The Play Is The Thing
An Investigation of Play Based Learning Strategies

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract
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An emphasis on the mastery of specific information may be exclusive of effective methods of discovery, expression and understanding. To investigate, an exploration of the effect of play based learning strategies, relative to addressing the curriculum expectations of the Ontario Ministry of Education in the Social Sciences, was undertaken. The qualitative research methodology utilized elite interviews, student surveys and researcher field notes to acquire data from events arising from the deployment of an arts based research unit in grade eight history. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed together with phenomenological considerations of the researcher’s involvement and aims. Results of the investigation included the discovery that a play based strategy such as drama is highly regarded by teachers because it can motivate students and promote multidimensional involvement in learning. Also revealed was that such strategies are seldom utilized because of teachers’ concerns with their skill in this area, student behaviour, time limitations and issues of evaluation.
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my loving parents,
without whose creativity I would not be a player in the cosmic drama;
who not only taught me the serious business of living,
but also the power of faith, humour and love.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The title of this study is borrowed from the lines of one of William Shakespeare's best known and most studied plays, Hamlet Prince Of Denmark.

"The play's the thing, wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king."\(^1\)

This line encapsulates the rationale of this study so well, that I could not help but adopt it. Just as the morose Prince of Denmark hoped to investigate his suspicions about his stepfather and uncle Polonius through observing the usurper's responses to a drama, I intend to investigate my own suspicions with respect to teaching strategies by employing the same device of the drama. Although we are separated by the line demarcating fact from fiction, our ends are the same.

Rationale for the Study

Hypothesis

Play seems to be an essential human behaviour that begins with infancy and persists in many forms into and throughout adulthood. Teaching strategies which are based upon an appreciation for and incorporate the principles of play, therefore, may be efficacious and effective because they "go with the grain" of human behaviour.

Educational Context

Activities described in this study will be undertaken with teacher-partners as part of the implementation process for the 1998 History, Geography and Social Studies Ontario Curriculum document. To this end and because of the timing of this proposal, the study will be deployed during the delivery of the Grade Eight History unit of study "The

\(^1\) Hamlet Act II, Scene ii in The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, pg. 949
Development of Western Canada”.

Arts Education Context

Central to the intent of this research study is to seek engaging methods which enable the promotion of personal growth and awareness of the individual through interaction, reflection and integration. Student participants will have opportunities for exploration and expressive investigation through varied visual and dramatic arts activities in many modes and media. One of the ultimate aims of the study is to gain an appreciation for the play element in culture, as it relates to discovery, exploration and transformation, especially through involvement in the arts.

Expected Significance of the Study

I expect that this thesis will add to present knowledge in education by elucidating the play element in culture as it relates to serving as an approach to engaging human curiosity and desire to learn. Such an approach will be examined against the practical necessities of delivering curriculum and instruction in the social sciences. Central to this examination will be the consideration of the practical, energizing context of the arts as a means of applying significant learnings and discoveries. The focus of the study therefore, will be upon events and reflections which arise from the execution of an arts based, integrated unit of study which incorporates strategies embodying the key components of play as a vehicle for discovery, expression and understanding. This study as proposed has the potential to produce fruitful and useful research, strategies and propositions which can enhance the practice of arts and social studies teaching professionals.

Statement of the Problem

Students and teachers in Ontario schools currently operate under curriculum imperatives
which assert that the explicit demonstration of government directed skills, content and attitudes constitutes a sound education, preparation for the world of work and social life as an adult citizen of Canada.

"The focus of teaching and learning in the Social Sciences, History and Geography curriculum is on the development of essential knowledge and skills. Students must develop a thorough knowledge of basic concepts that they can apply in a wide range of situations. They must also develop the broad-based skills that are vital to success in the world of work..."\(^2\)

This assertion places an emphasis on the mastery of discrete pieces of information and specified skills and at the same time, implies not only the effectiveness of instructional strategies which bring such mastery about, but how instructional time should be employed. Doing so, however, excludes a strategic approach that not only acknowledges an essential facet of human culture, but may prove effective and important in both motivating and engaging learners to achieve.

**Objectives of the Investigation**

As a researcher I plan to explore the relationship of the play element of culture to learning and investigate the use of play based learning strategies as a means of addressing the curriculum expectations required by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training in the Social Sciences. The value of my study will lie in describing the location of the play element of culture relative to learning, together with describing the effect of play based learning strategies in an adolescent learning context.

It is the purpose of this study therefore to compare and reflect upon my own experience

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\(^2\) The Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies Grades 1 to 6, History and Geography Grades 7 to 8, page 2
and beliefs, as much as to investigate the effect of a specific play based strategy in the current educational milieu.

**The Thesis in Operational Terms**

The thesis will be tested utilizing a series of clearly defined phases of inquiry, application and feedback. Phase One consists of a comprehensive literature examination and philosophical formulation, together with the generation of an original arts based research unit designed for grade eight history students, which incorporates the principles of the play element of culture. Phase Two consists of the unit’s deployment, and observation of its use by teachers and students in a number of York Region District Board of Education schools. Phase Three consists of the collation, analysis and summarization of teacher and student responses. A significant component of Phase Three will be the articulation of the researcher’s anecdotal observations from field notes made relative to the theoretical position formulated in Phase One.
**Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

**Introduction**

Although commonly acknowledged as the characteristic activity of the young, play is also perceived as a mysterious enterprise, leading some to suggest that

"...understanding physics is child’s play compared to understanding child’s play."\(^1\)

We can knowingly smile in sympathy with this sentiment; however, for enthusiastic physicists this statement may not seem entirely fair or accurate. Physics, or any branch of science (however difficult or abstract to the layman) when approached from the standpoint of exploratory play can have not only the rapt fascination, but the thrill of encountering the unknown and excitement associated with discovery, as with children at play.

"Dr. Pauling speaks of the delightful and sometimes hazardous experiments he did in his bedroom, and his sense that it was such a spontaneous and playful experimenting that set the stage for his entire creative life. Would Linus Pauling have become Dr. Pauling without this early play?"\(^2\)

As the history of science will attest, many useful technological and profound conceptual insights which have transformed our world have resulted from apparently fruitless avenues of playful exploration. The same could be said to be true of the arts, commerce, or any branch of human activity in which the participants are engaged with the same passion, curiosity, abandon and intensity as children at play. Perhaps it could be that play is not so exclusive to the young after all, but an essential feature of human behaviour. That there is instrumental value to play, beyond the random and accidental discovery is attested by the thousands of citations in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education library catalogue, when engaged under the search heading of "play". It seems plain that play is established as an ubiquitous area of professional

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\(^1\) *Children and Their Art*, Gaitskin, pg. 171
interest and activity in educational literature; however, almost without exception, the citations referred to deal almost exclusively with early childhood and primary school education.

Furthermore, play is dignified with an official position in the current Ministry of Education and Training kindergarten document,

"It has long been acknowledged that there is a strong link between play and learning... [and that] Play therefore has a legitimate and important role to play..."^3

but is not referred to again in any other grade or subject document, except relative to dramatic instruction and there, despite a strenuous statement of support of the value of role playing^4, the concept of play as a learning strategy is generally absent or employed in the noun usage, as a thing and not an activity.

Central to the aim of this study is investigating methods of recognizing and making explicit play as a technique essential to the healthy growth of the individual and a fun, fruitful school experience for children, in which they learn to navigate the serious world of adulthood. To this end, this chapter will contextualize the concept of play relative to an overarching cultural philosophy, survey notions of play in pedagogical theory and focus this thinking in terms of the operation of this study.

**The Animal Kingdom**

One of the most endearing images that comes to mind is that of young animals at play. The absorbed, exuberant prancing, pouncing, gamboling and wrestling that defines the activity of any young creature is acknowledged not only as the proper and important work of preparation for life as an adult, but as central to an understanding of the irrepressibility of the life force itself.

That this apparently fruitless play behaviour is of biological utility to the organism later in life was asserted by biologist Karl Groos (1901) and is of importance for our understanding here. he

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^3The Kindergarten Program, Ontario Ministry of Education, pg. 6
^4The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1 to 8: The Arts, Ontario Ministry of Education, pg. 46
suggested that rather than being a mere purposeless discharge of superabundant energy, as Herbert Spencer (1860) suggested, the play of animals and humans is in fact a preparation for life. Young animals playing (e.g. cats pouncing and stalking) are in reality practicing skills they will use as adults. Similarly, when human children play (house for example) they are engaging in preparatory activity for assuming adult roles. From a neuro-biological standpoint this makes sense too, that

"...an animal plays most vigorously at precisely the time when its brain cells are frenetically forming synaptic connections, creating a dense array of neural links that can pass on electrochemical messages from one neighborhood of the brain to the next."6

At what point, however, in the development of a living creature, does play end and the serious business of maturity begin? The knowledge, skills and attitudes gained through playful practice at some point become the behaviour defining the very essence of animals, however they fit into the great, interdependent web of life and assure their survival.

"Among highly social species play assumes the added task of easing an animal’s passage into group life, where overly selfish or hostile tendencies must be tamed if not eliminated."7

What becomes of the playfulness, once the matter of survival becomes an animal’s predominant aim? Does it simply disappear, supplanted by the immediacy of the life activity of an adult organism, or is play ever present as part of the perfectly adapted behaviour which enables survival and perpetuation. Surely the many hours of practice through play which seem to focus the raw energy of activity and permit the satisfaction of the basic life impulses of any organism do not simply disappear or become unimportant. The very fact of play’s prominence in the youth of animals suggests a deeper significance, that play is an essential tool to survival:

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5 The Play of Man, Groos, 1901, page 97
6 Serious Play, Angier, 1992 in Mann, 1996 page 461
7 ibid., page 5
Human Culture

That play functions as the source and soul of human society is the subject of *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element In Culture*, in which cultural historian Johan Huizinga analyzed ten major components of culture in terms of their play origins. His position is that play is a pure expression of the life force and that everything we recognize as valuable, enriching and ennobling in our culture has derived from it. Huizinga identified play as an indispensable feature of every human enterprise.

"...an absolute, primary category of life, familiar to everybody at a glance right down to the animal level."\(^8\)

Play is a function of living for Huizinga, but he suggests that it defies logical, biological or aesthetic definition since it exists on its own, for its own purposes, in ever-changing and sometimes incomprehensible forms. Even so, he hazarded a description of what he called the “play-character” which has been adopted as the primary observational and interpretive structure of this study. Huizinga suggested that play was a voluntary activity, executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules which are freely accepted, but absolutely binding. Its aim is in itself and its undertaking is accompanied by feelings of tension, joy and consciousness of being different from ordinary life.

Just as play is found everywhere in the animal kingdom as an integral part of the maturation and eventual definition of an adult animal’s role and behaviour in the wild, so has it been suggested (Huizinga 1954) that in the origin and ongoing history of the human race, play can be found at the root of every enterprise collectively defined as the culture of human groups. As a cultural historian, Huizinga concerned himself with the task of studying the themes, symbols, concepts, ideas, styles and sentiments of ages past. He felt that such components taken together expressed

\(^8\) *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga, pg. 2
a characteristic "spirit" of an age, which epitomized the mode of thought, feeling or action fundamentally characteristic of a particular period. For him this spirit finds its ultimate expression in the totality of a civilization's play-forms.

"Social life is endowed with supra-biological forms, in the shape of play, which enhance its value. It is through this playing that society expresses its interpretation of life and the world."9

Before considering this, however, what exactly is it we mean by the word 'culture'? It seems that in common usage it generally denoted different understandings about belief and behaviour, rooted mostly in personal experience. That there is much confusion surrounding the actual meaning of this word is not surprising, for I have found that there as many nuances of meaning as there are usages among specialized savants and literati. For example, among anthropologists, culture

"...is that which men create for themselves and transmit to their successors by other than biological means. Culture is the common characteristic of man...[and] are particular historical realizations of the common human potential."10

Archaeologists, as a subset of anthropologists, tend to focus on the material remains of social behaviour as discovered in the archaeological record. For them culture is defined as

"... the consistent recurrence of an assemblage (a group of artifacts found together in a closed context of association) limited in time and place."11

Sociologists on the other hand would include the intangibles, saying that culture consists of the 'social heritage' of a community. That is,

"...the total body of material artifacts, of collective mental and spiritual 'artifacts' and of distinctive forms of behaviour created by a people in their ongoing activities within their particular life conditions, and transmitted

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9 Homo Ludens. Huizinga, pg. 46  
10 Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought. Bullock, pgs. 149-150  
11 ibid.
In his book *The Culture We Deserve*, Jacques Barzun (1989) examines the state of affairs in contemporary art, education and morality in an attempt to describe what he identifies as a tyranny of method and analysis over the substance and spirit of human culture. Barzun uses an agricultural metaphor to explain that he means by culture

"...the traditional things of the mind and spirit, the interests and abilities acquired by taking thought: in short the effort that used to be called cultivation-cultivation of the self...The implication is that the raw substance of the creature has been turned over, plowed, and seeded with good germs and in such a way that the potentialities of both the human being and what has been implanted are visibly and usefully realized."

and for the literal-minded, the Oxford English Dictionary gives the word’s primary contemporary definition as

"The action or practice of cultivating the soil; tillage, husbandry."

So in the botanical-biological sense we get to the actual literal meaning of the word ‘culture’ as describing a medium which promotes growth and I think for educators, this to be the most relevant usage. We can say confidently then, that an educational culture for children must refer to the context or medium from which children draw psychic and social sustenance as they grow.

Coupled with Huizinga’s reasoning, insofar as culture can be understood from Barzun as a condition which promotes growth, the constituent components of any given culture which are transmitted to the young through its intentional and unintentional institutional practices may be considered as forms of play. Furthermore, the degree to which such transmission is open, free flowing or intuitive, is a measure of that culture’s fecundity with respect to nurturing the human spirit. The earnest, authority driven approach and attitude, by contrast, takes itself and its

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12 *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Bullock, pg. 149-150
13 *The Culture We Deserve*, Barzun, pg. 3-4
content very seriously; stressing the importance of conformity and achievement of externally approved goals. These for Huizinga are the hallmarks of a moribund or already dead culture, one bereft of the playful joy and “juice” that makes life worth living.

