

Theatre As Curriculum to Practice Vulnerability

By

Colleen Clement

B.A., Olivet College, 1987

M.A., Eastern Michigan University, 2009

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SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

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Colleen Clement
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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Wanda Hurren, Supervisor
(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. Monica Prendergast, Member
(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. Warwick Dobson, Outside Member
(Department of Theatre)

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Wanda Hurren, Supervisor
(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. Monica Prendergast, Member
(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. Warwick Dobson, Outside Member
(Department of Theatre)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation documents a doctoral endeavor to explore both the potential of theatre as a means to enable students to practice vulnerability and the potential curricular impact of such a practice, using an in-depth narrative study of six theatre and drama for the young specialists. The researcher attempts to gain understanding and create a discourse on the vulnerability of the every-student as a curricular concern as well as make a connection to the potential of theatre as a means to practice navigating vulnerability. This not only involves a reconsideration of the term *vulnerability* to be seen as a path to strength, but also a reconsideration of educator responsibilities. The researcher sought stories of the everyday vulnerabilities that a student might encounter during school and specifically did not seek stories of vulnerabilities from extreme or exceptional traumatic events. While this study does not produce specific curriculum planning, it yields a better understanding of the concept of vulnerability, including the acknowledgment that *practicing navigating vulnerability* and *practicing vulnerability* can be accepted as useful terminology in educational pursuits.

A key component of the research is the development of a Métissage Circle Theatre Script entitled “To Practice Vulnerability?” as a method of data analysis and research dissemination. It is the researcher’s intent that this script be available for readings by non-actors at school board meetings, parent-teacher meetings, teacher organizations, departments of education, theatre and drama organizations, theatre artist groups, and educational policy decision-makers. The script gently invites readers to begin to explore, ask questions, and discuss the educational possibilities, and provides a low-risk opportunity to navigate the vulnerability experienced when simply encountering the very subject of our own vulnerability.

THEATRE AS CURRICULUM TO PRACTICE VULNERABILITY

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THEATRE AS CURRICULUM TO PRACTICE VULNERABILITY

Introduction

While working on a confidence workshop for teenagers two summers ago at the University of Victoria, I received an email from a friend with a link to the TED Talk video of Dr. Brené Brown discussing her latest work on shame and the strength gained by working through vulnerability (Brown, 2012b). As I watched and listened to Dr. Brown, I could not help but think of my upcoming workshop. I realized that my work with students as a theatre artist, director, and vocal coach has been driven by my passion to provide young people with tools to help them find the courage to face and to navigate the vulnerabilities that surface in situations such as speaking or performing in front of others, knowing that any confidence gained could possibly extend to other areas of their lives.

This led me to several questions that I felt needed exploring. Do theatre and drama activities provide opportunities to teach young people skills to confront shame and vulnerability outside of the bounds of theatre? Could it be that participation in theatrical presentations/productions allows students to *practice* vulnerability? Could consciously providing a place to practice vulnerability be considered a curricular need in education? I wondered how the educational journey of a child would be impacted, if, thinking of vulnerability as a strength, schools were to make a habit of creating experiences for students to practice navigating their every-day vulnerabilities and become better at it, similar to practicing the trumpet or the game of tennis. “Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional. Our only choice is a question of engagement” (Brown, 2012a, p. 2).

I present here my research purpose, followed by a literature review to support the purpose and notes about my own practice and researcher vulnerability. I move on to the rationale for

choosing Narrative Inquiry, challenges and concerns presented by this methodology, the method details, and my motivation and intention for this study. I give my interpretation of the data and my thoughts on future implications. I include an overview of data points and the theatrical script resulting from this study.

Research Purpose

The purpose of my research was to explore both the potential of theatre as a means to enable students to practice vulnerability and the potential curricular impact of such a practice, using an in-depth narrative study of six theatre and drama for the young specialists. This is an attempt to gain understanding and create a discourse on the vulnerability of the every-student as a curricular concern as well as make a connection to the potential of theatre as a means to practice navigating vulnerability. This not only involves a reconsideration of both the term *vulnerability* to be seen as a path to strength and the vocabulary used in theatre and drama, but also a reconsideration of educator responsibilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum

I embrace the view that education needs to provide access to knowledge and experiences that increase the opportunity for healthy maturation of the life of individuals and the societies in which they live (Dewey, 1902). Education serves not only a specific individual, but all those who come in contact with or are affected by said individual, thus reaching beyond the individual. “It is through and by means of education that they [individuals] may become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds” (Greene, 1988, p. 12). As Nachmanovitch (1990) reminds us, we, as members of a society valuing the formal education of our children, must be wary of

confusing education with training, which while similar, have different purposes. Training refers to learning specific abilities to perform specific activities, whereas, education has a broader, more holistic meaning. “Education is the building of a person. To *educate* means to draw out or evoke that which is latent; education then means drawing out the person’s latent capacities for understanding and living, not stuffing a (passive) person full of preconceived knowledge” (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 118).

I believe that Dewey’s (1902) early 20th century cry for the methods and curriculum present in school systems to be modified to reflect the changes in society is particularly poignant and relevant to our new 21st century version of a global society and education, especially given the rapid changes in technology, commerce, and communication. However, being open to reconceptualizing ideas and processes does not equate to or even necessitate a drastic dismantling or complete overhaul of existing institutions and traditional wisdom (Pinar, 2009). Rather than viewing them as polar opposites, I view reconceptualization and the traditional wisdom of the field as interdependent, allowing for dynamic interchange and dialogue, examining issues from multiple perspectives to keep the field of curriculum studies healthy, vital, relevant, and, let us not forget, practical. As Schwab (2009) explains, the “arts of the practical are onerous and complex” (p. 131) and require an awareness of the benefit of renovating a structure piecemeal, rather than demolishing it in one fell swoop every time a new thought appears.

As information availability and accessibility have dramatically increased in my lifetime, my view of education in general has changed, and, therefore, my concept of what constitutes curriculum has also changed. While researching for a doctoral seminar assignment about the curriculum of words and in the spirit of Pinar and Grumet (1976), I went back to the original

meaning of *curriculum* from *currere*, referring to race courses, the running of races, a racing chariot, and even a career (*curriculum*, 2011). I thought about my connection to racing. I was a sprinter on my high school track team for four years. I've had my share of running races as well as my share of hurdle spills. I've even traversed a couple of cross-country courses through the woods. I lived in Saratoga Springs, New York, for a bit and had the opportunity to see a running of the Traverse Stakes—one of the largest thoroughbred races in the US. Soon images of racing began swirling around images of school in my head. When I finally put pen to paper, I ended up with an unexpected poetic image of curriculum:

Jogging. Sprinting. Pacing. Striding. Resting. Hydration. Fuel. Horsepower. Shoes.

Wheels. Motion. Breakdowns. Hills. Curves. Starting gates. Finish lines. Obstacles.

These are parts of a race. They are movement. They are dynamic. They are sweaty. They are grueling. They are endurance. They are strength. They are proud. They are win. They are loss. They are quit. They are finish. They are action. They are challenge. They are discovery. They are happening. They are tests. They are calls. They are worthy. They are life. Are they our present-day Curriculum and Instruction? (Clement, 2011, p. 1)

In an effort to understand curriculum from my autobiographical perspective, I presented this poem to the class as a form of poetic inquiry (Hurren, 2009; Prendergast et al., 2009; Richardson, 2005). What followed was a riveting class discussion on a new way to consider curriculum. We talked for 20 minutes on whether or not any of our experiences of curriculum and instruction had ever been sweaty. This had a profound effect upon my not only my view of curriculum, but on my view of how to approach academia. “Stated simply, *currere* seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one’s understanding of his or her life” (Pinar, W.F. et al., 1996, p. 518).

As such, I am open to the idea of reconfiguring what is deemed curricular and feel that education needs to reflect the changes in the current landscape of our children's experiences. "Cease thinking of the child's experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital" (Dewey, 1902, p. 11). While change to traditional patterns of thought is often met with resistance, I concur with Oberg (2003) who advocates *not* polarizing issues, creating sides of right and wrong, but rather to see resistance as opportunities for perspective realizations and shifts as well as personal growth.

Taking education and curriculum a step further, I believe that to connect with others and to the whole of society, we need to know ourselves. Education needs to include opportunities to awaken our awareness of our inner worlds while engaging with our outer worlds. It must involve the personal. "Unless we suggest that learning is this process that is somehow strangely removed from anything that means anything to us or that matters, it is going to involve the person's life experiences in the sense-making process" (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006, p. 129). This means that, to be a part of the race of a person's life, curriculum and instruction need to acknowledge the holistic sense of a person. Greene (1988) argues that the "richness, the complexity of the selves people create are functions of their commitments to projects of action they recognize as their own" (p. 22).

Yet, education is a highly social process (Dewey, 1944), as well. Regardless of the outcome, schools are managed systems of student experiences, some more interactive than others, which cannot *not* impact the social aspect of any given group of people. It is the combination of this social aspect of education with the ideals of personal awareness, growth, and commitment that provides opportunity for experiencing group projects, such as those in theatre and drama, as personally and socially curricular (Neelands & Goode, 2000; Heathcote, 1984).

“Experiencing is penetration into the environment...involvement on all levels: intellectual, physical, and intuitive...when a person functions beyond a constricted intellectual plane, his intelligence is freed” (Spolin, 1983, p. 4).

Theatre and drama are viewed as the most social of art forms (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009; Neelands & Goode, 2000). “Drama is unique among the arts in its concrete use of people and social living as material. It is the art of all dimensions, of which life itself consists” (Ward, 1957, p. 4). Goldberg (2006) writes that theatre and drama can be examined for its impact aesthetically, pedagogically, and psychologically, especially in regard to its ability to allow a child the chance to work through problems vicariously and develop socialization skills that can be later applied to circumstances outside of the bounds of theatre. Thus, theatre and drama as curriculum has the potential to encompass learning both as an individual and a member of a group. “In the same way, learners are not only minds or knowers but bundles of affects, individuals, personalities, earners of livings. They are not only group interactors but possessors of private lives” (Schwab, 2009, p. 128).

Vulnerability As Curriculum

Brown’s work (2012a, 2012b, 2010, 2006) challenges the definition of vulnerability as weakness, the chink in the armor, so to speak, and presents the strength of vulnerability as a necessary part of growth, maturity, and joy. Per Brown’s video TED Talk (2012b), vulnerability is (a) “emotional risk, exposure, uncertainty,” (b) “the birthplace of innovation, creativity, and change,” and (c) “our most accurate measurement of courage.” While part of me seemed to immediately connect with this interpretation, another part of me cringed at the notion. I reflected on this split for some time. I realized that for me Brown’s work allowed me to distinguish more clearly between a vulnerability and an act perpetrated against or a condition inflicted upon the

vulnerable. My perspective on vulnerability became analogous to the idea that a square is always a rectangle, but a rectangle is not always a square. An instance of vulnerability might not lead to maturity, for example, but maturity can only come through vulnerability. Thus, vulnerability in general is the rectangle, but vulnerability that leads to joy, growth, maturity, creativity, compassion, and strength is the square. In this view, consciously learning to navigate vulnerability could be seen as helping someone to be less likely to experience negative consequences when encountering vulnerable situations in life, such as being taken advantage of or feeling debilitated by the actions of others, and more likely to experience positive outcomes, such as knowing how to get out of a situation or gaining confidence by recognizing the power of one's own resilience.

However, being able to discuss or even acknowledge one's vulnerabilities depends upon the level of or experience of shame connected with those vulnerabilities. Brown declares shame an epidemic highly correlated with addiction, depression, violence, aggression, bullying, suicide, and eating disorders. "*Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging*" (Brown, 2012a, p. 69). Differing from guilt which is linked to regret over an action, shame involves condemnation of self and judgment of unworthiness. Shame's primary weapons prey upon our fear of disconnection. Finding our way back to each other, connecting with each other, is done through vulnerability—to dare greatly (Brown, 2012a).

Brown (2010) points out that *everyone* experiences shame. It is not limited to a select few who have survived horrific ordeals. "[Shame] actually tends to lurk in all of the familiar places, including appearance and body image, family, parenting, money and work, health, addiction, sex, aging, and religion. To feel shame is to be human" (Brown, 2010. p. 39). Coloroso (2008)

reminds us that shame is a major reason bullying can occur: children are ashamed of being bullied so they don't tell any adults; a bully uses shame to make a target feel unworthy and isolated; boys are culturally groomed that they should feel ashamed if they can't "take it" and are taunted with "crying to mama" if they tell someone; and shame produces a code of silence that enables more bullying, deepening the isolation for a victim.

Embarrassment is a product of shame. Grainger (2011) argues that although we may try to paint embarrassment as a "relatively minor inconvenience," it is actually a major determinant of our choices in our experiences, particularly in theatre, illustrating "an important way in which we learn how to cope with the business of being human" (p. 58). Heathcote (1984) warns us not to forget that children can feel great embarrassment simply from the feeling of being "stared at" in a class. Izzo (1997) reminds us that shame and the fear of being judged as silly, boring, stupid, or not very clever can emotionally block us to our creativity. Shame can be an aspect of daily life for anyone. It affects our life experiences in the personal and the social realms. Brown's (2006) study on shame revealed that where a personal vulnerability existed but went unacknowledged, the shame experienced took the participants by surprise, overwhelming them with emotions and confusion as to what they were feeling and why. Further, where there was a perception of invulnerability, encountering shame was even more emotionally painful and confusing (p. 48). Thus, perceiving oneself as invulnerable or lacking the awareness of one's vulnerability appears to not only *not* reduce the likelihood of being vulnerable, but to increase the level of shame one feels when the vulnerability is finally revealed.

This leads me to question whether knowledge of vulnerability needs to be addressed more directly with students in our educational systems. How might there be merit in curricular activities that teach skills to navigate vulnerability for the every-student and allow space for them

to practice those skills? By every-student, I'm referring to the everyday experiences common to being a student, in general, regardless of category, label, or stereotype. I am specifically not referring to extreme individual traumas or the sufferings associated with marginalized or vulnerable populations.

This brings me to a major reservation I had in choosing to research this topic. Would expanding the parameters of vulnerability to include the vulnerability of the every-student insult or trivialize the plights of those currently identified as vulnerable populations? Would practicing how to navigate vulnerability be seen as a road to strength or is the link to vulnerability as weakness so strong that suggesting to practice it implies practicing how to remain traumatized, dominated, or oppressed? I knew when I submitted my proposal that my topic of research could end up being deemed not only impractical and nonsensical, but sacrilege, in particular, by that segment of my fellow theatre practitioners who are passionately committed to the use of theatre and drama to challenge societal inequities and promote social justice for groups wronged by those in positions of power. Regardless of my hesitations, I felt compelled to explore and to better understand.

Theatre and Vulnerability

According to Brown (2012a), the belief that vulnerability is only weakness is a dangerous misconception. We reject vulnerability because it is most often associated with dark emotions that we don't want to see, let alone discuss with anyone. However, her research supports the concept of vulnerability as "the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity" (Brown, 2012a, p. 33). Her position is a rather hard sell, so to speak, when you consider how

pervasive the concept of vulnerability as weakness really is, especially within the bounds of theatre and drama.

In drama and theatre research, I find references to *vulnerability* in ways such as identifying which drama participants are able to hide their vulnerabilities (Edlman, 2006) and the labeling of juvenile offenders, disadvantaged youth, or abused women and children as vulnerable populations (Orme, Salmon, & Mages, 2006; O'Connor, O'Connor, & Welsh-Morris, 2006; Taylor, 2002). Heathcote (1984) talks about the how the drama teacher can be put in an uncomfortable, vulnerable position when the expression of a class might change to aggression depending upon the content of a given dramatic exercise. Grainger (2011) writes about how human vulnerability seeks to protect itself at all costs. Additionally, the work in Applied Theatre (Neelands & Dobson, 2008), which refers to the use of theatre for extra-theatrical purposes such as education, social change and community-building, and Theatre for the Oppressed (Boal, 1979) seeks to empower and create positive change on issues of particular importance to specific communities, yet references vulnerability only in terms of disempowered or disenfranchised persons or populations. Of course, these interpretations of vulnerability as weakness or disempowerment follow the standard dictionary definition which lists *vulnerable* as “capable of being physically or emotionally wounded” and “open to attack or damage” (*vulnerability*, 2012).

As I read through Brown's Shame Resilience Theory (2006) with feelings of being trapped, powerless, and isolated on one end of the Shame Continuum and empathy, connection, power, and freedom on the other end, I am overwhelmed by the number of connections to drama and theatre that can be drawn. This is what I yearn to explore: the potential for viewing participation in drama and theatre as a necessity for the healthy social and personal development of the young with the expressed purpose of allowing students to explore or practice vulnerability.

I agree with Seton (2006) who states, “I believe we, who are teachers of performance, can find ways in which vulnerability (and its inevitable traumas and stresses) can become a transformative process rather than treating vulnerability as something that has to be either defended against or denied” (p. 4).

Empathy is viewed as a byproduct of vulnerability and the antidote to shame (Brown, 2012a; Coloroso, 2008). This holds well for theatre and drama as increase in empathy serves as one of its well-documented outcomes (McCammon, Saldaña, Hines, & Omasta, 2012; Jindal-Snape, Vettrano, & Lawson, 2011; Catterall, 2007; Wasylko & Stickley, 2003). Although Miller and Saxton (2013) caution that the actual development of empathy should not be considered a guarantee, vulnerability in terms of empathy awareness is seen as a strength in theatre and drama. Vulnerability in terms of enhancing social and emotional development such as an increase in confidence, self-esteem, cooperation, and freedom of expression is also seen as a strength in theatre and drama (McCammon, Saldaña, Hines, & Omasta, 2012; Jindal-Snape, Vettrano, & Lawson, 2011). Yet, while vulnerability-related terms, such as *empathy*, *risk*, *safety*, and *trust*, abound in the field of theatre and drama, I have not found any direct connection of these terms to the concept of vulnerability as strength. I used this study to explore the potential evolution of this vocabulary.

I need to qualify that, while I am researching the potential for participation in theatre to help students practice navigating vulnerability, I am by no means suggesting that theatre is assumed to be this happy, sunshiny playground where we participate without question. To the contrary, in my experience, theatre done poorly and without regard for the safety and vulnerability of its participants can be utterly damaging. For example, I witnessed a professional director in an acting workshop verbally assault a first-time actress until she broke down into a

puddle of tears on stage. Afterwards, the actress confided in me that she felt as if she had been violated but didn't know how to stop it. When I questioned the director on it, she told me that she believed in emotionally stripping actors in rehearsal by whatever means possible so that she could show them where "real" emotional acting comes from. I was shocked when she justified it by saying, "I do it out of love."

I have witnessed children in community theatre and children's theatre being treated more like props or scenery rather than people, because putting on a professional-looking show was a director's top priority. I have been a participant in drama activities where, in the guise of objective exploration, it became clear that the facilitators had a political agenda to promote and anyone who disagreed was made to look foolish and ignorant. I have seen exclusive cliques develop in school theatre departments, which are proclaiming to be open to all. Serving as a final caution not to assume one will acquire positive life skills from participation in theatre, Quigg's (2007) study of workplace bullying in the UK revealed that the percentage of workers being bullied was higher in the performing arts than any other field. "So the performing arts are indeed *different*: they are the market leaders in bullying behavior" (p. 59). Yet, these cautionary tales serve as my motivation to place the topic of vulnerability center stage in an effort to raise our awareness in education *and* theatre and drama.

Consciousness

To make the practice of vulnerability an endeavor of consciousness, people would need to understand that vulnerability is part of the journey for all humans, not a select few. "When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability" (L'Engle, 1980, p. 190). The challenge to the acceptance of vulnerability as an instrument of growth and maturity means awakening to the idea

that it is a strength to honor, not a weakness to avoid (Brown, 2012b). From my perspective, to even consider this notions requires that one would need to separate the concept of being vulnerable or capable of being harmed from that of actually being harmed or an act/condition inflicted upon the vulnerable. To raise the consciousness level of vulnerability in this sense demands the “embodied thrusting into the lived and perceived” (Greene, 1988, p. 21) in order to bring forth the patterns of habit for examination.

Consciousness requires a constant practice of excavating our layers of thought via the power of limits (Nachmanovitch, 1990) presented to us in life. When our dogma and comfort zones are met with unexpected, important moments, we have the opportunity to notice the patterning of our thoughts and actions. The language that we use to work our way through our prescriptions helps us question our prescriptions and dogmas and helps change our patterning (Oberg, 2003; Steffler, 1995). This both transforms and raises our consciousness. Consciousness and practice relate to Dewey’s (1944) concept of habit whereby “every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences” (p. 26). At the very least, the idea of making practice navigating vulnerability a habit for schools does present, from my perspective as a researcher inquiring into this area, a chance to take notice of the prescriptions that have created our current images of education and its purposes.

Theatre and Practicing Vulnerability

I continue here with the use of Brown’s (2012a, 2012b, 2010, 2006) work as a scaffolding for me to examine the connection between vulnerability and theatre and drama from different angles and levels. Brown states with conviction that vulnerability is not weakness and that the uncertainty we encounter daily is not optional. “Our willingness to own and engage with

our vulnerability determines the depth of our courage and the clarity of our purpose; the level to which we protect ourselves from being vulnerable is a measure of our fear and disconnection” (2012a, p. 2). In her research, vulnerability is shown to be the catalyst for courage, compassion, and connection and is “the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences” (p. 11). I am immediately reminded of Spolin’s (2001) theatrical legacy. “There are many facets to your basic persona unknown even to you, that may come forth, appear, and become visible. You, the unique, invisible, unknown, must emerge, be seen, and connect” (Spolin, 2001, p. 1).

