic skills. Theater has added advantages because the target community population is provided the possibility to transform their world. They can practice the viability of their actions. Significant improvements and positive changes can be made when the children feel empowered by these experiences (Boal, 2002; Dolan 2001). In particular, community members who participate in theater

can assess and articulate their own and group identities at the specific location (Kuftinec, 2003). Their work in action can also be evaluated (Oddey, 2007).

Community-based theater. The particular type of process and theater for the project was a community-based created theater. That is, from Geer (1998), the activities during the fall 2012 are "of, by, and for" (p. xxxii) the children of the community. The students and lecturer facilitated weekly sessions in which the children had an opportunity to show their self and group identities and emotions (Cohen-Cruz, 2005). In turn, these were amalgamated and shaped into a theatrical play about, for, and of the children. The process led to a couple rehearsals and a final play for friends, family, and other interested parties. This development over an entire semester was the ideal setting for a qualitative and quantitative researcher. It created a safe environment for the children to experiment what could be. I had many opportunities to see how the children and University students evolved over the fall semester.

Further, theater can be a means to understand social justice by the children and students. (Hytten, 2006; Kuftinec, 2003). It provides participants the opportunity to think about disproportionate (Boal, 1985) and unjust situations. The theater environment can provide different scenarios for participants to rehearse that can lead to opportunities that lessen the problem at hand.

Following the above compelling advantages of theater, the topic of this action research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Hinchey, 2008) dissertation consists of a service learning project with a theater component. It was designed for at-risk children of a small suburban community. The study participants were a combination of underprivileged children who attend one of the after-school program programs and non-privileged

children in the area. The dissertation analyzed, both qualitatively and quantitatively, if the sample population could enhance social skills by integrating theater through a service learning project. Considering the proven significance of the arts, devising theater in particular, and service learning, it was expected that these combined had an even larger positive impact on the population studied. Theater can assist in providing "meaning to our lives" (Downey, 2005, p. 33). Through this process, a partnership known as the University Service Learning Program will become a resource for the children and families of the University community.

The theory underpinning this research was supported by the advocacy role I undertook for low-income families in the community. In addition, I placed emphasis on collaboration with the instructor, the University, the University students, and the children. Ultimately, I hope to provide continued opportunities for underserved children to overcome their main social issue(s). I realize that by being an advocate, I have engaged in political discussions during this study.

Proposed Changes

The changes proposed are ultimately planned for the short and long terms. In the fall 2012, the after-school children of a small community in central New Jersey and the University students collaborated and created a play that depicted the children's stories. Through devising theater, children could suspend time, location, and individualities. It provided a way to learn more about themselves (Grady, 2000). It was the intent of this project to show that the social and self-efficacy skills of the children improved and that the awareness of social justice for students increased.

I am optimistic that the infrastructure created by the establishment of a theater service learning course offered during the fall 2012 will remain active beyond that time period. This would facilitate future similar projects to take place with community children and University students. The infrastructure includes dedicated faculty time and efforts, space, supplies, children, and University students.

What is crucial to this project is that the positive changes that emerged from the participants continue to evolve after the course and involve others with whom they interact. The intent is not to fix the problem of the underprivileged, but to provide tools which they can use on their own to make positive changes in their lives. The pedagogy that was used as part of the course was built on partnership, collaboration, and dialogue with children, students, and lecturer. Transformation of the children's world was the ultimate change, facilitated by the course, through action and reflection. (Freire, 2010; Kuftinec, 2003). Additionally, abilities in critical thinking and actions regarding the status quo emerged from these experiences (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007).

The significance of the study. The value of this study is expected to reside at the intersection of the benefits of a service learning course led by an instructor and students with a theater component for the at-risk children of the community. When the arts are integrated in the curriculum, the aspects such as self-efficacy and determination were found to improve (Ross, 2000). Personal and interpersonal skills have shown that they can be enhanced through service learning (Zhao & Kuh, 2004) and identity formation (Marullo, 1998). Very few studies have looked at the joint areas of service learning and the arts. Even less studies focus on the benefits of the equally important other target population, which in this study are the underserved children in the community.

Research Questions

    a) What is the impact on collaboration among underserved children, a University, University students, lecturer, researcher, and a community who participated in a service learning course with an art component?

    b) What is the self-perception concerning social responsibility by the University students and the researcher?

    c) What is the perceived level of self-efficacy and interpersonal communications by the underserved children?

    d) How will my leadership influence this project?

Specialized Vocabulary/Definitions of Terms

Asset mapping. Asset mapping was an exercise used in the course by which all members were encouraged to list all of their assets, large and small. This resulted in a positive asset inventory of their self and group (Oddey, 2007). This provided a way to enhance view of themselves from which they could build upon as a group. These aspects contributed to the final play and beyond.

Devising Theater. Devising theater is different from traditional theater in that a new script is written by the participants who each have unique experiences and perspectives. The creative process allowed the participants to resolve some problems as they occurred (Oddey, 2007). On the other hand, traditional theater is based on previously written documents, and the organization is hierarchical (Oddey, 2007). As indicated in a lecture on September 14th, 2012, to a THR 307 course, the students in Lecturer Nagel's class stated that when it is well done, devising theater is supportive, reflects teamwork,

collaboration, encourages imagination, and camaraderie. In devising theater, the status shifts from the writer and director to the creative artists who make-up the collaboration.

Community-based theater. Often community-based theater can be a window about the participants' struggles as they are expressed to the public (Cohen-Cruz, 2005). This is a particular type of theater in which the emphasis is on the actors, most of them non-professionals, and act in achieving meaning (Kuftinec, 2003).

Human machine. Each participant creates a gesture related to a theme such as waking up. Sound can be added and the movement can stop in midstream so that the partakers remain in their position (Rohd, 1998). This brings about creative impulsiveness and can be the source for a scene and/or transition between scripts.

Privileged children. Privileged children are those with many advantages, such as parents with an education who transmit their knowledge to them, and who live at a higher socioeconomic level than at-risk children.

Scaffolding. Scaffolding employs teaching and learning methods that bring about the knowledge of a person, or the outcome of a class. Advancement of the children and others can result from this process (Maybin, Mercer, & Stierer, 1992). It minimizes the repetition of previously learned skills and takes the play further. Scaffolding in the context of devising was used constantly during the process.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is one's capacity to be confident in accomplishing tasks.

Service learning. Service learning is the integration of the community into an educational program and vice versa. Through experiences offered in the curriculum,

students can develop social and reflective skills and become involved in activities with the community.

Social justice. Social justice refers to individuals and activities who seek greater allocation of benefits in our society to those who are less privileged.

Social skills. Social skills are the skills related to behaviors with others such as communications, engagement, self-control, empathy, responsibility, assertion, and cooperation (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

Soundscape. Soundscape is created by brainstorming and recording from a computer various sounds emitted by the children and students. This background of sounds was used during the script to highlights and emphasized certain moments of the scenes.

Transformative mixed methodology. Transformative mixed methodology refers to the framework of the quantitative and qualitative research. Collaborative individuals can then learn about social justice through an environment with less influence by others (Mertens, 2007).

Underserved populations. Underserved populations are those at risk from living, for instance, in low-income families and/or are part of various racial and ethnic groups.

Underserved children. In this study, underserved children are the children who participated in after-school program in the community. Overall, some of their academic achievements are lacking and some may also be from families who struggle financially. I have not used the term marginalized because this would imply that the children are on the periphery when in fact they an integral part of the local community (Freire, 2000). Underserved, at-risk, and underprivileged are terms used interchangeably.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation indicated by Creswell (2011) for the researcher is to define the paradigm worldview and theoretical lens. This project took a participatory worldview. A mutual collaboration took place (Mertens, 2007) in which the children contributed to their development of self-efficacy and interpersonal skills. For instance, the children provided input in the creation of a new play based on their interests in writing, singing, acting, dancing, and based on the tale they sought to tell. This project was change oriented which is measured by a self-efficacy, interpersonal communications, and social responsibility. The instruments used with the after-school children include the Social Skills Improvement Rating Scales (Gresham & Elliott, 2008) administered before and after the course. The other instrument to measure social responsibility by the University students was the community-based research course survey created in June 2010 by Lichtenstein, Thorme, Cutforth, and Tombari (2011), which was created specifically for University students who take community-based courses.

The researcher should be aware that without building trust, an important limitation expressed by Creswell and Clark (2011), the stakeholders and the researcher will not easily achieve their goals (Baldwin et al., 2007). The lecturer ensured that stakeholders participated in the project. For instance, the University students teamed up and created lesson outlines and plans for the course. The Wednesday sessions were for the University students and the lecturers to test the lesson plans and amend them for the Friday classes when the children would join in. The University students, faculty, and I reviewed the interests of the children and the scenes they wanted to perform. They then proposed a play, which combined as many elements from the children that were

manageable and allowed for the children to express themselves. University students and

lecturer emphasized the children's capacity to achieve a meaningful collaborative play.

Chapter II

Literature Review

This study was designed to determine how a curriculum for the arts and service learning could merge into one course and positively affect underprivileged children and university students. The main focus of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the research and writings on the subjects of service learning and the impact of the arts on the curriculum. A few documents were found that combined the effects of both service learning and the arts.

The findings in this chapter are the basis from which this project emanated and further augments this area of the literature. The literature review will explore service learning and civic engagement. It will then look at the college response to service learning and the various general models that can be found at the intersections of the community, school, and college levels. It highlights models that focus on civic engagement and the arts and show the benefits to all stakeholders.

A section is devoted to the benefits of service learning to the students who assist in the administration of the courses. One gap encountered is that only a small amount of research exists that defines the benefits for the target population involved in service learning. The last section reviews those articles that detail some of the impact to the target population (Adejumo, 2010; Cho, 2006; Cloeren, 2010; Varshavsky, 2009). These studies of service learning projects with an art component are rare and are the focal point of this dissertation. The expectation of this study is to generate new information in this area. I first present a brief overview of the historical perspective of service learning.

Background of Service Learning

The idea of service learning began briefly in the 1920s at the University of Wisconsin. In the 1960s, the concept of service learning was initially introduced (Saltmarch & Zlotkowski, 2011). Initiatives brought in experiential learning with others and were brought into the learning environment (Shumer 1994; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). In 1990 came the ratification of the National and Community Service Act. Universities and K-12 schools received $275 million to supplement existing service learning programs (Myers-Lipton, 1998). As will be seen later, this act is a form of social justice (Lewis, 2004) for economically disadvantaged individuals. According to Saltmarsh and Zlotkowski (2011), recent targeted communities are not positively affected by civic engagement activities as much as is intended.

Putnam (1995) is known as a seminal author on the topic of civic engagement. He states that the participation in civic engagement has noticeably decreased in the last few decades. The dwindling participation by the society results in less opportunities for more auspicious members to enhance the lives of less fortunate ones. There are many economic reasons for this decline in the United States that can be highlighted in four areas. As more women joined the labor force, it reduced the amount of available resources for civic engagement. For instance, women who participated in the Red Cross and other organizations decreased. Another motivation for this is that many families moved from one city to another because of required relocations by their organization. Other demographic changes decreased participation such as increases in the divorce rate and decreases in the birth rate.

What is service learning? The interpretation of service learning and community

engagement is different from voluntary service. As cited in Sudeck's handbook (Berger-

Kaye, 2004), the particular aims of incorporating a direct service in the program of study

in the curriculum is key to service learning. (Marullo, 1998; McLean & Behringer, 2008;

Myers-Lipton, 1998; Shumer, 1994). Service learning is a form of experiential education.

As in the case of *Theater #307*, reflective abilities are obtained while scheduled

opportunities bring students to assist the community, the school, and the university

(Batchelder & Root, 1994; Gamwell, 2005; Kavanaugh, 2002).

Some argue that these opportunities can improve university students' self-

awareness within their surroundings; can foster problem resolution, social skills, and

critical thinking (Hedin, 1989; Zhao & Kuh, 2004); responsibility as citizens (Shumer,

1994); can direct students' thinking towards racial inequalities; can promote leadership

skills (Marullo, 1998; Spiezo, Baker, & Boland, 2005); can enlighten values (Myers-

Lipton, 1998); and can increase democratic governance (Hunter & Brisbin, 2000).

Leadership skills in this context relate to how individuals can shepherd others to initiate

action in their neighborhood or elsewhere. Also, service learning can increase their ability

to strengthen their roles as representatives of social and political change (Spiezo et al.,

2005).

Key principles of service learning. There are several general key principles that

apply to arts and non-arts based service learning programs and models. Schneider (1998)

established an important base line in 1998 by outlining 13 keys to achieve good service

learning models. Twenty-seven institutions were studied, which included 1,000 faculty

and 25,000 students involved in service learning. Several themes of success were

discovered. First and foremost, have a clear visualization of the desired achievements by the stakeholders through service learning; it is meaningful if the vision corresponds to the institutions' mission. Secondly, have the stakeholders focus on their knowledge and other assets toward a worthy outcome (Russell & Hutzel, 2007); and lastly, convince influential members of the university to support the vision.

Other goals of achievement for service learning models are to understand the significant impact that one person can make through marshalling others in contributing to service learning; to ascertain that service learning applies to many areas of the university curriculum (Goldbard, 2008; Schneider, 1998); to recommend a central group of faculty and involvement in the program; to show the variation in the intricacies of a service learning program, the complexity of the program requires additional integrated administrative support; and to recognize that students are the foundation in service learning endeavors. It is not unusual, as was in the course *Devising Theater with Youth*, that students are given the responsibility of designing their own lesson plans (Shumer, 1994; Spiezio et al., 2005; Thornton & Jaeger, 2006; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). When needed, other objectives are to bring additional participation from the stakeholders (Lewis, 2004; McLean & Behringer 2008); to show that risk taking and venturing in new approaches exhibit the benefits of service learning; to demonstrate the sustained efforts through a robust service learning program. Finally, various funding opportunities can be successfully obtained for a service learning program if researchers keep abreast of local and national matters.

Hedin (1989) details several components for successful service learning programs. Most service learning models include at least a few of them. At least one

element is needed for a good program with an art component. To begin, the stakeholders must perceive the significance of the program and that it is worth the time and effort of the students, teachers, and others (Thornton & Jaeger, 2006). Additionally, the receiver should acknowledge the value from the assistance given. The promotion of critical thinking exerted by the students should enhance the thought process (Hunter & Brisbin, 2000; Spiezo et al., 2005; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Liability and accountability by the students are essential (Thornton & Jaeger, 2006) to the project and they should have input on the directions of the outcomes. This was true in *Theater #307* as students and children provided creative content throughout the class. The adults and students must join their efforts on communal tasks (Marullo 1998; McLean & Behringer, 2008; Russell & Hutzel, 2007; Shumer 1994). Systematic reflection is an essential element on the service occurrence (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Gamwell, 2005; Goldbard, 2008; Kavanaugh, 2002; Marullo, 1998; Myers-Lipton, 1998; Russel & Hutzel 2007). This reflection is common to both the service learning programs that have an art component and for those that do not (Russel & Hutzel, 2007). Finally, there must be an end goal for the project ensuing from the students' efforts and other participants.

The emphasis of Marullo's study (1998) is on providing students with a tool through service learning to question their preconceived viewpoints about race and ethnicity. Further, it sets the ground for meaningful conversations with others of different cultures. Marullo (1998) employs a constructivist world-view in which the rigid views are tested and are at the foundation of the program (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Initially, students believe that decisions made by individuals in society are creating their own problems. Students' comprehension of the issues change by the time they finish their

assignment. They usually reach an understanding that not all people are given similar resources (Marullo, 1998).

Marullo (1998) brings forward three important aspects to service learning. First, that the course offering is integral to the programs (Goldbard, 2008). Second, that the community is involved in defining the needs with the partners (Burbank & Hunter, 2008; Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011). And third, that the reflections by students are a part of the examination process (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Gamwell, 2005; Kavanaugh, 2002; 1998; Marullo, 1998; Myers-Lipton, 1998).

Impact of electronic revolution on service learning. Andrea Kavanaugh (2002) and Putnam (1995) indicate that in the last three decades the decrease in civic engagement stems from the electronic revolution. They express that television is to be blamed, which has reduced significantly the networks essential for the relationships between members of the community. Additional investigation through empirical research is needed as indicated by Putman. This would determine if television viewing corresponds to a social exchange, such as a bowling alley.

The Internet, contrary to television, has a different impact regarding the communication facet of a community. The Internet case study (Kavanaugh, 2002) conducted in a rural university located in Blacksburg, Virginia, found that a higher level of exposure through social networks enhances community communication and participation. Leaders from the community were selected and included representatives from the art community of Blacksburg. It was found that email and discussion forums enhanced the social networks among community groups. This finding can have favorable impact by having the parties work as a team to define their goals (Marullo, 1998; McLean

& Behringer, 2008; Russell & Hutzel, 2007; Shumer 1994). Participants' opportunities to externalize their concerns are facilitated through the Internet. Although exchanges are made easier through this medium, they do not readily increase participation in civic engagement activities. There is no net gain by selecting this type of communication. Rather, it is a redistribution of social capital. This correlates with Putnam's (1995) thought that the quantity of social capital is not necessarily created or destroyed, rather, it is reallocated through the use of electronic forms.

Challenges of service learning. Hard work emerging from civic engagement efforts can be dampened by the current economic downturn (Goldbard, 2008). Nevertheless, many authors underscore the power of civic engagement (Hedin, 1989; Lewis, 2004; Myers-Lipton, 1998; Putnam, 1995). In particular, students have the opportunity to make their own decisions in a self-governing and conducive environment. Among other things, poverty and discrimination are brought to their attention (Myers-Lipton, 1998). Reading and alertness to social justice and democracy are often greater when civic activities take place. In the end, reflection can be voiced about these topics by the students (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Gamwell, 2005; Goldbard, 2008; Kavanaugh, 2002).

Walker and Gutmore (2002) add that the realization of significant change requires alliances between vested stakeholders. According to the authors, neighborhoods with fewer resources are not likely to participate in civic capacities. Similarly, individuals residing in crowded housing with a high occupancy ratio do not partake in many civic engagement activities. The more communities have a history of participating in civic engagement, the more likely their sustained actions will continue.

27

Cultural aspect of service learning. Various cultural aspects bring other interesting viewpoints about service learning. Thornton and Jaeger (2006) outline three areas from their research that describe institutional culture and civic responsibility. The areas of interest are culture, ideology, and action. Culture, as defined by Schein (2004), is analyzed through common values, assumptions, and/or behaviors. Thornton and Jaeger (2008) define civic responsibility in higher education along a five-dimension model. First, it is the knowledge and expression of democratic values (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Gamwell, 2005; Goldbard, 2008; Kavanaugh, 2002; Myers-Lipton, 1998). Second, it is the willingness to act with pertinent parties, including the community. Third, advantages for the society are gained by abilities and knowledge acquired through civic activities (Putnam, 1995; Russell & Hutzel, 2007). Fourth, it is the interest, acknowledgment, and display of interests of others. Fifth, it is one's own responsibility (Shumer, 1994; Spiezio et al., 2005; Thornton & Jaeger, 2006; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Moreover, Gamwell (2005) supports that empathy for others is another key component in service learning (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). What is central in the arts-based initiatives is the connection between emotional engagement and the learning process. This concept also becomes part of the classroom culture (Gamwell, 2005). The culture and the learning process are significant. Students increase their own responsibility for learning and becoming dynamic learners (Shumer, 1994; Spiezio et al., 2005; Thornton & Jaeger, 2006; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). For instance, students can be asked to create their own lesson plan, as in *Theater #307*, and construct the structure for their reflections and progress. Or perhaps, they could administer a questionnaire for pertinent community groups. Self-governance is only one of the many benefits of service learning.

General Programs and Models of Service Learning

This section of the literature review is a synthesis of various general service

learning programs and models found in the literature over the past couple decades. I will

then focus on service learning initiatives that focus on the arts. Service learning can be

segmented into either a charity or a social justice model (Lewis, 2004). Within each of

these models, the interpretation can focus on the community or the society. From the

inhabitants' perspective, community is the center under the charity model. Under the

social justice model, a partnership evolves with the community. For instance, the

community is an expert in certain service learning initiatives as it is extremely

knowledgeable about its assets inventory. It can share this valuable information with the

rest of the group.

The charity and the justice models. From the perspective of the society (Lewis,

2004), the charity model reflects mutual social issues at hand that need improvement.

From the social justice model it is a social framework in which change is needed. For

example, by using the social justice model, an initiative can foster fairness through

additional power to the stakeholders, which can bring transformation. Increase in

students' knowledge and civic engagement are the aims of the charity model (Lewis,

2004). In the social justice model, knowledge is communicated and partners can exert

their influence. Through empowerment, the social justice model can attend to unfair

situations. However, students can intensify their knowledge of civic engagement both by

using the social justice and charity models. The charity construct is more manageable

because fewer partners are usually involved in the process (Lewis, 2004). The

expenditures associated with a university are greater because the ratio of faculty to

students is higher. Further, commitment by an institution cannot guarantee continuous positive outcomes (Goldbard, 2008; Lewis, 2004; Shumer, 1994). A factor that can affect cost is the time sensitivity of a program (Schneider, 1998). Therefore, it is essential that universities do their homework and learn about the community prior to committing to a program. Networking with pertinent parties is likely to enhance a positive outcome in a service learning model. For example, I spent time to interview many local agencies to understand their roles and they provided suggestions for recruiting children for the course. Additionally, seeking a diversified and a collaborative faculty group can be exigent (Lewis, 2004). Two general community-based models of service learning include the community advocate model and the community based learning model.