Play As A Learning Strategy

In the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, eight pages of micro-printed etymological references are devoted to elucidating the 36 separate meanings and usages of the word ‘play’ and its derivatives. Its primary definition is

“Of living beings: Active bodily exercise; brisk and vigorous action of the body or limbs, as in fencing, dancing, leaping, swimming, clapping of the hands...”

and within the context of Huizinga’s analysis and description of all human cultural activity as “play forms” expressive of what he called the ‘agonistic principle’ of striving for excellence, honour, recognition, or first place, this makes sense.

Plato (375 B.C.) noted the value of play in living well:

“I say that a man must be serious with the serious. God alone is worthy of supreme seriousness, but man is made God’s plaything, and that is the best part of him...Life must be lived as play, playing certain games, making sacrifices, singing and dancing, and then a man will be able to propitiate the gods and defend himself against his enemies and win in the contest.”

It is significant to see the ancient and complex pedigree of play, since this alone adds weight to Huizinga’s position that play has always been with humanity as an essential, defining feature of our existence. However, continuing in this vein will not address the immediate question of the place of play in schools. A contemporary analysis therefore, suggests an examination of the various categories of play described by current pedagogical theorists.

Play provided an important “release function” in Vygotsky’s (1932) schema of development,

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16 ibid., pg.972
17 Laws, Plato, viii, 803
channelling energy and the impetus to move and emote. It is also a context for the development of both large and small muscle coordination as well as the practice and application of linguistic and expressive faculties, to say nothing of the value of safe exploratory activity which is expansive, interesting and enriching in its own right.

In writing on child drama and its implications for human development, Peter Slade (1954) defined play as falling into one of two groups of activity, personal or projected. In projected play, in which children animate objects, they

"...gain emotional and physical control, confidence, ability to observe, tolerate others, blow off steam and make contact with imaginary adventure."\(^\text{18}\)

Personal play, which involves the child’s physical being as a medium of expression, contains all of the benefits described above, but with the added value of enabling total expression through immersion and navigation through one’s own mentality. These two broad characterizations of play are in no way relegated to children only. How many adults enjoy hobbies that focus on the utterly absorbing manipulation of things, or involvement of the entire person in solo or group activity? The more we look, the more we see that there is no such thing as “child’s play”, but play as a fundamental feature of our humanity.

In contrast to Slade, Maria Montessori (1967) transferred Groos’ theory, which acknowledged the utility of play as preparation for adult life as well as serving as an aesthetic precursor, into the dictum stating that ‘play is the child’s work’, adopting a more instrumental approach to play, as being subordinate to social adaptation. In connection with this instrumental description of play is Freud’s (1911) suggestion that play (in the form of dreams, jokes and drama) was important in its own right as a kind of safety valve for dealing with and discharging socially unacceptable feelings, wishes and desires. This occurred Freud theorized as part of the

\(^{18}\) Child Drama, Slade, p. 106
achievement of equilibrium between the two adaptive modes of “Primary Process” satisfaction of the individual’s basic needs, and the “Secondary Process” of satisfying society’s external requirements. Play was therefore a form of essential self and social love since by means of its undertaking, the individual looks after their needs, resulting in the ability to look after others. Jean Piaget (1962) mirrored Freud’s central placement of play in the primary and secondary process of individual adaptation, in describing the interaction between assimilation and accommodation behaviours. For Piaget the process of assimilation involved play in the transformation of reality in the service of satisfying personal needs, whereas accommodation was concerned with the individual adaptation to the external world of work. For both Freud and Piaget, play and work are separate but complementary ideas necessary for healthy adaptation of the individual to society. One could argue, however, given the current educational milieu that both positions on play have been supplanted by a resurgence of interest in Montessori’s idea of play as children’s work. It certainly seems as if there is some kind of hurry, which pressures children through the current education system’s interminable lists of ‘essential learning expectations’, to make social accommodation at the expense of personal assimilations, which means even the youngest will work more than they play.

In his discussion pertaining to the future evolution of the human brain in the context of digital extensions of vision, and mind, Carl Sagan (1977) describes a salutary result from the playful manipulation of games and models in computer generated virtual spaces, suggesting

“...the important function of play is thus revealed: it permits us to gain, without any particular future application in mind, a holistic understanding of the world, which is both a complement of and preparation for later analytical activities.”

Gamlin (1980) coined the neologism “plearning” to signify his assertion that play and learning

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19 *Dragons of Eden*, Sagan, pg. 226
are virtually synonymous. The premise of his seven step approach to stimulating children’s thinking is that there is a natural progression in the kinds of activities that children enjoy and that therefore, there is a natural progression in the kinds of basic skills that children exercise and come to master. He pointed out that many people believe that having fun or playing is a kind of indulgence and somewhat trivial. However, to become proficient at a complex skill, chess for example, requires a great deal of exercising of basic skills...at play. Play is only perceived as frivolous when it is comprised of basic skills and does not appear to “pay off” immediately. That play is characterized by an insubstantial quality and may not be expected to be immediately apprehendable was described by Fromberg (1987) who closely reflected Huizinga’s definition of play. Fromberg described play as being symbolic, representing reality with “as if” or “what if” modes of operation; active, pleasurable, voluntary, episodic, rule governed (whether implicitly or explicitly expressed); meaningful in connecting or relating experiences and characterized by emerging and shifting goals that are developed spontaneously.

Johnson, Klugman and Smilansky (1990) refer to a direct relationship between discovery through dramatic play and academics. They elaborated the notion of “playing pretend” to include three stages of functionality and awareness: Imitative Role Play, Make-Believe and Sociodrama, organized in an ascending order of interactivity, imagination and effort required. They foreground Vygotsky’s (1930) ideas that thinking abstractly means creating mental pictures or symbols that stand for real objects or events. When in dramatic play, children develop the ability to substitute symbols for real objects and events.

Trister-Dodge and Colker (1992) proposed four types of play that each contribute something different, but essential to a child’s development and academic success. Functional play occurs from six months to six years of age and allows the child to explore and examine functions and properties of objects and materials. It is described as a sensory experience of the world, enabling
understanding of the environment. Constructive play involves assembly and disassembly activities in which exploration leads to understanding of relationships dealing with size, time and quantity. A third category paralleling Piaget’s developmental schema was described as Games With Rules, in which children focus concentration, understand the concept of rules and relationships, control behaviour and deal with success and failure. Lastly, Dramatic play which involves children in pretend, socio-dramatic play and taking a role. The most interesting thing for this study to emerge is their assertion that

“there is a direct relationship between the ability to pretend and children’s academic success.”

Of particular importance here is to note that when children play, or undertake any activity for that matter, what they do is not the same as when well-meaning adults intervene to shape play into an educational experience, or participate as players themselves. The spontaneous, self organizing nature of children’s learning through play may be immediately deflated by the imposition of a utilitarian “objective” or “expectation. The question then is whether children should be left alone to do whatever they might. In a word, I think the answer is yes, to the extent that providing both context and instruments, as in dramatic play, is enough. The personal injection of meaning through play is always present in any situation. The central point is that learning through play may be promoted, but not controlled. Moreover, no matter how well intentioned, extensively structured or aggressively advocated the curriculum model and methods of instruction, as Brickell’s (1980) synthesis of educational research indicated

“Given a particular student and a particular teacher, the length of time they are together influences student learning more than anything else. Once those three are established, researchers will discover little if any significant difference among various teaching methods.”

20 The Creative Curriculum For Early Childhood, Trister-Dodge, pg. 45
21 “Behavioral Objectives In Creative Dramatics”, Ayllon, pg. 355-359
22 “How To Change What Matters”, Brickell, pg. 202-207
If this assertion is true, then teachers who have to deal with curriculum systems as time consuming in terms of the minutae of content and execution of record keeping as the Ontario Curriculum, have little time, or at least not as much time as might be desirable, to interact with their students, or engage in activities essential for true learning. Additionally, all "professional" methods being equal, how much more important might it be for children, that when maximizing interaction time with students, teachers employ, promote and permit such a natural and pervasive human learning process as play?

Mann (1996) identified five functions of play, the most elementary being to facilitate brain growth.

"Scientists believe that the intense sensory and physical stimulation that comes with playing is critical to the growth of [these] cerebellar synapses, and thus to proper motor development...And they suspect that other parts of the brain benefit from play stimulation as well, which is the likely reason why such big-brained species as primates and dolphins are outstandingly playful: in these creatures the brain continues to flower long after birth and hence needs as much tweaking from the outside world as possible" 23

The second function of play is to lubricate action. Mann suggests that as adults we forget how daunting life is,

"...except in those rare moments when the imperative to act is combined with ignorance" 24

Play makes it possible to act by reducing the consequences and cushioning the action with fun. Play allows children to practice life. They use play to learn what they can about what life will be like, at a much deeper level than easily recognized vocational roles. The gamut of human activity in all its emotive variation as it is perceived is explored, including intellectual and academic skills. How true this is, but how ironic that we must turn to the study of profound personal and family dysfunction through the practice of play therapy for proof, to see how

23 Serious Play, Angier 1992 in Mann, pg. 461-2
24 ibid.
deeply and significantly life impresses itself upon children through play. In addition to the exploratory function of practice is the consolidation and stabilization of prior learning. Most learning requires repetition before it becomes part of our repertoire. Play gives children a chance to “rehearse” and acquire skills through repetition, as well as a sense of mastery and achievement which can result in a powerful multiplier effect in opening the child to more learning. Play functions as a context for the unity of body, mind and spirit; a way not only to burn excess energy, exercise large and small muscle groups in purposeful action, but to exert the self in an exuberant, celebratory manner as the confluence of thought, feeling, action and potential. Finally, play permits children to learn about learning in a safe, experimental environment in which there are no consequences to failure, innovation or exploration. They learn how to process symbols and develop interpersonal behaviours, incorporating ideas and manners of being into their behaviour to accommodate and interact with others.

The Ministry of Education and Training (1999) has articulated a clear position on play in its kindergarten document

“Play provides opportunities for learning in a context in which children are at their most receptive. During play with others and with materials and equipment in their environment, children become immersed in activities through which they learn about themselves and explore their world.”

Were government bureaucrats to substitute the word ‘children’ with the word ‘people’ in this statement and support its translation into action with money and time, not only would they be in accord with Huizinga’s philosophy, this study would be unnecessary.

Implications for This Study

As is typical of qualitative inquiries, this study proceeds from a combination of personal professional experience, learning and study of curriculum documents over the last thirteen years

25 The Kindergarten Program, Ontario Ministry of Education, pg.6
of my teaching career.

"Initial questions derive from real world observations, dilemmas and questions emerging from the interplay of the researcher's direct experience, tacit theories and growing scholarly interests."\(^{26}\)

In this time I have observed what seems to be an increasingly prescriptive approach to education in the arts and social sciences, which appears to focus on the acquisition and demonstration of specific skills and discrete pieces of information. The Ministry of Education and Training has stated that theirs is the job of delimiting the "what" of education and the "how" is the job of educators.

"Teachers are responsible for developing appropriate instructional strategies."\(^{27}\)

It is my contention, however, that specifying the "what", or content to such a particular degree necessarily requires certain "hows" and that this phenomenon has resulted in a steady erosion of the place of the arts in education. To be sure, the arts are acknowledged as important means to achieving ends.

"Education in the arts is essential to students' intellectual, social, physical and emotional growth."\(^{28}\)

Educators faced with a daunting list of specific content and skills are forced to rely on methods which although conventionally sound, may not engage the learner in the most important aspect of social science inquiry which I suggest involves a personal reflective understanding and appreciation.

Coupled with this is what appears to be a gap in educational practical theory which describes the use of play and play based strategies of engaging the learner, especially through the arts. There is, as has been described, a significant body of theory and practical literature treating the use of

\(^{26}\) *Designing Qualitative Research*, Marshall and Rosman, pg.16
\(^{27}\) *The Ontario Curriculum Social Studies Grades 1-6 History and Geography Grades 7/8*, Ontario Ministry of Education, pg. 4
\(^{28}\) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1 to 8: The Arts*, Ontario Ministry of Education, pg.5
play in the primary and to a somewhat lesser extent, junior grades. This approach however, seems to dissipate once one ventures into the higher grades, where the issues of relevance and motivation become most crucial, especially with respect to traditionally and bureaucratically defined information based subjects of study in the social sciences.

Goals of the Study

If play is so powerful, why is it so difficult to see in the curriculum? If we find the assertions of writers such as Huizinga credible, then we must acknowledge the centrality of play with respect to not only the development of the human being, but the culture and institutions which derive from human activity and experience. Just as the play of young lions is transmuted into the majestic survival potential of the fully functioning pride, so play becomes us as we find our places in the world of human intercourse. If so, play deserves a higher recognition in our institutions which rely upon it and we must find ways to undo the political, intellectual and professional devolution of will and awareness, which has caused us to stray from what really matters in our schools and society. Play is universally recognized as an educational tool of great utility among primary educators and seems to have also achieved prominence in the serious adult of motivational training. This study seeks to examine the effect of play in the form of drama in a context on the very cusp of seriousness.

Research Question

What is the effect of a play based instructional strategy?

Sub-questions

i) How is play related to culture, socialization and learning?

ii) How do adolescent learners in the Social Sciences respond to play based learning strategies?
iii) In what ways can play be utilized to facilitate and maximize the engagement of students’ learning?

iv) What is the location of play relative to learning?
Chapter Three: Methodology

Rationale

This study has been designed to examine the relationship of what has been called the "play element of culture" to learning and to investigate the effect of play based strategies in the intermediate social science classroom. This study can benefit teaching practice in history, which is often viewed negatively by students as boring or not relevant, for if the effect of play based strategies prove to be positive in terms of engaging and stimulating learners, then we have a powerful tool at our disposal to use in the achievement of personal and professional goals, as well as in encouraging positive attitudes with respect to this academic discipline. The accompanying benefit of energizing and motivating learners in seeking to understand and appreciate our history and heritage can contribute to the larger cultural goal, of inculcating a reasoned pride in Canada and Canadian achievements.

General Considerations

This study represents qualitative research by virtue of its emphasis on observation and emergence from a combination of experience, learning and study on the part of the researcher. The study consists of three distinct phases of activity and timing described below.