Brown (2012a) addresses the question of how to raise wholehearted children by reporting that her research data unequivocally shows the answer is to let children struggle and experience. In theatre and drama a child has the opportunity to encounter uncertainty in such a way as to allow for considering options and revising decision-making that is not always possible in real life (Grainger, 2011; Heathcote, 1984). This provides children with the opportunity to experience, imagine, extrapolate, and express meaning, which is an act of connection. “We have no better way to work together, to learn about each other, to heal, and to grow” (Rohd, 1998, p. xix). Grainger (2011) goes so far as to say that drama draws attention to our natural vulnerability so that we may become more human and that we would not be able to relate to one another on a personal level without drama.

I concur with Bolton (2010) who cautions that we must recognize that no one can specifically teach trust, concentration, focus, tolerance, group awareness, responsibility, and other such abilities and that the “achievement of these admirable qualities is not intrinsic to drama: it is an important by-product of the dramatic process” (Bolton, 2010, p. 110). We need to view these qualities as attainable goals over time under the guidance of trained professionals. It is from this platform where we can see that education as a whole needs to not only include the teaching of new

knowledge and skills, but also the time and space for considering and practicing the use of the newly acquired knowledge and skills. I believe that participation in theatre and drama provides that time and space.

As I consider theatre and drama as a means to practice vulnerability, I am not advocating a program for the purpose of healing of a specific wound/issue of a specific individual or group. I am not referring to the issues of vulnerability as experienced in intense actor training (Seton, 2006). Nor I am intending this exploration to delve into the therapeutic depths and concerns of Brown's (2012a, 2012b, 2010, 2006) research. I'm using her work as a guide to question how education can more deliberately approach the navigation of vulnerability for the every-student, to examine the possibilities, and to construct my thoughts as a theoretical framework. I wish to address the everyday, individual vulnerabilities that all students as people encounter in their lives, ranging anywhere from alienation and isolation to finding the courage to stand in front of class for an oral book report to stepping into the shoes of someone you don't like in order to gain a new perspective. "As teachers we cannot, do not, transmit information directly; rather, we perform the teaching act when we help others negotiate passages between their constructs and ours, between ours and others" (Doll, W.E., Jr., 2009, p. 271).

I believe that all of the aspects of a theatrical or dramatic performance, not only the subject or content matter, and including the audience perspective, have the potential to serve as a means to learn how to navigate vulnerability. For me to begin to tackle this idea outside of my own head, I needed to know what stories come to mind when other adults, who have had experience with theatre and drama for the young, attempt to connect these concepts. Comparing stories from our lives brought forth different perspectives and angles from which I could better determine not only if

practicing vulnerability could even be considered a viable concept, but also if it could be accepted in the field of theatre and drama.

RESEARCHER DISCLOSURE

My Own Practice through the Practicing to Navigate Vulnerability Lens

As part of my own researcher reflection process, I decided to glance back at some of the classes I created before I went to graduate school to earn an MA in Drama and Theatre for the Young and, obviously, before I entered my current PhD program. I think my journaling is worth sharing here as it reveals much about my own self-discovery and motivation throughout this research journey.

About a dozen years ago, I went to a string of incredibly mediocre high school musicals. I need to stress that they weren't mediocre because of lack of talent on the part of the students. Actually, I could see a lot of talent on stage. I remember thinking, "Why aren't they being given anything challenging to do? Why are they just standing and singing during musical numbers?" Everyone just seemed to be trying to take up as little space, physically and energetically, as possible. Frankly, they looked bored. Then I found out that if the students couldn't get some bit or routine right away, the director would cut it from the show and give them something much simpler to do. Of course, that meant that the usual two months of rehearsal *simply* consisted of going over easy things they didn't need to practice. Apparently, if there was a really complicated part, the director didn't even attempt to teach it to the students, but rather *simply* brought in adults from the community to do it! I was floored. Didn't the director know what that does to a student's self-esteem? Why was such a low expectation level placed upon the students? Why were they being trained to abandon anything challenging? No wonder they looked like they didn't know how to be or care to be on stage.

So, I decided to start an afterschool program to teach students, not about acting so much, but about how to carry themselves on stage and in front of people, how to be confident about who they are, and how not to hide who they are. I came up with a six-week, private course that I called the Stage Presence Class and offered it at a dance studio in my small hometown. My first class had five middle school students. Within a few years, I had guided a couple hundred students on how to find that positive, confident strength within themselves, both on and off stage. Most of the class sizes were small, under 15 students.

The class is organized around learning a challenging Broadway musical chorus number with the intent to perform it publicly. I believe in using music, dance, and singing as part of confidence training for children not only because it's fun, but because music helps you express emotions that you might not be able to or wish to verbally articulate. However, I don't hold auditions for placement into the class. Any talent level is accepted. I do separate the classes based on age/grade level or, basically, by elementary school, middle school, and high school. Parents aren't allowed in the rehearsal space. This is actually to provide a safe place for the students to practice and try out new things without worrying whether they are pleasing their parents. This also helps teach the students about personal accountability, especially with really young children. While some children don't speak or participate freely with the parents watching, others act out in disruptive ways that they wouldn't normally do when their parents aren't there. I want to be able to maintain a warm and encouraging atmosphere, yet I have the expectation that each student will perform to the best of their abilities during that particular class. I reinforce that by not requiring parental overseers.

I talk a lot about safety and respect in my classes. In fact, my number one rule is "No touching unless it's part of choreography." As harsh as that sounds, it actually brings a sigh of

relief to most of the students because they know that I'm looking out for their own personal boundaries, as they will hopefully learn to do for themselves, and will protect them from unwanted violation of that space. Of course, I'm not thinking that anyone will purposefully cause someone extreme physical harm, but it can be tough to seriously participate in the festive spirit of group work when a friend or sibling is poking you and whispering in your ear because they are, in truth, nervous. It can be difficult as a beginner to negotiate this and tell the friend to "stop it" without appearing uncool. In addition, I can't have people *not* paying attention in a theatrical group performance. Too many people, including the potential audience, are depending on each member of the ensemble. I mean, not only can someone ruin the experience for others by fooling around all the time, but there are a variety of physically dangerous situations that may be encountered on or back stage at any given time.

As the director in charge, I firmly enforce this rule. I'm not making a judgment about anyone being good or bad. It's for everyone's safety. Safety for me also entails providing a space where the students are free from ridicule. The students quickly understand this and respect it because I'm consistent and I don't make it personal. With a feeling of safety established, the trust in the process seems to dramatically increase on the very first day.

Our main task is to learn and perform a musical theatre number by the end of the course. I make it much more challenging than what most of them are used to getting in school. Particularly in elementary schools, performing usually involves reciting lines, then singing with a little back and forth movement, followed maybe by a simple group dance. In my classes we sing, act, and dance all at the same time. It's fast-paced and multi-layered. It is something that cannot be perfected in one rehearsal. It's packed full of things they can't do without a lot of practice. It's not easy, but that is what makes it so fulfilling at the end when they are doing their fabulous

performance in front of an audience. They accomplish something difficult. That's why they beam.

Along with learning the number, we do improvisation exercises that allow them to play with new ideas and to help them build awareness about themselves and their perhaps previously hidden abilities. I approach learning about positive confidence with an emphasis on the importance of each individual's unique combination of characteristics to the success of the group's performance. I also provide moments of private reflection, allowing for personal expression through writing, drawing, and even decorating cards with stickers. I'm not trying to change someone as a person, but to get one to appreciate and value her/his own quirkiness. I might teach a few tools and help polish a few skills, but the acknowledgment and acceptance of what each individual has to offer yields far more positive and interesting possibilities for the creation of any performance piece, and for our world, for that matter. The interdependency of it all...they're not *in this* alone despite their differences. In essence, we do the exact opposite of a chorus line, where the objective is to have everyone look exactly the same.

With that in mind, I seek out a unique, little something like a quirky dance step for each of the students to do and give them a moment to be featured center stage during the group number. I provide each child with the opportunity to be noticed and appreciated in a positive way, both as an individual and part of the team. I do have one specific omission in the performance. I never let any student play the lead role from the musical of whatever piece of music I've chosen. I've found that, particularly for those under the age of 13, assigning one student a lead can cause a lot of unnecessary friction and alienation, which is an unnecessary impediment to learning about confidence and stage presence. Students can learn about the lessons of "there is no small role" by taking part in full theatrical productions, preferably when

they are older. For what I'm trying to accomplish, all students have equal representation. They all get to come up with their own character names. They all make their own costumes from old clothes and found items. No money is to be spent. They help each other. That's part of the fun of discovery of self and learning to trust that you have the ability to create "from nothing" and to contribute to the group.

As confidence means full trust, we talk a lot about what trust and confidence physically looks like to them. We break down what makes someone seem not confident, to not trust oneself, which ultimately leads to discussions on nervousness and the worry that someone will laugh at them. We talk about the difference between what I've always called negative and positive nervousness and the ways we can change negative nervousness into positive. One such way is to identify specific things one might be worried about like dropping a prop, forgetting a line, or falling down on stage. Then I design an exercise that practices handling those very worries. It is a technique I had learned to do for myself after participating in hundreds of performing arts productions throughout my life.

In one exercise I take an extremely simple song like "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" and have the students sing it as if they were in a big musical number on Broadway, complete with choreography, which in this case is simply crossing from one side of the stage to the other. They repeat the song until every person has finished the routine. Then they have to give me a big strong-arms-out-hands-reaching-up Broadway ending. There's only one catch. When each student reaches center stage, they have to fall down or trip, safely, of course, without interrupting the flow of the number. In other words, they have to get up and keep going as if the fall was designed to be a part of the performance.

As they take a show-ending company bow that I instruct them to take, I'm applauding madly and loudly hooting sounds of praise. I can see on their faces how silly the whole exercise seems. Then I ask if anyone died during the number. It sounds absurd, but it's the absurdity that highlights the amount of fear that's generated over the worry of making a very public mistake on stage—people think that, like death, it's the worst thing that could happen to them because everyone is going to laugh and judge them. By creating a silly exercise where they get to experience firsthand their own ability to fall and get up without dying, I help deflate the crippling effect of the negative nervousness and provide them with a positive tool to use if and when they experience the shock of a fall in a real performance.

I then proceed to demonstrate what I have seen happen to people when they fall. I freeze on the stage down on all fours. I have a panicked look. I'm clearly no longer *in* the musical number. Then I run off stage. As I come back, I ask how that reaction might impact the performer and the audience. I point out that if I was worried about people noticing me before, they would certainly be noticing me now. Instead of admiration for the ability to keep going, it's now concern and worry over my well-being. The audience is no longer in the number either.

I explain how some of the longest standing ovations I've ever witnessed in theatre came after something went very obviously wrong, but the performers and crew figured out a way to keep going. They didn't apologize, panic, or run off crying. I suspect that, like me, most long time theatre artists would admit that anyone can perform well when everything's running smoothly, but it's in those imperfect moments where we really show our talents and skills. The opposite of negative judgment, the admiration from the audience and other cast and crew members emerges as this palpable positive energy that heightens the experience for all. It's probably the reason for the huge physical response of applause and praise-filled noises when the

number ends or the curtains close. The energy of appreciation cannot be contained any longer and has no alternative but to burst out the first chance it gets.

By the time we reach the course ending mini-recital, as I call it, the students have learned and rehearsed a difficult musical number. They've practiced how to navigate quite a few worst case scenarios, giving them the confidence both as individuals and a group to approach a live performance where anything can happen. The students are ready to perform. Are they ready for Broadway? Maybe a couple, but that's not what this is about. It's about facing one's fears in a safe environment, finding one's voice in a positive way, freeing oneself from previous limitations, and letting one's light shine a little brighter.

I find yet another benefit of having a performance element to the class—it seems to take care of discipline issues. While the students don't have the motivation of a grading system in my class, the worries associated with performing well on stage along with the knowledge that the students' efforts in class will be witnessed by an audience at a mini-recital, complete with post-performance cookies and punch, seem to keep the students focused and wanting to do their best, for the most part. Add to that that there are usually only five rehearsal periods before the mini-recital, and, basically, the students don't usually have time or desire to "get into trouble." Perhaps a performance element would have helped me considerably with the discipline issues I encountered in my days as a substitute teacher, where the most common lesson plan left for me by the regular teachers was the ever-motivating and engaging "study hour." I wonder what would have happened to certain students had an audience of teachers, family, and neighbors been part of the equation.

Needless to say, the audience members of the mini-recitals are usually blown away by what they witness. They never seem to expect the complexity of the performance. They think it

will be more like a little singing followed by a little dancing, rather than this wild, use-every-part-of-the-stage, students-strong-doing-several-different-things-at-the-same-time kind of routine that we provide them. Many parents say to me that they can't believe that was their child up there on stage. One proud father told me that he saw a change in how his little girl played baseball after taking my class. He said she went from timidly going up to bat to walking tall and stepping into the batter's box like she was ready to hit a home run.

There's one moment in particular of a successful vulnerability navigation that stands out for me. After taking their recital bows to thunderous applause, I might add, a couple of the middle school students ran off stage, not to get to the lobby to see their families, but to find me. "Did you see?! Did you see?! One of our best dancers totally fell down in the big number, and, just like we practiced, she got up and kept going! It was awesome!"

As a result of seeing the change in their children, parents began inquiring if I had anything like the Stage Presence classes that could work for busy adults. I quickly developed my Confidence Clinics, which are non-musical, one-off workshops geared toward bringing a little fun and silliness into what turns out to be a very serious and often extremely liberating reflection on our fears and finding our voices and how to navigate the places where we feel vulnerable as adults.

Looking back, it seems what I have been doing all along is helping people try to navigate certain vulnerabilities in a positive way and providing a safe place for them to practice it. I just never called it *practicing navigating vulnerability* or *practicing vulnerability*. But now that I've put it in those words, I can't think of any better way to put it. In my opinion, it seems so responsible and practical to look at education in general and theatre in particular through this

lens. I can't stop noticing all of the different types of vulnerability connected with the purpose of education. Whether or not others will share my opinion is, of course, another matter.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Narrative Rationale

My research philosophy reflects the social constructivist paradigm in so far as I believe that our perspectives are constructed by means of individuals' interaction with others and the societal context in which they live, thus blurring the lines surrounding what is deemed to be truth (Creswell, 2007; Etherington, 2007). "Human consciousness, moreover, is always situated; and the situated person, inevitably engaged with others, reaches out and grasps the phenomena surrounding him/her from a particular vantage point and against a particular background consciousness" (Greene, 1988, p. 21). Language is situated as well, and "is the mind's effort to encompass and define that world and the experience of consciousness itself" (Steffler, 1995, p. 46). Further, the constructivist view supports the concept that curriculum in schools needs to remain fluid as "the field of experience is very wide and it varies in its contents from place to place and from time to time" (Dewey, 1944, p. 95).

The field of theatre and drama operates in, and might arguably demand, multiple perspectives. Participants, including audiences, have continual opportunities to construct their own meanings. In a reference to school theatre societies, Catterall (2007) suggests "that a culture of theatre [sic] (both in the abstract and in the moment) is likely to impact the ways and outcomes of meaning making among the participants" (p. 165). For my study, I needed to hear stories from these varying perspectives of others to begin investigating the interpretations of practicing vulnerability as a curricular possibility. I looked for the individually meaningful stories to get beyond the meta-narratives or grand sweeping narratives (Lyotard 1984; Shor & Freire, 1987) such as vulnerability as a weakness and its extension—invulnerability as strength.

Dirkx and Mezirow (2006) tell us that only by making learning experiences more personally meaningful can we challenge our fundamental ways of thinking, believing, or feeling. In my opinion, this calls for personally meaningful stories to be explored to gain understanding (Kramp, 2004), and therefore, I chose narrative inquiry as my methodology.

Narrative is the primary way for us to make our human experiences meaningful through a cognitive process which organizes our experiences into temporally meaningful events (Polkinghorne, 1988). As this is a mental process, we cannot directly observe narrative meaning, but we can observe the stories that manifest from the meaning, explaining our actions. Narratives revealed in stories capture life experiences (Aalsburg, 2005). Therefore, narrative or storytelling is a way of knowing. “The focus is no longer on the object (the so called ‘art work’, the ‘text’) but on the transaction between the living human being and what is to be grasped, what is to be learned” (Greene, 1996, p. xv).

From an ontological perspective, I believe multiple voices emerge from the researcher, the participants, and even the readers of the narrative study, and I embrace the idea “that interviewees are narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own” (Chase, 2005, p. 660). I am drawn to the epistemological interest of Clandinin & Connelly (1998), seeking the personal and practical or “personal practical knowledge” of the participants in the consideration of *practicing vulnerability*. In this view, the participant knowledge is seen in terms of “storied life compositions.” Yet, I try to remain epistemologically humble (Barone, 2000) in that I am not seeking to replace one all-encompassing narrative with another.

As human consciousness and language are always situated to the world and experiences of a particular person (Greene, 1988; Steffler, 1995), the stories lived through and told and retold by that person (Craig, 2009) will reflect a much desired, practical, and uniquely personal vantage

point that could better illuminate the various aspects of vulnerability, theatre and drama, and curriculum, providing a more well-rounded view of the concept as a whole. Exploring the stories of theatre and drama specialists who have had extensive yet varied experience with theatre and drama for the young yielded a more complete, and therefore more valuable, image of that which could be conceived as practicing vulnerability in the field.

By restorying the experiences shared into a framework and identifying any possible turning points or epiphanies on either the part of the participants in my study or myself as a researcher (Creswell, 2007), I hoped to create a platform from where perhaps new contributions to the language of education might be made (Polkinghorne, 1988). Restorying captures changes in knowledge landscapes in terms of individuals' and groups' actions and meaning making (Craig, 2009), allowing tensions and conflicts that might otherwise be difficult to articulate to become clear. A researcher chooses a narrative approach when studying an individual or individuals who can shed light upon a specific issue (Kramp, 2004; Creswell & Miller, 2000). I sought fewer participants in order to go into greater depth (deMarrais, 2004). In my opinion, going deeper into the stories told by a small number of participants provided a better chance of moving beyond the more typical prescriptive responses that initially arise in discussions around vulnerability, theatre and drama, and curriculum, such as vulnerability as weakness, theatre as extra-curricular, and education determined by standardized testing.

The autobiographical, self-reflective nature of narrative inquiry leads to greater self-awareness of our subjectivity and perhaps even to experiences that allow us to consciously transform to a new way of thinking and proceed to change our life accordingly (Brock, 2009). As my research revolves around the topic of vulnerability, shame will undoubtedly come into play. If shame thrives on secrecy, silence, and judgment (Brown, 2010), then narrative inquiry seems

of obvious benefit as a methodological choice to inquire into vulnerability as narrative not only honors but encourages individual voice and reflection, allowing for multiple perspectives.

Critical Lens

Attempting to identify hegemony requires a critical touch, especially when approaching subjects such as curriculum, theatre and drama, and vulnerability, where existing theories are well-documented and opinions are strong. Examining existing structures to challenge meta-narratives and dogma demands critical cognitive engagement (Freire in Shor & Freire, 1987). The critical theory paradigm exists as a complex combination of both the positivist and interpretivist perspectives in that subjective meanings are recognized without denying the existence of objective relationships. “Reality is seen as a state of tension and contradiction resulting from the conflict between the presentation of what ‘appears to be’ and an underlying reality which may be based on illusion and explication” (Carroll, 1996, p. 75).

The attribute of the critical lens that I find of utmost importance to my inquiry is its quest to reveal what is *not* there, what messages might be hidden, the gaps in the narrative, and the unexpected (Waite & Conn, 2011, p. 124). This investigation into the hidden or unsaid complements the very nature of theatre and drama which operates through a penalty-free exploration of socially constructed concepts and structures of power (Carroll, 1996). This critical lens demands that I bring my assumptions to the foreground instead of hiding them, which requires a great deal of reflexivity on my part (Grady, 1996). “Theory and theorizing ‘happens’ whether one is paying attention or not” (p. 60). I needed to know how my assumptions affect the concept of *practicing vulnerability*; therefore, I paid as much attention to my assumptions as possible to obtain the results and high level credibility in my research that I desire.

To that end, I recognize that I move even further along the continuum of postpositivist paradigms of inquiry (Lather, 2004, p. 207) toward emancipation. Viewing the world through a critical and feminist lens, I value methods that work toward transformative action and egalitarian participation, that connect meaning to broader issues of social power and control, and that “work toward open, flexible theory building grounded in both confrontation with and respect for the experiences of people in their daily lives and profound skepticism regarding appearances and ‘common sense’” (p. 209).

Transformative Lens

According to Mezirow (2006), most of our learning takes place *outside* of our awareness and includes emotional, intuitive, symbolic, imaginistic, and/or contemplative modes of learning. Transformative learning occurs *within* our awareness and includes the acknowledgment that a different way of understanding can often shed new light onto a problem and the nature and consequences of our established beliefs (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006). “In order for students and teacher to transform and be transformed, a curriculum needs to have the ‘right amount’ of *indeterminacy, anomaly, inefficiency, chaos, disequilibrium, dissipation, lived experience...*” (Doll, W.E., Jr., 2009, p. 268). I find transformative learning to be a driving force for me. I question how students learn to handle vulnerability. As learning experiences become personally meaningful challenging our fundamental ways of thinking, believing, or feeling, assumptions and beliefs are forever altered (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006). Potentially, the proposition of formally practicing vulnerability falls in the realm of personally meaningful learning experiences that challenge the traditional concept of school curriculum.