The community advocate model (CAM). Learning for underprivileged individuals is mutually transferred between participants. This type is a combination of the charity-based and social-justice models. CAM fosters partnership and support by those who are involved (Burbank & Hunter, 2008). As several authors point out, partnership is dependent on nurturing shared goals (Marullo 1998: McLean & Behringer, 2008; Russell & Hutzel 2007; Shumer 1994). Social networks are the basis for sound programs (Burbank & Hunter, 2008; Kavanaugh, 2002; Putnam, 1995). The CAM's main goal is to exchange knowledge, which benefits the members of the community (Russell & Hutzel, 2007).

The community-based learning model. The Community-Based Learning (CBL) model (Shumer, 1994) is founded on the interconnections and the environment. For instance, in a K-12 community-based learning setting, the ratio of adults from the community to the student body was increased. In addition, divergence decreased among

K-12 children when smaller groups were formed for the program. In the study, not only this model demonstrated improvements in areas such school grades, assisting students to learn, and improving attendance through youth services, but it also required students to be accountable with their teachers. The student-adult connections seemed to have a direct positive impact on their academic achievements, which was confirmed from higher GPAs as compared to a control group. Retention, networking of students within their communities, improved knowledge of their surroundings, and functions as citizens resulted from this model (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Shumer, 1994). Also, it provided insight in the students' progress as to their professional identity (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Goldbard 2008; Shumer, 1994). According to Gamwell (2005), it is rare that K-12 students are asked about their experiences of the academic process and teaching methods. However, enabling the students to more freely express themselves and allowing them to identify with their environments provided a way to understand themselves better.

The give-get grid model. The Give-Get Grid is a useful tool in community-university and school partnership collaborations. For instance, in creating a new curricular offering (Goldbard 2008; McLean & Behringer, 2008; Russell & Hutzel, 2007), as seen in other models, the university and the community must collaborate to set mutual goals (Marullo 1998; McLean & Behringer, 2008; Russell & Hutzel 2007; Shumer 1994) to be successful in their endeavors. At times, it may take time for the faculty to see the results from the change in the curriculum. This might produce negative perceptions among the faculty (McLean & Behringer, 2008).

The above model is a matrix developed by East Tennessee State University. It integrates theories such as social psychology, business practice, and community

development. Trust is enhanced from emphasizing the concept of reciprocity (Goldbard, 2008; Putnam, 1995). This is a valuable tool as it allows partners to understand from the onset the expectations from the intended exchange. This model can also be used to evaluate the inventory of assets by the participants. This research uses this model in the dissertation project, as mutual exchanges among all parties are essential in the overall success. The accomplishment of a partnership depends on several factors such as social interaction, flow of information, participation, relationships, time, and successful background. Let me.

In the next section, I turn to service learning models with an arts focus and review how this social-justice model integrates the arts. This model has basic elements to steer the practitioner and has its own set of challenges.

Service Learning Models – Art Focus

Community and cultural development model. The Community and Cultural Development (CCD) model in higher education focuses on the arts (Goldbard, 2008). The CCD model entails an array of initiatives about social change, which are undertaken by artists with community partners and fosters discussions regarding concerns. The timing of these efforts is opportune. More documentation is being written about CCD and more programs are being offered in higher education, as is the case in the institution where this research was conducted. Further, more students are enrolling in these programs, and more social-justice supporters partner with artists. The cultural consciousness about this topic is being raised as a result. The success of most CCD programs depends on the equilibrium among community engagement, training, and scholarship.

CCD programs are not without challenges when introduced in universities. Unconstructive relationships between the universities and the communities can take place. In this research, I observed that the contacts are courteous. On the other hand, both parties could benefit from learning more about each other's needs. Lack of communications concerning expectations about time commitments can be a problem and need to be specified at the onset (Lewis 2004). Issues around participation, equity, and reciprocity can impact meaningful engagements (Goldbard, 2008; Putnam 1995).

There are several basic elements to guide the practitioners of CCD: participation, diversity, equality, cultural expression, dynamics, influences that allow social change, and artists as important agents of change (Goldbard, 2008). These elements are similar to Hedin's (1989) seven components for successful programs of service learning. Additionally, existing CCD initiatives at universities are diverse. Some provide comprehensive programs with certificates, while others provide isolated courses within other programs (Goldbard, 2008). In this university, there are courses offered as part of a community learning initiative, but no certificates can be obtained in this area. All forms of arts such as visual arts, theater (Cohen-Cruz, 2005; Dolan 2001), creative writing, dance, and other arts can enhance learning abilities by creating and fostering a safe environment and by suspending disbelief (Gamwell, 2005; Goldbard, 2008). Safe and experiential environments were crucial and evolved right from the onset for *Theater #307*.

In a service learning study integrating the arts as a major component, Hutzel and Russell (2007) utilized a collaborate-and-create method using an asset-based strategy to incorporate the art into the curriculum. Classroom creativity and proper behavior by

33

students were the concurrent accomplishments in this learning method. The learning process was enhanced by the social and transformative qualities inherent in the arts. In the study, the collaborate-and-create method and asset-based strategy, also known as asset mapping (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), refers to the skills and knowledge, large or small, of each of the individuals collaborating in the creative effort.

Russell and Hutzel (2007) provide instructional phases for creating service learning courses in the arts and these have the simultaneous advantage of teaching students how to behave in class. Some of these phases could also be easily applied to other types of learning programs. The initial step is the planning phase in which students review issues of the community and determine which ones are of the highest priority and which ones would best be lent to a future creative collaboration. Next is the personal asset-inventory (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Lewis 2004). In this phase, the students and faculty make a self-assessment of their strongest perceived skills and knowledge, which could be applied in a project (Burbank & Hunter, 2008; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). These steps are followed by teaching the collaborate-and-create model. After that is creating the partners' asset-inventory. In this phase, students prepare, for instance, an interview for their meeting with representatives of the community. This questionnaire would attempt to determine common interests and goals between the students and the members of the community (Marullo, 1998; McLean & Behringer, 2008; Shumer, 1994). In the context of this research, children's and students' assets were gathered in one inventory session early in the semester. Creating an asset-based artwork follows this phase. This is the time to create artwork within the selected themes in collaboration with the members of the community.

This collaborative process was exemplified by the students and children of *Theater #307* when they chose the topic of the play, which was dream. The creation of the play and performance ensued from the partners' collaboration. Afterwards, an important assessment and reflection piece of the process is made. Student journals are reviewed and analyzed in this phase (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Gamwell, 2005; Goldbard, 2008; Hedin, 1989; Kavanaugh, 2002; Marullo, 1998; Myers-Lipton, 1998). Finally, participants are acknowledged in the celebration phase, which, in this case, took place in the last class of the semester. Good food, balloons, and impromptu singing were experienced that day. It is imperative that all participants be recognized for their contributions to the initiative. In conclusion, reciprocity between the stakeholders is a key notion in this study (Goldbard, 2008; Putnam, 1995).

Benefits of Service Learning

There has been a response by many schools and institutions to incorporate service learning in their curriculum. With this mixture comes many benefits. Service learning is important because it makes constructive differences and contributions in the lives of the collaborators and society (Hunter & Brisbin, 2000; Hedin, 1989; Marullo, 1998; Myers-Lipton, 1998; Shumer, 1994; Spiezo et al., 2005; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Although these positive changes come with worthwhile costs, service learning is an important part of higher education because the work accomplished by the students adds value to the relationship between the universities and the communities. The children's parents, students, and lecturer were very appreciative of the investments that were made in the children. The benefits of service learning are mutual for the community and those who

35

participate in these activities (Zlotkowski, 2011). The studies made in the last couple of decades are synthesized below and demonstrate this clearly.

Reflection. The reflection aspect of service learning is one of the most important characteristics (Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011), and benefit the students who are part of various initiatives, whether they are focused on the arts or not. For instance, in the Internet project, also known as the Blacksburg Electronic Village, the participants focused much of their energy on reflection by eliciting their thoughts and concerns. This was invaluable in improving some of the social issues (Kavanaugh, 2002). In Hutchinson (2005), logs were utilized by students to reflect on and evaluate their work during the semester. This component was at the center of their service learning work. In *Theater* #307, some students expressed that the entire course was the equivalent of an entire reflection piece. Following log recording, all students and children completed written assignments and questionnaires near the end of the class to voice their reflections. The report by Goldbard (2008) highlights how 83% of the population surveyed found a positive aspect to the quality and the amount of emphasis on reflection and analysis in civic engagement on projects related to the arts. As noted earlier, the strong connection between all service learning programs, including those with an art component, is the reflection piece (Hedin 1989; Russel & Hutzel 2007).

Although incomplete by itself, Hedin's (1989) methodical reflections on service learning and self-reflections are a major component of the evaluation (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Gamwell, 2005; Kavanaugh, 2002; Marullo, 1998; Myers-Lipton, 1998; Russell & Hutzel, 2007). Data collected from students' journals and essays were quantified into regression equations. Findings suggested that students' could better

identify their professional interests when they took the service learning course (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Goldbard 2008; Putnam, 1995; Shumer, 1994). Goldbard (2008) highlights how students can use their experiences in service learning to their benefit as it adds value to their arts degree. As we will see in this project, the qualitative data strongly suggested, through the reflection pieces, that some of the participants improved their self-confidence and social skills.

Impact of Service Learning on Stakeholders

The main thrust of this paper is to illustrate that service learning can make a positive difference for all stakeholders. In particular, service learning can increase retention, routes to success (Zlotkowski, 2011), grades, and persistence rates (Zhao & Kuh, 2004); foster identity formation (Marullo, 1998); help students to develop their occupational identities (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Goldbard 2008; Putnam, 1995; Shumer, 1994); and increase their economic outcomes (Putnam, 1995). The results of service learning activities indicate that students are more pro-social, while being concerned with one another's needs and feelings (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Goleman et al., 2002), and are motivated by the experience (Hedin, 1989; Shumer, 1994). Service learning impacts students by assisting them in making decisions about their future careers and helping them become better citizens and community members (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Shumer, 1994). It brings meaning into their learning experience and students can relate what they learn in their real life experiences. Collaboration, for instance, was a skill that students and children practiced in *Theater #*307 and which will continue to be important in carrying on their lives. Further, lower crime, more effective government, and

better schools can be derived by civic engagement through service learning (Putnam, 1995).

Benefits of Integrating the Arts into the Academic Curriculum

The second portion of the literature review focuses on the benefits of integrating the arts into the academic curriculum. The main authors in this section are Caterall (2002), Deasy (2002), DeJarnette (1997), de la Cruz (1995), Hetland (2000), Minton (2000), and Podlozny (2000). The studies found on this topic were collected in a compendium assembled in 2002, which was sponsored by the Department of Education and by the National Endowment for the Arts located in Washington, DC. This collection includes 62 studies on the areas of dance, drama, multi-arts, and music and their benefits when these areas are part of and integrated into the set of courses for children of various ages and backgrounds. These studies indicate that the arts can support the advancement of essential academic and social skills such as literacy and mathematics (Deasy, 2002). This compendium was the only one found of its kind, which directly addressed how various forms of art can positively impact academic and social skills.

Social skills. Some of the social skills addressed in the studies were confidence, focus, and distraction exerted by children and how the arts can have a positive influence on these areas (Russell & Hutzel, 2007). Self-confidence (Harland et al., 2000; Ross, 2000), persistence, reading skills, and creativity in poetry were found to be greater when traditional dance was incorporated into the curriculum (Catterall, 2002). Children have shown to put forth more emphasis on their academic work when multi-arts, like devising theater, are part of the course of study. Further, the students pay more attention to their work, the dropout rate is reduced, and they apply higher-order thinking skills (Catterall,

2002). In the study by de la Cruz (1995), he also found that creative drama, such as devising theater programs, enhanced the social skills of children. For instance, they were able to ignore distractions around them.

Academic skills. As mentioned earlier, the compendium used for the literature review was the only amalgam of studies found of its kind which directly addressed how various forms of arts can positively impact academic skills. Dramatic plays improved academic skills such as writing and reading when in conjunction with one another (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999; DuPont, 1992; Goodman 1990; Moore & Caldwell, 1993; Pellegrini, 1980; Page, 1983; Parks & Rose, 1997; Podlozny, 2000; Wolf, 1998). The same was true with poetry writing (Kassab, 1984), and re-telling stories (Pellegrini, 1984). In the area of visual arts, drawing and writing resulted in achieving higher scores for content (DeJarnette, 1997). In dance, one study found that children improved their reading skills when they were also asked to represent their bodies in the shape of letters (Rose, 1999). Overall, academic achievement was positive when it includes arts involvement (Catterall, 1998; Heath, 1998).

As for the music art form, it was found to enhance writing (Catterall, 2002; Kariuki & Honeycutt, 1998), reading abilities (Butzlaff, 2000), and conduct (Baum & Owen 1997; Standley, 1996). Children's focus level was improved with the use of contingent music (music used as a reward for learning and for behavior changes) (Standley, 1996).

Another academic skill that is impacted positively when combined with various forms of arts is spatial reasoning, which includes mathematics, conduct, and reading (Catterall, 2002; Hetland, 2000; Vaughn, 2000). As for science, Tishman, MacGillivray,

and Palmer (1999) and Catterall (2002) have found a correlation between visual arts and science. Children's critical skills are used when they reason about what is seen in the arts, which can transfer to science reasoning.

The internal or external perception of oneself, known as self-concept, improves through performing music, learning traditional dance, and dramatic enactment. It is interesting to note that these areas all involve the performing arts where skills are exhibited for an audience (Catteral, 2002). In Seaman's (1999) study, he could not prove that children who spent more time in arts education had, as a consequence, a lower academic achievement rate.

Service Learning and Devising Theater

This dissertation focuses on service learning and a particular facet of theater called devising theater. Devising theater is a greatly compelling process for this project since its main attention is to treat all constituencies as equal. All stakeholders were given opportunities to provide input toward the creation of a new play. The play was the representation of an amalgam of ideas shaped into one body of work. This process was achieved, among other things, through freedom to create, liberal improvisation, spontaneity, risk taking, collaboration, and experimentation (Kerrigan, 2001; Oddey, 2007; Rohd, 1998), and is non-judgmental (Kerrigan, 2001).

Service Learning with an Art Component: Impact on Target Populations

Adejumo (2010) provides details about the "learners" who are the target population of his research. He explains how service learning can facilitate change through art. The results amalgamated "enhances their self-esteem, pride in their community, and enthusiasms for participating in future community development

40

projects" (p. 24). This type of study is of great value to the dissertation as I wanted to learn more about the impact on the target population following a service learning project with an art component.

Considerations by University when Instituting Service Learning

When universities develop policies about service learning and civic engagement they may not necessarily think through the implications and how they might impact the traditional academic style of learning (Hedin, 1989; Lewis, 2004). For instance, they need to consider changing and/or adding the resources needed to ensure the successful completion of the initiatives. Universities need to do a thorough analysis before instituting a service learning model. They need to evaluate if the emphasis should be on student learning and/or in community transformation. Lasting social change collaborations with communities take time and sustainable efforts to establish (Lewis, 2004). Change in the school system, as in many other areas, can be difficult to achieve as pointed out by Fullan (2001), especially if the institutional underlying assumptions are not compatible with the explicit ones (Walker & Gutmore, 2002).

Conclusion

The process of learning Community and Cultural Development (CCD) can seem foreign at first, as an immigrant might feel when he relocates, until he has a chance to experiment new ways and he selects one that works for his own development in his new environment (Goldbard, 2008). Naturally, service learning cannot be expected to solve all stakeholders' problems (Goldbard, 2008; Zhao & Kuh, 2004), but it can improve the complex relationships among all parties.

Having the right kind of community setting is essential for a good service learning program. That setting is one that encompasses the three Ts: technology, talent, and tolerance (Florida, 2002; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Social tolerance, for instance, is crucial in fostering the right kind of communities that can appeal to creative individuals to reside there. Additionally, people of different ethnic and or sexual orientations should feel welcome to inhabit a service learning community. If they are tolerated in a community, they can contribute to the creativity of the region (Florida, 2002). It is preferred for the aspirations of individuals in a community to instill more than tolerance. Compassion and open-mindedness are essential in a multicultural society (Grady, 2000), as they allow better understanding of our environment. As Burbank and Hunter (2008) indicate, almost a third of school children are from various cultural backgrounds. Multiculturalism is valuable as it enriches our communities by providing a more diverse culture with innovative possibilities.

The town considered for this project is an ideal location for pursuing a community-based learning initiative with an arts component. It currently has such a curriculum established for this purpose and it is slowly including arts in the initiative. Also, many service learning projects are already under way at the University, and the vast majority of them are outside the town and country. The various agencies and constituencies I interviewed locally were surprised and pleased that such a project is taking place in their town. As Dewey (1946) and a University student stated in a planning meeting about a walking tour of the adjacent town (Gao, 2012), democracy needs to originate at home, which is the thrust for this research.

The town was established in 1756 (ERA, 2012). In the mid 19th century through the 20th, the local area was impacted by segregation between Whites and Blacks. As my office colleague explained in a recent assignment, the concerns of the Black residents were dismissed by the White. This was evidenced by allowing the play "The Clansman" to be enacted, even though many asked that it not be performed. Controversial aspects of the play were that Whites were a superior race and that it did not describe the Blacks in a positive manner (Henderson-Napoli, 2012; Washington, 2005). One approach to recognize the pervasive racism by the Whites is through Senge's (1990) mental models. It is human nature to reach assumptions and generalizations about others without investigating further about them.

The town is situated at the juncture of technology, tolerance, and talent (Florida, 2002). It is on the border of U.S. Highway #1 where many high-tech companies are operating. The University and its town attract a multitude of worldwide talent. At first sight, it seems apparent that the town is tolerant of all genders, sexual orientations, and ethnicities, which make it for an ideal setting.

For the dissertation, the idea is to create the first course for this University that would combine service learning with community-based theater for, of, by (Geer, 1998), and Schroeder (1996) adds, "near" the children living mostly in a lower socioeconomic area of the town. The purpose of the course was, among other items, to elicit ongoing concerns and struggles by the children and for them to express them. Community-based theater, through the devising method, was an ideal art form because the voices of the children were integrated in a theatrical presentation that depicted their stories into a play. Theater is a way to experience and perform common significance (Cohen-Cruz, 2005;

Kuftinec, 2003), which means that *Theater #307* was a project created by, for, and of the community members.

Community-based theater is performed by the members of the community who are usually nonprofessional actors and/or with proficient artists. In this case, the play was performed by the children and students who have little acting experience (Cohen-Cruz, 2005; Kuftinec, 2003). This provided further opportunities for the children to experiment, reflect, and often attempt something new. The University students were intricately involved in the process along with the lecturer who leaded the efforts. The content of the course mattered as much as the relationships between the University students and children. The final presentation was made to friends and family, and others who were interested to learn more about their community. This course was part of the community learning initiative program, which was already established at the University. Often social justice issues make use of a participatory action research method, which draws parallels in community-based research (Lewis, 2004).

Ultimately, the long-term goal for me is to create a community-based learning curriculum that would encompass a majority of the fields taught at the University, including the arts. The impact on participants is greater when service learning is intensive (Marullo, 1998). It would seem most beneficial in the long-term to target a comprehensive and systematic curriculum service learning program for University students. Currently, the CBL program does not provide a certificate program and a further study might identify that the immediate community would benefit by a comprehensive service learning program at this University.

Chapter III

Methodology

Mixed methodology can be a powerful research tool because it draws from both the quantitative and qualitative forms of methodologies. Mixed methods have been known as the "third methodological movement" (Creswell & Clark, 2011). There are two major preceding movements, which are qualitative and quantitative. They are also still in use independently.

Mixed methods are appropriate for the problem at hand because it provided a needed transformation approach for this project. A transformative method was used because it furnished an effective framework in participatory action research. The purpose of a participatory action research is to enhance the quality of life of the underprivileged (Hinchey, 2008) children by collaborating with the University students and after-school children in the process. Hinchey (2008) compares a participatory orientation to emancipatory and critical theories. All are geared toward a democratic society and bringing more freedom to those who may have become passive to their situation (Boal, 1985, Creswell & Clark, 2011; Hinchey, 2008).

The advantages and rationale of the transformative method is that the structure allows social justice changes (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Hinchey, 2008; Mertens, 2007). Through this approach, the research can attend to disparity and unfairness in society (Mertens, 2007). Social justice in this study refers to the increased distribution of benefits in our society to marginalized levels.

In this study, the after-school children were typically in lower socioeconomic levels who resided within a prosperous area. I worked with the children of this program during a pilot qualitative study in the fall of 2009. It was noted through reading poetry written by the children that they had a low level of self-confidence. Further, I met with the director of the program to inquire about the continuation of the dissertation. The director gave authorization to continue the research with the children who attended the Community Center (CC). A request was made for the confidential financial information about the parents/guardians to determine the socioeconomic level of the children who attend CC.

In this project, I was responsive (Creswell, 2009) to the children's needs. I did so by formulating a service learning course with an art component which was designed with the input of the after-school children and University students to enhance skills such as self-efficacy and interpersonal communication. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to succeed at tasks. Self-efficacy can be an indicator of quality of life (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). As the methodology is described in more detail in this chapter, the goal for me was to show a change in self-efficacy and interpersonal communications by the children before and after the service learning course through devising theater. Further, the change in social responsibility for the University students who collaborate in the service learning course with the after-school children was evaluated at the end of the course.