Phase One: January - February, 1999

The concept of the play element in culture and classrooms was researched, constructed into a conceptual model and applied to adolescent learning in the context of subject and skill specific role experimentation. A review of literature investigating play and dramatic role playing as an instructional tool, as well as qualitative research methods was
undertaken. An arts based research unit entitled “Golden Spike” (Appendix One and Two) was designed for the grade 8 History course section “Opening of the West” and offered to potential teacher-partners in the York Region District Board of Education system, as a facilitating enhancement of their Ontario Curriculum implementation plan.

Phase Two: March - May, 1999

The study was activated with the teacher-partner and student groups identifying themselves as wishing to participate in the study. The plan involved a general invitation to participate outlining the study parameters and plan, a teacher briefing to discuss the study’s curriculum context and establish a comfortable set of expectations surrounding researcher field observations, teacher-partner observations, and student observations & feedback throughout the execution of the unit and the study. Researcher field note observations and participant feedback data synthesis was undertaken at the conclusion of the study activity for each participating site.

Phase Three: June - January, 1999

Multi-modal (numeric, prose and reflective) interpretation of the findings occurred with respect to the study questions. Findings were articulated and a summative discussion drafted.

Site and Population

The study took place in five York Region District School Board Grade Eight History classrooms and because of my role as practicing teacher and curriculum consultant, under ideal conditions as described by Marshall and Rossman (1995).

“The ideal site is where (1) entry is possible; (2) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions and structures of interest are present; (3) the researcher is likely able to build trusting relations with the
participants in the study; and (4) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured.”

As part of my professional duties I had access to schools, teachers, and students as well as the classrooms and programs in which the phenomena under scrutiny take place. The role of the curriculum consultant was that of a non-evaluative, support and resource person, who was invited into classrooms to give professional advice and support the development of programs as well as teaching practice in a collegial and non-judgmental manner. Central to such a relationship is the factor of trust and I am pleased to say that having served successfully in this capacity for four years, my presence was generally perceived as non-threatening and constructive by teachers and students alike. Finally, I designed the study to operate in the typical context of classroom instruction in the social sciences, supplementing by way of the arts based research unit, activities that would be undertaken anyway by grade eight History teachers in response to Ontario Ministry of Education and Training curriculum directives. This authentic context together with the triangulation achieved in my data collection strategy I believe resulted in credible and significant results.

The study population consisted of approximately one hundred seventy adolescent history students, more or less evenly divided by gender and from a wide ethno-cultural and geographic (urban and rural) background. The teachers participating were all veteran history instructors and had elected to participate in the study after full disclosure of the thesis goals, objectives, methods and instruments had been made in the spirit of co-discovery and intellectual exploration, for the betterment of teaching, learning

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1 Designing Qualitative Research, Marshall and Rossman, pg.51
and curriculum development.

**Role of the Researcher**

Although certain features of the researcher's role have already been alluded to in the previous section of this chapter, it is worthwhile to note Patton's (1990) series of continua for thinking about one's role in planning the conduct of qualitative research and to adopt this structure to clearly elaborate what I imagine myself doing. These continua are divided into technical and interpersonal considerations below and notations made with an "X" in the technical realm represent my vision of activity and commitment to observe the qualitative principles of inquiry as a researcher in the course of this study.

**Technical Considerations: Deployment of the Self**

**Particpantness**

Refers to the degree of actual participation in the daily life of the subject group.

```
[------------------------X------------------------]  
Full Participant (Goes about ordinary life in a role constructed in the setting)  
Complete Observer (No social interaction at all)
```

**Revealness**

Refers to the extent to which the fact that there was a study going on was known to the participants. I also rationalized the extent to which such knowledge would have compromised or contaminated results.

```
[------------------------X------------------------]  
Full Disclosure  
Complete Secrecy
```
Intensiveness and Extensiveness of Role

Refers in two dimensions to the amount of time I planned to spend on a daily basis with the group and the duration of the study over time.

Time Spent

[--------------------------X------------------]

Study Length

[--------------------------X------------------]

Long Time

Short Time

Specific or Diffuse Role

Refers to the kind of activity I planned to undertake as a function of the focus of the study. For example, if the study had clearly defined and specific items to investigate, I might focus on these to the exclusion of unrelated phenomena, whereas a less focused study would have permitted me to be more flexible in terms of pursuing tangential phenomena of potential interest or utility.

[--------------------------X------------------]

Specific Role

(Rigid, exclusionary)

Diffuse Role

(Flexible, inclusionary)

Technical Considerations: Negotiating Entry

There was a plan for negotiating access to site and participants through formal gatekeepers. Aspects of my involvement and participation in the study that would be useful to participants were identified.

Technical Considerations: Persistence

I made a commitment to stick with the overall strategic plan for the study while maintaining a flexible outlook and approach.
Technical Considerations: Efficiency

Resources required for the smooth execution of the study plan (supplies, photocopying professional literature, planning time, supportive involvement) were provided as part of my support role as consultant. Additionally, I committed to flexibility in scheduling and accommodating participant needs.

Interpersonal Considerations: Building Trust

I committed to adopting a non-evaluative role and to helping participants where able, as well as to maintaining their anonymity and right to withdraw their voluntary participation.

Interpersonal Considerations: Maintaining Good Relations

I committed to professionalism, dependability, consistency and courtesy and to being an active and thoughtful listener.

Interpersonal Considerations: Respecting Norms of Reciprocity

I committed to flexibility, follow-up and partnership throughout the study process.

Interpersonal Considerations: Sensitivity To Ethical Issues

I committed to full disclosure of purposes, information and proper procedures and protocol in dealing with individuals and administrative structures. The role of the researcher required tremendous patience, and sensitivity to others’ needs if participants were to feel comfortable enough for the study to proceed uncompromised and yield fruitful results. Wilson (1977) noted the difficulty of past researchers in deriving meaningful and useful findings from research since the research techniques and actions of researchers themselves affected the findings, either because research subjects were suspicious and wary of what was going on, or were aware of what the researchers were after and responded in a manner perceived to please them. I designed the study to be as
unobtrusive and useful to participants as possible, deploying it as I did in the authentic
learning context of the classroom, the curriculum context of a unit of study typically
undertaken at that time of the school year and the professional context of program
innovation in response to provincial Ministry directives. I feel that the strength of the
study lies in the transparency of the activities proposed and my role as a team teacher
since they are not uncommonly encountered in the various contexts described.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study conformed to and proceeded according to the ethical protocols of both the
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto and the York
Region District Board of Education with respect to the observation and involvement of
school age children in research. Student subjects for the study were selected by invitation
to their teachers to take part in the investigation on their behalf. No identification of
subjects in this study was required and where references to specific segments of the study
group were required or deemed significant, names were replaced with pseudonyms. Raw
data linked to specific sites or persons was numerically coded to ensure anonymity and
securely stored by the researcher in a locked facility. Upon written request, a narrative
summary of responses was made available to participants. Participants were invited to
take part in the study through a letter of consent (Appendix Six) which specified the
non-evaluative, exploratory and voluntary nature of the study and which was explained
prior to the undertaking of any research activity. Informed consent was obtained from all
participants, as well as administrative consent by participant school principals and
teachers, since the study involved the responses of individuals to the effects of curriculum
teaching and learning strategies based upon an innovative theoretical framework.
Methods

Operational Sequencing

Formation of the thesis proposal and goals was followed by telephone contact and preliminary discussion of the thesis with potential participant teachers, principals and students. In-context familiarization with the researcher in the role of curriculum consultant facilitated meetings with potential participants to examine thesis goals, the arts based research unit and instruments. Discussion around the study’s processes and methods as well as the optional nature of participant consent resulted in consent being given or reserved. Planning meetings occurred with each teacher participant to identify and book a convenient and unobtrusive project timeline within the context of school operations, in which the initiation of the arts based research unit would be consistent with extant planning. The researcher attended teacher participant classes as planned and executed observational checklists during key research and drama activity as well as recording observations in field notes. Upon conclusion of the arts based research unit, the Learning Strategy Preference Survey was administered to all student participants. Students, teachers and researcher discussed the experience in the classroom as a large group, while teachers were interviewed alone. Data were analyzed and conclusions articulated in thesis Chapter Five.

Phenomenological Reflection

At various points in this paper, the reader will note “asides” in which I examine personal questions, motives and ideas as part of navigating through the hypothesis, research, data and recollection of experience. For example, let me consider here, my thirteen year consultative and teaching career, which has included the use of integrated, arts based
strategies of engaging the natural curiosity, abilities and desire to learn of pupils in many subject areas. I have had ample opportunity to utilize and improvise upon established practices, as well as generate unique curriculum and teaching strategies. My academic career at OISE began with the desire to research efficacious teaching practices and philosophies from the past, distilling and reformulating these into a contemporary 'toolkit'. My research so far has led me to believe that any kind of general application, approach or method must transcend the limitations of any given subject, content or socially driven intention. Such a position I think would best be described as 'going with the grain' of what is commonly human, representing 'meta-learning' in the truest sense of belonging to the supra-ordinary range of skills, attentions and behaviours that operate in every person and context.

I believe that I have an effective combination of individual, school, system and academic perspectives which have catalyzed my thinking, philosophy and approach to teaching. Furthermore, my personal learning style and areas of academic interest lie at the juncture of this study as a potential solution of usefulness to myself and other teaching professionals.

Prior to setting pen to paper in the design of data collection instruments, I undertook a visualization process in which I posted my two main research questions prominently and tried to imagine the form and content of instruments that would answer them. I put my ideas down once they coalesced and then undertook the same kind of process with respect to the kind of raw data I imagined I would acquire, the interpretation activity I saw myself undertaking together with their uses and the manner in which I imagined I would present them.
Participation

An essential element of all qualitative studies is participation involving a firsthand involvement in the social world chosen for study. Marshall and Rossman (1995) suggest that immersion in the study context allows the researcher to experience reality as the participants do and forces the researcher to examine their role and how it relates to and affects the study. Please see the section in this chapter “Role of the Researcher” for specific comments and commitments to the nature, extent and focus of participation I planned to undertake in this study.

Observation

A systematic notation of events and behaviours germane to the research question and any emergent sub-questions was made using two specific instruments described below. The objective of this observation was the accumulation of data from which patterns might be extracted to determine the effect of play based strategies.

Interviewing

Since the teacher participants were influential, prominent and well informed individuals relative to the population groups studied, I chose to use an “Elite” Interview model to acquire their perspectives on the research question and student participant responses to the play based strategies deployed, as well as the Student Learning Strategy Preference Survey (Appendix Three). The Elite Interview model was here justified by virtue of the teacher participants’ expertise relative to teaching practice in history in general and familiarity with the student populations in particular.
Document Review

Part of the literature review undertaken in Chapter One involved an analysis of current Ontario Ministry of Education and Training Curriculum documents which are official policy statements outlining the values, beliefs and objectives of education in our province. The content was analysed relative to the research sub-question “What is the relationship of the play element of culture to learning?” in order to establish the theoretical context for the study and further, to construct Elite Interview questions (Appendix Five) for teacher participants, which would catalyze discussion about history teaching, teaching practices in general and play based strategies in particular.

Survey

The veracity of responses to a survey is always problematic due to the assumption that respondents understand the instructions and language of items it contains. Another unknown quality is the degree of respondents’ commitment to answer thoughtfully and seriously. Even so, a survey of student attitudes was deemed valuable from a content standpoint, since this study focuses on learning strategies chiefly employed with students, with the overall objective of informing teaching practice to better serve student learning. In short, since the study ultimately was about them and how they learn, it made sense to ask students what their experience was relative to the phenomena under study. From the operational standpoint a survey was an appropriate mode of inquiry in order to make inferences about the larger group of “adolescent history students” relative to play based learning strategies, as part of the final reasoning in the study which attempts to draw conclusions from data obtained from the necessarily smaller group of students in the study population.
Kinesics

The Researcher Field Observation Form (Appendix Four) and Researcher Field Note instruments described in greater detail below, incorporate elements aimed at analyzing patterns of non-verbal body behaviours of student participants as they are engaged in various study activities. Birdwhistell (1970) posited Kinesics as the study of body motion and its accompanying messages as a form of physical communication. The assumption in this assertion is that without being aware of it, humans are constantly engaged in adjustments to the presence and activities of other persons and that furthermore, these “adjustments” constitute a physical lexicon of meaning that a sensitive and alert researcher might observe, measure and interpret. For the purpose of this study three of the four “Vocal”, “Visual”, “Olfactory” and “Tactile” Kinesic channels were incorporated into the observation strategy of noting the presence or absence of key play behaviours, derived from Huizinga’s (1954) description of the “play-character”. This strategy served as a means of observing the degree of engagement, absorption and attunement of learners undertaking activities presented to them as part of the “Golden Spike” arts based research unit and describing the effect of play based instruction.

Instruments

Researcher Field Notes

(Play Characteristics & Vocal, Visual and Tactile Kinesic channels, Appendix Four)

The qualitative research orientation of this study focussed on participatory, observational and descriptive ways of undertaking the recording of events noticed by the researcher. Abiding by the epistemological precepts of qualitative research, this instrument was designed to focus on description with sympathy for the participants’ frame of reference.
The synthetic cultural history of Huizinga undergirds the aim of this thesis. Therefore, in designing a data instrument, it was logical to itemize the play character criteria for observational purposes relative to the research questions. This was done to determine if students were playing and discover what the effects of such activity were. The field note organizer, therefore, consists of a tally checklist composed of play character criteria “look fors”, as well as a continuum for recording whether activity noticed was positive, negative or neutral relative to the large group learning process. Both incidence of occurrence and effects were recorded as they occurred. An integral part of my role here was to question and discuss with subjects the nature and motivation of their actions as part of noting their incidence.

*Student Participant Learning Strategy Preference Survey (Appendix Three)*

The survey consisted of three sections. Section I composed of “control” questions of no real relevance to the study, but conceivably of interest to participants. They were included to reduce concern over the “test” like aspect of the survey and to encourage a sense of ownership. These consisted of questions everyone doing the survey could “get right” and had no bearing on the study. Section II consisted of 25 questions balanced between “play strategies” and “non-play strategies”, the task being a simple ranking of preference with no qualification required. Section III required students to examine their subjective emotional state during learning by choosing an emotive word in connection with a learning activity. This section was not strictly connected to preference, but was balanced to include play and non-play forms. It was designed to engage the reflective mode to try to ascertain in general, how participants felt in the context of the learning given as options.
Teacher Participant Elite Interview Questions (Appendix Five)

The ten questions proposed for this part of acquiring data were designed to be as probing as possible, but not intrusive. I also took care to balance direct questions with diffuse questions, in order to provide for a range of possible responses from “yes and no”, through factual observation statements to speculative and reflective discourses. The strategy of gaining the teacher participant’s perspective after the fact was powerful, since the teacher’s view paralleled and supplemented that of the researcher.