For my purposes, *practicing vulnerability* applies to the individuals that make up a society. I feel strongly that we cannot address the healing of societal wounds and the

transforming of larger societal issues by looking solely at a group level. We must acknowledge the importance of addressing an individual's journey for the betterment of the whole (Freire in Shor & Freire, 1987). That said, I recognize the need to be careful of the all too frequent emancipatory research trap of seeing oneself as a transformative savior to a perceived oppressed individual or population (Lather, 2004). Researching through a lens of transformation requires not only a thorough examination of structures of power and researcher assumptions, but also transparency of researcher motivation to maintain integrity and credibility.

Arts-based Lens

I am profoundly affected by the arts-based lens. What I have learned personally through the theatre arts, in particular, is a way of looking at life from a variety of angles and perspectives, forever changing the lighting and gels to see what the change of shadow reveals or conceals. Through the arts-based lens, hegemonic structures are made pliable—constructed and reconstructed to gain new awareness and points of view (Nachmanovitch, 2007). The arts-based lens is particularly well-suited for inquiry into curriculum, theatre and drama, and vulnerability due to its ability to promote empathic understanding (Barone & Eisner, 1997). Awareness through empathy carries with it the ability to create new visions and construct new meanings, both of which are necessary to challenge existing structures and concepts.

My motivation for using an arts-based lens in all of my work and considerations is best summed up by Cahnmann-Taylor (2008):

Education researchers cannot lose by acquiring and applying techniques employed by artists as well as scientists. We must assume an audience for our work; one that longs for fresh language and imagery to describe the indescribable emotional and intellectual experiences in and beyond language-education contexts. (p. 13)

As my research calls for fresh imagery of several concepts, the arts-based lens not only served me in my substantive arena, but served me well in my methodological decisions.

Métissage As Method

There are different approaches to conducting qualitative interview studies, thus, there is no one and only *right* way (deMarrais, 2004; Ely, 1996). In my approach to narrative inquiry, I used métissage as a means to explore the data—the stories—in an attempt to break apart the threads of the prescriptions, dogmas, and meta-narratives that I/we might have not realized surround my research questions. Métissage is a writing technique that combines the autobiographical narratives of several people. It comes from the Latin *mixtus* meaning *mixed*, referring to cloth that is woven with two different fibers (Worley, 2006; Chambers & Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2008). The root *metis* is Greek, referencing Metis, the wife of Zeus who possessed the powers of transformation. Through its properties of mixing, métissage has the power to transform thoughts by undoing the logic and the clarity of well-known concepts (Chambers & Hasebe-Ludt, 2008). My mind reels when braided moments illuminate a connectedness of experience and spirit that I had not before considered.

Part of the power of métissage stems from the autobiographical component. Not only do autobiographical narratives make for compelling reads, seemingly weaving themselves into the life of the reader, they also provide a means for examining in close detail the running of the race of an individual's life, *currere*, which is significant when attempting to reexamine that which is deemed curricular in our educational systems (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009; Pinar & Grumet, 1976).

Métissage illustrates how writing is a form of knowledge. The woven autobiographical stories provide insights by illuminating, in unexpected ways, experiential differences and

similarities that might have otherwise been overlooked. Stories are produced and created within the social relationship of the storyteller and the researcher, who has the opportunity to be actively involved in the co-construction of “previously untold stories by asking curious questions that help thicken and deepen existing stories and invite the teller into territory beyond what is already known to him or her” (Etherington, 2007, p. 600). The autobiographical writing allows us to cultivate our own authentic voice, freeing us from “the censorious hold of ‘science writing’ on our consciousness as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche; writing is validated as a method of knowing” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008, p. 962).

By allowing ourselves to tell our stories uninhibited, we can discover patterns in our thoughts and actions in a nonjudgmental way. Paying attention to patterns creates a mindfulness about our writing and our approach to life (Oberg, 2003). “I am amazed that, although the text is autobiographical, the topic is not the self—the self is the site/sight of enquiry; the site/sight of enquiry is the individual life, the topic is about something in society” (Simpkins, 2012, p. 28). This consciousness proves particularly important to the qualitative researcher where transparency and self-reflexivity are critical not only to the validity of the overall research process, but to the discovery of ideas and connections (Etherington, 2007; Cole, 2001).

A benefit to using *métissage* for narrative inquiry is the small number of participants involved in the study. To get beyond the habitual patterning of thoughts surrounding a given issue, the researcher needs time to explore the stories perhaps hidden beneath the initial, often superficial narrative offerings. The successful application of *métissage* requires that the researcher establish an atmosphere which welcomes the storytellers to delve deeply into their narratives and explore what might be completely uncharted territory. Of course, this means that the researcher will also need to venture deeper into her/his own stories, giving the research a

distinctly personal connection to the researcher. I agree with Ely (1996) and see this personal connection as benefitting the research journey of exploration and discovery. Ely notes, “In fact, I’ll go one step further: unless doing qualitative research has essential, personal impact, there is no use going further” (p. 167).

I must note here that while *métissage* as a research practice has been seen as a constant interaction and interweaving of the researcher’s and participants’ written autobiographical content (Simpkins, 2012), I chose to gather the narrative via face-to-face interviews, thus utilizing predominantly spoken participant autobiographical content. Instead of a dialogue between all of us, the participants only met one-on-one with me, each having no prior knowledge as to the identity of any other participant in the study. This gave the participants the space to confidentially talk about vulnerability since the word *vulnerability* tends to immediately raise people’s defenses. I felt that one-on-one private encounters with one researcher would be more effective and ethical for the initial exploration into whether or not this was a workable or even appropriate concept in the minds of the participants. Therefore, I alone sat at the loom as I wove together the stories taken directly from the transcripts, my own research journal notes, and quotations from literature.

I departed from the *métissage* technique of multiple researcher-participants writing and rewriting their own stories in responses to each other’s stories, where the learning is seen to take place in the sharing among the participants. Rather, through a series of invitations to reflect and write within the *métissage*, I am attempting to evoke the learning process at the reader/audience end of the scale. As there is no one right way to conduct qualitative inquiry and as I remained true to the participants’ individual voices, I feel that my particular liberties with the *métissage*, including its use as a theatrical piece, will prove to be both fruitful and accessible pedagogical

tools for exploration and research dissemination, especially with participants and audiences from outside of the world of academia.

Métissage As Arts-based

Métissage is an arts-based method, as well. Barone and Eisner (1997) put forth seven major criteria for what constitutes quality educational arts-based research, which is defined by the presence of pronounced aesthetic design that infuses the inquiry and its writing. Métissage has the potential to fulfill all seven requirements. First, it allows for the creation of a virtual reality by means of creating text with verisimilitude, pulling the reader further into the work. Second, it allows for the presence of ambiguity, enabling the readers to engage in the construction of meaning based on their own experiences. Third, métissage features expressive language to evoke feeling and connection. Fourth, by using the language of the detailed stories as told by the storytellers, métissage highlights contextualized and vernacular language as opposed to theoretical. Fifth, it has the ability to promote empathy by juxtaposing seemingly separate stories in ways to reveal unexpected connections among the differences. Sixth, it reflects the personal signature of the researcher/writer as each braid of stories does not follow a strict format and will be unique to the choices of inclusion and exclusion made at the discretion of a given researcher. Finally, seventh, and arguably most important, métissage exhibits the presence of aesthetic form (Barone and Eisner, 1997).

To further the arts-based connection, I turned the métissage into a narrative performance piece, detailed in the following section, to broaden the audience for my research. Creative means of expressing research findings have been shown to have a powerful impact on audiences as well as reach more people than traditionally written scholarly formats (Roulston et al., 2008; Saldaña,

2008; Etmanski, 2007). “Responding creatively to prescription transforms opposition into a flow that is dynamic, balanced, and transformative” (Ober, 2003, p. 128).

Métissage Circle Theatre

After weeks of weaving stories to create the métissage, I realized that my vision of a narrative performance piece naturally manifested into the form of a script. By breaking the stories down into smaller threads, using only a few sentences from a story at a time, instead of keeping the stories in large paragraphs, the métissage read more like dialogue rather than a string of monologues. This format allowed me to re-search the stories, yet again, highlighting opportunities to incorporate quotations from the literature and my own research journal notes that I had not clearly seen before.

Providing the readers an opportunity to begin to safely navigate their own personal opinions of vulnerability is paramount for me. I decided that I wanted the audience to be able get close to the research and not feel removed by a performance done by actors on a stage. After all, my research is ultimately talking about the vulnerability of the every-student, which includes every person, not just those who are labeled actor or performing artist. Therefore, this script presents data analysis in a very personal way by inviting the readers to literally voice the data while allowing them to remain at a safe distance from the material as they are only reading as characters from a script, not sharing their own personal stories.

This script is a form of research-based theatre (Prendergast & Belliveau, 2013; Beck, Belliveau, Lea, & Wager, 2011) which attempts to animate intentional, systematic research for targeted academic audiences and other stakeholders such as policy makers and, in my case, perhaps parents of students via conference or closed performances such as in workshop settings (Beck, Belliveau, Lea, & Wager, 2011). Regardless of setting, the research remains the priority

over theatrical convention. “The audience attends the performance to imaginatively engage with the research, not to evaluate the performance on its aesthetic merits” (Beck, Belliveau, Lea, & Wager, 2011. p. 694). As a further distinction, in creating the research-based theatrical script *Naming the Shadows: Theatre as Research*, Mackenzie (Mackenzie & Belliveau, 2011) as researcher utilized the métissage technique similar to mine of cutting and pasting various data texts and mixing them together for data analysis. However, it was their intent from the beginning to use theatre as a means to conduct and display the research. My approach differed in that I did *not* research vulnerability and theatre through a theatre-based lens. I explored the concepts in question through the use of narrative métissage. Only after the initial draft did I see the potential for the métissage to serve in its entirety as a script for further analysis and research dissemination.

As such, for the métissage/script, I creatively incorporated the data verbatim, with the exception of edits I made for the sake of participant confidentiality and the anonymity of the people and organizations referenced in the data stories, placing this under the category of Verbatim Theatre (Prendergast & Belliveau, 2012; Paget, 2010; Anderson & Wilkinson, 2007). I agree with Anderson and Wilkinson (2007) who, when contemplating the resurgence of Verbatim Theatre of late, link this recent upsurge to a community’s need for connection, multiple perspectives, diverse and authentic voices along with the eagerness and willingness to be informed, engaged, and transformed (Anderson & Wilkinson, 2007). “Like all verbatim material, the very fact that someone has said it adds to the power of these words” (Paget, 2010, p. 85).

The script is designed to be held and read by audience members, not memorized and not played by actors, where the function of the performance is to serve as a conversation starter. It would seem then to fit under the heading of Readers’ Theatre (Prendergast & Belliveau, 2012;

Paget, 2010; Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 2008; Anderson & Wilkinson, 2007). However, Readers' Theatre still involves a separated performance stage and perhaps rehearsals, props, and stage directions, although minimal at most. I'd prefer none of that.

With a research topic revolving around starting a conversation and involving suspension of current beliefs around a high risk subject such as vulnerability, I feel it is important to *not* create a spotlight scenario when inviting audience members to read. I intend for this to be read unrehearsed from the audience chairs around a conference table or meeting room, which significantly lowers the participation risk level. While rehearsing a script several times might help the readers feel they can read without stumbling, heightening the aesthetic value (Paget, 2010), I rather like that someone might be vulnerable and not read perfectly. This is about vulnerability. An aesthetic limitation perhaps, but I also appreciate an unrehearsed read by a non-actor as it doesn't sound canned or like someone trying to *sound* like an actor acting, both of which I find utterly disengaging.

That said, I have tried to make this as easy for the reader as possible in that the script is not laden with stage directions and bracketed comments. Even the literature quotations to be read aloud only reference the authors' names. The full citations are listed at the end of the script. As far as part assignments for my particular script are concerned, the stories shared in my study seemed to extend across cultural, ethnic, and gender boundaries for the most part, so it doesn't matter who reads them. Anyone can read any part. Of course, the script can still be read ahead of time to avoid vulnerable surprises.

In addition to the staging and rehearsals differences, I've included one more feature that strays from traditional Readers' Theatre. I've designed the script as an invitation for the audience to not only read and reflect upon the woven life stories from the research through listening, but to

privately reflect and write about their own thoughts and stories. After each scene, the script provides instructions for a 90-second written reflection. There is no requirement to share your thoughts, only to share the space and the consideration of the topic of exploration. Read...reflect...write. Listen...reflect...write. I believe this allows for and reiterates the need for a sense of personal space and boundaries in regard to sharing personal stories, in particular for younger readers. It helps to remind the readers of the dangers of oversharing, traumatization, and re-traumatization that can occur in spaces of theatre and drama which have the potential to present a false sense of safety and security (Gallagher et al., 2012).

While this might be theatre in the broadest sense of the word, it is theatre and it is an invitation to weave more stories into this research tapestry that I'm calling Métissage Circle Theatre. I believe this more subtle form of theatre is well suited to address and engage with topics that might be considered taboo. If a researcher wants people to temporarily suspend their beliefs to personally explore the strange and new from different angles and perspectives, the researcher needs to provide a safe environment for the audience to be willing to let down any defenses. By asking audience members to participate by reading aloud the parts in the script, which I identify as a high level of personal risk, this circle theatre reading provides a risk balancing effect by lowering any perceived participation risk by not requiring a physically interactive or staged performance. If done well, at the end of the exploration, the audience will have been given the choice, rather than the demand, to consider and reconsider the research presented. It is my belief that we are more willing to consider when we are not forced or coerced. "Audiences hear voices that address them directly as if they were part not just of the original interview but of a profoundly human conversation" (Paget, 2010, p. 188).

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

The Narrative Itself

One of the challenges to narrative inquiry is the view that narrative can *exclude*, rather than include, which seemingly undercuts that valued under a critical or emancipatory lens. Stories told without reflection can serve to reinforce any meta-narratives or prescriptions under investigation rather than providing opportunities for liberation or transformation (Aalsburg, 2005). Further, the stress of trying to live a story that has been imposed by others and telling that story can produce negative ramifications such as feeling inauthentic, victimized, and isolated (Olson & Craig, 2005). However, I believe I effectively address these issues through the use of *métissage* with its power to undo logic and reveal gaps and through a conscious effort to encourage participant self-reflection and honor the storytellers' own voices.

Another challenge to the narratives produced in the research process relates to the actual setting of the interviews. All of the physical considerations, including the site and the use of recording devices, affect the level of comfort felt by the participants, their perceptions of me as an interviewer, and the resultant rapport (Fontana & Frey, 2005). For my research, I sought in-depth, personal stories. I did not want mechanical responses. Thus, I conducted the interviews informally, connecting with each participant via email several times over the course of a few months prior to the interviews. I wanted to be seen not as a distant researcher, but as a contemporary and confidant.

Ely (1996) raises yet another challenge to narrative work by issuing a caution regarding the presentation of the narrative findings. She warns that the aim of the presentation is to communicate with the audience, inviting them into the research to reflect. A presentation style should not be chosen because it shocks or amuses, as this could result in misrepresentation or

manipulation as a researcher could be tempted to only include findings that entertain. As my research topic involves theatre and drama, I created a theatrical script from the métissage as a means to disseminate my research findings. I did my best to heed Ely's advice, making sure that I was driven by a need to accurately communicate the findings and not to sell out on opening night. That said, I personally find the resultant Métissage Circle Theatre script compelling, not because I had to force it that way, but because the narratives told by the participants were compelling.

Role of Researcher

Another challenge in narrative work concerns transparency on the part of the researcher. In my role as the researcher, I recognized “that I am not an objective authority who operates independently of social constraints” and I attempted to “provide such self-reflexive understanding through descriptions of my stance in the research and of my choices in the construction of the narrative” (Blumenreich, 2004, p. 10). This includes the documentation of my own state of mind and feelings entering and exiting each interview session, which I believe (a) is unethical to ignore as it has direct bearing on the construction, flow, and interpretation of the interview and (b) increases my credibility as an ethical researcher and the validity of my study as a whole for my audience (Mosselson, 2010). In addition, it is important not to hide the strong autobiographical nature inherent in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My research interests naturally arise out of my own narratives and will therefore impact my narrative inquiry decisions. The detailed disclosure of such enhances my role as researcher and my credibility.

I followed the suggestion by Richardson (2005) to apply creative writing skills to my field notes by giving different voices to different content such as writing observation notes as accurately as my senses detect, methodological notes, and personal notes detailing an uncensored

account of my feelings throughout the research process. I see this as an opportunity to collect data more effectively, but also to remain conscious of my role as a researcher and of validity in that my biases and their effects upon my interpretation of the data will be continuously acknowledged, not hidden or forgotten. In so honoring the field texts, I hopefully have reduced as much as possible the danger of the less-than-adequate story construction which misleads instead of illuminates (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Further, I recognize that I cannot and did not produce conclusive results via narrative inquiry. Rather, I negotiated meanings and interpreted using the storied data, my perceptions of the field, and my creativity as a writer of research. The meanings are dependent upon the interpretation of a multitude of factors including the context, time, and place in which a story was told (Mello, 2002).

Validity

A major challenge to narrative inquiry is the validity of the research. As trustworthiness and authenticity are two validity measures valued in the constructivist paradigm (Creswell & Miller, 2000), it is critical that every attempt is made to ensure the trustworthiness and the authenticity of the findings. I believe that my attention to the disclosure of my research process and the inherent biases along with commitment to the authentic voice of my participants will increase the validity of my research in the minds of the readers. This supports the postmodernist concept of crystallization (Richardson, 2005), rather than triangulation, as a measure of validity. As there are multiple perspectives, there are more than three sides from which to make considerations.

There are those who question the validity of qualitative research due to its subjectivity. I concur with Taylor (1996) who believes that while the use of numbers and scales in research

findings may give the appearance of greater accuracy in the measurement of trustworthiness, a thick narrative description of an event is just as credible. Objectivity or value freedom does not ensure good research. “Yet, despite its efforts to be objective and rigorous in its search for truth, quantitative research is actually a value laden enterprise...Statistics are not neutral; there are assumptions behind every number” (Saldaña, 1996, p. 117).

Another issue with validity concerns the researcher-participant relationship. I was aware that there exists a potential for long-term participant interviewing to enter the realm of the acquaintance interviews. Although this can cause difficulties initially as to who is controlling the interview, I believe that the interviews I conducted evolved into a more conversational style of interaction, generating data that might not have been available using more traditional social science interviews, and thus, the validity of the data should not be called into question (Garton & Copland, 2010).

In regard to validity in general, I follow Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who advise to be ever vigilant throughout the narrative inquiry process in an effort to steer clear of the dangers of narcissism, solipsism, and the temptation to create the “Hollywood plot” to ensure that your research story has the perfect ending. If anything, the resultant Métissage Circle Theatre script opens the door to questions and dialogue rather than presenting a neatly wrapped solution tied up in a bow.

Ethics

Narrative inquiry involves numerous ethical considerations in that the research is conducted via interviews of human subjects. I narrated these considerations over the duration of the study as opposed to addressing them as simply a one-time concern (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). One such consideration is the recognition that I as researcher have a position of power

over the participants, but also that the participants have their power, too. Etherington (2007) offers guidelines for ethical research in reflexive relationships. They include remaining aware of potential power imbalances, negotiating research decisions transparently, and documenting any research dilemmas as well as the resolutions.

Ellis, Denzin, and Richardson (Ellis et al., 2008) remind us that challenges to ethical decision making arise throughout the career of a researcher. A concern in one study might not be a concern in another. In other words, ethics are always situated. “However, no matter how much we include participants’ views and voices and negotiate our relationships, in the end, the research is our work” (Etherington, 2007, p. 613).

METHOD DETAILS

Participants

The participants in my study, chosen by purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007), are six competent adults who are theatre and drama for the young specialists in the United States of America (US), willing to share their life stories with the recognition of my full disclosure that the gathered narratives will be incorporated into a performance piece, dissertation, and other published materials for research dissemination. I restricted the field of participants to that of the US in an effort to minimize the consideration of educational system differences. As concepts such as Youth Theatre and Youth Drama programs are prevalent in the US, there was a large pool of potential participants from which to draw for this narrative exploration.

My primary concerns for the characteristics of the participants were that they were people who experienced education in a school as children, that they had more than ten years of experience with theatre for the young, that there was a mix of urban and rural experience, and that there was a mix of different roles within the category of theatrical and dramatic performance

for the young (i.e. youth theatre director, theatre/drama university professor, teaching artist, etc.). My goal was to have at least one participant from a university setting and at least one from the youth theatre world existing outside of the K-12 school system designation. I was able to represent all of these characteristics with the participants who agreed to be in this study.

To clarify my intent in selecting participants, it was my intention to seek stories from adults regarding their own childhood and adult memories of school and theatre. However, I also needed to be assured that the participants had been around theatre and drama for the young long enough (at least ten years) to have most likely experienced and witnessed both the good and the bad, so to speak, in order to explore the concepts of vulnerability, theatre, and curriculum more fully. I was *not* conducting an ethnography on theatre artists or educators.