Statement of the Problem

As seen in Chapter I, the after-school children of the community in this study live within a relatively affluent school region. One goal of this project was an effort to reallocate knowledge and other assets from the University institution to the children in

need who live in the same community. Another goal of this project was to increase social responsibility in the University students by enhancing self-efficacy and interpersonal communications in the after-school children through a service learning course with a theater component. As Downey (2005) indicates, theater can be the catalyst for participants to realize that they can make a difference in their lives and those of others.

One expectation of this project was to improve the self-efficacy of the children. This can be described as the capacity to successfully control exigent tasks (Luszczynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005). The children had their self-efficacy assessed through pre and post surveys and observations. The results determined that self-efficacy increased at different levels for some of participants. Further, feedback was gathered from the University students and the lecturer.

Challenges. The challenge to this mixed methodology was the need to structure a sound plan for the project. I studied other mixed methods projects with a transformative perspective to learn how they were implemented and evaluated the success of the projects. These other transformative projects had a similar aim as this dissertation. That is, the intentions for each project were to enhance human interests that are located in a lower socioeconomic status (Sweetman, Badiee, & Creswell, 2010). The review of these comparable studies was helpful in the effective use of mixed method research.

The other stated challenge by Creswell (2011) for the researcher is to define the paradigm worldview and theoretical lens. This project took a participatory worldview. That is, it enabled, in a collaborative fashion (Mertens, 2007), the children to partake in their development of self-efficacy and interpersonal skills. For instance, the children were given a multitude of ways to provide insights about them during the entire fall 2012

47

semester. The creative input and process (Cohen-Cruz, 2005; Kuftinec, 2003) was the impetus for a new play based on their artistic interests such as writing, singing, acting, and dancing. The facilitators for the course, that is the University students and lecturer, made use of various methods to build a comfortable environment for the children in the group so that they would express themselves openly.

For instance, facilitators had a wide array of games to select from for non-actors such as those offered by Boal (2002) and Rohd (1998). Questions such as "What am I? What do I want?" (Boal, 2002) were asked of the children and they recorded their thoughts about who they are (such as a child, Hispanic, trouble maker, etc…) and their wants onto paper. Their wants revealed that they want to be happy, to be wealthy, etc. These in turn became considerations for the final play. The product of the process was not predictable until almost rehearsal time. The final performance was about the wide topic of dreams. All were identified and assembled through the guided process by the lecturer and students.

Research Design

This study has a sequential transformative explanatory design with three main strands. The sequential portion took the form of QUAN => QUAL => QUAN (see Appendix B). The transformative part takes into account how the project brings positive change in enhancing the self-efficacy and interpersonal skills for the children, and social responsibility for the University students. That is, the creation process of a play empowered the after-school children by directly involving them in the development and performance of the play about thoughts they wished to express. This was done in partnership with the University students, the instructor, and the researcher.

The explanatory component indicates that the quantitative came first followed by the qualitative or observational phase (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2011). The experimental segments were established throughout the first and third quantitative phases by conducting, analyzing, and interpreting close-ended surveys with the University students and children. The observational (Fink, 2005) portion was demonstrated by the second qualitative phase through open-ended surveys, the implementation of a service learning course with a theater focus, observations, photography, and field notes.

The Nature of Action Research

Action research is led by individuals who are part of the same organization under study. In this case, I am an administrator in an academic unit and this research project was a process that evolved within the same unit. One advantage is that my knowledge of the organization brings clarity to the development of the dissertation. On the other hand, it may have brought some bias.

The action research addresses gaps that I identified in the conceptual frame such as the promotion of additional service learning courses in the arts. To address these gaps, I systematically collected, observed, and analyzed the changes through a mixed methodology, which incorporated multiple target populations. In this case, the populations are the University students, the privileged, and at-risk children. This led to the review of reflections by the lecturer and University students and myself. The above progression led to this action research.

The groundwork to build a plan for this project included research questions found in Chapter I. Those were based on my interests for the topic of a service learning course integrating devising theater with and for children. The formulation of the plan was based

on a review of the many research designs and utilized the one that would bring forward the most compelling information that would assist in making conclusions. The action plan was implemented based on cycles described below.

By using a transformative mixed methodology I was able to triangulate data from a multitude of sources, which strengthened the validation for the study. Systematic data collection was made by observing the children and University students for three hours a week during the fall 2012 semester. In addition, many videos and photographs were taken by students and lecturers. These were supplemented by the notes the lecturer took as the class was underway. She readily also provided email exchanges between the students and herself as students prepared to apply the lesson plans they fashioned. All data sources were recorded in writing, coded, and analyzed using various software packages.

Purpose of this action research through cycles. The action research study included several cycles of research, which used qualitative and quantitative design methods. The first cycle entailed a quantitative assessment of the underserved children and University students by administering close-ended surveys. The second cycle required me to observe children and University students in a theater service learning course during the entire fall semester of 2012. I was present during each class, observed, and took notes about anything that would be helpful in understanding the social and interpersonal skills of the children and how they changed or not changed during the fall of 2012. Similarly, I observed the University students and took notes related to the way they approached the children and worked with them during the semester. I had limited participation in the course so that my presence did not interfere with the work of the lecturer and students. It appeared that the children and students did not pay attention to me after a couple of

weeks. I remained in the observer role of the participant/observer continuum (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2006). The third cycle evaluated the impact of the course by analyzing all qualitative and quantitative data gathered during the fall 2012 which concluded with a play based on the stories the children wanted to tell.

This mixed-method project identified the framework of this University community partnership by beginning with a quantitative skills assessment. Through a series of structured closed-ended surveys with the children, and recorded observations of University students and children at the Community Center (CC), a non-profit early childhood literacy program located on the University campus, the skill levels of the community's at-risk and privileged children were identified. CC is committed to closing the minority achievement gap in the community. CC is a good site for this study because it brings together many of the underprivileged children of the community under one roof which facilitated in part the initial assessment.

The generated qualitative and quantitative data from the study provided direction and parameters for the University and its community partnership and subsequent intervention. By surveying and observing the children and the University students, I was able to identify the various viewpoints and perspectives about the type of sustainable community partnership intervention that would most benefit the community. Common themes emerged from the observations, which provided additional clues about how to design the study. This service learning intervention has the potential to foster a local community partnership outreach between the University and the underserved children in the community beyond this project.

Strands. The three strands or processes in this research design include a large

two-prong quantitative and a central qualitative strand. That is, the priority focus was

placed on the quantitative strands since they gathered data from a larger population in

phase one and the results were generalized. The quantitative phase made use of the Social

Skills Improvement System created by Gresham and Elliott (2008). In this phase, the

survey questions evaluated the children's perceptions concerning their own self-efficacy

and interpersonal skills before and after the creation and implementation of a service

learning course with a theater component. The survey also gathered the perceptions of the

children by their teachers. Quantitative data were collected from these close-ended

surveys, which were then analyzed and interpreted (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The

quantitative strand in phase one informed the second qualitative strand (see Appendix B).

The art component of the program, the presentation of a theatrical production, is

rich because there were many facets, such as drawing, producing soundscapes,

improvisation, writing, singing, scene making, and acting, in which the children were

able to explore and participate. It was also an occasion for the children to become more

confident and to have the bravery to question injustice in their lives (Downey, 2005).

The director of the Community Center readily shared the children for a little over

an hour each week for this endeavor. She also arranged for a meeting with the supervisor

of visual and performing arts for the regional schools, who is also a teacher at the middle

school. He assembled seven children that are privileged. Initially, I was disappointed that

this group of children was privileged. As we will see, this provided another layer of

dynamics for the children's interaction with various socio economic groups. Further, I

made contact with several local agencies and interested parties in the project during the

summer of 2012. A teacher in the local middle school, who is also the Community and

Coordinator for the Latinos en Progreso, identified at-risk children at the school who

might be interested in the class. My criteria were that they are at-risk, that they would

make the commitment for a full semester project, and that they would have an interest in

the course. As it turned out, six of the recommended children by the middle school

teacher also attended the after-school program at the Community Center. All of the

children were interviewed by the lecturer and all were admitted in the class. All of the

parents who responded to the waivers approved for their child to participate in the theater

service learning course. They continued the academic work with their tutors at the

Community Center. The weekly observations during the fall semester provided a plethora

of advantageous chances for me to compare and contrast how the children and students

behaved during the fall 2012. This provided a rich database from which was constructed

this mixed method research. Qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted.

The post quantitative phase reflected any changes in self-efficacy and

interpersonal skills after the children had a chance to perform the theatrical play. The

same Social Skills Improvement System survey in the first phase was utilized again in the

third phase. It was administered to those children who participated in the play. This was

followed by an overall interpretation (Creswell & Clark, 2011) of the three phases.

The information obtained throughout the semester via surveys and observations

was shared with the lecturer as it might have provided insight in the development of the

play. The role of the facilitators, which included the University students and lecturer, was

to devise a collective theatrical play. My function was to observe and gather data about

the behavior of the children and students during the development of the play and to see how they evolved during the fall 2012.

The sample. The approach for the first quantitative phase utilized a purposeful sampling method (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Glesne 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) in which the lecturer selected available at-risk children who had an interest in a performance class. That is, the lecturer created an application (Appendix C) for interested children and a questionnaire (Appendix D) for the interview. All children referred by the director of the Community Center and by the middle school teacher completed the application and questionnaire. The questionnaire administered by the lecturer asked why they wanted to participate in a performance project. The questions asked were: Did they work collaboratively in projects and were those more interesting than working alone? If so, the children were asked to provide more details. The questionnaire ended by inquiring if they had skills that they wanted to share. All 13 were admitted in the class since they fulfilled the requirements of intending to attend all classes. Unfortunately, three at-risk children dropped out at the onset or after attending one or two classes.

All children were asked to complete the phase one Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) survey and the survey I created called "Survey Says." Similarly, all University students who enrolled in the service learning course were asked to complete the Survey Says (Appendix E) which was mostly closed-ended survey. University students were also asked to be interviewed by the lecturer to determine their interest in the course. In the end, 12 University students participated in the course. Some previously took theater courses and some did not. At this University, students cannot major in

theater, but they can earn a certificate. The students came from a varied liberal arts

background and are majoring in sociology, economics, and religion. The rationale is that

students with a variety of personal experiences will complement each other and provide

good feedback to the instructor and researcher along the research process.

The sample structure for this study was enhanced in the first quantitative phase as

all children had an equivalent opportunity (Fowler, 1993) to be chosen to respond to the

surveys. In the third quantitative phase, all children who participated in the second and

qualitative phase were asked to complete once more the Social Skills Improvement

System (SSIS) survey so that they could be compared to the set completed at the start of

the semester. As for the University students, all of them were made aware of the new

course through the University on-line course offerings. In addition, publicity was created

specifically for the course and distributed widely to the University student population.

For the second and qualitative phase, the same children selected for the first round

remained participants throughout all phases of the project. A purposeful sampling

approach was utilized. That is, children were selected based on the recommendation of

the director of the Community Center and the teacher, along with applications and

interviews by the lecturer (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Glesne 2006). This

sampling method was used to choose the sample of 13 children, which included, at first,

six at-risk. All children recommended by the teacher and the director had an equal chance

of being selected (Creswell & Clark, 2011) for this phase, which included a service

learning course with qualitative survey and observations. Permission was sought from the

Community Center, the University where the course was taught, the University from

which I am completing my degree, and the Institutional Research Board (IRB). As part of

the first class for the course, the lecturer provided time for the children to complete two surveys: SSIS and Survey Says. The SSIS survey is a closed-ended document through which I utilized the deductive mode. Predictions were made based on the generalization of the samples studied (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Validity. Mixed methods research can enhance validity if well constructed because it provides an opportunity to benefit from more than one method such as quantitative and qualitative. The methods should be adapted around the research questions at hand. In this study, quantitative surveys are used to empirically evaluate a larger population in the first phase. The second qualitative phase uses observations, videos, and photographs to gather rich descriptions. The quality of the data was expected to be of good validity because of the purposeful sampling technique (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Glesne 2006), which intentionally selected at-risk children recommended by the Community Center and the middle school. These children represent a combination of ethnicities and grade levels which makes for a good sample. As for the qualitative phase, there could be an increase in bias because the profile of the after-school children may be unlike those who are privileged. The sample also includes six privileged children from the middle school, except for one who was at the high school level, who were also participating in the service learning course. Member checking was used as an additional method to increase validity. I compared my notes from the observations with that of the University students and the lecturer and they agreed with one another (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Glesne, 2006; Hinchey, 2008).

Internal validity was the focus of this study. That is, without trustworthy conclusions and inferences drawn from the reasoning created through data collection, the

validity of the research would be diminished. It is imperative to properly support the findings and to sufficiently provide empirical and qualitative details demonstrating significant causes and effects (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In this study, the quantitative phase informed the qualitative phase and vice versa. The closed-ended surveys provided information about the levels of self-efficacy, and interpersonal communication. The same surveys were administered at the end of the service learning course. Qualitatively, significant changes in some instances were made, analyzed, and reported.

Democratic validity was also essential in this project. This type of validity refers to the attentiveness of the researcher to the feedback obtained by the stakeholders and participants of this study such as the lecturer. The collaborative concept was embodied in the qualitative phase in which the students and children designed a play. Children assembled and performed with the guidance of the instructor and University students. This follows the concept of a transformative research design, which was the foundation of this project (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

I have guarded against compromising the data from all three phases. This was achieved by controlling for validity threats in the data collection, data analysis, and interpretations. Each research question was answered from the interpretations obtained from the mixed methodology. This was done in relation to the social justice and advocacy views of the research (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

Limitations. In terms of resources (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005), I was most concerned about the time it would take to design the service learning course and for it to be approved as part of the community based learning initiative. I delayed the completion

of my dissertation by one year to allow the necessary time for the course to be well designed by the expert lecturer in devising theater. Ultimately, the course was approved by the director of theater and the registrar of the University. Also, the goal was to include a faculty member that is currently part of the University Art Center who, ideally, also had knowledge of theater. A faculty member was identified and she agreed to be part of this dissertation committee. This scholar has been essential in advising, overseeing the text, and asking pertinent questions from me to ensure that I incorporate needed elements to make a significant case for this project. In general, the time available to faculty to advise is tightly restrained.

The plan was that the service learning program at the University would review and approve a course proposal in conjunction with this project. An expert in devising theater was hired to lead the University students and children to devise a play based on the input collected in the qualitative phase from the children and students.

In terms of ethical limits, this project was subjected to several reviews. The director of the after-school program and the dissertation committee reviewed the proposal before it was implemented. Further, the project was subjected to the Institutional Review Board approval since it entailed surveying 6th to 9th graders, some were affiliated with the after-school program and some were not. It was important to consider all time constraints along with other resource limitations in finalizing the methodology of this dissertation.

I needed to consider the limits of the University. Currently, the University offers a dozen courses as part of the community learning initiative (CLI). None of them, until a year and a half ago, offered an art component. I had preliminary conversations with the assistant director (AD) to the CLI program two years ago. I presented an overview of the

project to the AD and she was open to the concept for this new course. The concurrent step was to meet with the director of the Community Center along with the faculty from the University Art Center. All agreed that I should undertake the project.

I conducted a trial study on a similar topic in the fall of 2009. The director of the after-school program participated in the interview process. She also received a copy of the class project. The researcher recently contacted the director and she obtained a general approval for the research. A copy of the self-efficacy was shared and a draft copy of the qualitative survey was also provided. Before the final version was sent to the IRB it was also provided to the director for her review and approval. As for the middle school teacher, she was instrumental in identifying children at-risk from the Latino community.

The constituencies. There were many stakeholders to consider in the project. The constituents that I hope will benefit from the results of the study are the underserved children of the community, the Community Center, the Community Learning Initiative at the University, the middle school teacher, the University students/mentors who participated in a service learning course, the researcher, and the lecturer who lead the service learning devising theater course. All of the constituents are important, but the children and the University students are of utmost significance.

The site. The class was taught on campus located within walking distance from the Community Center, the middle school, and the high school. The community center is the ideal organization for this study as it gathered in one place some of the after-school children population I wanted to study in the community. This organization is also housed conveniently on the University campus. This study includes three types of individuals: University students, instructor, and 6th through 9th grade children. The children

population for this study was provided from children who attended the Community

Center (CC), from those recommended by middle school teachers.

Measurement instruments. Measurements include reports and charts created in

software such as Nvivo10. My rationale for choosing this computer software was that it is

designed to assist the researchers in achieving their objectives more effectively.

Unstructured information becomes more accessible and provides the chance to add

significant value to the work. Data were collected through surveys for the children and

University students, observations, and artifacts such as stories written by the CC children,

photographs, and videos. As with measurement devices, data analysis made use of

software. Once the data were coded, many queries, reports, and charts were produced to

assist in the analysis of the information.

Data collection. The goal of data collection was to obtain answers to the research

questions. I modified the participants' names to fictional ones so as to not offend anyone

(Creswell & Clark, 2011). For example, the children were simply labeled using the first

three or four letters of their first name. It was essential also to include a representative

portion of the stakeholders into the research. In this way, there was greater buy-in to the

trustworthiness (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Hinchey, 2008) of the project. In this case, the

input from the lecturers, students, children, teachers were incorporated in the findings.

Once the project was completed, a debriefing session was made with all interested

participants. The performance by the children in the play was a significant portion of the

debriefing as it showcased to the parents in the audience a new perspective of what their

children could do. Some of the disconfirming evidence (Kerrigan, 2011) of the changes

was further documented in the post quantitative surveys.

The structure of the data collection was to gather survey results, and to observe the children and University students. The rehearsal and final play were videotaped and notes were taken during class sessions that I observed. These transcriptions were coded in the computer software. The artifacts such as the drawings, songs, dances, and writings by the children for the play were analyzed and coded.

Mixed data analysis. The quantitative data analysis was made through the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS). It contained surveys for the children and teachers to be administered pre and post the Devising Theater with Youth class. The system provided software to tabulate and analyze statistical information about each child. The main emphasis was on the evolution of social skills such as communication, cooperation, assertion, and responsibility. The progress reports were generated for each self-evaluation made by the children and teachers' assessment of the children's progress pre and post.

The structure of the qualitative data analysis as part of the second phase was to review all coded surveys, observations, field notes, photographs, transcriptions, videos, and to identify patterns that emerged from the data. A draft outline was created from this phase, which provided guidance for the formulation of the results. From the draft outline, a chart was created which illustrated the major themes and how they connected with one another. From this, I was able to begin my analysis by pulling various recurring codes and patterns along with the coded text.

Once the qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed, I interpreted how the qualitative data were explained from the quantitative phase. For instance, one of the questions from the survey asked the children, "I ask others to do things with me." The child indicated before the start of the course and after the theatrical

play if this is a true statement and how important it is. I looked at how the quantitative

answers compared to how the child actually behaved (qualitative) during the semester.

Similar comparisons were made for all survey questions and examined across all children

at the onset of the fall semester, during the semester, and at the very end. That is, the

research showed how the qualitative surveys, observations, field notes, photographs,

videos, could be understood from the initial quantitative social skills assessments. At this

point, it was determined that further investigation was needed to explain any

discrepancies in the data.

Chapter IV

Findings

I met with the executive director of the local housing authority who provided and

reviewed statistical information about accommodations for the low-income families from

which at-risk children would be identified for this project. The Authority's goal is to

foster safe and reasonably priced housing quarters to enhance self-reliance and financial

constancy for its inhabitants. The governmental public corporations "own and manage

236 family and senior/disabled apartments with five developments throughout the (…)

Borough and Township" ("Welcome!," 2013). Activities reported by the NJ Department

of Law and Public Safety include gang activities in the town's Borough and youth

aggression. From 2008 to 2009, the level of assault, homicide, and terroristic threats in

the county increased respectively to 5%, 10%, and 28% ("Domestic," 2009). These

statistics were part of the impetus for this project.

Prior to applying for funding for the course, I successfully obtained the approvals

from the Institutional Research Boards from the University I work for as an

administrator, since the course was taking place in that location, and for the University in

which I am enrolled in the doctoral program. As for funding, I regrettably was not

successful because I could not act as the Principal Investigator at the University I work

for since I do not teach in that institution. Further, I could not obtain monetary support

from the University where I studied, because the course and money would not benefit the

University directly. I also submitted proposals to obtain funding from a couple of internal

departments at the University where I work and they did not prove favorable. However, I

was grateful for the Art Department of the local University to provide the majority of the resources needed for the course. The Community Based Initiative (CBI) also provided a subsidy.

Some of the agencies in this small New Jersey community were hoping that I would consider children in adjacent towns who certainly could benefit from such a program. This would have necessitated transportation. Unfortunately, the service learning course was not comprised with the necessary budget to transport children who lived outside of town.

I met many representatives of local agencies to recruit children at-risk aged 12 to 14-years-old. Last summer, I visited several organizations dedicated to improving the conditions and situations of local adolescents. On this quest, the agencies were excited about the project and delighted that it would bring the University and at-risk children together. One agency indicated that only on occasion does the University reach out to its office. Further, since it was summertime and most children were out of school, it was tricky for these agencies to readily assist in identifying potential children for the study. They suggested that once a candidate is identified, that other friends of theirs be sought immediately after.

Findings from Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collections

The sections that follow are detailed so that the context is described. This led to specific mixed data collections. The segments include recruiting the children and students, the profiles of children and students, retention, and the devising process.