Framework for Data Collection

The observational methodology was been made as transparent and natural as possible in order that subjects and results were not unduly influenced, with the possible exception of the presence of the researcher, which is explained and justified according to the established role of the curriculum consultant and team teaching model in use and historically accepted in professional practice. Triangulation in data collection was achieved by specifying the three sources of researcher, teacher participants and student participants as informants and the three methods of observation, survey and interview to accumulate data related to the primary research question “What is the effect of a play based instructional strategy?”

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Experience of the Researcher

The source of this inquiry as with qualitative research was the personal experience of the researcher with respect to the implementation of government directed curriculum. The germ of the study was the experience of using play-based strategies personally, coupled with observation of colleagues in the field, generalized to the broader question “What are
we doing and how?” and also “How are we coping as residents of the institutions acting on priggish government precepts which have made a virtue of taking ourselves so seriously and taking all the fun out of learning?”

Reading and personal study of Huizinga’s work along with others led to the major research questions of how curriculum is operationalized in schools. Posting my major research questions in a prominent place on my living room wall led to many thoughtful tangential moments in which semantic, as well as conceptual analysis revealed both motive and an overall plan for investigation. Seeking an operational design for the study led me to rework tools at hand, which in many cases had proven efficacious, and to craft specialized instruments which when taken together became the treatment through which this study was undertaken. The design of proposal and methods for ethical purposes clarified my purposes of seeking to understand the phenomenon observed of technical concern to teachers with respect to new curriculum implementation. My epistemological focus became describing sympathetically the result of participation of students and teachers in curriculum implementation from their frame of reference, with the ultimate aim of arriving at a salutary method of instruction which provided curricular benefit to all involved.

Considering the proposition that reality is a socially constructed and defined phenomenon open to more than one perspective, as suggested by designers and promoters of qualitative, naturalistic inquiry such as Lincoln (1985), Patton (1990) and Marshall and Rossman (1995), I resolved to acquire first hand knowledge through field work of the curriculum situation and to describe events as they unfolded from multiple viewpoints of the various participants. I internalized many different experiences and sought to interact
with participants and collaboratively contextualize phenomena observed in the overarching philosophy of play as a culturally valuable and pervasive phenomenon.

Every effort in the research design was made to minimize the distance between researcher and participants through the use of a collaborative, in-context planning model, participatory and transparent research design which involved the researcher, as well as a triangulated data acquisition strategy which engaged the chief sources of information relative to the phenomena under study. Data yielded from the triangulated sources was carefully recorded as it happened and scrupulously maintained to preserve its “immediacy”. As one might imagine my role was exhausting, encompassing as it did the various functions of mentor, analyst, participant, sounding board and observer.

*Imaging*

Field notes were put aside to percolate in the back of my consciousness, while quantitative data were imaged. I tried to calculate mathematically the number of pages of responses from survey data and then the number of discrete items to be examined, multiplying the number of sites by the number of participants and items on the questionnaire. Having arrived at a huge number, I began to think of alternative ways to organize such data. Digital spreadsheet technology was considered, then rejected since this tool precludes by its nature the possibility of seeing the “big picture” pattern of the data all at once. A rather old fashioned method employing large sheets of paper, coloured pencils and a ruler was decided upon for a primary analysis. The construction of these large data organizers was not foreseen by imaging, but emerged from involvement in the data and only after two unsuccessful formats had been rejected for their inability to give a large scale and comprehensive picture of the data. The actual quantity of data yielded
from the single source of student surveys alone proved to be far beyond the imaged
calculation! It proved to be almost beyond manageability and so a selective reporting of
data, together with a reconsideration of spreadsheet methods was undertaken. I reasoned
that many different “sorts” or “sifts” of data could be made to detect patterns, but I was
afraid that the big picture patterns might still prove elusive; therefore the most significant
data from this source was presented in tabular form in the text of Chapter Four.
As mammoth an undertaking as it seems, all student responses were tabulated relative to
response, age, gender and posted on large chart paper upon which patterns were
highlighted and marginal observations and notes were made.
Abiding by the principle of faithfulness in reporting events as they occurred, I transcribed
field notes verbatim into the text of the study as prepared before hand in a digital outline
format. The final synthesis of the three triangulated sources of data resulted from a
careful reading and letting alone...sometimes dreaming...and at one point literal throwing
against the wall.
Anxious by virtue of time and personal conviction to be fair in drawing conclusions, from
a necessarily limited though comprehensive and physically and emotionally taxing
experience, it took a significant period of thought, discussion and time away from the
data for a clear set of analytical principles to emerge. Most important was a revisitation of
my goals in pursuing the investigation, as well as my commitment to qualitative research.
The result was a decision to report the multiple perspectives of those immersed within the
research settings, especially myself, using everything at my disposal to describe patterns
as they emerged from data against the background of theory.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Implementation Difficulties

The rationale for the organization of the study as it was executed was based upon the diversity of the student participants, the play form being examined and the utility of the study activity relative to the teacher participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Appointments</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>Mr. Red</td>
<td>May 11 a.m.</td>
<td>- high ethnocultural diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 20 p.m.</td>
<td>- regular stream program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 21 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>Mr. Blue</td>
<td>May 4 p.m.</td>
<td>- high ethnocultural diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 18 a.m.</td>
<td>- regular stream program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 28 a.m.</td>
<td>- two classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>Mr. Yellow</td>
<td>May 17th a.m.</td>
<td>- high ethnocultural homogeneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- gifted program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 4</td>
<td>Mr. White</td>
<td>May 11 p.m.</td>
<td>- high ethnocultural homogeneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- regular stream program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- behaviour concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 5</td>
<td>Mr. Black</td>
<td>May 7 a.m.</td>
<td>- high ethnocultural homogeneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 14 p.m.</td>
<td>- gifted program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 25 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June 3rd a.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The field observation question “What is the effect of a play based learning strategy?” resulted from a reformation of several possible initial research questions following a phenomenologically oriented visualization process intended to really try to understand what it was I wanted to know.

Sub-questions appearing in Part 3 derived from the visualized reformation, as much from the recognition that teacher participants were busy people and an after hours interview schedule was not likely to be convenient; and also from the realization that much of the interviewing was taking place in the context of the team planning and delivery of the unit in which the study was
was deployed. The Field Observation Form (Appendix Four) conforms to the criteria of play derived from Huizinga’s (1954) description of the “play-character”.

The intention was to undertake a dual track observation process to determine what the effect of a play based strategy was in general and pedagogical terms. I as researcher, therefore, was looking for manifestations of play and its effects, whereas the teacher participant was looking for effects in the context of play relative to the Ministry defined curriculum expectations.

**Field Observation Criteria Interpretation Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play-Criteria</th>
<th>Descriptions and “Look For”</th>
<th>Kinesic Channel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Voluntary Participation</td>
<td>- involved, on task, communicating</td>
<td>Visual/Vocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Having Fun</td>
<td>- smiling, laughing, happy, joking</td>
<td>Visual/Vocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Task Conscious</td>
<td>- focused on activity, behaviour related to task</td>
<td>Tactile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Time Conscious</td>
<td>- checking clock, keeping track, urging haste</td>
<td>Visual/Vocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self Conscious</td>
<td>- closed body postures, not vocalizing, refusing engagement</td>
<td>Visual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Aware of Others</td>
<td>- looking “over shoulder”, checking for reactions</td>
<td>Visual/Vocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Generating Rules</td>
<td>- directing, experimenting, trying options</td>
<td>Visual/Vocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Showing Off</td>
<td>- stepping forward, taking the focus, “topping” others</td>
<td>Visual/Vocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Challenging Others</td>
<td>- directing, suggesting, posing, arguing, insulting, physical contact</td>
<td>Vocal/Tactile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Creating Space</td>
<td>- moving furniture, moving self, changing location</td>
<td>Tactile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Researcher Field Note Observations

Site 1 General Notes

- highly diverse ethnocultural composition of group with many new Canadian pupils.
- was booked April 23rd and week of May 3rd for in-class observations, but plans put aside due to car accident and conflicting work requirements. Students undertook research activities and drama warm-ups independently of researcher involvement.
- relied on teacher participant for information, as well as observation of student product.
- play based strategy was the use of poetry and improvised skits to portray knowledge and understanding of Canadian history unit content.
- only a few drama strategies employed since teacher not familiar with drama or play based strategies, also, no formal drama program operating in the division.

Observational Notes By Play Criteria

1. Voluntary Participation
- coalesced into assigned groups
- largely one or two leaders doing the organizing, little full group involvement
- once on feet, more group interaction
- spontaneous creation of props and scenery on ad hoc basis

2. Having Fun
- laughing, goofing off while leader organizing task, behavioural concerns
- improvisation gives presentations a comical characteristic, the awareness of the impromptu and that it’s a common experience...that they’re all “under the gun” to perform

3. Task Conscious
- group process questionable with one or two “operators” and rest idle
- mostly on task, innovating and experimenting, but halt when observed directly
4. Time Conscious

- events in 1, 8 & 9 of concern for other’s concentration

- the clock and teacher instructions are like cold water, just as they are warming to the task and getting going with a few ideas...then they are stopped.

5. Self Conscious

- students rose to challenges posed without much concern

6. Aware of Others

- groups operated on their own with little cross group interaction

- some goofing off for attentions, some wanted privacy (see item 10)

7. Generating Rules

- one or two “directors” of others, who obeyed and began to improvise and innovate

8. Showing Off

- physical contact inappropriate, distracting

9. Challenging Others

- disruptive, appropriate?

10. Creating Space

- groups seated, what difference would standing make?

- little use of space until one group rose to try out ideas, then all groups stood up!

- some moving into hall into small physically separate groups who claimed they needed “room to move”, but who ended up standing very close together

Site 2 General Notes

- two sessions including an introduction, warm up and performance

- was booked May 4th and 13th but schedule put off due to school trip and death in family of teacher participant.
- highly diverse ethnocultural composition of group, many new Canadian pupils; what are the implications for learning, with respect to familiarity and relevance of content.

- room cleared of furniture for drama warm-up, enchantment technique used to cast “spell” of the dramatic play space, but students experienced a high degree of self consciousness, nervousness and hesitancy to participate; the later additions of the theatrical conventions of stage, costume, lights helped to encourage them.

Observational Notes By Play Form Criteria

1. Voluntary Participation - coalesced into small groups, seated, following activity warm up

2. Having Fun - most looked worried, a few “got it”, that it was only half serious

3. Task Conscious - a lot of time spent on research since little familiarity with context (ESL, cultural origins)

4. Time Conscious - much clock watching

5. Self Conscious - high degree of self consciousness, arms crossed, hiding eyes downcast

6. Aware of Others - very aware of being watched by other pupils and teacher, researcher - distractions increased interactions, but inhibited others

7. Generating Rules - one or two leaders directing others - teacher direction required - some students exemplifying roles and actions for others in very boisterous way seemed to help others by setting a tone for activity, that it was ok to act out

8. Showing Off - see above, also, very vociferous characters the “live wires” who tried things rose to the challenge of performance

9. Challenging Others - disruptive, inhibiting further responses of others
- distracting and limiting

10. Creating Space - having to perform right away required immediate activity and creation of “private” huddles for idea generation (panicking??) and rehearsal...

- seated - huddle - activity - huddle - dispersion in groups

Summary Notes

- what is the effect of cultural origin, time in Canada linked with adolescent mentality on ability or willingness to learn using conventional and play based strategies?

- a very clear relationship between length of time to performance as it affects activity of participants noted: short time (improvisations/skits) result in high degree of energy, activity and invention with (sometimes unintentional) effective comic results whereas a longer time to prepare, even when using dramatic conventions such as props, costumes and a stage seems to result in higher accuracy with respect to the characterizations, but less energy in the delivery.

Site 3 General Notes

- high degree of ethnocultural homogeneity in composition of class

- special education group designated as gifted

- no formal drama program in effect

- due to nature of curriculum completed a team of 15 ‘volunteers’ worked with the researcher to model events related to the unit of study in which the study was deployed.

- the researcher worked separately from the whole class with this small group

Observational Notes By Play Form Criteria

1. Voluntary Participation - group of volunteers interested in a challenge activity

2. Having Fun - a lot of conversation, joking, smiling, horsing around

3. Task Conscious - moved off onto tangents often, but returned to task at hand
- lost some of the props and other items made between sessions

4. Time Conscious  - little concern for the clock, except for getting time “out of class”

5. Self Conscious  - not worried about being viewed, seen or undertaking activity

6. Aware of Others  - were aware when others came to watch and happily explained what they were doing

7. Generating Rules  - very definitely; took germs of ideas and went off with them in their own directions

8. Showing Off  - enjoyed this very much, for the onlookers

9. Challenging Others  - see 2. above, joking and horseplay very disruptive at times, threw off the rest of the group; inhibiting by calling attention...

10. Creating Space  - liked to go off with partner or in trios

Site 4 General Notes

- high degree of ethnocultural homogeneity in composition of group, but a large number of student behaviour concerns made activities planned problematic, especially within the context of the subject (history class), negative student attitudes, audible groans and complaints when task announced

- no drama program in effect due to behaviour concerns

- high degree of teacher control over classroom events, activities and organization

Observational Notes By Play Form Criteria

1. Voluntary Participation  - at first none, all done under duress and those apparently interested and willing to try were put off/inhibited by those who were unwilling and actively hostile to the teacher, subject and activity.
- some wanted to but were very tentative about "how" to "do" drama in this context

2. Having Fun - only insofar as the disruption and frustration level of the teacher was kept high

3. Task Conscious - aware of expectations but uncooperative

- very negative attitudes toward subject context for drama activity

(Canadian history)

4. Time Conscious - the clock regulated this group...when the bell went there was an immediate cessation of activity...students closing books, getting up, leaving not waiting for any kind of acknowledgment or communication from teacher

5. Self Conscious - yes, careful, wary of risk? vulnerability?

6. Aware of Others - see above...disruptive persons looking for opportunity to make wise cracks about others

7. Generating Rules - no, a high degree of teacher located control seemed to result in passivity

- waiting for direction, or simply waiting

8. Showing Off - yes, much name-calling, hitting, disrespectful behaviour

9. Challenging Others - mostly the teacher and those attempting the activity, or others "laying about"

10. Creating Space - no, behaviour management requirements limited student mobility, although they were able to sit in small groups.