Further, with the exception of one of the participants who had been an instructor of mine, the other five participants were virtual strangers to me. I had met one briefly at a conference before and one via a one-time committee conference call, but I didn't even know what four of the participants actually looked like until they showed up at the door of the interview room. My only prior contact had been introductory email and telephone conversations. I mention this as assurance that I did not seek out like opinions. I had no prior knowledge as to how any participant would respond to this inquiry.

Process

The overall research process consisted of the following steps: (a) selecting participants; (b) obtaining participant consent; (c) collecting data via interviews and written stories; (d) analyzing data through the use of *métissage*; and (e) writing and disseminating the research results. I used *métissage* as a means to examine the data for patterns and themes. Again, note that the *métissage* was a mixing of each participant voice, my own voice, and the literature. With the

exception of slight changes to the text to provide anonymity for any people or organizations mentioned in the stories, I used exact interview transcript quotations and written story quotations to represent each participant voice in the métissage and the resultant Métissage Circle Theatre script.

Researcher Power

I did not perceive any power over relationships between me as researcher and the participants. They are considered my colleagues in the field of theatre and drama, perhaps even acquaintances, but none are considered a close friend, mentor, employer, or employee. I did not want the participants to feel they couldn't share stories because I was personally a part of or somehow connected to their stories. Although I, as researcher, retained control over the organization of the results and dissemination formats, I utilized member checking to ensure the best possible interpretation of participant meaning and intent. In addition, as I did not conduct the research in a school, with teachers in a school, with children, or with individuals from a designated vulnerable population, I did not need permission from other bodies and did not feel pressured to produce specific results for any other body/entity.

Data Collection

Through my own network of connections in theatre and universities, I recruited and contacted the participants via email, telephone, and in person. My networks include performing arts specialists primarily from Chicago (IL), New York, New Jersey, California, Eastern Michigan University, The American Alliance for Theatre & Education (AATE), and the International Performing Arts for Youth (IPAY).

I contacted the participants directly from a list of people whom I felt would provide me with the greatest cross-section of the criteria. I explained what was involved in this study and

asked for their participation. I stopped recruitment when I had five people who agreed to participate, but I took advantage of an impromptu opportunity to add one more participant to the study while I was attending the conference where the other interviews took place.

I used two separate email prompts (see Figure 1) over a period of four weeks to elicit written, first-person stories, similar to journal entries, prior to the interview, with the exception of the additional sixth participant. I don't believe this presents a problem because that additional participant had a general idea about my study ahead of time as I had mentioned it to her at a previous conference. As theatre specialists tend to have extremely busy schedules, sometimes being involved in more than one production/project at a time, I allowed a two-week window for addressing each email story prompt. The entries were to be made at the participants' leisure as they did not have to be in contact with me to make the entries. I anticipated that this inconvenience would be seen as minor when compared to the benefit of having time to digest the study's intent and to gather their thoughts and stories. My intent was to remove any unnecessary stress in the interview that could arise if they felt compelled to generate stories on the spot for a study which is asking them to look at their stories through a new lens, dramatically impacting how the participants would restory their stories. Although not every participant completely filled out the story cards, they did acknowledge that the cards helped give them an idea of how I was approaching a rather tricky subject.

Figure 1: Email Story Prompts

Postcard Stories Focus #1

Focus #1

"When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability." – Madaleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art*, 1980, p. 190

Consider the following:

- ✍ A story from your own childhood about an experience of vulnerability in school, like your first book report.
- ✍ A story from your own childhood about an experience of vulnerability participating in a theatrical production, like missing a cue.
 - Participation can be a cast, crew, or audience experience.
 - Focus on the participation, *not* the content matter of a piece or a particular role.
- ✍ A story where an experience in theatre directly related to you developing resilience to a vulnerable experience from your school/after-school life.

Bring to interview with

Colleen Clement

Researcher

Postcard Stories Focus #2

Focus #2

"The only road to strength is vulnerability."
– Stephen Nachmanavitch, *Free Play*, 1990, p. 64

Consider the following:

- ✍ A story from your adulthood about an experience of witnessing the vulnerability of a young person in a school.
- ✍ A story from your adulthood about an experience of witnessing the vulnerability of a young person participating in a theatrical production.
 - Participation can be a cast, crew, or audience experience.
 - Focus on the participation, *not* the content matter of a piece or a particular role.
- ✍ A story from your adulthood of witnessing an experience in theatre that directly related to a student developing resilience to a vulnerable experience from school/after-school life.

Bring to interview with

Colleen Clement

Researcher

The interviews were face-to-face with the exception of one participant who could not attend the conference. Due to her expertise in the theatre arts and the fact that she was the one participant with whom I was personally acquainted, I felt that a Skype video call interview would be considered a safe and welcoming environment to conduct the interview. She agreed wholeheartedly, especially since she had access to a private room in her house from which she could conduct the call. For the other participants, who were relative strangers to me, the face-to-face interview was a much more appropriate way to address the subject of vulnerability.

The entire data collection process covered a period of approximately six weeks of time: two weeks for each of the email story prompts (two story prompt sessions for a total of four weeks in time passed); an interview in a fifth week; and member-checking of data in a sixth week. The interviews were audio recorded only and ranged in time from 45-90 minutes. After taking a couple of weeks to transcribe the interviews, I emailed the participants copies of their own transcripts, asking each of them to review the transcripts for accuracy. They were to send me any changes and their approval via email along with an acknowledgment of continuing consent. All of the participants approved their transcripts with only a few minor changes, mainly regarding spelling of names or the removal of names for confidentiality purposes. All participants consented to continued participation in the study.

Researcher Vulnerability

I made several observations about the vulnerability of a researcher conducting a narrative study that I feel could be helpful to others endeavoring to do the same. I've organized these observations into three categories: Creation of space, timing of interviews versus research needs, and writing and reflection in narrative work.

Creation of Space. Especially working with the topic of vulnerability, I found myself hyper-conscious of the safety of the interview setting for the participants. The face-to-face interviews were in a private, quiet boardroom space. I placed a chair on either side of the same corner of the table. I thought this might be more intimate and less like an interrogation or deposition, yet still allowing for our personal boundaries. There was a space connecting us on one side, but a distinct barrier, the corner, on the other. That and my continual assurances that they did not have to reveal anything to me that they were not comfortable doing seemed to put the participants at greater ease as we delved into this sensitive subject.

One participant, who is used to dealing with vulnerable topics in theatre, took notice of the seating arrangement right away and complimented my creation of a warm and inviting space that allowed him to consider what he wanted to share with me. I have to admit that put me at ease. I had been really worried about the well-being of the participants throughout this process, even though I specifically told them that I was not looking into severe, individual traumatic occurrences.

Having tissues and glasses of water on hand proved invaluable to establishing a safe and comfortable environment. One just doesn't know what might trigger a tear or feelings of nervousness. Knowing a tissue is near or having a glass to hold on to provides comfort and can make the difference as to whether or not someone is willing to finish a thought or story.

Timing of Interviews versus Researcher Needs. In order to conduct face-to-face interviews on my limited budget, I needed to conduct the face-to-face interviews at one location, where I could have access to each participant. Since I purposefully chose participants from all different parts of the United States, I chose to do the interviews at the American Alliance for Theatre & Education National Conference in Washington DC. This meant I needed to be able to

plan the interviews around the very tight schedules of the participants attending this four-day only event. I was really at the mercy of their schedules.

As it turned out, each participant, not knowing who else was in the study, had only one time slot that worked in their schedules, and none of their time requests conflicted, so I was able to accommodate them. However, almost freakishly so, the interviews were divided over two consecutive days, with the interviews each day being back-to-back. So what was great for their schedules proved to be a really long couple of days for me!

Of course, I had been really excited that I had found a way to have all of these particular theatre experts join my study and to interview them within my budget. However, given the subject matter and my constant ethical worries regarding their well-being, I was energetically and physically drained at the end of each day. Although I had intended to participate in the conference when I wasn't interviewing, I ended up needing to get away from everyone and recharge. I found it incredibly important that I acknowledged that to myself, that I recognized my own needs, and that I consciously attended to those needs, considering them as vital as any other part of my research.

Writing and Reflection in Narrative Work. Sharing stories not only puts the participants in a vulnerable position, but the researcher as well. As a researcher, one is hopefully enthused about the subject matter and has a lot of ideas and experiences from one's own life that most likely intersect with the research area. This can be both positive and negative when it comes to judgment of boundaries.

The positive side gives one a passion for the subject and an ability to relate to participants in the interviews, which hopefully begets more willingness to share details to fill in the research. However, on the negative side, a researcher can forget that sharing her/his own stories requires

just as much diligence in protecting the confidentiality of the people in those stories as was promised to be given to the participants' stories. In narrative work, the researcher is just as much a part of the research as the participants. I know that sounds rather obvious, but I have found that while using my journal notes and writing this dissertation, it was easy to forget that my own stories and thoughts are not anonymous. The research will be published under my name. As researcher, one might need to disguise or eliminate certain details from one's own stories as they can be more easily traced to specific people and organizations. My suggestion is to reflect uninhibitedly in your journals, but remember to look upon yourself as a participant when it comes to writing up your results for public consumption.

One tactic I found particularly helpful in this regard was to complete a draft of the ethics application before I wrote my research proposal. Given my topic area which contains three major Ethics Review Boards' red flags—narrative, theatre, and vulnerability—I figured it was better to look at the application first to make sure I was covering all of the ethical bases. That application form forced me to look at the details of the vulnerability of not only my participants, but of myself. As a result, I wrote a more effective research proposal and gained a greater awareness of the implications of being a researcher, which I believe has helped me significantly in the entire research writing process.

Consent

I detailed in writing via a consent form the intent of the study, the on-going requirements of the participants, the rights of the participants, including right to withdraw, potential for data to be used in a future study, and how the research results will be disseminated, including the dissertation, a theatrical script for used for educational purposes, and a possible performance piece with a possible video recording of the original, live performance to be used/accessed by

educational organization websites. Anonymity and confidentiality were addressed in this form. The participants gave permission to have their names be known with my assurance that, regardless of participant recognition, anonymity for any people and organizations mentioned in their stories would be maintained.

Checkpoints & Costs

I met with my committee two times throughout the research process for guidance and evaluation. I had two additional meetings with my supervisor to receive guidance on my progress. I personally transcribed the interviews. As far as monetary costs are concerned, I budgeted \$2000 of my own funds to cover travel for interviews, flash drives, postal fees, printing, and small token Thank-You gift cards for the participants whose data was collected and used in the dissertation. The cards were sent after I received their interview transcript approvals and, therefore, were not used as a means of participant recruitment. I did receive a \$300 travel grant from the UVic Faculty of Graduate Studies. I do not have a budget for the possible performance piece, beyond the writing and printing of a theatrical script which is covered in the above time and money allotment. As a performance is a means of dissemination and not part of the research method, I will examine the costs more closely and seek outside funding at that time if the performance becomes a reality.

Reflection on Intention

As a final note of reflection and transparency, I am profoundly motivated to present my research and moved by the simplicity of L'Engle's (1980) declaration "We don't have to be right! We do have to love, to be vulnerable, to accept joy and pain, and to grow through them" (p. 191). It is my intention that this study will benefit myself, the participants, educational thought, society at large, and the state of knowledge by expanding the boundaries of the

dialogues on vulnerability and curriculum as well as expanding the concept of theatre and drama and its impact on students.

“The only road to strength is vulnerability” (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 64).

DATA ANALYSIS

Construction of the Métissage

As researcher, I analyzed the study's interview data using métissage—a narrative pieced together by weaving the stories of the six participants, quotations from literature referenced fully at the end of the piece, and my own journal notes. I turned the métissage into what I am now calling Métissage Circle Theatre, which I describe in more detail below. It is my hope that this form of presentation will generate questions and dialogue for all interested in the continual advancement of our educational system, from parents to policy decision makers.

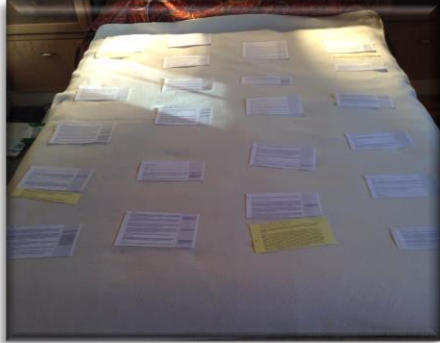
After I received transcript approval notices from all of the participants, I began creating the métissage by printing each of the transcripts on a different colored paper. I printed two copies of each: one to review intact and one to cut into the pieces that could be mixed with other transcript pieces. In addition to transcribing the interviews myself, I read through each interview several times, making notes as to patterns and themes within each individual transcript. I became very familiar with the contents from each interview at this point. Then I cut up the second copy of each of the transcripts into story chunks, as I call them, meaning that I separated out each of the individual stories told by a participant by literally cutting the transcript paper with scissors into large chunks. Initially each chunk contained one entire storied segment. I laid the chunks out over a large area, leaving room between each one to be filled in with chunks from the other transcripts. Once all of the transcripts were cut into story chunks, I moved segments around and playing with the order, mixing the colors, weaving different patterns to see what they revealed.

More predominant themes began to emerge. Certain stories intertwined with others seemed to belong together, not only by what was said or written, but by what was not said, by that which lay behind the story told. For example, one participant's story was filled with very

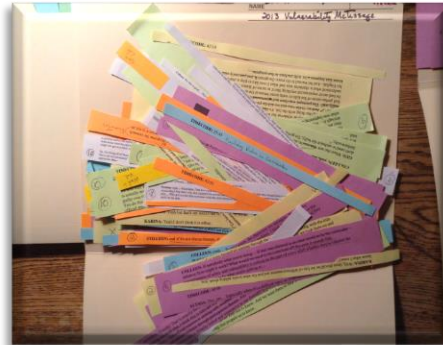
specific circumstances for the vulnerability felt in a certain situation. No one else in the study had shared a story with those circumstances, so it appeared at first that the vulnerable situation was unique to that participant. But when I began to mix the stories around, ever so slightly distancing them from their identifiable, individual transcript origins, I noticed that, despite having drastically different circumstances, several stories alluded to the same core vulnerability as that in the story that had previously seemed unique. The mixing gave a flow to the data, showing the interconnectedness of being human in that the stories represented actions or inactions that had an impact on more than just the main characters from their original stories.

Once I had the pieces roughly grouped into themed segments, I went on to the next phase where I cut a little more off the fabric of each piece to create a more tightly woven tapestry. I put the extra threads, the discarded pieces, in a manila file folder, and began to assemble the remaining edited pieces in their groups. With scissors and a glue stick, I cut and pasted the strips of transcript onto colored construction paper. I used a different colored background paper for each of the emerging groups or themes. It was very much an artistic process (see Figure 2).

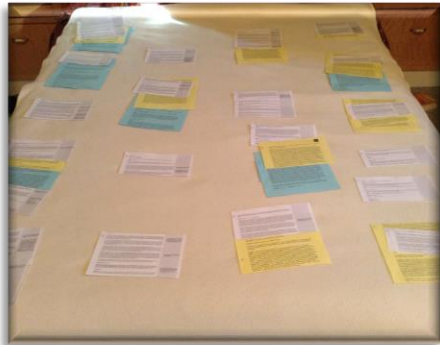
Figure 2: Photographing my process.



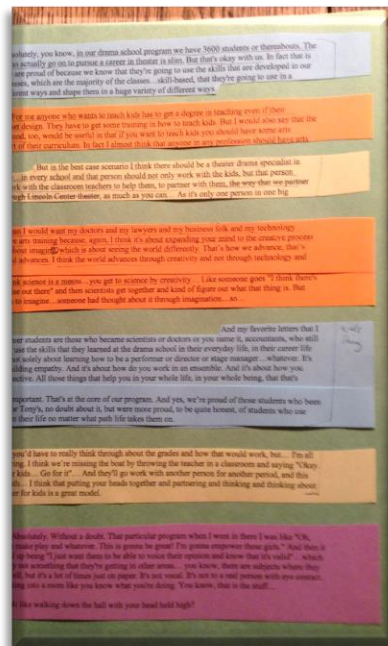
Initial transcript chunks...



Extra threads...



Beginning to weave...



Cutting...pasting...



Trying different patterns...

I believe that analyzing the data through an artistic means engaged both my mind and body, enhancing my opportunity to explore the data from different angles and perspectives. I could more easily look at an individual piece close up by lifting it away from the group and from farther back by stepping away and seeing its effect upon a particular woven piece of data material. In addition, this was an extremely labor-intensive process, requiring extensive time with the data stories, and dozens of readings.

After I wove the transcript data into the métissage, I began to weave in stories and thoughts from the notes that I took throughout this research journey. To complete the content of the piece, I braided in quotations from literature. Then I entered the rather tedious process of electronic cutting and pasting the transcript material in order to create an electronic copy to match the hard-copy métissage. To accomplish this, I changed each transcript to a different font color, which is explained in greater detail in the next section.

Participant Characteristics

The following is a list of the participants whose stories are represented in the métissage and who have allowed me to recognize them for their contribution:

- Alyssa Vera Ramos, *For Youth Inquiry*
- Gustave Welstek, III, PhD, *Indiana University*
- Karen Sharp, *Seattle Children's Theatre*
- Karina Naumer, *Lincoln Center Theater*
- Michael Bobbitt, *Adventure Theatre MTC*
- Patricia Moore Zimmer, MFA, *Eastern Michigan University*

I modified the participant quotations only when necessary to protect the confidentiality of the participants and the anonymity of the people and organizations alluded to in their stories.

You will note that I have used color names and coordinating font colors rather than the actual participant names, not only as an additional anonymity measure, but also to heighten the sense of woven threads. While the order does *not* correspond to the above order of participants, the colors below consistently represent the following voices:

- **Red** = one participant
- **Orange** = one participant
- **Yellow** = one participant
- **Green** = one participant
- **Blue** = one participant
- **Purple** = one participant
- **Gray** = researcher journal notes
- **Pink** = literature references

As a further measure of confidentiality, rather than revealing the background of each participant, I have chosen to show through a more general list that their background attributes along with my own cover the following territories:

- Ages range from mid-20s to mid-60s.
- All are members of the American Alliance for Theatre & Education.
- Female, male, hetero- and homosexual participants are represented.
- In-school and after-school theatre and drama program experiences are represented; for students ranging in age pre-Kindergarten to Graduate School.
- Public and private school experiences are represented; for students ranging in age pre-Kindergarten to Graduate School.
- Small, rural towns to large, metropolitan areas in the US are represented.

- Teaching artists are represented.
- Theatre artists are represented.
- University educators are represented.
- A variety of ethnic groups and religious/spiritual persuasions are represented.
- A broad range of theatrical participation experience from applied theatre to musical theatre productions, both with children and by adults for children, are represented.

Métissage Circle Theatre Script

TO PRACTICE VULNERABILITY?

A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION

Researched, arranged, and edited by

Colleen Clement

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Setting

The reading of this script should be looked upon as an attempt to gain an understanding of the vulnerabilities of the every-student in and around school life. The research started as a narrative exploration into the notion of the potential for participation in theatre as a means to allow students to practice navigating vulnerability in schools and purposefully did not seek stories about exceptional or extreme traumatic situations of vulnerability.

As researcher, I analyzed the study's interview data using *métissage*—a narrative device where I wove together the stories of the six participants in their own words, quotations from literature*, and my own journal notes into one large piece. I created the following *Métissage Circle Theatre Script* in order to allow a greater number of people to interact more intimately with the concepts explored in the study. It is my hope that this will promote questions and generate a conversation for all interested, from parents to policy decision makers, in the continual advancement of our educational system.

This script is specifically designed to be read by any interested adult, perhaps in a school board or parent/teacher meeting. It does not need to be rehearsed and performed on a stage by actors.

The script can be read straight through, which would take approximately 60 minutes.

- OR -

This may be used more as a workshop. At the end of each scene, you'll find an invitation to each member of the listening/reading audience to engage in 90 seconds of private written reflection. A 15-minute intermission between Act I and II is recommended as a break from the material. The completion of Act II serves nicely as discussion starter.

* *Full references to literature quotations compiled at the end of the script.*

Characters

The following is a list of the participants, along with myself as researcher, whose stories are presented in the script and who have allowed me to recognize them for their contribution:

- Alyssa Vera Ramos, *For Youth Inquiry*
- Gustave Welstek, III, PhD, *Indiana University*
- Karen Sharp, *Seattle Children's Theatre*
- Karina Naumer, *Lincoln Center Theater*
- Michael Bobbitt, *Adventure Theatre MTC*
- Patricia Moore Zimmer, MFA, *Eastern Michigan University*
- Colleen Clement, PhD Candidate & Researcher, *University of Victoria*

There are eight characters in this piece:

- **RED** - *see note below*
- **ORANGE** - *see note below*
- **YELLOW** - *see note below*
- **GREEN** - *see note below*
- **BLUE** - *see note below*
- **PURPLE** - *see note below*
- **GRAY** - *represents Researcher's journal notes*
- **PINK** - *represents quotations from literature*

Note: Each character ordered **RED** through **PURPLE** represents the stories of one of the six participants, but the order here does *not* correspond to the above order of participants.

Rather than revealing the background of each participant, I have chosen to show through a more general list that their background attributes along with my own cover the following territories:

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Scenes

ACT I

Scene 1: Vulnerability in School - When We Were Young.....p. 63

Estimated Read Time 11 min.

Scene 2: Vulnerability in School - When We Grew Up.....p. 69

Estimated Read Time 11 min.