Recruiting University students for the course. Enlisting University students was comparatively much easier than recruiting children. (From here on end, when I

mention the University, I refer to the institution where the research took place.) The Devising Theater with Youth course was well publicized across the student body and took place during the fall of 2012 at the University. A flyer was produced by the Arts Department to recruit the students for the course. It proved a winning element of the recruiting process as 11 students and one auditor from various areas of study at the University were recruited. All University students were free to sign up for this course as they could for any other offerings for the fall 2012 semester. They were also required to be interviewed by Eleni, the fictitiously named lecturer for the course, and ultimately they all were admitted to the course since they fulfilled the interest for devising theater and were committed to the course. The 11 students formed the University ensemble and participated wholeheartedly and committed themselves steadily and entirely throughout the semester from the beginning to the end.

   Recruiting children for the course. As for recruiting at-risk children, I followed a recommendation by the Latina middle school teacher, who is also the coordinator for the Latino en Progresso, to translate all waivers, letters, and forms from English to Spanish. This measure was accomplished by my identifying University students who wanted to volunteer to translate the documents to ensure that the parents and guardians who only understood Spanish would comprehend the premises of the course. The grounds for the course were to devise a new play based on the input of the children and students. I hoped that the conversion of the forms from English to Spanish would promote interest by the parents and children for the course. Ultimately, the play was performed at the Community Center housed within the University campus in December 2012.

The Latino en Progresso group is comprised of Latino children who attend the middle school along with their parents. These individuals congregated on a weekly basis. Various activities are arranged throughout the year through this group.

The selected University Students met with Eleni, on a bi-weekly basis. Both sections were taught at the Art Center located on the University Campus a couple blocks away from the heart of town and the Community Center (CC). On Wednesdays', students would review and try out warm-up exercises, draft lesson plans, and think of ways to apply the readings to the lesson plans. On Fridays, the youth ensemble would join with the University ensemble and the lecturer so that the process of devising evolved from week to week at a vertiginous pace. From this point onward, when I refer to the ensemble, I am including both the University and youth groups into one unless I specifically mention one in particular. The session on Fridays began at 4 p.m., which provided sufficient time for the children to walk from the middle school to the University. The middle school holds about 700 students with a staff of approximately 70.

At-risk children were recommended by the middle school teacher and the local Community Center (CC). All attended an after-school program at CC. The privileged children were introduced to Eleni by a middle school teacher, who also served as the Supervisor of Visual and Performing Arts for the Regional Schools. All children were asked to complete an application so that the lecturer could determine their interests in a theater course and their commitments to coming to class every Friday during an entire semester. Eleni also interviewed the middle and high school children. The site was nearby the black box theater at the high school. The children shared about their previous collaborative experiences and how that may have contributed to their project(s).

The at-risk children were identified by the Latina middle school teacher who also served as the Coordinator for the Latinos en Progreso and the Community Liaison. In visiting the teacher's classroom, it was evident that she instilled the Habits of Mind principles and was a strong proponent. The walls were pasted with various posters, which described the virtues of the Habits of Mind. The 16 components of the Habits of Mind included items such as; applying past knowledge to new situations; thinking and communicating with clarity and precision; creating, imagining, and innovating; remaining open to continuous learning, persisting, thinking flexibility. I thought that the course would expose all the children to those habits of mind, which are transferrable skills from the classroom to their everyday lives.

This Latina coordinator was identified through an extensive identification phase of organizations in the town, which regularly produced programming for underprivileged children. With each new person I met, I requested other leads, which brought me to other contacts that could potentially identify additional interested children.

I began this outreach phase by meeting with a Coordinator of Activities for subsidized housing who eventually led me to the Latina teacher. She further assisted with the recruiting process. As part of this quest, I also met a representative of the Crisis Ministry at the Presbyterian Church; visited a person responsible for a youth project, which is a center that produces a comprehensive community-wide program and offers multi-system prevention and intervention efforts to diminish or eliminate juvenile wrongdoing. Further, I met with the executive director of an agency next to the town library that promotes adolescent health and well-being. I also chatted with a prevention specialist who recommended others.

This prevention specialist suggested that I contact a teenager by the fictitious name of Janine, who resided in a subsidized housing complex. She explained that the prospective child had learning disabilities and that Janine was slightly hyperactive. Janine lived in one of the affordable housing units managed by the Housing Authority. Its executive director shared some information about the specific apartments in the area. The complex holds approximately 39 families and 85% of them are Black ("Statistical," 2011). According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, the federal poverty level in 2010 was $22,050 for a family of four (Chau, Thampi, & Wight, 2010). In this complex, 36% of the families are below the national level.

I called Janine's home telephone number and asked when would be a good time for me to come over to retrieve the application. I arrived on the agreed date and time and inspected the complex. I found the building and surroundings very clean and orderly. The housing units did not resemble anything like you might find in Newark, New Jersey or other socio-economically depressed areas.

Janine's application read as follows:

> I would love to be involved in this project because I always wanted to be involve in theater since I can remember. I love Singing, dancing, It feel like im in my own world where I can be who I'am do what I love. What I can contribute to the group is positivity, fun, energy, bubbly. I sing for fun in my home, school, friends house. I do dancing well haitian dance, African and jazz sometime ballet I took dance class for about 2 years then stop because my family and I moved. Singing is my everything.

As I took the application from Janine, she added that she could easily walk from the school to the Art Center every Friday. The Prevention Specialist indicated that she would begin the 9th grade that fall. I provided the application to Eleni who promptly reached out to her. Eleni described to Janine the many ways that she could participate in

68

the class including acting, dancing, drawing, and writing. Eleni explained that the moment she mentioned the word "writing" to Janine, she seemed to have lost interest in the course. Her writing sample above is below average for a child at the 9th grade level, which is probably something she was aware of and was not comfortable in participating in a project that might reveal this to others. In fact, I contacted Janine a couple more times and I did not hear back from her. This was disappointing because she seemed to be a perfect candidate for the course. She had the interest in theater and the commitment to regularly attend the classes.

Retention. The roster for the children was not finalized until the day before the first class with the University and Youth ensembles. The University ensemble began by interacting with six at-risk children from the local middle school and six privileged children from the middle and one from the high school. Presence by the at-risk children was difficult to sustain. To foster increased numbers of underprivileged, I wrote to the Latina teacher and the director of the Community Center every Friday morning and asked that they would remind the at-risk children to join us. At the end of October, the three at-risk Latina children, recommended by the direction of the Community Center and the Latina teacher, dropped out of the course by the end of October. This represented a considerable 50% drop out rate for the at-risk population.

In an effort to rally better participation from the at-risk group, I also went to their classroom and tried to speak with as many as I could. I spoke with two of them informally, one Latina (Lisa) and one African American (Cathy), while the middle school teacher was present. I explained to Lisa and Cathy how the ensembles and the lecturer really enjoyed their previous participation in the class at the beginning of the semester. I

69

inquired why they did not come to class recently. Since they were not forthcoming to my

questions, I asked if there were some things we could have done differently to keep their

continued participation. Further, I asked about what they liked about the sessions they

attended. I explained that their ideas and input were essential and that it was not too late

for them to return. I concluded my visit by stating how wonderful their contributions

were to the course. The two at-risk children seemed comfortable speaking to me in their

classroom with the teacher present. Nevertheless, they did not voice any particular

dislikes about the course. Afterwards, when I met Cathy in the hallway she explained that

she made a commitment to the course and that she intended to stay with it. I spoke about

Lisa to Cathy as they seemed good friends. Cathy did not feel Lisa would continue

onward (October 25, 12).

As a last resort, with the suggestions of the teacher and director of the Community

Center, I offered all of the children gift certificates if they were to stay for the last four

sessions of the class. In the end, a Caucasian and two African-American underprivileged

children remained and the three Latinas permanently withdrew. This was disappointing

since they were important contributors to the devising process. Peer pressure may have

been part of the answer. In viewing a video, I saw Kristen speaking up in class and

described how her group selected a certain topic for the play. Kristen expressed that the

topics they chose were "aspect of cultures" and "Beauty and the Beast" but that this topic

could be related to beauty. As Kristen was speaking, Cathy turned around and made a

gesture to Kristen indicating that she should not utter her opinion.

In January 2013, I contacted the Latina teacher and the director for the

Community Center regarding their impressions of why the three Latinas withdrew early

on. In the opinion of the director, even though the commitment part was required at the start, they did not want to dedicate every Friday in the fall for this purpose. They wanted to keep options open for the library or other activities. The children indicated that they enjoyed the classes when they attended. As for the teacher, she believed that it was because of a lack of focus and that they were not mature enough to make the commitment.

Profiles of Students and Children

Profile of University students. Among other fields of study, University students who participated in the Devising Theater with Youth course are majoring in Religion, Sociology, Economics, Philosophy, and several also took courses in the theater program. Students with a theater interest were a strength, but this was not required to be admitted to the course since the varied knowledge and perspectives of all students added great value to the process of devising theater. From the start, the students and children were energized about the idea of creating a new play based on collaborative thoughts and actions. In the end, the script originated from their personal experiences and was extrapolated into a final outcome that combined many forms.

From the Community Based Research survey created for University students who take Community Based courses at the University and others nationwide, it outlined a general profile of the University students. The auditor was absent during the survey gathering. Three students were male (25%) and nine were female (75%). The respondents, adding to almost 55%, were sophomores. Other students were seniors, and juniors, which represented 18% in each category. There was one freshman, which was equivalent to 9% of the student population. There were two Black Females (18%), 72%

were Caucasians, and there was one Asian American male, which equaled 9% of the students.

Family income for the majority of students was in the middle range representing 54.5%. Next, 36% of them lived in an upper-middle revenue range, and one (9%) lived within the middle to upper middle earning range. The mothers' highest degree of education included one doctorate (9%). Four of the mothers had masters' and the same had bachelors' degrees. In addition, one had a law degree (9%) and one was a high school graduate. One father earned a doctorate (9%) and four had bachelors' degrees. A father graduated from high school. This left five of the fathers who graduated with a masters' degree (45%).

Profile of middle school and high school students. The youth ensemble was made up of at-risk and privileged children. At the onset, there were three Latinas, two Blacks, and one Caucasian at-risk child. By the second month of the semester, the three Latinas ceased their participation. The privileged group included one Asian and five Caucasians who faithfully attended class on Fridays.

Of the at-risk children, one was in 7th grade, and two in the 8th grade. The privileged profile showed that two were in the 8th grade, two in the 7th grade, and one in the 6th grade. According to the applications completed by the at-risk children, an interest was shown in the areas of theater. The privileged children expressed curiosity and abilities in being in a different character, in singing, in being humoristic, in writing, in expressing themselves, in creative body movements, in speaking with multiple foreign accents, in creating, in performing, and in having an artistic mind. One concern

articulated from the Asian child, Kelly, was her stage fright. Privileged children had a wide array of interests and abilities as compared to the at-risk.

As for performance experience, the at-risk children indicated on the application form that they had familiarity in dancing, acting, and playing the violin. One of the Black children, Cathy, stated that she was "not good as a violin player and passable as a dancer." This statement, which she did not need to provide, alluded to her perception of a shortage of skills and potentially her lack of control over this (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; Senge 1990). I question whether this self-assessment and attitude towards herself stem from how others perceive Blacks in general. Also, Cathy, an at-risk child in 8th grade, described her favorite daydream as "Las angelas in a manshion." This sentence construction shows that it is below expectations in regards to the formulation and grammar for an 8th grade child. Lorraine, another Black underprivileged child in the 7th grade, wrote very little on her application. Her handwriting and sentence constructions were poor. I circulated the confidential form to colleagues and they estimated that her handwriting was equivalent to a child in the 3rd grade. For example, on Lorraine's application form she wrote "my performance is acting." When she described her favorite daydream she wrote "I was Play with my Friends in Haiti that was in my house." All, except for one child in high school, attended the same middle school and are taught by the same teachers. Reasons for the differences in experiences and abilities could be that the home life and support levels are different and the children are not exposed to as many opportunities as the privileged children.

The privileged children had similar performing competences in acting, dancing, and playing instruments. In addition, they had the opportunity to act in a musical, sing in

73

a competition, play instruments such as piano, flute, trombone, and played at recitals. The privileged children also demonstrated other skills such as ballet, tap, stage crew, costume design and creation, dress in the opposite sex as a red queen, and sports. It is clear that the at-risk children had a more limited variety of interests and skills, which could be explained by their lower socio-economic class. That is, their home environments were less supportive as the parents' education levels were likely to be less as compared to the privileged children. Also, as per the Housing Authority report of subsidized complexes ("Statistical," 2011), 41% of the families only included one adult. This situation can partially explain why underprivileged children have opportunities for extracurricular activities. Further, it potentially reduced the amount of educational support these children obtained from their family life.

In-person interview questionnaires were conducted with both the privileged and at-risk children. However, when the at-risk children were interviewed by the lecturer, I was not able to join them to take notes. Therefore, responses were available only for the privileged children. The advantaged children described their motivations for participating in the course as potentially performing onstage, knowing new people at different levels, learning more from others' perspectives, controlling the audience, screenwriting, using a camera, and to have fun. When lecturer Eleni asked if they worked on collaborative projects, they responded by saying that they solved problems with others, combined ideas and experimented with others, which proved more interesting and efficient than working alone. The privileged adolescents were characterized by speaking several languages, had traveled around the world, and had acquired many talents.

A survey titled "Survey Says" (Appendix E) was administered to both ensembles on the first Friday of class in September. The survey highlighted the reasons why they enjoyed the arts. Ninety percent of the respondents indicated that they liked the arts because it expressed their thoughts and feelings, 82% enjoyed the arts because it was an added avenue to communicate with others. Finally, 77% expressed that they take pleasure in the arts because it makes others feel better. Additionally, the results indicated that most members of the youth ensemble spent on average a little over two days per week writing and four days a week playing music.

Devising Process

Contrary to traditional theater, which begins mostly with a previously written script, this screenplay was written over time with the contributions of all participants. Another major characteristic of the devising process is that the method is even more important than the actual final performance. It was all about sharing skills and expertise from one to another. It was about learning more about social justice (Hytten, 2006; Kuftinec, 2003) by sharing with others ideas, challenges, and skills. Tools, enabled by devising theater, allowed experimentation and allowed for discovery of themselves and others. This was achieved by suspending an idea (Belliveau, 2007; Cohen-Cruz 2005) at a time and a place. Uniqueness was then shaped (Grady, 2000). For instance, Kelly told about her dream of approaching her "crush." One of the scripts actually allowed her a chance to communicate this to another student, which in real life she may not have been able to gather the confidence. But now that she pretended and practiced the exchange of words, she may have the assurance to speak with him in real life. As Boal (2002) wrote,

"Theater is change and not simple presentation of what exists: it is becoming and not being" (p. 28).

Warm-ups. Warm-ups were essential for both Wednesdays' and Fridays' classes as they literally loosened up the bodies and throat. They energized the group and increasingly fostered a safe space (Belliveau, 2007) from week to week. Participants learned about each other by playing games (Kerrigan, 2001; Oddey, 2007). This resulted in additional trust among the members of the ensemble (Oddey, 2007), which was indispensable to make everyone comfortable with their new weekly environment. Ultimately, this relaxed atmosphere led to the creation of the play. Circles were made by the standing participants during the warm-ups. This time the ensemble focused on producing sounds, movements, and gestures (Boal, 2002; Oddey, 2007). The children realized that it was a time to relax and have fun.

Ensemble contract. At the onset of the course, Eleni had the ensemble members express their ideas of the important elements for this class, which would lead to its success. The major themes of the ground rules were to be open to ideas and experiences; be positive about ideas; provide a full commitment when in class; encourage each other; be inclusive; and be confident in the group's abilities. This agreement was signed by all and remained on the classroom wall for the remainder of the semester. Upon reflection, the students indicated that at the following session the children should have read the statements first to reinforce the buy-in and then pin up the large paper on the wall to strengthen the positive reception of the document. But, as it happened continuously, time was a critical element in short supply. By and large, time, finances, and space resources

directed many aspects of the end goal (Oddey, 2007). Regardless, the creation process had to move along.

What makes a good play or a performance piece? The lecturer led the initial classes and then the students teamed up into pairs of two and facilitated the rest of the semester. Before the students and children could determine a theme for the play, they needed to understand what makes a good performance. Eleni assembled the children and students and elicited their thoughts, which were not judged by anyone. The non-judgmental aspect of devising was brought up in the ensemble agreement and required to carry out the goals of the class. Ideas that emerged from the session were: problems, conflicts, singing, objectives, empathy, monsters, emotions, relevance to the audience, experimental, acrobatics, strong characters, and scary. In the end, all these ideas were incorporated in the final performance.

Determining a theme. Once the ideas about creating an interesting performance were laid out by the members of the ensembles, it was time to determine a theme for the play. The origination of the play (Oddey, 2007) began early in the process during the second class with the entire ensemble. Eleni asked that each person think about three types of topics. They were about stating a significant issue in the world, briefly describing something important, and/or an area about which the members wanted to learn more. The youth ensemble had additional powers as they could affix two topics per person, whereas the University students could only post one on the wall. This supplementary power for the youth members was important as the emphasis for the creation of the play was about their stories.

Once the topics were mounted to the walls, each ensemble person was able to vote for a particular topic by placing a star on the sheet of their liking. The topics most voted for were relationships, friendship, what other people dream about, and school. The topics were reduced to categories. Eleni reminded all about what makes a good play. Then, a democratic vote was taken where all covered their eyes so as not to be influenced by the selection of others. The majority vote was for the topic of dreams.

Topic for the play: Dreams. Since the early days of ancient Greece, dreams often stimulated writers and storytellers to incorporate the topic into the plots of various plays (Shampain, 2012). Dramatic performances that include dreams offer an opportunity for the particularly adolescent actors to embody unusual situations and characters in a playful manner (Shampain, 2012). Dreams are one of the most interesting topics for devising theater as it provides a carte blanche in terms of the contents and directions of the play. Anything is possible and can be created in one shape or another. The play can be about actual dreams, fictional dreams, or even dreams about the future. Eleni emphasized that, in the end, the play would not be about a talent show, but about their stories.

Transferrable Skills for Members of the Ensemble

Creation of a lesson plan. Many of the skills the students and children experimented with were transferrable to their current and future evolution. Consider the creation and application of a lesson plan. For many University students, creating a lesson plan was a new activity and challenge. Eleni provided reading material and time for the students to think about the best ways for children to learn the weekly topic. The subject matters varied from asset mapping, language based material, movement, music, sound based material, and for assembling all components, and integrating production elements.

As will be reviewed in the assessment, this practical aspect of the course was the most demanding for the students. Typically, facilitators prepared a draft lesson plan that was reviewed and rehearsed on Wednesdays with University students only. Learning by doing was a constant learning method that provided the ensemble with learning new skills or enhancing current ones by practically engaging in those skills, such as collaboration, lesson plans, asset mapping, projection, and creating soundscapes. During the Friday sessions, the lesson was put into action with both ensembles. These were some of the many transferrable skills acquired for the students.

For the creation of lesson plans, students read and conducted research on the topic before the Wednesday session. The two facilitators collaborated and prepared a plan. The difficult part was for the facilitators to grasp the end goal that the children needed to retain after the lesson and sufficiently carry and build upon the lessons in upcoming classes. This was compounded by the need for clear communication and strict timing restraints. Time management was a recurring challenge throughout the semester. All were wrestling with the time factor to go through and accomplish the devising process by the final performance. The final performance was a fixed date driven by the impracticality of finishing sooner than originally anticipated, which could adversely impact the quality and readiness of the participants in devising a play. Facing deadlines and dealing with them was another transferrable skill the students experienced. The students gained respect for teachers in general who accomplish the tasks of creating a plan, facilitating, and adjusting the plan based on anticipated and actual responses on a routine basis within a time limit.

Asset mapping. Asset mapping was a way for all to understand the full scope of participants' assets. It was empowering for the ensemble to view all their collective

strengths and talents, and at the same time, enhanced their perceptions of what could be applied and accomplished towards the common goal. This method differs from the common account of deficiencies of people in a neighborhood, which only worsens their impressions of what can be done to improve their situation (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996).

Leadership. I observed leadership by the lecturer, students, and children. For instance, Joyce led the warm-up exercise and rallied other children to join her in singing a song to a student. The lecturer shared the knowledge about devising with the students and children and gave guidelines from which the students could expand upon. Her syllabus with the reading material created an intrinsic direction for others to follow. The University students created lesson plans and learned from their mistakes by adjusting and editing the class during their sessions and/or when they met with the children on Fridays. The lessons rehearsed on Wednesdays certainly reduced the mishaps for the Friday sessions. There were no major failures, but some of expected results were not achieved as planned (Oddey, 2007). The soundscape was one of those instances where the overall background sound effects were less than intended.

Also, the university students increased their sensitivity to the interests and aptitudes of the children (Oddey, 2007). One student realized that after a child indicated to him that what he just said made no sense to him, the student adjusted how he explained something so that it could be understood better. Further, two facilitators introduced a challenging tongue twister to the ensemble. It was called "Majesty Victoria" that was written by famous artists named Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman. Sondheim, an Academy Award winning composer and lyricist, specializes in the genre of the American

musical theater. He is probably the best artist in this field. Tony-award winning author, Weidman, collaborated with Sondheim in writing various musicals, such as the *Pacific Overtures*, from which "Majesty Victoria" originated.

The intent of the tongue twister was for the children to respond quickly and to realize that their message to the audience needed to be clear to minimize dissatisfactions by the spectators. Some of sentences enunciated were "…And sent me to convey to you her positive euphoria as well as little gifts from Britain's various emporia… So please ignore the man-of-war we brought as a preventative." I observed the experiential exercise and noticed that this was particularly difficult for Lorraine, an at-risk student. She persisted, with great exertion, but she could not keep up with the tongue twister and probably did not understand the significance of many of the words. The facilitators may have considered a simpler exercise if they had realized the differences in abilities from one child to another. Additionally, in reviewing the videos featuring Lorraine, I noticed that compared to the other children, she also had difficulty following the movements and words of others during warm-up sessions.