Summary Notes

- high degree of control and constraint put on the students by the teacher with respect to the activity and content: teacher assigned groups, narrow permission for movement and behaviour,
as well as conceptual constraints (can't impose present conventions onto the past; no anachronisms permitted in either forward or backward temporal dimension; must act out what happened historically...can't change the past in presentation as described in text)... a lot of control over what students were permitted to do
- control issues took the activity away from the students and resulted in low degree of involvement
- reflective of difficult environment, high needs of students and limitations on the skill of the teacher

*Site 5 General Notes*
- two sessions with the group, which had a high degree of homogeneity in its composition
- designated as a special education “gifted” group

*First Session*
- activity had to be halted due to miscommunication of expectations to students by teacher participant...
- students were not aware of the play based task (drama) and were “not used to” doing drama as part of the program. This coupled with concern for covering content was cause for anxiety on the part of the teacher participant, concerned it was not the “right time” to “do” drama due to interruptions and need to “cover” curriculum...perception of drama strategy as another “interruption”
- preliminary work was needed with the whole group who were very subdued and aware of the work...not enthused...started with interpretation of historical photos (constructive and deconstructive activity) in which personae were generated through looking at photos and hotseating (see Appendix Two) and presented with some initial reluctance to the group in a forum arrangement. As the activity progressed, there were gradually a few more volunteers,
with progressively greater enthusiasm, but still self conscious of being seen “out front” by others.

- pointed out drama techniques to teacher participant in Appendix Two and clarified the play based activity of dramatic interpretation for next meeting

Second Session

- what a remarkable difference!

- students are very excited compared to last time’s “institutional indifference”

- now there seems to be a tremendous sense of imminence, anticipation for the performances, the event

- it’s like a whole other group compared to the sullen ennui encountered during the previous “content covering” and task instruction session...

Observational Notes By Play Form Criteria

1. Voluntary Participation - high degree of mobility, a lot of costumes and props created by students
   - students comparing, discussing, appraising each others’ work

2. Having Fun - a lot of smiles, palpable excitement and anticipation for the performances
   - students comparing costumes, props as well as last minute practicing of delivery for their performance personae created quite a synergetic atmosphere of immanence, tension, buoyancy, excitement

3. Task Conscious' - evident in the obvious effort and care put into the costumes and props, attention to detail, as well as the looks of concentration and purposefulness in preparation

4. Time Conscious - not really worried about the clock, but definitely a time pressure at
work...aware of the last few moments before “going on”

- later on the imposition/intrusion of the school’s timed structure (bells)

immediately quelled the energy and enthusiasm evident

5. Self Conscious - little concern for being observed and watched in performance, very

concentrated on their own activity and relations within their performance

groups

6. Aware of Others - very much so in a very positive way, I think, relative to their

characterizations and supportive in terms of praising and “enthusing”

about costumes and props

7. Generating Rules - last minute preparations and intensity appeared to be with respect to the

order, content and delivery of the performances planned

- internal coherence to performances/presentations constructed by student

performers, the surrounding context of the performing was extremely

chaotic without teacher direction/leadership with respect to performance

order and location

8. Showing Off - a lot of posturing, miming, moving and practicing of characterizations;

one little fellow wearing a bandage on his right leg as part of his

costume, holding his leg stiff and limping around the entire time in

character

- plain that the female students in particular spent a great deal of thought

and effort on their costumes and characterizations...they looked

gloriously unlike their regular selves

9. Challenging Others - yes, but as characters in a gay, “up” sort of way that was not menacing,

or particularly disruptive...more of a trying on for size of the personae
they created relative to other similar creations...a very high volume level
- very chaotic, some disruption as boys got physical...excited...

10. Creating Space  - they did, with little teacher direction or standard theatrical conventions
(stage, curtain, lights), the students cleared a space to create a
performance area for themselves
- very interesting that the focal point for performance seems to shift
around the room, sort of a theatre-in-the-round with no particular
“audience” and “stage” dividing line
- set up their own props, set pieces to create temporary dramatic spaces
- two groups left the room to “make an entrance”

Student Survey Data

As part of the implementation process for the study unit, students were briefed on the aims of
the study and asked at the beginning of scheduled time together to complete a Learning
Preference Survey (Appendix Three ). Data resulting from the completion of these surveys
were broken down by gender and age for analysis and the percentage findings are here presented
in numeric form. Please note that percentage totals may add up to + or - 5% of 100% since
figures were rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent for purposes of clarity in analysis.
Table 1: Male Learning Strategy Preferences

Total Male Respondents: 92

Male Responses (Learning Strategy Scale)

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Table 2: Female Learning Strategy Preferences

Total Female Respondents: 84

Female Responses (Learning Strategy Scale)

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Table 3: Male and Female Learning Strategy Preferences

Total Respondents: 176

Male and Female Responses (Learning Strategy Scale)

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Want More/Want Less</td>
<td>61/39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Hard To Do/Easy To Do</td>
<td>33/67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Situation</th>
<th>Doing Research</th>
<th>Playing Game</th>
<th>Watching Video</th>
<th>Having Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>32/68</td>
<td>88/12</td>
<td>70/30</td>
<td>61/39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>41/59</td>
<td>75/25</td>
<td>52/48</td>
<td>40/60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Game</td>
<td>29/71</td>
<td>78/22</td>
<td>53/47</td>
<td>43/57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching Video</td>
<td>36/64</td>
<td>63/37</td>
<td>53/47</td>
<td>52/48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having Discussion</td>
<td>23/77</td>
<td>85/15</td>
<td>59/41</td>
<td>52/48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing Research</td>
<td>21/79</td>
<td>74/26</td>
<td>42/58</td>
<td>39/61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Game</td>
<td>22/78</td>
<td>80/20</td>
<td>43/57</td>
<td>47/53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching Video</td>
<td>47/53</td>
<td>87/13</td>
<td>61/39</td>
<td>43/57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having Discussion</td>
<td>12/88</td>
<td>77/23</td>
<td>57/43</td>
<td>46/54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing Research</td>
<td>49/51</td>
<td>10/90</td>
<td>12/88</td>
<td>32/68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: Female Subjective Emotional State During Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective Emotional State</th>
<th>Feeling A/ Feeling B</th>
<th>Doing Drama</th>
<th>Doing Research</th>
<th>Playing Game</th>
<th>Watching Video</th>
<th>Having Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling A/ Feeling B</td>
<td>Doing Drama</td>
<td>Doing Research</td>
<td>Playing Game</td>
<td>Watching Video</td>
<td>Having Discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Interested/Disinterested</td>
<td>64/36</td>
<td>43/57</td>
<td>79/21</td>
<td>62/38</td>
<td>50/50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Imagining/Daydreaming</td>
<td>65/35</td>
<td>39/61</td>
<td>71/29</td>
<td>43/57</td>
<td>45/55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Turned On/Turned Off</td>
<td>60/40</td>
<td>29/71</td>
<td>77/33</td>
<td>55/45</td>
<td>44/56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Curious/Content</td>
<td>44/56</td>
<td>50/50</td>
<td>50/50</td>
<td>48/52</td>
<td>51/49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Having Fun/What A Drag</td>
<td>73/27</td>
<td>24/76</td>
<td>79/21</td>
<td>55/45</td>
<td>40/60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Energetic/Tired</td>
<td>55/45</td>
<td>17/83</td>
<td>75/25</td>
<td>31/69</td>
<td>30/70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Excited/Bored</td>
<td>60/40</td>
<td>14/86</td>
<td>71/29</td>
<td>43/57</td>
<td>32/68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Satisfied/Disappointed</td>
<td>65/35</td>
<td>44/56</td>
<td>82/18</td>
<td>64/36</td>
<td>48/52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Want More/Want Less</td>
<td>57/43</td>
<td>19/81</td>
<td>73/27</td>
<td>51/49</td>
<td>27/73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Hard To Do/Easy To Do</td>
<td>33/67</td>
<td>48/52</td>
<td>10/90</td>
<td>14/86</td>
<td>35/65</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elite Teacher Interviews

In the course of undertaking this study two modifications to my Elite Interview strategy had to be made. One occurred as a natural extension of realizing the other, which was that very often my colleagues and I found that we were discussing the concepts and ideas scheduled for an interview during the course of our collaborative planning. Moreover, the availability of my teacher participants kept shifting and it became clear that we would not have time to undertake formal interviews, although I was able to complete one at Site Five with Mr. Black. To remedy the situation, since to not include the professional opinions of teachers would collapse the triangulation of my data collection structure, I chose to incorporate these conversations as Incidental Elite Interviews into the study in lieu of formal interviews as planned, since I feel these responses to be significant by virtue of containing the veracity of being both reflexive and of the moment. To facilitate this decision, as well as to accommodate the shifting teacher/researcher availability, I also reduced the number of my focus questions to five from the original ten.

Incidental Interview Responses

Question 1. What did you observe during the drama activity?

Site 1 Mr. Red: I saw a lot of activity, interaction and risk-taking on the part of students seeking to negotiate meaning between themselves and the content. They were physically involved and although they were trying, it’s not clear how meaningful the performances were to them, since their origins are so different from the historical raw material.

Site 2 Mr. Blue: The kids were curious and seemed to enjoy it. We have never done drama together, so it was a new experience for them and for me, since it’s not my background. Some were avoiding getting involved, but most of them seemed to be ok with it. They really liked using the stage, costumes and props. I think it helps a lot of them understand the content better,
especially since so many are first generation Canadians, or newly arrived immigrants, you know, a lot of the curriculum material is foreign to them.

Site 3 Mr. Yellow: A lot of excitement and eagerness to get into the activity. They all volunteered to participate.

Site 4 Mr. White: Students unsure of what to do or how to proceed (We don’t have a drama program in the school). Some of them fooling around, some just sitting there.

Site 5 Mr. Black: Student participation and interest grew in regards to the curriculum being covered. Recall of basic concepts as well as some specific dates were easier for students to recall due to concrete experiences and memorable moments.

**Question 2. What effect did drama seem to have on students?**

Site 1 Mr. Red: They really had to put a lot of themselves “on the line” so to speak with the drama, I mean they had us watching and they were watching each other...that’s a lot to ask of kids who are not used to drama activity, or speaking out in a center stage sort of way. A lot of these kids come from non-western backgrounds so the virtues of using a loud voice, making eye contact and boisterous behaviour is not part of their tradition or what they’re used to. They did seem willing and interested in trying once they had a few examples and some of the braver ones “tested the water” by going first with the warm-ups and that was probably a good outlet for my really demonstrative, outspoken students. There were some who went along for the ride, who weren’t engaged at all, but I’m not sure if it was self consciousness, the historical nature of the content, or the usual “cool boredom” that they put on sometimes as a defense.

Site 2 Blue: I think you might have scared some of them...we haven’t had a formal drama program and they might not be used to it...the techniques for getting into character... Maybe I shouldn’t say scared, it’s just not what they’re used to...for some of them, speaking out, or acting out is a no-no culturally, but after they got the idea, they really seemed to be ok with it. You met
our resident actors, Ahmed and Philip (pseudonyms) they’re not shy. The rest of them seemed to really warm to the task once they were able to get scripts and costumes going. Also working on the stage seemed to help focus them on the task.

Site 3 Mr. Yellow: They seemed very energized and enthused, on task and motivated. Looking forward to working with you acted as an incentive for their other work and their behaviour. They realized that if they didn’t get their regular class work done, then they wouldn’t be able to do the special project. Similarly, if they fooled around, or proved to be untrustworthy, then they wouldn’t be permitted to continue.

Site 4 Mr. White: They haven’t had any drama classes, so I’m not sure they know what to do, plus we have to keep an eye on characters like Jennifer, Marcus and Mervin (pseudonyms). The first one just got back from a suspension and the other two are heading for one if they keep it up. Some of them look at it as free time or an opportunity for misbehaviour.

Site 5 Mr. Black: There was a wider use of curriculum specific language being used, ex. “barricades, oaths to the king”. A greater interest was also forged. Students had to also address gaps of understanding through role play which accommodated the various stages of learning.

Question 3 Were the students playing? Please discuss plus, minus and interesting items.

Site 1 Mr. Red: Not in a negative sense. I think there was an “inter-play” which was really valuable, especially for kids from backgrounds where their voices are not heard as loudly because of gender or youth. Also, the opportunity for interaction from an historical perspective required a different kind of communication and interaction than students at this age level are used to, especially between genders. It permitted freedom in adopting a persona and showing how that person acted, as well as restricted the usual kid-type behaviour by the structure of the task, as well as the conventions of performance.

Site 2 Blue: If you mean wasting time, I’d have to say no. But they were having fun so I’d have
to say yes...I don't know...they were creating plays, skits from historical situations, play-acting, so in the sense of developing theatrical skills they were working. Not all of them were involved. Some were hiding at the edges of the group because they're shy. But that doesn't mean that they weren't watching the others and getting something from the experience.

Site 3 Yellow: I don't know what you mean by that...playing in some special sense, I presume as related to the activity you're doing with them and the study...They seem to be enjoying themselves, without there being any trouble or problem. They really seem to be into it, which I guess is part of playing. Some of them seem to be having too much fun.

Site 4 Mr. White: Well, you probably spotted the ones we're most worried about, they were definitely fooling around, "playing around" I suppose, but they have a lot of needs and they do that no matter what you try with them, so you've got to control their options. There were others who probably would have liked to try to do the drama. I'm sure they were put off by the others acting out. It's just that we have our hands full and have to be careful about relaxing expectations.

Site 5 Mr. Black: Improvisation, relating and retelling of information, dramatizing yes, playing! To an untrained or eye out of context, the classroom program would resemble something close to chaos. These activities however did promote a keener awareness of the issues and broader links to issues today.