Scene 3: What Is Vulnerability?p. 75

Estimated Read Time 8 min. 30 sec.

Scene 4: Consciousnessp. 80

Estimated Read Time 5 min. 30 sec.

ACT II

Scene 1: Resiliencep. 83

Estimated Read Time 9 min. 30 sec.

Scene 2: Curriculum.....p. 89

Estimated Read Time 17 min.

Literature Credits

Note that the script text for the character Pink contains only that which needs to be read aloud. Complete citation details for all literature quotations are listed at the end of the script (p. 98) in order of appearance.

ACT I - Scene 1

Vulnerability in School - When We Were Young

ORANGE: I went to public schools for many years, but then got recruited to go to this private high school, which was a whole 'nother world for me. So, in our senior year, we had this three-day retreat. And it was a big deal. We had to go sit in this room and they started reading letters from our parents... in front of everyone.

BLUE: I am the younger sibling of a really *brilliant* woman. I mean, I was a good student, but she was a *brilliant* student.

PURPLE: I had this teacher for Sex Ed. He was pretty large, had these like large glasses and comb-over hair... I don't know how comfortable I felt around him.

ORANGE: Yeah...[laughter] so my friends were getting these two and three page letters read, and they were breaking down crying because they were filled with so much love. And so at this point in my life, my mom...my mom and dad were no longer together.

PURPLE: And he says to our class, and this is 5th grade, "I don't believe in separating the boys and the girls for these conversations."

BLUE: I just so remember that feeling of when the teachers saw their roster with that same somewhat unusual last name...

ORANGE: My mom had a bit of a crisis and had to move away, leaving us kids with my grandparents.

BLUE: ...and the expectation that was put on me.

ORANGE: I understand it now. But then...

PINK: Unless we suggest that learning is this process that is somehow strangely removed from anything that means anything to us or that matters, it is going to involve the person's life experiences in the sense-making process – *John Dirkx, et al.*

YELLOW: So, my friend and I took our scene to the High School Regionals. And my drama teacher had directed us to be very superficial in some places and then sort of drop into this real place.

BLUE: There was this history class and we had to write a term paper. And I really poured a lot of work into it.

YELLOW: And I really did work on that.

ORANGE: Now, many of my classmates were from affluent families...

PURPLE: So, he's talking blah blah blah in the front and he said something about puberty, and this boy in front of me turns around, "Hahaha! You're a girl! You're going to bleeeeeeeed everywhere!"

BLUE: And the teacher actually said to me, "Huh...I had a different expectation for the final result."

YELLOW: But the fellow in charge of the whole thing stood up and basically told me what a horrible job I had done and that I didn't know how to play with consistency...

ORANGE: Well, I didn't know my family was poor until I went to a friend's house.

BLUE: I felt like I had totally failed because I wasn't my sister.

YELLOW: ...in front of everybody in the auditorium!

GRAY: I went to this small town high school. And this one day I noticed a group of students standing around this rather loud commotion.

PURPLE: And I was like, "No, I'm not!" But I'm thinking, "What? WHAT?!"

ORANGE: But anyway, they get to my letter and it was literally a half page...written by my grandma.

BLUE: [Laughter] It was really a little bit mortifying.

YELLOW: I was dealing with a lot personally in high school... more than some people might know.

GRAY: It turned out to be a couple of school bullies tormenting this cognitively-impaired boy.

BLUE: That labeling really impacted me. One in General Ed, one in the higher achieving program or whatever you call it.

YELLOW: So I was just floored that he would say this in front of my peers from all these different high schools. And I was completely devastated.

ORANGE: And it just seemed like...there was no time put into it.

GRAY: So I jumped in to stop it. I mean...it was the right thing to do, right?

BLUE: It's really interesting to see what pressures are put on both sides of *that* equation.

YELLOW: And then my scene partner, who ignored my teacher's directions, gets the best actor award?!!!

GREEN: My kindergarten teacher was handing out scissors. And she asked everyone if we were right or left-handed. I wasn't actually sure what that meant.

GRAY: The boy's shrieking, crying. The bullies laughing. I'm screaming for them to let him go.

ORANGE: It really upset me. At first I was really sort of mad.

PURPLE: I remember it so clearly...defensiveness from not having knowledge...from being totally clueless and feeling like this boy was saying that was a negative thing.

GRAY: And the others? Frozen...voiceless.

GREEN: I stared at her dumbfoundedly. And I raised my left hand.

ORANGE: And then I was sad. And then I was jealous. And then I sort of needed some attention.

PURPLE: And the fact that the teacher (a) didn't even hear that and it was pretty loud and (b) set up this environment without any rules for respect in these conversations!

GREEN: And she handed me a pair of lefty scissors. [Long pause]...And they were the wrong ones...

GRAY: I mean, how could they just stand there?!

ORANGE: I was like, "I gotta do something dramatic!" So I remember storming out of the room. [Laughter]

PINK: Will standing tall, walking confidently and with purpose, and speaking assertively always do the trick? No, but it is one more valuable script your child will have. The key is to have several well-rehearsed scripts and a few actions readily available, with the ability to discern which one is the most appropriate for the given situation - *Barbara Coloroso*.

YELLOW: My director *wanted* us to go out of our comfort zones. So I was experimenting...as a high school student.

RED: My 2nd grade teacher asked us to pass up our science books. And she collected them all and there was one missing.

GRAY: I mean, sure, it was kind of scary to face down the bullies, but my concern was for the boy...the victim...

YELLOW: It's not like we were doing *The Man Who Came to Dinner You Know*, you know what I mean?!

RED: And I was so certain it was not in my desk.

GREEN: I really do believe that in that moment I was vulnerable to being embarrassed because I had put up the wrong hand.

PURPLE: Well, I basically just checked out.

GRAY: ...at least that's how I saw it then...

RED: She went from desk to desk, and lo and behold, the book was discovered in *my* desk.

GREEN: It does stand out for me.

ORANGE: It was the guidance counselor who came out to get me.

GRAY: That's when I learned that having the courage to stand up to something or someone doesn't necessarily make you someone the group will rush to embrace.

GREEN: That was just a very profound moment.

ORANGE: She grabbed me into a hug and I broke down crying. And some of it felt like pretend and then some of it felt so real because I hadn't remembered the last time I cried like that.

RED: And I remember being so mortified and being in sobs to the point that she kept me in from recess and I cried all the way through it.

YELLOW: My home life at that time was extremely difficult.

PINK: It is through the personal narrative, a life as told, rather than through our observations as researchers, that we come to know a life as experienced - *Mary Kay Kramp*.

RED: I was so humiliated and embarrassed that the book was in my desk and I was so sure that it wasn't...

ORANGE: It *really* affected me.

RED: AND it was so public.

ORANGE: It changed the dynamic of the retreat for a lot of the other kids. Even kids that were bullies to me came up and apologized.

BLUE: And my strength, I soon discovered at high school, was the arts and theatre and that was my reason for going to school.

YELLOW: And you know, you meet this one teacher, this one person in your life who just kind of keeps you going.

RED: But I think another piece of it was that I loved this teacher...I idolized this teacher...

YELLOW: And she was that for me. I was lucky.

RED: ...and somehow I had failed her.

BLUE: And I was fortunate to have that leading role time after time.

ORANGE: But that sense of love I was getting spiraled me into a deeper feeling of needing more love that stayed with me my entire senior year.

BLUE: But *then* there was the year that we were doing *Romeo and Juliet*.

RED: I don't think her intention was to humiliate me.

BLUE: Of course, before auditions everyone was like "Oh, you can just start memorizing those lines now..."

PURPLE: So at 13 I was cast in a lead role in our school play. And I was like "Yes! I get to be in this!"

RED: And even though she calmed me down and resolved everything, I *still* remember so clearly how badly I felt.

BLUE: You know, it was just so silly when I think of it now. [Laughter]

RED: And it was about nothing really...

ORANGE: So, we had to do speeches in high school and I wrote this speech...

PURPLE: I had all these lines and really had to put myself out there.

ORANGE: ...and you know to memorize a long speech and get up to perform it is a little bit nerve-racking.

BLUE: And the cast list was posted and I was *not* cast as the lead.

PURPLE: But then I suddenly realized that I could fail.

GRAY: Of course, it didn't help that teachers always announced my grades in high school, but even if someone just *thought* I had made a mistake, it became like this...big deal.

BLUE: And I think that was the first time I can ever remember crying at school.

GRAY: It seemed like I was either mocked or treated as this huge disappointment.

ORANGE: I just remember feeling the need to get every single word correct...that idea of having to be perfect.

RED: You know...I was a good student, one of the *good* kids [laughter], which meant that in the social structure of the school, I had to fight for status somehow because I was sort of a boring person.

GRAY: And some just couldn't wait to see me fail...

BLUE: Just noticing how people were reacting to me...

PINK: This is theatre—the art of looking at ourselves - *Augusto Boal*.

BLUE: I even called my dad in the middle of the day. And I was like "I'm not feeling good. Come and pick me up." And, of course, it took me a day...

GRAY: But according to them I'm *perfect*...I'm strong, so I don't need any help, right?

BLUE: ...okay, maybe a weekend...

RED: And I had a good time in high school, but I never missed it a day after I left.

BLUE: But I'll never forget that feeling in my gut that I had failed in some way...

RED: I never missed it a day...not a day.

-----End of Scene-----

Private Reflection

For 90 seconds, jot down the first thoughts that come to mind when you think about vulnerability and your childhood experience of education.

Not intended for public sharing or collection.

ACT I - Scene 2

Vulnerability in School - When We Grew Up

BLUE: And so we did *The Big Friendly Giant* with this high school.

GREEN: I ran a creative drama course/storybook theatre for pre-K to 1st grade.

GRAY: I was hired to direct this musical for an afterschool program.

PINK: The *point* of cognitive development is not to gain an increasingly complete grasp of abstract principles. It is to interpret from as many vantage points as possible lived experience, the ways there are of being in the world - *Maxine Greene*.

BLUE: There were challenges that we had expected and ones we had *not* expected.

GREEN: And it had never been offered before but, bam...ten kids right away.

BLUE: Things like we would drive in for rehearsal and the school would be on lock down. I mean, it was a *tough* school.

GRAY: I cast this little boy in a couple of really fun, active roles with lots of stage time. But he didn't technically have a lead, as they told me he did in their show the previous year.

GREEN: As a parent myself, I understand how hard it is to give your child away to someone else.

BLUE: Now the BFG is a *tough* role. The young man that we cast had to drop out because he was on academic probation. So we recast it.

ORANGE: I mean, I guess she *was* 13, so she should be emotional, but she was *really* emotional.

GRAY: So at our 1st rehearsal, he was...I mean, I'll never forget how solemn he looked.

GREEN: However, there's a sense with theatre that "This is going to enrich my child, so this is a risk that I am willing to take."

BLUE: *That* young man had to drop out because he allegedly assaulted a teacher.

ORANGE: I'd never seen someone break down as much as her.

GREEN: There was this one little girl in my class, who didn't speak any English.

ORANGE: So one day I just asked, "Why are you crying so much?"

BLUE: The 3rd student had to drop out because he got some really terrible strain of the flu.

GREEN: And it was very obvious that this child, this person, was very scared...even with her mom there.

ORANGE: And she was like "You don't understand!" and ran out crying.

BLUE: The 4th had to drop out because the *one* thing the school had going for it was sports... several professional ball players had gone there...and well, he made the team.

GREEN: And she seemed particularly horrified of me.

GRAY: Then I heard him quietly say to one of the leads who had forgotten to bring her script, "Here...take mine. You're important. You're the lead. I'm no good anymore. I'm nothing."

ORANGE: It was the production manager who finally said to me, "This is a problem. I don't know what to do about it. She's become a nightmare."

BLUE: So we're on our 5th BFG and the day before the last rehearsal, he said, "I'm dropping out."

GRAY: He was six. Where'd that idea come from?

GREEN: And the mom came the next time and I said, "Please stay. She seems a little..."

BLUE: And I said, "Is there anything that I can do?"

GREEN: "No, no, no! I'm going. This is good for her." And she left.

GRAY: I've seen so many situations where parents just let their children go in because "Oh, it's children's theater so, of course, they'll be protected."

ORANGE: I mean, she was swearing at her mom, cursing out other kids, storming offstage.

BLUE: And he was like, "Nobody has ever counted on me before and all I feel is that everyone is counting on me right now and I just can't do it."

ORANGE: And her mom was like, "I don't know what to do."

GREEN: What do you think happened? The child started crying and screaming because I was next to her.

BLUE: And, you know, we talked through it, and we allowed him some space and some time. And he ended up doing it, thank goodness.

GRAY: Obviously, there are many examples where children in theatre are treated respectfully and guided safely and responsibly.

RED: We were doing a production of *A Wrinkle in Time*. And Charles Wallace in that story is five years old, and I had a young-looking adult actor playing him.

PURPLE: I was working with these 7th and 8th grade girls.

BLUE: Was he the best BFG?.

RED: So I said, “We’re gonna go spend some time playing with five-year-olds.”

GRAY: But I’ve seen my share of directors, wanting to prove their show could be on Broadway or something, treat children more like props than people.

PINK: We need to recognize that every bit of our culture is school – *Stephen Nachmanovitch*.

ORANGE: It turned out that she had been writing in her diary and her onstage co-partner was standing a little bit too close to her, so she said something nasty to him.

BLUE: Was he even a medium BFG? No.

PURPLE: I would say for 90% of them it was hard to get them to speak to be heard or talk at all.

BLUE: But did it matter? Absolutely not. His mom was there and, of course, had never seen him in a show. I mean...tears, tears, tears...

ORANGE: And instead of him walking away, he got even closer.

PURPLE: Even though it was an afterschool program, I knew it was the same dynamics as in their school because it was all of their same peers.

RED: So we went to this preschool, and we hung out with the 5-year-olds. Then it was lunch time.

ORANGE: And so this whole thing started escalating.

GRAY: I’m just saying that we can’t assume it’s automatically good for you.

PURPLE: And there were these huge expectations of being cool and being smart and even being sexy, or whatever.

RED: And this one little boy opened his sandwich, and I don’t know if he took a bite or whatever, but he erupted into howls of sadness and tears, sobbing, “My mom...forgot the MUSTARD!”

PURPLE: This one girl would always put her hand, with her sweater covering her fingers, up to her face and over her eye, and she would talk in a way you could barely hear.

RED: And he was bereft! I mean, the teachers tried to comfort him, but there wasn't any mustard.

GRAY: Unchecked...theatre not done well...can be damaging...

PURPLE: Then she would smile but not really look you in the eye.

RED: And there's nothing you can do, right? You're not at home, so it's "I am powerless to save my lunch."

GREEN: I'm now thinking that just an entire kid is vulnerable, is vulnerable, is vulnerable.

PURPLE: And I was like does this have to do with gender? Does it have to do with age?

PINK: Because theatre is essentially concerned with the sweep of human experience, it tends to prompt new levels of questioning rather than to promote answers - *Jonothan Neelands & Tony Goode*.

BLUE: And I said over and over again that we're not going to be "one and done."

PURPLE: Is it because it's a new scary thing?

BLUE: We're *going* to stay.

YELLOW: It's really hard.

PURPLE: Am I a new scary person?

BLUE: We have a commitment to the school!

YELLOW: I cannot tell you how many times I'll go into a classroom and there is like a little boy and his desk is turned against the wall and he's facing the wall...

BLUE: And then...the school cut the arts, which was just devastating.

ORANGE: And I had this really great 12-year-old kid in my program with a very pronounced lisp, who was also a bit of a know-it-all, and it was turning people off. And so he went off to a camp, and he was put into a bunker with some non-theatre kids, who I guess bullied and teased him.

GRAY: I can't stop thinking about Red's story of the little boy and the mustard.

ORANGE: He was very vulnerable.

RED: There was this student with Asperger's working backstage on a show. I guess he was having trouble negotiating his duties. And I think they had to ask him to leave the crew.

YELLOW: And that's what it is for him all year long.

GRAY: You know, he didn't scream "*I don't have any mustard.*" No...it was "*My mom forgot...*"

GREEN: For some reason my daughter had decided that it was important for her to find the meanest person in a room and make them her best friend.

ORANGE: He was very impressionable.

GRAY: The idea of calling for Mommy...the scariness when you first realize that you've reached this point where you can't just go get Mommy anymore...

GREEN: And when I questioned her on it, she said, "Because then they won't beat me up."

RED: And I have to give this kid credit because I know that had to hurt.

ORANGE: I saw him.

RED: But he was sort of philosophical about it and he didn't let it stop him from working on other shows or auditioning.

YELLOW: So through theatre and drama I just really try to give these kids something where they are individually noticed and heard and they are able to offer who they are as an individual and a person, respected.

ORANGE: I knew him.

RED: I saw him a little later and he had finally been cast in a play and had lines. He was quiet about it, but he was very proud of that, you could see.

YELLOW: That's what we all as human beings need in this world... drama or not...

BLUE: And every year it's like, "Hmmm...will this even stay a high school?" It's very unsafe and not very well managed for a variety of different reasons.

YELLOW: It's like what that principal was saying that if test scores of kids do not go up in two years, a teacher can be fired.

BLUE: And, of course, they publish the achievement test scores in the paper, which I am not in favor of, but they do.

YELLOW: What kind of climate does that create in your classroom?

PINK: You can't be involved in education without noticing that teachers, like most other people, must engage with the problems of societal flux and shift, and therefore with a stringent re-examination of what schools are supposed to be for - *Dorothy Heathcote*.

GRAY: I just happened to catch this documentary about a new trend sweeping through schools in the US and Canada.

GREEN: So my daughter came home one day, and I said, "Do you want to race?"

GRAY: They're calling it the over-sexualization of girls...

GREEN: And she said, "Ummm, well, I'll cheer."

GRAY: We're talking even pre-teens...9-year-olds...

GREEN: "Oh? Why won't you race?"..."Because boys race and girls cheer."

GRAY: ...being pressured via *sexting* on cellphones to physically *please* a boy.

GREEN: I was like "Okay, wait a minute. What's going on?" "Where'd you learn that?"

GRAY: Of course, this happens wherever they have cellphones...

GREEN: "At school," she said.

PINK: *Curriculum* (n.) from Modern Latin transferred use of classical Latin *curriculum* "a running, course, career"; also "a fast chariot, racing car"; from *currere* - *Online Etymology Dictionary*.

-----End of Scene-----

Private Reflection

For 90 seconds, jot down the first thoughts that come to mind when you think about vulnerability and witnessing as an adult a child's/student's experience of education.

Not intended for public sharing or collection.

ACT I - Scene 3

What Is Vulnerability?

PINK: We can try to control the uncontrollable by looking for security and predictability, always hoping to be comfortable and safe. But the truth is that we can never avoid uncertainty. This not knowing is part of the adventure, and it's also what makes us afraid - *Pema Chödrön*.

YELLOW: So, we were doing these scenes about immigration life from a nonfiction book called *Enrique's Journey*. It's about this kid who travels through Mexico on the trains trying to get into the US.

GREEN: I was raised in a bizarrely small town. We were divided literally by tracks...honest to God railroad tracks. The African-American kids lived on one side...

BLUE: Of course, when I talk about diversity, I don't just mean color of our skin. I mean economic diversity.

GREEN: But in school, we were integrated.

RED: Recess was a mixed time for me because I was never a really physically agile kind of person. But in the 3rd grade, I had this amazing teacher who let me stay in from recess to rehearse a play I had written.

YELLOW: There was this boy in the class who...would normally be in the back with his head down...So he was playing Enrique. He had actually volunteered...

GREEN: The divides were hard. You know, we'd play in the same sandbox. And we saw each other naked.

RED: I was placed in a position of safety where I could create and it was allowed and affirmed.

GREEN: But then around 4th grade, all of a sudden we were white kids and we were black kids and we were Italian kids and we were Hungarian kids and we were girls and we were boys...

BLUE: In our metropolitan area we have an affluent middle and upper class where skin color doesn't matter.

YELLOW: And so he ended up, and *he* chose his part...he ended up being the guy who asks this girl out...

PURPLE: You know she would stand on the stage and she would bring her hand down from her face ... even just that...she would lift her head up...

BLUE: But in the lower economic class, there are students who just like there's no way that they would be able to afford class tuition or tickets of any price.

YELLOW: He discovers her and is kind of sort of interested in her and he sort of blurts, because Enrique's sort of a little bit forward, "Will you be my girlfriend?!" [Laughter]

PURPLE: And even if you couldn't hear her as well, she was standing openly. And she wanted to go up there.

YELLOW: So this kid is like [laughter] up there and sharing in front of everybody, and is a little nervous anyway, and he uses that!

PINK: We don't have to be right! We do have to love, to be vulnerable, to accept joy and pain, and to grow through them - *Madaleine L'Engle*.

PURPLE: And you could tell she was working through the vulnerability.

ORANGE: Yeah, being vulnerable in the theatre...it's hard to say...

GREEN: Theatre provided me with the opportunity to see larger aspects of the world that I wasn't getting in school.

YELLOW: And the whole audience cracked up...with him...not at him...because they thought it was so funny that Enrique was actually asking this girl out.

BLUE: But even providing a free experience doesn't solve all the problems for them because there's transportation.

PURPLE: You know, she started as someone who almost didn't participate and then ended up with one of the pivotal roles in our show.

YELLOW: The audience got it...He got it. And he got a laugh. He got to play this vulnerable guy...so he got to use his own jitters as part of his character [laughter]...