The transferrable skills particularly applicable for the youth and student ensemble were featured through practicing collaboration, brainstorming, and commitment. The entire devising process was based on these aspects. The more the students and children made use of them, the more successful the process became. Overall, these skills were observed for all throughout the semester.

Final performance: Dream On. Even before the course began, Eleni and the University and Art Department offices of communications planned a short video to promote the play. It preceded and encouraged individuals inside and outside the

81

University community to attend and it was posted on the main University webpage. A videographer visited the class a few times and assembled a story that attracted the attention of many. This publicity and the positive responses to it verified the importance of bringing both worlds together so as to provide a better appreciation of the other, along with an increased awareness of needs.

For the final performance, the students assembled a program to guide the audience in the understanding of the skits, which included many forms such as improvisation, monologues, soundscape, tableaux, human machine, and movement. The audience consisted of approximately 75 friends and family members. It was a mixture of non-theater (Oddey, 2007) and theater going individuals. Traditionally a play is performed for the audience. In this case, as in most devised plays, it was designed by and for the participants (Oddey, 2007). The props and costumes were modest and for the most part, readily found at home or made with basic materials such as newspapers. The rear view projection was a good way to bring a backdrop created in part by drawings the ensemble made (Figure 1).
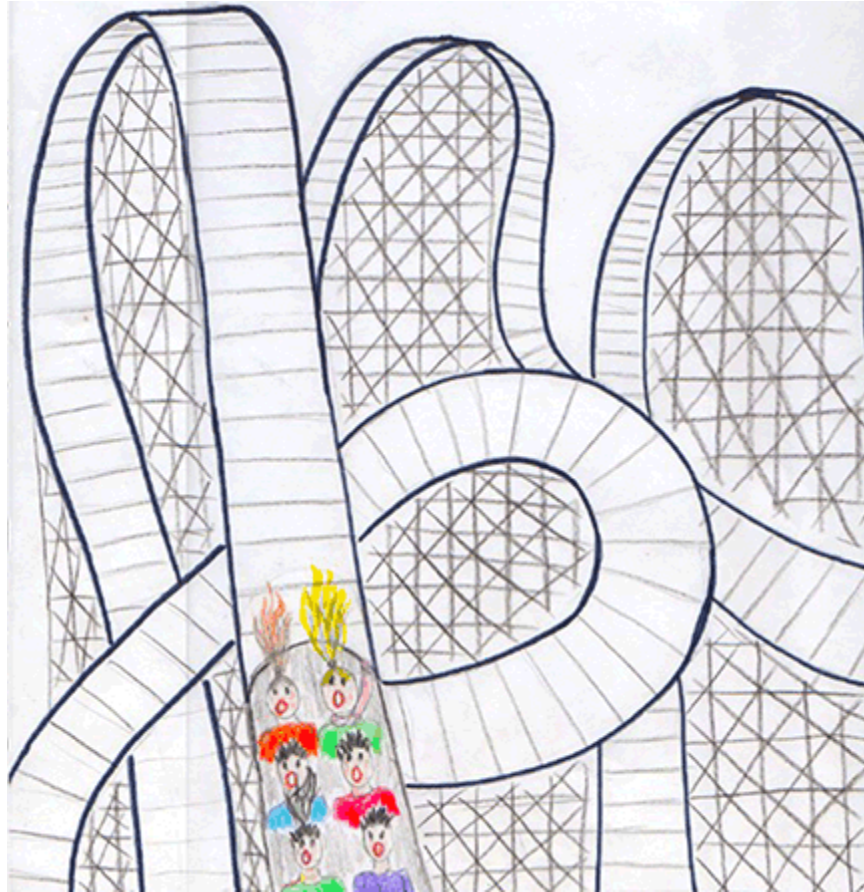
Figure 1. Drawing #1, Devising Theater with Youth (Drawing by Poniz, 2012).

Many lines were not memorized, as most of the energy was spent towards movement and synchronizing all transitions and skits (Figures 2 & 3). The skits were about acting but also integrated choreography, movement, and slow motion dances through the creation of various tableaux.

Figure 2. Photo #1 Rehearsal, Devising Theater with Youth (Photo: Seymour, 2012).

Figure 3. Photo #2 Rehearsal, Devising Theater with Youth. (Photo: Seymour, 2012).

In the end, it was clear that without the commitment shown by each member, the final

play could never have been created and performed as well as it did. This process was the

result of a strong collaboration and confidence in the abilities the ensemble members gained during the fall.

Assessments and reflections. How to assess if the transferrable skills were internalized for the short and long terms by members of the ensemble? Will this exposure make a difference in their lives? These questions are beyond the scope of this project. What was emphasized in this course was the constant feedback that was vital for all during the process. In general, the comments were constructive, non-judgmental, and well received. All members of the ensemble were respectful of the criticism (Kerrigan, 2001; Oddey, 2007). A recurring constructive criticism was about the need for more voice projection. In the end, some students improved in that area more than others. Nonetheless, they will need to continue to work on this aspect to enhance their success as professionals and/or amateur actors. For example, in September, Lorraine and Kelly could barely be heard a few feet away and by the final performance they were more audible from a distance. This enhancement could be due to the encouragement by all, the safe space existing around them, and an increase in self-confidence.

At the end of each session, a check-out took place in small groups, which included students and children. These were regular reflective occasions in which the members could talk about what went well during the class and what could be enhanced. As the findings suggest, the National Community-Based Survey indicates a modest correlation for University students between expressing reflective actions and the value of a community-based course.

Goal achievements. The syllabus stated several goals and the students along with the children also had initial goals for the course. They spanned a wide range of objectives

85

from acquiring know-how, being open to ideas, having reliance on their abilities, to valuing the voice of others. It is apparent below that all of these aims, among others, were accomplished by the individuals and to their satisfaction.

On the very last class, after the final performance, it was a time to celebrate their undertakings. Eleni distributed a form and in groups of three they wrote about their preferred activity, what they learned and would recollect in five years, and how it might be relevant to other areas of their lives. The last question was about a goal they had in September and whether or not they accomplished their objectives.

The highlights for the overall ensemble were the warm-ups and games, the time for originality and brainstorming, the bonding with others, and the check-out times. As for what they learned, it ranged from executing an engaging lesson plan, teaching, projection of their voices, creating soundscape, tableaux, and letting go of inhibitions. What the members of the ensemble learned and discovered include surmounting embarrassment; being positive with others and supplementing their voices with further information, if needed; using their body to express words; and being trusting even though the end was unknown. They also learned that they could enjoy the process and have fun and how to enjoyably work with unfamiliar persons. A University student also wrote, "The formation of a new play from an initial blank canvas without a leader can be possible." Although the lecturer met and corresponded with the students regularly, this comment shows how Eleni was able to empower them with just the right amount of direction since she was confident in their abilities to facilitate and lead the sessions. The students did not sense a leader in the process when in fact the students were in charge of the classes.

As for the attainment of goals by the ensemble, and as far as the participants were concerned, they were all reached. The successful objectives varied among enjoying themselves, learning how to create a play from brainstorming collaboratively, having a voice that is heard, and learning how to sing and dance. The final performance was successful even though not all members had experience in acting.

Here are a few striking examples pertaining to at-risk and privileged children and increased confidence. Marguerite seemed extremely shy in September. This was confirmed by the director of the community center. By the last class, she and two other children unexpectedly sang a few songs dedicated to one University student in front of the entire ensemble. Lorraine and Vivian also markedly improved their projection on stage. Joyce decided to lead the class with a warm-up exercise, and she was the one who led the two other children to sing in front of the classroom. These examples demonstrate that no matter what confidence level each child had at the onset, they built on these foundations and ended as they started with a gap, but all were at a greater level of confidence than when they began. For instance, Joyce was confident even from the start. By the end she was comfortable in taking the lead as all other students exemplified through their facilitation and implementation of lesson plans.

Colonialism or Democracy?

Cohen-Cruz (2005) inquires whether acts of colonialism are exhibited when devising theatre takes place. What are the resulting perceptions of the at-risk parents, children, and outsiders such as the lecturer and myself (Kuftinec, 2003) of the process and final performance? Two of the three at-risk parents articulated strong and positive comments about the course and how their child benefited from the program. They felt

that it should continue on. As for the at-risk children, all of their initial goals reviewed in an earlier section of the project were achieved. Outsiders, such as the directors of the Community Center and the Community Based Initiated also wrote in. They complimented the lecturer about the program and hoped that it would be offered again. The feedback was communicated to the director of the theater program. I hoped that this positivity would be expressed and I am delighted about the outcome.

Did the privileged children and students have more power and influence over the at-risk children? Yes, but the power and knowledge of the students were shared with all with the main purpose of benefiting those participants with less power and knowledge. It was up to the children and the students to internalize what they learned and to display new abilities. Any improvements were embraced by the lecturer and students. The students received University credits for the course, but as we will see, their interest in the course was to heighten the children's social and practical skills that could be transferrable to their daily lives. In this project, the vision was communal and it was not created for a particular portion of the ensemble, but for the entire community represented by *Theatre #307: Devising Theater with Youth*. The lecturer and students constantly praised the children for what they said and did. Also undeniable were the overwhelmingly positive comments from the director of the Community Center, the teachers, the parents, and children about the positive experience the children gained from their participation. The devising process, in this instance, was characterized by empowerment and a democratic structure.

From my perspective, there were no significant instances, if any, of racism in the classroom. The University and youth ensembles were diversified. The majority of the

members were Caucasians, but they also included Blacks and Asians. I could not sense that prejudice was a factor. The resonating ambiance was congenial, which certainly contributed to the advancement of the process.

The sharing of thoughts among all was non-judgmental and encouraged. Eleni and the students practiced the principle of the cosmic yes. That is, no one would refute a thought from anyone. If they felt the person did not include all of the important aspects for the question, the facilitator would say "yes, and" and would add other essential elements to the discussion. As the lecturer indicated, this would keep the creative rhythm moving onward. The dynamic and diversity of all categories of individuals such as lecturer, director, University students, privileged and at-risk children were remarkably respectful (Belliveau, 2007), and in unison. This was an emerging theme, which was a commonality among the members of the ensemble (Oddey, 2007). Tolerance and open-mindedness were observed from the participants in the class (Grady, 2000). Other aspects that were tolerated were ethnicity, gender, age, and background.

This sense of equality was verified on stage for the rehearsal and final performance. At almost all times, the members of the complete ensemble were either on the stage or immediately on the side of it supporting each other regardless of their standing. Also, in the group and at a glance, all had to wear jeans with a solid top, and some University students were smaller than the youth ensemble. The chair of the Art Department and the advisor of this project remarked that often times if was very difficult to determine who the members of the youth and University ensembles were. All members, no matter what their roles were in the play, pulled together. The shared

collaborative identity and commitment evolved throughout the semester (Oddey, 2007) by aiming for a final performance.

The hierarchy used in the devising process was considerably flat. That is, the student facilitators led classes under the direction of the lecturer. But all material was generated by all members. Materials, aside from the reading assignments for students, were selected by all. Due to time constraints, a couple of facilitators had to make decisions on their own without the rest of the class. They received Eleni's support prior to exercising their influence. In the end, the facilitators for the week needed to select the forms the skit would take but allowed for all to provide input for each scene. In a traditional, text-based play, the hierarchy is more pronounced and less flexible. In devising theater, more powers are funneled from the lecturers to the facilitators to the children who are non-professional actors in this case (Oddey, 2007).

Evaluations and Analysis: Post Final Performance

Evaluations and analysis about University ensemble post final performance. I administered the National Survey to Assess Student Learning Outcomes of Community-Based Research (Lichtenstein et al., 2011) to the local University students during the class before the last session. This statically valid survey was designed for all university students in the country who take a service learning course such as *Theater #307: Devising Theater with Youth*, and to determine the efficacy of the various community-based courses. The results of the survey provided insight about various constructs related to the experiential learning of the students. Those components provided the structure for the survey. The survey was founded on examining changes in "academic skills, educational experience, civic engagement, professional skills, and personal growth"

(CXXLI, 2012, p. 12). Some of the questions that were asked were: Did *Theater #307* augment the students' learning and professional training? Were reflection activities a part of the process as they have been found to improve the benefits of the course if they are? And, was the goal of the course aligned with that of the University (Lichtenstein et al., 2011)?

The three constructs that were most outstanding were the students' positive observations of their professional skills, personal growth, and educational experience. For instance, for their professional skills, they noticed moderate advancement in clarifying the direction of their professional path, and they felt like they made headway in capably dealing with conflict. In addition, they enhanced their ability to be a part of a team.

With regard to their personal growth, the areas with the most moderate impact were that 45% of the students regarded the course and its activities as a continuous reflection. Since the majority of the process was not habitual to the students it precipitated more reflections on their part (Dewey, 1958). The remaining 54% indicated that the course included some opportunities for reflection when they wrote a self-assessment paper and spent a couple of classes on the topic. Further, the students had the notion that they enhanced their individualistic nature and gained a better understanding of their identity. In terms of their educational experiences, they rated this construct somewhat less than moderate. That is, time to complete the project and the expectations for the course were near to moderate.

The next areas with noted minimum betterment were in the areas of academic skills and civic engagement. In other words, these components did not significantly make a change in their aptitude to analyze more critically, or enhance their writing skills. The

course did not transform their appreciation concerning social issues, although, they

moderately expected that they are likely to participate in other community engagement

activities,

Evaluations post final performance for youth ensemble. Youth ensemble

members and their teachers took the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) survey.

The social skills constructs that were reviewed were communication, cooperation,

assertion, and responsibility skills. Teachers were also prompted to rate the academic

competencies of the children. Problem behaviors were also considered, but were not the

focus of this project.

Once the results of the SSIS survey were summarized and compiled using

compatible software, it was clear that the at-risk students who self-evaluated and the

surveys completed by their teachers were ranked in many areas below average. The areas

of assertion, responsibility, and self-control were most notably below average as

compared to the privileged children. Assertion refers, for example, to not asking for help.

Whereas responsibility refers to, among other aspects, as less than proper behavior when

not supervised. Lastly, self-control represented less than suitable manners when the

children are upset.

As for the academic competence of at-risk children, one rated at the lowest and

the other at the level immediately below the highest level. It is important to note that

Lorraine, the most at-risk child, was evaluated by two of her teachers at the highest

motivation level to reach a successful academic standard. From meeting with her aunt

and family friend, I understood that part of that enthusiasm was strongly instilled in her

from their support.

SSIS also provided an opportunity to evaluate the progress of the students by administering the surveys to the children and teachers at the onset of the course and at the very end. The results are summarized in Appendix F. It shows on the top row the social skills constructs and below the evaluations made by the teachers and children. They are grouped by child. All teachers referred to as #2 represent the director of the Community Center. Teachers #1 are various middle school teachers and counselors.

Lorraine, Black and at-risk, does not show a positive outlook of herself, which was a similar feature when Cathy completed Survey Says and her application. In her view, Lorraine does not believe she has control over her outlook (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; Senge 1990). Teacher #1 rates her low on all constructs, whereas Teacher #2 (director of the Community Center) assessed Lorraine at above average for assertion and engagement. From my observations, I found that Lorraine made some progress, but I would not consider it as above average. In December, Teacher #2 also rated Lorraine's academic competence, compared to the other teacher, 30% higher than her own rating in September. When I reached out to Lorraine's family friend she explained that Lorraine has difficulties with mathematics and science. She is getting extensive tutoring assistance from the University, the church, and at school. This comment does not coincide with the evaluations made by Teacher #2.

Marguerite's summary is the strongest of all the at-risk children. Marguerite was extremely shy at the start and gained remarkable confidence in class. She sang in front of the group during the last session. The qualitative and the quantitative survey results support this finding. As for Cathy, caution was emphasized as part of the validity index summary. The response pattern for Teacher #2 was graded at 6 within a range of 0 to 16.

The response pattern refers to the variation of change in the teacher's rating from one question to another. In my view, Cathy improved in engagement slightly over the semester, but I would not qualify her improvement, as made by Teacher #2, as above average based on what I observed. The other drawback regarding Cathy's case is that she did not complete the SSIS survey at the onset and neither did Teacher #2. For all these reasons, it is difficult to appraise the change in Cathy. Finally, another word of caution was issued by the survey for Teacher #1. Teacher #1 did not respond to 45% of the questions and therefore this response pattern could not be conclusive.

As for the SSIS summary for the privileged children, I was not able to collect information of children who were under 13 years of age since I did not find out in time about that age group until later. There were three children below 13 years of age. The survey for the children could only be administered if they were aged 13 through 18. As for the children over 13 years of age, I was able to collect feedback from teachers only at the end of the semester. The reason for this is that the teachers did not know all the children in September and could not evaluate them at that time. To compensate for that, I posed a few questions at the time the teachers completed the survey in December. Basically I asked if they found any changes in the social skills as part of the survey. The response for Kelly from Teacher #1 was that she is "much more verbal, still very quiet." This account directly confirms the lecturer's and my observations about Kelly's improvement during the fall. Kelly made it clear from the start that she wanted to surmount stage fright. During the semester, she noticeably became more assertive and confident in the way she communicated. On the other hand, even though Teacher #1

recognized the verbal changes in Kelly, she rated her below average for assertion, empathy, engagement, and self-control.

What Did I Learn From Analyzing My Data?

In the end, I collected notes from more than 40 hours of observations, several hours of video footage, along with several photographs during the fall semester. The video footage recorded some of the class sessions, rehearsal, and the final performance. These greatly provided insight for my original research questions, which I will expand upon in the next chapter.

A deeper analysis was made by looking at various graphs derived from the quantitative SSIS surveys. The data collected in the survey were compared to a normative group. A representative nationwide group included 4,700 children aged from 3 through 18 as the basis to establish normative scores for social skills. The three graphs (Appendix G) summarize some of the information gathered during the fall semester. Figure G1 (Appendix G) displays self-evaluations by the children pre and post the Devising Theater with Youth course. They represent the perceived values by the at-risk and privileged children. It is interesting to notice that the communication element is rated similarly by all children who took the survey. That is, they felt that before and after the course they made eye contact with others and their hand movements and degree of courtesy with others were perceived to be good by the other children.

What is unclear is why overall both groups rated their self-evaluations lower at the end of the semester than at the start. Many factors could have impacted the unexpected change. If the resources were such that more children participated in the course, the results may have been different.

The second figure (G2 in Appendix G) distinctly shows the teachers' evaluations for both groups before and after the course. Teachers #1 represent several middle school teachers, and Teacher #2 show ratings expressed by the director of the Community Center. Teachers #1 ranked the privileged children on social skills such as communication, cooperation assertion, engagement, and self-control much lower than the director of the community center. The lecturer expressed that, in her view, all children were above average for engagement and self-control. This could explain that the children behave differently at school than they do at the after school program or during the theater class. Alternatively, or in combination, the children may have been perceived differently by the after-school program and by the school teachers. The data used in figures G2 and G3 (See Appendix G) include results from Teacher #2 in which the SSIS software rated the response pattern for one of the at-risk child as cautious. That is, many of responses from Teacher #2 for a child had little variation from one question to the next. As a result, the analysis must take this into consideration and this weakens somewhat the findings.

The third figure (G3 in Appendix G) compares the self-evaluations and the teachers' evaluations at the onset of the course and at the end. Teacher #2 rates the at-risk children highly as compared to themselves. Also, middle school teachers (Teacher #1) overall rate the social skills less than the director of the community center (Teacher #2) and that of the children's self-evaluations. In any case, the majority of the ratings for cooperation were clustered relatively closely among the survey takers before and after the course. Overall, the three figures illustrate differences between the raters. The self-assessments and responses by middle school teachers at least match what the lecturer and I observed during the fall. We felt that the participants improved on many fronts,

96

including communication and engagement. It could be explained potentially by the fact that the transferrable skills the children developed lagged in the classrooms.

Appendix F summarizes quantitative responses at-a-glance for the children. Lorraine, Black and most at-risk, does not have a positive view of herself in the assertion and self-control areas. That is, her power about improving herself is low (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; Senge 1990). Similarly, Cathy devalued herself when describing her dance and violinist skills on her application form. The middle school teachers expressed the same negative connotation for Cathy and added engagement in the negative category. Joyce, Caucasian and privileged, was very positive about herself pre and post. In my view, she is the one child that exerted the most leadership in the group. Overall, from my observations, the students and children joined the class with an initial level of social skills. In the end, they all were exposed, learned, and improved from the original qualitative assessments.

Appendix H compares qualitative and quantitative data post the final performance. The appendix shows that according to the qualitative aspects of the information, the findings collected from the children, lecturer, researcher, parent, teachers, and students are overwhelmingly positive about the change in some social skills and the self-confidence the children experienced. Also the students, through experiential learning, acquired new skills and/or improved upon several transferrable skills. In contrast, the quantitative data do not often confirm information observed by many constituencies in the qualitative phase.

Why might this be? There were many more opportunities to collect qualitative data. In total, there were 26 individuals who contributed qualitative segments. As for the

quantitative side, there were approximately 13 children and teachers who participated in the SSIS survey. In addition, the amount of time to complete surveys pre and post performance was less than an hour. Qualitative data were obtained during 40 hours of classroom and performance time in which the lecturer, students, children, and I observed and reflected on the children's and students' experiences. Furthermore, photographs taken at the rehearsal and a couple of hours of video were added. In retrospect, it would have been very difficult to increase the amount of quantitative data, as it would have impinged on time needed for the course.