**Question 4. Were the students learning? Please discuss plus, minus and interesting items.**

Site 1 Mr. Red: Definitely. The drama activity provided a context for unfamiliar information and ideas to be portrayed, examined and considered. Some seemed bored or turned off, but I wonder if they were too challenged by the performance aspect. Mostly, the students seemed motivated, entertained, amused and to be having fun with material that can be a bit dry, if you don't do something interesting with it.
Site 2 Mr. Blue: Yes, but I'm not sure it's what you're after. The kids come from a wide variety of backgrounds and it is not clear exactly what kind of connection they can make to the content...you know...how relevant it is. For my students it's a double whammy...most kids this age don't see the relevance of events many decades or hundreds of years in the past anyway and when you add cultural unfamiliarity it can make teaching the subject very challenging. Using the skits and drama techniques is a way for kids to investigate the meaning of historical events. Also, the group process skills don't hurt either, of having to work in a group, plan, listen and contribute.

Site 3 Mr. Yellow: Well, with gifted students, they learn from everything, in fact I guess we all do, but with them, they always seem to take something from experiences that we don't plan for. I think you'd be the better judge of how much they're learning since you've spent so much time with them, and are dealing with how they are assimilating and interpreting information, but I'll probably give them a test on the content later. I'll let you know how they did. But they definitely gained from interacting with you and each other.

Site 4 Mr. White: If you're not careful, what they learn is that they can get away with things and that's bad for everybody else who has to wait while you deal with them. It's hard to do anything like drama with these kids because behaviour is such an issue. Also, basic literacy skills and factual knowledge are wanting, so they have to learn those before they could do anything meaningful.

Site 5 Mr. Black: Students were learning both curriculum expectations and also teambuilding skills. In order to communicate and grow in their own perspective about history and events in history it is and was necessary to discuss, debate and even disagree in their preparations and dramatic interpretations.
**Question 5. How would you describe an effective instructional strategy?**

Site 1 Mr. Red: I think that an effective instructional strategy permits the learner to make connections between the self, the content and life in general at the same time as it practices skills of utilitarian value.

Site 2 Mr. Blue: I’d say that drama was an effective instructional strategy. It’s helped them focus on historical material, content and process it in a very personal way. We’ve already talked about developing language skills and you can see that they’re very excited about being on the stage with their sets and costumes, so there’s a whole other category involving motivation and attitude.

Site 3 Mr. Yellow: An effective instructional strategy challenges the student to apply skills, knowledge and attitudes about themselves and the subject, to also transfer what is learned to other contexts.

Site 4 Mr. White: One which enables the achievement of learning expectations by the student. It results in measurable improvement by the learner relative to the objectives of the lesson.

Site 5 Mr. Black: One that is engaging for students, instructionally relevant to curriculum, provides for critical thinking, is measurable in terms of information recall and achievement.

**Summary**

I have observed in my thirteen year career that using the arts as a valuable and effective medium of instruction seems to require three conditions:

1. The personal readiness of the instructor to be engaged in the (play form) arts mode chosen for instruction. Without a personal investment and risk as leader and model on the part of the teacher, there can be no appreciable return for students, since students look to the instructor for the level of permission of their involvement. As John Dewey (1938) pointed out, the effective teacher must be a master of the subject of instruction. The
teacher cannot be so focussed on the act of instruction (either in terms of content or action) that their attention wavers or is entirely drawn away from their true task of teaching which is observing and guiding students as they investigate, learn and grow.

2. There must be clear planning and provision for a mechanism of capturing the experience. This can be achieved through the provision of a supportive, educated audience, paper and pencil records, or by recording the experience using audio, visual or digital technology and committing time to the review and consider what actually happened.

3. There must be a commitment to allotting and spending as much time as is necessary to interpret the experience fully. Many teachers seem to want to “do” drama, but the doing is not the only part. Personal reflection and communication to share and explore insights is crucial to the valuing and anchoring of the dramatic experience. This requires the engagement of the student and teacher as both participant and spectator, as well as the interpersonal reflective mode of interpretation of making meaning.

What I observed were children willing to engage in a new experience and teachers wanting to provide it, but being held back or inhibited by the personal and professional challenge of the dramatic play form; as much as by the burden of having to account for the expenditure of time required as well as the relevance of the experience relative to the government supplied learning expectation checklists, which presume to describe everything that is worth knowing in schools.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this investigation was to discover the effect of a play based strategy such as drama, in the context of the intermediate level social sciences classroom. The study yielded observational, anecdotal and numeric confirmation of the pervasiveness, problems with and preference for play in this environment. Following are statements articulating the major findings of this study, a description of the kind of results garnered from an analysis of the three triangulated sources of data relative to the three research sub-questions and summary comments with respect to recommendations stemming form the study’s findings together with suggestions for future research.

Major Findings

Research Question: What is the effect of a play based learning strategy?

A play based strategy appeared to have three chief effects on students.

i) Motivation was the principal effect as witnessed in the synergistic activity students voluntarily undertook, together with the willing extension of their effort into attempting to incorporate dramatic conventions of costume, props, scenery and characterization. Most students appeared to genuinely enjoy the inter-play and creative challenge involved in negotiating personal meaning and interpretation of historical material, relative to those of others. The sense of excitement and imminence in high functioning groups prior to performance was palpable and moreover, no matter how challenging students found the task to be, they seemed to experience a deflated sense of disappointment when the sessions ended, especially when the ending occurred due to the ringing of the school’s bell.
ii) The anonymity and passivity of the student's status of being submerged as part of a
group which is subservient to the teacher's authority was challenged. It seemed in many
cases that students were being asked for the first time to not only tell what they thought
about something, but to do that by stepping forward, Thespis-like, from the group.

iii) Catalysis occurred in terms of articulating a preference for play based strategies in
learning as indicated in the Student Learning Preference Survey undertaken. One
concludes that the reason for this is due to the active, inter-active, reflective posture and
"fun" which inheres in the play mode of investigative learning, which I proposed at the
outset of this study as "going with the grain" of human behaviour.

*A play based strategy appeared to have three chief effects on teachers.*

i) Due to the lack of personal expertise and familiarity with drama instruction, teachers
were professionally and personally challenged.

ii) Since the dramatic play based strategy required an open-ended, student centredness
which was uncharacteristic of some of the classes involved from a matter of routine as
much as necessity, teacher frustration resulted. Of particular concern was the potential for
disruption and misbehaviour, especially where a high degree of teacher control over
student activity was the norm.

iii) Teachers expressed enthusiasm with the play based strategy approach, but also
concern with its presumed limited utility due to the apparent lack of ability to assess and
give marks as part of the evaluation and reporting process. I observed tremendous anxiety
on the part of teachers who were very concerned with "covering" material in the limited
instructional time available.
A play based strategy appeared to have three chief effects on the researcher.

i) My suspicions about the nature of play as an essential human feature and the power of the arts are confirmed and adequately corroborated by direct experience and observation. I would suggest also that the culture we are providing currently in schools is not as nurturing of the person as it could or should be.

ii) I am discouraged since we don’t appear to have the nerve, orientation and strength to take a risk with kids to examine the interior of our hearts and minds. We’re too busy proving to the government that we are doing what we are told, in the way we have been told to do it, rather than working on developing the next generation of citizens to effectively direct government, our society and common cultural and intellectual heritage. The dispirited way pupils approach their learning and ideas in school was more reminiscent of a detention centre than a place for discovery and growth.

iii) Notwithstanding items i) and ii) above, I am empowered by what I saw. The natural energy of purposeful imaginative and creative activity and the potential in self organization among young adults imbues me with purpose. I am resolved to facilitating among teachers and learners the engagement and channeling of the power of human interaction in the creative quest for meaning and understanding.

Sub-Question i) How is play related to culture, socialization and learning? and

Sub-Question iv): What is the location of play relative to learning?

Johan Huizinga’s assertion of the pervasiveness of play and his definition of the play character and play itself is accurate and present in learning.

The ten features of play Huizinga elaborated which became the basis for the student observation matrix used during dramatic activity, seem to have been verified by
observations recorded in the researcher's field notes and shared in elite interviews to a high degree. Of particular significance was the presence in each context of a sense of competitiveness, or "one-upmanship" which Huizinga identified as the "agonistic principle" of striving for excellence, honour or being first. Also of note was the absorption in the task that seemed to transcend the time allotted. Huizinga in his writing apparently described something essentially human, but not easily transferable into the institutional, or bureaucratically designated structures of schools which are largely regulated by bells and conformity, rather than inspiration and personal excellence.

The primary operant kinesic channel appeared to be visual, in which participants closely regarded each other's reactions and performances, relative to each other in an ongoing synergistic intra-interpersonal appraisal and acting out.

Sub Question iii): In what ways can play be utilized to facilitate and maximize the engagement of students' learning?

The use of play forms like drama in the current educational culture is not commonly employed to facilitate, maximize or engage student learning.

Four factors in combination, arising from analysis of field note observations and elite interviews, seem to have converged in preventing the use of play (in the form of drama) as a learning strategy at the sites studied in the course of this research:

i) A lack of experience, training and confidence with its use on the part of teachers precluded the inclusion of dramatic arts in school curricula. Most reported that no drama program was in operation in their school and that they didn't often "do" drama.

ii) A lack of comfort with the leadership and risk taking role required in the deployment of dramatic study prevented teachers from providing the necessary catalytic impetus of
personal example and involvement for inspiration of student action. No elite informant overtly acknowledged a lack of nerve in this regard; however, I found it significant that in every case, the teacher participants politely declined to participate when invited to take leadership of drama activity, either in the first instance, together with me, or after I had modeled strategies with students.

iii) It was the opinion of teacher participants that although salutary in the extreme, the affective, qualitative and interpersonal nature of the dramatic process and learning associated with it, appeared to preclude quantification of results for assessment, evaluation and reporting. In every case, elite informants identified assessibility as being of prime importance in terms of their professional responsibilities and their understanding of the educational process. Moreover, they expressed concern and anxiety with respect to not “covering” Ministry specified curricular criteria, losing instructional time to do such “covering” later by engaging in drama, and the possible negative personal and professional consequences related to leaving things “uncovered”.

iv) An absence or displacement from curriculum documents and imperatives by explicit skill, content and attitude expectations, which emphasize the quantitative evaluation of student achievement and products relative to minutely specified, compulsory goals leaves little room for traditional forms of humane and liberal education, such as play in the form of drama.

Sub-Question ii): How do adolescent learners in the Social Sciences respond to play based learning strategy such as drama?

The dominant male, female and group responses with respect to a preferred learning strategy suggest a preference for and approval of play based learning strategies.
Both males and female students were unequivocal about extending a rating of "1", expressing high preference or "loving" a strategy. Females appeared to be more reticent to extend the "1" rating to many choices compared to males. Only three choices emerged with a majority of female respondents giving them a rating of "1", whereas among males, ten choices were rated by a clear majority of respondents with a rating of "1".

The top three rating "1" responses in order of preference among males were for choice 16. Playing a Game, choice 11. Listening to Music and choice 14. Using a Computer. Male respondents ranked choice 20. Role Playing and Drama fifth among their "1" ratings. Female choices correlated with males, but the order of "1" rating was slightly different, with choice 11. Listening to Music being first, choice 16. Playing a Game second and choice 25. Creating Art third. Choice 20. Role Playing and Drama was ranked fifth as well.

There was no dominant male or female response in the negative (rating "5" I hate this) with respect to learning strategies, which was surprising given the anonymity of the survey and the vociferous objection to instruction encountered in some instances. The lowest desirability rating for learning strategies given was a "3", with students appearing to acquiesce to the inevitability of being instructed, perhaps taking care to please the researcher, or avoid potential repercussions from an extreme negative response. As a group, the top three majority responses in order were choice 16. Playing a Game, choice 11. listening to Music and choice 21. Watching a video. Choice 20. Role Playing and Drama emerged as a fifth choice in assigning the rating of "1". Even though Role Playing and Drama ranked only fifth in an outright matter of preference, in terms of describing a positive or negative subjective emotional state, Drama for both males and
females fared much better, ranking third or even second. Of particular importance are the responses indicating that students felt that they wanted to do more drama and felt both satisfied and interested about it. Both male and female students indicated that they felt that drama was relatively easy to do and that they felt "turned on" in such a learning situation. In addition, field observations and elite interviews both corroborate the subjective states of students as described in Tables 4 and 5.

Summary

This study revealed that a play based strategy such as drama appears to be highly regarded by teachers due to its ability to motivate students and promote multidimensional involvement in learning. Also revealed was that such strategies are seldom utilized because of teachers' concerns with their skill in this area, student behaviour, time limitations and quantifying results for evaluation. Of what utility then is play and in what ways, if any, has it been transplanted from the arts, transmuted into expectations in other subjects or submerged by the myriad skills, attitudes and knowledge expectations directed as being of essential value and of timely worth with respect to school programming time?

It seems that the Ministry of Education is attempting to make teachers technicians. Their approach in the curriculum documents studied seems to be based upon and promotes the theory that there is a calculable science of teaching that can result in accurately measurable results and that in the very human enterprise of learning, there are clear cause and effect relationships. Perhaps this may be true for fact based, binary (right and wrong) disciplines which have already lost the "play-character" posited by Huizinga, but I wonder if this is the case or even desirable for the arts. Perhaps the existence of the outcomes approach as a comprehensive educational philosophy suggests at once the
nature and triumph of the positivist spirit of our age, namely, that there is nothing that can’t be quantified, calculated and measured, and it is those things we consider to be most valuable. Is the current curricular milieu merely a matter of convenience given a large arts landscape to “cover” as a subject of study, or representative of a deeper philosophical vacuum which does not and can not appreciate the instrumental and civilizing functions of dramatic play, due to an anxious and over serious conformity to an equally ill informed provincial mandate? Any pedagogical system, no matter how assertively deployed is only a means to an end and not an end in itself. What is the point of having an educational system in which the educators are so focussed on accounting for instructional time and proving things were covered, that the major aim of having the system is lost in the rush to prove that expectations have been observed? Have we reached the point where

“We measure the success of schools not by the kind of human beings they promote but by whatever increases in reading scores they chalk up. We have allowed the quantitative standards, so central to the adult economic system, to become the principal yardstick for our definition of children’s worth.”