ORANGE: I have always been confident in the arts, even when I didn't have the skills. I just loved it so much. It wasn't work. It was fun.

GREEN: Because I knew more, experienced more, sensed more, embraced more, I became vulnerable to people who hadn't had that similar experience.

BLUE: Or they're counted on to earn money to support their family.

YELLOW: I think that for a lot of kids, especially the most vulnerable kids who don't have strong parenting, the school experience means trying to navigate things on your own.

BLUE: Or they're counted on to take care of their younger siblings or their *own* children.

GREEN: You know, a lot of kids didn't even watch Sesame Street. But back in the day...that was a radical show. And it was vibrant, it was active, and the people were angry. It wasn't the sanitized version we see now.

ORANGE: For me vulnerabilities came out of not being able to do the *other* school stuff *as* well.

PURPLE: I feel like most of my experiences in theatrical productions were generally positive.

YELLOW: This is my own personal feeling, but if you're not socially adept, you can't navigate all of those things, and very few of those kids are going to do well academically.

ORANGE: You know...this is hard because, when you think of vulnerability, you tend to think of the sad stuff. [Laughter]

GREEN: So even watching Sesame Street, and that's theatre hard-core, changed my perspective.

PURPLE: But now that I'm talking with you, I guess vulnerability doesn't just mean a negative outcome.

RED: I think one of our personal resources is our ability to find, what I would call, positive vulnerability that allows us to let others into our lives, to receive instruction, and to be in relationship.

GREEN: And if there were live theatre available to me that was complex and meaningful, I would have absolutely taken my daughter to see that.

PINK: At various stages throughout the lives of children and young people—particularly at the closing stages of school life—it is equally necessary for education to be concerned with the development of resourcefulness within each person. Here again, drama has an important part to play, for it is through drama that direct experience and practice can be given for the simple and confident practical everyday use of one's resources - *Brian Way*.

RED: And all of that involves a certain level of risk. And then there's navigating and balancing the risk where the benefit is winding our way through vulnerability, I would think...

GREEN: I went to this thing about baby theatre, and it was cool...

BLUE: In high school, I had to choose the show and then audition and cast the younger students. And it was a lot of pressure...a huge responsibility.

GREEN: But they said you don't want to deal with any complex issues, just stick to the colors and things...

ORANGE: There's a lady who I guess has been spending her life working on defining vulnerability.

GREEN: I had to bite my tongue not to say "Why?"... [Laughter]

ORANGE: I can't think of her name right now...I saw a snippet of her on a Ted talk video.

PINK: What most of us fail to understand and what took me a decade of research to learn is that vulnerability is also the cradle of the emotions and experiences that we crave. Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity - *Brené Brown*.

ORANGE: And it makes so much sense to me that when we numb ourselves to vulnerability, we numb ourselves to the possibility...

BLUE: Now, I don't think I was a great director, but it really opened my eyes to what the possibilities could be.

ORANGE: ...possibilities of life and love and joy and happiness.

RED: So they hired this photographer to document our production and he was not afraid to let the children experiment with his expensive camera...

ORANGE: And it's the people that think themselves worthy of all that who are willing to be vulnerable.

GRAY: It's funny how I never really considered how much theatre pretty much banks on something going wrong...

RED: ...which just blew me away.

GREEN: The vulnerability there, just the inability to know or control, and to embrace that...I think it's magnificent.

GRAY: Hence "The show must go on!"

RED: I think that being curious...that asking a question is to admit a vulnerability.

GREEN: And that theatre provides this extra space to play in that vulnerability, to explore multiple vulnerabilities, multiple scenarios where one might be vulnerable...

RED: And I felt that this man was celebrating this rather than telling them to stop bothering his stuff.

GREEN: And not being afraid of being afraid, you know?

GRAY: A cast and crew rehearse to understand the vulnerable moments of a show because you never really know what's going to happen live.

PINK: We accomplish so much in the theatre precisely because the theatre does not seem to be teaching, and at that moment, it is teaching most effectively - *Moses Goldberg*.

RED: I think we don't talk about vulnerability in its multiple dimensions...

GREEN: I think all children... I mean, we're all vulnerable absolutely 100%. I think that's who we are as a species.

RED: It's like I was saying, it's both negative and positive. It is the place at which we can be most healed, grow most, and be most heard.

GREEN: And that's learning, that's sensitivity...

PINK: Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional - *Brené Brown*.

RED: I am really struck now by the fact that to step into any kind of creative work is—by its very nature—to practice vulnerability. It is unavoidable! To share a rehearsal or design idea, express an opinion, suggest a technical solution, move into another actor's personal space, submit to the guidance of a director, brave the response of an audience, lend your own persona to that of a character, allow yourself to be measured for a costume, or do the measuring, rely on the technical crew for your safety, or even read the review that comes out in the paper. All involve risk and all are acts of vulnerability. The *goal* is the best production we can make. And the only way to pursue that goal is *through* vulnerability.

-----End of Scene-----

Private Reflection

For 90 seconds, jot down the first thoughts that come to mind when you think about the idea of strength through vulnerability.

Not intended for public sharing or collection.

ACT I - Scene 4

Consciousness

ORANGE: So my rather dramatic reaction to my grandma's letter did seem to catch my school counselor off guard.

PINK: No matter how active we are, how much effort we make, our state of consciousness creates our world, and if there is no change on that inner level, no amount of action will make any difference - *Eckhart Tolle*.

GRAY: Maybe it's just a lack of awareness of the vulnerability of those who might not *look* vulnerable...

ORANGE: And we shared a moment later where she said, "It really affected me."

GRAY: ...the *good* student...the confident kid...the rich kid...the talented kid...the non-minority kid. You know, I don't think I was really *allowed* to be considered vulnerable in school.

GREEN: It's something that really resonates with me right now talking with you...this notion of allowing yourself to be vulnerable...

ORANGE: I was very glad that *that* had been said...

GREEN: ...because it's within that vulnerability where we learn. And to embrace it and to understand it as that space of inquiry within the insecurity...you know, the unknown...

GRAY: So, navigating this unknown...how do we approach that at school?

PINK: There are many facets to your basic persona unknown even to you, that may come forth, appear, and become visible. You, the unique, invisible, unknown, must emerge, be seen, and connect - *Viola Spolin*.

GRAY: There's sports, which I love, but at some point organized school sports, especially high school team sports, do require a certain level of athletic ability to play.

GREEN: Play is absolutely part of theatre. We had a huge battle over that. They didn't want to put the word *play* in the Standards.

GRAY: But in theatre, even the most seemingly uncoordinated can play an improv baseball game and experience the World Series.

PINK: To play is to free ourselves from arbitrary restrictions and expand our field of action. Our play fosters richness of response and adaptive flexibility – *Stephan Nachmanovitch*.

YELLOW: We channel play in different ways at different ages, but the fact is that these days it's sort of allowed until you're four, maybe. After that, everything is structured and you have to sit at your desk.

GREEN: We had to argue that play is essential to theatre because it's the basis of creativity and imagination. I mean, they're almost synonymous.

GRAY: More levels of ability can be included in this type of play.

PINK: We wonder where else in a student's day, does he or she have the opportunity not only to explore the big questions but also to play inside them? Through the playing, we are practicing and developing the capacity for compassion - *Carole Miller & Julianna Saxton*.

YELLOW: It's like the love of learning, play, being able to explore, being able to be responsible for yourself as a learner...

GRAY: I feel there's so much shame connected to the word *play* for adults.

YELLOW: ...it's all completely [laughter] pretty much taken away by the time you're in kindergarten.

PINK: Shame needs three things to grow out of control in our lives: secrecy, silence, and judgment - *Brené Brown*.

GRAY: Oh, we joke about all work and no play, but I really think it's more like "To *play* means I'm not doing what I'm *supposed* to be doing. I have to be responsible."

YELLOW: In my usual world it's like how often do I get to play with adults? I don't really. I guess if you're in a play, there's a certain aspect of playing and discovery that happens in that whole process.

GREEN: So play is theatre.

GRAY: But there's also the whole concept of *practice*. Not just showing them once and sending them on their way. Being involved in a theatrical performance demands practice. And school is practice, isn't it?

PINK: Mastery comes from practice...we practice until our skills become unconscious. If you had to think consciously about the steps involved in riding a bicycle, you'd fall off at once - *Stephen Nachmanovitch*.

GRAY: So a friend of mine asked about my research the other day. After hearing my brief explanation, she was like, "Oh, it's like fire drills in school. They give kids do-over opportunities to practice instead of trying to figure out what to do for the first time in the panic of the real thing." And I was like, "Ummm, yeah...exactly."

-----**End of Scene**-----

Possible Intermission

Suggest a 15-minute break from the material before beginning Act II.

ACT II - Scene 1

Resilience

RED: I was directing a family play with adult student actors. It had some very intense scenes where the father loses it and nearly attacks his son.

PURPLE: This girl would cover her face and she wouldn't really talk, but you could tell she was pretty much enjoying the scenes we were working on because she came back every day.

GRAY: I had just finished 7th grade and was in my first summer youth theatre production.

GREEN: It was huge. It was my first live theatrical experience. I had only seen television before.

RED: One of my students brought her five-year-old son to a dress rehearsal.

GREEN: There it was...theatre, in my face, performing...

GRAY: By the end of the first rehearsal for the big musical number, we were so frustrated! "We're never gonna get this!"

PURPLE: For my work, safety is SO important, especially for these 7th and 8th grade girls who just would *not* speak to be heard.

GRAY: The director just calmly said, "Well, you have six weeks to practice it and get it because this is what you need to do by opening night."

GREEN: AND it was not of the Western culture. It was absolutely African dance...not African-American dance. It was an African group of people who came to the United States to do traditional African dance.

GRAY: Then...the director...she just walked away.

RED: And although the play was *not* developmentally appropriate, he understood a lot of the story.

PURPLE: This one particular girl actually came to me after class one day and asked me about this situation with a boyfriend.

RED: But when the play became scary, she took him behind the wall between the seats and the theatre entrance...

PINK: The experience of attending a live theatre performance is so different from almost anything else in a child's life, that it is amazing to see how quickly he or she understands it - *Moses Goldberg*.

GREEN: There was dialogue, story, movement. I was very impressionable.

RED: And his mother said he just laid there on his stomach listening to the play, and then when it was safe again, they came back out into the house.

GRAY: We were kind of stunned.

PURPLE: I admit it was a little bit tricky in terms of what my role was because I was a teaching artist, not a therapist.

RED: It was for me an interesting lesson of the emotional vulnerability in an audience member.

GREEN: In short, being able to participate in this event normalized, if you will, a way to look at the world that I may not have had otherwise.

GRAY: There was no making it easier for us or anything. I mean, she apparently had no doubt whatsoever as to our ability to do it.

RED: And because it got too intense for him, his mom had the sense to take him to safety but *not away* completely, so that he could hear the resolution that everybody loved everybody again.

GRAY: So, what else could we say, but “Ummm...ok.” Simple as that. I always think of that moment.

PURPLE: But it was a huge breakthrough.

GRAY: And we nailed it opening night, by the way.

PINK: The only road to strength is vulnerability - *Stephen Nachmanovitch*.

ORANGE: I think the nerve that it takes to get up in front of a group of people and perform is extremely valuable.

GRAY: So now I'm an adult directing a summer theatre program. And this 7th grade girl, who you might say was a little reserved but was really enjoying learning the big group numbers, suddenly froze on stage while rehearsing her solo line and just started to cry...head down...shoulders shaking.

GREEN: I feel this was one of the moments that began to define my own notions of culture, diversity, equity and justice...

ORANGE: I could see it happening in so many different instances outside of theatre.

GRAY: I mean, when a kid starts to cry, you *do* question yourself.

PINK: It's not that our children can't stand the vulnerability of handling their own situations, it's that we can't stand the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure, even when we know it's the right thing to do - *Brené Brown*.

GRAY: But...I knew she was safe. I knew this was survivable. I knew she could do it.

RED: She was teaching him resilience...

GREEN: ...to say nothing of complex notions of self, identity, and the construction of that identity.

RED: ...that scary things can be survived...and resolved. And you can go on.

PURPLE: While we improvised the scene, she was saying *amazing* stuff, but really, really softly.

GRAY: So I put my arm around her shoulders and calmly talked her *through* it...not *out* of it.

RED: She had the sense *not* to take the child out completely but to stay where they could hear the story continue without being threatened by it.

PURPLE: At first we did a circle drama in order to make the play.

GRAY: I reminded her how we had practiced the week before things like falling down during a musical number...

PURPLE: Then we rehearsed it, rehearsed it, rehearsed it.

RED: His fear was honored. His fear was respected.

GRAY: And how we got back up and nobody thought it was a horrible failure.

RED: There was no shame in being afraid.

YELLOW: On so many different levels...to be in the theatre affected my ability to *be*...

GRAY: Instead, they thought it was awesome that we could continue on to such a big finish.

YELLOW: To know that it was still something that I really wanted to do...but also to meet this director who was such a wonderful role model.

GRAY: And anyone who witnesses that kind of courage on stage, well...she had the ability to make an entire audience a little braver because of it.

PINK: A culture of theatre, both in the abstract and in the moment, is likely to impact the ways and outcomes of meaning making among the participants - *James Catterall*.

YELLOW: She took her work very seriously. She took theatre very seriously. She took her students very seriously.

ORANGE: I want to stress that I want them to be kids. But I always tell them, “Hey, look, I don’t make up the rules, but this is what it is and I’m here to guide you.”

PURPLE: She was able to come into her own by participating in this piece of theatre.

GRAY: So I guess you could say that I let myself be vulnerable to criticism by trusting my gut and take away her shame but *not* her opportunity to continue.

ORANGE: I’ve learned that had it not been for those few people in my life that were like “Stop it! Do this right!” I would never have learned anything.

PURPLE: In rehearsal it wasn’t about failure.

GRAY: By *not* mentioning that I would take her out of the scene if she wanted me to, I allowed her to find her way through this trauma and go on.

ORANGE: I’ve learned the power of being firm with them because they can accomplish a lot.

PURPLE: She had the opportunity to try and try again and to improve.

GRAY: And she never did actually ask to be taken out of the scene...

ORANGE: I’m firm because I care.

PINK: I believe we, who are teachers of performance, can find ways in which vulnerability (and its inevitable traumas and stresses) can become a transformative process rather than treating vulnerability as something that has to be either defended against or denied - *Mark Seton*.

BLUE: I had never directed before in high school.

ORANGE: So we’re just days from our tech rehearsal, and he was messing up his lines, missing his blocking, and joking around.

BLUE: [Laughter] It all sounds so ridiculous now, but that feeling of telling people what to do, rather than, you know, when you’re being directed in a show, you’re *following* directions...

YELLOW: So I think maybe what I learned is that even when you’re in high school...

BLUE: ...and I was good at following directions.

YELLOW: ...whoever you’re working with, you have to take them seriously as a person, not just for their age level...

ORANGE: I finally just yelled, "Stop it! What are you doing? You're the lead in the show and you're screwing up! This is not okay! Get it together!"

GREEN: So my daughter is shy, introverted, and as contemplative as the day is long...very vulnerable to bullies and bullying, intentional and unintentional.

ORANGE: And he was like, "I'm sorry." "Don't be sorry. Just fix it." And that was it.
[Laughter]

RED: In high school the director let me direct, really direct one of the scenes.

ORANGE: Then I reached out to his mom and said, "I don't know what's going on, but he's got to get this together. He's the lead. I'll be there on Sunday and I will work with him for an hour, but he's gotta know his lines..."

RED: I got to invent and deliver the blocking.

GREEN: We have always shared with her the idea of standing up for self and others.

RED: I realize now that I developed a lot of confidence doing that.

BLUE: But I really remember having to make decisions, which I think connects back to feeling like I would never be able to be where my sister was in school.

ORANGE: "If he doesn't know his lines, then I might have to pull him because he's letting the rest of the cast down."

GREEN: We have shared films, stories, and live theatre that help her explore these notions of what we feel are issues of justice and equity.

BLUE: Then all of a sudden, that flipping of roles and being given that responsibility which I never had before...

RED: I think there was something in that that built resilience in me because I got to try my wings.

ORANGE: It was a life lesson.

GREEN: Her viewing of *Alice in Wonderland* with Mia Wasikowska as Alice was a defining moment for her sense of self and power as a female, in particular.

GRAY: Well, something must have clicked 'cuz when it came to the performance in front of a full house, she blew everyone away.

ORANGE: And he totally rose to the occasion and tore it up. Tore it up!

GRAY: Even her family and friends said they had never seen her that confident and animated... oh...and LOUD!

GREEN: I witnessed her fear, joy, and elation as she watched Alice overcome obstacles and find herself. She became stronger, less vulnerable, and more empowered.

GRAY: It was almost like an entirely different person...

ORANGE: I mean I get weepy eyed when I see the change in a kid that I worked with even just last year.

GRAY: ...this little 7th grade girl.

ORANGE: It breaks my heart and not in a sad way, but in a joyful way.

GRAY: It was a beautiful thing.

PINK: Theater is an artistic group relationship demanding the talents and energy of many people—from the first thought of a play or scene to the last echo of applause - *Viola Spolin*.

ORANGE: Yeah...I've had hundreds of experiences like that.

-----End of Scene-----

Private Reflection

For 90 seconds, jot down the first thoughts that come to mind when you consider resilience and the theatre arts.

Not intended for public sharing or collection.

ACT II - Scene 2

Curriculum

YELLOW: One of my favorite teachers that I have worked with spends the first month with her first-graders *not* on academics.

RED: We did a production of Laurie Brooks' play *Devon's Hurt*. It's about a boy who's had a terrible day.

YELLOW: The first month is all about how do we work together as a class and develop cohesion and develop our culture.

BLUE: We went to this high school very well known for its arts programs, especially in music and theatre.

RED: His mother almost drives over his bicycle, so she's mad at him. He gets into trouble at school. He has a fight with his best friend. He gets angry with his dog. Then out of his toy chest comes his *Hurt*. And his *Hurt* won't go away until Devon acknowledges how hurt and sad he is. And that's the basic play, right?

PINK: One cannot teach concentration, trust, sensitivity, group awareness, patience, tolerance, respect, perception, judgment, social concern, coping with ambivalent feelings, responsibility, etc, etc; one can only hope that education will help to bring them about over a long term and as I have already suggested it could be argued that drama brings them about in a special way, but the achievement of these admirable qualities is not intrinsic to drama: it is an important by-product of the dramatic process - *Gavin Bolton*.

RED: And so we took it to this elementary school which had just lost a child to leukemia.

YELLOW: And how do those kids end up doing? Are you kidding me? They're unbelievable.

BLUE: I mean...phenomenal students so dedicated and so passionate.

RED: And the school counselor was thrilled by the piece. "Every child in our district should see this play."

YELLOW: I mean I would go into her class and would have these unbelievably wonderful conversations about topics that you couldn't even get to with other kids because so-and-so's poking over here with the pencil and somebody's fiddling with somebody else's hair or whatever.

GRAY: So I decided to take a break from doing this research and turned on the TV to catch one of those all-day marathons of *Criminal Minds*.

YELLOW: These kids were focused. They were ready to learn.

GRAY: It's a show about a team of FBI profilers trained to track down serial violent offenders.

RED: Then we went to another school to do two performances. It was in an entirely second-grade school.

BLUE: But I did have a moment where I thought, "Huh...this is the same school district as that other school?"

RED: We did the first performance and all the children laughed where they should laugh. It was great audience response. And the moment it was over, they canceled our second show on the spot.

GRAY: After a couple of episodes, I realized how many times characteristics of the unknown subjects, or "unsubs" as the profilers call them, included qualities such as *confident*, *empowered*, *resilient*, and *skilled*...

RED: Apparently the teacher guides were delivered to the school but had not been distributed. So the teachers didn't know what the play was about.

GRAY: ...the *exact* same words used for some of the hopeful, positive development outcomes of performing arts programs.

BLUE: How is it really possible to have two such diverse schools and how can we spread out the resources?"

RED: And the principal's complaint to me was "Now these teachers have to go back to their classrooms and talk to these kids about feelings."

GREEN: You know, educators have a tendency to think that pedagogy is curriculum and skills and standardized tests, when pedagogy by definition is intimately linked to politics, which is intimately linked to identity, which is intimately linked to self...and understanding the self within a space as you work with another individual.

BLUE: So I have these thoughts on how we can keep programs like ours in those schools where parents who *can* will do *anything* in the world to keep their kids *out*...

GRAY: It made me think...to fully bring practicing navigating vulnerability into our curricular consciousness, we need to recognize that without tools such as compassion, positive acceptance of self, empathy, and doing no harm, a student who learns to be technically *confident*, *empowered*, *skilled*, or *resilient* might *not* necessarily be operating from that place of light and love that we often assume them to be when we normally use these words.

PINK: Every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences - *John Dewey*.

BLUE: So the students that are left are those who don't have a parent to advocate for them, basically.

GREEN: I think essentially that it's back to that basic thing you have made so very clear to me today that the essence of being human is being vulnerable to your environment...

GRAY: And we need to recognize how easily a student like that can be manipulated, for that matter.

GREEN: ...to continue to explore, to continue to wonder, to consider the possibilities...

PURPLE: We try to target communities that need the sensitive curriculum we offer or where there's a teacher who feels that they need us because, let's face it, you can teach content all you want, but that doesn't mean that students want to engage with it or want to talk about it.

GREEN: ...to *not* know, and to not be afraid of not knowing...to be inquisitive about not knowing.