From the detailed evaluation above, I learned that the course had an impact at various levels for each participant based on the observations, more so than from the survey results from the teachers, students, children, and my own. When the SSIS validity index indicated caution, I was not able to draw strong quantitative conclusions. But the comments from the lecturer and the students in the class were important factors in drawing conclusions from the qualitative side. Also, whenever surveys were not obtained, either because the children were too young or the teachers were not sufficiently knowledgeable about them, and/or if the children were not present during the survey session, naturally diminished the opportunity to learn more about the growth of the children.

How is the Knowledge Situated in the Literature?

What I learned was that empathy for others was the entry to making this collaboration possible. As shown in the survey results from the National Community-Based Survey (CXXI, 2012), the students were sympathetic of others differing from

98

themselves. The permissiveness of diversity within a multicultural community of all the participants was essential (Grady, 2000) to the success of this course.

As Lewis (2004) indicates, time is essential in creating collaborative efforts for and by communities. This project spanned over five months and benefited, at different levels, the self-confidence of students and children and exposed them to other transferrable skills. The needs of community members surrounding the University are continuous, and it is my responsibility and that of others in the district to sustain and put in place a comprehensive plan to increase investment efforts in this neighborhood. This will be described in depth in the next chapter.

As indicated by the literature, an element to the devising process is reflection obtained through a service learning endeavor (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Gamwell, 2005; Goldbard, 2008; Kavanaugh, 2002; Marullo, 1998; Myers-Lipton, 1998; Russel & Hutzel 2007). From the findings collected from Community-Based Research Course Survey, 45% of the students considered the entire process as a reflection. The other students acknowledged the reflection paper that counted towards their final grade. I interpreted this project, which includes this course also, as a continuous reflection from my part.

Many of the principles elaborated by Senge (1990) are applicable to this project. What was created at the inception of the course was the essential concept of a shared vision by all participants (Senge 1990). After all understood what made a play successful, they were able to decide democratically on a theme for the play. This method applied during the entire course to develop all viewpoints of the common goal.

The general understanding by the ensemble members was to cultivate risk taking and trial and error (Senge, 1990). The rhythm of experimentations, errors, adjustments,

99

and new tests (Wheatley, 2006) were made possible by the safe and inclusive atmosphere that was produced during the semester. This was affirmed by a student who spoke about a lesson plan and how she needed to appraise the trial sessions and edit them so they would be more effective for the Friday class.

The experimentation is the equivalent of a virtual world (Senge, 1990) that provides a blank canvas from which all participants could brainstorm and create. This description of an imaginary world corresponds to the devising theater notion in which all is possible. The difference in devising theater is that a space is formed to allow the participants to act out and pretend certain concepts. From this, they can adapt their presentation and also transfer what they have learned in their day-to-day life. In other words, the risk they take in attempting and adjusting new things are done in a safe space that can be transposed to the real world in which the members live.

The fifth discipline, for which Senge (1990) is well known, indicates that before further evolution can be achieved a holistic understanding is required. This is identified as systems thinking. It was accomplished by the lecturer's leadership in producing a comprehensive syllabus containing all the parts needed to devise a play. These parts were then understood and put into action through the lesson plans the students created. The continual change process over time (Senge 1990) was integral to the project and generated much reflection.

How is the Knowledge Derived from the Methodology?

The quantitative collection of information through Survey Says was helpful as a way to obtain an inventory of the members' assets. This was part of a larger mapping process and was a valuable tool to understand the strengths of the members. It was a

source of inspiration for the devising progression. The SSIS survey completed by teachers and children provided insight into the children's social skills, which again could be observed through the qualitative phase. The qualitative and quantitative methodologies informed each other during the entire course. They provided the ground for making hypotheses and conclusions.

Member checking (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Glesne, 2006; Hinchey, 2008) was used throughout the mixed methodology of the research. The observations from the students were compared to the lecturer's and to mine. All established common findings from the course. For instance, similar observations were made by the lecturer, students, and me concerning which children evolved and how.

With the transformative mixed methodology, I was able to triangulate data from a whole host of sources, which reinforced the substantiation for the study. Systematic data compilation was achieved by observing the members of the ensemble for three hours a week during the fall 2012 semester. I was able to intersperse the actual words from participants, partners, and children throughout the text. This strengthened the significance of the project. The observations were supplemented by several videos and photographs taken by students, lecturer, and others. In addition, the lecturer shared notes and memos created during the semester. All data sources were assembled, organized, reviewed, and analyzed with the software packages.

What Are the Limitations of the study?

This study was limited in the amount of impact it had on the participants. It is also difficult to make generalizations. A comprehensive analysis of the long-term effects are important, but not within the realm of this project. Although much of the information

gathered came from different perspectives, emerging themes did come though such as transferrable skills and the construction of a shared vision. As described above, more time and individuals provided information for the qualitative side of the research as compared to the quantitative details gathered.

What Are the Biases?

Action research is known for having someone part of an organization and to be the same person leading the research. Since I am an administrator where the course took place, it may have brought in some bias. For instance, there could have been selection bias (Delgado-Rodriguez & Llorca, 2004). In this case, the lecturer reviewed applications and conducted interviews with prospective students. As for the children, the lecturer relied on the suggestions of the middle school teachers and the applications and interviews. I did not participate in the selection of the members. But, were there some bias by the teachers and lecturer? The lecturer established the criteria prior to the recruitment process and it was centered on commitment and interest in creating a play. These parameters were pertinent to the success of the program.

The results of the interpretation could also be scrutinized. Central to the mixed methodology are the triangulations and member checking components that took place. I included the interpretations of the surveys, lecturer, students, children, and my own in the determination of conclusions. Conclusions reached in this way improve the validity of the research because the findings were at the confluence of an assortment of perspectives.

What Are the Assumptions?

The success of the project was partially based on maximizing the number of participants with the resources and means available. The original assumption was that if

more at-risk individuals were part of the project, there would be more opportunities to document more and significant changes. But the situation was such that the first group of children interviewed and accepted to the program was privileged. This reduced the possible number of at-risk children from a maximum of 12 to 6 to be included in the class. In the end, three of the six at-risk children withdrew. Contrary to my first belief, the additional layer of privileged children contributed greatly to the progress of the at-risk population. Marguerite, for instance, who was extremely shy at the start, gained confidence by collaborating closely with Joyce and other children. I am unsure that this improvement would have been such without this additional layer of interaction within the entire ensemble. This could be the topic of another project. In general, assumptions in conducting research can be made in terms of validity of the findings, the inferences made about causality, and the meaning of the results.

What Are the Insights Gained for the Field of Study?

The insights for the field of study are that the impacts and benefits of a service learning course are not only present for the students who obtain credit for the course, but also found in the other populations of interest, in this case, the members of the youth ensemble. Cause and effect, as Senge (1990) indicates, cannot restrain the building of a straight line. There were many layers of relationships and connectivity that flourished during the semester. Some were visible and understood and others were not. The shared vision created through devising theater was about devising the many relationships (Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 2006). In organizations, which we can consider this course included, the results emanated from the participants as part of the whole (Wheatley, 2006). The whole was the vision Eleni proposed, which was sculpted by the members of

the ensemble. The shared vision (Senge, 1990) developed from the commitments and

responsibilities among the collaborative members (Wheatley, 2006).

What Are the Implications Regarding My Theoretical Framework?

The conceptual frame described and depicted in Appendix A identifies aspects

found in the literature. Most of the literature focuses on the students and not necessarily

on the other population at least of equal concern in the study. The gaps highlighted on the

page indicate that there are significant benefits for University students and the children

that collaborated on the service learning project. This also is true of service learning

programs with an art component such as this one. Also, this new course added another art

service learning option to the Community Based Initiative at the University. This project

aimed at diminishing these gaps.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Did the Research Reach Its Aims?

The study enlightened the research questions. These were:

a) What is the impact on collaboration among underserved children, a University, University students, lecturer, researcher, and a community who participated in a service learning course with an art component?

The impact on collaboration among all participants, including privileged and underserved children, manifested itself at the end of the course. Without the input of all, the final play could not have been produced with such success. The accomplishment of the process and final performance were also commanded by all the participants. This aspect was celebrated throughout the semester and during the very last class. I collected testimonials from a mother and her child at risk, and also from the director of the Community Center. The director wrote:

> The performance on Sunday was absolutely amazing! This has been a positive experience for the Community [Center] participants and the …[Civic] center. "We hope to continue working with the Community Based …Initiative and the [Art] Center to repeat this kind of collaboration that highlights the power of civic engagement and learning in the community. One student from the class reached out to me today to explore ways in which she can continue working through the Community Center (CC) with kids in the community with the arts. I have asked her to talk to others from the class and hope that this group will continue to work at the CC in the spring during our Fun Friday gatherings. (Young, personal communication, 2012)

The civic center that the director refers to in her testimony is the umbrella organization for the Community Center and its mission is to pursue developments in education. It

seeks inventive solutions and seeks social justice. Further, it reinforces communities and sustains efforts to keep our planet green.

Overall, the analysis of children and students at the onset and after the final performance illustrated the numerous instances when the ensemble was exposed to and practiced transferrable skills. This introduction otherwise would not have necessarily taken place for some of the participants. The fact that the ensembles were open to take these elements and make them their own has the potential to continue in the short-term, and potentially in the long-term, to enhance their growth and skills.

A mother of one of the at-risk children wrote:

> As we discussed, I really do hope that the theater project will continue - it was wonderful to watch […] so enthusiastic and involved ([…] (my daughter) has always struggled with being organized, and keeping her grades up. Programs like the theater project help her to be more confident, and give her something to look forward to, and be proud of. You are wonderful at what you do, and I pray we will connect again in the near future. Please let me know if there is anyway I can help!

An at-risk child responded to a query as part of the reflection guide questionnaire prepared by the lecturer. The question was: "What was something you learned, discovered, or practiced that you have applied or can imagine applying to other parts of your Life?" (Nagel, 2012) and the daughter responded: "I learned that you don't have to wait for an opportunity to come but that you can approach it yourself." In my view, I am not entirely sure that the daughter was the originator of this response. Nevertheless, even if her parent assisted in composing this line, it is still valuable and provides insight into the impact of the course.

The second research question asked:

b) What is the self-perception concerning social responsibility by the University students, and the researcher?

106

The only survey administered in December 2012 to University students was designed by faculty and staff at the local institution for students across the nation who take serving learning courses. Its title is *CBR Student Learning Outcomes Survey!* (Lichtenstein et al., 2011). This survey showed student responses to the civic engagement construct and indicated they moderately expected to participate in other community engagement activities. The course did not transform their appreciation concerning social issues. From this, it is difficult to assess their initial appreciation regarding social issues.

It is important to add that the above does not reflect the University's position, and the multitude of activities surrounding civic engagement nationally and internationally. The self-perception of the University regarding social responsibility is one of its utmost priorities. So much so, that the motto makes clear where it stands: "In the Nation's Service and in the Service of All Nations." There are a multitude of offices and community offices that work toward improving social justice. The University's Community Base Initiative offers many course options for students to pursue engagement opportunities within and outside the United States. Devising Theater with Youth was listed as one of these offerings. As for my own standpoint, I have gained a much greater appreciation for the impact of social responsibility. I intend to significantly increase my contributions from this moment forward. From what I have found and observed, the self-perception of many constituencies improved, which will be detailed in the following sections.

The third research question asked:

c) What is the perceived level of self-efficacy and interpersonal communications by the underserved children?

107

Self-efficacy clearly improved during the course of the project. It was more evident for some. Marguerite, who was tremendously shy at the start, turned around her actions and by the last class she claimed she learned to sing and serenaded a University student with two other children in front of the lecturer and all other ensemble members. This bonding among the University students, privileged children, and at-risk children was noticeable when the children wanted to show publicly their admiration to the students. Also, one Black student's intention was to meet and bond with other students through the course. She facilitated a class with the other Black student and openly stated that this connection took place.

In terms of Marguerite's self-perception and self-efficacy, she proudly stated in her reflection guide that she was delighted to embarrass her sister but she did not provide a specific example. This sentiment was contrary to her comments in the beginning of the semester. She stated that she did not want to embarrass her sister. Marguerite also indicated in her reflection that she learned to project her voice and will remember this in the future and that she learned to sing.

The fourth research question asked:

d) How has my leadership influenced this project?

In 2008 I wrote, as part of the doctoral program, my leadership platform. It still holds true today and I made improvements to it over time. I stated then that my leadership styles encompassed emotional intelligence. When using this leadership style, I praise honesty and encourage positive emotions to the team. Another leadership style is my aim to serve the community, which focuses on clarifying visions and goals (Greenleaf, 1995; Zlotkowski, 2011) with others. The communities could be professional,

personal, or local. The objective of this service learning course is to reduce the gap between the "served" and "servant" (Baldwin et al., 2007; Greenleaf, 1995). Collaborations developed to shrink the gap were an underlying purpose of Devising Theater with Youth.

Further, I value democracy (Goleman et al., 2002). This is part of Model II outlined by Argyris (1990). A leader following this change theory (Argyris, 1990) strives for collaboration, never ceases to ask the question(s) leading to the underlying reason(s) for a particular situation. From that, one can better solve problems. This second order change, known as a transformation model, empowers and distributes expertise to others (Argyris, 1990). I sought and continue to seek synergies and to resolve problems in the at-risk community.

Contrary to Model II, the transactional feature exhibited by leaders using Model I tend to have direct power and avoids disagreements (Senge, 1990). One model is not the opposite of the other. Model I is used for routing situations such as easy to perform tasks. More complex circumstances are achieved through Model II (Argyris, 1990). I make use of both models, and strive for Model II.

One leadership aspect I learned from the lecturer is that often people know the answer they are seeking. She taught me how to elicit ideas from my staff about solving their challenges. By asking them how they would go about solving the problem they just stated that they would be required to become accountable and think about solutions that make sense to them. Most of the time, the staff had the answer to their own question or at least could identify part of it. This approach empowers the staff to think about solving their concerns without explicitly stating that intention to them. This is an example of an

espoused theory (Martin, 2002; Schein, 2004) and theory-in-use (Argyris, 1990). I believe in empowering those around me. In practice, I use tools to assist in achieving this aim. All of these aspects of my leadership components were at the center of my research and still prevail. They were also primary in the course taught at the University. As we will see, my leadership has acquired some new aspects since I first began the Doctorate in Education program.

Professional Growth, Change, and Leadership Style

I learned that my advocacy for the at-risk population in the immediate community is greater than servant leadership. My leadership is also about creating chances and engaging the community in solving their issues of concern. As an example, the asset-mapping is an important tool which partially achieved this (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). This method was used as part of the Devising Theater with Youth course. This can be useful for at-risk members to accentuate that they have assets. I can with others, demonstrate how they can build upon them. The aim would be that the at-risk parents and children would continue this technique on their own once they are comfortable with the process.

Although I have become more self-confident all around since the start of this dissertation, I need to continue being more assertive. At the time when recruiting at-risk children last June 2012, I relied on those who participated in the recruitment process to keep the focus on underprivileged regarding decisions about enrollments in the course. I realized later that the initial pool was not all at-risk. In the end, this made my project more interesting because of the multilayer of participants who provided additional types

of relationships among the children and students. This was beneficial to them all since being children they were exposed to more diversity.

Another characteristic of my leadership is that I need to study all parts of a situation before I can act on the whole. The relationships of the segments emerge and provide an understanding of how they interconnect (Wheatley, 2006). In this project, I gained knowledge about the various advocacy agencies in town and at the University.

One of the most important aspects of my leadership growth is how my espoused theory corresponds to my theory-in-use. My espoused theory of creating chances and engaging the community in solving their issues of concern is analogous to my theory-in-use (Argyris, 1990). My ongoing efforts beyond the dissertation are a way to demonstrate my strong interests in working with vulnerable populations and find approaches that the populations can use on their own.

The layers of individuals who participated in the course were fruitful. From the observations elaborated upon earlier, it seemed that privileged and at-risk children benefited from each other. Similarly, the students and children learned from each other. The relationships among the lecturer, students, and children were also positive. If I was to conduct a similar research project, I would continue to make use of the mixed methodology. The planned and additional qualitative and quantitative aspects informed each other. Both types of data were compared to each other and provided more clarity to the findings

The success of this research could not have happened without the ratio of lecturer and University students versus the number of children. In this instance, there were about 1.5 lecturer and students for each child. According to the National Center for Education

Statistic ("Fast Facts," 2013), the average number of children in elementary and secondary school is 20 and 23.4 children per teacher respectively. By having a smaller number of children per teacher, it provides a greater level of attention and resources for each child, which can lead to higher achievement rates.

Recruiting. I would recruit the children in the spring prior to the fall semester in which the course would be taught. When I recruited children in June instead of the spring, I was at a disadvantage for identifying the children, since most of them were out of school for the summer. Also, I would insist on a different ratio of privileged versus at-risk children. In this case, the ratio was six privileged to three at risk. I value the layers of relationships of children from various socio-economic backgrounds, but the research targeted the changes in social skills mostly for the at-risk children. I would aim for a ratio of approximately three privileged and six at-risk children. Also, I would scrutinize further the commitments made by the children prior to including them in the class. If I can improve on finding children who have a true and strong commitment for the course the retention rate might naturally improve. For instance, as indicated by the teachers near the end of the semester, the three Latinas lacked focus. If further inquiry was made during the recruiting process it may have averted some of the drop-out rate and allowed for more committed children to participate.

Timing and location. I would modify the start of classes and location. The class was taught at the University, approximately four blocks away from the middle school. I would recommend changing the start time to 3:15 p.m. instead of 4:00 p.m. and change a portion of the location from the University to the middle school. Changing the time to 3:15 p.m. would eliminate the gap between the end time for classes at the middle school

112

and the start of the devising course. Cathy's mother explained that her daughter was concerned about walking alone and would call her on the way to make sure all was fine. In addition, if the children are on their own for an hour, I believe they lose focus on their commitments to attend all classes. The children may be attracted to other activities that would prevent them from reaching the devising class. On the other hand, the 4 o'clock start allowed the children to mingle before the start of each class next to the ice cream shop. Nevertheless, an earlier start, I believe would be best. The registrar offers classes starting at 2:50 p.m. that would allow the students to reach the middle school by 3:00 p.m.

In terms of changing the location for at least a portion of the semester, I believe that it would convey symbolically and literally that the University students are willing to cross over the main street and immerse themselves in the Latino and other worlds in which the children live. The students would gain a higher level of understanding of the children's environment. At the appropriate time in the semester, the lecturer would modify the location on campus. In this way, the children would have a chance to acclimate themselves to the University and the final performance hall. This would provide time needed for them to be comfortable in the University venues, which can be intimating for some. Alternatively, the location might be entirely at the middle and high schools. I believe that this would increase sensitivities of the students toward the children and might result in a lower drop-out ratio.

Another angle I would investigate further is to devote a greater emphasis on follow-ups. For instance, I hope to mentor Lorraine in the near future. These new observations would be helpful in gaining added knowledge of the changes experienced by

the disadvantaged children since the course took place. During this time, I could also observe if the children make use of the transferable skills and at what intensity. In speaking with the school counselor, who was referred to me by the family friend of Lorraine, I realized that children in the age group who participated in the class can be expected to develop, as most children would, in the natural course of their development. As a result, it is difficult to distinguish between "normal" developments compared to others as a result of the course.

  Future considerations. The University students were never explicitly told about the subgroups within the youth ensemble. I wrestled with that idea. At first, it made sense since the plan of treating all children the same seemed like a good arrangement. My viewpoint changed when I realized that the comprehension level of at least one at-risk child, Lorraine, was below the 7th grade level, even though she was enrolled in the 8th grade. When I met with Lorraine in my office so she could complete the survey while her aunt and family friend chatted with me, I realized that Lorraine did not entirely understand the questions in the Social Skills Improvement System survey. For instance, I reviewed with her the first question, which stated, "I ask for information when I need it" (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). Lorraine had to indicate if this statement was true or not and how important it was. After I explained the statement to her, she agreed that because of her shyness it might prevent her from asking questions at times. She understood that it is important for her to raise questions in order to progress in her learning. In speaking with the school counselors, they explained that Lorraine's schedule was modified during the fall of 2012. She was placed in 7th grade in mathematics and 6th grade for a science class and remained in 8th grade during the lunch period. Initially, Lorraine knew that she was

different than the other children and disliked the changes, but she adapted to the new plan.

In the interest of scarce time, I agreed with the lecturer that I had to reduce the number of surveys to be given to the youth ensemble from three to two. When I contacted a representative of the company who created and supplied the SSIS survey, she explained that if a child's grasp is less than other children of her age, as in Lorraine's case, that this could be problematic. Giving her a survey made for younger children would not solve the problem. I should consider the responses in light of this and realize that the survey results are potentially skewed because of this lack of comprehension. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that Lorraine rated herself below most social skills, which included assertion, responsibility, empathy, engagement, and self-control.

Next steps. The director of theater at the University indicated his interest in the devising theater course. This sentiment was also expressed by several constituents in and outside the participants of the course. This suggests that the content of the course be offered in the future either within or outside the University, or in combination. In addition, the course might be supported by the art department along with the local YMCA and/or the Art Council. Training for new devising teachers would be required. It could be provided by the lecturer or experienced students at the start so that they enhance its success. This is another tool for the community that it can use with autonomy to bring positive change for all children.