I believe that we have reached this point and that this is cause for great alarm and action. It has been suggested in this thesis that play seems to be an essential human behaviour that begins with infancy and persists in many forms into and throughout adulthood. It has also been asserted that prescribing instructional content to as high a degree as in the current Ministry of Education and Training curriculum documents do, necessitates the utilization of specific instructional processes to the exclusion of others. Despite lip service paid to both the effectiveness of play, the arts and the ability and duty of teachers

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1 “The 11 Year Olds of Today...”, Keniston, New York Times
to provide varied and innovative instruction, as the bard said, "the play is the thing"... no matter the intention or rhetoric embellishing it, the nature of a thing is revealed in the actions of and surrounding it. To "do" is at once to "not do", as the pre-Socratic philosophers formulated in their position that all determination is negation.\(^2\)

If, as I believe this study reveals, that play is an essentially important human activity which inspires, permeates and defines the soul of a dynamic culture as Huizinga (1954) suggested, the question remains how and why has the exuberance inhering in playful discovery been eclipsed among the young in our schools, where surely this energy and inspiration is needed most, by the oppressive ennui of earnest conformity? Could it be that the prescriptive and sparse words of Bertrand Russell were prophetic in 1921?

"The function of education is to guide instinct into the directions in which it will develop useful rather than harmful activities."\(^3\)

One of the very interesting things observed in the course of this study was that at the site where the play character was most strongly manifested, as demonstrated in their drama, the focal point for performances seemed to shift around the room of its own accord, as a sort of theatre-in-the-round with no teacher direction, or particular dividing line between "audience" and "stage". There was a natural kind of flow to the way the students organized themselves in turn as viewers and presenters, as a function of their enthusiasm. Having witnessed this firsthand, the question that comes to mind is whether there is any one perspective possible in history or life? Is it advisable or desirable to want, advocate or pretend to a particular perspective in history, or a way of doing things?

Perhaps it is the end of history and that our culture is dead, as Huizinga suggested, a

\(^2\) *A Dictionary Of Philosophy*, Flew, pg. 286
\(^3\) *Marriage and Morals*, Russell, pg. 59
victim of fatal overseriousness in advocating an official "end point" to history and historical perspective. The calcification of our play forms is evidence to the morbidity of the current curricular and philosophical imperative, which seems to espouse a single goal and point of view, that of conformity and externally bestowed approval. If we accept Huizinga, what then does this portend for the future, in which the notion and value of play appears to have been officially expunged, even from the culture of the young in schools? The Ministry of Education appears to be promoting the irrational, ill-educated and limited notion that it is possible to list everything that is worth knowing and that the way to learn it all is by using time to "cover" the minutae of content. In so doing, they appear to have missed the point of education, which is that the real "content" is the development and growth of the person. It is the function of drama and education itself to help children enjoy and understand their encounters with each other within the rich playground of our culture and in so doing, discover their life's work which, with good fortune and an effort of will, for them will be as easy as play.

**Recommendations**

*Personal Renaissance*

I wonder if we have a sufficient sense of where and to what extent play is present in our society and if it is possible for us to "unlearn" what seems to be an artificially constructed demarcation between the joy of the child and the drudgery of the adult. A step towards this awareness I think involves allowing play to emerge from the exclusive domain of childhood, where it has been heretofore banished in favour of more serious, perhaps darker purpose.
Professional Renaissance

The development of play based skills (theatre, visual arts) among educators, as described by Wilkinson (1992) aimed at extending skills and expertise not already prevalent in theatre education. Let’s pursue this line of inquiry from other perspectives and means, to investigate the quality of the medium for growth we are providing in schools. Let’s decide to create the means and methods to make the arts, as play based strategies for learning and personal growth, more accessible to teachers and through them, learners. To begin, perhaps we could follow the Ministry of Education’s imperative in their 1998 kindergarten document that

“It is important that teachers develop an understanding of how children learn through play by observing and analyzing children’s play. Such an understanding will allow them to plan productive play activities that have specific learning goals and to provide appropriate and stimulating resources.”

It must become an imperative for every teacher to ensure that the vital, natural, flowing, ennobling fun of learning and play not be squashed by a paranoid rush toward record keeping. In all disciplines the focus must remain on creating enabling, welcoming environments which permit growth of the self and its creative, constructive expression. Rather than teaching children that the sum total of their intellects, feelings and skills can be totted up and graded as successful or not, we have to continue to help them discover, understand and appreciate that there resides within each one of them an infinitely expansive potential of mind and spirit.

Cultural Renaissance

To hurry up and slow down to take the time to give children opportunities for reflection

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4 The Kindergarten Program, Ministry of Education, pg. 7
and growth; to make meaning for themselves rather than parrot received wisdom and explanations. If we can agree that children’s culture is composed of play, primarily represented by artistic expression (visually and dramatically) and furthermore; that both art and play are essential components in the psycho-social maturation process of human beings; and that moreover, play in many forms (especially in the arts) is ubiquitous in human society, perhaps beneath our very noses, there lie powerful ways that may assist us in engaging our basic humanity to help us discover each other in a way that seems natural, joyful and fruitful.

"To be playful and serious at the same time is possible, and it defines the ideal mental condition."  

Suggestions for Future Research

Extension of Study

This study has been designed with a wide focus relative to its participants, encompassing teachers and adolescent learners in the social studies, from a variety of socio-economic and ethno-cultural backgrounds, educational contexts and across a wide geographical distribution. A longer term, more comprehensive (in terms of size and location of the study population) and outcomes oriented study to investigate the hypothesis and findings in greater breadth and depth may be advisable.

Refinement of Technique

A study designed to investigate from a qualitative and utilitarian standpoint the transferability of learnings in the arts to other subject areas, as suggested by Courtney

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5 Serious Play, Dewey (1933) in Mann, pg. 286
would be very interesting and of lasting utility for educators and policy makers, particularly where Arts oriented assessment, feedback and reporting techniques might be concerned.

Investigative Cultural Reflection

The ethnocultural sources and nature of learning styles relative to play and content would be most illuminating, given the cosmopolitan, multicultural landscape in Canadian schools.

Comparative Qualitative Analysis

An empirical investigation based on the question "How efficacious are play based strategies compared to other forms of instruction?" might provide insights of value and immediate utility to teachers and policy administrators.
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Appendix One

Golden Spike: Research Component

Introduction

Central to the effective study of history is the ability to logically undertake research investigations and then artfully and effectively present one’s findings. The projects offered combine elements of choice within compulsory contexts to result in a complete research portfolio which will address a variety of cross curricular subjects. Students should receive a copy of the Research Project Planner.

1. People of the Western Rail

All of the people listed below were important contributors to the building of the Canadian Pacific railway in 19th century Canada. Choose any two names from the list below and write a short “journalistic’ biography for them. Your biography should at a minimum cover the five “W’s” about the person and include:

i) information about the person’s origins and early life

ii) a pencil sketch (drawing) of the person

iii) a brief explanation detailing how the person was connected to the railway or the west

CHOOSE ANY TWO PERSONS

a) William Cornelius Van Horne  b) Sandford Fleming  c) John A. MacDonald

d) Marie Rose Smith  e) Isabella Smith  f) Alexander Mackenzie

g) Father Albert Lacombe  h) Sir Hugh Allan  i) Marguerite Riel

2. Come One, Come All!

Advertising was very important in developing many aspects of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Carefully plan, design and then artfully produce a poster for one of the following:
CHOOSE ONE SITUATION TO ADVERTISE

a) Attract workers to build the railway from North America & Europe.
b) The railway is a superior passenger alternative to the stagecoach.
c) The railway is an effective means of shipping goods and doing business.
d) Attract emigrants to the Canadian West to settle the land.
e) Solicit investors to give money for developing and finishing the CPR.

3. Making the Railway Work

In building the railway across Canada, the most advanced technology available at the time was used. Choose two of the following topics and research your answer carefully, then plan and design an artful combination of diagram, sketch or model as appropriate to illustrate your findings.

CHOOSE ONE TO RESEARCH AND PRESENT

a) Explain how a steam engine works. Consult your library and create a labeled technical diagram and simple model. Share some amazing and interesting facts about 19th century steam trains and technology that will fascinate the group.
b) Use a combination of research and real observation to look carefully at a section of railway track (Check this out with parents and be safe!!). Draw a labeled blueprint style diagram using proper technical terms to show how it is built. In addition, be ready to explain why the Canadian government decided that for twenty years after its completion, no other railway tracks should be built south of the CPR’s main line.
c) In many ways the CPR could be considered a “high tech” industrial achievement of the 19th century. Explain what is meant by the term ‘high tech’ and compare the CPR to a
high tech achievement we may be familiar with in the 20th century, or one in the works for the 21st century. Be sure to use visual resources to explain your thinking.

d) The government of John A. MacDonald wanted the transcontinental railway line to be Canadian owned. The deal it made to ensure Canadian ownership of the CPR has become known as the ‘Pacific Scandal’. Use visuals to unravel this scandal as an investigative reporter would for the class. Compare this with a current government scandal in the news.

e) The dining cars on the CPR provided lavish meals at a price ($0.75). Create an antique menu dated May 19th, 1886 for the dining car passengers that would have enticed them to spend their money over the 139 hour trip. Remember that you are planning for breakfast, lunch and dinner for six days! In addition, use graphics and charts to describe for the group exactly how much money $0.75 was in 1886 comparing your findings with today’s cost of living.

4. Experiencing History

Use hot seating, role playing, tableaux, props and costumes to personally investigate and then present one of the following situations to the group:

a) Many companies have shares and shareholders that contribute money so that the company can function. Describe what these terms mean and how investors could make money by buying shares in the CPR, by making a sales pitch in character to the group that you think would get them to give their money to you.

b) Father Lacombe did his best to persuade his Blackfoot Indian friends to allow the railway to cross their lands. Portray Father Lacombe as he tries to do this, or create an aboriginal character(s) that visits the group to describe the effects of the railway on
traditional ways of life. These may be positive or negative, but should conveyed to the group in character.

c) Create a dramatic skit or vignette which describes for us what traveling the CPR might have been like for an immigrant on the way to their homestead, or CPR worker returning home after building it. You are free to choose the dramatic “dilemma” portrayed, but you must do this in character.

d) Imagine that you are aboard the CPR’s first prairie-riding train the “Countess of Dufferin”. Show us how a “high class” passenger and a “low class” might have been treated by creating a dramatic scene in character.

e) Driver of the “Last Spike” Donald Smith apparently enjoyed parties and in her description of just such a party, Canadian chronicler Nellie McClung mentioned that the “Blue Danube Waltz” was played. This waltz by the composer Johann Strauss is still well known today. See what you can find out about the dances, music and forms of popular entertainment of the 1800’s and artfully share this with the group in character. In addition, listen to a recording of the Blue Danube waltz, do your best to learn the steps of the waltz and demonstrate it to the group.
Golden Spike Research Project Planner

1. People of the Western Rail

Biographical Sketch 1  Preliminary Planning and Ideas  Biographical Sketch 2

2. Come One, Come All  Creating an advertisement that:

Preliminary Planning and Ideas

3. Making the Railway Work  Topic to research and present:

Preliminary Planning and Ideas

4. Experiencing History  Dramatic scenario to present:

Preliminary Planning and Ideas
Journalistic Biography Planner

"Name's" Life Lived
(Timeline)
Born

Pencil Sketch

(Freehand, no photocopies)

Who: 

Life data

What:

Where:

Why:

When:

Significance: 

Died
Appendix Two

Golden Spike: Drama Component

Rationale

"The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King."

Hamlet II, ii, 590

The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training has indicated that it's business is the "what" of education; the "how" being left up to the professional teacher. What is not acknowledged is that all people learn in their own way and in their time. The job of schools is to help students make connections with knowledge in ways that are meaningful and relevant for them. The purpose of the Arts is to explore, provoke and question, through the mimetic aspect of drama in particular. Current pedagogical theory suggests that learning is based on sensory perception, is not all intellectual and that we may possess as many as eight "intelligences". If our social studies and social science classrooms are about problem solving, the Arts provides us with a powerful set of tools to help us explore and learn, by permitting us to experience a variety of dilemmas and issues in a variety of ways.

Warm-Up Activities

Drama lessons should start with a few introductory exercises to "loosen" students up by having a bit of fun and generating the "spell" (tension, absorption, sense of immanence and creative personal energy) so central to the execution of the dramatic play-form. This serves to lower inhibition levels and raise confidence and security in the group for the main lesson, which may involve significant risk taking on the part of individuals acting out of

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1 The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, Hamlet Prince of Denmark, pg. 949
their usual context to explore situational concepts and the self.

**Transition Strategy (Casting the Spell)**

An aural or visual signal enabling the willing suspension of belief, giving permission for the actor to step out of the self and the audience to believe that the actor is another...an almost magical, but quite effective engagement of the self, the other and the dramatic situation. Pioneer drama educator Brian Way recommends the use of a cymbal suspended from string which can be sounded or struck depending upon the intensity of the Transition effect required.

**Atom**

1. The leader calls the word “Atom” followed by a number and the students must quickly get into group which match by linking arms. For example, when “Atom Two” is called, students pair up with left over students hiding among other groups.

2. The leader calls another atom combination and students reconfigure themselves into groups which match (ex. “Atom Three”), however, this time and from now on they are not permitted to combine with someone they have already combined with.

3. The game might be varied by adding modifiers to the calls. For example “Atom Five Furniture” requires students to link up in groups of five and form a piece of common household furniture.

**“Please. No Thank You”**

1. Students work in pairs to use their very best wheedling, pleading and persuasion skills in situations that might include the persuader trying get:

   - brother or sister to lend you a treasured possession

   - father to increase your allowance
- mother to let you stay out late with friends

- best friend to tell you a secret

One person does the persuading and the other takes on the role of the person resisting their attempts to get what they want.

2. On the leader's signal the roles are reversed and the person being persuaded now is trying their best to get the persuader to take the item in question. For example, where before a student was trying to persuade mother to let them stay out late, now mother is trying to persuade the student to stay out late and the student resists.

Open Script Work

1. Pairs of students are given dialogue to work on without a dramatic context or directions about the characters. The students each take one of the roles and create the context, characterization and the drama as they interpret the dialogue and their responses to it. (See open script examples in support material)

2. Build the complexity of this exercise by adding props, sound effects and light.

3. Students might be given the task of creating a "second scene" to the open script, which carries the characters they have created and their scenario on.