PURPLE: And I feel like theatre is a vehicle...and I mean *artistically sound* theatre is a vehicle...that is *key*...

PINK: Drama is unique among the arts in its concrete use of people and social living as material. It is the art of all dimensions, of which life itself consists - *Winifred Ward*.

GREEN: A teacher would just have to put this concept into his or her awareness.

GRAY: Are we going to let vulnerability and all its forms remain in the unconscious and let the chips fall where they may?

PINK: The percentage of performing arts workers being bullied is higher than that reported in any other field, so the performing arts are indeed *different*: they are the market leaders in bullying behavior - *Anne-Marie Quigg*.

RED: So here's a play that is showcasing a character in very recognizable positions of vulnerability for any child. And the teachers couldn't face that conversation.

GREEN: Standards aren't the enemy. Standards become the enemy because people who don't understand education are trying to impose a non-educational paradigm into a space that's human...

RED: And they were uniformly upset about it, even though the children had a great time.

GRAY: Or are we going to bring it out of the shadows and talk about it, consciously and proactively, where we have a better chance to influence to the positive?

PURPLE: We do workshops divorced of the play, and the most amazing things are the small group conversations that we have at the end. It's the curriculum built within the play.

YELLOW: So I would say personally that this is *essential* for student learning because kids are vulnerable.

PURPLE: We scaffold it.

BLUE: I think it's acknowledging who is present and what they should be receiving as part of their core education.

GRAY: What if school systems deemed practicing navigating vulnerability one of the purposes of education?

PURPLE: But the hope, honestly, is that through all of this dialogue, and through seeing it dramatically, that they'll be having an experience that will make them think critically about their own lives...

GRAY: And what if participating in theatre was a curricular solution to allow students this practice? How would that work?

RED: I think it's a little bit like Jonathan Levy saying that when it's good, theatre will teach just by being.

GREEN: So how would education change? I don't think it should change at all, from an inquiry-based, pedagogical perspective.

PINK: The arts of the practical are onerous and complex... The practical arts begin with the requirement that existing institutions and existing practices be preserved and altered piecemeal, not dismantled and replaced – *Joseph J. Schwab*.

YELLOW: This goes to the heart of educational pedagogy and teacher training, especially in our world of testing where everything is focused on knowing content.

GRAY: Teaching math, science, reading and writing in schools...are we really doing this expecting all children to become statisticians, scientists, and authors?

ORANGE: You know, people think of me as this savvy person, and all of it is because my mind has expanded to the creative process.

PURPLE: ...and how to talk about it in their own lives because they're seeing it modeled... right?

PINK: We are all artists, and theatre is a language. We have no better way to work together, to learn about each other, to heal, and to grow - *Michael Rohd*.

BLUE: So a program like this could get kids to stay in school, instead of dropping out.

GRAY: Or could learning these traditional academic subjects be providing children with tools to help them better navigate the vulnerabilities they'll encounter on whatever path they take in life?

GREEN: It would just be a continuation, another way, and I think it's a brilliant thing for you to play with, especially with theatre teachers...as to how are you understanding the notion of vulnerability and are you able to keep your students in that vulnerable state to fully, intimately, and completely explore what it means to be human, to not know...

YELLOW: I mean, we're also living in a world where we need to be able to navigate socially with each other and to problem solve and connect in lots of different ways.

ORANGE: I can problem solve and think about the future of my organizations because I have the ability to be creative.

GREEN: ...because that's the essence of who we are as a species.

GRAY: Put in this light, wouldn't the traditional academic subjects *and* theatre now share the same stage equally in education?

PINK: When people lack attachments, when there is not possibility of coming together in a plurality of a community, when they have not tapped their imaginations, they may think of *breaking* free, but they will be unlikely to think of breaking through the structures of their world and creating something new – *Maxine Greene*.

ORANGE: I think of *imagination* as seeing the world differently. I think of *creativity* as putting imagination into real life.

YELLOW: Now we're in the 21st century and it's like...Hello?! The needs of education have changed.

ORANGE: So to develop curriculum using theatre to teach kids how to be thinkers, it's amazing!

YELLOW: And there's never been a time in the history of our country that I know about when teachers have been more marginalized and more vulnerable.

RED: I think that if you consider how much pressure teachers are under, how vulnerable their jobs are often, how politics affects them, standardized testing.

PINK: Understanding curriculum is not a consolation prize...but without opportunities to write the curriculum some of us cannot help but feel stranded on the sidelines - *William F. Pinar*.

YELLOW: So if you put teachers in that position, there's no way that kids aren't going to be vulnerable.

RED: All it takes is one angry parent and suddenly all of your time and emotional energy and thinking goes into how do we solve this for this student? All the while you have other children in the program, whose parents aren't angry, who have needs, too.

ORANGE: Using my imagination...I think that anyone that goes into the teaching profession should have to go through performing arts training.

BLUE: I think every adult working with a child needs to be trained.

RED: Maybe a piece of it is...you know, how we train teachers to be sensitive to the smaller moments of vulnerability that happen every day in the classroom that you don't have curriculum for...you know, that you have to improvise your way through.

ORANGE: It would have to be a part of their coursework, not to major in it, but as part of their curriculum, just like math and all of the other stuff.

BLUE: I mean, definitely any professional teaching artist should be trained, and, of course, every classroom teacher should have some training in this pedagogy, as well.

PINK: Cease thinking of the child's experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluid, embryonic, vital - *John Dewey*.

ORANGE: Actually, I think that anyone in any profession should have arts training.

BLUE: Yeah, I think for it to be really successful, it should be ingrained into everything that we do.

RED: But the thing that's stopping me is the fear that participation in theater would become a mandated thing.

YELLOW: I think there should be a theatre drama specialist in every school...

BLUE: You know, in our drama school program we've had several thousand students. The percentage who actually go on to pursue a career in theatre is slim.

RED: There is a difference between directing a show where everybody has volunteered to be there versus kids that are forced to be there.

YELLOW: ...and that person should not only work with the kids but also work with the classroom teachers to help them.

BLUE: But that's okay with us.

ORANGE: I mean, I would want my doctors, lawyers, business folk, and technology people to have arts training because, again, I think it's about expanding your mind to the creative process which is all about imagining, which is about seeing the world differently.

RED: I think the answer is in that somewhere, if you want to practice vulnerability, the structure of the experience somehow has to let the children place the gift of themselves into it.

ORANGE: That's how the world advances.

BLUE: My favorite letters are those from former students who became scientists or doctors or you name it, accountants, who say that they still use those skills in their everyday life...because it's not solely about learning how to be a performer or director or stage manager. It's about things like building empathy, working in an ensemble, creating objectives...all those things that help you in your whole life...

PURPLE: I just wanted them to be able to voice their opinion and know it was valid...which was apparently *not* something that they were getting elsewhere.

RED: For my first teaching job, I was required to do a play with 4th graders.

YELLOW: I'm all about partnering.

PURPLE: You know, there are subjects where they're doing well, but it's a lot of times just on paper. It's not vocal. It's not to a real person with eye contact. It's not walking into a room like you know what you're doing.

RED: And the parents made these beautiful costumes and this great set...

YELLOW: I think we're missing the boat by throwing a teacher in a classroom and saying "Okay. Here are your kids...Go for it by yourself."

PURPLE: We are about inquiry.

RED: And it looked all really shiny and fine.

PURPLE: We are about critical engagement on your own terms.

YELLOW: The other thing you have to think about is the individual kid.

RED: And it made me sad because it wasn't really good theatre as it had very little of the children themselves in the production.

PURPLE: And we're also, in terms of curriculum, about giving students *many* opportunities to participate.

RED: And the next semester their homeroom teacher allowed them to create their own show. And they wrote the script and made all the costumes.

YELLOW: You have to think about what does this child need versus that child.

PURPLE: It's about differentiated learning...different access points.

RED: It was not nearly as polished...

PURPLE: And it's geared towards *all* students.

RED: But it was so full of their life and their choices that it really had a qualitative difference that was palpable.

PURPLE: I mean, any student can be vulnerable...

PINK: When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability - *Madaline L'Engle*.

GREEN: I had put up the wrong hand.

RED: I was so humiliated.

BLUE: Because I wasn't my sister.

ORANGE: I broke down crying.

YELLOW: In front of everybody.

PURPLE: I basically just checked out.

GRAY: I'm *perfect*...I'm strong, so I don't need any help, right?

[*Pause a beat*]

ALL TOGETHER: My mom forgot the **MUSTARD!!!**

-----End of Script-----

Private Reflection

Let's say that to practice vulnerability merits curricular attention. What if school systems put that into their consciousness and it was deemed one of the reasons for education?

For 90 seconds, jot down some of your thoughts about how theatre could be a curricular solution to address practicing vulnerability.

Not intended for public sharing or collection.

Suggestion for Group Discussion

After a short refreshment break, discuss the possibilities of conversation now or a follow-up meeting after people have had time to reflect. Regardless of which path you take, there should be no pressure to share personal reflection notes.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Literature Citations

Act I – Scene 1

- ☆ “Unless we suggest that learning is this process that is somehow strangely removed from anything that means anything to us or that matters, it is going to involve the person’s life experiences in the sense-making process”- *John Dirkx, et al., 2006, p. 129.*
 - Dirkx, J. M., Mezirow, J., & Cranton, P. (2006). Musings and reflections on the meaning, context, and process of transformative learning: A dialogue between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow. *Journal of Transformative Education, 4*(2), 123–139. doi:10.117
- ☆ “Will standing tall, walking confidently and with purpose, and speaking assertively always do the trick? No, but it is one more valuable script your child will have. The key is to have several well-rehearsed scripts and a few actions readily available, with the ability to discern which one is the most appropriate for the given situation”- *Barbara Coloroso, 2008, p. 143.*
 - Coloroso, B. (2008). *The bully, the bullied, and the bystander.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- ☆ “It is through the personal narrative, a life as told, rather than through our observations as researchers, that we come to know a life as experienced”- *Mary Kay Kramp, 2004, p. 111.*
 - Kramp, M. K. (2004). Exploring life and experience through narrative inquiry. In K. deMarrais & S.D. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences* (p. 103-121). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- ☆ “This is theatre—the art of looking at ourselves”- *Augusto Boal, 1992, p. xxx.*
 - Boal, A. (1992a). *Games for actors and non-actors.* New York: Routledge.

Act I – Scene 2

- ☆ “The *point* of cognitive development is not to gain an increasingly complete grasp of abstract principles. It is to interpret from as many vantage points as possible lived experience, the ways there are of being in the world”- *Maxine Greene, 1988, p. 120.*
 - Greene, M. (1988). *The dialectic of freedom.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- ☆ “We need to recognize that every bit of our culture is school” – *Stephen Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 117.*
 - Nachmanovitch, S. (1990). *Free play: The power of improvisation in life and art.* New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

- ☆ “Because theatre is essentially concerned with the sweep of human experience, it tends to prompt new levels of questioning rather than to promote answers”- *Jonathan Neelands & Tony Goode, 2000, p. 105.*
 - Neelands, J., & Goode, T. (2000). *Structuring drama work: A handbook of available forms in theatre and drama* (2nd ed.). London: Cambridge University Press.
- ☆ “You can’t be involved in education without noticing that teachers, like most other people, must engage with the problems of societal flux and shift, and therefore with a stringent re-examination of what schools are supposed to be for”- *Dorothy Heathcote, 1984, p. 171.*
 - Heathcote, D. (1984). In L. Johnson & C. O’Neill. (Eds.), *Dorothy Heathcote: Collected writings on education and drama*. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd.
- ☆ “*Curriculum* (n.) from Modern Latin transferred use of classical Latin *curriculum* "a running, course, career"; also "a fast chariot, racing car"; from *currere*”- *Online Etymology Dictionary, 2011.*
 - *curriculum*. (2011). In *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved February 5, 2001, from <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=curriculum&searchmode=none>

Act I – Scene 3

- ☆ “We can try to control the uncontrollable by looking for security and predictability, always hoping to be comfortable and safe. But the truth is that we can never avoid uncertainty. This not knowing is part of the adventure, and it’s also what makes us afraid”- *Pema Chödrön, 2001, p. 7.*
 - Chödrön, P. (2001). *The places that scare you: A guide to fearlessness in difficult times*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- ☆ “We don’t have to be right! We do have to love, to be vulnerable, to accept joy and pain, and to grow through them”- *Madaleine L’Engle, 1980, p. 191.*
 - L’Engle, M. (1980). *Walking on water: Reflections on faith and art*. Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers.
- ☆ “At various stages throughout the lives of children and young people—particularly at the closing stages of school life—it is equally necessary for education to be concerned with the development of resourcefulness within each person. Here again, drama has an important part to play, for it is through drama that direct experience and practice can be given for the simple and confident practical everyday use of one’s resources”- *Brian Way, 1967, p. 287.*
 - Way, B. (1967). *Development through drama*. London: Longmans, Green and Co. LTD.

- ☆ “What most of us fail to understand and what took me a decade of research to learn is that vulnerability is also the cradle of the emotions and experiences that we crave. Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity”- *Brené Brown, 2012a, p. 33.*
 - Brown, B. (2012a). *Daring greatly*. New York, NY: Gotham Books.
- ☆ “We accomplish so much in the theatre precisely because the theatre does not seem to be teaching, and at that moment, it is teaching most effectively”- *Moses Goldberg, 2006, p. 40.*
 - Goldberg, M. (2006). *TYA: Essays on the Theatre for Young Audiences*. Louisville, KY: Anchorage Press Plays, Inc.
- ☆ “Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional”- *Brené Brown, 2012a, p. 2.*
 - Brown, B. (2012a). *Daring greatly*. New York, NY: Gotham Books.

Act I – Scene 4

- ☆ “No matter how active we are, how much effort we make, our state of consciousness creates our world, and if there is no change on that inner lever, no amount of action will make any difference”- *Eckhart Tolle, 2005, p. 290.*
 - Tolle, E. (2005). *A new earth*. New York: Penguin Group.
- ☆ “There are many facets to your basic persona unknown even to you, that may come forth, appear, and become visible. You, the unique, invisible, unknown, must emerge, be seen, and connect”- *Viola Spolin, 2001, p. 1.*
 - Spolin, V. (2001). *Theater games for the lone actor: A handbook*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- ☆ “To play is to free ourselves from arbitrary restrictions and expand our field of action. Our play fosters richness of response and adaptive flexibility” - *Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 43.*
 - Nachmanovitch, S. (1990). *Free play: The power of improvisation in life and art*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.
- ☆ “We wonder where else in a student’s day, does he or she have the opportunity not only to explore the big questions but also to play inside them? Through the playing, we are practicing and developing the capacity for compassion” - *Carole Miller & Julianna Saxton, 2013, p 21.*
 - Miller, C. & Saxton, J. (2013, July). *Drama develops empathy? Not always*. Workshop paper presentation for the 2013 American Alliance for Theatre & Education National Conference. Bethesda, MD, USA.

- ☆ “Shame needs three things to grow out of control in our lives: secrecy, silence, and judgment”- *Brené Brown, 2010, p. 40.*
 - Brown, B. (2010). *The Gifts of Imperfection*. Center City, MN: Hazelden.
- ☆ “Mastery comes from practice...we practice until our skills become unconscious. If you had to think consciously about the steps involved in riding a bicycle, you’d fall off at once”- *Stephen Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 72-73.*
 - Nachmanovitch, S. (1990). *Free play: The power of improvisation in life and art*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

Act II – Scene 1

- ☆ “The experience of attending a live theatre performance is so different from almost anything else in a child’s life, that it is amazing to see how quickly he or she understands it”- *Moses Goldberg, 2006, p. 65.*
 - Goldberg, M. (2006). *TYA: Essays on the Theatre for Young Audiences*. Louisville, KY: Anchorage Press Plays, Inc.
- ☆ “The only road to strength is vulnerability”- *Stephen Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 64.*
 - Nachmanovitch, S. (1990). *Free play: The power of improvisation in life and art*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.
- ☆ “It’s not that our children can’t stand the vulnerability of handling their own situations, it’s that we can’t stand the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure, even when we know it’s the right thing to do”- *Brené Brown, 2012a, p. 238.*
 - Brown, B. (2012a). *Daring greatly*. New York, NY: Gotham Books.
- ☆ “A culture of theatre (both in the abstract and in the moment) is likely to impact the ways and outcomes of meaning making among the participants”- *James Catterall, 2007, p. 165.*
 - Catterall, J. S. (2007). Enhancing peer conflict resolution skills through drama: an experimental study. *Research in Drama Education, 12(2), 163–178.* doi:10.1080/13569780701321013
- ☆ “I believe we, who are teachers of performance, can find ways in which vulnerability (and its inevitable traumas and stresses) can become a transformative process rather than treating vulnerability as something that has to be either defended against or denied”- *Mark Seton, 2006, p. 4.*
 - Seton, M. C. (2006). “Post-Dramatic” stress: Negotiating vulnerability for performance. *2006 Annual Conference of the Australasian Association for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies* (p. 1–5).

- ☆ “Theater is an artistic group relationship demanding the talents and energy of many people—from the first thought of a play or scene to the last echo of applause”-*Viola Spolin, 1983, p. 9.*
 - Spolin, V. (1983). *Improvisation for the theatre*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Act II – Scene 2

- ☆ “One cannot teach concentration, trust, sensitivity, group awareness, patience, tolerance, respect, perception, judgement, social concern, coping with ambivalent feelings, responsibility, etc., etc.; one can only hope that education will help to bring them about over a long term and as I have already suggested it could be argued that drama brings them about in a special way, but the achievement of these admirable qualities is not intrinsic to drama: it is an important by-product of the dramatic process”- *Gavin Bolton, 2010, p. 110.*
 - Bolton, G. (2010). It’s all theatre. In D. Davis (Ed.), *Gavin Bolton essential writings*. Staffordshire: Trentham Books Limited.
- ☆ “Every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences”- *John Dewey, 1944, p. 26.*
 - Dewey, J. (1944). *Experience and education*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- ☆ “Drama is unique among the arts in its concrete use of people and social living as material. It is the art of all dimensions, of which life itself consists”- *Winifred Ward, 1957, p. 4.*
 - Ward, W. (1957). *Playmaking with children: From kindergarten through junior high school* (2nd ed.). New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.
- ☆ “The percentage of performing arts workers being bullied is higher than that reported in any other field, so the performing arts are indeed *different*: they are the market leaders in bullying behavior” – *Anne-Marie Quigg, 2007, p. 59.*
 - Quigg, A. (2007). Bullying in Theatres and Arts Centres in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Arts Management*, 10(1), 52–85.
- ☆ “The arts of the practical are onerous and complex...The practical arts begin with the requirement that existing institutions and existing practices be preserved and altered piecemeal, not dismantled and replaced” – *Joseph J. Schwab, 2009, p. 131.*
 - Schwab, J.J. (2009). The practical: A language for curriculum. In D.J. Flinders & S.J. Thornton (Eds.), *The curriculum studies reader* (3rd ed.), 123-137. New York: Routledge.

- ☆ “We are all artists, and theatre is a language. We have no better way to work together, to learn about each other, to heal, and to grow”- *Michael Rohd, 1998, p. xix.*
 - Rohd, M. (1998). *Theatre for community, conflict & dialogue: The Hope Is Vital training manual.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- ☆ “When people lack attachments, when there is not possibility of coming together in a plurality of a community, when they have not tapped their imaginations, they may think of *breaking* free, but they will be unlikely to think of breaking through the structures of their world and creating something new”- *Maxine Greene, 1988, p. 16.*
 - Greene, M. (1988). *The dialectic of freedom.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- ☆ “Understanding curriculum is not a consolation prize...but without opportunities to write the curriculum some of us cannot help but feel stranded on the sidelines” - *William F. Pinar, 2000, p. 319.*
 - Pinar, W. (2000). Response to Robert J. Helfenbein the agency of theory. In E. Malewski (Ed.), *Curriculum studies handbook: The next moment.* 318-321. New York: Routledge.

- ☆ “Cease thinking of the child’s experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluid, embryonic, vital”- *John Dewey, 1902, p. 11.*
 - Dewey, J. (1902). *The child and the curriculum.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

- ☆ “When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability”- *Madaleine L’Engle, 1980, p. 190.*
 - L’Engle, M. (1980). *Walking on water: Reflections on faith and art.* Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers.

MY EXPERIENCE OF THE INITIAL SCRIPT READING

Rather than live in a state of speculation about the effects of this form of theatre, I assembled a group of volunteers to do a reading of the script in order to document my impressions of the reading. The group consisted of my colleagues here at the University of Victoria, where I was the only person in the room who knew everyone. We sat around a table in the private boardroom at the Graduate Students' Society building. As there were a variety of backgrounds and educational fields represented, I felt like I created a scenario similar to that of my target audience. In other words, it was not a room full of old, familiar acting buddies comfortable with each other and accustomed to cold reads. It was a mix of people whose main common interest is education.

As far as part assignments were concerned, I had decided ahead of time that it might be beneficial for me to hear another voice saying my own words. Therefore, I chose to read Pink, the character that represented literature quotations, and let the others choose from the remaining characters, which included Gray, the one that represented my researcher journal notes. After a brief explanation of how the script reading works, we jumped in and read the script straight through, doing the 90-second reflections between scenes, but not taking the intermission break. The overall sense I got from the room was that reading the script not only engaged the readers, but seemed to make the data more personal as each story had a physically different voice attached to it. They weren't just names on paper identifying characters and situations. They were actual human voices talking about a topic that is not in everyone's comfort zone.