There are many areas in which I can continue ongoing and new activities, which derive from this research. These include following up with the at-risk children and conducting follow-throughs at the institutional and community levels. I very much want

115

to further develop my relationship with the most at-risk children and surrounding families of the ensemble. It is a delicate balance, as I do not want to impose myself inappropriately.

      Lorraine. In speaking with the school counselors, they explained that Lorraine arrived from Haiti to New Jersey in 2011 following the destructive 7.0 magnitude earthquake. The counselors have no clue as to what Lorraine saw. When I met with the aunt and Fabienne, the family friend, for more than two hours, the subject of Lorraine's parents did not surface whatsoever. Also, during the final performance, I noticed an older man sitting with a few children next to the aunt. The man could have been her father. However, I noticed that he was entirely disconnected by what was happening around him. I thought that he was drunk, drugged, or very ill. During the few hours I spent with Lorraine's family, they clarified that the older man was a neighbor. One can presume from the above, that the parents are out of reach. Considering Lorraine's relatively new arrival in the United States, she has made great strides in adjusting herself to her new environment. At a service I attended at the First Baptist Church, the reverend confirmed this and the fact that Lorraine spoke not a word of English when she arrived in the United States. Recently, I learned that Lorraine sings in the choir every fourth Sunday of the month at the church. She followed the lead of the school counselor, who is also a member of the church. Lorraine sang her second solo at the church. According to Fabienne, her second latest solo was much clearer and she was more confident than the first. Also, her family announced that Lorraine was selected for the annual play, Willy Wonka. I asked Lorraine if she would have auditioned before the devising course and she replied that she would not have.

Fabienne explained that Lorraine receives a tremendous amount of unusual mentoring. This attention comes from the church, the University, and the after-school mentoring programs. All the same, as our relationship evolves, I would like to guide her in different ways. I could potentially help her with her lines and her projection for the play. Further, I shared a University opportunity for Lorraine to Fabienne. I recently contacted Diana, a dance lecturer in the arts department who is an expert in American and Africanist Dance Practices. Diana agreed that I could bring Lorraine and family to some of her classes. Since Lorraine is an avid dancer, I proposed to Lorraine and her aunt that I pick them up at the school on occasions this spring. I would bring them to the lecturer's classroom and offer them a different dance cultural viewpoint by including them in a new environment featuring African dance. I am optimistic that Lorraine and her family will be open to this dance practice.

Another follow-up for the short-term could be that I would propose, and possibly work in partnership, with the Director of the Community Base Initiative (CBI) to commence an introductory core course or workshop that all University students who want to participate in a service learning class need to take prior to taking the curricular offering. The lecturer thought this would be a good idea. It would save valuable time for the faculty, who teach approximately 27 courses per year, as the foundational historical perspective would reduce the emphasis for each course to review the basis of service learning (Baldwin et al., 2007; Saltmarsh, 2011) and general current aspects, which apply to the majority of the CBI curriculum. Also, this starting point would increase students' understanding of their upcoming actions and research. Without this fundamental basis, the impact of civic engagement can be jeopardized. This would be a

change from the current cultural setting, but it has potential for enhancing the program and for providing the students with a greater holistic appreciation for service learning. A survey could be created and administered at the start of the academic year and at the end for the faculty and students to evaluate the proposed change.

As part of the faculty's program of study, CBI could also require a stronger local community focus for the adjacent surroundings of the neighborhood (Pittman, 2010). I would recommend, and perhaps collaborate with CBI and the faculty who teach service learning courses, to introduce a portion or even a fraction of their classes towards the topic at hand and how it relates to the at-risk local community. Some classes lend themselves to do this, but some do not. Some courses such as Gods of Many Faces: Comparative Perspectives on Migration and Religion could include a section that focuses on the local at-risk population and could integrate this aspect into the course. Another example was a course in the fall entitled Public Opinion. It focused partially on how individuals create their opinions about disproportions in society. Did the course include the point of view of the local community? If not, I recommend that it be a part of the offering. This would strengthen the ties between the University and the adjacent town and would be an attempt to diminish the bubble surrounding the institution. When I spoke with the director of Community Relations and the special assistant they pointed out that part of the reason for the symbolic bubble is that it represents and works as a safety net for the undergraduate students. I believe that as young adults, students need to move onward and acclimate themselves with society and real life situations. The director indicated that the above does not apply to the graduate student population. Graduate students for the most part live outside the campus and are more integrated with the town.

At the community level, I want to further my involvement in the short and long-terms. In the short-term, I began working with a student and other representatives of the University on creating a new walking tour. I participated in a planning meeting and the intent was for University students to take the tour on the other side of town. Anecdotally, a student by the fictitious name of Sandy is leading this effort and she indicated that the joke around the University is that very few students cross over the main street of town.

This divide between the at-risk inhabitants and the University population is not uncommon for other students at other universities to behave in this way. I believe that a walking tour could be a valuable tool for students to learn more about the history of the town and its residents. As Sandy stated, students can make a valuable impact since most of them spend four years in town. This would provide a way for a mutual understanding of each other's need. Sandy's view is that University constituents need to make a positive difference at the local level first. I expressed my interest to Sandy in being an advocate for this project by finding ways to offer the walking tour to all current and new faculty and staff of the University. I indicated to the student leading the effort that, for this to be successful and for obtaining the buy-in by the residents north of main street, the University students should team up for the tour with young adults of the local community. As the director of the Community Based Initiative said, we do not want to make the population north of the University feel like they live in a "zoo." We need to be sensitive to the perceptions of all constituencies. This is another attempt at bringing the two sides of the main street to understand each other's aspirations and wants better. As with Sandy, I believe we need to address our local challenges before we can understand

the greater needs. I fully support this statement and this project is directly related to this belief.

The devising theater course as part of this was an attempt to increase self-confidence for the children of the community and the students. I fully realize that more needs to happen in this direction. More relentless efforts need to be sustained. I view my role as leading with others this effort through the walking tour and other means that are described in this project. I am a firm believer in sensitizing the faculty, staff, and students to their immediate neighboring environment. This needs to take place at the inception prior to allocating significant energies outside the surrounding community, the state, the country, and the world. This will require me to influence others in my quest and lead them toward a mutual plan (Argyris, 1990) that can be fulfilled. I intend to make time and continue to build relationships with pertinent persons within and outside the University, who would be important constituencies for the cause. I would construct, with others, a planned outline (Bolman & Deal, 2008) which would express a comprehensive and holistic map that could use mixed methods. This agenda, with the contribution of others, would evaluate over time the impact of all efforts for the at-risk population. Before this effort can be realized, a study discerning the current efforts dedicated to the cause need to be separated from other broader initiatives. As it stands, the brochure created by the civic center of the University includes statistics that do not highlight the contributions by the center for at-risk parties.

Future Goals

There are many University and local endeavors that provide and share resources, but there does not seem to be an interrelated plan. My initial action would be to meet with

all advocates of the at-risk population and determine a way to collect, on an annual basis, all work directly benefiting the population. I would highly recommend that local efforts for the at-risk be separated qualitatively and quantitatively from other advocacy efforts. In this way, not only can we build an organized and overall plan, but we can see from year to year the progress in this area.

When I met with the director of Community Relations and special assistant, they confirmed that most of the current University activities were not specifically identifying activities for the adjacent at-risk community. Let me emphasize that I am not seeking the eradication of current or projected efforts in local, regional, or international locations. I am stressing the need to include more attention for local at-risk individuals whenever it makes sense to do so.

In 2017, the University is planning an Arts Neighborhood complex, which would include programming for the constituencies within and outside the institution. I anticipate that by that time I will have developed with others the necessary relationships and advocacy plans so that they can be integrated in the new operations of the facility dedicated to the arts.

In the meantime, I would be very interested in collaborating with various agencies and the institution on ensuring, as much as possible, to include the at-risk population as part of assorted efforts. Here is an example that revolves around the exhibition in the park outside the Art Council in 2006. It was a wonderful way of bringing artistic and scientific knowledge to the community from the University. Several engineering faculty of the University worked with artists in bringing aspects of their research and converting them into three-dimensional objects that were featured in the park. Regretfully, nowhere could

I find how the nearby at-risk residents were brought into the project other than walking by and seeing it.

Recently, I was approached by a local Black resident, on the main street of town outside my office. She handed me a flyer that indicated local workers are not considered for local University construction projects. The leaflet blamed and accused the community of greed. I am sure there is more to the story than this flyer. Nevertheless, I brought it to the attention of the upper administration at the University and it was immediately dismissed. I realize that my involvement in these situations may not be welcomed. Therefore, I need to insist on fostering good relationships with all pertinent groups at the onset and to make sure they understand my genuine interest, which I realize, may not be sufficient at times to carry unrelenting efforts. I expect I will need to rally more support (Bolman & Deal, 2008) to make a constructive difference. I believe that I can achieve some of above recommendations, either on my own and/or with other constituencies. The plan is to build on this project and further the possibilities for the underrepresented segment of the town.

Implications for Future Research

      No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The implications for research are potentially to address the issues around the national legislation governing NCLB, or locally referred to by the teachers in the trenches as "NikelB." This legislation affects every child in the United States and, according to many, in an unfavorable way. The review of the law's history and its current impact would bring forward new inquiries that could be further understood through research.

The precursor to the current NCLB legislation was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was initiated by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). NCLB provides considerations for low performing schools, which is contrary to the one under this study. I recently spoke with a lecturer at the University in the Sociology Department and she is the Program Associate for the Teacher's Preparation program. Her interest resides partially toward Urban Teaching. She expressed the lack of documentation and legislation concerning at-risk children located in high performing districts, which is the condition particular to this research.

The legislation has good intentions of educating our children in return for a better economy ("New Jersey Joins," 2009). The evaluation imposed on schools focuses on test scores and very little on children's growth and progress ("26 more states," 2012; "Obama Administration," 2011). In particular, the test produced under the NJ Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) was created to assess the educational standards for K-12. About 3% of the teachers and parents opt out for their children to take the NJ ASK test. They voice that it is not a suitable measure to evaluate and does not inform parents and teachers of any worthwhile details in the children's progress in schools (Mooney, 2012). Webley (2012) goes as far as qualifying the NCLB efforts as test factories. As of 2011, 48% of schools across the United States failed the rigid principles of NCLB. By 2014, under the NCLA, 100% of the children attending public schools are required to be adept in reading and math ("What does ESEA," 2011).

According to many, the intended effectiveness of the NCLB failed ("What does ESEA," 2011). In an effort to remedy the futile efforts of the law, Obama announced in 2011 that states could voluntary opt for a waiver from the NCLB obligations. Instead,

school's formal procedure is to reach a common core, which includes a universal standard in English language arts and mathematics. This is a substitute for decreasing the goal of enhancing the achievement gap outlined in NCLB ("New Jersey Joins," 2009).

Many states have requested waivers since 2011, even though the NCLB aims remain unrealistic (USDOE, 2013). Given that waivers have been granted in at least 33 states since January 2013, a mixed methodology would be informative in evaluating the changes, as implemented in this research project ("No Child Left Behind Waivers," 2013). If 33 states have been approved for the waiver, it seems to be an indication that NCLB is unable to provide the intended aim for our children to be proficient in reading and math. According to one of Lorraine's counselors, it is time to stop pointing the finger concerning accountability for the results. The counselor indicated that requests and approvals of waivers engulf valuable time that could be spent more effectively in other areas. For instance, qualitative and quantitative studies could be used to get a fuller evaluation of the law. Test scores, surveys, and observations could be the basis of future research in this area. The mixed method would inform each other and provide more conclusive information than using quantitative test scores exclusively.

At the local district level, the number one focal point is to heighten children's achievement, particularly for at-risk children ("XX Regional Schools," 2013). As the supervisor of visual and performing arts and teacher for the public school explained, NCLB restricts the majority of our nation in distributing resources to the arts. Fortunately, this high performing locality benefits from the support of the community and school administration and can offer many art possibilities for its children. The teacher proudly explained that children are exposed, at a minimum, to two classes per week in

the areas of visual arts, music, and drama. The shortcomings are that children in need of special education, which I would presume would impact children such as Lorraine, conflict with their schedule. Many at-risk students cannot participate in the arts offerings. This very issue makes a strong case for extracurricular courses such *Theater #307,* which did not interfere with other classes.

Thorough investigation is required by education leaders, and others, toward the educational policies, such as (NCLB) enacted in 2001 (USDOE, 2001). Darling-Hammond (2010) and Taubman (2009) are authors, among others, who do not view the law as enhancing impartiality by those who need it the most, which are the underprivileged individuals. Leaders and others still need to spend more concerted efforts on these ethical and educational matters to reverse this trend.

The minority achievement gap. The area of the minority achievement gap is one of the grounds for establishing this study. It is also the mission of the Community Center. As Spohn (2008) indicates, the NCLB legislation of 2001 (USDOE, 2001) proved to have a negative result on shrinking the gap by not obtaining the necessary funds for arts education. The obligatory rules instituted by NCLB have brought about substantial changes in schools. As a result, less support was available for the arts programs. Scholastic skills, including those with an arts element, are critical for children because their academic skills are promoted (Catterall, 2002; Hetland, 2000; Vaughn, 2000). As seen in this project, the children's imagination, experimentation, risk taking, and commitment as expressed by Cathy, are improved through devising theater (Kerrigan, 2001; Oddey, 2007; Rohd, 1998). One of the basic aims of devising theater is demonstrated by participants in solving their own problems (Oddey, 2007) and improving

125

judgment skills (Spohn, 2008). The flexibility provided by NCLB amendments provides more positive control over the achievement gap ("What does ESEA," 2011). Considering all the benefits shown through this project, it is imperative that even during recession times, the arts and service learning remain in the curriculum. This would apply to high and low performing schools, as both include underprivileged and privileged children, and many benefit from the art components, as seen in this project.

The Change Process

The change process is challenging and requires persistent time and effort by many. A collective plan is necessary for it to achieve a shared vision (Senge, 1990) and needs to include the voices of all pertinent parties. The change process has the potential to affect several unexpected areas. The connections initiated as part of the course had rippling positive effects after the fall semester. Some participants improved upon their ability to connect with others (Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 2006). A University student contacted me after the course to get contact information about one of the children. The student directed a show in the arts department and he was in need of a younger male actor. Further, some of the University students who participated in the course have a strong interest in continuing the devising method directly with the Community Center.

Organization Culture and Cultural Change

One aspect of the University culture is referred to as the institutional bubble. Local individuals are isolated by a rich setting and a safe milieu. Very few faculty, staff, and students venture across the main street of town and very few individuals at-risk cross south beyond University perceived and/or existent boundaries. On the other hand, many privileged members of the community attend events created or organized by the

institution. Overall, this suggests that the institution is not entirely ready to learn from its

neighbors, especially the ones at-risk. It should be noted that there are many interactions

by faculty, local privileged inhabitants, and students in the nation and the world. As for

the local connections, I have found, from an interview with the director of Community

Relations and special assistant, that most of the relations with the local at-risk groups are

primarily identified and found among the Arts Council and the YMCA groups. Although

the amount is undisclosed, it appears that the University makes contributions to the Arts

Council. However, the arts department at the University is not listed as a member of the

Arts Council. Considering the mission of the Council is to assemble a community via the

arts, I was disappointed not to find a mention of a donation from the art department at the

University. The mission of the arts department emphasizes how the arts provide ways for

us to understand our lives and that of others in the neighborhood. The missions of both

the Council and the arts department converge, but from what I have observed in the past

six years, there is no support for each other financially or otherwise. There may be some

political issues that might explain this situation. This relationship presents some political

challenges (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Nevertheless, I will casually bring this matter to the

attention of the chair of the academic unit to understand better the underlying reasons. I

will work on connecting these two entities, as they truly need each other's support to

carry out their missions. Currently, very few University activities clearly reach out to the

at-risk and when it happens the events usually take place inside the University bubble.

The above might imply that the institution focuses greater attention on the external

academic setting (Schein, 2004) and places more value on its relations with the state,

nation, country, and the world than with its neighbors.

Upon reflection and further realizations, I now recognize that more changes need to happen within the University before other significant external actions can be made with the at-risk population in the neighboring town. There needs to be an increase in the inclusiveness of all constituents at the University level. Many times, projects are put into motion for specific groups and the University could easily offer the activities to others. For instance, I received a request from the President of the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) to support the Mental Illness Week at the University in which a photographer's work would reduce the stigma of Mental Illness. The aim for the USG is to have students take ownership and pride in their identities through the vision expressed by a photographer. I explained to the president that our academic unit would very much support this effort. I also inquired about expanding the promotion of the event to our faculty and staff who also face mental illness challenges. He readily agreed and we are working on a revised advertisement for the awareness occasion to be inclusive of faculty and students along with University students. As shown here, it does not necessarily require much to encourage inclusiveness within the University. I believe that the more we routinely expand the breath of many efforts within the University we can then be in a better position to develop the University's culture to also include at-risk populations.

To sustain continued change requires continuous action and diminishing the bubble represents a sustainable challenge for many. The University senior who is leading the walking tour said anecdotally that undergraduate students negatively joke about walking across the main street. My aim is to thin the walls of the boundaries and allow the ebb and flow across both sides in an approved fashion in a judicious manner. For instance, every year the Arts Council and University students lead a one-day festival

where the arts are celebrated and 40,000 visitors attend. This event brings many artists to display their goods or to express their inventive talents. When I spoke with the counselor and with the local director of regional affairs, they both expressed that the event does not include the participation of the at-risk population in the town. I am working with our director of communication and others to bring *Theater #307* students and children into the act. They might wear some of the costumes fashioned by the costumer of the art department, reenact one of the scenes created through the course, and/or manipulate puppets also made by students and costumers.

When it comes to the organizational culture, there are some challenges that have the potential to be curtailed. The previous dean of the college at the University, the longest-serving in this capacity, stepped down from her role in the fall of 2011. According to the director of the Community Based Initiative (CBI), the dean did not regard service learning as rigorous as other academic endeavors at the institution. Nevertheless, the CBI program of study has flourished and gained momentum as in other Universities. Fortunately, two deans were named following the departure of the previous one and they are more receptive and progressive in their understanding of the meaning and the benefits of the service learning curriculum. This support from upper administration is essential in the evolution of the program. This sentiment about the lack of rigor through Community Theater, which devising theater is a subset of, is emphasized in Wolf's (2004) book review of Kuftinec (2003) entitled *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-Based Theater*. The perceived lack of thoroughness and attitude leads to an "image problem" (Kuftinec, 2003).

What can be done about the image problem? Currently, the CBI curriculum includes a wide array of courses, some of which include a hands-on component, mostly in the classroom, and others that include a research component. The Community-Based Performance course taught last fall and this spring are good examples of a course that offers both elements. There are approximately three courses as part of CBI this academic year that combine both. I recommend that service learning courses at the University, when feasible, should integrate both the hands-on in and outside the classroom, and into the at-risk community. Further, the scholarly research aspects of a course could be a feature that would address partially and specifically the challenges in the town community. This weight on the scholarly aspect would strengthen the rigor of the course offering which would enhance the image of service learning at the University.

Conclusions

The endowments received by the University represent one of the five largest educational institutions to benefit from these gifts. Considering the tax advantages to the institution which ensures tax-free growth of the funds, I favor that "…more should be done for the public good…" (Arenson, 2008) or else face more scrutiny. Despite the tax-exempt status, the institution pays a levy even though it is not required to do so. All the same, it is important to modify the perspectives and allocation of the endowments and to build positive connections financially and otherwise with the community.

Expanded skills by the students did not happen fully in the various areas (Zlotkowski, 2011) of devising theater, but they gained an appreciation for the area of service learning with an art component. The devising theater process is an excellent tool to elicit the voices of all participants, including the at-risk children throughout the

creation of a new play. The main aspect of it is that all participants listen to everyone's voices and democratically select the ideas that become part of the final performance. Similarly, I need to prolong listening to all relevant parties to continue my advocacy work.

The mixed methodology was a good fit mostly from the qualitative side for gathering, triangulating, and analyzing the data from different perspectives. On the quantitative side, there were fewer resources permissible for the project, but it did provide some insights for the analysis of the information. The evaluations from all parts, especially from both target populations represented by the students and children, were crucial in understanding the observations and quantitative information. The strongest findings were identified when there was validity in the response patterns, consistency, and when children's comprehension level matched the appropriate survey for the age level. Several teachers and children did not complete the survey (Fowler, 1993). This was also detrimental to the generalization of the findings. A larger sample size was not feasible due mostly to the space limitations. A similar course and research at other universities may shed more light on the effect of devising theater upon self-confidence and social skills. The findings cannot be generalized due to the limited conclusive findings. The study reached its aims and answered the original research questions. Through the process, many more questions have been identified. I hope that those who are interested in service learning in the arts may read, gain insight, and build their project upon this one.

In actuality, the change brought forward by this project is small. On the other hand, my awareness of the issues surrounding the University and its environment are

much greater than they were previously. The political arena and ramifications in pursing the above recommendations will be significant. Any transformation of the culture is challenging but worthwhile for many if a detailed comprehensive plan is accepted by a substantial number of the partners involved. This study provided the momentum from which I will continue my engagement and enlist that of others in current and future efforts. I am an advocate for a service learning course, which I feel is valuable, especially if it can be coupled with scholarly research. I hope this project and others that follow enhance the image of the community theater field (Kuftinec, 2003; Wolf, 2004).

The first paper I wrote in 2008 for the first class I took under the Educational Leadership program was entitled Leadership Platform for Fanny Chouinard. The last section of it underscored "what I would go to the wall for." I realized how I cannot change the world but was, and still am today, determined to make a difference through this study and other future opportunities.