Equipment and Supplies

construction paper (props)

scrap wood (flats, props)

found objects as appropriate (props)

large format mural paper (backdrops)

paper fabric (costumes)

found clothing (costumes)
commercial or found makeup (characterization)
spot or flood lights (scene effects)

*Instructional Strategies*

*Hand/Body*

Students problem-solve the portrayal of dramatic scenarios on two scales, engaging both
modes of projected and personal play.

Procedure

1. Students are grouped in fours and supplied with a randomly selected scenario to
   portray. They may use their hands, fingers and voices only.
2. After an appropriate amount of time has elapsed, the large group gathers around each
   quartet and observes the hand performance.
3. After each group has presented their hand drama, the leader now instructs the group that
   after a few minutes, they will be called upon to repeat the same drama, this time
   expanding the scale to use their bodies and voices in performance.

*Tableaux Vivant*

Invites students to see various perspectives and points of view to any problem. Puts the
emphasis on solutions when investigating situations by “walking in another’s shoes” as a
divergent problem-solving method.

Procedure

1. Ask students as a class to silently use their bodies to show how they might feel about a
   current sporting event from the point of view of the winning side. Use the transition
device to regulate and then freeze, or “frame” the motion upon the cessation of the
transition signal.

2. Point out elements of the frame such as centre of attention, attitude and use of parts of
the body. Have the group relax after this analysis.

3. Repeat this exercise from the point of view of the losers. Analyze the difference.

4. Assemble students into groups of five and ask them to “freeze-frame” different parts of a
sporting event in time with the transition signal, e.g. “batter up”, “he shoots, he scores”,
“crossing the finish line”, etc.

5. “Tap” the tableaux by tapping one of the people in it on the shoulder and have them state
their feelings in one word, a short sentence or in rhyme.

Application

1. Show students photographs of well known historical events and have them recreate them
as “freeze-frame” tableaux. After the process is completed and the final pose is achieved,
a student could step forward and recite an appropriate poem, speech or narrative.

2. Have students combine historical personages from each other’s tableaux as elements of
their own to investigate how this might have changed history.

3. Brainstorm a quick list of current world or national challenges. Have students create
tableaux which present possible solutions. Debrief and record the discoveries and
outcomes from these tableaux in writing or graphically, analyzing solutions for
practicality, cost, likelihood.

4. Provide each student group with the headline from a newspaper and have them recreate
the tableaux for the rest of the group. The audience interprets the tableaux attempting to
get the gist of the event. Have the tableaux repeated this time with the emphasis on
students seeking a different outcome for the situation.

*Storytelling*

Promotes invention and verbal skills as well as quick, improvisational reasoning. Helps students see history as a human construction with a point of view and encourages the analysis of bias and perspective, as well as the separation of fact from opinion.

**Procedure**

1. Put three randomly or intentionally selected objects on a table at centre stage with a spotlight on it. Have students create a story which connects the three objects.

2. Have students select one of the objects which they feel has some significance for them above the other two. Have each student tell another why they chose the object they did and share their stories with each other.

3. Have students create a story about a fictional object and ask for volunteers to tell their story to the group. As a large group compare the conventions in the two storytelling exercised.

4. Have students work with a partner to think of a well known fairy tale and rework the story from a non-conventional point of view. For example, “The Three Little Pigs” from the Wolf’s perspective; “Jack and the Beanstalk” as told by the Giant, etc.

**Application**

1. Students think of what they did last night, on the weekend or over the summer vacation and share their oral histories with another person. They quiz each other on why they chose to include the things they did and why certain things were excluded.

2. Provide students with a newspaper or magazine article about an event and have them invent a “final chapter” to the story, or tell it from another point of view. Discuss the
effect this has on the article as a journalistic fact.

3. Create a radio drama by combining sound effects and dialogue to tell the story of a significant event from the historical period under study. Record, edit and play back to the group, or broadcast over the school intercom or local radio station on a date appropriate to the event.

*Flocking*

Puts students in tune with their emotions and reactions to an event. They can internalize events to help construct their own interpretation of events. Inspires integrated processes and products such as poetry writing, visual arts, essays, photography, etc. limited only by possibility and student vision.

Procedure

1. Cluster students in one area of the class, all facing in the same direction.

2. The leader faces away from the class and initiates any movement he or she likes very slowly and the class follows that movement.

3. The leader plays music appropriate to the historical period under study during the posturing.

4. When the leader wishes, he or she may turn over leadership to a different person by simply turning in a different direction and facing a particular person.

5. Continue until the end of the music, or until dramatic energy and innovation is exhausted in this exercise.

Application

1. Take a speech from a period of history studied and divide it into statements. Every
student is given one statement to memorize. When the leadership changes, the new leader states his or her line and/or it can be repeated in chorus by the group.

2. Have students create a movement piece describing a current event and “flock” it. Afterwards, debrief the experience centering around cause and effect, sequences and analysis of execution in terms of refinement and articulation of the ideas in the piece.

3. “Flock” a series of events characterizing an historical or social phenomenon in their chronological order.

Hot Seat

Procedure

1. Provide sufficient research, media and discussion time to facilitate exposure to issues or events of interest by pairs or small groups of students.

2. Introduce the activity to students and place a chair in the centre of the classroom. Telling them that the group will find out about the issue/event by interviewing the appropriate historical person as their group presents them.

3. Invite students to ‘get into character’ for the event or issue they have been working on interpreting (e.g. Confederation & John A. MacDonald) and take a place on the “hot seat”. They may use props, makeup or costumes to help them with their characterization.

4. Other students in the audience take turns interviewing the person in the “hot seat”. The person in the “hot seat” does their best to answer as they think the person they are representing might answer.

5. At any time during the process, a partner of the “hotseated” person or the teacher may take the “hot seat” by placing their hand on the “hotseated” person’s shoulder. This person takes over the in-character representation and the hot seat interview until either
the interview is over, or another member of the group presenting (or teacher) wishes to take over the “hot seat”.

Application

1. Students select either a well known historical personage or generic “everyman” type of character (soldier, farmer, trader, housewife, etc.) that they imagine may have been present during the event/issue under consideration, or had an opinion on it.

2. Students conduct a research based discussion with respect to the attributes of their character (age, marital status, experience, etc.) and the kind of response their character might make to questions, if interviewed about the event/issue.

3. Undertaking this as a group presentation in which group members can help each other by taking over the “hot seat”, can result in an interesting composite interpretation of historical events or issues from what we imagine to be a personal perspective. It can also generate a broad zone of comfort in which students may feel encouraged to apply knowledge acquired through play acting, since they know they have a team of partners, including the teacher, who will help them by taking over the “hot seat” if they run out of ideas, or are particularly challenged by the interviewers with respect to knowledge or dramatic interpretation.

4. The various research based, human interpretive and artistic-dramatic viewpoints and levels of expertise of students presenting, can provide a rich catalyst for discussion, response and emulation by others in their research and interpretation.

5. This method may be applied to any historical event or issue and can be engaged to examine a full spectrum of experiences, rather than the traditional patriarchal, Eurocentric viewpoints that constitute “the narrative” in history.
Presentation

A very important conversation to have with students will centre around their role as an audience. It is not always a given that students, even as mature as adolescents know the correct etiquette and conventions of being a supportive, polite and appreciative audience. Key elements to discuss with students involve the necessity to refrain from talking or other distracting behaviour during a performance. Maintaining concentration during performance is difficult enough, without an unruly an inattentive audience to deal with. Students should also be coached with respect to appropriate means of showing appreciation for a performance, no matter how limited the skill displayed. Performance is risk taking and the performer, as will they all be in turn, risks nothing less than themselves by taking on the mantle of the drama. The significant trust and vulnerability this entails should be the focus of this discussion in order for performers and audience alike to be comfortable with the proceedings. It is of equal importance that student performances be captured on video or with a digital or still camera to facilitate self assessment and reflection later on.

Assessment and Evaluation

“If I could tell you what I mean, there would be no point in dancing.”

Isadora Duncan

Even though the mimetic-transcendent aspect of drama has generated significant debate with respect to whether it is quantifiable or not relative to instruction, there is no doubt that it holds significant power as a force for motivation and learning, as well as for engaging us as human beings on an empathic level. Whether participating as actors or part of an audience, the engagement of students is clear with respect to the trying on and playing out of various personae and situations. The tricky task of evaluating the learning which occurs
in dramatic exercises requires an interpretive reflective mode on the part of the learner, as well as by the teacher. To this end, self, peer and teacher assessment may be employed as the principal measurement of growth along with rubrics or scales such as concentric tracking to assess the technical qualities of performance and mastery of discrete elements of knowledge.
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<td>1 2 3 4</td>
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<td>I made my character believable and effective by:</td>
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<td>Content</td>
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<td>I presented the historical issues clearly.</td>
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<td>The most important thing I learned about _______________________________ was:</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>I portrayed the feelings and concerns of my character.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
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<td>1 2 3 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>You made the character believable and effective by:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You presented the historical issues clearly.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most important thing you learned about _______________________________ was:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You portrayed the feelings and concerns of your character.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What you will remember and use after this experience is:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Three

Learning Strategy Preference Survey

Section I

5. Favourite Drink ____________ 6. Favourite Colour ____________ 7. Favourite Number (0-9) ______

Section II

1. Think about your experiences in studying history and social studies over the last eight years.

2. Please rate each of the following learning strategies by circling a 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 according to the scale.

LEARNING STRATEGY RATING SCALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I LOVE THIS</td>
<td>THIS IS OK</td>
<td>NO PREFERENCE</td>
<td>NOT OK</td>
<td>I HATE THIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>WRITING REPORTS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>13. PRESENTATION TO CLASS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>DOING A PROJECT</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>14. USING A COMPUTER PROGRAM</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>HAVING A DISCUSSION</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>15. HAVING A DEBATE/ARGUMENT</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>MAKING A MODEL</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>16. PLAYING A GAME</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>EXAMINING ARTIFACTS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>17. LOOKING AT ARTWORK</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>DRAWING MAPS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>18. GUEST SPEAKER</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>VISITING HISTORIC SITE</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>19. LOOKING AT PHOTOS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>EXAMINING DOCUMENTS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>20. ROLE PLAYING/DRAMA</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>MAKING A VIDEO</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>21. WATCHING A VIDEO</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>WRITING LETTERS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>22. DOING RESEARCH</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>LISTENING TO MUSIC</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>23. PRESENTATION TO TEACHER</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>ANSWERING QUESTIONS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>24. DESIGNING A GAME</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25. CREATING ARTWORK | 1 2 3 4 5
**Section III**

Select one of the words from column A or B that best describes how you feel in each situation and write its letter under each of the activities listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling A</th>
<th>Feeling B</th>
<th>Doing Drama</th>
<th>Doing Research</th>
<th>Playing Game</th>
<th>Watching Video</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Interested</td>
<td>Disinterested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Imagining</td>
<td>Daydreaming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Turned On</td>
<td>Turned Off</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Curious</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Having Fun</td>
<td>What A Drag</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Energetic</td>
<td>Tired</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Excited</td>
<td>Bored</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Satisfied</td>
<td>Disappointed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Want More</td>
<td>Want Less</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Appendix Four

‘The Play Is The Thing’ Field Observation Form

Site: ____________________________ Subject(s): ____________________________

Date: ____________________________ Duration: ____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play-Character Criteria</th>
<th>Tally</th>
<th>+ Effect</th>
<th>0 Effect</th>
<th>- Effect</th>
<th>Vocal</th>
<th>Tactile</th>
<th>Visual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Voluntary Participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Having Fun</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Task Conscious</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Time Conscious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Self Conscious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Aware of Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Generating Rules</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>8. Showing Off</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Challenging Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Creating Space</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Five

Teacher Participant Elite Interview Questions

1. What did you observe during drama activity?
2. What did you observe during the simulation game activity?
3. What effect did drama and simulation gaming seem to have on students?
4. Were the students playing?
5. Were the students learning?
6. How would you describe an effective instructional strategy?
7. What appeared to be the effect of play based strategies?
8. What would you say the attitude of adolescent students is to studying history?
9. Do you think instructional strategies can affect this? How?

Modified Teacher Participant
Incidental Elite Interview Questions

1. What did you observe during the drama activity?
2. What effect did drama seem to have on students?
3. Were the students playing? Please discuss plus, minus and interesting items.
4. Were the students learning? Please discuss plus, minus and interesting items.
5. How would you describe an effective instructional strategy?
Appendix Six

Teacher Name  
Participating Site Public School  
Mailing Address

Dear Name,

I am writing to invite your participation and the participation of your grade eight history students in a study aimed at investigating and enhancing learning in the social sciences. The study hinges on student and teacher responses to the use of an arts based research unit called “Golden Spike”. The aim of the study is to investigate the effect of play based instructional strategies among adolescent learners and in what ways play may be utilized to engage and enhance learning.

Should you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of this unit of study to keep and I will make myself available at your convenience to facilitate its planning and execution in a manner that best matches your needs and those of your students. You need to know that this study is in no way evaluative of your program, students, professional skill or person and that you are free to withdraw at any time, upon notifying me in writing. At no time will the identity of students, teachers, schools or communities be divulged and where necessary, pseudonyms will be used as referents to individual responses of significance. Data collected and any findings arising therefrom will be processed to achieve aggregate results and at no time will these data be used or made available for evaluative purposes. Your signature on this letter will suffice to indicate your understanding of the intent and terms of the study just described, as well as your consent to participate.

This study meshes nicely with Ontario Curriculum implementation activities you may be undertaking with the new Social Studies, History and Geography document and fits specifically with the second term unit “Opening the West”. Not only will you be provided with a unit resource to add to your repertoire, both you and your students will have the opportunity to contribute your opinions and observations to a process which will serve to inform and perhaps shape future teaching practice and curriculum design. I look forward to working with you and your class!

Yours truly,

John E. Cassano  
Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Researcher

Teacher Consent Statement

I,__________________________________________ understand the intent and terms of the study entitled “The Play Is the Thing” and consent to participate in the various study activities as described.

Teacher Signature ____________________________________

Principal Consent Statement

I,__________________________________________ understand the intent and terms of the study entitled “The Play Is the Thing” and give administrative consent to the undertaking of the various study activities as described in our school. Principal Signature ____________________________________