I must admit that I personally had a totally unexpected reaction. As familiar as I was with the script in that I compiled it, and even though the research had not been about what one might deem extreme personal traumas, I immediately teared up upon hearing my words voiced by

someone else—my intimate thoughts about my own sense of vulnerability in school said out loud to a group of people. Although no one else seemed to notice, which I found myself worried about, I was momentarily taken aback by emotions, and I didn't even hear the next few lines. I “got it together” by the second page, but that really spoke volumes to me not only about the research topic and methodology, but also about researcher vulnerability. I was not anonymous.

As the group moved through the script, I could see that there were certain people in the room that would not have participated if they were required to physically interact with others or be spotlighted in any way. The read-only format appeared to level the playing field as far as performance was concerned. I also noticed how appreciative everyone seemed to be of the private reflection time between the scenes. I heard a couple of comments about how *not* having the requirement to share their stories completely affected what they were willing to write about. At the end, everyone wanted to keep a copy of the script. As such, I felt that the script had been effective as a tool for research dissemination and audience engagement at both individual and groups levels.

MY INTERPRETATION

Overview of Vulnerabilities from Data

I told the participants that I was researching the everyday vulnerabilities that a student might encounter during school and that I was not looking for stories regarding exceptional or traumatic events. I compiled a rather extensive list of over 60 points of vulnerability that I could identify from the data stories. Of course, I was not expecting the data to be an exhaustive coverage of the topic, by any means. This was an exploration into a topic that I began with only six participants to gain a better understanding. However, I was a little surprised to realize that I could readily list ten points of vulnerability that I both had considered more common and have personally witnessed which were *not* on the list. Far from finding fault with the data, to me this illustrates the vast boundaries of vulnerability in school. I've included both lists here.

Points of vulnerability found in schools mentioned in data stories:

- Apathy.
- Asking a question; curiosity; staying in a place of inquiry and unknown.
- Auditions; try-outs; grading.
- Being open to ideas and cultures in an area where those around you aren't.
- Big city and large schools; small town and small schools.
- Crying; boys being allowed to cry.
- Boys versus girls.
- Bullies and bystanders.
- Compassion and lack of compassion.
- Competition.
- Death of fellow student; concept of death in general, particularly in early elementary.

- Dropping out of school.
- Dysfunctional family life.
 - Absentee parents/lack of parent involvement in child's life.
 - Negligence.
 - Possible abuse.
- Economic status – poor vs. affluent.
- Feelings of failure and devastation.
- Humiliation – public.
 - Chastisement/ridicule.
 - Comparison to siblings.
 - How vividly situations of humiliation and failure come to mind even years after the incident.
 - Labeling/putting students into permanent categories.
 - Lack of knowledge; ignorance of an issue.
 - Home life/family is not like others.
 - Panicking on stage/freezing.
 - Public test scores for individuals, classes, and school systems.
 - Punished for following rules/directions.
 - Singled out for negative or even positive reasons.
 - Victim of or standing up to bullies.
- Identity; being yourself.
- Illness.
- Isolation; alienation.

- Lack of creativity and imagination.
- Low self-esteem; lack of confidence.
- Not looking vulnerable; not allowed to be considered vulnerable.
- Not speaking the dominant language/learning English as a second language.
- Parental worry for child.
- Parents not available to protect their child during school time.
- Participant difficulty associating the word *vulnerability* with a positive outcome, while at the same time having no trouble coming up with stories about resilience.
- Perfectionism.
- Performing in public; public speaking.
- Physical violence, including rape.
- Problem-solving.
- Rejection.
- Relationships; dating.
- Sexual orientation.
- Sexuality; puberty issues/sex.
- Shame.
- Shame for thinking you might have been vulnerable.
- Shyness; speaking to be heard; having a voice.
- Small-mindedness.
- Social status; cool kids vs. good students.
- Special needs.
- Standardized testing.

- Standing up for yourself; thinking for yourself, apart from group pressures.
- Teacher vulnerability.
 - Angry parents.
 - Budget cuts.
 - Educational politics.
 - Frequently changing curriculum dictates.
 - New teacher.
 - Not knowing how to handle a new situation.
 - Published school test scores.
- Trust; deception.
- Trying something new; taking a risk.
- Worries about what other people think.

Points of vulnerability I have seen in schools, but are *not* specifically addressed in the data:

- Anorexia; bulimia.
- Cutting.
- Falling in love with a teacher.
- Learning disabilities.
- Refugee status.
- Religion negatively affecting status in school.
- Size or weight issues.
- Suicide.
- Trouble with a specific academic subject.
- Weather/natural disasters.

Emerging Concepts

Blocks Encountered

I remind the reader that the original purpose of my study was to explore both the potential of theatre as a means to enable students to practice vulnerability and the potential curricular impact of such practice. However, to get to that point of inquiry, I had a hunch I might encounter resistance in the beginning as we attempted to get beyond the more traditional boundaries of the concept of vulnerability, boundaries of which we may or may not have previously been aware. It turns out that my hunch was correct. As I disclosed earlier, especially for those of us trained in theatre and drama, this inquiry could be thought of as borderline sacrilege with its appearance to lay equal all situations of vulnerability, thereby diminishing the plights of vulnerable populations. Despite all reservations to the idea, I believe each interview did prove to be a successful exploration into the notion of vulnerability as curricular. Not only did they produce stories to examine the concept from a variety of angles, but they also illuminated two major points of resistance blocking the consideration of this concept, much like negating the flow of forward motion during a theatrical improvisation game.

Block #1 – Vulnerability as strength? One of the bigger hurdles to jump in the interviews centered on our perceptions of vulnerability. Initially, each participant could only seem to connect stories of vulnerability to weakness, victimhood, and negativity. Even with concept prompts quoting well-known performing arts experts like Stephen Nachmanovitch's sentiment "The only road to strength is vulnerability" (1990, p. 55), there was a palpable reluctance to the thought of linking vulnerability to strength. Physically, the participants seemed subdued and spoke with a lot of pauses and nervous laughter, giving me the impression that they

were uncomfortable allowing themselves to consider a notion that was somehow against their training. They voiced their difficulties with comments such as:

1. You know...this is hard because, when you think of vulnerability, you tend to think of the sad stuff. [Laughter]
2. I feel like most of my experiences in theatrical productions were generally positive. But now that I'm talking with you, I guess vulnerability doesn't just mean a negative outcome.

However, no one had any hesitation when it came to connecting stories about resilience to strength. Everyone spoke energetically and enthusiastically about the high importance of learning about how to overcome a fear or a problem. In fact, one of the participants who expressed how hard it was to connect vulnerability to a positive strength revealed the following after telling three stories of resilience:

I mean I get weepy eyed when I see the change in a kid that I worked with even just last year. It breaks my heart and not in a sad way, but in a joyful way. Yeah...I've had hundreds of experiences like that.

While I did not force any ideas upon the participants, we did probe further into the idea that each of their stories of resilience seemed to involve journeying through a vulnerable situation rather than avoiding it. It soon became apparent that resilience is a strength only gained via vulnerability, supporting the notions brought forth by Nachmanovitch (1990) and Brown (2012b). This placed the concept of vulnerability under a new, broader set of lights in each of the interviews. It lit the way for us to reconsider who and what could now be considered vulnerable.

Block #2 – Who can be vulnerable? In my opinion, the six participants and I are considered accomplished, competent, and confident adults, who have all worked in and around

theatre throughout the majority of our lives. For anyone who works in the theatre arts, considering vulnerability from the standpoint of the personal exposure from playing a particularly intense role or working with a vulnerable population is familiar territory. However, examining the notion of strength through vulnerability and the consideration of the vulnerability of the every-student seemed to take each participant into unknown territory. They were hesitant at the beginning of their interviews, expressing concern that they weren't sure what they could really offer to this study. I could almost see a physical barrier preventing the participants from allowing themselves to *really* be considered vulnerable. To me, their demeanor and laughter seemed to almost be apologizing for even daring to bring up their "trivial" experiences, as if their minds were filled with comparisons to others who were more easily viewed as the "most vulnerable."

Yet once they accepted my assurances that I was purposefully looking into the everyday vulnerabilities of any student, not those designated to a specific vulnerable population or individually tragic event, any hesitancy disappeared. A sentiment shared among all, including myself, was the surprise at how quickly and vividly even the seemingly smallest moments of vulnerability then jumped into mind, no matter how long ago the moments actually occurred. In fact, the connection made between the apparent smallness of the moment and the vividness of the recollection resulted in laughter and admonishments of the ridiculousness of it all with qualifications such as "This all seems so silly now" and "Well, I don't have anything really big...more like small moments really." This type of disclaimer popped up in the majority of the stories retold, which were the same stories that revealed an unquestionable vulnerability of school life. That, in and of itself, is revelatory about what we have been trained to perceive, expect, and assume when it comes to who and what are allowed to be considered vulnerable.

Allowance & Flow

Once the participants accepted that I did not view any story as too trite or silly, it was as if I had granted the interviewees permission to engage with the notion of vulnerability of any student without the shame-based limitation of comparison to “students with real problems.” The participants became more vibrant in the retelling as if it was “ok to go there now,” particularly in the stories from their own childhood. With only the request to consider this notion and not the demand to believe it, we moved passed the blocks, and the narrative expeditions began to flow more quickly and easily.

As I continually reassured the participants throughout the interviews that there was no right or wrong response and that the idea under consideration might lead to nowhere, the reluctance to look at vulnerability differently changed into allowance, another of the more revelatory aspects of the study. To become aware of the number of students who we may or may not have allowed to be considered vulnerable, including ourselves, gave pause to every one of us in the study. In fact, one participant stopped right in the middle of a story about a child, thought for a moment, and simply blurted out, “I’m now thinking that just an entire kid is vulnerable, is vulnerable, is vulnerable!” The allowance of this one concept, that every child is vulnerable, opened a door in each interview to reconsider the necessities of education in general—the notion that one of the expressed purposes of education needs to be to help students learn to navigate vulnerability.

Learning to Navigate Vulnerability as Curricular

This new open door signaled a change in consciousness toward the notion under consideration, revealing a space which allowed for transformative opportunities (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006; Doll, W.E., Jr., 2009). It was as if we could see our minds begin to swirl the

ideas around, discovering new possibilities of what a modern day curriculum needs to include without necessarily a drastic change to what we currently look upon as education. As one participant put it, the step into this new direction is just a continuation of education as seen from an inquiry-based, pedagogical perspective. With the acceptance of the vulnerability involved in simply asking a question, in not knowing, in being curious, and in exploring completely what it means to be human, we began to see that those subjects deemed traditionally academic, such as math, science, and reading, have always been working in and around our vulnerabilities, providing us with the tools to better navigate that which we may encounter outside the boundaries of our educational systems. Thus, connecting current educational systems to the idea of providing a place to practice navigating vulnerability not only seems possible, but seems utterly logical.

If we then acknowledge that education is already a place for practicing navigating vulnerability, we can then ask if our current system is officially addressing all that vulnerability encompasses. The stories collected from just six participants for this study brought to light over 60 different points of vulnerability that can be experienced daily as part of childhood education and that absolutely interfere with a student's ability to learn. I must point out that none of those points relate to a vulnerability extending from any trouble with an academic subject. In fact, the majority of the points fall into social interaction/life skills category, which do not fall under the *official* academic purview of teaching core subjects such as Math, Science, Reading/Writing, Literature, Social Studies, or History, although, of course, teachers might be *choosing* to address some of these points in their classrooms.

The research supports the idea that participation in the theatre arts has the potential to address all of the points on the list, especially if we expand exposure to good quality theatre arts

education to include not only students but teachers, as well. Again, if we were to operate on the premise that one of the core purposes of education is to help students practice navigating vulnerability, we need to extend the boundaries of that considered core subject matter. Put in this light, might not traditional core subjects *and* the theatre arts now share the same core stage equally in education?

Participation in Theatre As a Means to Practice Vulnerability

As I noted before, a key aspect of this research came through the difficulty for theatre experts to open up their definitions and perceptions of vulnerability. What started as reluctance, as if completely averse to the subject, changed to excitement, intrigue, and expressed moments of brilliance and wanting to continue with this exploration. We could see it turning everything on its head, so to speak, in the interviews. Once we allowed ourselves to conceptually distinguish and separate *vulnerability* from any acts that might be perpetrated against or any conditions that might afflict the vulnerable, we were better able to see the vulnerability of all students, of that which is to be human in general. In fact, we couldn't unsee it. We all seemed to reach this point where we couldn't *unknow* what we were finding in this journey into the unknown, particularly as it took us to new vantage points from where to view our own individual work with theatre and education. "The *point* of cognitive development is not to gain an increasingly complete grasp of abstract principles. It is to interpret from as many vantage points as possible lived experience, the ways there are of being in the world" (Greene, 1988, p. 120).

Per the research, theatre is play. It's creativity and imagination and expanding your mind. Theatre has rules and responsibilities. It has the ability to foster positive self-image and acceptance, confidence, compassion, resilience, finding your voice, and healthy group interactions and relationships. But also per the research, theatre can do the exact opposite. It can

be a place of judgment, shaming, bullying, and manipulation. This supports the notion that positive outcomes from theatre are not a guarantee. For example, parents often blindly trust that theatre programs will *automatically* have their child's interest as a top priority because "theatre is good for you." However, some of the participants and I have witnessed directors who, even in children's theatre, worried more about getting that great review in the paper than they did about the children under their care. The point being that, just like any other organized educational program, we would need to find those adults who keep the well-being of their students and practicing navigating vulnerability as paramount concerns. We wouldn't need to necessarily change the art of theatre, but we would need to change our awareness level of the variety of ways theatre impacts the vulnerability of its participants.

The research supports a full range of theatre genres as having equal merit under the heading of theatre. Educationally valuable participation in the theatre arts ranges from creative drama and improvisation to full theatrical productions, from live theatre to film, from performers and crew to audience members. However, the abilities to speak to be heard and to publicly present ideas confidently are specifically noted as unquestionably necessary skills for success in school and life. Thus, incorporating some sort of efficacious theatrical performance experience, not just creative play, as a curricular requirement is seen to be of great benefit to the education of any student.

Practicing vulnerability and theatre go hand in hand as theatre is also about rehearsal. In theatre we try out ideas, we rehearse, and we practice what we are learning. It does not only exist on paper. However, although participation in theatre is clearly seen as essential to any pedagogy that includes navigating vulnerability, the research does not produce any one way to structure it as curriculum. There are beginnings of ideas, but, frankly, we did not have the time or energy in

the interviews to get to intricacies of curricular planning due to the intensity of the journey just to get us to this point. All participants in the study do support research into more detailed curriculum planning as a highly desirable next step.

As part of that next step, the research brings to light two cautions in particular on the use of theatre that need to be considered. First, one participant initially expressed that we would need to be mindful of how and when we ask students to participate, especially if they are not participating willingly. However, unwilling students can currently be found in a variety of required school subjects, making the issue of mandatory participation not specific only to theatre. Second, all participants were very clear that we would also need to remember that we are specifically *not* talking about the use of drama therapy and psychodrama, which are not meant for guiding the every-student, but rather are programs for very specific individuals and therapeutic concerns.

It is abundantly clear that all participants support utilizing the theatre arts as a curricular solution to allow students to practice vulnerability. This is actually somewhat of a surprise to me. I had been worried that the idea of the theatre and practicing vulnerability might be taboo, pushing too far, having no use in the practical world. To the contrary, once over the initial reluctance, the participants were willing to embrace the idea to the point of recognizing the essential need not only for the young, but for the adults connected with education to have it as part of their education, as well. This extended beyond theatre educator training to include teachers of any subject. One participant went so far as to suggest that any adult from any career path should have some sort of performing/theatre arts training as a requirement for graduation from university.

I have chosen to end this section with a sentiment that a participant sent to me, attached to the interview transcript approval notice, several weeks *after* our interview together. I think this best exemplifies the impact that even the consideration of theatre as a curricular means to practice vulnerability had on all of us in this study:

I am really struck now by the fact that to step into any kind of creative work is—by its very nature—to practice vulnerability. It is unavoidable! To share a rehearsal or design idea, express an opinion, suggest a technical solution, move into another actor’s personal space, submit to the guidance of a director, brave the response of an audience, lend your own persona to that of a character, allow yourself to be measured for a costume, or do the measuring, rely on the technical crew for your safety, or even read the review that comes out in the paper. All involve risk and all are acts of vulnerability. The *goal* is the best production we can make. And the only way to pursue that goal is *through* vulnerability.

(Participant)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I am grateful to the participants who were willing to venture with me and explore the connections between curriculum, theatre and drama, and vulnerability. In my opinion, the resultant narrative data expressed through *métissage* yields an empathic means to a different way of understanding the experiences of others. It provides us with an opportunity to consciously open up a dialogue around subject matter that can be difficult to think about, let alone discuss with anyone, and prompts new levels of questioning, rather than providing concrete answers, which good theatre tends to do (Neelands & Goode, 2000; Heathcote, 1984). It lights up a stage from where we can play with and construct new meanings and points of view, thereby,

challenging the existing structures and concepts surrounding the purposes of education in general and participation in theatre in particular.

While this study did not produce specific plans of execution, it does yield a better understanding of the concepts of this exploration, including the acknowledgment that *practicing navigating vulnerability* and *practicing vulnerability* can be accepted as useful terminology in educational pursuits, especially in regard to *currere* (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009; Pinar & Grumet, 1976). If to question and to admit you don't know something is a vulnerability, as suggested in this study, then to seek to be educated is a vulnerable act. Enrolling in school with others who are witnesses to this vulnerability is then a brave public act, demanding courage and strength. To confine the notion of vulnerability within the limited bounds of victimhood and weakness is doing ourselves and our children a grave disservice, especially when we consider the rather dangerous connection to invulnerability as strength.

Acknowledging that everyone is vulnerable gives us a platform to bring vulnerability in from the margins. Far from neutralizing the term, I feel that the recognition that everyone is vulnerable heightens one's sensitivity to the possibility of and layers of vulnerabilities for all, thus, serving as a bridge of connection and compassion toward those who might be experiencing greater vulnerabilities at any given time. It also serves to remind us that the levels and magnitude of the vulnerabilities of any one person can vary throughout one's lifetime, thereby, freeing one from the label of "once weak, always weak."

If we were to stop looking at the vulnerable as permanent victims, stop creating people who think they aren't allowed to be vulnerable, and embrace the vulnerability that is to be human, we have an opportunity to reconsider the concept of education as a whole. This study asks the reader to think of education in terms of learning and practicing to navigate vulnerability.

Notice how that encompasses the full spectrum of our current educational offerings from core academic subjects to vocational training, from sex education to forensics, from sports to the arts, while allowing us to look at the life of a student between the academic cracks, so to speak. To practice navigating vulnerability or to practice vulnerability can be an umbrella term to unify different tracts of education by providing a common objective, languaged in a way that no longer dances around or hints at the issue, but rather deals with vulnerability and the total personhood of every student directly, officially, and out loud.

The notion of practicing vulnerability as a curricular priority might not change what we offer in schools, but how we value what we're offering and how we support it. If every person is vulnerable, those who do *not* avoid working through their vulnerabilities have a distinct *advantage* in life over those who do avoid it. Ideally, a typical elementary through high school educational system provides students with the tools and information to navigate their lives better. Yet even more than that, it provides a place to *practice* using those tools and information in a safe environment. Thus, participation in the theatre arts, with its inherent ability to paradoxically safely rehearse vulnerabilities, can be seen as an essential core, curricular response to one of the purposes of education—that of allowing students to practice navigating vulnerability. No longer relegated to fringes, first in line to be cut in a budget crisis, the theatre arts would share the same stage as the other core subjects.

Future Implications

What started as a narrative exploration into the notion of the potential of participation in theatre as a means to enable students to practice vulnerability in schools expanded to include enabling the adults connected with education, as well. Therefore, the implications for future research lie on several levels:

1. A broader study on practicing vulnerability as one of the purposes of education for the healthy social and personal development of every student, including adult education.
2. A broader study on participation in theatre arts as a curricular, core necessity for allowing students to practice vulnerability, including adult education.
3. A broader study on participation in theatre as a curricular, core necessity for allowing any adults connected to the educational process to practice vulnerability.
4. An exploration into the details of concrete applications of participation in theatre for school systems to implement to specifically allow students to practice vulnerability. This would need to address developmental appropriateness, types and levels of participation, genre possibilities, and educator responsibilities.
5. An exploration into the vulnerability of the teaching theatre artist.
6. An exploration into the vulnerability of the graduate student/researcher.

As to the more immediate impact, it is my intent the *Métissage Circle Theatre Script* from this study entitled “To Practice Vulnerability?” be available for readings at school board meetings, parent-teacher meetings, teacher organizations, departments of education, theatre and drama organizations, theatre artist groups, and educational policy decision-makers. The script gently invites the readers to begin to explore, ask questions, and discuss the educational possibilities, as well as, provides a low-risk opportunity to navigate the vulnerability experienced when simply encountering the very subject of our own vulnerability. In my opinion, it provides access and allows contribution to the utterly complicated conversation (Pinar, 1996) that is curriculum, reeling it back in from that distant institutionalized world to a more personally meaningful connection to our human experience. Formalized or not, “every bit of our culture is

school” (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 117). As a final note for those of us in the theatre arts specifically, I see this script as a reminder that the difference between good theatre and bad theatre is a matter of consciousness.

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