In closing, Dewey wrote, "Continuity of culture in passage from one civilization to another as well as within the culture is conditioned by art more than by any other one thing" (1958, p. 327). This continues to add importance to the role of the arts in our current education system. Every culture has its own collective individuality. "…this collective individuality leaves its indelible imprint upon the art that is produced" (Dewey 1958, p. 330). In this project, the final performance was a unique reflection exerted from the input provided by all individuals who participated.

This study could not have been possible without the lecturer's interest in my research. A scholar herself, she understood the need to collect and document all possible information that could be analyzed later. For instance, her creation of questionnaires and

reflection guides for students and children enriched this work tremendously. This

dissertation is a springboard to continue this advocacy work in years to come in several

ways for the local underserved community.

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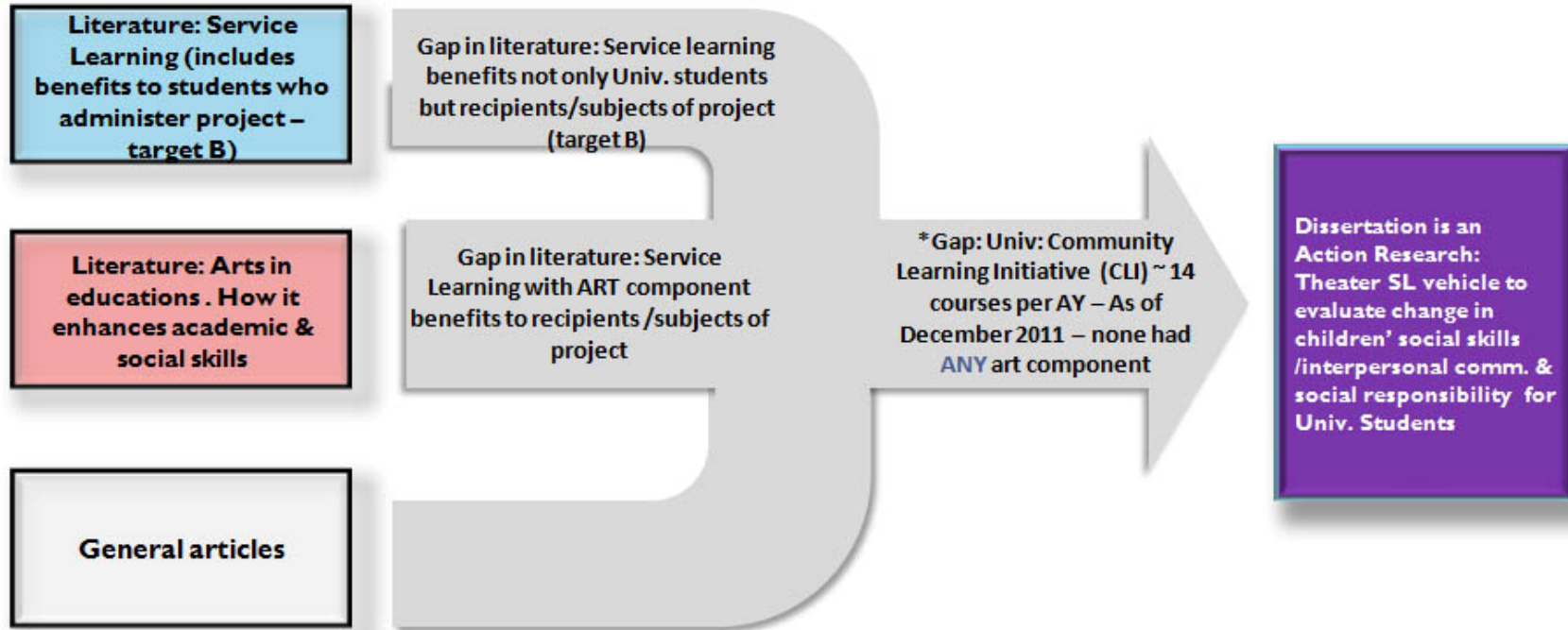
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Appendix A

Conceptual Framework

Literature: Service Learning (includes benefits to students who administer project – target B)	Gap in literature: Service learning benefits not only Univ. students but recipients/subjects of project (target B)

Literature: Arts in educations . How it enhances academic & social skills	Gap in literature: Service Learning with ART component benefits to recipients /subjects of project

General articles

*Gap: Univ: Community Learning Initiative (CLI) ~14 courses per AY – As of December 2011 – none had **ANY** art component

Dissertation is an Action Research: Theater SL vehicle to evaluate change in children' social skills /interpersonal comm. & social responsibility for Univ. Students

Appendix B

Methodology Chart

	Study Phase		Data Collection		Sample		Methods		Products		Scale		Timeline
Phase 1	QUAN	=>	Persuasive Data Collection	=>	Children: Simple random sample (segment of pop/random # table): ~20 (11 yrs & older) -	=>	Closed-ended questionnaire: self-efficacy & interpersonal communications	=>	Survey completed: numeric dada	<=	Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)	↘	Completed September 2012
					11 Univ. students recruited at large within University. Interviewed by lecturer & selected based on commitment and interest in the course.								Completed September 2012
Phase 2	QUAL emphasis	=>	Persuasive Data Collection	=>	Sample from Phase 1	=>	"Devising Theater w/Youth"(tbc): emphasis of rsch. on QUAL - observation, photographs of children, students,	=>	Observation/photos for entire fall 2012 semester & video of rehearsals: Nvivo coding & thematic analysis	<=	Administered to sample	=====>	Interpretation of all phases, validity threats for merged data
							Performance		Video of rehearsals & performance: thematic analysis				Fall 2012
Phase 3	QUAN Data Analysis	=>	Social skills improvement system	=>	Sample from Phase 1	=>	Closed-ended questionnaire: self-efficacy & interpersonal	=>	Survey completed: numeric dada	<=	Social skills Improvement System (SSIS)	↗	
					Sample from Phase 1	=>	Closed-ended questionnaire: social responsibility for University students	=>	Closed-ended questionnaire: social responsibility for University students	<=	2010 College Survey (adapted)		Late December 2012

(Adapted from Creswell & Clark, 2011)

Appendix C

Application Form for Theater #307

Prepared by Erica Nagel

1. Why do you want to be involved in this project? What do you think you would contribute to the group? (application prepared by eri)	2. Do you have any performance experience, such as singing, dancing, acting, or playing musical instrument? If so, what kind?	3. Please write the name and phone number or email address of an adult (for example, a teacher, employer, or guidance counselor) who could vouch for your level of commitment and collaboration.	4. This project will meet every Friday from September 21 – December 14 (except for November 23) from 4:00 – 5:20pm; the final performance will take place on Sunday, December 9th. Please list any conflicts you foresee in this time period.

Questionnaire for Theater #307

Questionnaire written by: **Lecturer, Erica Nagel**

Purpose: **For applicants of Theater 307**

From: Erica Nagel [enagel@mccarter.org]

Sent: Thursday, June 07, 2012 4:46 PM

1. Why do you want to be part of this performance project?

2. Have you ever worked on a project (at school, with friends, with family) where working cooperatively made the project better/more fun than working alone? Tell us about it – why was collaboration important to that project?

3. Do you have any special talents you want to tell us about or show us?

Appendix F

Survey results – Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)

Administered in September (pre) and December 2012 (post)

at risk vs priviledge	Fictitious Names	Pre vs. Post	rater	communication	cooperation	assertion	engagement	self-control
at-risk	Lorraine	Pre	teacher 1		below	below	below	
at-risk	Lorraine	Pre	teacher 2		above	above		
at-risk	Lorraine	post	teacher 2		above	above		
at-risk	Lorraine	Pre	self				below	
at-risk	Lorraine	post	self		below		below	
at-risk	Marguerite	post	self			below		
at-risk	Marguerite	pre	teacher 2					
	Marguerite	pre	teacher 1					
at-risk	Marguerite	post	teacher 2		above	above		
at-risk	Cathy	post	self			above		
at-risk	Cathy	post	teacher 2		above	above		
priviliged	Daniel	post	teacher 1					
priviliged	Daniel	pre	self					
priviliged	Daniel	post	self					
priviliged	Joyce	pre	self	above	above	above	above	above
priviliged	Joyce	post	self		above	above	above	above
priviliged	Joyce	post	teacher 1					
priviliged	Kelly	pre	self	above				
priviliged	Kelly	post	self					
priviliged	Kelly	post	Teacher 1		below	below	below	

Average results are shown as blank cells

Appendix G

Evaluations

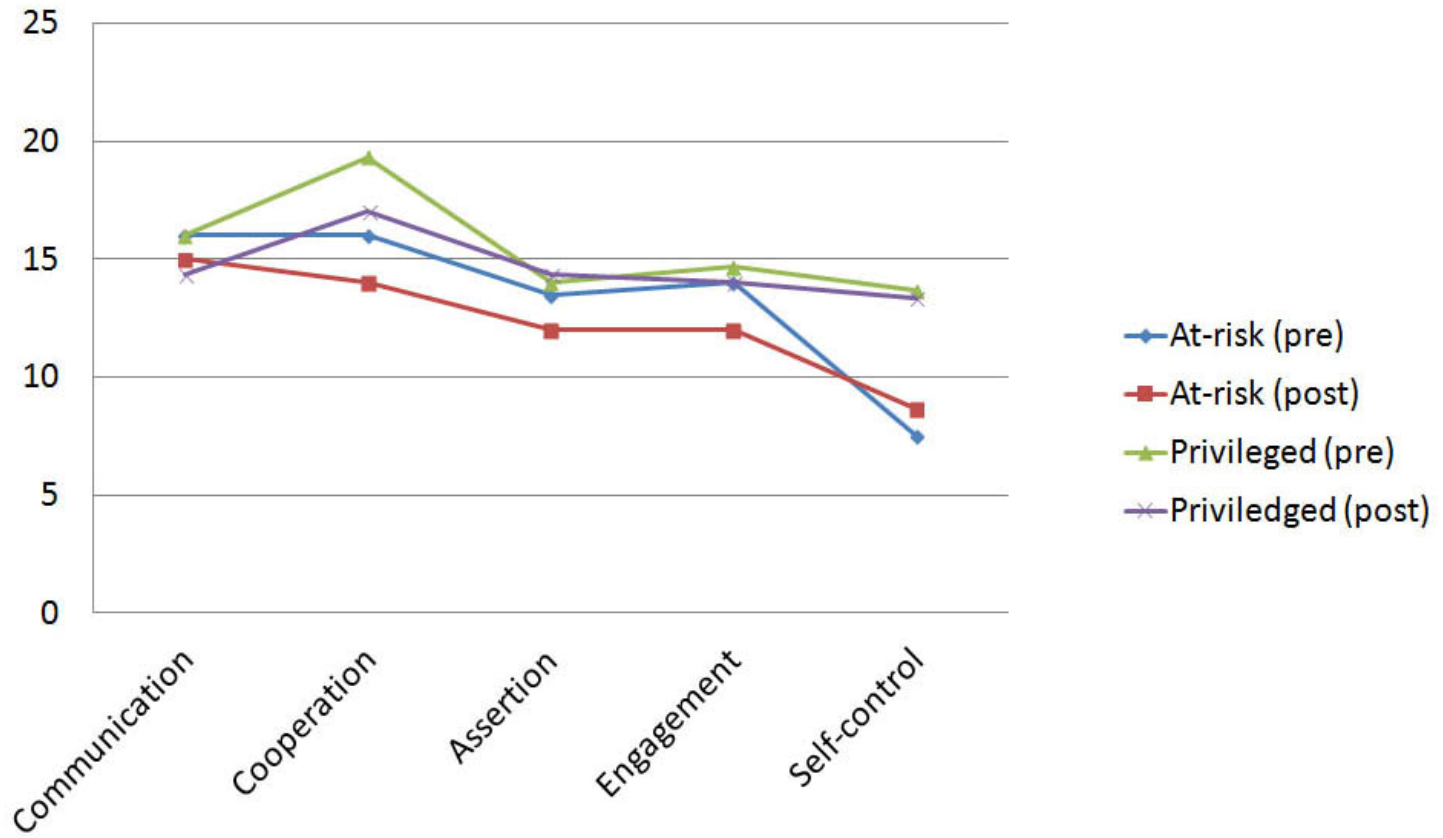**Figure G1. Children's Self-Evaluations - Pre & Post – Fall 2012**

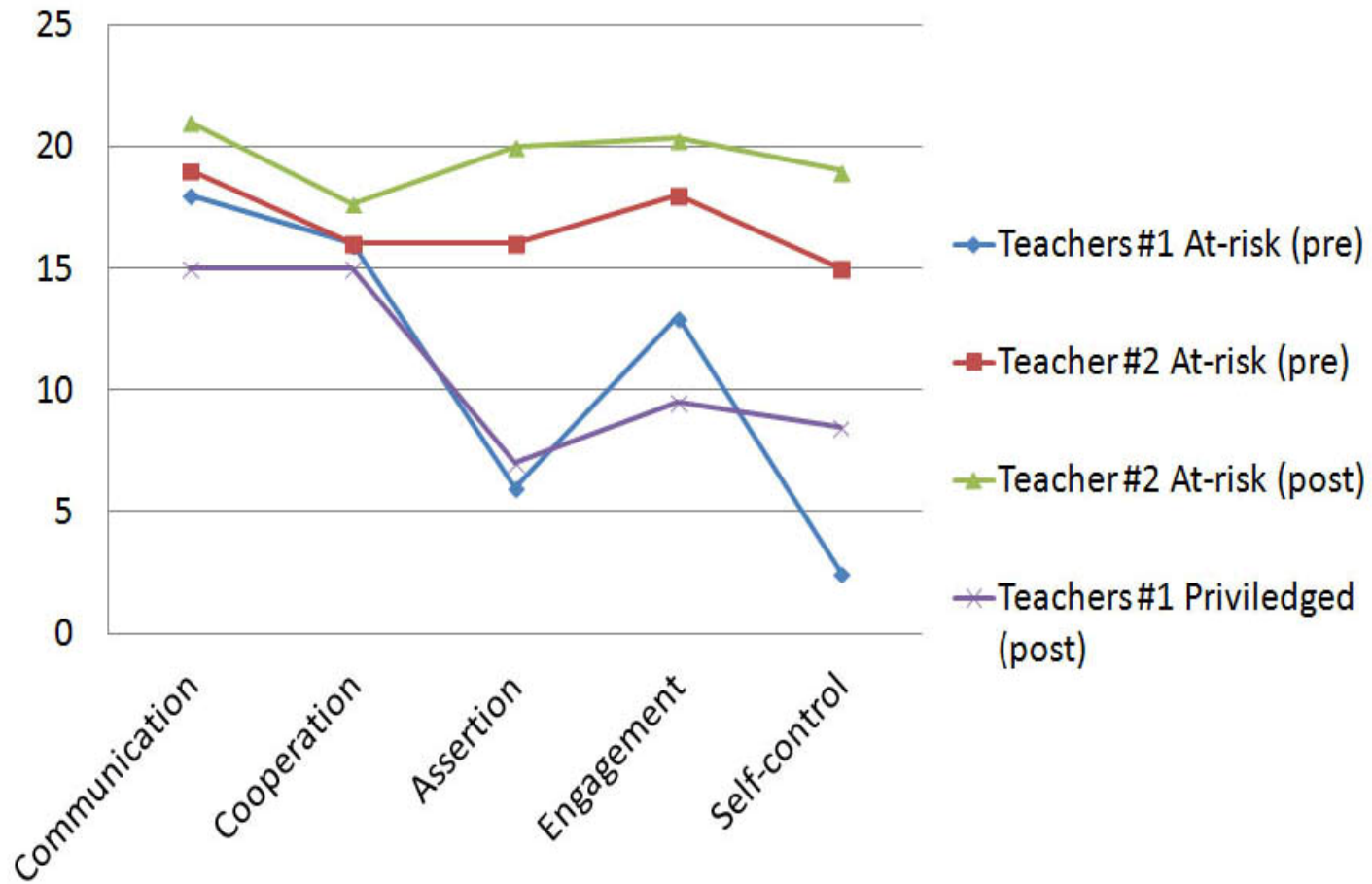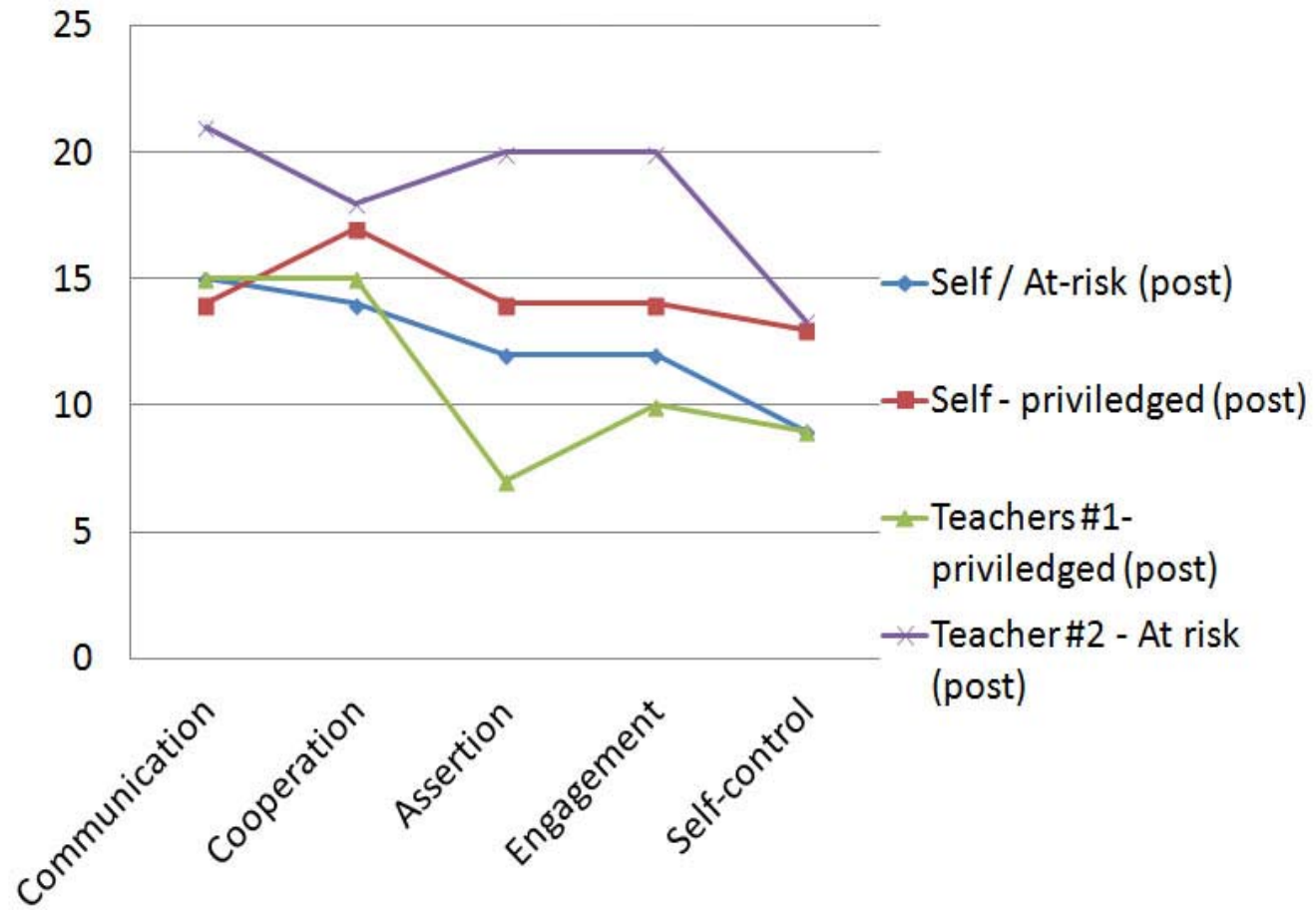**Figure G2. Teachers' Evaluations**

Figure G3. Teachers & Self-Evaluations Pre & Post – Fall 2012

Appendix H

Comparative Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

Pre & Post performance

	Self	Self	Lecturer	Researcher	Parent	Teacher 1	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Student's reflections on children	Students' self-reflections (learned)
	Quant (pre/post)	Qual (from reflections - discovery)	Qual	Qual (from reflections, observations)		Quant	Qual	Quant	Qual	
Lorraine	12/11	liked planning play	above average for empathy, engagement, self control	confidence did improve				18/19	projection, confidence, presence on stage improved; not forthcoming	Letting go of control; trusting others; go with the flow
Cathy	n/a/16	enjoyed meeting new people & became friends	above average for empathy, engagement, self control	did not observe a significant level of change	more confident			n/a/20	projection, confidence, presence on stage improved	Little encouragements made a big difference over time
arguerite	15/12	learned to project voice & learned how to sing	above average for empathy, engagement, self control	did observe a great increase in her self-confidence				15/20	projection, confidence, presence on stage improved	my presence really mattered; would have liked the names & pictures of kids earlier
Kelly	15/13	learned to use projection	above average for empathy, engagement, self control	did find her level of self-confidence improved greatly		n/a/9	much more verbal		far more outspoken	Learned not to underestimate kids; would like to have worked harder at bonding with
Joyce	18/19	made progress	above average for empathy, engagement, self control	initially was very confident and it grew even more		n/a/18			projection, confidence, presence on stage improved	learned to devise a lesson plan
below norm										
above norm										